Marquette University
e-Publications@Marquette

Dissertations (1934 -)
Dissertations, Theses, and Professional Projects

Confessing Characters: Coming to Faith in the Gospel of John

Dominic Zappia
Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Zappia, Dominic, "Confessing Characters: Coming to Faith in the Gospel of John" (2019). *Dissertations (1934 -)*. 861.
https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/861

CONFESSING CHARACTERS: COMING TO FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

Dominic Zappia, B.A., M.Div.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2019

ABSTRACT

CONFESSING CHARACTERS: COMING TO FAITH
IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Dominic Zappia, B.A., M.Div.

Marquette University, 2019

There are at least seventy-two characters in the Fourth Gospel. Given its statement of purpose in 20:30-31, which suggests that it is for the sake of narrating *miracles* to produce faith, this observation is of interest. According to traditional counting there are seven miracles in John. Nonetheless, much of the Gospel is the retelling not of miracles but of conversations and other encounters between Jesus and a wide variety of characters, many of whom are not directly tied to these miracles. Given the number and variety of characters in John, questions arise: What function do characters *as characters* serve in the Fourth Gospel? Why include these particular characters? What do they contribute to John's work?

My goal in this study will be to examine one specific set of characters—those who make a confession of faith—and seek to understand the reason for their presence in the Gospel. Through this group of characters, I intend to show that these Johannine figures exist to articulate a specific theological and confessional proclamation. "Confessing characters," as I will call them, manifest John's understanding of spiritual transformation. Mary Magdalene will act as my principal test case (others will include Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and Thomas). My hypothesis is that Mary Magdalene's narrative in 20:11-18, and the pericopes of other confessing characters, depict what John expresses in the Prologue, Jesus' dialogues, the narrator's interjections, and John the Baptist's teachings concerning spiritual transformation. In other words, these characters' stories *portray* what is merely *stated* elsewhere in the Gospel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dominic Zappia, B.A., M.Div.

This project could not have happened without the support of my friends and family. I want to begin by thanking my students at Marquette University and The King's College, NYC for challenging me in the classroom with thought-provoking questions and theologically rich insights. I could not have finished this project without the care and attention of my Dissertation Director, Julian Hills. His dedication to training the next generation of researchers is seen in the great amount of time and energy he puts into editing and critiquing everything his students write. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee: Deirdre Dempsey, Joshua Burns, and Sharon Pace. Their willingness to read six chapters on a subject as specific as mine shows their commitment to students and their desire to help anyone who has even the smallest inkling of an interest in theology. Additionally, I would like to thank Fr. Kurz for his course on Johannine literature. It was in this class that the seed of this project began to grow. The paper I wrote for him was gutted and expanded into what is before you. I would also like to express my appreciation for the librarians and staff support of Raynor-Memorial Library, especially Ms. Molly Larkin and Ms. Mary Frenn. Their encouragement and employment made my time at Marquette possible. Furthermore, I want to thank my parents and brothers for their love and support during this time in my life. At the start of this project my son Joseph was born. Raising him while writing this has been a joy and something I am incredibly grateful for. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my wife Laura. Her willingness to move across the country with me as I pursued a fool's dream is a testament to her character. Now that this chapter of our life has ended, I look forward to helping her pursue her dreams and to supporting her in her endeavors. This project is dedicated to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS....……………………………………………………….……i

TABLE OF CONTENTS..…………………………………………………………..ii

ABBREVIATIONS…………………………………………………………………...vi

INTRODUCTION.…………………………………………………………………..1

CHAPTER 1 – CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION: AN EVALUATION OF JOHANNINE CHARACTER STUDIES…………………………………………………6

1.1 The Rise of Narrative Criticism and Character Studies………….…………6

1.2 Johannine Character Studies…………………..……………………………7

1.2.1. Representative Figures……………………………………………...9

1.2.2. Ambiguous Believers and Post-Modern Thought………………....17

1.2.3. Ancient and Johannine Characterization: Comparative Studies………………..……………………………………31

1.2.4. Johannine Eye Witnesses: Judith Christine Single Redman…………………………………………….…………….42

1.2.5. Characters as Agents of Revelation: William Bonney…………....44

1.2.6. Point of View and Johannine Characters: James L. Resseguie…………………………………………………………...49

1.2.7. Johannine Themes and Johannine Figures………………………...54

1.2.8. Summary…………………………………………………………..61

1.3. The Contribution of this Project…………………………………………….63

CHAPTER 2 – LITERARY FIGURES……………...………………………………..66

2.1. Methodology: A Defense of Applying Narratology and Narrative Criticism to Ancient Texts…………………………………………………………………….67

2.2. Modern Character Studies and the Purpose of Literary Figures…………….71

2.2.1. The Ontology of Characters……………………………………….72

2.2.2. The Thematic Use of Characters…………………………………..81

2.2.3 Literature and Themes……………………………………………..89

2.3 Conclusion…………………………………………………………………...91

CHAPTER 3 – MARY MAGDALENE AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION...…92

3.1 Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)…………………………………………………93

3.1.1 Dialogue and Action……………………………………………….95

3.1.2 Irony………………………………………………………………....100

3.1.3 Plotting……………………………………………………………103

3.1.4 Mary Magdalene's Development ……………………….………..105

3.2 Dramatic Persons: The Use of Characters in John………………………….110

3.3 John's Purpose Statement and My Thesis about John's Figures…………...110

3.4 Conclusion…………………………………………………………………112

CHAPTER 4 – CONFESSING CHRIST: JOHANNINE CONFESSION
SCENES – PART I…………………...………………………………..…………….113

4.1 Nathanael (John 1:43-51)…………………………………………………...115

4.1.1 Dialogue and Action…………………………………………...119

4.1.2 Intratextuality, Intertextuality, and Irony……………………...…127

4.1.3 Plotting……………………………………………………………....130

4.1.4 Nathanael's Development……………………………………...132

4.2 The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-30)……………………………………133

4.2.1 Dialogue and Action……………………………………………...135

4.2.2 Irony, Intertextuality, and Genre………………………………….148

4.2.3 Plotting……………………………………………………………152

4.2.4 The Samaritan Woman's Development…………………………..154

4.3 Conclusion……………………………………………………………..…161

CHAPTER 5 – CONFESSING CHRIST: JOHANNINE CONFESSION SCENES – PART II……………………...……………………………..……………162

5.1 The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)………………………………...……162

5.1.1 Dialogue and Action……………………………………………...165

5.1.2 Irony…………………………………………….……………...180

5.1.3 Plotting………………………………………………………………183

5.1.4 The Man Born Blind's Development…………………..………186

5.2 Thomas (John 20:24-29)…………………………………………….....192

5.2.1 Dialogue and Action……………………………………………...194

5.2.2 Irony…………………………………………………………….....200

5.2.3 Plotting………………………………………………………………202

5.2.4 Thomas's Development…………………………………………..205

5.3 Conclusion……………………………………………………………….208

CHAPTER 6 – BECOMING A BELIEVER: SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL………………………………………………….……………210

6.1. Why These Statements?...211

6.2. Spiritual Transformation: A Trinitarian Approach……………………..…216

6.2.1. The Father…………………………………………………..……217

6.2.2. The Son……………………………………………………………..225

6.2.3. The Holy Spirit……………………………………………..……237

6.2.4. Summary of John's Trinitarian Understanding of Spiritual Transformation……………………………………………………………….253

6.3. The Purpose of John in light of the Gospel's View of Spiritual Transformation…………………………………………………….……………255

6.4 Conclusion……………………………………………………………….257

CONCLUSION………………………………………………………………259

Avenues of Research To Be Pursued in Light of These Findings…………......260

Confessing Characters in Other Gospels…………………………..……260

Spiritual Transformation in the Epistles………………………………..261

Other Groups of Characters in John…………………………………....261

Johannine Spiritual Transformation and the Johannine Community…...262

Origin of the Pattern of John's Confession Scenes……………………..263

Johannine Hermeneutics and the Life of the Church…………………………...269

Conclusion…………………………………….........………………………269

BIBLIOGRAPHY……………………………………………………...………..271

Primary Sources and Reference Works……………………………..……….271

Secondary Sources………………………………………………………...272

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AcBib	Academia Biblica
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF	Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und (Neuen) Testament
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly: Monograph Series
CDMS	*Church Divinity Monograph Series*
Colloq	*Colloquium*
DRev	*Downside Review*
EDNT	*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-1993.
EgT	*Eglise et théologie*
ENT	Études neo-testamentaires
EstEcl	*Estudios eclesiásticos*
ERev	*The Ecumenical Review*
ETR	*Études théologiques et religieuses*
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
FETS	Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series
FM	*Faith and Mission*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship

HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HThKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
Int	*Interpretation.*
IRM	*International Review of Mission*
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JECH	*Journal of Early Christian History*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JPT	*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTAK	*Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
LC	Literary Criticism
LEB	Lexham English Bible
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
SBFLA	*Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus*
LM	*Longman's Magazine*
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
MFSVVN	Mediated Fiction: Studies in Verbal and Visual Narratives
MSH	Michigan Studies in the Humanities
MP	*Modern Philology*
NA 28	*The Greek-English New Testament: Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament.* 28th ed. Edited by Barbara Aland et al. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.
NABRE	New American Bible (Revised Edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NFTL	New Foundations Theological Library
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Edited by Colin Brown, 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–1985.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
NTL	New Testament Library
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OPTAT	*Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics*

PmSt	Postmodern Studies
Presb	*Presbyterion*
PNTCS	Pillar New Testament Commentary Series
Proof	*Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PEGLBS	*Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society*
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
REC	Romanica et Comparatistica
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLGNT	*The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*. Edited by Michael W. Holmes. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.
SFBS	Sources for Biblical Study
SMTh	*Swedish Missiological Themes*
SSLP	Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
TDNTW	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*. Edited by Verlyn D. Verbrugge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
TCSV	Trends in Classics: Supplementary Volumes
TE	Textual Explorations
TH	*Theology*
TS	*Theological Studies*
TTE	*The Theological Educator*
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
UBS	*The Greek New Testament*. Edited by Barbara Aland et al. 4th rev. ed. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2006.
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAA	Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Studies

INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel of John, there are twenty-four named and forty-eight anonymous characters (some in groups).[1] This means that there are at least seventy-two literary figures in a work of twenty-one chapters. The diversity found among these characters is profound. There are individuals of wealth and poverty, Jews and Greeks, men and women, people of virtue and ignobility. Not all of these characters make actual appearances in the Gospel. Some are discussed only in dialogue (e.g., the Samaritan Woman's husbands and the son of the royal official). Nevertheless, most of them are present in the narrative and either perform some action or speak. Of those who appear on the stage of John's story, many do so for the sole purpose of conversing with Jesus. In fact, there are a small number of scenes in the Gospel where Jesus is absent (e.g., 3:25-30; 7:40-52; 11:45-53; 18:15-18, 25-27), but even in these scenes the only reason that

---

[1] The named characters of the Fourth Gospel are God the Father (1:14), John the Baptist (1:6), Jesus (1:29), Andrew (1:40), Peter (1:40), Philip (1:43), Nathanael (1:45), Nicodemus (3:1), Judas the Betrayer (6:71), Lazarus (11:1), Mary of Bethany (11:1), Martha (11:1), Thomas (11:1), Caiaphas (11:49), Satan (13:27), Judas not Iscariot (14:22), Malchus (18:10), Annas (18:13), Pontius Pilate (18:29), Barabbas (18:40), Mary of Clopas (19:25), Mary Magdalene (19:25), Joseph of Arimathea (19:38), and the Holy Spirit (20:22).

The anonymous characters/groups in the Gospel are the world (1:9), the Jews (1:19), priests (1:19), Levites (1:19), Pharisees (1:24), disciples of John (1:35), an anonymous disciple (1:37), the mother of Jesus (2:1), disciples of Jesus (2:2), servants at Cana (2:5), the Steward at Cana (2:8), the Bridegroom (2:9), the brothers of Jesus (2:12), animal sellers (2:14), money changers (2:14) , a "Jew" (3:25), the Samaritan woman (4:7), former men of the Samaritan woman (4:16), the current man of the Samaritan woman (4:18), Samaritans of Sychar (4:28), Galileans (4:45), the royal official (4:46), the son of the royal official (4:46), slaves of the royal official (4:51), the ill at the pool of Bethesda (5:3), the invalid at the pool of Bethesda (5:5), the crowd (5:13), the boy with the loaves and fish (6:9), the Twelve (6:67), authorities (7:26), temple police (7:32), Greeks (7:35), scribes (8:3), the adulterous woman (8:3), elders (8:9), the man born blind (9:1), parents of man born blind (9:2), neighbors of the man born blind (9:8), believers across the Jordan (10:41), the beloved disciple (13:23), Roman soldiers at Jesus' arrest (18:3), the woman who guarded the gate (18:16), the servant girl (18:17), the servants before the fire (18:18), the officers beside the fire (18:18), one of the slaves of the high priest who was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off (18:26), the soldiers who crucified Jesus (19:2), the co-crucified men (19:18), the sister of Jesus' mother (20:13), the angels at the tomb (20:12), sons of Zebedee (21:2), and two other of his disciples (21:2).

This list is a modified form of the table composed by Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie , and Ruben Zimmermann ("Table on the Characters in the Fourth Gospel (in order of first appearance)," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* [eds. *idem*; WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 34-45).

these characters are drawn together is because of him—Jesus is the impetus for their dialogue.[2]

These observations are of interest in light of the Gospel's stated purpose. John writes, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (21:30-31).[3] On its own, this passage seems to suggest that the Fourth Gospel was written to record the "signs" of Jesus—understood by a majority of scholars as his miracles—so as to motivate its readers to believe. However, much of what John writes about is given not to the retelling of miracles performed but to conversations had between Jesus and a full cast of characters.

Given the great importance of literary figures in John, a question remains to be asked: What purpose do characters serve in the Gospel of John? Do they exist solely for narratival purposes, to move the story along? Are they intended to re-present the historical circumstances of the Johannine community through storytelling and thus promote an intentional double reading of the Gospel? Are they there to draw the reader into the text to create sympathy for the author and his message? Or are they simply for the purpose of entertainment?

---

[2] This is argued by R. Alan Culpepper. He writes, "Because these functions [of characters in John] are served through interaction with Jesus, the disciples do not interact with the Jews, and the minor characters seldom interact with each other. Jesus is at the center of all exchanges. Where one minor character does interact with another (Judas and Mary in 12:4-5; Peter and the servant girl in 18:17; John the Baptist and his disciples in 3:25-26; the Pharisees and the blind man in 9:15ff.; or the Greeks and Philip in 12:20-21)—and there are not many such exchanges—it generally serves as a witness to Jesus or as a foil for him" (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* [FF: New Testament; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 145).

[3] All English Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless indicated. All Greek NT quotations come from the SBLGNT unless specified.

My goal in this study is to examine one specific set of literary figures—those whom I shall call "confessing characters"—and to investigate the reason for their presence in the Gospel. The main question I seek to answer is the one specified above: What purpose do characters serve in the Gospel of John? Through this group, I intend to show that characters in the Fourth Gospel are there to express Johannine ideas.[4] Specifically, I aim to denote that confessing characters exhibit John's understanding of spiritual transformation. This is similar to the "thematic sphere" of characters as James Phelan understands it.[5] Nevertheless, these characters do not represent an idea; rather, the narrative portrays that idea through the characters' actions, speech, development, and circumstances in the narrative. Each confession scene depicts the mechanics of John's comprehension of what I shall call "spiritual transformation"—how one moves from unbelief to belief or from faith to greater faith.[6]

This body of characters is of importance in understanding John's use of characters for three reasons. First, several of these scenes could be removed from the Gospel and its general plot would be unaffected.[7] Consequently, the reason for including them is not

---

[4] This has been a known fact in non-biblical investigations of characters. As Fotis Jannidis states, "Viewing characters as entities of a storywold does not imply that they are self-contained. On the contrary, the storyworld is constructed during the process of narrative communication, and characters thus form a part of the signifying structures which motivate and determine the narrative communication. Characters also play a role in thematic, symbolic or other constellations of the text and of the storyworld" ("Character" in *Handbook of Narratology* [eds. Peter Hühn et al.; Narratologia 19; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009], 15). In addition, Jannidis explains that this occurs in dialogue novels "where the characters' role is to propound philosophical ideas" (*ibid.*, 23). Since conversation is such a prevailing element of John's narrative, one could argue that the Fourth Gospel falls into this genre of literature.

[5] Phelan, "Character, Progression, and the Mimetic-Didactic Distinction," *Modern Philology* 84 (1987): 282-99.

[6] I have decided against using the more traditional term of "conversion" because some of the figures that I will discuss are already disciples. It would difficult to claim that they were converting to something. This was fact that some of the characters I survey were already disciples was pointed out to me in a private conversation by Julian Hills.

[7] E.g., the character of Nathanael occurs only in 1:43-51. This narrative adds nothing to the conflict within John's plot. It reveals nothing about Jesus that is not already known. It is superfluous and yet John chose to integrate it into his Gospel.

directly tied to story design. Second, confessing characters appear regularly in the work, beginning in chapter one (Andrew) and concluding in twenty (Thomas). Third, belief is one of John's chief themes. The verb occurs in John more than in any other NT document and the Gospel's self-stated purpose is the desire to transform the faith of its readers. All of these reasons give precedence to examining these conversations to answer my question about characters and their purpose in the Fourth Gospel.

In general, I do not anticipate my project to be the definitive statement on what characters do in the Gospel of John. Figures in literature of any kind are tricky. Ontologically, they are difficult to pin down. When critics attempt to characterize one, they reach differing conclusions. And if James Phelan is correct, characters can serve multiple purposes in a text. As a result, what will follow is one argument in favor of one purpose that one group of characters perform in the Fourth Gospel.[8] This means that other proposals may coexist with this one and multiple readings may be equally legitimate representations of John's use of characters.

To give the reader a path forward, I will provide a brief summary of each chapter. In the first, I outline the history of the scholarship on Johannine characters. This chapter allows me to show what is similar in this project to those that come before it and what is different. It will also provide the reader with an understanding of where this work falls in the history of the discipline. In the second, I lay out the methodological premises of character studies developed among modern literary critics, showing how my thesis fits in

---

[8] In addition, there is the complexity of the Fourth Gospel itself. As John A. T. Robinson remarks, "The effect of reading too much on the Fourth Gospel is to make one feel either that everything has been said about it that could conceivably be said or that it really does not matter what one says, for one is just as likely to be right as anyone else" ("The Relationship of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John," in *Twelve More New Testament Studies*, ed. idem [London: SCM, 1984], 65).

this discipline. Additionally, I specify what a character is. To do so, I reach out to experts in non-biblical literary criticism for help. These theorists provide me with a working philosophy of literature and precise terminology so as to handle characters responsibly.

The third chapter is where I examine my primary example—Mary Magdalene and her appearance at Jesus's tomb. What is seen is that Mary Magdalene comes to faith because of Jesus's direct action. The fourth and fifth chapters are continuations of the third. In them, I move from looking at Mary Magdalene alone to investigating four other Johannine confessing characters—Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and Thomas. My aim is to show that there is a consistent pattern in how characters depict the way one comes to faith. Each character makes a confession of faith not just *in* but *because of* Jesus.

In my final chapter, I analyze those places in the Fourth Gospel that overtly articulate the way in which one comes to faith. This chapter is an investigation into statements made by John's trusted figures which directly reflect the Fourth Evangelist's understanding of how someone comes to faith. These statements can be compared with what is displayed in John's confessing characters to reveal a consistent understanding of spiritual transformation. My overarching argument, then, is that there is overlap regarding how John talks about spiritual transformation and the way it is displayed in his confessing characters. This then supports my notion that Johannine confessing characters reflect the author's understanding of spiritual transformation and thus serve a thematic function.

CHAPTER 1 – CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION: AN EVALUATION OF JOHANNINE CHARACTER STUDIES

1.1. The Rise of Narrative Criticism and Character Studies

Modern interpreters of the Bible often affirm the influence that narrative criticism has had on exegesis.[1] With this discipline, interpreters have shifted the stress of biblical studies away from uncovering the history that stands behind the texts or the sources from which they are derived to working within the literary world of the documents themselves. The rise of this field is thanks to the efforts of such intellectual giants as Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Meir Steinberg, David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, R. Alan Culpepper, Robert C. Tannehill, and Jack Dean Kingsbury.[2]

Narrative criticism is important for this project because the study of characters—my chief interest—arose as a facet of this methodology. Many of its founders discuss characters and characterization.[3] Additionally, this subfield is a thriving enterprise within

[1] E.g., Christopher Skinner makes this point, mentioning its rise within biblical studies while also acknowledging two of the major figures that I specify above—R. Alan Culpeper and David Rhoads (Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John: Reflections on the Status Quaestionis," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. idem, LNTS 461 [New York: Bloomsbury, 2013], xvii-xviii).

[2] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, BLS 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, FF (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, ISBL (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Rhoads and Dewey, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

[3] Berlin, *Poetics*, 23–42; Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 99–148; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 321–41; Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 51–67; James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*, BibInt 56 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 121–65; Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 143–62; Rhoads and Dewey, *Mark as Story*, 99–136.

Johannine research, having grown greatly in the last decade with a steady stream of publications.[4]

1.2. Johannine Character Studies

Given this upsurge of character studies in John and its importance for this project, the primary concern of this chapter is to recount and analyze its history—especially in terms of how interpreters have understood the purpose of figures in the Fourth Gospel. Its story begins with the establishment of an initially unchallenged and univocal comprehension of Johannine characters as representative figures. This consensus is then

---

[4] Skinner provides a thorough examination of the rise of Johannine character studies in the last decade ("Status Quaestionis," xxvii–xxxii). He lists the following works as evidence of its growth: James M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *BSac* 163 (2006): 63–78; Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, "Jesus and Ordinary Women in the Gospel of John: An African Perspective," *SMTh* 96 (2008): 139–59; Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 211–32; Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading," in Bauckham and Mosser, *John and Christian Theology*, 233–44; Ruben Zimmermann, "The Narrative Hermeneutics of John 11: Learning with Lazarus How to Understand Death, Life, and Resurrection," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer, WUNT 222 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 75–101; Steven A. Hunt, "Nicodemus, Lazarus, and the Fear of 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel," in *Repetition and Variation in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. G. van Belle, M. Labahn, and P. Maritz, BETL 223 (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 199–212; William M. Wright IV, "Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 544–59; Cornelis Bennema, "The Character of John in the Fourth Gospel," *JETS* 52 (2009): 274–84; idem, "The Identity and Composition of Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John," *TynBul* 60 (2009): 239–63; ("Status Quaestionis," xxvii n. 62).

In the accompanying pages, he discusses the ensuing monographs which should be added to his initial list: Philip F. Esler and Ronald Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: A Social-Scientific and Theological Reading of John* (London: SCM, 2006); Bradford B. Blaine Jr., *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple*, AcBib 27 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Judith Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, NTOA 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question*, PTMS 115 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Nicolas Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding*, WUNT 2/290 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Michael W. Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel*, NTM 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010); (Skinner, "Status Quaestionis," xxviii–xxx).

disputed by a postmodern grasp of literature that forced researchers to ask whether John's characters were as "flat" and simple as once assumed.[5]

This new perspective produced a divide among students of John. Some continued down the old path of seeing John's characters as easily recognized by their actions and John's either-or approach, which clearly defines individuals as belong to one of two camps: believers and unbelievers. Others broke fresh ground, preaching a new gospel of ambiguity, declaring John's characters to be difficult to pin down and narrated as such to puzzle the reader. In the end, no one system has won universal support. Instead, we come across various experts using an assortment of methods to come to one of these two conclusions.[6]

Few scholars, nevertheless, deal exclusively with the purpose of Johannine figures—the aim of this study. Many (if not most) are concerned with the analysis of characterization: how to describe a specific character and/or how the author constructs said character. Interpreters tangentially discuss John's use of literary persons but for only

---

[5] Colleen M. Conway herself recognizes this history—that up until her work, Johannine scholars argued that figures in the Fourth Gospel were accessible and representative of differing responses to Jesus ("Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel," *BibInt* 10 (2002): 326-28). Likewise, Hunt, Tomie, and Zimmerman call Conway's work a "a provocative article" that "challenges the consensus view that Johannine characters represent particular belief-responses" ("An Introduction to Character and Characterization in John and Related New Testament Literature" in idem, *Character Studies*, 25). In addition, Bennema's survey of the scholarship takes note of the importance of Conway. He says that her article is "provocative" and "challenges the consensus view that the Johannine characters represent particular belief-responses" (*Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014], 11). In part, what I am doing is recognizing that Conway and others are correct in their assessment, but that Conway's recommended shift in focus—taking a more postmodern approach to character studies—did not put an end to what came before it.

[6] My reading of the history of Johannine scholarship on character studies reflects that of Bennema. He concludes that "as for character classification, there is a tendency to oversimplify Johannine characters and categorize them as being flat, minor, or ficelles (Kraft, Collins, Culpepper, Davies, Tolmie, Koester; cf. Myers).… More recently, scholars have started to recognize that the Johannine characters are more complex (Hylen, Skinner, Farelly, many contributes to the two 2013 volumes on Johannine characters), but there is no uniform approach of agreement on what classification to use" (ibid., 22). He goes as far to say that "*there is still no consensus on how to analyze, classify, and evaluate characters*" (ibid.; emphasis original).

a few studies is it the priority.[7] Before I probe this dilemma, I must start from the beginning of this scholarly drama with the preeminent works of Raymond F. Collins and R. Alan Culpepper.

1.2.1. Representative Figures

In 1976 Collins produced the first influential study of John's characters. In two complementary articles, he argues that the persons in John represent various responses of faith to Jesus.[8] He supposes that the Gospel derived from "traditional Johannine homiletic material," maintaining that

> within this homiletic tradition we should place the development of units of material, pericopes, in which various individuals appear—precisely as types of the point that the homilist was trying to make. The evangelist and a final redactor would have compiled these several units of traditional Johannine homiletic material into his gospel where they remain as types which can serve to support the basic theme of his gospel.[9]

Collins then contends that "in the development of these homilies, various persons were chosen from the common Gospel tradition or selected from his own tradition by the homilist in order to illustrate some point about the nature of faith, or lack of it, in Jesus Christ."[10] This applies specifically to "those individuals … who appear to have been definitely type-cast by the Evangelist so that he might teach his readers about salvific

---

[7] William Bonney (*Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John's Christological Narrative*, BibInt 62 [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002]); and Judith Christine Single Redman ("Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel," in Skinner, *Characters and Characterization*, 59–78) discuss the purpose of characters in John to a greater extent than those authors who precede them. Nonetheless, even in these two instances the use of John's characters comes second to arguing another thesis.

[8] Collins, "Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel—I," *DRev* 94 (1976): 26–46; idem, "Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel—II," *DRev* 95 (1976): 118–32.

[9] Ibid., 29, 30. Collins admits that his view of John's homiletic material is not unique and states, "in a general way I espouse the homiletic provenance approach urged by Laconi, Brown, Schnackenburg, Lindars, et al." (ibid., 30).

[10] Ibid., 31.

faith."[11] Thus, John the Baptist moves from being primarily a baptizer to one who bears witness to Jesus; the Samaritan Woman represents "the Christian messenger who brings others to faith"; the royal official "stands as a representative of those who believe in Jesus's word"; and so on.[12] The author employs each character to detail what salvific faith looks like for John's reader and to "enkindle and confirm that faith within them."[13]

According to Collins, the Beloved Disciple stands as the ideal believer and the reader's chief example. He is "not merely one among the several representative figures" but "the representative figure of the Johannine tradition" and "typifies the disciple of Jesus *par excellence*."[14] In fact, Collins holds that

> The tradition of the Fourth Gospel capsulizes in the single person of the Beloved Disciple the testimony of John, the receptivity of Mary, the faith of Nathanael as well as that of the man born blind, Peter, Mary Magdalene and Thomas. … [He] is *the* representative figure, the one who epitomizes all that faith in Jesus Christ implies.[15]

In summary, Collins finds that figures in John serve as exemplars of correct and incorrect responses to Jesus, revealing aspects of what Christian discipleship looks like. The Beloved Disciple is the person we are to imitate most carefully.[16]

One of the principal alarms that can be raised about this study is its limited scope. Collins claims that John's figures represent responses of faith. Nevertheless, he only covers "those individuals in the Fourth Gospel who appear to have been definitely type-cast by the Evangelist" and therefore will not look at "the Jews, the Greeks, his own, the

---

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 34, 39, 41.
[13] Ibid., 31.
[14] Ibid., 130, 132.
[15] Ibid., 132.
[16] As a side note, Collins also suggests that within these conversations, "The Evangelist reveals his Christological interest when he narrates the encounters between Jesus and the representative figures of the Fourth Gospel" (ibid., 39). Collins does not develop this point and only discusses it when assessing the narrative of the Samaritan Woman.

world, and … Satan, as having a representative character."[17] Within these excluded groups are the two most hostile sets of unbelievers: "the world" and the Jews. It would be difficult to say with certainty that John's characters are types that represent correct and incorrect forms of faith without discussing these figures.[18]

Another matter is his imprecise use of "represent." Collins finds that the Gospel's persons exist to provoke correct faith among its readers.[19] This indicates that they "represent" adequate or inadequate responses to Jesus. Even so, he presents many characters as representatives of groups or individuals from the time of John's community. Nathanael "represents" authentic Israel, Lazarus the disciple who has died but will be raised, and Peter the Twelve. In other places figures do not represent a type of faith but the actions of the faithful or the outcome of having faith (e.g., John the Baptist "represents" the Christian confessor and the Samaritan Woman the Christian messenger). The multiple meanings Collins gives to this important term complicate his main thesis.

The most significant problem with Collins's work is his exegesis. His interpretations do not necessitate a reading of the purpose of John's characters as paradigmatic. Two examples will be sufficient to make my point. Of John the Baptist, Collins contends that "nowhere is he characterized as the Baptizer or the Baptist; rather he is simply introduced as 'a man sent from God whose name was John' (I,6)."[20] Nonetheless in 1:31 the Baptist himself states, "I came baptizing with water," and in 3:26

---

[17] Ibid., 31.

[18] Scholars after Collins resolve this deficiency by publishing works that survey more figures in greater detail.

[19] Ibid., 31.

[20] Ibid., 33.

and 4:1 the author directly links him to the practice of baptizing.[21] The Fourth Gospel's Baptizer is hardly "quite different from the John of the Synoptics," as Collins asserts.[22]

After this, Collins concludes that "John is the type of the Christian confessor" who "bears witness to Jesus."[23] His reason for this is (1) that the Gospel says that he has come to bear witness to the light (1:7), and (2) that when he witnesses to Jesus's identity "no mention is made of the public to whom John's testimony is addressed," which reveals that "he has been stripped down to an essential role, in which time and audience are almost unessential."[24] These passages do illustrate that witnessing is a deed John performs and action is often an aspect that exegetes use to understand a character's essence. Then again, simply because the author of the Fourth Gospel portrays the Baptist in this way does not mean that this makes him a character who represents witnessing, nor does it signify that the author intended for him to be an exemplar. There would need to be more evidence from within the text to make this conclusion valid.

In truth many characters witness to Jesus's identity—the Samaritan Woman, the paralytic, the Man Born Blind, Mary Magdalene, et al. What could be argued is not that John the Baptist represents "the type of the Christian confessor" who "bears witness to Jesus" but that confessions of faith are common among Johannine characters and this says something about the author's perception of what it means to follow Christ.[25] In other words, John's characters may not be representative figures but portals into his theology—the argument of this project.

---

[21] There is some attempt by Collins to suggest that these passages are additions by a redactor. However, he never clearly states this but only describes them as "problematic passages" and presents the fact that Bultmann does not consider them to be original (ibid., 32–33).

[22] Ibid., 33.

[23] Ibid., 34.

[24] Ibid. He also proclaims Jesus's identity in 1:29-34.

[25] Ibid.

In the case of Nathanael, Collins is confident that he represents "authentic Israel" for three reasons: (1) Jesus describes him as seated under the figure tree, which may lead the reader to "recall the late Jewish tradition about the study of Scripture under a fig tree"; (2) Jesus identifies him as "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit"; and (3) Nathanael "identifies Jesus as the 'King of Israel,' a traditional messianic title," and as the "Son of God," which is the "Christian (Johannine) interpretation of Nathanael's faith."[26] These three clues to Nathanael being a faithful Israelite say something about John's characterization of him but they do not demand a reading of Nathanael as being a representative figure. More would be needed to make this claim.

This process of describing characters without providing strong evidence to support the representative claims made about them continues throughout the articles.[27] The overlap between form and function is never guaranteed and Collins's examination of the characters he chooses is too shallow to prove that such a relationship exists. I am not alone in this assessment. Cornelis Bennema criticizes Collins with these words:

> Collins's descriptions of the characters are not very detailed and they do not classify the characters or their responses to Jesus. The reader is left with a collection of unconnected character descriptions since their studies are neither preceded by guidelines on how to analyze character nor followed by an evaluation of how the various characters relate to one another.[28]

Despite these shortcomings, Collins's work remained the dominant understanding of John's characters for twenty-five years. It was not until the early 2000s, when Colleen M. Conway challenged it, that other theories arose. Furthermore—and in spite of these

---

[26] Ibid., 35.

[27] This criticism excludes Collins's examination of the Beloved Disciple, which is detailed and thorough.

[28] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 4.

criticisms—some scholars continue to promote this view of John's figures.[29] Collins himself upheld some form of it into the 1990s. Traces of it can be found in his article "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters."[30]

After Collins the next leading publication on Johannine persons is Culpepper's chapter on characters in *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*.[31] In it Culpepper begins by delineating two major streams of "contemporary approaches to characters in narrative literature": those which identify literary figures as "autonomous beings with traits and even personalities" and those that deduce that characters are "plot functionaries with certain commissions or tasks to be fulfilled."[32] Culpepper insists that John's characters are read best within this second category since "most of the characters appear on the literary stage only long enough to fulfill their role in the evangelist's representation of Jesus and the responses to him."[33]

Without evidence this conclusion is a subjective claim. John's characters do not have the complexity that modern figures of literature do but many appear frequently enough to be studied as characters with traits and personalities. The Beloved Disciple, Peter, and Thomas would be clear candidates for this sort of classification. Even the

---

[29] For example Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 33–77.

[30] Collins, "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters," *Int* 49 (1995): 359–69. In this piece Collins does not directly discuss his theory that John's characters represent responses of faith to Jesus but he does make parenthetical remarks that suggest this. For instance, when discussing minor characters in John he argues, "They are cast in a representative role and serve a typical function" (ibid., 361). In his examination of Nicodemus he states, "As a representative of institutionalized Judaism, Nicodemus is a person for whom the acknowledgment of Jesus' signs is the end as well as the beginning of his acknowledgment of Jesus" (ibid., 363). He begins his analysis of Peter by saying, "While the other characters in the drama are cast in typed roles as representative figures, Peter alone appears as a complex individual" (ibid., 365–66). The article itself lacks a definitive thesis. It is instead a series of characterizations of Johannine figures.

[31] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 99–148.

[32] Ibid., 102–3.

[33] Ibid., 102.

narrative of the Samaritan Woman is lengthy and detailed enough to observe character development and individuality.[34] In fact, entire articles and monographs have been written on John's presentation of each of these figures, illustrating their depth.[35] Conway and Bennema's work are reactions to this line of thinking, demonstrating the complexity of many Johannine characters.

After his insistence that John's characters are plot functionaries, Culpepper then categorizes nearly all figures in John as "ficelles," typical characters who are easily recognizable by the readers and exist to assist specific plot functions, often revealing something about the protagonist—Jesus.[36] Consequently, characters in John exhibit "a continuum of responses to Jesus which exemplify misunderstandings the reader may share and responses one might make to the depiction of Jesus in the Gospel."[37] John's dualism, Culpepper argues, calls for a reading of his characters in terms of "either/or." That is, either they believe Jesus to be the Son of God or they do not.[38] Therefore, the purpose of these characters is twofold: "(1) to draw out various aspects of Jesus' character successively by providing a series of diverse individuals with whom Jesus can interact, and (2) to represent alternative responses to Jesus so that the reader can see their

---

[34] Culpepper himself admits this when he writes, "Some of the minor characters, the Samaritan woman and the blind man in particular, undergo significant change" (ibid., 103).

[35] Examples of such publications include Margaret Pamment, "The Fourth Gospel's Beloved Disciple," *ExpTim* 94 (1983): 363–67; Arthur H. Maynard, "The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 30 (1984): 531–48; Kari Syreeni, "Peter as Character and Symbol," in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, JSNTSup 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 106–52; Janeth Norfleete Day, *The Woman at the Well: Interpretation of John 4:1-42 in Retrospect and Prospect*, BibInt 61 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002); Blaine, *Peter*; Dennis Sylva, *Thomas – Love as Strong as Death: Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*, LNTS 434 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

[36] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 104.

[37] Ibid. When making this point, Culpepper acknowledges that Collins shares his view (ibid., 104 n. 16). In addition, he expresses indebtedness to a seminar paper by David M. Hughes. The publication information for Hughes's paper is lacking in Culpepper's work. It does not appear in his bibliography or in the note in which Hughes is mentioned.

[38] Ibid., 104.

attendant misunderstandings and consequences."[39] Ultimately, Culpepper contends that "Through the construction of the gospel as narrative … the evangelist leads the reader toward his own ideological point of view, the response he deems preferable."[40]

Both of these theorized purposes for John's figures are extensions of Collins's conclusions and in many ways Culpepper's work mirrors Collins's.[41] Given the similarities shared between these works, it is not surprising to discover that they have corresponding drawbacks. Like Collins, Culpepper presents little evidence to prove that John's intention for including the characters he does is for his audience to reflect their behavior. In fact, the main support he presents is his twofold presupposition on readers and characters. He conjectures (1) that people are "interested in people" and thus "it is not surprising that the success of a literary work depends heavily on whether its characters are convincing, in some general sense 'life-like,' and interesting"; and (2) that through characters the reader experiences "for a little while life's perplexities as they are encountered by 'others,' and is thereby led to wrestle with them from a different perspective."[42] Each of these assumptions may be true but that does not mean that the Fourth Evangelist uses the characters he does in his work for these purposes.

Moreover, Culpepper's assertion that John's characters reveal aspects of Jesus's identity is stated without explanation or evidence. He carefully shows that John has

---

[39] Ibid., 145.

[40] Ibid., 148.

[41] Both authors see John's characters (excluding Peter) as flat. Each maintains that the Beloved Disciple is "the ideal disciple, the paradigm of discipleship" (ibid., 121). Their methodology is to characterize Johannine persons as a means of understanding their purpose. According to Collins and Culpepper, John uses characters to motivate his readers to have correct belief. Culpepper adds to this a second purpose: the articulation of facts about Jesus. As Skinner writes, "Culpepper's discussion of character in Anatomy stood squarely on the shoulders of Collins' contributions. Prior to the rise of narrative criticism within Gospel studies, the representative model was one of the more important approaches to understanding Johannine characters" ("“Status Quaestionis,” xxi).

[42] Culpepper, *Anatomy*., 101.

characterized Jesus through his deeds, actions, emotions, and what the prologue says about him. Nevertheless, he never fully clarifies how each character reveals aspects of Jesus's person except in the figures of Nicodemus, who Culpepper describes as a foil to Jesus, and Mary of Bethany, Martha, and Lazarus, who collectively reveal that Jesus is "the bringer of life."[43]

Thus Collins and Culpepper present claims regarding the purpose of John's characters but do not validate their theories with clear evidence. John's characters may represent responses to Jesus that should be imitated by the Gospel's audience and they most likely reveal aspects of Jesus's identity—a point I do not dispute. Yet both of these theses are missing compelling support. Furthermore, their investigation of the purpose of John's figures comes second to the main goals of these authors—the characterization of Johannine persons and their responses to Jesus.

1.2.2. Ambiguous Believers and Post-Modern Thought

The first and only substantial shift in the history of Johannine character studies comes with Conway.[44] She argues that although the Gospel's expressed purpose is to convince its reader to make a clear choice between belief and unbelief, its minor

---

[43] Ibid., 135, 140.

[44] Conway makes a case for her deviation from Collins and Culpepper most thoroughly in her 2002 article, "Ambiguity." Although not developed in full, she mentions this new perspective of Johannine persons in her 1997 dissertation published in 1999, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization*, SBLDS 167 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999). In this work she writes, "The consideration of character brings me to an additional way that this study will move beyond previous studies. Earlier studies on Johannine characterization have in large part restricted analysis to determining what each character 'represents' in the Gospel. As we have seen, this has been answered in terms of various responses to Jesus, and/or in terms of recognizable roles in the Johannine community. I suggest this approach is too limiting; Johannine characters are not only representative figures, but also characters in their own right, contributing in multiple ways to the Gospel narrative" (ibid., 48). This "additional way" is not the primary concern of *Men and Women*. Instead it concentrates on comparing the presentation of men and women in John to show that women are continually depicted in a positive light in contrast to the male persons (ibid., 205).

characters are more complex than Collins and others have admitted.[45] Conway says that these figures "play a major role in undercutting the dualism of the Gospel," proposing that "the Fourth Evangelist repeatedly portrays characters in indeterminate ways" which "pull the reader in multiple directions, frustrating attempts to discern a clearly drawn trait."[46] Her motivation for reading John's characters in this way stems from "post-modern concepts of the fluid and fragmentary nature of texts" and from her principle that "in the face of whatever authorial intention one may discern, and in spite of the readerly desire for clearly defined characters, textual indeterminacy remains."[47]

Conway begins her argument by demonstrating that the reading of John's characters as representative figures stretches as far back as Origen and was reestablished in our era by Collins and Culpepper.[48] After this she shows that scholars have divergent readings of supposedly flat and transparent characters by looking at various interpretations of Nicodemus.[49] She finds that commentators have understood Nicodemus's reaction to Jesus in conflicting ways. They have described it in terms of "unbelief, acceptance, gradual conversion, [and] spiritual weariness," even though he is almost always characterized as "embodying only a single trait."[50]

To reason that ambiguity exists in many of John's figures, Conway examines Peter, Pilate, the Samaritan Woman, Martha, Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and the Beloved Disciple.[51] She maintains that these individuals are not flat but "colorfully drawn

---

[45] Conway, "Ambiguity," 325.
[46] Ibid., 325; 330.
[47] Ibid., 330.
[48] Ibid., 326–28.
[49] Ibid., 329.
[50] Ibid., 239, 238.
[51] Ibid., 331–39.

characters that resist the Gospel's binary categories."[52] This leads Conway to conclude that John transforms our understanding of faith, making it "less stable, but no less productive," because "the construction of the characters [in the Fourth Gospel] gives implicit recognition of what actually constitutes a life of faith, whether in the first or twenty-first century."[53]

What does this mean for John use of characters? As Conway puts it, "Their presence comments on the dualism of the Gospel, undercuts it, subverts it."[54] In turn, this destabilization prevents us from "flatten[ing] our own lives into an oversimplified, unambiguous posture" because the characters themselves stubbornly resist our flattening.[55] We are to find ourselves in John's characters as Collins and Culpepper suggest, but the outcome we arrive at is not an understanding of ideal faith but the knowledge of our own complexity.

As intriguing as this proposal is it remains underdeveloped and without adequate support. Conway offers it at the end of her paper within the span of two paragraphs. In addition, she provides no evidence to defend her theory as to the effect this ambiguity is to have on the Gospel's readers. For one, it is not clear that the *faith* of John's characters is as obscure as she claims. Bennema exposes this, maintaining that complex characters can have easily read reactions to Jesus.[56] Secondly, if John does portray characters in an equivocal light, this does not demand that they undercut the Gospel's dualism. Lastly, if John is subverting his own dualism and his character are as elusive as Conway supposes,

---

[52] Ibid., 339–40.
[53] Ibid., 340.
[54] Ibid. Whether this is the author's intention or not, Conway does not say.
[55] Ibid., 341.
[56] Bennema, "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature," *BibInt* 17 (2009): 415, 418.

how do we know that this subversion is to challenge the readers' understanding of themselves? Conway could use 20:30-31 as proof, but this passage seems to attest to a cohesive narrative with authorial intent and this would take away from her argument rather than add to it.[57] As with previous authors, Conway's investigation into the use of characters in John stands second to her desire to characterize them accurately. This results in a deduction drawn about the purpose of John's characters that needs further evidence for authentication.

Conway is not alone in her interpretation of Johannine characters as ambiguous. Susan E. Hylen, Christopher W. Skinner, and Nicolas Farelly follow suit.[58] Similarly to Conway, Hylen starts by demonstrating that current models of understanding John's characterization spotlight the representative nature of individuals in the Fourth Gospel in spite of these same authors admitting ambiguity within the way these persons act.[59] She then details that her ambiguous characterization of John's figures fits within (1) the

---

[57] Within modern Johannine scholarship, most commentators judge that John 20:30-31 accurately reflects the true intentions of the Fourth Evangelist (e.g., Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB [London: Oliphants, 1972], 616–17; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 575; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTCS [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 661, 663; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 2:1215; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 582; Kelli S O'Brien, "Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," *CBQ* 67 [2005]: 284). Even Rudolf Schnackenburg, who claims that this passage was lifted from "the σημεῖα-source" and utilized here, recognizes that John uses it "in his own way … to tell his readers clearly once again of his intention" (*The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, 3 vols., HThKNT [New York: Crossroad, 1980, 1982, 1987], 3:340). I will follow this majority view, maintaining that 20:30-31 is the purpose statement of the Fourth Gospel. I will do so for two reasons: (1) the terminology of 20:30-31 indicates that it is John's purpose statement (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε); and (2) the leading themes of the Gospel are summarized in this passage, indicating the likelihood that it reflects the intent of the rest of the Gospel. George R. Beasley-Murray makes the second point but not in relation to the viability of 20:30-31 being John's purpose statement (*John*, WBC 36 [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 388).

[58] Likewise, Bennema finds the arguments of Conway and Hylen to overlap but the extent of his analysis of this is limited. He groups them together twice (*Encountering Jesus*, 17, 22-23) and remarks that "most scholars do not evaluate the Johannine characters," but Conway and Hylen fall into the category of critics who "question or object to such evaluation" (ibid., 22-23).

[59] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 1–2.

language of the Gospel in its first-century literary and social context, (2) the dualistic and symbolic nature of John's language, (3) its relationship between plot and characterization, and (4) literary theory which explains how readers construct characters.[60] For each point, she establishes that ambiguous readings of John's characters are to be preferred and make better sense than "flat" ones.

The remainder of her monograph is divided into two parts. In the first, she surveys "figures who are often read as flat but for whom [she] find[s] evidence that suggests greater complexity."[61] These include Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, the Disciples, Martha and Mary, and the Beloved Disciple. Her second section looks solely at the Jews and Jesus.[62] She groups Jesus and the Jews together for two reasons: (1) "each of these characters encompasses virtually the entire Gospel"; and (2) "external considerations of history and theology intervene with these characters to a much greater extent than with other characters."[63]

Ultimately, Hylen proposes that John's characters express three types of ambiguity. Nicodemus portrays the first: ambiguity in characterizing a figure's faith. When handling this figure, the reader is unable to determine whether he believes or not because the author depicts him in an opaque manner. The second is exhibited by the Samaritan Woman, Martha, the Beloved Disciple, the disciples, and the Jews. These figures "believe in Jesus and at the same time disbelieve or misunderstand a good deal

---

[60] Ibid., 3–15.
[61] Ibid., 16, 23–109.
[62] Ibid., 113–52.
[63] Ibid., 16. Even though she gives these reasons for dividing her work into two parts, her discussion of the Jews and Jesus do not touch on either of these points.

about him."[64] It is not that their depiction in the narrative is ambiguous but that their behavior and beliefs are.

The last is the ambiguity Hylen suggests of Jesus. She claims that John drafts him as "an elusive character."[65] She maintains that in John "the reader must simultaneously hold together multiple views of Jesus, some of which seem mutually exclusive or contradictory."[66] She believes that this imprecision is created "by the many metaphors that characterize him."[67]

According to Hylen, John's characters serve two purposes. The first is "to draw the reader into a process of discernment about what counts as true discipleship."[68] As a result, readers apply "this discernment in their own lives, using the categories that John sets forth to evaluate their own or other people's words."[69] For instance, the ambiguous depiction of Martha forces the reader to answer questions such as, "Are her words and actions those of a faithful character? What does she understand about Jesus' words? What does it mean to be a faithful disciple when confronted by the death of a loved one?"[70]

The second purpose of John's ambiguous figures is to pull "the reader into a deeper understanding of Jesus' own character."[71] The illustration she gives for this is John's use of metaphors to describe Jesus. She writes, "Each of John's metaphors involves the reader in an act of imagination, putting the character of Jesus into a relationship with an aspect of Jewish tradition. As the metaphors accumulate, the reader

---

[64] Ibid., 153.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 5.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 154.
[71] Ibid., 153.

may come to see Jesus from various angles, each of which offers a distinct perspective."[72] In the end, this "ambiguity" in the character of Jesus "involves the reader in a theological task that does not end when the Gospel closes, but deepens as the reader returns again and again to understand different aspects of his character."[73]

Even though Hylen views John's characters differently from Collins and Culpepper, she perceives their use in ways similar to them. John's figures are still seen as (1) those from whom readers learn about faith and (2) those through whom Jesus's identity is announced. The difference between her and those who find simplicity in John's figures is that they say that ideal faith is shown in John's characters and that readers should imitate what is depicted. Hylen, on the other hand, holds that faith is not perfectly represented in these figures but that this imperfect demonstration of belief moves the reader to ask questions about what discipleship should look like. Thus, this new perspective of Johannine characterization does not radically change how the purpose of these persons is understood.

Additionally, Hylen's conclusion that the *ambiguity* of John's characters should lead the reader to contemplate true discipleship is difficult to prove. If it is impossible to discern how some of these figures are to be read, how can a reader then learn from them? It appears that if this were the circumstance, then ambiguity would inhibit reflection on discipleship rather than spur it forward. This is so because Hylen does not present a clear rule with which to measure a character's actions. Without a distinct gauge as to what

---

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 154.

makes one a true disciple, how is the reader to know that he or she has come to the right ideas about discipleship by viewing ambiguous characters?[74]

Lastly, Hylen's perception of Jesus also succumbs to this same problem. She remarks that Jesus is an ambiguous and elusive character whose portrayal "may lead the reader into deeper understanding of him."[75] She develops this thesis from John's metaphors for Jesus, claiming that each one "creates its own worldview" and "asks the reader to comprehend Jesus in specific—and distinct—metaphorical terms."[76] She goes so far to say that "because John's metaphors are so different each one requires the reader to understand Jesus differently," asserting that John's metaphors for Christ are "not only distinct but also somewhat divergent," and that they "create ambiguity in the character of Jesus when the terms of different metaphors conflict with one another."[77] One of her example for this is John's portrayal of Jesus in John 6 as Moses, God, and manna. She alleges that it would be impossible for the reader to understand Jesus as all three of these at once.[78] Yet if John's metaphors do not cause complexity but actually clash with one another, it seems unlikely that this would allow the reader to comprehend Jesus better. Therefore, it is difficult to affirm Hylen's position on the purpose of John's characters.

Unlike Hylen, the main thrust of Skinner's work is not characterization in itself but the anti-Thomasine narrative that some interpreters think pervades the Fourth Gospel

---

[74] In her chapter on the Beloved Disciple she talks about how the reader is to evaluate the figures' actions at the foot of the cross by "associating the values that the Gospel presents with the behaviors of the characters" (ibid., 98). However, she only briefly articulates what those "values that the Gospel presents" are (i.e., "belief in Jesus, abiding in him, or witnessing to him") (ibid., 145). She never explains what it means to believe in Jesus, what abiding in him looks like, or from where in the Gospel she draws these standards. Does she happen upon them within the speeches of Jesus? Are we supposed to derive them from the Prologue? Is it through a comparison between characters that one finds them? We are not told.

[75] Ibid., 154.

[76] Ibid., 145.

[77] Ibid., 145, 146.

[78] Ibid., 146–47.

as a literary representation of a hypothetical historical conflict between a Johannine and Thomasine community.[79] In the process of criticizing this theory, he establishes that it is not Thomas alone who misunderstands Jesus but all disciples and a number of "other characters that are not disciples but nevertheless demonstrate the same trait of incomprehension" (Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, Martha, and Mary of Bethany).[80] According to Skinner, each figure "approaches Jesus with varying levels of understanding," and "no one approaches him fully comprehending the truths that have been revealed to the reader in the prologue."[81] This characterization then undercuts the arguments of those who advocate that John has a polemic against Thomas.[82] While making this case Skinner also presents his theory as to why John's characters exist in the Fourth Gospel in light of their continual misunderstanding.

Skinner judges that the author's reason for articulating the disciples' persistent misunderstanding is twofold.[83] The first is plot development. He defines "plot" as action that "is ordered and focused toward achieving emotional and rhetorical effects."[84] Consequently, John's figures "contribute to the narrator's desired emotional and rhetorical effect by pointing the reader both backward and forward."[85] The reader knows what is supposed to be understood about Jesus through the Prologue. He or she then is to compare that knowledge with what each character misunderstands. This back-and-forth

[79] Skinner, *John and Thomas*, xx–xxii. The scholars he primarily challenges are Gregory J. Riley, Elaine Pagels, and April D. DeConick.
[80] Ibid., xxii.
[81] Ibid., 37.
[82] Ibid., 38.
[83] Ibid., 238.
[84] Ibid., 228.
[85] Ibid.

motion between each pericope and the Prologue continually reminds the reader of what the main ideas of John are.[86]

The second function is characterization. Characters' misunderstanding of who Jesus is allows the author to portray the truth concerning Jesus's identity.[87] These characters misinterpret Jesus so that they contrast with the Beloved Disciple, who is portrayed as knowing Jesus fully and responding correctly.[88] In fact, Skinner even thinks that the reader is a character who stands outside the narrative but is able to contrast his or her own view of Jesus with each character's through the "agency of (1) incomprehension, (2) the prologue, (3) the Beloved Disciple, and (4) the Gospel's stated aim (20:31)."[89] The reader is then challenged to "evaluate Jesus properly and to respond appropriately (that is, by believing)."[90]

Skinner's resolve to use the Prologue as a baseline for what one should know about Jesus will be helpful for this work. I will use what the Prologue has to say about how one comes to faith and show that this happens with certain confessing characters. I will expand on Skinner's method by looking not just at the Prologue but also the words of trusted figures (Jesus and John the Baptist) as well as other interjections the narrator (who is also a trusted figure) makes.[91] These passages will help show that John's characters reflect his theology through the movements they make upon the Gospel's stage.

---

[86] Ibid., 228–29.

[87] As Skinner reports, "Jesus's response to these characters confirms the reader's impression of their incomprehension and assists the reader's evaluation of each. This allows a contrast to emerge between the reader's expectations of Jesus (based upon the information provided in the Prologue and the cumulative reading experience) and a given character's expectation of Jesus (based upon an incomplete understanding)" (ibid., 229).

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 229–30.

[90] Ibid., 230.

[91] This will take place in Chapter Six.

For Farelly, the purpose of characters in John (at least that of the disciples) is so that the reader may identify with them. Readers are to sympathize with the disciples, who are frequently depicted as being in the process of deepening their comprehension of Christ. This rendering is then to encourage readers to continue to expand their cognizance of Jesus as they grow in faith.[92] Nevertheless, what is observed is that as with authors above Farelly's primary concern is John's characterization, focusing principally on the disciples' faith in Jesus and their grasp of him.[93]

Farelly emphasizes characterization because he presumes that implied readers are not bystanders but jurors who actively read texts ready to "make up their own minds while being involved, included, and guided, as they are, within the narrative."[94] He makes this assertion by using the work of Andrew T. Lincoln and his instances that "[readers] are judges who assess the attitudes and actions of all characters. … They are judges who are expected to be familiar with the basic facts of this case and to be in sympathy with the stance and witness of its main character."[95] Accordingly, he spends most of his piece analyzing the depiction of the disciples to demonstrate that John consistently paints them as misunderstanding Jesus and his teachings. He makes his case by first considering the

---

[92] As Farelly states, "As a whole, this Gospel is an attempt by the evangelist to declare once more to those who have already believed in Jesus the significance of his person and work. The evangelist sought to strengthen their faith and their understanding of Jesus, encouraging them to continually let Christ redefine their whole selves. For, as a deepening of their understanding of the significance of Christ's identity and ministry occurs, they too would adequately be prepared to take on the task of witnessing in their own world. Thus, the Fourth Gospel's intention is to nurture the faith and understanding of believers through its presentation of the person and work of Christ, and through a process of identification with the disciples who are themselves being prepared for their witnessing ministry" (*Disciples*, 228).

[93] Ibid., 10.

[94] Ibid., 9.

[95] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 173, quoted by Farelly (*Disciples*, 9).

disciples as a group and then through an examination of specific persons: Peter, Judas Iscariot, Thomas, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary Magdalene.[96]

A second justification for Farelly's focus on characterization is because he presupposes that this misunderstanding is the reason that implied readers are able to relate to the disciples and that John intentionally does this sort of characterization so that identification with the disciples would occur. He writes,

> It is *because* most disciples are not consistently portrayed positively that readers are led to identify with them and, in turn, to grow with them in faith and understanding. The implied author thus uses the resemblance between the disciples and the imperfect life of discipleship of his implied readership to nurture their faith and understanding.[97]

To prove this supposition he clarifies first that the reader "can" identify with the protagonist Jesus but "since he possesses traits that implied readers could never own, identification with him may be deemed 'idealistic.'"[98] Second, he maintains that readers are to identify with the disciples because their circumstance is "analogous to theirs," experiencing feelings of empathy, sympathy, and antipathy towards them.[99] For instance, Farelly writes,

> Implied readers can certainly *empathise* with the disciples when Peter, speaking on behalf of the group, declares: "You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68-69). … However, they can only *sympathize* with the disciples as they question Jesus' willingness to go to Judea in 11:8. … Finally, *antipathy* or disdain for the disciples is also produced in the narrative. The most obvious example is that of Judas, one of "the Twelve," whose hypocrisy and ultimate betrayal are in total opposition to the narrative's evaluative point of view on Jesus and his mission.[100]

---

[96] Farelly, *Disciples*, 14–88, 89–161.
[97] Ibid., 192; emphasis original.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 192, 194.
[100] Ibid., 194.

Farelly further supports his proposition through his grasp of John’s Prologue (especially 1:10-13). He argues that it exists “to pose the question of whether or not the characters encountered in the narrative have received Jesus.”[101] He contends that the beginnings of narratives “have a primacy effect in constituting a hermeneutical frame which readers need to understand the remaining narrative, and which inevitably shapes or influences their interpretation of the narrative.”[102] Within the Prologue itself, he finds (again via the work of Lincoln) that its “we” language “invites readers to share the implied author’s perspective in including them [as among those who rightly believe].”[103] This then makes John’s readers judges who decide whether a character’s actions are fitting or not.

Thus far, Farelly offers the strongest argument for suggesting that it was the author’s intention for readers to scrutinize his figures to assess whether they are faithful or not. One can assume from this interpretation that the author would want the readers to imitate those who believe rightly. On the other hand, it could also be argued that John 1:1-18 does not demand a command to judge the characters of the Gospel but instead sets up an ideological world within which the audience is to experience the remainder of the text.[104] If this is the circumstance, then John’s Prologue divides the world into two camps: those who reject Jesus and those who believe. There is no specific direct call from the author to play juror but there are theological themes that will be explored through the

---

[101] Ibid., 21. Once more he is dependent upon Lincoln’s work (*Truth on Trial*, 174).

[102] Farelly, *Disciples*, 21. Farelly also claims that the importance of prologues for understanding texts has been maintained by narrative analysis, citing Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, Poétique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 77–121; Mikeal C. Parsons, “Reading a Beginning/Beginning a Reading: Tracing a Literary Theory on Narrative Openings,” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 11–31; Werner H. Kelber, “The Birth of a Beginning: John 1:1-18,” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 121–44; Robert C. Tannehill, “Beginning to Study ‘How the Gospels Begin,’” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 185–92.

[103] Farelly, *Disciples*, 20; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 172.

[104] In Chapter Two, I dive deeper into the concept of John’s ideological universe.

characters in what follows.[105] In addition, Farelly's thesis rests on the underpinning that John's purpose statement reveals his audience to be believers who are being called to continue in their faith. If this were not the case, then John's readership would not discover that the disciples experience is analogous to its own.

Besides the relational role of Johannine characters, Farelly also advocates the traditional view that John's figures exist to disclose Jesus's identity. He argues that "there is no real change or development in the character of Jesus throughout the narrative" but that "implied readers discover more of what his identity and mission entail as Jesus interacts with and reveals himself to other characters."[106] This second use of John's characters is not his main concern, and as a result he does not fully explore it. In short, Farelly maintains the same ideas about the purpose of Johannine characters as Collins and Culpepper. They are with whom readers identify and they reveal Jesus's identity.

From these works on the ambiguity of John's figures we find a significant development in how we are to read characters in John, but except in the work of Conway, the understood purpose of these figures has not changed much from what Collins and Culpepper articulated. For the most part characters are still viewed either as having responses of faith that challenge the readers to examine their own faith or they are seen as foils who reveal aspects of Jesus's identity. More importantly, what we continue to find is that these conclusions on the use of John's figures are secondary to the main aim of each work (i.e., explaining John's characterization). This emphasis on characterization

---

[105] Armand Barus makes this observation about the Prologue in his dissertation ("The Faith Motif in John's Gospel: A Narrative Approach" [PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2000], 43–44).

[106] Farelly, *Disciples*, 171.

continues in many of the works ahead and is especially noticeable in the approaches of William M. Wright IV and Bennema.

1.2.3. Ancient and Johannine Characterization: Comparative Studies

In recent years, some interpreters have attempted to understand Johannine characterization by exploring ancient notions of literary figures. In 2009, Wright claimed that John's depiction of Judas matched the Greco-Roman practice of constructing characters as moral types. This article promotes the Collins-Culpepper perspective on John's characters as representative figures (i.e., types) but with evidence from antiquity.[107] Wright opens his argument by showing that ancient writers developed literary figures as moral types. He establishes this point with works by Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Aelius Theon of Alexandria, and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[108]

After this, Wright moves to his main contention: that the Fourth Gospel's picture of Judas belongs within this Greco-Roman model of characterization. He maintains that Judas is regularly illustrated as "vicious and wicked"—a villain, and he shows that in the first half of John the author depicts Judas to be disloyal (6:71), a devil (6:70), a liar (12:4-6), and a thief (12:4-6).[109] In fact, he reveals that Judas is described as having several stereotypical ancient vices that are outlined in the works of Seneca, Epictetus, Cicero, and

---

[107] In fact, Wright mentions Collins and Culpepper, and he criticizes their work for not looking at characters from "the perspective of antique literary composition" ("Judas," 544). At the same time, he states, "The use of representative characters in the Fourth Gospel bears some similarities to the Greco-Roman compositional practice of defining characters as moral types" (ibid.). Thus, he simultaneously distances his work from the theories of Collins and Culpepper while tying it closely to their work by using language like "representative characters."

[108] Wright, "Judas," 545–50.

[109] Ibid., 559, 551–55.

Josephus.[110] He then demonstrates that in the second half of John the author continues his unflattering portrayal of Judas. In 13:11, he is described as unclean, he is most likely the son of destruction in 17:12, and in 18:2, he is called the betrayer. [111]

Wright posits that this construction of Judas's person reveals that John was familiar with "Greco-Roman compositional technique of moral character typing."[112] He is confident that John regularly depicts Judas as an immoral character and "invites the audience to evaluate [Judas' words and deeds] in moral terms."[113] He does not elaborate on this conclusion and its further implications for the purpose of John's characters. This is expected since he states that his goal is not to focus on the "narrative function and theological valence" of John's figures but instead "John's practice of representative characterization" and its "consideration from the perspective of antique literary composition."[114]

Wright's analysis is limited in scope. First, John's literary context is not just Greek and Roman but also Jewish, and biblical critics have long recognized the complexity of OT characters—a point that will be raised by Bennema.[115] Besides, Hylen summarizes the modern understandings of ancient characterization as "more nuanced" than Wright and others claim it is.[116] Second, Wright makes his case with only one

---

[110] Ibid., 551–55.
[111] Ibid., 555–59.
[112] Ibid., 559.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 544.
[115] Bennema, "Character," 380. Bennema lists the following citations as evidence: Alter, *Biblical Narrative*; Berlin, *Poetics*; Sternberg, *Poetics*; Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).
[116] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 11. The works Hylen references for this point include Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 92; Christopher Gill, "The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus," *ClQ* 77 (1983): 469–87; Warren Ginsberg, *The Cast of Character: The Representation of Personality in Ancient and Medieval Literature* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Christopher Pelling, ed., *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Fred W. Burnett,

figure—Judas, who in the perspective of Bennema, is the simplest and most one dimensional character in John.[117] In the text of the Fourth Gospel there are clear occasions of complex figures, the best examples being Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, and Peter. Wright argues convincingly that John shows knowledge of culturally conceived ideas of what constitutes evil in its typical form, but with this alone he cannot prove that John did characterization in the way he maintains it was done in the first century.

From Wright I move to Bennema, who uses a similar method but belongs with those who see John's characters as complex. His work specifically targets "Johannine characters and their responses to Jesus" and his objective is to show "that many characters are more complex, round and developing than most scholars would have us believe."[118] This contrasts "many biblical critics" who "assume that the Aristotelian view of character was dominant in all of ancient Greek literature and also influenced the

"Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 6–15; Petri Merenlahti, "Characters in the Making: Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels," in Rhoads and Syreeni, *Characterization*, 51; Richard P. Thompson, "Reading Beyond the Text Part II: Literary Creativity and Characterization in Narrative Religious Texts of the Greco-Roman World," *ARC* 29 (2001): 81–122; Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, AcBib 9 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 50–52.

[117] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 238.

[118] Ibid., 3. In 2009, Bennema published his first set of paired works to tackle this issue: "Character in the Fourth Gospel," and *Encountering Jesus*. In 2014 he revised and expanded *Encountering Jesus* and released a book based on his original 2009 article, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). This work mirrored the article in structure and content but with the obvious goal of extending his argument beyond the confines of John and into the rest of the NT. Given its length, it is greater in detail and level of argumentation. The update to *Encountering Jesus* contains four main revisions. Bennema outlines what they are in the preface: "(1) I have added a chapter on Jesus, the protagonist in the Johannine narrative, with whom the other characters interact. (2) I have indicated the role of each character in the Johannine plot. (3) I have adapted the table of character descriptors to correspond more closely with the topoi ('topics') found in ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and progymnasmata. (4) I have sought to include the most significant contributions on the topics since 2007, which was essentially the *terminus ad quem* of the first edition" (*Encountering Jesus*, ix–x).

Gospel narratives."[119] The result of this way of thinking is that "the majority of scholars treat most of its characters (if not all) as 'flat' or 'types' (with the exception of Jesus)."[120]

Bennema's goal in "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel" is to establish "a comprehensive theory of character in the Fourth Gospel" in the context of its literary counterparts and modern literary character theory.[121] He expands on the points made in this work to the entire NT in his 2014 publication *A Theory of Character in the New Testament Narrative*. His intent in *Encountering Jesus* is to "classify Johannine characters along three dimensions … and then plot the resulting character on a continuum of degree of characterization (from agent to type to personality to individuality)."[122] In the first work, he develops a theory of ancient characterization; the third is the application of his theory to almost all Johannine characters.[123]

In Bennema's first work, he demonstrates that the scholarly presumption that ancient characters were flat has already been dispelled by OT narrative critics.[124] Figures in the OT are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to "fixed Homeric types" (see Jacob, Joseph, Saul, and David).[125] Ambiguity and change rather than permanence is dominant among OT figures, and this is more in line with modern fictional characters than Greco-Roman ones.

---

[119] Bennema, "Character," 377.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 378.
[122] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 27.
[123] In his second edition of *Encountering Jesus*, Bennema applies the developments he made in *A Theory of Character* along with what he accomplished in his 2009 article. He also employs the method he develops in his 2009 article and in *A Theory of Character* to a few figures in Mark, John, and Acts in a chapter in *A Theory of Character* titled "Application of the Theory—Validating the New Paradigm" (*Character*, 113–83).
[124] Bennema lists Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Meir Sternberg and Shimon Bar-Efrat as evidence ("Character," 380).
[125] Ibid., 381.

In addition, Bennema also ascertains that the process of character creation drawn by Aristotle is not representative of all ancient Greek writers. Using examples from Greek tragedy, he shows that figures in antiquity could be complex and display development (e.g., the persons in Sophocles's *Ajax* and *Antigone* or those in Euripides's *Medea, Electra*, *Orestes*, *Ion*, and *Antiope*).[126] Bennema maintains that many of the characters in John model these same intricacies.[127] From these findings, he determines that it would be suitable to apply modern theories of character studies to ancient texts.[128]

After establishing these two points, Bennema advises that we read John's characters with a modified form of Yosef Ewen's classifications: complexity, development, and penetration into the inner life.[129] *Complexity* is measured by the number and level of traits a character has.[130] *Development*, says Bennema, "occurs when a new trait replaces another or does not fit neatly into the existing set of traits, implying that the character has changed."[131] *Penetration into the inner life* is the observation that "characters may vary from those who are seen only from the outside (their minds remain opaque) to those whose consciousness is presented from within."[132] The depiction of the inner life of a character is not as prevalent in John as it is in other writings, but it does appear in a number of places. For example, the disciples "remember certain things (2:17, 22; 12:16), are amazed (4:27), afraid (6:19; 20:19), make assumptions (11:13; 13:29), are at a loss (13:22), do not understand (12:16, 13:28, 21:4), and lack courage (21:12)."[133]

---

[126] Ibid., 383–86.
[127] Ibid., 399. His research contradicts the work of a number of NT scholars besides Wright. See his list (ibid., 382 n. 29).
[128] Ibid., 397.
[129] Ibid., 392, 403–7.
[130] Ibid., 403.
[131] Ibid., 403–4.
[132] Ibid., 392.
[133] Ibid., 405.

These are all depictions of the internal feelings of the disciples. In sum, the more complexity and development a character possesses and the greater the penetration is into its inner life, the more personality it has and the less likely it is a type.

Given John's emphasis on belief, Bennema also finds that the study of John's characters must include a classification of each person's faith response in addition to these taxonomies. This is accomplished by appraising a character's reaction to Jesus in light of the author's evaluative point of view, purpose, and dualistic worldview.[134] He finds that a character displays adequate faith implicitly and explicitly through verbal and non-verbal responses.[135] For example, a reader can compare the "explicit belief responses" of Nathanael's "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49), and Martha's "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (11:27), with that of the confession that the author desires for his readers in John 20:31 to conclude that the declarations of Nathanael and Martha are adequate "since they closely parallel the ideal Johannine confession."[136] On the other hand, the act of the Samaritan Woman leaving behind her water jar is a satisfactory implicit non-verbal answer since it reveals that "her thirst has been quenched."[137] I will apply this methodology in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

---

[134] Ibid., 410. In *Encountering Jesus*, he makes the same point, writing, "I evaluate the characters' responses to Jesus in keeping with John's evaluative point of view, purpose, and dualistic worldview. As the Johannine characters interact with Jesus, John evaluates their responses according to his ideology and point of view and communicates this ideological or evaluative system to the reader with the intention that the reader should embrace it" (*Encountering Jesus*, 29–30). As in his article "Character," an example of him doing this is found in his section on Nathanael. In the conclusion of that chapter, he summarizes his findings stating, "Nathanael responds adequately to Jesus' revelation (1:48b-49), and his declaration of Jesus as the Son of God and king of Israel matches the ideal Johannine confession mentioned in 20:31—and indeed Jesus identifies Nathanael's confession as (adequate) belief (1:50)" (ibid., 133).

[135] Bennema, "Character," 417.

[136] Ibid.

[137] This is but one example of the Samaritan's non-verbal or implicit faith response. The others are the Samaritan Woman inviting "her fellow-villagers to 'come and see' this man, Jesus, whom she tentatively believes is the Messiah," "many Samaritans believ[ing] in Jesus on the basis of the woman's

As to the matter of the purpose of John's characters, Bennema writes, "The Fourth Evangelist tries to persuade his readers by communicating and recommending his values and norms to the reader, particularly in the way he portrays his characters and evaluates them."[138] In fact, he is certain that "the narrative itself calls for the evaluation or judgment of the characters' responses towards Jesus" because "the narrative and its inbuilt perspective demand that the reader reflect on and assess each character."[139] Furthermore, he maintains that the author's intent is not for the reader's judgment to stay within the world of the narrative and its characters but to move outside it, so that "in this process of evaluation the reader will judge her or his own response towards Jesus [while judging the Gospel's characters]."[140]

Thus—and unlike Conway—Bennema advocates that the complexity of John's characters can work within the book's dualistic system. He builds this argument by pointing out (1) that it is not the characters themselves but their responses that readers are to judge, and (2) that these responses are typical even though the characters themselves are complex.[141] The application of this theory takes place in Bennema's second work, *Encountering Jesus*.

In this volume, Bennema evaluates many of John's characters using the aforementioned techniques. He specifically surveys Jesus, John the Baptist, the world, the Jews, Andrew and Philip together, Simon Peter, Nathanael, the Mother of Jesus, Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, the Royal Official, the Invalid at the Pool, the crowd,

---

testimony," and the possibility that "their climactic confession of Jesus as the Saviour of the world (4:42) very likely includes the woman's confession" (ibid.).

[138] Ibid., 411.

[139] Ibid., 414.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid., 415, 418.

the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, the Man Born Blind, Martha, Mary of Bethany, Lazarus, Thomas, the Beloved Disciple, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, and Joseph Arimathea. He has a chapter for every figure or group, and at the conclusion of each chapter he provides a table for that chapter's character. These tables correspond to "the topoi (topics) found in ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and *progymnasmata*."[142] Each table reflects the following pattern:

Name of Character[143]	
Narrative Appearances	
Origin	Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Nation/City
	Family (Ancestors, Relatives)
Upbringing	Nurture, Education
External Goods	Epithets, Reputation
	Age, Marital Status
	Socioeconomic Status, Wealth
	Place of Residence/Operation
	Occupation, Positions Held
	Group Affiliation, Friends
Speech and Actions	In Interaction with the Protagonist
	In Interaction with Other Characters
Death	Manner of Death, Events after Death
Character Analysis	Complexity
	Development
	Inner Life
Character Classification	Degree of Characterization
Character Evaluation	Response to the Protagonist
	Role in the Plot
Character Significance	Representative Value

In many ways Bennema's work is similar to Collins's and Culpepper's. He analyzes Johannine characters to designate the kind of person John was creating and

[142] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, x.
[143] Ibid., 38–39.

comes to comparable conclusions. The difference between his work and theirs is the depth at which he analyzes each figure and the connection he builds between the characterization of John and the characterization of other ancient writers. Furthermore, Bennema rejects the notion of Collins and Culpepper that John's characters are "types" while at the same time accepting their conclusion that these figures represent responses of adequate and inadequate faith.

In truth, Bennema develops a *via media* in Johannine character studies. He creates a convergence and expansion of the last forty years of scholarship on John's figures, combining Conway's assessment that the Gospel's characters are complex with the thesis of Collins and Culpepper that the persons of John are representative figures.[144] With this, nonetheless, we find no significant development in our knowledge of the purpose of Johannine persons. Bennema reacts to the popular perspective of John's characters as types but comes to the same conclusions about their use as authors prior to him.

Before progressing, I should comment on the similarities between Bennema's work and what will follow in this project. First, this work and Bennema's are concerned with "confessing characters." Bennema does not call them by this name but chooses to

---

[144] An example of Bennema walking the line between Conway and Collins/Culpepper is found in the following statement: "Many characters gain 'roundness' in the Johannine narrative and move toward personality or even individuality on the degree of characterization continuum, but their responses are typical. For example, Nicodemus comes across as a somewhat round character—sympathetic towards Jesus but slow when it comes to spiritual matters, willing to be associated with Jesus and ready to face scorn and possible retaliation from his colleagues but not taking a clear stand. But his dominant response of ambiguity (it remains unclear whether he accepts Jesus) is typical. It is thus imperative that we classify both the characters and their responses towards Jesus" ("Character," 409). He even creates an extensive chart near the end of *Encountering Jesus* that specifies the contemporary representative value for each figure that he studies, and comes to many of the same conclusions that Collins and Culpepper do (*Encountering Jesus*, 368–70). Redman's assessment of Bennema's work in light of Conway's is helpful. She writes, "Bennema responds to Conway by suggesting that characters reflect the human perspective, but their responses are ultimately evaluated from the divine perspective and are considered to be either acceptance or rejection of Jesus, so it is at that point that they fit into binary categories" ("Testimony," 65).

label them as individuals who make "belief-responses."[145] Second, he also understands the transformative process of John's characters in a way comparable to what will be sketched below in Chapter Six, affirming that figures comprehend who Jesus is because the Holy Spirit enables them "to progress in their understanding of and belief-response to Jesus."[146]

This first parallel should be anticipated, since there are few characters who do not converse with Jesus and thus respond with faith or unbelief. This fact is corroborated by the list of characters that Bennema does not cover in his works.[147] What remains are mostly figures who do little in the narrative or who can be grouped with other characters he analyzes. As a consequence, overlap as to who will be studied and why should be expected in literature that surveys characters in John.

Additionally, if one is going to discuss characters who make a confession/belief-response, then one would expect an articulation of how that belief response takes place. Furthermore, Bennema emphasizes the need for divine action to occur prior to faith, but at times he makes tangential comments that conflict with this notion, stressing human responsibility.[148] Moreover, I contend that John's understanding of salvation and spiritual

---

[145] Bennema *Encountering Jesus*., 36–37.

[146] Ibid., 35. See also Bennema's discussion of the epistemological state of the world, which reflects what I say in Chapter Six to some extent (ibid., 77–78).

[147] He reports that he will ignore "characters such as the master of ceremonies in 2:8-10, the servants of the royal official in 4:51-52, the adulterous woman in 7:53-8:11, and the soldiers in John 18-19 (they do not produce a response); Jesus' biological brothers (the information is minimal—they simply disbelieve Jesus and are 'from below' [7:3-7]; Judas not Iscariot (he appears only in 14:22); and Caiaphas (he is subsumed under 'the Jews')" (ibid., 37).

[148] Ibid., 35. For instance, in his discussion on the responses of John's characters and modern readers, he says, "The Gospel of John is uniquely timeless: readers of this Gospel, in any generation and culture, will encounter Jesus and must decide where they stand" (ibid., 371). In another place, he writes, "People [in John] who encounter Jesus and his teaching and signs are required to make a response to him and his revelation. John presents a spectrum of responses…. People either accept Jesus and his revelation … or they reject him. … Today, as we read John's Gospel, we are confronted with Jesus just as the characters in the story were and face the same challenge: where do we stand in relation to Jesus?" (ibid., 35–36).

growth fits within a Trinitarian model, which shows how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each involved in the transformation of a believer's knowledge of Jesus. This is an expansion of what Bennema finds in his research.

What matters for this study and where it differs from Bennema is in its understanding of the scope of the purpose of characters. Even though Bennema recognizes that John sees divine action as necessary for faith, he still comprehends the purpose of Johannine figures in the same way that Collins and Culpepper do. Bennema maintains that John's characters exist so that the reader may evaluate them and learn from their example.[149] This may be an aspect of the purpose of John's characters but it is difficult to prove. All we have is what John has done with them and one cannot assume that the author includes these persons in the "these things" of John 20:31 as Bennema and others have done, especially when the direct referent of "these" is "signs."[150]

Ultimately, what distinguishes my work from Bennema's is his concern with how John renders each character. His goal for every chapter is to look at a figure to determine how John depicts this figure and then to classify that individual according to his degrees of characterization (agent to individuality).[151] Consequently, the aspect of characters that

---

[149] Ibid., 40.

[150] I am not saying that it is impossible for characters to be included in the "these" of 20:31, but I insist that a more nuanced reading of how John's figures fit within the bounds of his purpose statement is needed. If the "these" of 20:31 are only the signs of Jesus, which include his appearances after the resurrection, then it is not the characters themselves who promote the call to faith of 20:31 but the act of Jesus in the conversation between himself and each character. Seeing the "these" of 20:31 as referencing Jesus's appearances is not abnormal. J. Ramsey Michaels holds that it only points to Jesus's appearances in John 20 (*The Gospel of John*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 1021–23). As a result, the characters do not immediately exist to bring about faith in the believer. They are not representational figures we are to emulate. Instead these persons fulfill a thematic role within the Gospel. As commentators have argued, they are to help display Jesus's identity, but they also act out the stated theology of the Evangelist, as I will suggest. John outlines the way one comes to faith through trusted figures and then his characters depict it.

[151] Ibid., 38.

Bennema studies and the conclusions he draws about their use differ from what will be presented below.

1.2.4. Johannine Eye Witnesses: Judith Christine Single Redman

In reaction to Bennema stands Judith Christine Single Redman. Her article "Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel" offers an interesting explanation of the purpose of John's characters. She argues that through the Gospel's figures "the author intended to show the implied reader that the heroes and heroines of the early Christian movement were ordinary, fallible human beings, empowered to do extraordinary things by their encounters with and belief in Jesus."[152] As a result, she maintains that characters reveal that "the reader can also access the belief in Jesus that results in life" as well as "serve as examples for [us], the reader, of what the life that comes with belief in Jesus might involve."[153]

Redman presents this interpretation because she maintains that those projects that judge the belief-responses of John's characters are fallible endeavors since Martha alone makes the confession of 20:31 word for word .[154] She surveys the major monographs that make this case and establishes that their claims are unfounded since Martha alone makes the confession of 20:31 word for word.[155] She concludes that John's characters are complex and difficult to judge because they are "real live people and real live people are

---

[152] Redman, "Testimony," 60.

[153] Ibid., 60, 67. Kelli O'Brien comes to the same conclusion as Redman. She writes, "The author presents characters who experience confusion, uncertainty, and misunderstanding but who profit from the experience and come to authentic faith—that is, the reader is presented with characters much like him. The reader is given characters with whom he can identify and who can induce him to believe" ("John 20," 296).

[154] Redman, "Testimony," 66. The specific publications she challenges are Culpepper, *Anatomy*; David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel*, BibInt 27 (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997); Bennema, *Character* (Redman, "Testimony," 63–67).

[155] Ibid., 66.

not flat. They do not necessarily behave in ways that sit comfortably within a plot outline, and the writer of historical narrative cannot easily dispose of the problematic behaviours because other people know they happened."[156]

Redman establishes her thesis through a view that favors a historically reliable yet critical reading of John. The Fourth Gospel itself says that it is eyewitness testimony, and several modern interpreters have affirmed this notion. She stresses this point, relying on the writings of Richard Bauckham, but she does not take it without modification.[157] Instead, she alters this perspective by questioning the accuracy of eyewitness testimony with a review of psychological literature on the subject.[158] She then comes to the following conclusion:

> If we take the claims of the text at face value, we cannot rely on the details not to have been supplied from the imagination of either John, to improve the flow of the story, or his informants in an effort to please, although the ongoing presence of the eyewitnesses is likely to have ensured that they remained consistent with what actually happened.[159]

This use of the nature of the Gospel as eyewitness testimony to inform our assessment of the purpose of Johannine characters is helpful. Nevertheless, Redman's only support for her deduction that characters exist to "serve as examples of lives of faith" is this understanding of the essence of the Gospel as eyewitness testimony.[160] More than anything, her work is a reaction to Bennema and others who understand John's figures to be what she calls "yardsticks against which to judge belief."[161] She writes

[156] Ibid., 67.
[157] Ibid., 68–72.
[158] Ibid., 72–76.
[159] Ibid., 76.
[160] Ibid., 77.
[161] Ibid.

against this view in detail but does not provide sufficient evidence to show that John includes characters to illustrate what real life examples of faith look like.[162]

1.2.5. Characters as Agents of Revelation: William Bonney

Some works study John's characters to defend theses that are not principally related to the study of characters but the Gospel in general. Of those where this occurs, two are pertinent for our study: William Bonney's *The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John's Christological Narrative*, and James L. Resseguie's *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*. The first is concerned with how we interpret the Thomasine narrative of 20:24-29 and the other with "point of view," which will be detailed below. I will explore Bonney's monograph first.

Bonney's concern is to show that "a focus on Jesus gains ascendancy over a focus on Thomas when one reads the passage [of 20:24-29] within the context of the gospel as a literary whole."[163] This is because "the central point of this pericope is the source and object of faith, rather than the method by which faith is attained. Thomas' actions give the reader an opportunity to learn something about Jesus."[164] What one discovers when this approach is taken is "that faith does not simply result from one's acceptance of testimony; rather, it results from Jesus' direct willful action"—a point that I will make throughout this project.[165]

Bonney establishes that this concept is found not only in John 20 but in the whole Gospel. The Thomasine pericope is merely the climax of John and the highpoint of the

---

[162] Ibid., 60–67.
[163] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 2.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 5.

manifestation of this concept.[166] To defend this view Bonney canvasses large portions of the Gospel, dividing it into three main parts: (1) 1:19-4:54; (2) 5:1-10:42; and (3) 11:1-20:29.[167] In surveying these sections, he contends not only that the Gospel consistently displays this notion but that it purposefully puts forward this concept prior to the story of Thomas's confession to condition the reader to comprehend 20:24-29 in this manner.

In terms of Bonney's place within the history of Johannine character studies, he bluntly states that his work is challenging previous scholarship on the subject. He openly decries an investigation into characters to recognize what is the correct way to come to faith (e.g., not through signs) or to determine the kind of faith one should have via the examples that characters give (as Collins, Culpepper, and others have done). He insists that these views are incorrect for two reasons.

First, Bonney stresses that John's characters are "portrayed rather flatly" and thus we should not perceive "an intricate psychology of how one comes to faith," nor should we expect to find a systematized presentation of their behavior.[168] Second, he claims that "nowhere in the gospel does John propose to leave his reader with a scale of faiths against which he or she might judge his or her own faith."[169] Instead John's purpose statement of 20:30-31 indicates that the Gospel's intention is to make known Jesus's identity. Therefore Bonney argues that readers should come across illustrations of John revealing Jesus in his characters.[170]

---

[166] Ibid., 3, 5.

[167] His reasoning for dividing John into three parts is established on the basis of the work of Charles H. Giblin (ibid., 3). Prior to his three chapters on John's main sections, Bonney also has a chapter on the history of the scholarship on John's portrayal of Thomas and one on his recognition of the Gospel as "a signifier created by John in order to identify for his readers an object that exists independently of the text" (ibid., 29). A close examination of these chapters is not relevant here.

[168] Ibid., 27–28.

[169] Ibid., 27.

[170] Ibid.

This becomes the main contention in Bonney's work. That is, the purpose that John's characters serve is to make Jesus known "dramatically."[171] He writes, "Over the course of John's narrative, Jesus' interactions with other characters [besides Thomas] reveal by degrees a fuller view of who he is and how his identity is not discovered according to earthly criteria but rather revealed according to his own plan, a plan that culminates with the encounter between Jesus and Thomas."[172] He asserts that every figure "encounters Jesus in a different way and thus reveals something about Jesus that the other characters cannot."[173] Yet he talks only about John's persons revealing Jesus to be the enabler of faith.

As shrewd as Bonney's work is, it contains a few shortcomings. Chiefly, he advocates the same theory as to the purpose of John's characters as Culpepper. This is in spite of his criticism of Culpepper's work.[174] Bonney holds that Johannine figures disclose Jesus's identity. Culpepper contended this as well.[175] Additionally, his interpretation of Johannine faith conflicts with his ideas as to how readers are to utilize the Gospel. He repeatedly suggests that the narrative of John is conditioning its readers "to see that the identity of Jesus will be the focus of the narrative" and to prepare them

---

[171] Ibid., 28. It is unclear what Bonney means by "dramatically." The full quotation reads, "in their encounters with Jesus, they [characters] draw out response from him and thus dramatically reveal his identity" (ibid.). He never repeats this phrase but he speaks of "dramatic tension" and "the dramatic effect of the narrative" elsewhere, though neither of these expressions represents Bonney's ideas (ibid., 91, 147 n. 42). The first is used to summarize a point made by Culpepper and the second to sum up an idea presented by Schnackenburg.

[172] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 4. Or as he writes elsewhere, "The meetings between Jesus and the other characters in the text reveal not primarily the identities of the other characters but rather how Jesus' identity comes to be known in relation to them. John wishes his readers to recognize Jesus not simply as an object of faith but as that faith's proactive cause and its continuing ground" (ibid., 37).

[173] Ibid., 100.

[174] As shown above, he refutes Culpepper's theory regarding the representative value of each character's behavior (ibid., 27–28). He also disapproves of Culpepper's interpretation of misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel (ibid., 78–79).

[175] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 145.

"to read the gospel expecting to see Jesus defined in terms of his relationships to others."[176] This gives the impression that the Gospel (and not Jesus) is what brings about faith.[177]

As with Bennema, readers will notice parallels between what appears in Bonney's work and what will take place below. First, Bonney and I share a similar interpretation of John's explanation regarding how one comes to faith. Second, we each examine characters by looking at the theme of faith and Jesus's necessity for it. Nonetheless, the places in Bonney's work that need expansion allow for this project.

As I argue, Bonney recognizes similarity between the Johannine pericopes of believing characters. Even so, he does not elaborate on it. For instance, he notices several motifs that appear throughout John, two of which are (1) "Jesus' transcendent insight into the hearts and lives of those he encounters" and (2) "the transformative power of this insight."[178] He mentions these two features in reference to the narratives of Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, and Thomas (passages covered in the chapters ahead).[179] Yet he does not demonstrate the full structure that is exhibited in these narratives or those of other confessing characters (as will be shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five). In fact,

[176] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 39.
[177] Ibid., 29, 170.
[178] Ibid., 173.
[179] E.g., Bonney writes, "The transformative power of Jesus' personal knowledge into the hearts of those he encounters is a theme John introduced with the call of Nathanael (cf. 1:47b-48), repeated in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (4:18-19), and will repeat again in Jesus' encounter with Thomas (20:27)" (ibid., 153). He also observes the paralleling composition of Mary Magdalene's story and Thomas's, writing, "as he did with Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (20:11-16), John has made it clear that a personal encounter initiated by the risen Lord constitutes the only effective means for this transformation. Against the backdrop of Thomas' doubt, John most effectively displays the nature of belief" (ibid., 169). In comparing the pericopes of Nathanael and Thomas he makes this comparison: "The parallel with the call of Nathanael is especially striking. Both Nathanael and Thomas reject the testimony of others because the testimony is not commensurate with their view of the world (1:46 20:25)" (ibid., 165–66). Thus one can see Bonney touching on but not fully exploring similarities among confession scenes.

his unit on "pattern of testimony and contact" is only a paragraph long.[180] He does not fully detail the parallels between each confession scene.

Moreover, Bonney promises to survey "Jesus' interactions with other characters—especially those who seek to understand him," but he does not cover Jesus's conversations with Peter, the Beloved Disciple, Martha, and the Man Born Blind.[181] Besides Thomas, he analyzes no character in depth. His synopsis of many Johannine persons spans but a few pages and sometimes less than that.

Bonney also holds that faith prior to Jesus's resurrection is not possible. This prevents him from seeing as adequate any confession before John 20.[182] I disagree with this notion. Furthermore, he sees characters as "provid[ing] backdrops against which Jesus' transcendence is revealed" and "emphasiz[ing] the chasm that exists between Jesus' perspective and an earthly one."[183] Instead, I will argue that John openly discloses his theology—how one comes to faith—and then depicts this idea in the stories of his characters. This difference is subtle but reveals that I will concentrate on John's use of characters more so than Bonney.

---

[180] Ibid., 163.

[181] Ibid., 4–5.

[182] Ibid., 71, 78-79, 125. When analyzing Nathanael's narrative Bonney says this directly, writing, "Nathanael has been impressed, but his new judgment of Jesus also proves inadequate. Nathanael sees Jesus in terms of an earthly kingship, a judgment Jesus quickly puts into question with his reference to the heavenly Son of Man in his glory" (ibid., 59–60). In a note he states, "Nathanael's declaration 'Son of God…' should not be taken as more than a messianic title in the Jewish tradition (see 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 1 Enoch 105:2; 4 Ezra 13:42). Nathanael does not recognize Jesus as the unique progeny of God as John describes him in the prologue" (ibid., 59 n. 51). He writes all this even though Jesus affirms Nathanael's faith in 1:50 when he asks, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe?" Bennema argues this point well in his chapter on Nathanael (*Encountering Jesus*, 133).

[183] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 84.

1.2.6. Point of View and Johannine Characters: James L. Resseguie

Resseguie's *The Strange Gospel* is not primarily concerned with characters but with how point of view is expressed in the Fourth Gospel and with the point of view that the author wants his readers to adopt.[184] One way Resseguie judges that John's point of view is expressed is through his characters.[185] He writes, "Characters in the Gospel of John represent distinct points of view that elaborate, reinforce, or in some way highlight ideological perspectives of the gospel."[186] Nevertheless, Resseguie holds that not every character puts forward the author's perspective. Some figures, he writes, "voice material perspectives to underscore the strangeness of common norms and practices."[187] Whereas others—marginalized characters—"dismantle the thinking of the dominant culture."[188]

As scholars have done before, Resseguie commences his discussion by reviewing the works of Collins and Culpepper. He claims, "Although these writers identify the representative qualities that either propel characters to faith or repulse them from a faith response to Jesus, they do not explore characters' distinct points of view and their relationship to the gospel's overall ideology."[189] From here, Resseguie suggests that John's characters should be understood as falling into one of three distinct positions: the protagonist, dominant characters, and marginalized persons.

In John, the protagonist is Jesus and he "represents the principal point of view of the narrative." [190] This perspective is expressed in the following ways: "1) by what the

---

[184] Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 1–2.
[185] The others are rhetoric, setting, and plot (ibid., 197).
[186] Ibid., 109.
[187] Ibid., 197.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid., 109–10.
[190] Ibid., 110.

narrator says about Jesus; 2) by what other characters say; 3) by Jesus' speech; and 4) by his actions."[191] The narrator reveals Jesus's outlook as singular. In the Prologue he describes Jesus as being outside of time and space, divine, creator of all things, the only one who has seen God, and close to the Father's heart.[192] Other characters reinforce the primacy of Jesus's perspectives by what they say about him.[193] Characters confess him to be the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), the one on whom the Spirit has descended (1:32), the Son of God (1:34), Rabbi (1:38; 3:2), the Messiah (1:41; 4:42), the King of Israel (1:45), the one who is from above and is above all (2:31), the Savior of the World (4:42), the Holy One of God (6:69), a prophet (9:17), the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world (11:27), etc.

Jesus's speech reverses the dominant point of view and expresses John's.[194] According to Resseguie, the leading perspective is "superficial (7:24), judging by appearances and according to human standards (8:15)."[195] He stresses that "it is self-serving, seeking approval and public recognition from others rather than glory from God (5:44; 7:18; 12:43)."[196] On the other hand, Jesus presents a view that stands in contradistinction to this one. His outlook is "from above" and "not of this world" (8:23). He finds glory outside of this κόσμος (5:44), desires correct judgment (7:24), and "urges his followers to come out of the world (15:19) and to be hated by the world."[197]

---

[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., 110–15.
[193] Ibid., 115–17.
[194] Ibid., 117–19.
[195] Ibid., 117.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.

Ultimately, Jesus's perspective is "strange" and the characteristics of Jesus's speech reflect opacity.[198]

Jesus's actions reflect the strangeness of this speech. They are "provocative and unsettling, making the strange common, routinized perceptions of the world."[199] He serves the best wine last instead of first (2:10). He transforms our understanding of the temple by associating it with his body (2:21). He changes a meager meal into a feast (6:11) and he defies all expectations by walking on water (6:16-21). He says that he came to give sight to the blind and to take away sight from those who see (9:39). This sort of upside-down behavior continues throughout the rest of the Gospel and demonstrates that Jesus "turns on its head practices, norms, and expectations that are taken for granted by the dominant culture."[200]

Resseguie's second class of characters are "dominant" figures. He reasons that they "represent the point of view of the prevailing, dominant culture (whether Jewish or Gentile)."[201] Characters who fall into this category are the world, the religious authorities, Gentile and Jewish officials, and all others who are from below. This includes named characters like Nicodemus and Pilate. A materialistic view permeates each of these characters' perceptions. For instance, Nicodemus cannot understand Jesus's talk of being born ἄνωθεν because he thinks of it in a materialistic way. His response exhibits this: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's

[198] Ibid., 118.
[199] Ibid., 119.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 120.

womb and be born?" (3:4b). As Resseguie remarks, he is unable to "translate earthly analogies into heavenly categories."[202]

Resseguie's final category is that of marginalized figures.[203] As the classification suggests, these characters are at the margins of society, being of low social status. This may be a result of their gender, ethnicity, physical disabilities, or line of employment. Their place in the world makes them "the living dead—socially and culturally" but it also allows them to be "ideal candidates for resurrection."[204] Throughout the Gospel this is true. The Lame Man is given wholeness of body and witnesses to Jesus before the officials.[205] The Man Born Blind moves from being an object of theological discussion to a fully developed personality who has a mature voice and faith.[206]

This kind of transformation occurs with Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Thomas and their view of Jesus. Mary Magdalene's perspective changes as to why Jesus's tomb is empty because "[Jesus's] call, his display of personal knowledge into her person, causes her recognition."[207] At first Peter has a materialistic view and wants to follow Jesus on his own terms but he eventually commits himself to Jesus in a manner of self-giving love.[208] Thomas has "a material, concrete point of view" and "judges by appearance."[209]

---

[202] Ibid., 124.

[203] Ibid., 134–67.

[204] Ibid., 134.

[205] Resseguie reads this final encounter between the Lame Man and the officials within an affirmative light because of the consistently positive use of ἀναγγέλλω throughout the Gospel (e.g., 4:25, 16:13, 16:14, 16:15; ibid., 138).

[206] Ibid., 143–44.

[207] Ibid., 152.

[208] For example in John 13, Peter initially does not want Jesus to wash his feet and then would prefer for his entire body to be washed. Resseguie interprets this as being a "material point of view, which takes the washing a step too far and in too literal a manner" (ibid.).

[209] Ibid., 163.

His statements throughout the Gospel disclose this (11:16; 14:5; 20:25). Yet when Jesus reveals himself to Thomas, he makes a rather high Christological confession.[210]

Resseguie sees the Beloved Disciple as having the ideal perspective. He contends that the Beloved Disciple "correctly perceives and judges rightly the spiritual significance of events" and "represents the ideal point of view of the gospel: able to see the glory in the flesh."[211] Since he is described as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" and said to be "reclining at table at Jesus' side" (13:23), his intimacy with Jesus is observed in John 13. At the tomb he arrives first and is the initial person to judge rightly what had happened (20:8).[212]

Resseguie's division between marginalized and dominant characters is useful for my discussion. In his system, all of John's confessing characters are those who find themselves on the margins of society and those who ultimately reject Jesus are part of the dominant culture. Nevertheless, Resseguie does not detail the purpose of the dominant and marginalized characters until his concluding chapter. When this occurs, he gives the discussion but one line. He writes, "Characters voice material perspectives to underscore the strangeness of common norms and practices, and the marginalized dismantle the thinking of the dominant culture."[213]

To an extent, it seems that Resseguie is simply repackaging Collins's and Culpepper's thoughts but in his own ideological matrix. Thus, for Resseguie characters represent a specific point of view just as they represented different faith responses for Collins and Culpepper. These points of view are to challenge the reader's own outlook if

[210] Ibid., 164.
[211] Ibid., 155.
[212] Ibid., 161.
[213] Ibid., 197.

it belongs to the dominant perspective by making his or her view strange in the same way that Collins and Culpepper thought different faith responses were to ignite faith in the lives of John's readers.

1.2.7. Johannine Themes and Johannine Figures

Two works come close to what I attempt in this project—Culpepper's 2013 article, "The Weave of Tapestry: Character and Theme in John," and Arman Barus's dissertation, "The Faith Motif in John's Gospel."[214] Each looks at characters in John and proposes—similar to Bonney—that they highlight the Gospel's motifs. Barus pays attention to faith and its multifaceted intricacies whereas Culpepper surveys the entire Gospel and a plethora of themes. At first glance these works appear to negate the need for this one. Instead, what will be seen is that they pave the way for what I will argue in the chapters ahead, demonstrating that Johannine themes and characters belong together. I will look at Culpepper's work first.

Culpepper begins his article by looking to the past. He assesses that "the most significant insights about characterization in *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* are probably twofold, first that in aggregate the characters offer a spectrum of responses to Jesus, and second that the depiction of these responses serves the stated purpose…."[215] After this he quickly traces scholarship on John's characters from Collins to 2013.[216] This survey leads him to the conclusion drawn in our investigation: "Studies of characterization and the characters in John typically proceed from an examination of various characters

---

[214] Culpepper, "The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in John," in Skinner, *Characters and Characterization*, 18–35; Barus, "Faith Motif."

[215] Culpepper, "Character and Theme," 18.

[216] Ibid., 19–23.

individually … and our survey of recent literature shows that increasingly the characters are being read as developing characters and/or ambiguous or unfinished."[217]

Possibly to right the ship, Culpepper decides to "take a different, and perhaps somewhat contrarian, approach to show that characterization in John is closely related to the development of the Gospel's themes"—the way forward in this project.[218] To navigate this route he investigates the Gospel in commonly recognized sections: ch(s). 1; 2-4; 5-10; 11-12; 13-17; 18-21.[219] For each, he explores how characters develop a certain theme (or themes) that the author hopes to display.[220]

For example, of John 1 Culpepper says that "the first chapter consists of the Prologue and narrative introduction to Jesus and his mission."[221] He proposes then that the characters "serve the plot function of introducing Jesus by means of confession and declarations that echo or reference the scriptures and by referring to his role as one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, take away sins of the world, and serve as the Messiah, King of Israel, and eschatological Son of Man."[222] He concludes that "while both the Jewish groups and the disciples … will reappear in later scenes and receive a higher degree of characterization, it is clear from this chapter that their roles are tightly integrated with the plot development [of explicating Jesus's identity]."[223]

---

[217] Ibid., 23.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 24.
[220] He outlines his methodology in the following way: "The approach taken here will be to survey the plot development and major themes of each section and then examine how each of the active characters (Bennema's term for those characters who make some belief-response to Jesus) function in that section of the Gospel" (ibid.).
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid., 25.
[223] Ibid.

His examination of the second section follows his pattern successfully—the subject now being "the life that Jesus mediates to those who believe in him."[224] In the pericopes that follow, Culpepper's approach becomes more multifarious as he delves into multiple themes for each section and is less clear as to how the characters advance every motif. In fact, after his analysis of various figures in John 18-21, he judges that "this final section of the Gospel … offers examples of characterization where development of the character transcends plot and theme functions, especially in the cases of Peter, Pilate and Nicodemus."[225] This would seem to undercut his general thesis. His limitations of space may be the cause of these problems. He covers the entire Gospel in less than twenty pages. It is also a testament to the intricacy of John's figures and the need for further work in this area.

Overall, Culpepper's view that "characters [in John] are not free agents who lend incidental colour or interest to the narrative" but instead "are an important feature of the narrative's rhetorical and thematic development" is an important advancement in Johannine research.[226] In fact, Culpepper—a once leading proponent of Johannine persons as representative figures—concludes that "this survey of the function of characters in relation to plot and theme suggests that it is inadequate to treat the characters individually, in isolation from one another, or simply as representative responses to Jesus that form a spectrum of responses."[227] This progress gives credence to the hypotheses of this work. John's theology is tied to his characters and this says something about their role in the Gospel.

---

[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 34.
[226] Ibid., 30.
[227] Ibid., 35.

Armand Barus's 2000 dissertation concerns itself with John's faith motif in what he labels the "Book of Belief" (John 1-12).[228] He investigates this topic via narrative criticism, breaking John 1-12 into twelve narrative blocks. [229] For each section, he analyzes the unit's setting, narrator, point of view, characters/characterization, plot, and literary devices to discover what it has to say about faith. As this list specifies, characters and how they contribute to the Gospel articulation of faith play an important role in his study. He maintains that John's figures (1) "dramatize the faith motif" in each narrative, and (2) are the "carriers of the faith motif."[230] At first glance, these expressions seem to indicate that what he has done mirrors what will take place in this project, but his general focus shows that this is not the situation. A brief consideration of how his work differs from this one will corroborate this notion.

In contrast to this project, Barus is not concerned chiefly with how one comes to faith but instead his discussion regarding faith is multifaceted and each dimension of faith that he studies tends to be divided between the twelve pericopes that he has demarcated (e.g., narrative II [1:19-2:11] portrays the personal feature of faith, narrative III [2:12-25] the communal, narrative IV [3:1-4:54] the universal, etc.).[231] At times he details several

---

[228] Barus, "Faith Motif," 17.

[229] His segments and the titles he gives them are Narrative I: Prologue (1:1-18); Narrative II: Personal Belief (1:19-2:11); Narrative III: Communal Belief (2:12-2:25); Narrative IV: Universal Belief (3:1-4:54); Narrative V: The Offensive of Belief (5:1-47); Narrative VI: Mystical Belief (6:1-71); Narrative VII: Schismatizing Belief (7:1-8:30); Narrative VIII: Enduring Belief (8:31-10:21); Narrative IX The Object of Belief (10:22-42); Narrative X: Witnessing Belief (11:1-12:11); Narrative XI: Relational Belief (12:12-36); and Narrative XII: Summarizing Belief (12:37-50). This list can be found in ibid., 360–61.

[230] Ibid., 41–42.

[231] Barus's exegetical work occurs in chs. 3-5 of the dissertation, and in his summary he outlines what major theme characters exhibit in each. He writes, "In Chapter 3 the characters dramatize the personal, communal and universal aspects of the faith motif. Chapter 4 shows how the σχίσμα emerges and how the characters dramatize not only the σκάνδαλον to participate in the divine community but also how one's relationship with Jesus who is the object of faith entails transforming his words into deeds. In Chapter 5 the characters dramatize that faith in Jesus entails witnessing about him and is essentially relationship with him" (ibid., viii). Barus reports other elements of John's faith motif for each section. For instance, beyond the personal aspect of faith within narrative II (1:19-2:11), Barus also discusses the fact

aspects of faith in a single narrative. Of the Prologue he writes, “The missiological, soteriological, Christological, and to a certain extent ethical dimensions of belief are blended with its personal, communal and universal dimensions in the well-structured and carefully written Prologue.”[232] The fact that he examines faith from so many angles prevents him from showing that characters dramatize one theme across the whole Gospel. Rather, he points out how characters exhibit multiple aspects of faith within each of his blocks of text or between narratives. As a consequence, Barus makes no systematic statement as to John’s theology of belief.

Barus does ask how John perceives faith to come about, and he openly considers this through the lens of John’s characters as “the carriers of the faith motif” who “demonstrate how faith emerges.”[233] Again, on the surface this appears to be saying precisely what will be argued in this work. Nonetheless, what he maintains that John’s characters portray reveals that this is not the case. Four points of divergence illustrate the differences between Barus’s project and this work.

First, throughout his study Barus understands coming to faith to be both a divine and human act, calling them “two paradoxical poles in John’s Gospel” that “are not contradictory to each other and are not intended as two different stages in the process of believing in Jesus.”[234] He states this view whenever discussing faith and its cause.[235] Conversely, my work will emphasize the former given John’s belief in the necessity of divine action for belief to arise. Chapter Six will expound this view.

---

that witnessing and belief are inseparable, that faith will grow, that the motif of glory is united to the theme of faith, and other elements of faith within this one segment of John (ibid., 95–97).

[232] Ibid., 72. Talking about faith in John using these key terms (missiological, soteriological, Christological, etc.) is common in this work. E.g., see ibid., 4, 17, 44, 68, 100, 122, 147, 215, 364.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid., 67.

[235] See ibid., 67, 199–201, 207, 263, 279, 333, 351–55.

Second, in his analysis of John's narrative Barus shows the reason for a character choosing to believe or not, highlighting the role of the character's free will. He does not demonstrate—as I will in Chapters Three, Four, and Five—that the author portrays characters as changing because of Jesus's direct action within the story of the Gospel itself. In his exegesis, Barus attributes unbelief to human pride, the rejection of testimony, or some other human action.[236] In the same way, he often points to the human deed of witnessing as the cause for faith. He remarks that the text discusses the need of divine action for faith to take place, but he does not illustrate that this happens in the story of the narrative.[237]

Third, Barus's analysis of the cause of belief covers a limited number of texts. He examines it only when the subject is brought up in discourse or by the narrator (1:12-13; 6:22-71; 8:31-10:21; 12:37-44).[238] He surveys many texts where confession occurs but he usually draws out other elements of John's theology of belief when interpreting these

---

[236] He does this even when the passage clearly seems to indicate a heavy emphasis on divine action like in 12:37-43 (ibid., 352).

[237] The closest he comes to doing this is with the transformation of the Man Born Blind: "The interrogation by the religious leaders opens his spiritual eyes to see the person who gave him sight progressively from 'man' to 'man come from God' while the religious leaders move in the opposite direction" (ibid., 254). He then states, "Personally encountering Jesus, the man born physically and spiritually blind receives new eyes to perceive first the natural reality and then the supernatural reality of who Jesus is" (ibid., 255). In spite of these statements, he maintains that there is a human aspect behind the man's change. He looks at the entire story as depicting "how to abide in Jesus' words (8:31)," and in part he attributes the man's faith to "his persistence in Jesus' words and, in effect, his disillusion with the religious leaders" (ibid., 253, 254). His summary of the belief motif in this unit makes this point clear: "Human responsibility and divine sovereignty are kept in balance here. The believers are responsible for abiding in Jesus' words. As they abide in his words Jesus protects them from all threats, and provides for all their needs even to death. Thus faith as a process of abiding in Jesus' words is both human moral endeavour and divine preservation. On the other hand, to be an unbeliever, as the Jews demonstrated, is one's own responsibility. Their sin, i.e. their refusal to believe in Jesus is their own deliberate decision and choice though vaguely linked to divine action (10:14)" (ibid., 263).

[238] He comments on these passages in ibid., 67–68, 199–207, 253–56, 263, 351–55. One of the few places he examines it where the text does not directly cover the subject is in the story of the Man Born Blind (ibid., 253–56).

passages.[239] Additionally, his dissertation stops at John 12. He recommends that future studies research John's faith motif in the second half of the Gospel (what he calls the "Book of Jesus") but by stopping at ch. 12 he does not give his readers a full consideration of Johannine figures and how they contribute to John's notion of faith.[240]

Lastly, Barus's conception of characters includes figures who do not appear or act in the narrative but are discussed only in the Gospel's conversations. He labels these individuals "implied characters," and he analyzes any mention of "believer" or "unbeliever" in the narrator's interjections or Jesus's exchanges to discuss John's faith motif and how characters dramatize it.[241] For example, when interpreting 5:1-47 he lists "believers" under his section on "characters and characterization" for narrative V alongside the Lame Man, Jesus, and the Jews. He writes the following about this figure:

> This textual character existing in a narrative which is populated by unbelievers is further evidence that the narrative plot is a conflict between belief and unbelief. The believer is expressly described as the one who honours the Father and the Son (v. 23), hears the voice of the Son (vv. 24,25), has eternal life (vv. 24,40), does not come into judgement (vv. 24,29), abides in God's words (v. 38), and seeks the glory that comes from the only God (v. 44). The characterization suggests that the believers-as-the implied characters are not fictional nor ideal figures. It shows how and what it means to believe in Jesus.[242]

These implied characters are not persons acting out John's ideas but are instead part of John's stated theology, appearing in the speeches of trusted people (the narrator, Jesus, and John the Baptist). Examining the terms "believer" and "unbeliever" as if they are characters does not assist in unearthing what the author does with figures in his story.

---

[239] Of the Samaritan Woman he acknowledges that her final statement assures that she has authentic faith, but that her primary role in his argument is to demonstrate that faith knows no sociological boundary—a woman of low social status can believe (ibid., 139–40, 147).

[240] He may not investigate this section of John since he upholds that "the faith motif is subordinated … to other motifs" in chs. 12-21 (ibid., 368).

[241] Ibid., 168, 362.

[242] Ibid., 168.

Besides these factors, what Barus means by the expression "dramatizing the faith motif" has primarily to do with the conflict between belief and unbelief that he sees as the tension of the Fourth Gospel. According to Barus, the plot of John is the clash between belief and unbelief.[243] For each narrative block, he makes this point.[244] Moreover Barus—like Collins, Culpepper, and the many after them—still sees one use of Johannine figures as encouraging readers to believe.[245]

Thus Barus's and Culpepper's research create a path for what will be done here. These studies show that there is a marriage between John's ideas and his characters. The main difference between these studies and this one is that Culpepper and Barus segment John's characters and themes into narrative blocks. My aim will be to look at one aspect of faith and how a group of John's figures exhibits this idea across the entire Gospel.

1.2.8. Summary

In looking at the history of Johannine character studies, readers find five main views concerning the use of characters. For this summary, I will begin with the two most prominent perspectives. First, some argue that the purpose of John's figures is to make the reader sympathetic to the author's perspective of correct faith and discipleship. Most who affirm this think that Johannine figures are constructed in such a way that the reader is encouraged to identify with them. In some cases, the reader is thought to be motivated to emulate the positive and avoid the negative aspects of each individual (e.g., Collins,

---

[243] Ibid., 62.

[244] Ibid., 94, 145–46, 168–69, 197, 227, 229, 258, 304, 325, 349.

[245] For instance, Barus writes, "We can propose that a character, whether anonymous or mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, functions as a common ground whereby the readers could identify themselves with the character and consequently the readers have the opportunity to reorientate their life following the truth-values of a character or totally reject and abandon them. However, we should acknowledge that character is not the only textual device in persuading the readers to fulfil the stated purpose of the Fourth Gospel" (ibid., 34). Other examples of him making this contention can be found in ibid., 114–15, 147, 258.

Culpepper, Bennema, Barus). Other interpreters find that the misunderstanding of each character is meant to remind the reader of his or her own misperceptions and thus to challenge the audience to understand Jesus's identity better (e.g., Skinner, Farelly). Or, as Hylen reasons, the misunderstanding forces the reader to ask questions about what counts as true discipleship. Readers are not to identify with John's characters but they are still expected to learn what it means to follow Jesus from these figures.

Second, many scholars hold that characters in John relay information about who Jesus is. This theory arises first in Collins and Culpepper, and it is found in its most refined form in Bonney. In this view, Johannine persons become agents of revelation, illuminating readers to the Gospel's portrait of Jesus. Nearly every scholar surveyed holds some form of this reading of John's characters.

Third, a few commentators perceive that there is a union between John's motifs and his figures. Resseguie shows that the two main groups in John's Gospel each express his ideologies but in different ways. The marginalized characters express views that "dismantle the thinking of the dominant culture," and those with a materialistic perspective reveal "the strangeness of common norms and practices."[246] Culpepper's 2013 article and Barus's 2000 dissertation fit within this category, examining how characters in different sections of John display his themes.

Conway provides a fourth and distinct interpretation. She argues that Johannine persons function to undercut the dualism established throughout the Gospel. As a result, she puts forward the idea that characters show the true complexity of the book's readers.

---

[246] Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 197.

This view is unique. I have yet to come across another scholar who advocates this perspective or agrees with it.

Redman offers a final theory. She maintains that John's characters provide real examples of people who believe in Jesus. Readers are not to judge these examples. Instead, they are to learn from them that life in Christ is possible. If the imperfect persons of John can believe, then so too can all readers of the Fourth Gospel.

1.3. The Contribution of this Project

To this discussion I offer a study on the use of characters in John that flows from the same stream as Bonney, Barus, and Culpepper (2013). Since the number and diversity of John's characters is immense, I will concentrate my efforts on those characters who make confessions of faith. I will use Mary Magdalene as my chief example and then show that the conclusions drawn from her narrative are found in most other narratives where characters make spoken confessions. What I will show is that a pattern emerges in these figures' narratives that demonstrates intentionality on the part of the author and a potential revelation of how John uses his characters.

In contrast to some of the projects above, I advocate a shift in emphasis from looking exclusively at characters themselves and their narratives for the sake of characterization to examining the pericope of each figure in conjunction with the stated theology of John to establish a literary-theological reading of the Gospel.[247] I will attempt to discover the purpose of Johannine characters by answering the question: "What does John do with his characters?" Since this work is to look only at confessing characters, what will be found is that these individuals reflect John's view as to how a person moves

[247] The term "literary-theological" comes from Farelly (*Disciples*, 219).

from believer to unbeliever or from faith to greater faith. Each pericope depicts what John expresses elsewhere directly. Thus, figures in John not only reveal his Christology, as Bonney and others judge, but they also disclose other aspects of his theology, specifically the mechanics of how one's faith in Jesus comes about and continues to grow.[248]

In part, studies of John's characters have focused on the response that the reader is intended to have without taking into account how John believes one is changed. This has resulted in a series of studies that assume that the author thought that his readers were free to determine whether they would follow the depicted faith or not. This attention to the reader's response and his or her ability to choose to believe does not take seriously

---

[248] The closest I have come to finding someone who advocates this notion is Raymond E. Brown. As an aside, he writes, "The wrong identification of Jesus as the gardener may be an acted-out form of Johannine misunderstanding (Barrett, p. 469) to illustrate the mere sight of the risen Jesus does not necessarily lead to understanding or faith. Perhaps the same lesson is found in the Lucan narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus who recognize Jesus only in the breaking of the bread" (*The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., AB 29–29A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 2:1009). He goes on, however, and states, "John may be telling his readers that in the spoken word of Jesus they have the means of recognizing his presence. Magdalene, by recognizing Jesus when he calls her 'Mary,' plays out a role delineated in John x 3: 'The sheep hear his voice as he calls by name those that belong to him.' The episode illustrates the claim of the Good Shepherd, 'I know my sheep and mine know me' (x 14, also 27). Mary Magdalene could serve as an example to Christians of the Johannine community at the end of the 1st century whose contact with the risen Jesus is through the Paraclete who declares to them what he has received from Jesus (xvi 14)" (ibid., 2:1009-10). Note that Brown cites the first edition of Barrett's commentary in developing this point (*The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* [London: SPCK, 1955]). However, Barrett never examines the idea that Mary may be acting out John's theology of misunderstanding. A portion of his exegesis of John 20:11-18 is found on the page that Brown references, but no mention of the notion that Brown postulates.

Regarding the figures of John 20, Lindars writes, "In each case John has expanded the underlying tradition by bringing into it a particular person, who is the subject of John's own elaboration of it, and embodies his real interest in the nature of the act of faith" (*John*, 595). This sounds similar to what I propose concerning the purpose of John's characters. Yet, the closet he gets to clarifying this point is when he writes, "He [the author] is concerned that *the reader* should believe, and sets the Beloved Disciple before him as the first example for him to follow" (ibid., 602; emphasis original). Or when examining Thomas's confession, he states, "Being absent when Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter night, Thomas was virtually in the position of the Christian who has not seen the risen Jesus, and he should not have needed a further appearance in order to come to faith. Obviously John has the reader in mind in making this point. Consequently he gains the most universal reference by putting the final statement in the form of a beatitude in a didactic style (cf. 13.17). This is the real purpose of the Thomas episode, and indeed of John's presentation of the Resurrection traditions as a whole" (ibid., 616). Ultimately, Lindars is unclear in what he means by "the act of faith," and his commentary that follows never fully elaborates on his point that John's characters embody it. Furthermore, his understanding of how one comes to faith in John differs from my own. He sees it as "a gradual unfolding of the truth" (ibid., 605).

the language of the Gospel on the necessity of divine action for faith to occur. As I will show in Chapters Three through Six, the transition from unbeliever to believer or from faith to greater faith is dependent upon God and his work.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERARY FIGURES

In this chapter, I will present my reading of John's confessing characters using narrative criticism and modern character studies. Since I am applying modern theories to ancient texts, I first need to show that this is not anachronistic. After establishing the viability of my methodology, I will shift my attention to modern literary theory and what it says about fictional figures. I will rely on these experts for their terminology and philosophy of literature.

Once again, I am arguing that one of the ways that John uses his characters is thematically. That is, individuals in the Fourth Gospel reflect the author's theological understanding of spiritual transformation in the moves they make in their narratives.[1] As a result, their role is demonstrated more clearly to be thematic than mimetic—two distinct approaches to studying characters that literary theorists take. This does not mean that readers cannot experience John's figures mimetically. Often they do.[2] However, the way that John's characters present themselves in the text reveals their *function* to be *thematic*

[1] As indicated in Chapter One, Brown mentions that "The wrong identification of Jesus as the gardener may be an acted-out form of Johannine misunderstanding … to illustrate that mere sight of the risen Jesus does not necessarily lead to understanding or faith. Perhaps the same lesson is found in the Lucan narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus who recognize Jesus only in the breaking of the bread" (*John*, 2:1009). In part, this chapter and those that follow are expansions of Brown's remark.

[2] In fact, Uri Margolin considers the mimetic dimension of characters "closest to our initial, intuitive conception [of them]" ("The What, the When, and the How of Being a Character in Literary Narrative," *Style* 24 [1990]: 457). Aleid Fokkema finds that "a mimetic reading lies at the heart of the traditional concept of character. Because real people are taken to be models for characters in literature, representation is understood as a matter of fact rather than a literary convention. Not surprisingly, the borderline between fiction and reality is often crossed and critics speak of people rather than characters" (*Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction*, PmSt 4 [Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991], 28). Although Jonathan Culpeper provides no evidence for this claim, he suspects that "humanising characters [i.e., reading them mimetically] is part of most people's appreciation of literature: part of the enjoyment of plays and films is imagining characters as if they were real people" (*Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*, TE [Harlow England, NY: Longman, 2001], 7). I note here his argument that scholars do not take on a humanizing approach to studying characters because doing so "would require the literary critic to abandon his or her familiar and exclusive haven, and venture into the realms of psychology in attempting to understand how the 'ordinary' person comprehends" (ibid.).

rather than *mimetic*.[3] I will elaborate on the precise meanings of these terms in the pages to come.

2.1. Methodology: A Defense of Applying Narratology and Narrative Criticism to Ancient Texts

The application of modern theories to ancient texts is not a new development. Biblical interpreters and classicists have been approaching texts in this way for some time.[4] Specifically, critics of ancient narratives have applied the discoveries of narratology, "[a] discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation."[5] In the 1980s, biblical experts rebranded this approach as

---

[3] These terms come from James Phelan *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*, LC (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2–3, 9).

[4] E.g., Charles Segal, "Ancient Texts and Modern Criticism: Some Recent Trends in Classical Literary Studies," *Arethusa* 1 (1968): 1–25; Stephanus Kresic, ed., *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Classical Texts* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1981); Berlin, *Poetics*; Culpepper, *Anatomy*; Sternberg, *Poetics*; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*; Irene J. F. de Jong and J. P. Sullivan, eds., *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1994); S. J. Harrison, ed., *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory, and Classical Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Thomas A. Schmitz, *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007); Jonas Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos, eds., *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature*, TCSV 4 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2009); Alter, *Biblical Narrative* (2011); Rhoads and Dewey, *Mark as Story*; de Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[5] Jan Christoph Meister, "Narratology," in Hühn, Pier, Schmid, and Schönert, *Handbook of Narratology*, 329. de Jong indicates the important role that narratology has played in studying the classics by providing a lengthy bibliography of a number of works on the subject that utilize narratology (*Narratology*, 13–15). Additionally, Charles Segal writes that "the single most important influence on classical literary studies in recent years has been and still is the so-called New Criticism [a predecessor to narratology], by now no longer new and even a bit passé. Though still sometimes regarded with mistrust by some classicists, the New Criticism, with its concern for recurrent words, echoes, plays upon connotations and double meanings, has proven its usefulness in a field where close attention to the text and language has always been of primary importance. The New Criticism has been of value too in contributing to the seriousness of literature and of criticism, for it presupposes that literary works are rational structures susceptible of disciplined, rigorous study. It has also helped combat the shallow and supercilious deference to literature which selects a few purpose passages for approving mention, but shuns any closer involvement with the difficult problems of seeing how individual embellishments relate to the whole" ("Trends," 11). Segal does not mention narratology by name since Tzvetan Todorov did not coin the term until 1969 (Douglas Estes, *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 92 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 16). Nevertheless, Terry Eagleton connects New Criticism and narratology through the complex web of structuralism and semiotics (*Literary Theory: An Introduction* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008], 78–92). It is not a straight line or necessarily indicative of direct and integrative development, but the chief concern of New Criticism—the text itself—is the most

narrative criticism.[6] Readers of ancient texts who implement these devices have constructed convincing arguments to justify their use. For instance, Thomas A. Schmitz and Charles Segal provide two mirrored claims that promote this type of work. Schmitz affirms (1) that literary criticism is the search for universal theories that transcend every critic's time; and Segal proposes (2) that ancient writings are deemed "classics" because various people from different periods have recognized their value.[7] It seems reasonable, therefore, to apply universal principles to texts that transcend their time.

J. P. Sullivan and S. J. Harrison present another set of premises that backs the use of narratology in the investigation of classical works. They argue (1) that modern interpreters find the tropes that narratologists explore within the classics; and (2) that modern theorists draw from ancient works to develop their approaches.[8] Irene J. F. de Jong demonstrates their first point. In *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide*, She

---

important element of narratology (ibid., 41–42). One of the reasons that there is not a one-to-one relationship between narrative criticism and narratology is that, as Estes recounts, "Narrative criticism … evolved from a grafting of modern literary theory into Biblical studies. Due to uneven grafting techniques, narrative criticism exists only in the world of Biblical studies, and has become a much more fuzzy term than its literary antecedents" (*Temporal Mechanics*, 10).

[6] The term itself was most likely coined by David Rhoads in a paper presented at the Markan Seminar for the Society of Biblical Literature's annual conference in 1980 (Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," in Rhoads and Syreeni, *Characterization*, 17). Estes provides a history of New Criticism, narratology, and narratology's link to narrative criticism in *Temporal Mechanics*, 10–22.

[7] Segal, "Trends," 1, 3, 7; Schmitz, *Ancient Texts*, 7–8. It is important to observe that Schmitz endorses a limited view of his assertion. He tempers the reach of this claim by making it clear (1) that "it behooves the specialists of every literature to examine whether this claim holds water"; and (2) that "the discussion about literary theory has been dominated to an unhealthy degree by students of modern Western literatures who have had a tendency to draw untenable generalizations from the restricted corpus of texts they know" (ibid., 7). On the other hand, he expressly states that "if it were true (as I firmly believe it is not) that classical texts cannot be understood in modern terms, if modern eyes and modern methodologies had no business looking into these texts, they would be dead for our time, and their existence would have to be considered mere museum of leftovers from a long defunct culture. In that case, how could we possibly justify that students should still read these classical texts?" (ibid.).

[8] Sullivan, "Introduction: Critical Continuity and Contemporary Innovation," in de Jong and Sullivan, *Modern Critical Theory*, 14–16. Harrison argues these two points and adds a third ("General Introduction: Working Together," in *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory, and Classical Literature*, ed. idem [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], 13–14). He reports that "the pioneers of narratology themselves received extensive classical educations and sometimes treat classical texts (an example would be [Tzvetan] Todorov's piece on the *Odyssey*); their approaches are thus likely to be useful to classicists" (ibid., 14).

surveys the topics regularly covered in narratology—narrators and narratees, focalization, time, and space.[9] She then devotes a chapter to each subject and provides numerous examples of their occurrence in ancient and modern literature. Most of her illustrations come in pairs—an example from modern literature coupled with one from antiquity displaying the same device. By setting ancient and modern examples of different aspects of literature side by side, de Jong shows that narratology is a viable tool for investigating ancient texts since what narratology studies appears in ancient writings.

Moreover, Schmitz presents the idea that narratology is not the only modern literary theory that can be applied to ancient texts.[10] He aims to show that the concepts of structuralism, Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalization, intertextuality, etc., can be applied to the classics. For several of the models that he surveys, he provides an example of how the given approach can help readers better understand a specific ancient text. For example, in his section on narratology he summarizes de Jong's work on the *Iliad* and that she has proven, by using the categories of narratology, that the narration of the *Iliad* is not as objective as scholars had maintained but instead exhibits subjectivity.[11] His explanation of the way in which particular disciplines relate to ancient texts is brief (lasting only a few pages), but the fact that such a tactic is possible further demonstrates the appropriateness of applying modern literary theories to classic texts.

Without going into detail, I will add that biblical scholars have long proven that the application of present-day literary approaches to Scripture is fitting. Through a

---

[9] de Jong, *Narratology*, 17–131.

[10] Schmitz, *Ancient Texts*. He specifically covers Russian formalism, structuralism, narratology, Mikhail Bakhtin, intertextuality, reader-response criticism, orality and literacy, deconstruction, discourse analysis, new historicism, and gender studies.

[11] Ibid., 61.

number of works, they have shown the effectiveness of using narratological tools to investigate Scripture. The works of narrative critics such as Alter, Berlin, Culpepper, Douglas Estes, Powell, Resseguie, and D. F. Tolmie illustrate this point.[12] For characters specifically, I can point to Bennema, who has made it clear that ancient characters are not as far removed from their modern counterparts as some biblical scholars would have us believe.[13]

Thus from modern literary experts we can—and should—draw precise terminology regarding how to talk about characters and their roles in narratives. Since they read modern texts in ways that would assist us in better understanding ancient works, we should also employ their philosophy of literature. As a result, I will use the

---

[12] Berlin, *Poetics*; Culpepper, *Anatomy*; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Estes, *Temporal Mechanics*; Alter, *Biblical Narrative*; Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

[13] Bennema, "Character," 394. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg examine characters in such a way that they unintentionally show the similarities shared between modern and ancient literary figures (*The Nature of Narrative* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1966], 160–206). They start by alleging that the difference between characters and "incidents" is the fact that characters have inward life (ibid., 170–71). Beginning with Henry James, some critics have collapsed these two aspects of the novel into a single category. They restate James's oft-quoted questions: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" ("The Art of Fiction," *LM* 4 [1884]: 512). Scholes and Kellogg oppose this view by using the concept of characters having inward life. While looking at this phenomenon, they trace the use of interior monologue by authors from Homer to modern writers of stream of consciousness (*Narrative*, 177–206). At one point they write, "in narrative literature after the eighteenth century the two principal devices for presenting the inner life are the same two that have been employed by Apollonius [of Rhodes] and all his followers: 1) narrative analysis in which the character's thoughts are filtered through the mind of the narrator with more or less interpretive commentary, and 2) the more direct and dramatic interior monologue" (ibid., 193). Because they put on display this overarching use of interior monologue, they inadvertently demonstrate that ancient characters are more similar to modern literary figures than most scholars assume. In fact, they conclude by supporting the view that readers understand modern characters better when they see the resemblance between modern literary figures and their ancient counterparts. They write, "But no matter how thoroughly individualized a character may be, for the literate reader he will be the richer through the various modes of family resemblance which connect him to the worlds of ideas, and the literary past. Anna Karenina gains from our recognition that she is of the sisterhood of Madame Bovary and Dido. Dorothea Brooke gains from our recognition that she is of the sisterhood of both Emma Woodhouse and St. Theresa. Isabel Archer gains because we can see in her a resemblance not only of Dorothea Brooke and to [Walter] Scott's Diana Vernon, but to the Roman goddess Diana (the virgin with the bow) whose memory she awakes as surely as does [George] Meredith's Diana of the Crossways" (ibid., 206).

findings of narratology and integrate them with the traditional practice of narrative-criticism as I explore John's Gospel.[14]

2.2. Modern Character Studies and the Purpose of Literary Figures

My goal in this section is not to recount a detailed history of extra-biblical character studies.[15] Instead, I am going to touch lightly on those issues in the discipline that are relevant for this project, and to draw from this deep well of resources the germane material for the task of investigating John's characters.[16] I also aim to demonstrate that the theory I advance concerning John's characters reflects some modern notions regarding the task that characters perform in narration.

---

[14] This is the route that Estes takes. He promises to employ "contemporary literary narratology as the primary methodological tool within the realm of narrative criticism" (*Temporal Mechanics*, 10). He advocates supplementing this approach with "a variety of critical tools including those from the study of historiography, linguistics, anthropology and general literary theory" (ibid.).

[15] Henriette Heidbrink offers a brief examination of the history of character studies in literary theory in "Fictional Characters in Literary and Media Studies: A Survey of the Research," in *Characters in Fictional Worlds Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider, Revisionen 3 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 67–110. Heidbrink outlines other recent works that outline the history of character studies (ibid., 68 n. 8). She identifies Thomas Koch, *Literarische Menschendarstellung: Studien zu ihrer Theorie und Praxis*, REC 18 (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1991); Jannidis, *Figur und Person: Beitrag zu einer historischen Narratologie*, Narratologia 3 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 2–10; Schneider, *Grundriß zur kognitiven Theorie der Figurenrezeption am Beispiel des viktorianischen Romans*, ZAA 9 (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000), 15–24; Margolin, "Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66–79; Eder, *Die Figur im Film: Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse* (Marburg: Schüren, 2008), 39–60; and Jannidis, "Character," in Hühn, *Narratology*, 14–29. The articles by Jannidis and Margolin do not probe the history of character studies but instead cover the major concepts and debates within the field. It should be noted that Heidbrink does not provide the full pagination for each citation she gives. What is presented in this footnote is my reconstruction of what I think she intended to reference. Other works that summarize the scholarly landscape of character studies that are not mentioned by Heidbrink are Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 13–27; Fokkema, *Postmodern Characters*, 18–41; Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, 5–12. These look at the history of the discipline from the angle of seeing it as divided between those who take a mimetic approach to analyzing literary figures and those who do not.

[16] For a summary of the most pertinent issues being addressed in character studies, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123–37; Jannidis, "Character"; Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters in Fictional Worlds: An Introduction," in idem, *Characters*, 3–64.

2.2.1. The Ontology of Characters

So what is a character? Most literary critics answer this question with another: How many children had Lady Macbeth?[17] Or, does Sherlock Holmes have "a birth mark on his back"?[18] By posing these questions, theorists shed light on a division in literary studies surrounding the ontology of characters.[19] The divide is between reading characters structurally or mimetically, a debate over a dehumanizing or a humanizing approach to character studies.[20] In essence, literary experts ask if figures are only part of the structure of a text, or if they exist beyond it as entities in the mind of the reader.[21] In recent years, the divide has lessened. Most critics take a representational approach while recognizing that the structuralist (and thematic) perspective is a legitimate way of understandings characters as well.[22]

---

[17] L. C. Knights, *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism* (Cambridge: Gordon Fraser, the Minority Press, 1933). Knights finds scholarship that poses questions like this one so troubling that he writes that "the habit of regarding Shakespeare's persons as 'friends for life' or, maybe, 'deceased acquaintances,' is responsible for most of the vagaries that serve as Shakespeare criticism…. It is responsible for all the irrelevant moral and realistic canons which have been applied to Shakespeare's plays for the sentimentalizing of his heroes … and heroines. And the loss is incalculable. Not only do we lose the necessary aloofness from a work of art (to be distinguished from an inability to respond imaginatively), but we lose the dramatic pattern and we are inhibited from the full complex response which a play of Shakespeare's can evoke" (ibid., 27–28). He also differentiates between good and bad critics with this standard: "the good critic points to something that is actually in the work of art, whereas the bad critic points away from the work in question; he introduces extraneous elements into his appreciation–smudges the canvas with his own paint" (ibid., 33). Thus, according to Knights, to examine characters for their mimetic use without investigating what they do in the text itself is an egregious error.

[18] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 12.

[19] Ibid., 6–10.

[20] Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, 6. Culpeper provides a thorough discussion of the relevant points for each side. His summary is worth reading (ibid., 5–12).

[21] There are actually four main positions on the "ontological status of characters" (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 8). Theorists perceive literary figures as (1) "signs or structures," (2) "representations of imaginary beings in the minds of the audience," (3) "abstract objects beyond material reality," and (4) not existing at all (ibid.). Margolin outlines the first three of these in his article "Character," on which I am dependent upon for this analysis of modern literary criticism's understanding of characters.

[22] Margolin, "Being a Character," 454–57.

I will not solve this enigma, but I will recognize that I take a more structuralist or semiotic approach to character analysis.[23] Ultimately, I am not concerned with the character itself but with what John does with it in his text. For this project, a "character" will be understood as "an artistic product" or as a "device" and not an actual person.[24] My demarcation of what a character means is important for this study because, as Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider remark,

> How we define *character* is relevant not only with regard to theoretical questions, but also in practical terms, for the definition influences how we analyse characters: If we regard Sherlock Holmes as a person-like being, we are likely to focus on his personality traits; if we see him as a sign, we will concentrate on the textual structures of his presentation; if we think of him as a mental construct, the psychological processes of his recipients will move centre stage, and so on.[25]

This does not mean that characters cannot be "representations of imaginary beings in the minds of the audience" or "objects beyond material reality."[26] Baruch Hochman's words regarding this fact are poignant. He writes,

> As critics have tried to show, with greater or lesser effectiveness, literature—whether read as fiction, or heard as oral narrative, or viewed as drama and film—involves the generation in our minds of images of people who figure in it. Hence we must have a way of talking about such images, about their nature and function—doubly so, perhaps, because to judge by the history of critical tradition, we often respond to these images with an intensity and a degree of both affectivity

---

[23] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 8.

[24] This is how Margolin describes the structuralist perspective ("Character," 67). In an earlier article, he labels this understanding of characters "*Character as narrative devices*" and defines it in the following way: "The NA [narrative agent] is *not* regarded as an analogon, simulacrum or whatever of a 'real life' phenomenon, and all attention is focused on its formal, artificial, contrived and purely artistic nature. It is, in other words, a *device*" ("Characterization in Narrative: Some Theoretical Prolegomena," *Neophilologus* 67 [1983]: 2; emphasis original).

[25] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 6.

[26] Ibid., 8. Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider make it clear that when readers reduce characters only to "signs, mere words or a paradigm of traits" they forget that "these webs of semes attached to proper names" in fact "correspond to traditional character traits" and thus have something about them that makes them look like persons (ibid., 9). As a result, these experts find Margolin's blended view, which combines "elements of structuralism, reception theory and the theory of fictional worlds," to be a significant breakthrough (ibid.; e.g., see Margolin, "Character," 66). Phelan, whose work I will be dependent upon, takes an approach similar to Margolin's.

> and objectivity that are greater than what we feel for people we encounter in life.[27]

By examining characters as artistic products or devices, I do not wish to devalue the reader's role in the process of interpretation, but to acknowledge that I desire to know what John's intention was in including the characters that he does in his text in the manner in which they appear. As a result, my goal is to remove as much as possible the subjectivity that a reader might bring to the text, and to employ the text itself to answer my questions. Using language from literary criticism, I aim at investigating a "bottom-up" or "data driven-cognitive" process rather than a "top-down" or "conceptually-driven" approach.[28]

With this said, I also recognize that the role a character plays can never be separated from the figure in the text with his or her "personological features."[29] As Uri Margolin puts it, one never encounters "bare actants/roles."[30] It is impossible to separate the textual figure from the described individual.[31] To use Mary Magdalene as an example, even though the Evangelist employs this character in a specific way (thematically), readers cannot remove the personal traits that she possess from her purpose in the text. She is present with her features and attributes while serving a specific role of promoting the ideas of John's Gospel. In fact, at times readers cannot see the

---

[27] Hochman, *Character*, 30–31.

[28] Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, 28. This technical language comes from ibid., 27–28; Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 35–36.

[29] Margolin, "Characterization," 3.

[30] Ibid. Granted, at this point Margolin is talking about "role" in the sense of "a standardized, stereotyped and codified social role, with the norms of action and appropriateness, expectations and values associated with it" (ibid., 2). Even so, this idea can carry over to the role a character plays in a piece of literature. This is especially the case since he defines a "*Character as actant*" in this manner: "The NA [narrative agent] is equated with a certain highly abstract sphere of actions, defined in terms of a narrative case grammar (object, instrument, etc.) or of a functional range in the action sequence (hero, helper, donor)" (ibid. emphasis original).

[31] Margolin, "Characterization," 3.

rhetorical moves an author makes without grasping a figure's "conformity to or deviation from the expected role-based personality model" specific to that individual.[32] As a consequence, I will avoid understanding characters *only* as "paper people" or "identical semes [that] traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it" (two classic structuralist definitions for characters).[33] I recognize that characters are more complex than this.

In addition, Martin Price argues that readers are only aware of a character's attributes when they are important to the novel itself. He writes,

> It would be possible to make long lists of all the attributes of characters that are never supplied. We do not know what most characters eat. We hear about servants in Jane Austen's novels, but we rarely see them. The things revealed about Emma Bovary are the very things ignored in Henry James's heroines. Rarely does a critic speculate about Robinson Crusoe's sexual frustration during his long years on the island. What of the missing attributes? The fact is that we do not miss them. We adjust insensibly to the rules of relevance the novel establishes. We can make surmises about the attributes that are missing, but we are hardly inclined to do so unless the novel invites it.[34]

---

[32] Ibid. As a reminder, at this point Margolin is not discussing characters as devices but as stereotypes. See my previous note clarifying this.

[33] Mieke Bal, *Narratology Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 133; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), 67. In this project, I will try to avoid the purely structuralist approach that Hochman describes: "On the whole, the structuralists have held that character does not emerge as a detachable or independent element in our consciousness during or after reading. Nor is character to be thought of as part of that realm of existence that figures in the text itself. Rather, it is, in a manner of speaking, dissolved in the sequence of events and images in the text and cannot be fleshed out or imagined as possessing coherence in its own right" (*Character*, 23).

[34] Price, *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 41–42. Furthermore, for Margolin, the ideas and themes which an author portrays are some of the reasons why a writer might include certain attributes of a literary figure. Thus, like Price, he affirms that "while authors can assign their characters any properties they wish, in practice the properties authors assign to their characters are governed by some principle(s) of selection, ranging from lifelikeness (verisimilitude) to an ideological, thematic, aesthetic, or purely inter-literary one, e.g., parody of an earlier text and its characters" ("Character," 68). Ultimately, he holds that "since characters are shaped by their authors to attain certain ends and efforts, it makes perfect sense to inquire why and to what end they endowed their characters with this particular selection of features" (ibid.). Since John develops his characters from what appear to be actual people, his limitations are not only ideological and thematic. If this is so, then it creates another complicating layer in analyzing John's characterization. I will comment on this problem below.

Therefore in my examination of the Fourth Evangelist's figures, I will analyze a figure's features when they are highlighted by the author and pertinent to understanding the text. In this regard, I follow Price's example.

In a way, I am looking to investigate a plane similar to what the representational or mimetic models of characters examine. These approaches move beyond "the syntax and semantics of the language in which the text is articulated" and enter into "a narrative universe (possible world)."[35] The difference is that I am not *only* interested in what the reader perceives of the character in this place outside the text. I am concerned with the ideas that the author develops for the reader to consider as well. That is, I care not only about the universe where characters are (the story world) but also the space where themes and ideas are to be understood (the ideological universe).[36] This means that I strive to

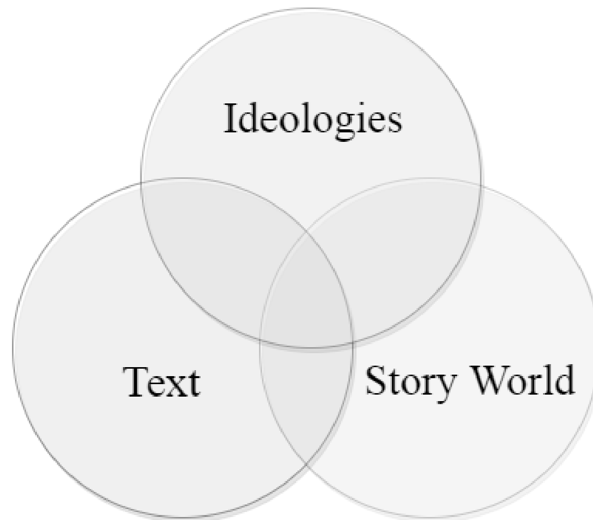
---

[35] Margolin, "Characterization," 5.

[36] Margolin often uses the concept of the "story world." I am borrowing it from him. He discusses it in a number of places: Margolin, "Individuals in Narrative Worlds: An Ontological Perspective," *PT* 11 (1990): 844; idem, "Fictional Individuals and Their Counterparts," in *Poetics of the Text: Essays to Celebrate Twenty Years of the Neo-Formalist Circle*, ed. Joe Andrew, SSLP 17 (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), 43; idem, "Being a Character," 454–55; idem, "Character," 71–72. In general, he writes, "the construction of a narrative universe (possible world) or any component thereof from textual meaning is a second level, interpretative activity which presupposes linguistic competence but is distinct from it and involves a further set of operations, as well as non-linguistic, general semiotic or representational types of variables, rules, and background information (world models, cognitive frames)" ("Characterization," 5). At one point he seems to apply this concept to the thematic element of characters. He delineates one of the subcategories of "*Character as narrative devices*" to be "Character as symbol" and defines it in this way: "The NA [narrative agent] is an expressive device or signifier for a signified on a higher level. Alternatively, it embodies or concretises this 'higher' unit: a theme, idea, thesis, literary archetype ('faustian figure') or any abstraction whatsoever: 'Vitality,' 'Faith,' etc." (ibid., 2; emphasis original). This is somewhat similar to the notion that Culpeper raises: "Understanding why something happens is a kind of higher-level coherence (that is, above the level as which, for example, one works out the reference of a pronoun) that leads to a deeper understanding" (*Language and Characterisation*, 34). Nevertheless, since Margolin follows this quotation with "allegorical interpretations of NAs [narrative agents] are the paradigm case here," it is possible that he is describing an allegorical reading of characters and not precisely what I am arguing for below ("Characterization," 2). In either case, these are the realms that I think readers move into when they engage with characters. The two diagrams I present to portray this reflect Margolin's statements. The second reflect the design of and certain elements from Culpeper's model (*Language and Characterisation*, 34–38).

Eder, Fotis, and Schneider also summarize the notion of story world well. Instead of using the language of "story worlds" they call these places "fictional or possible worlds" and their work has been helpful for the creation of these diagrams ("Characters," 8–9). Furthermore, my use of "ideological universe" is similar to Eagleton's notion that "literary works are … forms of perception, particular ways of

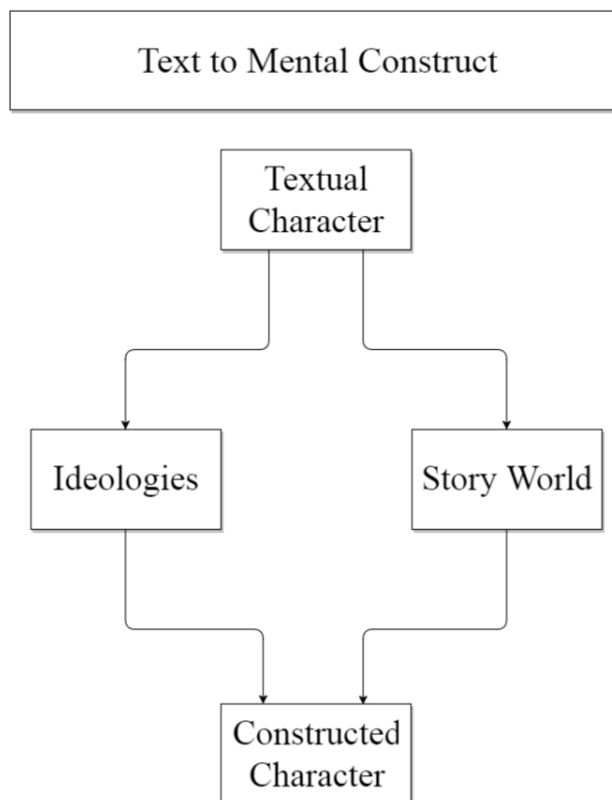
understand the way that characters work within the structure of the text's argument, and that I am investigating the manner in which literary figures create the conceptual perspective the author wishes his readers to take. This can be diagrammed in two ways:



seeing the world" (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* [London: Routledge, 1976], 3). Eagleton goes further and says that this means that texts "have a relation to the dominant way of seeing the world which is the 'social mentality' or ideology of an age" and that "to understand *King Lear, The Dunciad* or *Ulysses* is therefore to do more than interpret their symbolism, study their literary history and add footnotes about sociological facts which enter into them. It is first of all to understand the complex, indirect relations between those works and the ideological worlds they inhabit—relations which emerge not just in 'themes' and 'preoccupations,' but in style, rhythm, image, quality and (as we shall see later) *form*" (ibid.). Eagleton is right, but reading John's ideological universe in conjunction with "the dominant way of seeing the world" in the first century will not be the chief concern of this project.

W. Randolph Tate quotes these lines by Eagleton and offers a concise summary of the importance of knowing the ideological universe of a biblical author's work for biblical interpretation. He emphasizes the fact that "a literary work of art may transform the ideological structure of which it is a part, but it is still a part of that structure. People live their lives in accordance with societal roles in which ideas, values, and images tie them to particular social functions. Therefore, any literary expression bears the imprint of its historical epoch, and the most plausible reading is a critical one which takes into account this ideological imprint" (*Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 44). Thus, seeking to understand the ideological universe created by a text is important and worthwhile since texts reflect the ideological worlds they come from.

Or this:[37]



In these figures, I aim to demonstrate that the ideological world that the characters depict comes from the text itself. The reader moves from the text to the ideological world—a bottom-up approach.[38] In the first diagram, this is depicted by having the "text" overlap with the ideologies and story world that the author wants the reader to enter into. In the second, this is shown by having the reader move from the "textual character" (what is stated directly in the text) to the "ideologies" and "story world" which the "textual

[37] Culpeper diagrams "how characterization might work" with the desire "to show how a representation of character (an impression of character) might be constructed in the mind during the process of reading" (*Language and Characterisation*, 34). He does this in ibid., 35. He then describes each aspect of his diagram in ibid., 35-38. His diagram stands behind mine. Its design has especially influenced the second of my diagrams.

[38] Ibid., 27–28.

character" puts forward. This movement results in the reader conceiving of the "textual character" as a "constructed character," which portrays the ideologies and story world that the author instils in his or her characters.[39] Not only does the reader enter into the world created by the author, but this world—its ideas and its makeup—also enters into the reader's. He or she experiences them and choses to reject, accept, or ignore them.[40]

The same can occur with the character itself. A figure may move beyond the text and become a real person in the mind of the reader. In this case, as well as in the first, the reader begins with the text.[41] By reading it, the characters in the text move outside it and

---

[39] My "textual character" is similar to Culpeper's "textbase," which "only includes the propositional content of the text" and "some of these propositions will, of course, relate to character" (ibid., 37). In addition, my "textual character" includes Culpeper's "surface structure" (ibid., 37). As Culpeper describes, "the surface structure of the text … will include the particular linguistic choices attributed to characters" (ibid.). Likewise, my "constructed character" is comparable to Culpeper's "situation model," which is where "prior knowledge and textual elements combine to create a meaning representation—our sense of what the text is about" (ibid., 36). As I argue above, Culpeper finds that "for some characters, their propositional existence in the textbase may be incorporated in the situation model and play an influential part. For example, allegorical characters, such as those of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), represent abstract qualities and ideas, as the propositional content of their names makes clear—Fellowship, Giant Despair, Sloth, Hypocrisy and Piety" (ibid., 37).

[40] No reader is forced into these worlds. Some enter them, others ignore them, and many may be unaware of their existence. Margolin presents this view when he says that the story world is a "second level" and asks, "What is there then to prevent the reader from stopping after the first stage and refusing to engage in any constructive activity?" ("Characterization," 5). He continues, "The decision to resort to the notion of character, and hence to acts of characterization [i.e., the construction of a character by the reader from what is presented in the text], is consequently never forced on the reader but represents a decision/choice—albeit often unconscious—on his part. The choice is determined by a variety of factors: the reader's general literary *Erkenntnisinteresse* (what does he 'look for' in literature, what in his opinion is its 'essential' nature, what does he value in it primarily); poetic concepts prevalent in his generation, which encourage or discourage this particular kind of interpretative activity (mimetic, anti-mimetic); and the particular structure of the text being reader and its generic affiliation" (ibid., 5–6).

[41] As Hochman, who takes a mimetic approach, points out, "if character is to be dealt with at all as an element in its own right, it must be dealt with as an aspect of the surface structure of the text, as one of the relatively complex and relatively independent interlocking elements that constitute the text. There are other structures in a text, and levels of meaning other than the one at which character as a thing in itself subsists. But if we are to deal with character as such, we must begin with the level at which character exists. That may be said to be the first, most evident, utterly manifest level of the text, the level at which we appropriate the elements of the text from the verbal signs that constitute it" (*Character*, 31). Furthermore, and in a similar fashion, Margolin attempts to strike a balance between these two worlds. He finds that the text and the reader's mind are both important for the existence of a character. He writes, "Texts are necessary for characters to exist and subsist; individual minds are needed to actualize them; and the end result is a relatively stable and enduring inter-subject entity which can be the subject of legitimate public argument about its properties" ("Character," 67). Although he judges that "characters are abstract in the sense that they do not exist in real space and time, and are more like concepts in this regard," he also asserts

become part of the reader's world. The reader constructs a story world in his or her mind, and then the characters in this world become people with whom the reader can engage outside of the written story of the text.[42] Without the text, neither of these secondary levels of knowledge can occur.[43] This applies to thematic and mimetic readings alike.

When talking about the figure of Sherlock Holmes, Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider summarize this multi-leveled approach to knowledge well. They write,

> While the statement 'Holmes is a detective' stays safely in the boundaries of the fictional world and might also be uttered by another character, sentences like 'Holmes stands for human reason,' 'Holmes was invented by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,' or 'Holmes is more perceptive than any other fictional or real detective' transcend the fictional world in different ways, connecting it with reality.[44]

In using this one figure, Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider have shown that a character appears in a text but then moves beyond it. The statement "Holmes stands for reason" represents the thematic sphere. Saying "Holmes is more perceptive than any other fictional or real detective" embodies the mimetic. "Holmes is a detective" places the figure in the text itself. We acquire this information by reading Doyle's stories. We then move from it to the thematic realm—"Holmes stands for reason"—and the mimetic—"Holmes is more perceptive than any other fictional or real detective." The final

---

that literary figures "are not open to direct perception by us, and can be known only through textual descriptions or inferences based on those descriptions. In fact, they are these complexes of descriptions, not having any independent worldly existence. And in order to find out what properties a given character possesses or what claims about him are true, there is only one route to follow: examine the originating text, what is explicitly stated in it and what can be inferred from it according to standard procedures" (ibid., 68).

[42] Hochman describes it in this way: "Character in itself does not exist unless it is retrieved from the text by our consciousness, together with everything else in the text. But it can be retrieved, provisionally and for the sake of pleasure or understanding. … Characters do not 'live' between the covers of a book; Constantine Levin and Othello are not homunculi contained in the works they figure in. They, like everything else in the text, exist meaningfully only insofar as they come to exist in our consciousness" (*Character*, 32).

[43] See my discussion of Phelan's criticism of Judith Fetterley's reading of *A Farewell to Arms* below.

[44] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 15–16.

statement, "Holmes was invented by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle," places these stories in a historical context—a fourth layer. The ideological realm will be the focus of this project.

2.2.2. The Thematic Use of Characters

The majority of modern character studies take part in a mimetic reading of literary figures.[45] Yet even Margolin, who imbibes the representational value of characters most fully, admits that one appropriate theoretical model for understanding a literary person is seeing it "as a thematic or ideational element."[46] For Margolin, this means that the character supports "some proposition or assertion" and that "its attributes are viewed as vehicles to express ideas."[47] He not only recognizes that this approach exists, but he considers it to be "anchored in self-consistent, well-developed theoretical frameworks."[48] At the same time, he outlines other models for analyzing characters and considers them each to be "cognitive instruments, tools, or points of vantage" which "coexist at any given time as options for the theorist."[49]

One literary critic who promotes the thematic use of characters and provides us with a holistic approach to literary figures is James Phelan. He developed his theory in the 1980s, but it is still relevant in the scholarly discourse on characters today, and it is referenced often in summaries of the history of character studies.[50] Phelan maintains that characters are literary elements "composed of three components, the mimetic, thematic,

---

[45] Margolin, "Being a Character," 417.

[46] Ibid., 454.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 455. The other models he presents are the literary character as "topic entity of a given discourse," "artifice or construct," and "an image of a possible person" (ibid., 454). The quotation above applies not only to the thematic approach but also to these three.

[49] Ibid., 455.

[50] Jannidis, "Character," 23; John V. Knapp, "Introduction: Self-Preservation and Self-Transformation; Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literary Character," *Style* 24 (1990): 349; Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 16; Heidbrink, "Survey," 92.

and synthetic."[51] These three roles have framed the debate. Today, scholars conceive of characters "as persons [mimetically], as the meeting points of thematic issues [thematically], or as linguistic entities [synthetically]."[52] Phelan holds that a literary figure does not usually exhibit only one of these roles but as many as all at once. Characters are "multichromatic."[53]

Ultimately, Phelan's study is "designed to enable its practitioner to achieve a certain kind of knowledge about texts, knowledge about them as communicative transactions between author and reader."[54] He finds that characters participate in the rhetorical transaction between an author and her or his "hypothetical audience."[55] Therefore, one of the purposes of a literary figure in a text is the promotion of thematic material with which the author wants his or her reader to consder.

A valuable distinction that Phelan makes is between the *dimensions* and *function* of a character, and how *progression* separates the two.[56] He writes,

> A dimension is any attribute a character may be said to possess when the character is considered in isolation from the work in which he or she appears. A function is a particular application of that attribute made by the text through its developing structure. In other words, dimensions are converted into functions by

---

[51] Phelan, *Reading*, 3.

[52] Phelan, "Character, Progression, and the Mimetic-Didactic Distinction," *MP* 84 (1987): 282.

[53] Phelan, *Reading*, 3. Knapp points out that Phelan's three categories for approaching characters have been shown to be the way in which readers naturally see them. Knapp states that Brian J. Reiser, John B. Black, and Wendy G. Lehnert present "empirical evidence that individuals do coordinate formalistic (plot), mimetic, and thematic elements during recall, depending on what is asked of them" (Knapp, "Introduction," 1–2). The specific sections of Reiser, Black, and Lehner's work that Knapp cites are "Thematic Knowledge Structures in the Understanding and Generation of Narratives," *Discourse Processes* 8 (1985): 376, 386. I am not certain this article supports Knapp's claims. It argues that when asked, readers can notice the thematic nature of characters. As Reiser, Black, and Lehnert report, "The results demonstrate that subjects are capable of abstracting the thematic structure of a story written about one topic, and constructing a thematically similar story in a different domain, concerning different goals and actions" (ibid., 376). Nonetheless, the article never examines the formal or mimetic elements of a story. Furthermore, the authors' understanding of what a theme consists of is vague and may not represent what Phelan or I suggest it is.

[54] Phelan, *Reading*, 207.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 9.

> the progression of the work. Thus, every function depends upon a dimension but not every dimension will necessarily correspond to a function.[57]

As a consequence, a character can have thematic *dimensions* (a "lust for power") that are translated into a thematic *function* (the demonstration of "the strength of inherent evil in humans").[58] Characters can also have thematic *dimensions* that are not translated into a thematic *function* because of the nature of the work.[59] An author might not turn those *dimensions* into a thematic *function* because she or he is using the character in a non-thematic way.[60] How the novel *progresses* reveals whether a *dimension* turns into a *function* or not.[61]

Progression, as Phelan remarks, "refers to a narrative as a dynamic event, one that must move, in both its telling and its reception, through time."[62] When examining progression, a critic is "concerned with how authors generate, sustain, develop, and resolve readers' interests in narrative."[63] The way in which he maintains that an author progresses the text is through its instabilities. He writes, "I postulate that such movement is given shape and direction by the way in which an author introduces, complicates, and resolves (or fails to resolve) certain instabilities which are the developing focus of the authorial audience's interest in the narrative."[64]

---

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] For instance, Phelan claims that "The Duke [in Robert Browning's poem, 'My Last Duchess'] has many thematic dimensions (attributes that may be considered for their potential to contribute to thematic assertions) but essentially no thematic function: the work progresses not to make assertions but to reveal his character" (ibid.).
[61] Phelan sees this happening with the synthetic and mimetic dimensions of characters as well (ibid.).
[62] Ibid., 15.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I will study the thematic *dimensions* of Johannine characters—their attributes in the text. I claim that these thematic *dimensions* are translated into a thematic *function* of depicting John's theology of spiritual transformation. I take this view because I find that the thematic *function* that confessing characters put forward mirrors what is seen in the speech of the Gospel's trusted figures (the narrator, John the Baptist, and Jesus).[65] Therefore—and as with Phelan—I hold that the *dimensions* of a character are known to be reflective of a *function* because the text itself witnesses to this fact. He uses *progression* as the indicator. I will use ideology as expressed through trusted figures. The concept of trusted figures and their relevance for discovering an author's view will be treated in full in Chapter Six of this work.

Phelan makes his case by looking at a number of novels. These works cover "a two-hundred-year span … from *Tristram Shandy* [by Laurence Sterne, 1759] to *If on a winter's night a traveler* [by Italo Calvino, 1979]".[66] He examines the literary purpose of leading characters (e.g., Winston Smith in *1984*, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, John Marcher in *The Beast in the Jungle*) and minor ones (John Wemmick in

[65] Many biblical exegetes affirm the trustworthiness of the narrator's interjections, Jesus's speech, and the words of John the Baptist. Those who maintain that the narrator is reliable are Culpepper (*Anatomy*, 32), Margaret Davies, (*Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, JSNTSup 69 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992], 31–37); Resseguie (*Strange Gospel*, 21–22), and Farelly (*Disciples*, 8–9). Examples of those who state that Jesus's view reflects the author's are Davies (*Rhetoric*, 38–41) and Resseguie (*Strange Gospel*, 110). Although experts do not normally talk about the reliability of John the Baptist for expressing the Gospel's ideology, the fact that they label him a Christian witness whose actions ought to be mirrored shows that they take his words as expressing the author's views. Collins ("Representative Figures," 34), Culpepper (*Anatomy*, 133), and Bennema (*Encountering Jesus*, 72) each identify him as such. To be clear, my understanding of reliable and trustworthy comes from Wayne C. Booth, who describes a reliable narrator as one who "speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 158; this quotation comes from Resseguie [*Strange Gospel*, 21]). In fact, my notion of trusted figures parallels what Booth says about authors speaking through "any character who has been conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability" (*Rhetoric*, 18). For a full summary of my argument in favor of trusted figures see Chapter Six.

[66] Phelan, *Reading*, 208.

Great Expectations and Catherine Barkley in *Farewell to Arms*).[67] In the process, he comes to several findings regarding how authors use the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic nature of characters.

For example, Phelan demonstrates that at times the mimetic function can help to illuminate the thematic—drawing the reader into the text so that he or she may learn the theme that the character is putting on display. This takes place in *1984*. As Phelan summarizes, "he [George Orwell] emphasizes Winston's mimetic function, increases our involvement with his progression toward his fate as itself an emotionally affecting experience, and then ultimately subordinates that function and our involvement to his communication of a larger thematic point [the threat of totalitarianism]."[68]

In other texts, the mimetic and thematic blend to such an extent that one cannot tell the difference between the two. Phelan shows that this happens with John Marcher in *The Beast in the Jungle.* Phelan writes, "[Henry] James has effected what I believe is a rare fusion of the mimetic and thematic functions of the protagonist. Not only is neither function subordinated to the other but the line between them becomes blurred: to be the Marcher is to be this obsessed man and to be this obsessed man is to fail to live."[69] The Marcher represents "an attitude toward life—waiting for it to happen."[70] This is the theme he displays, and this is what makes up his character.[71]

Phelan claims that the reason that his theory works so well for such a broad spectrum of texts from a number of historical contexts is because he is looking at "the

---

[67] For the leading characters listed, see ibid., 28–79. For the minor, see ibid., 126–31, 165–88.
[68] Phelan, *Reading*, 37.
[69] Ibid., 69.
[70] Ibid., 62–63.
[71] These are but a few instances of the discoveries he made in how the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic aspects of characters work together. He offers a helpful summary of many of his other findings (ibid., 206).

internal logic and affective structure of the whole progression [of a work]" and not just its historical setting.[72] This does not mean that he thinks that knowing the history that surrounds a piece of literature cannot aid critics in assessing a text's characters or its themes. He states this plainly, "authors typically assume that their audiences know many things, including social and cultural codes extant at the time of their writing," and that "those elements of sociohistorical situatedness are very much a part of the transaction and very relevant to the analysis of these narratives."[73] For instance, he considers it important to know "conventions of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-American narrative (as a minimum) in order to understanding the progression of *The French Lieutenant's Woman.*"[74]

Yet Phelan argues that "knowing those conventions will not allow one to understand the functions of [John] Fowles's playing with them. To do that, one must look at the internal logic and affective structure of the whole progression."[75] As a result, Phelan privileges "the [rhetorical] transaction itself more than the conditions under which the transition is produced."[76] This does not mean a "turn[ing] away from the history toward the realm of the 'purely literary,'" but it does imply working within the fabric of the text first prior to evaluating what the text has to say about the history from which it came.[77]

---

[72] Ibid., 209.

[73] Ibid., 208. E.g., Phelan makes the point that "Reading *Pride and Prejudice* in the authorial audience requires one to know such things as social conventions about visiting among the upper classes, social codes about feminine delicacy, what it means to have one's estate entailed, what it means to be the daughter of a gentleman, what it means to get one's money by trade in that society, and so on" (ibid.).

[74] Ibid., 209.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

Overall, Phelan maintains that the theme a critic is to analyze must come from the novel itself and not be imposed upon it (or its characters) by the exegete. He demonstrates this in his assessment of Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*. Judith Fetterley presents a feminist reading of Catherine that judges her as reflective of Hemingway's sexism.[78] She argues that this is on display in Catherine's death.[79] She claims that Catherine dies because she is a woman.[80] In fact, Fetterley holds that Catherine needed to be eliminated so that Frederic could evade growing up.[81] Phelan responds by arguing that the progression of the novel does not support her reading.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, there is no progression of "the hostility of men to women" that Fetterley asserts.[82] Instead, one of the novel's main themes is the horror of this life—"that the world is in fact destructive."[83] The progression of this theme promotes the view that

> Catherine's response to her knowledge of the world—her attempt to establish an alternate way of life—and her tough response to pain and danger, especially to her own impending death during childbirth, serve the thematic function of demonstrating how one should act in the face of such knowledge.[84]

In fact, Catherine is "the exemplary respondent to the world."[85] This undoes Fetterley's reading.

One point that Phelan makes that is of importance for what will come later is his finding that there are "general patterns of progression," and that

---

[78] She develops this theory in *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
[79] Phelan, *Reading*, 166.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 170.
[83] Ibid., 174. His argument for Catherine promoting this theme and his rebuttal of Fetterley takes place in ibid., 174–82.
[84] Ibid., 180.
[85] Ibid., 181.

> these patterns allow us to make such general predictions as (1) representations of actions will typically have mimetic and thematic functions of the main characters moving along parallel tracks while the synthetic functions remain in the background and (2) novels with a central thematic point such as *1984* will subordinate the mimetic function to the thematic function.[86]

This is of interest because John appears to have a "central thematic point"—John 20:30-31. If Phelan is right and if what he says can be applied to the Fourth Gospel, then we should look for the thematic purpose of John's figures over and above the mimetic since that aspect of their composition will be subordinated to the thematic.

In sum, Phelan shows us that the thematic aspect of characters is part of the ontological make-up of literary figures. Characters are pieces of the work in which they find themselves. They can reflect actuality by becoming "real" people, but they may also help to portray a work's themes. To investigate what theme a character displays, a critic must limit him or herself to the themes a work exhibits. Phelan finds that one learns what these themes are through the progression of the novel. I hold that John's text reflects its themes through the lips of its trusted figures. Finding an anchor in the text that can be used as a point of comparison between what one says characters are doing and what the text seems to be doing in general will prevent interpreters from imposing upon a character a theme that the author did not intend.[87]

---

[86] Ibid., 206.

[87] Regarding characters in film, Eder holds that experts can distinguish "between analysing characters (a) as artifacts (how are they represented, and what are their textual structures?); (b) as fictional beings (what features do they possess in the fictional world?); (c) as symbols (what do they stand for?); and (d) as a symptoms (why are they the way they are, and what are their effects?)" (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 16). This is nearly identical to what Phelan proposes but with the addition of characters as symptoms. The specific work in which Eder presents this view is *Figur im Film*.

2.2.3 Literature and Themes

Besides examining characters for their thematic purposes, there has been a longstanding tradition among literary critics to read novels thematically. In the 1980s, one of the chief methods of interpretation was thematization.[88] Phelan observes this happening so frequently that he says that the motto of commentators at that time was "Always thematize!"[89] He points out Robert Scholes as an example of this slogan.[90] He informs us that this method of analysis is so prevalent that it occurs in both deconstructionist and non-deconstructionist readings.[91]

One of the reasons that a thematic approach to literature is viable is that the essence of literature promotes this kind of examination. In fact, Price makes the case that the structure of novels themselves argues for thematic readings. He writes,

> The novel not only claims, by virtue of offering itself as a work of art, a high degree of structure, but it is a structure which has some unifying end, some principle of composition. Without such a presumption, we have no way of considering the relevance of details or of establishing, to the extent that we can, their irrelevance. The unity of a novel is expressed most succinctly in thematic terms. This presupposes that a narrative is shaped so as to disclose meaning: to apprehend the form is to find a way of stating the meaning toward which a novel moves.[92]

Likewise, Gerald Graff argues for the thematization of literature from the fact that this is what authors do when writing texts and what readers do while reading them. He states,

---

[88] Phelan, *Reading*, 27.

[89] Ibid. Phelan states that "always thematize" is a play on "always historicize" from Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). Phelan mentions Gerald's work in *Reading*, 216–17 n. 1.

[90] He asserts that for Scholes "all interpretation is thematizing" and that Scholes "is concerned with all the ways that the text invites thematizing" (ibid., 73).

[91] Ibid., 216–17 n. 1.

[92] Price, *Forms*, 43.

> There are two arguments for rejecting the anti-assertionist view [that holds that literary works should not be read thematically] and accepting the claim that literary works make assertions. Briefly put, the arguments are that authors intend assertions and readers can scarcely help looking for them. Authors intend to make assertions whenever they set out to write "serious" works. Even when an author attempts to undermine or negate all assertions—as frequently is the case with modern authors—that very enterprise involves making or presupposing assertions to which he commits himself. Readers, for their part, can scarcely help formulating assertions, in the form of thematic propositions, in making sense of literary works, and in practice readers are balked when these thematic propositions are greatly variance with their own beliefs about the world.[93]

One of the ways that Graff makes this point is by demonstrating that when we hear our neighbors arguing, we do not analyze that event in the same way that we would if we were to read about it in a novel.[94] If we were to encounter a narrative in which a fight between a couple takes place, then—as Graff puts it—"we would look for thematic links between this episode and the rest of the novel and implications relevant to the world of experience."[95] We might give meaning to the real fight by suggesting that it signifies "the imminent likelihood of a divorce, the deterioration of the nuclear family, the need for better apartment insulation, and so forth. But this kind of interpreting differs from the kind we do in construing literary significance."[96] In searching for the literary importance of an argument in a text, the goal is to discover the author's rhetorical purpose for the quarrel, since "literary conversations are expected to illustrate some point, and when a work comes along in which they fail to do so (e.g., *Tristram Shandy* or [Eugenè] Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*) we begin to look for the point of their not illustrating a point."[97]

---

[93] Graff, "Literature as Assertions," in *American Criticism in the Poststructuralist Age*, ed. Jonathan D. Culler and Ira Konigsberg, MSH (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981), 161.

[94] Ibid., 146.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 146–47.

Moreover, for some the thematic element of literature is one of the main reasons people read texts. In fact, I contend that although stories are entertaining, a tale's real power comes from the ideas it presents.[98] For example, *The Road* by Cormac Mccarthy is not just a thrilling narrative about a boy and his father surviving in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. It is a thought-provoking work that presents interesting ideas such as the notion that humanity will do unthinkable evil but that there will always be good striving to undo it.

2.3 Conclusion

Therefore with Phelan and others, I can argue that literary critics outside of biblical studies have discovered that there exists a thematic use of characters. Fictional persons exist in texts as part of their structures. They can reflect life and come off the page to be part of the reader's world, but they may also exist in a narrative to promote the ideas of its author. Characters serve a number of purposes—synthetic, mimetic, and thematic. The one in John that I will look at most closely is the thematic.

---

[98] E. D. Hirsch makes this claim: "Fiction has value beyond the pleasure it gives only because it presents something that is not fiction" (*The Aims of Interpretation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976], 157), quoted in Graff, "Assertions," 137.

CHAPTER 3 – MARY MAGDALENE AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."

– 1 John 4:15

In this chapter I move from theory to text as I survey John 20:11-18—Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb. This passage is a useful test case for my thesis because it is the first of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances in John's Gospel, and as a result, we have Jesus's identity as the Word made flesh revealed most fully to one of John's characters in the clearest of terms. Yet, even though Jesus stands before Mary risen from the death, she is unable to believe without his assistance. Furthermore, if we are to take seriously 20:30-31 as the Gospel's purpose statement, then the proximity of this passage to those verses makes it important for understanding how John utilizes his characters.[1]

Through an examination of this narrative, I will call attention to a literary pattern that appears in a number of Johannine confession scenes. The repetition of this pattern indicates a consistent use of confessing characters by John and hence intentionality on the part of the author. In the next chapter, I will explore instances where this structure is repeated. The constant application of this pattern reveals that John uses his characters thematically and that one of the themes he presents through his characters is how, what I have called, "spiritual transformation" takes place.[2]

---

[1] The reasons as to why John 20:11-18 should serve as my testcase arose in a private conversation with Julian Hills. This last point—the proximity of 20:11-18 to John's purpose statement—came directly from him.

[2] I will understand "spiritual transformation" as any increase in faith in Jesus. In John, this is often seen in a character having a greater understanding of Jesus's identity. I survey this topic in greater detail in Chapter Six. In addition, Lindars does not say what he means by this in full, but he makes the point that in John 20 "various traditions are retold in such a way as to present one theme to the reader," and that theme is "the act of faith" (*John*, 595). He remarks, "In each case [the narrative of Mary Magdalene and Peter at the tomb as well as Jesus before his disciples] John has expanded the underlying tradition by bringing into it a particular person, who is the subject of John's own elaboration of it, and embodies his real interest in

3.1 Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)

John situates 20:11-18 as the first of three appearance scenes. In it, he shows that a correct understanding of Jesus is only possible through divine action.[3] John depicts Mary as having an incomplete understanding of Jesus's identity. She believes him to be dead or just a gardener. On her own, she is unable to grasp who Jesus really is. She sees angels, an empty tomb, and the risen Lord, but she does not recognize the true identity of the person standing before her.[4]

On the other hand, the author presents Jesus as alive and the Lord. His tomb is empty, angels are present, and he stands before Mary having risen from the grave. In fact, the way that this passage is written makes it obvious that this is what Mary might have perceived all along.[5] In light of these data, I argue that in this narrative Jesus causes

---

the nature of the act of faith" (ibid.). To an extent, this is what I argue in this chapter and in Chapter Five concerning the other figures in John 20.

[3] Interpreters who support this view include Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., AB 29–29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 2:1009; Ben Witherington III., *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 330; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 998. Sandra M. Schneiders argues this in part when she writes that Mary was converted by Jesus's call ("Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," in Koester and Bieringer, *The Resurrection*, 165).

[4] Several authors make this point: R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, FF (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 144; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 330; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 567–68; Michaels, *John*, 996, 998–99. Bonney says something close to it. He writes, "For John, the vision of angels is not an adequate basis for coming to knowledge of the resurrection. Such knowledge comes only through personal contact with the risen Jesus himself" (*Caused to Believe*, 151). A few lines later, he states, "John makes it clear to his readers that the resurrection of Jesus somehow remains outside Mary's ordinary perceptive abilities" (ibid.).

[5] As Keener points out, "the narrative emphasizes by repetition that she need not weep; both an angel and Jesus confront her weeping (20:11, 13, 15) not because her weeping is wrong (cf. 11:31, 33) but because it is about to become joy, as Jesus promised his disciples (16:20)" (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 2:1185). Additionally, Andreas J. Köstenberger observes, "Mary's failure to recognize Jesus [in v.14] continues the pattern of misunderstanding that characterizes the Fourth Evangelist's portrayal of Mary throughout the chapter up to this point. Neither the removal of the stone (20:1) nor the angels inside the tomb (20:12) nor even the risen Jesus himself fail to remove it" (*John*, 567–68). Many of these points will be surveyed below.

Mary's transformation from faith to greater faith when he calls her by name, and that Mary could not experience this change without Jesus's direct action.[6]

This reading is to be taken with the statements that John's trusted figures make regarding spiritual transformation to suggest that he displays these stated ideas in the actions of his characters.[7] What we find is that John's characters experience spiritual transformation in the same way that John's trusted figures talk about it. The author's use of dialogue and action, irony, plotting, and character development combine to paint this picture.[8]

---

[6] I am not alone in this reading. Ben Witherington III writes, "Even though this revelation is more positive than the one that Peter or the Beloved Disciple received, neither the empty tomb nor the presence of the supernatural is sufficient to change Mary's mournful mood. It is likely that the evangelist wants us to think that nothing less than Jesus himself could accomplish that feat" (*Wisdom*, 330). Michaels makes a similar claim, stating, "she, not Peter and not even 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' will be the first to experience and articulate true resurrection faith. … How does this happen? Only at the initiation of Jesus, who stands behind Mary, waiting for her to 'turn around'" (*John*, 998). Culpepper holds that "Neither the empty tomb nor the vision of Jesus lifted the veil for Mary Magdalene, only the words of Jesus" (*Anatomy*, 144). See also Brown, *John*, 2:1009; Frank J. Matera, "John 20:1-18," *Int* 43 (1989): 404; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTCS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 641; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 741; Schneiders, "Touching," 165; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 415.

[7] This is akin to Brown's reading mentioned in Chapter Two: "The wrong identification of Jesus as the gardener may be an acted-out form of Johannine misunderstanding … to illustrate that mere sight of the risen Jesus does not necessarily lead to understanding or faith" (*John*, 2:1009).

[8] These are common literary elements that narrative critics examine. Ann Skamp explores dialogue, characterization, irony and plot development in John 20:1-18, and she is doing so because she is following Culpepper's lead ("'But Mary Stood Weeping Outside the Tomb' (John 20:11)," *Colloq* 32 [2000]: 23–30). However, Skamp and I look at these narrative devices for different purposes, and what I present here is dissimilar to what is found in her work. Her goal is to argue that a narrative-critical reading of John 20:1-18 could "help address the dilemma of women as they live in the tension of being part of an encumbering religious tradition characterised by patriarchy and hierarchy while at the same time experiencing its life-giving power" (ibid. 23). Furthermore, regarding how Mary comes to faith, she holds that "it is her [Mary's] perseverance that leads to the revelation of a new relationship, given emphasis by the repetition in 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (v17)" (ibid. 26). In addition, she finds that "Mary's misunderstanding about Jesus represents an important aspect of her seeking for him, a part of her human-ness that leads to revelation. In the end her level of understanding was such that Jesus trusted her with delivering his message to the 'brothers'" (ibid. 29).

3.1.1 Dialogue and Action

The dialogue that occurs portrays Mary's misperception and Jesus's true reality.[9] Both what Mary says and what is said to her establishes this. In this scene (and the previous one) Mary expresses her misunderstanding by exclaiming some form of "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."[10] She makes this claim three times to three different individuals—the disciples, the angels, and Jesus (20:2; 20:13; 20:15).[11] In the first instance, Jesus is *the* Lord and *we* do not know where they have laid him. In the second, Jesus is *my* Lord and *I* do not know where they have put him. And in the third, Mary speaks directly to Jesus and assumes that he is the one who is responsible for having taken away his own body. With these declarations, John repeatedly portrays Mary's belief that Jesus is dead and missing, as opposed to alive and risen.[12] Commenting on Mary's final plea, Francis J. Moloney writes, "There is no suggestion of resurrection and there is no recognition of the risen one. Mary Magdalene remains in a situation of unbelief as she concerns herself with the removal of a corpse."[13]

Beyond Mary's own admission, the questions asked of her also alert the reader to her misapprehension. The repeated inquiry, "Why are you weeping (τί κλαίεις)?" by the

---

[9] Dorothy A. Lee holds that "like other characters in the Fourth Gospel, Magdalene's response shows misunderstanding. Her faith still needs to develop. The Lord's body is gone and Mary does not know why" ("Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20," *JSNT* 58 [1995]: 41).

[10] So Lee (ibid).

[11] As noted by Francis J. Moloney (*The Gospel of John*, SP 4 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998], 525).

[12] Skamp also observes the shifts in Mary's language as she searches for Jesus's body ("Mary," 26). As early as in the fourth century, John Chrysostom takes the view that Mary's speech discloses her misunderstanding. He writes, "Do you see how she did not yet understand anything clearly about the Resurrection, but thought that the location of the body had been changed, so she told everything to the disciples as the situation appeared to her?" (*Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 85 [FC 439]). Lindars, relying on Hoskyns, and Moloney reference Chrysostom's quotation (Lindars, *John*, 601; Moloney, *John*, 523).

[13] Moloney, ibid., 525.

angels and Jesus makes this point (20:13; 20:15).[14] Given who it is that asks these questions, what is indicated is that there is no reason for her tears. Angels, who signify God's action, and not a body fill Jesus's tomb.[15] Jesus is not missing. For immediately following this, he shows himself to be alive and it is he who asks her why she is weeping.

Besides these inquiries, we perceive Mary's confused state from her actions. Mary is weeping. John depicts her sorrow as κλαίουσα, which Andreas J. Köstenberger says can denote "loud wailing."[16] Furthermore, the author accentuates Mary's tears with narration (20:11), and by means of the questions asked of her by the angels and Jesus (20:13; 20:15). Moreover, in 20:11 the description of Mary's crying is repeated twice. Mary is said to be "weeping (κλαίουσα) outside the tomb" and this portrayal is followed by "and as she wept (ἔκλαιεν)" (20:11). Coupled with her speech, it may be the case that these tears are not "lament for the dead" but instead "an expression of her personal pain and her sadness, that she does not find her dead Lord."[17] Her behavior indicates that she

---

[14] Regarding the angels' questions, Skamp writes, "The angels in the tomb asked her 'Woman, why are you weeping?' (v13), challenging her to understand what it was she was really seeking" ("Mary," 28). Or, as Köstenberger reads the passage, "This question [by the angels] constitutes a call for Mary to set aside her anguish and recognize the reality of Jesus' return to life" (*John*, 567). Michaels's analysis is fair. He writes, "the question [of the angels] is simply a corollary of 'He is not here.' His absence from the tomb is a reason for joy, not tears" (*John*, 997). Thompson more or less agrees with Michaels when she writes, "Thus the angels' question may gently nudge Mary toward understanding that it is not appropriate to weep, but for sorrow to turn to joy (16:20)" (*John*, 415).

[15] Several exegetes make note of the fact that angels indicate God's action: Beasley-Murray, *John*, 374; Carson, *John*, 640; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 330; Moloney, *John*, 525; Köstenberger, *John*, 567; Michaels, *John*, 996; Thompson, *John*, 414.

[16] Köstenberger, *John*, 567 n. 1.

[17] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:315.

is unaware of what transpired that morning.[18] She should be experiencing joy instead of sorrow because Jesus is not dead but alive.[19]

In conjunction with her tears, Mary's one desire in these verses is to find Jesus.[20] In her final plea, we observe, as Leon Morris notes, that "she uses 'him' three times" because "it was he who filled her thoughts to the exclusion of all else."[21] These acts further reveal Mary's misperception. Jesus's body is missing, but it is not because someone has taken it.

Jesus's dialogue with Mary, on the other hand, accentuates what Mary ought to have recognized by this point in the narrative. His first words after the resurrection are "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking (τίνα ζητεῖς)?" Some interpret the first of these questions to be "a mild rebuke."[22] This may be so, but it is hard to tell. If anything it indicates that the author wants the reader to know that Mary's current state should not be what it is given the reality of the situation.[23]

The second question alludes to the fact that Mary should have been looking for a person (τὶς; 20:15) and not a body (σῶμα; 20:12).[24] D. A. Carson remarks that it may also

---

[18] As Lindars writes, "Mary's distress is caused by her supposition that the body of Jesus had been stolen. It has not occurred to her that he might have risen" (*John*, 605). In addition, Moloney observes, "Her standing outside the tomb in tears shows her continued inability to believe or understand what might have happened" (*John*, 525). He compares her crying to "the faithless wailing (*klaiein*) that accompanied the death of Lazarus (cf. 11:31, 33)" (ibid.). Even Lee, who reads Mary in a favorable light, finds that "the ambivalence of Mary's faith is demonstrated in her weeping" ("Partnership," 41).

[19] Keener makes a similar remark—even though he does not think that Mary's weeping is wrong but he does make the point that it will be turned into joy (*John*, 2:1185). Furthermore, Moloney puts it this way, "she [Mary] is portrayed as stationary, standing still in the darkness of the unbelief she shared with them [i.e., Peter and the Beloved Disciple] in vv. 1-2. Her standing outside the tomb in tears shows her continued inability to believe or understand what might have happened" (*John*, 525).

[20] Lee notes that in John 20:11-18 Mary is depicted as one determined "to see and touch the Lord" ("Partnership," 40). .

[21] Morris, *John*, 741.

[22] Carson, *John*, 641; Köstenberger, *John*, 568.

[23] Beasley-Murray claims that "the question of Jesus was calculated to draw her attention to him," but "it was insufficient for her to realize that he who addressed her was the one she sought" (*John*, 375).

[24] Morris, *John*, 740; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 330; Michaels, *John*, 998.

be "an invitation to reflect on the kind of Messiah she [Mary] was expecting, and thus to widen her horizons and to recognize that, grand as her devotion to him was, her estimate of him was still far too small."[25] At the very least, his inquiry displays Mary's misunderstanding, and her response—"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away"—confirms her confusion.

Furthermore, after Mary's confession Jesus commands the following: "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). Jesus's talk of "my" and "your," his use of "Father" for the first time in reference to God for anyone other than himself, and the fact that he calls his disciples "brothers," shows his true identity to be the way to the Father (14:6).[26] His disciples access God through

---

[25] Carson, *John*, 641.

[26] I read v. 17 as Brown does. He argues that "by speaking of his ascension in xx 17, Jesus is not drawing attention primarily to his own glorification—that process has been going on throughout 'the hour'—but to what his glorification will mean to men, namely, the giving of the Spirit that makes them God's children" (*John*, 2:1016). He presents the view that there is a "renewal of personal relations with the disciples" in the resurrection of Christ (the quoted material is from Dodd *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 442; in *John*, 2:1016). He then maintains that "these relations are in mind when Jesus speaks of the disciples as 'my brothers' and describes the goal of his ascension as 'my Father and you Father, my God and your God,' … [This statement] is one of identification and not of disjunction. Jesus is ascending to his Father *who will now become the Father of his disciples*. In Johannine thought they alone are children of God who believe in Jesus (i 12) and are begotten by the Spirit (iii 5). Jesus' ascension will make possible the giving of the Spirit who will beget the believing disciples as God's children—that is why, in anticipation, Jesus now refers to them as 'my brothers'" (ibid., 2:1016; emphasis original).

Additionally, Beasley-Murray interprets Jesus's message to the disciples, "I am ascending," to relate back to the Jesus's work throughout the book as mediator between God and the world. He maintains that "the 'ascension' to which Jesus refers [in v.17], which has not happened but which is on the way, relates especially to the *work* that Jesus is accomplishing in the completion of his task, i.e., in his mediation of the saving sovereignty of God to the world. This work of his, for which he dies and rises and ascends to the Father, has been made known to the disciples, especially in the Upper Room discourses. We recall his promise to prepare a place for the disciples in the Father's house (14:2); to banish their sadness and fill them with joy through reunion with them (14:18-19; 16:16-22); the new relationship whereby the Father and the Son will make their home with them (14:21-23); the new era of effective prayer and power in their service for God (14:12-14; 16:23-24); and above all the bestowal of the Paraclete-Spirit, who will take the place of Jesus and expound his revelation to them and enable them to carry out their mission" (*John*, 377). In fact, Beasley-Murray finds that "the virtual replacement of the language of resurrection with that of ascension is an indication that the two are fundamentally one, and indissolubly bound with the death of Jesus" (ibid.). Ultimately, he agrees with Brown, writing, "[by calling the disciples 'my brothers'] we may

him.[27] This declaration of Jesus's state stands in contrast to Mary's understanding of it prior to her transformation. Jesus proclaims what has happened, while Mary weeps out of confusion because of what she thinks has happened.[28]

Thus in each conversation and through narration, John focuses the reader's attention on Mary's reaction—her misunderstanding expressed in word (they have taken the Lord out of the tomb) and deed (crying and searching). The fact that other characters are challenging Mary's perception by asking her why she does these things shows that her understanding of reality is skewed. She is shedding tears for something that did not happen and is looking for the wrong thing (a body instead of a person). John wants his readers to see that Mary does not know what has happened even though she shows herself to be longing for Jesus in her search. The speech and actions of John's characters in 20:11-18 indicate that Mary could not have faith on her own.

---

therefore interpret them as believers who by virtue of the 'lifting up' of Jesus and the impending bestowal of the Spirit are to become sharers in his sonship with the Father. … [Jesus] has chosen to come to us, and in virtue of his total saving activity, living, dying, rising and ascending, makes us the sons of the Father and the people of God" (ibid., 378).

Lee observes that "the expression οἱ ἀδελφοί articulates a new relationship for the believing community through the Easter events. The term recalls the birthing imagery of the Prologue where believers are God's children (τέκνα θεοῦ, 1.12; also 3.3, 5), and brothers and sisters to one another, and to Jesus (cf. 15.15). Closely linked are the covenantal overtones of v. 17c: πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν (see Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 37.28; also Ruth 1.16). … The covenant relationship in which believers become God's 'family' is dependent on Jesus as Son (14.6; also 10.7, 9). Here again the forming of a new community as the people of God, and as sisters and brothers, takes place in and through the Easter events (see 19.26-27)" ("Partnership," 45).

Other commentators who see Jesus's message as indicating a new union between the Father and the disciples because of Jesus include Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 566; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:320; Carson, *John*, 645; Teresa Okure, "The Significance Today of Jesus' Commission to Mary Magdalene," *IRM* 81 (1992): 182–83; Moloney, *John*, 526; Keener, *John*, 2:1191; Michaels, *John*, 1002; Thompson, *John*, 418.

[27] So also Brown (*John*, 2:1016), Carson (*John*, 645), and Michaels (*John*, 1002–3).

[28] Witherington offers something similar to this. Regarding the contrast between Jesus's command in v. 17 and Mary's prior state, he writes, "Mary's initial concern is with where the body of Jesus is. She is seeking Jesus in the wrong sense. The evangelist is suggesting that it is not knowledge of where Jesus was at the moment that was the key to understanding him but rather where he was going" (*Wisdom*, 332).

3.1.2 Irony

John's irony in 20:11-18 further reveals what Mary should have been able to see, although she does not. Mary might have recognized that Jesus was the Lord (ὁ κύριος), who has risen from the grave. This begins as early as 20:12. When Mary stoops to look into the tomb, she sees two angels—one at the head and the other at the feet of where Jesus's body had been. As mentioned above, the presence of these angels denotes an act of God, and Mary should have known that the body was missing not because a human has moved it.[29]

Moreover, given the position of the angels, some interpreters hold that John is alluding to the Tabernacle, the Temple, or both.[30] For both, the place where God dwells was centered between two angels—one on the left and the other on the right (Exod 25:18; 1 Kings 6:23-28). Now in 20:12, where Jesus's body had been laid are two angels—one

---

[29] Beasley-Murray, *John*, 374; Carson, *John*, 640; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 330; Moloney, *John*, 525; Köstenberger, *John*, 567; Michaels, *John*, 996. It can be argued that from Mary's perspective it was unclear who these figures were, as noted in a private conversation with Sharon Pace. As a result, it would be unfair to say that she "should have known that the body was missing not because a human has moved it." Nevertheless, the irony is still present. The reader sees what Mary Magdalene cannot, and in a way, her lack of understanding is put on display and it is only undone when she converses with Jesus.

[30] Recent proponents of this position (that the placement of the angels reflects either the Tabernacle or the Temple) include Philippe Simenel, "Les 2 anges de Jean 20/11-12," *ETR* 67 (1992): 75–76; Schneiders, "Touching," 165; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1151. I am indebted to their work for this section.

Mariusz Rosik does not directly tie John's angelic figures to the Tabernacle. He discusses the purpose of cherubim at the Ark of the Covenant and at the Temple ("Discovering the Secrets of God's Gardens: Resurrection as New Creation [Gen 2:4b-3:24; Jn 20:1-18]," *SBFLA* 58 [2008]: 91). Instead, he links the presence of the angels in John 20:11-18 to their appearance in Gen 3:24 (ibid., 93). He does this to show that in one garden, angels were used to keep humanity from immortality, and now in another, they stand without swords drawn and proclaim by their presence the "opening of Jesus' tomb and at the same time the way leading to re-establish the lost relation with God" (ibid., 93; see also 96). This will be relevant for the discussion below.

It should be noted that Keener finds that comparing the situation of the angels in John to the "position of the cherubim on the mercy seat" to be "overreaching" since "Jesus's presence was gone from the site" (*John*, 2:1188 n. 192). With that said, what is proposed above is a much simpler solution than that of Izaak J. de Hulster, who suggests that 20:12 reflects Egyptian iconography of "Isis and Nephthys mourning Osiris and assisting him in his resurrection" ("The Two Angels in John 20:12: An Egyptian Icon of Resurrection," *NTS* 59 [2013]: 28).

where his feet were and another where his head had been. It has been maintained that the location of the angels is meant to draw a parallel between the Temple or Tabernacle as being the place where God resides and Jesus.[31] If this is true, then John is revealing to the reader what Mary should have known all along—that Jesus, like the Tabernacle and Temple, is "the meeting place of God and humans."[32]

In 20:14, Mary comes face to face with the risen Lord, and yet she does not know it is he. Throughout this conversation, irony abounds. Jesus—the person she is looking for—asks her "Whom are you seeking (τίνα ζητεῖς)?"[33] The answer to this question stands before her, but she is completely unware of that fact.[34] Mary responds with more than she realizes. While looking for her κύριος (20:2, 13), she politely calls Jesus κύριος, as she asks him if he knows where his own body might be (20:15).[35] Without knowing it, Mary confesses Jesus to be what she should have known him to be from the beginning—

---

[31] Schneiders describes this scene as a "verbal picture" that "recalls the golden throne, the 'mercy seat,' of the ark of the covenant (cf. Exod 37:6-9 and the LXX version Exod 38:5-8) which was guarded by two cherubim, one at either end of 'the meeting place of God and humans'" ("Touching," 165; quoting Richard J. Clifford, "Exodus," *NJBC*, 56). This claim can be further supported by the fact that John portrays Jesus as the new Temple—the place were God dwells (see 1:14, 18-19, 51; 2:21; 4:20-24; 14:2, 23; Christopher Rowland, "The Temple in the New Testament," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day, LHBOTS 422 [London: T&T Clark, 2005], 470, 472; Zimmermann, "Symbolic Communication between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, eds. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008], 232; Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 53–55).

[32] Clifford, "Exodus," 56, quoted in Schneiders, "Touching," 165.

[33] Moloney recognizes the irony in Jesus's second question. He writes, "Ironically, the one whom she seeks asks her whom she is seeking, but her lack of faith is intensified as she mistakenly identifies Jesus as the gardener" (*John*, 525). Köstenberger does not call this question ironic but states, "Not only was he [Jesus] aware of who it was that Mary was looking for; he, in his very person, was that individual" (*John*, 568). Thompson agrees with Moloney and Köstenberger when she comments, "This question [asked by Jesus] recalls the same question asked earlier in the Gospel (1:38; 18:4, 7) and ironically points out that the one she is looking for is standing right before her, albeit not in the form she expects" (*John*, 415).

[34] Witherington describes Mary's mistaking Jesus for the gardener as "colossal and ironic" (*Wisdom*, 330).

[35] Michaels points out this irony, writing, "Ironically, she addresses the Stranger she believes to be 'the gardener' as 'Sir,' the same word she might have used had she known who he was" (*John*, 999). Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger finds that both Jesus's question and Mary's response add to the "ironical dimension" of the passage ("Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala—Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative: A Feminist, Narrative-Critical Reader-Response," *NTS* 41 [1995]: 583).

the “I am.”[36] This accidental confession takes place while she asks Jesus to tell her where his body is.[37]

This irony is possible because the reader is privileged with information concerning the resurrection that Mary and the other characters lack. The reader is specifically told that Mary is talking with angels and Jesus (20:12; 14). In 20:7, the author points out that the cloth that was covering Jesus’s head was “not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.” As Michaels writes,

> The whole scene—the empty “linen cloths,” with the head cloth “rolled up separately in one place”—speaks eloquently against Mary’s hasty conclusion that “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (v. 2). “The Lord” is indeed missing, but who would carefully unwrap a body, separate the head cloth, rolling the latter up by itself, and then make off with the naked and mutilated body?[38]

---

[36] ὁ κύριος is regularly used in the LXX as a translation of the divine name. G. Quell reports that “apart from unimportant periphrases of the name in figurative speech, it [κύριος] is used regularly, i.e., some 6156 times, for the proper name יהוה in all its pointings and in the combination יהוה צְבָאֹת or in the short form יָהּ” (“κύριος,” TDNT 3:1059). Given that in the Gospel of John, Jesus often identifies himself as ἐγὼ εἰμί—a Septuagintal translation of the divine name—it seems likely that when a Johannine character calls Jesus κύριος either the individual is recognizing Jesus as God or the author is creating an ironic statement in which the speaker is saying more than he or she realizes.

There is some debate regarding whether in John ἐγὼ εἰμί refers to the divine name or has gnostic parallels. Billy E. A. Simmons is right when he says that “we cannot prove a direct gnostic influence this early as far as cultic language is concerned. However, we know definitely that the Old Testament was constantly used by the earliest Christians. Jesus himself often quoted from the Old Testament, and in its prophecies he saw his work mirrored. There is every reason to believe that he would have used such language in reference to himself and his work” (“A Christology of the ‘I Am’ Sayings in the Gospel of John,” *TTE* 38 [1988]: 95–96). Thus I take ἐγὼ εἰμί as a reference to the divine name

[37] Köstenberger observes the irony of Mary’s statement in v. 15 and describes it as “palpable” (*John*, 568). Furthermore, Moloney, upon whom Köstenberger relies, writes, “With deepening irony the earlier ‘they’ now becomes ‘you.’ Jesus, the supposed gardener, is asked where he, taken as a representative of the violent ‘they’ who crucified Jesus, has laid his body! The one whose body she is seeking is asked for a solution to the mystery of the empty tomb” (*John*, 525). As with Moloney’s comments, Michaels’s summary of the scene recounts the irony well: “Mary is talking *to* Jesus *about* Jesus, without realizing to whom she is speaking” (*John*, 999; emphasis original). Keener recognizes that “Mary’s supposition that her dialogue partner has ‘carried’ Jesus away might be another example of John’s irony” (*John*, 2:1190). On the other hand, he also labels this irony “subtle” and that it “may be merely our expectations as readers too accustomed to the author’s irony” (ibid.).

[38] Michaels, *John*, 990. Chrysostom makes a nearly identical statement about this passage: “For, if some persons had changed the location of the body, they would not have stripped the body in doing this. Or, if they had stolen it, they would not have taken the trouble to take the handkerchief from the head and roll it up and put it ‘in a place by itself.’ How differently would have done it? They would have taken the body just as it was” (*Homilies*, 85; quoted in Lindars, *John*, 601; Moloney, *John*, 522–23). Each references Chrysostom.

These details let the reader know that it was not body-snatching that took place but resurrection.[39] Given these specifics, the reader learns of Jesus's resurrection prior to Mary's perception of it in the narrative. John allows us to peek behind the curtain to learn what was really happening. As a result, we can experience the irony of Mary's statements and actions.

3.1.3 Plotting

To investigate how John plots this passage, I will employ Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin's terminology for analyzing a narrative's structure: initial situation, complication, transformative action, dénouement, and final situation.[40] Using their technique, what I find is that 20:11-18 peaks with Jesus calling Mary by name. This is the climax of the narrative—the *transformative action*.[41] The opening lines of 20:11 are the *initial situation*. The pericope begins with Mary weeping beside Jesus's tomb because she thinks that he is dead and that his body is missing. From here, the narrative arc rises

---

[39] As Keener writes, "Most clearly, the fact that the grave clothes remain behind at all testified that the body had not been taken by tomb robbers or anyone else, who would not have taken the body yet left its wrappings. By process of elimination, the missing body but remaining clothes should suggest to the disciples that Jesus' promise about reclaiming his life was literal (10:17-18)" (*John*, 2:1182). In a similar way, Beasely-Murray contrasts Jesus's resurrection with Lazarus's, stating, "The Evangelist had penned the story of Lazarus, and recorded how Lazarus, at the bidding of Jesus, came forth from his tomb, with the wrappings of the dead still binding him hand and food, and the napkin on his head; he had to be freed to take up life again in this world. Jesus on the contrary left his wrappings in the grave as a sign of his resurrection into the life of God's eternal order" (*John*, 372). Many commentators take the folded grave clothes to be the Evangelist's arguing against the possibility of grave robbery: Barrett, *St. John*, 563; Moloney, *John*, 522–23; Köstenberger, *John*, 564; Michaels, *John*, 990.

[40] Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1999), 43–48. Laurence A. Turner offers a concise summary of Marguerat and Bourquin ("Preaching Narrative: Plot," in *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching*, ed. Grenville J. R. Kent, Paul J. Kissling, and Turner [Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2010], 15–16).

[41] Schnackenburg finds this to be the case as well. He writes, "Undoubtedly, Mary's encounter with the risen one represents for the evangelist the climax, which, according to his Christological thought, he emphasizes strongly (v. 17)" (*St. John*, 3:315). Likewise, along with the recognition scene of v. 16, Köstenberger considers "the focal point of the present section" to be "Jesus' self-revelation to Mary" (*John*, 566).

with each conversation Mary has (20:12-15). This builds suspense and articulates John's notion that Mary is unable to believe on her own.[42] This section is the *complication* of the passage.

The apex is reached when Jesus speaks Mary's name (20:16).[43] This act results in Mary's new understanding of Jesus and is the *transformative action* of the passage.[44] The *dénouement* and *final situation*—Jesus's charge not to cling to him and Mary's testimony to the disciples of having seen Jesus—demonstrate that Mary has gone from faith to greater faith (20:17-18). Her change occurs precisely when Jesus intervenes. The plotting I have just described can be organized as follows:

---

[42] As Köstenberger remarks, "The repetition of Mary's complaint, first to the angels (20:13) and now to Jesus, heightens the tension in the narrative, accentuating both Mary's distress and the comfort about to be provided by Jesus" (*John*, 568). Similarly to Köstenberger, Schnackenberg writes, "Narratively, a progression may be intended through Mary's redoubled complaint: the dramatic effect of Jesus' mode of address and the effect on Mary are strengthened" (*St. John*, 3:314). Moloney does not say that this happens with each development in the pericope but notes that "the portrayal of the depths of her unbelief is heightened as she turns to behold Jesus standing in front of her but is incapable of recognizing the figure as Jesus" (*John*, 525). Although examining more than 20:11-18, Skamp finds that 20:1-18 "builds to a dramatic conclusion, with its intensity gathering through gradual, cyclical stages. Firstly, Mary comes to the tomb and seeing the stone rolled away, she goes back to the disciples. Then the disciples (presumably with Mary) come to the tomb to see it empty and go away to their homes. Mary stands outside the tomb weeping, eventually being drawn to look inside to see two angels, indicating a special revelation, message, is near. Mary then turns away from the tomb to encounter someone whom she supposes is the gardener only to recognise Jesus when he calls her name. But with Jesus no longer the formerly familiar teacher, she experience further revelation: that not only is he risen but he is to go to his 'Father,' now also her 'Father,' and she is sent on the mission of all time. A spiral of 'coming to' and 'going away from' an empty tomb results in the final dramatic revelation" ("Mary," 27).

[43] This calling is reminiscent of John 10:3-5, and it is a broad theme of the Fourth Gospel. A majority of commentators take this view (reported by Keener, *John*, 2:1191 n. 217).

[44] As R. H. Lightfoot comments, "At 20^{11} we revert to Mary, whose attention is concentrated on the tomb, nor does the vision of celestial beings within it assuage her distress or her anxiety to know where to find the body of her Lord. Only when she turns away from the tomb and when the Lord addresses her by name, does she know and acknowledge her master" (*St. John's Gospel: A Commentary*, ed. C. F. Evans [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960], 333). In addition, as Michaels states, "What sight could not do, hearing finally accomplishes. Only one word is necessary: 'Jesus says to her, Mary!'" (*John*, 999). Lindars seems to agree, commenting that "The moment of recognition is the moment of personal address" (*John*, 606). Schneiders uses language similar to mine when she calls v. 16 the moment of "revelatory crisis and subsequent resolution" ("The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Johannine Spirituality," in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, ed. John R. Donahue [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005], 182).

Initial Situation	But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.
Complication	And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."
Transformative Action	Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).
Dénouement	Jesus said to her, "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.'"
Final Situation	Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Thus by using sound storytelling techniques John writes his narrative so as to depict the central concern of his passage to be Mary's change from faith to greater faith. The reason she changes—the *transformative action* that occurs—is something done not *by* her but *to* her. Jesus calls her by name. From plotting John's text, what is clear is that Mary is unable to believe that Jesus is risen apart from his direct action.[45]

3.1.4 Mary Magdalene's Development

One final way that we can observe that Mary is able to change only with Jesus's help is through her character development. First, we can trace this through her perception of reality. It is obvious from what has been shown above that Mary initially thinks that

[45] Along similar lines, Bonney judges that "the author has made it clear that it was neither sight of Jesus nor the sound of his voice that spurred Mary's recognition" (*Caused to Believe*, 152). Nonetheless, what he maintains changes Mary is Jesus's call, which he defines as Jesus's "display of personal knowledge into her [Mary's] person" (ibid.). He contends that this is what causes transformation among John's other characters: Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, and Thomas (ibid., 153).

Jesus is dead and that his body had been stolen.[46] At the same time, Mary also believes that Jesus is a gardener (20:15). Some have argued that John is referring to the garden scene of Genesis in 20:11-18 because of the setting (a garden), the characters (a man, a woman, and two angels), Mary's faulty perception of Jesus as a gardener (see Gen 2:8; 2:15), and the paralleling motifs of immortality, life, knowledge, searching, and divine prohibition.[47]

However, even if Jesus is another Adam—the gardener who was called to work and keep Eden—he is more than that. He is the Lord who planted the garden and walks in it during the cool of the day (Gen 2:8; 3:8; see also Gen 13:10; Ezek 31:8; Isa 51:3).[48] I deduce this from the passage's conclusion. John 20:11-18 ends with Mary declaring Jesus to be ὁ κύριος, which is a reference to Jesus being God. As already detailed above, in the LXX, κύριος is used often in place of the divine name, and in John, Jesus says that he is divine when he uses the expression ἐγὼ εἰμί of himself.[49]

---

[46] This has already been quoted in full above, but Köstenberger notes that there is a "pattern of misunderstanding" in John 20:11-18 that "characterizes the Fourth Evangelist's portrayal of Mary" (*John*, 567). In addition, Moloney argues that "Mary's unbelief has been described with considerable detail across vv. 1-2 and 11-15" (*John*, 525). Furthermore, he holds that when the reader gets to the end of v. 15 "there is no suggestion of resurrection and there is no recognition of the risen one. Mary Magdalene remains in a situation of unbelief as she concerns herself with the removal of a corpse" (ibid.).

[47] These correlations between John 20:11-18 and Gen 2-3 come from Dorothy A. Lee, "Turning from Death to Life: A Biblical Reflection on Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)," *ERev* 50 (1998): 113; Zimmermann, "Communication," 231; Rosik, "Gardens," 82–96. Rosik mentions several of these parallels. The overlapping motifs come directly from him.

[48] Rosik, "Gardens," 84, 86; Zimmermann, "Communication," 231.

[49] Regarding the meaning of Jesus's "I am" statements and their relation to his divinity, Simmons finds this to be especially the case for 8:58. He writes, "Here Jesus claimed unequivocally to have been deity and to have been pre-existent" ("Christology," 101). Of the rest, he remarks, "Other than this occurrence, the use may run the gamut from a simple declarative statement of identification to a Messianic claim as well as possible allusions to the divine name" (ibid.).

Lindars recognizes that in the OT, κύριος "regularly replaces the divine name" (*John*, 615). He makes this point and adds, "But this means that the restraining influence of rigid Jewish monotheism is beginning to weaken, so that the word can be more generally applied to Jesus. It does not mean a fundamental change of doctrine. The confession 'Jesus is Lord' means more than the use of a title of honour. It means that Jesus is exalted to the throne of God" (ibid.). Quell also notes the use of κύριος in the LXX for the divine name (3:1059).

Moreover, following this scene is Thomas's confession, in which he calls Jesus "my Lord and my God." Maruisz Rosik notes that Thomas's exclamation is almost identical to the recognition of God in Gen 2:4-3:24 as יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים.[50] Additionally, in Gen 3:9 the LXX has the κύριος ὁ θεός calling out to Adam by name, saying, Αδαμ, ποῦ εἶ;[51] In John 20:16, Jesus—the Lord God of Thomas's confession—calls Mary by name.[52] This view of Christ as God is what is presented to the readers, and it eventually becomes Mary's understanding of Jesus when she tells the disciples that she has seen ὁ κύριος (20:18).[53]

Secondly, because of Jesus's transformative action Mary moves from sorrowful mourner (20:11, 13, and 15) to joyous evangelist (20:18).[54] Before Jesus intervenes, Mary

---

One of the facets of Mary Magdalene's characterization that I did not consider was her gender. Future studies on the purpose of characters in John should keep this aspect of Mary Magdalene's characterization in mind when examining this subject as recommended by Sharon Pace in a private conversation.

[50] Rosik, "Gardens," 90–91, 96.

[51] Ibid., 88, 90, 96.

[52] Ibid. Additionally, Zimmermann shows that there is overlap between Jesus calling Mary by name and God walking in the garden of Eden in Gen 3. He holds that "in Gen 3:8 (LXX), the 'listening to the voice' of the Lord … plays a decisive role in the process of recognition (above all of the sin) of the first people. He whose voice is heard is either God, who in Gen 3:8 is walking in the garden (περιπατοῦντος), or Jesus, who in John 10:23 is walking in the temple (περιεπάτει)" ("Communication," 231).

[53] Rosik points out that the motif of having or not having knowledge plays an important role in Gen 2:4-3:24 and John 20:10-18. He writes, "the first parents, wanting 'to know good and evil' (to know everything), contravene the order of God and, as a result of this, 'they recognize their nakedness.' Finally, anxiety for 'recognition' leads them to the recognition of suffering and the necessity of death. The similar, and, yet, reversed theme, appears in the story about the open tomb. Mary Magdalene being aware of the death of Jesus, at first does not recognize the Resuscitated in the Gardner. However, after a certain time, she learns the truth of the Resurrection and its consequences" ("Gardens," 95).

[54] Regarding Mary's sudden transformation, Carson exclaims, "anguish and despair are instantly swallowed up by astonishment and delight" (*John*, 641). Köstenberger rightfully identifies Mary's response as joyous (*John*, 566). Michaels says that, "The sound of her own name awakens Mary as if out of sleep—the sleep of despair" (*John*, 999). Witherington characterizes Mary's state in chs. 19-20 as moving "from a state of abject sorrow and preoccupation with the body of the dead Jesus to a state of sudden euphoria" (*Wisdom*, 328). In addition, Witherington implicitly traces a development in Mary's character from lacking "spiritual perceptivity" to being a "witness" when he writes, "Mary's lack of spiritual perceptivity at the beginning of the story is not covered up any more than her bold witnessing to the risen Lord at the end of the story to the inner circle of male disciples is glossed over" (ibid., 333). Schneiders identifies this as well, writing, "When Jesus, the good shepherd, calls her by name, she turns, she is converted from her despair to recognition of him as indeed the 'teacher' she had known in his pre-paschal life" ("Touching," 165). Lee makes the same point as Schneiders, stating, "Magdalene's physical motion represents the turning from grief and sorrow to joy and home in the discovery of Easter faith" ("Turning," 112). Frank J. Matera

sobs and is shown to be grief-stricken. Once she is changed by Jesus, she no longer weeps because of Jesus's death but instead proclaims his resurrection. She has gone from announcing that "someone had carried off the body (20:2)" to proclaiming that "she has seen the Lord and that he told her 'these matters' (20:18)."[55] In fact, as Teresa Okure recounts, "Mary was not only the first to see the risen Lord; she was also the first to be commissioned by him to proclaim the Easter message."[56] Mary's behavior and status are radically changed by the end of the narration.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Mary's initial exclamation and acts specify a need for further change.[57] In her confession, she calls Jesus ραββουνι and not κύριος or θεός.[58] Furthermore, Jesus's charge, μή μου ἅπτου, exhibits that Mary does not

---

observes that "Mary has passed from confusion and grief to recognition as she announces, 'I have seen the Lord' (20:18)" ("John 20," 402). Thompson emphasizes the fact that Mary's "grief will turn to joy when she sees Jesus again—and that will happen soon" (*John*, 415). I call Mary an evangelist here in the same way that Keener labels her Jesus's agent (Keener, *John*, 2:1191). Likewise, Skamp implies that Mary Magdalene is an evangelist when she notes that she finds Mary's commissioning by Jesus in John and Matthew, and angelic figures in Mark and Luke to be significant. She writes, "Despite texts and translations that employ an overarching, patriarchal focus, we are told it was a woman (or women) who were first sent to announce the pivotal message of the Christian church" ("Mary," 30).

[55] Keener, *John*, 2:1194.

[56] Okure, "Jesus' Commission," 185.

[57] As Schnackenberg remarks, "The recognition of Jesus the risen one still needs to be deepened, and this is granted to Mary in a revelatory saying" (*St. John*, 3:317).

[58] As Köstenberger states, "Mary's address of Jesus as 'rabbi' indicates that she has not yet come to terms with the reality of Jesus' resurrection" (*John*, 568–69). Morris does not compare Mary's confession to Thomas's but simply finds that her calling Jesus "Teacher" shows that her "understanding of Jesus' person is not complete" (*John*, 741). Witherington interprets Mary's confession in this way: "Even when Jesus calls Mary by name, her pilgrimage is not over. In her initial reply she calls Jesus *Rabbouni* (my master), which suggests that she still thinks of Jesus in terms of her past relationship with him, as teacher" (*Wisdom*, 331). Moloney calls it a "partial confession of faith" (*John*, 526).

On the other hand, Morris argues that the "in the older Jewish literature it [Rabboni] appears to be used but seldom with reference to men, and as a mode of address it is mostly used of addressing God in prayer" (*John*, 741). The only other person who I found that advocates this view is Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, who observes that "in the older Jewish literature the word *Rabboni*, as distinct from *Rabbi*, is hardly ever used in reference to men, and never in addressing them. The word is reserved for address to God" (*The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davey [London: Faber & Faber, 1947], 543). However, J. Duncan M. Derrett translates διδάσκαλος in v. 16 "master" since the expression is ambiguous and because "as our textual apparatus shows, ancient editors amended v. 16 to read 'Lord,' or 'Lord Teacher'" ("Miriam and the Resurrection (John 20, 16)," *DRev* 111 [1993]: 175). Bruce Chilton reports that "the 'lord' might also correspond to 'rabbi' on occasion" ("The Gospel according to John's Rabbi Jesus," *BBR* 25 [2015]: 40).

entirely comprehend what is happening (20:17).[59] This type of development occurs with others in John.[60] The Samaritan woman changes from complete misunderstanding to possible belief ("Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" [4:29]). Peter moves from confessing Christ to be the Holy one of God (6:68-69) to rejecting him (18:15-18, and 25-27), to loving him (21:15-19), and finally to partially misunderstanding what Jesus is asking him to do (21:21). In part, Martha comprehends who Jesus is, but not fully, since she doubts his ability to raise Lazarus before the general resurrection (11:17-44).[61] In John, faith is a gift from God, as this narrative indicates, but it does not result in spiritual perfection. Growth and development are aspects of the process of discipleship.[62]

Even though ambiguity is apparent in Mary's transformation, it does not remain for long. After being rebuked by Jesus, she goes to his disciples in an act of obedience and confesses Jesus to be the Lord (20:18).[63] Her ultimate declaration of faith is one that demonstrates that she now fully knows who Jesus is. She believes that he is the Lord.[64]

---

[59] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:317. Possibly Mary thinks Jesus is about to leave and does not want to lose him again (Morris, *John*, 742–43; Köstenberger, *John*, 569). Alternatively, John could be emphasizing the message of 13:33 and 36—the fact that Mary cannot go where Jesus is going (Michaels, *John*, 1000). Lindars reads this command as "establishing the proper relationship which must exist from now on," and holds that it indicates that "the desire to hold Jesus must be restrained, because it is an attempt to recapture the conditions of the incarnate life in place of the universal and abiding relationship [of mutual indwelling as described in John 14]" (*John*, 607).

[60] Witherington, *Wisdom*, 334; O'Brien, "John 20," 291.

[61] Ibid.; Howard, "Minor Characters," 76.

[62] Witherington sees "spiritual development or pilgrimage" as a theme of John 20:11-18 (*Wisdom*, 334).

[63] Witherington finds Mary's shift from mourner to evangelist as indicating that "Mary is no longer fixated on the past but is focused on the task before her" (ibid., 332).

[64] Moloney outlines the transition of Mary from unbelief to belief in a way that is similar to what is presented here. He concludes by defining Mary's faith at the conclusion of this pericope as "perfect" (*John*, 527). Brown sees Mary's declaration of Jesus as Lord to the disciples as a possible reference to the tetragrammaton because her testimony in v.18 is reminiscent of Ps 22:22. He writes, "The christophany to Magdalene ends with her going off to Jesus' new brothers (the disciples) and announcing, 'I have seen the Lord.' Many interpreters have proposed that here John has in mind a verse from the greatest of the 'Passion psalms' (Ps xxii 23[22]): 'I will proclaim your name to *my brothers;* in front of the congregation I will praise you.' The possibility becomes more interesting when we reflect that 'Lord' (*kyrios*) is truly the name

3.2 Dramatic Persons: The Use of Characters in John

To use Phelan's terms, what I observe is that as a character Mary aids in the progression of the text by advancing John's ideology.[65] She is a didactic figure.[66] The literary web of the pericope suggests this. John's use of dialogue, irony, plotting, and character development all point to the fact that Mary believed because of Jesus's initiation.[67] As will be seen in Chapter Six, the dimensions and attributes of her character shift in such a way that they parallel John's thematic enunciation of the mechanics of spiritual transformation in the statements of his trusted figures. That is, her actions reflect the theology that the author outlines elsewhere. She and other characters dramatically portray John's stated theology.[68] This is one purpose that John's characters fulfill in the text.

3.3 John's Purpose Statement and My Thesis about John's Figures

Before concluding this chapter, I wish to indicate how my thesis regarding John's employment of characters works alongside the Gospel's stated purpose. What I find is that most hypotheses about the purpose of John's figures can be located in the structure of John 20:31. First, those who observe that the characters of the Fourth Gospel exist to

---

of the risen Jesus, and that in the LXX *kyrios* renders the tetragrammaton, YHWH, which is the proper name of God" (*John*, 2:1017; emphasis original). Indeed, Carmen Picó observes that Mary's announcement to the disciples has more force when it is recognized that "Lord" translates the divine name in the LXX ("'He visto al señor' (Jn 20, 18a): La palabra autorizada de María Magdalena," *EstEcl* 90 [2015]: 52).

[65] See Phelan's definition of progression ("Mimetic-Didactic Distinction," 285–86; *Reading*, 15).

[66] This language also comes from Phelan, but he accepts the idea that "character is not either mimetic or didactic but both (or at least potentially both)" ("Mimetic-Didactic Distinction," 284). Additionally, Phelan is "shy about embracing the conclusion that one function will always dominate the other" (ibid.).

[67] George Allen Turner uses the language of "divine initiative" to talk about how one gains salvation in John ("Soteriology in the Gospel of John," *JETS* 19 [1976]: 273). I will use language comparable to this expression throughout this project.

[68] Brown, *John*, 2:1009.

"enkindle and confirm faith" advance the view that the author employs his figures to promote the ἵνα clause of 20:31.[69] They find that the Evangelist's persons exist in the Gospel *so that* John's audience *may believe* (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε).[70] Second, other interpreters—such as Bonney—emphasize the Christological thrust of 20:31.[71] These exegetes argue that John's characters are sewn into the fabric of the Gospel so that the audience may believe *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* (ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ).

What I am suggesting is that they enable the reader to comprehend better the grammatical subject of John 20:31, the "you" of πιστεύ[σ]ητε. John's characters help to show the theological anthropology of those who have faith and those who do not. They aid in explaining why some believe.[72] In a way, Redman and Conway already emphasize this aspect of John's characters. Redman holds that Johannine figures show that anyone can believe because the persons in the Fourth Gospel are normal people.[73] Conway moves 20:31 into the present by arguing that John's characters assist in demonstrating the complexity of faith for readers then and now.[74] These critics come to conclusions

---

[69] Raymond F. Collins, "Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel—I," *DRev* 94 (1976): 31.

[70] I placed the sigma in brackets given the textual ambiguity present in the manuscript tradition. I will error on the side of caution and leave it in brackets in the same way that the UBS and SBLGNT editors do.

[71] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 172. However, in his reading of Thomas's narrative, he makes the following point: "As a character in the gospel, Thomas functions specifically to illustrate the radical nature of the change brought about by the experience of the risen Christ. John employs Thomas only in scenes where he engages in conversations in some manner related to Jesus' death (11:16; 14:4-5). In each of his earlier appearances, John portrays him as one who cannot see beyond a this-worldly point of view. Only personal contact with the risen Jesus remedies his lack of perception" (ibid., 168).

[72] Although not discussing John's purpose statement, Michaels's comments on the Gospel's determinism is help. As he puts it, "The accent [in John] is not on 'conversion' (the words for 'repent' and 'repentance' never occur), or even the forgiveness of sins, but on revelation. The coming of Jesus into the world simply reveals who belongs—and who does not belong—to his Father, the God of Israel. If the Gospel of John reveals who the Son is and who the Father is, it also tells its readers who they are and where they stand with the Father and the Son" (*John*, 42).

[73] Redman, "Testimony," 60.

[74] Conway, "Ambiguity," 340–41.

different from mine about the purpose of John's figures, but they still find that these literary persons help to articulate something about the "you" of 20:31.[75]

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid the groundwork for recommending that John's grasp of the mechanics of spiritual transformation is portrayed on the stage of his Gospel. What I will show in Chapters Four and Five is that this pattern repeats itself in a number of Johannine figures.[76] I will propose that the scheme of 20:11-18 replicates itself throughout the Gospel. What will be seen is that Mary's confession is not an anomaly but part of a consistent design.

---

[75] My conclusions reflect Michaels's. He finds that in John, "the accent is not on 'conversion' (the words for 'repent' and 'repentance' never occur), or even the forgiveness of sins, but on revelation. The coming of Jesus into the world simply reveals who belongs—who does not belong—to his Father, the God of Israel. If the Gospel of John reveals who the Son is and who the Father is, it also tells its readers who they are and where they stand with the Father and the Son" (*John*, 42).

[76] Thompson is not clear in where else this takes place, but she specifies that happens in other Johannine scenes besides 20:11-18. She states, "Whatever the explanation [for why Mary is unable to recognize Jesus], *as elsewhere in John*, Jesus must make himself known so that he will be recognized" (*John*, 415; emphasis added). Thus I am not alone in seeing this theme appear throughout the Gospel.

CHAPTER 4 – CONFESSING CHRIST: JOHANNINE CONFESSION SCENES – PART I

"Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."

– 1 John 2:23b

In a number of scenes similar to 20:11-18, the Fourth Evangelist portrays confessing characters as unable to come to a deeper understanding of Jesus without his direct action.[1] This kind of narration runs like a thread through the Gospel, and we see it in a number of confessing characters: Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and Thomas.[2] In this chapter and the next, I will analyze the pericopes of these

---

[1] As discussed in Chapter One, Bonney argues this. He holds that "faith [in John] does not simply result from one's acceptance of testimony; rather, it results from Jesus' direct, willful action" (*Caused to Believe*, 5). This remark is made in reference to Thomas's confession, although Bonney writes it about others in John like that of the Samaritan villagers (ibid., 86–87). Throughout this chapter, I will discuss characters coming to faith using the same language.

[2] A few commentators recognize the interconnectedness of some of these narratives. For instance, Elizabeth C. Piasecki and Chris Knights see overlap between the confession of Nathanael and Thomas (Piasecki, "Nathanael: The 'Twin' of Doubting Thomas?" in *Church Divinity*, ed. John H. Morgan, CDMS [Notre Dame: J. H. Morgan, 1981], 101–6; Knights, "Nathanael and Thomas: Two Objectors, Two Confessors - Reading John 20:24-29 and John 1:44-51 in Parallel," *ExpTim* 125 [2014]: 328–32). Knight proposes that "while they are not absolutely identical in narrative structure and theme, there are enough common features between John 1:44-51 and 20:24-29 to suggest that the two passages can profitably be read in parallel with each other" (ibid., 332). Bonney finds that the confessions of Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas all take place because of "the transformative power of Jesus's personal knowledge" into the lives of these figures (*Caused to Believe*, 153). As he concludes regarding 4:7-42, "Jesus brings the Samaritan woman to a deeper understanding of his identity through his personal knowledge of her. The reader has already seen this motif in Jesus' encounter with Nathanael (1:47-50). John will again emphasize this theme in Jesus' post resurrection encounter with Mary Magdalene (20:16) and Thomas (20:27). Through these personal encounters Jesus brings his disciples to knowledge to his identity. Once again, Jesus' identity, not the behavior of his interlocutor, proves to be the focus of the passage" (ibid., 76). The other confessing characters that could be added to this list include John the Baptist, Philip, Martha, and the disciples of John 20. I will not survey these characters' confessions because of the limitations of space. Nevertheless, some of these narratives will be discussed in passing when they are relevant for understanding the above confessions.

As a side note, Piasecki thinks that "the Nathanael-doubting-Thomas scenes reflect John's understanding of the movement of faith required of every person who believes in Jesus, and to be a disciple of the Lord, and John's christological movement about the nature of Jesus as well" ("Nathanael," 101-2). She also stresses that these figures put forward both John's christology and understanding of discipleship (ibid., 103).This thesis mirrors that of this project's, but I discuss it in regard to confessing characters beyond these two. The other difference is that Piasecki sees John's characters as representative figures, as did Collins (ibid., 102, 103), and she is unclear concerning what is "John's understanding of the movement of faith required of every person" (ibid., 102-3). Essentially, she argues that there is a progression in the

literary figures to argue that the pattern found in 20:11-18 is present throughout John. This fact says something about the rhetorical purpose of John's characters. They are thematic—revealing the author's understanding of spiritual transformation.

As with John 20:11-18, I will probe these passages with the tools of narrative criticism, examining dialogue and action, plotting, character development, and other literary devices.[3] Given the amount of attention these texts require, I will divide my study into two chapters, surveying the aforementioned figures in order of appearance. In the first, I will look at Nathanael and the Samaritan Woman, and in the next, the Man Born Blind and Thomas.

This sort of investigation fits comfortably within the aims of modern literary criticism where the examination of "character constellations" takes place. [4] This field of study looks at the relationship between characters in a single work.[5] For this project, two aspects of this discipline are significant. Firstly, this discipline recognizes that it does not matter how often these persons come into contact with each other.[6] An example of this is Romeo and Juliet, who share little time together in Shakespeare's play but whose love is its driving force.[7] As Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider describe,

> Character constellations can be mental constructs invited by the text but not necessarily projected there by the configurations. Such qualitative aspects as slight contrasts between two (or more characters), whether they have scenic

---

revelation of Jesus's identity throughout the Gospel (ibid., 103), and she implicitly claims that one needs to see Jesus (like Thomas) rather than be seen by him (as is the case with Nathanael) (ibid., 104).

[3] As discussed in Chapter Three, these are common literary elements that narrative critics study, so much so that Skamp surveys dialogue, characterization, irony and plot development in John 20:1-18 ("Mary," 23–30).

[4] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 26–27.

[5] Ibid. Wolfgang G. Müller discusses character *configurations* in the same way as Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider talk about character *constellations* (Müller, "Interfigurality: A Study on the Interdependence of Literary Figures," in *Intertextuality [Research in Text Theory]*, ed. Heinrich F. Plett [Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1991], 117; quoted in Kitzberger, "Two Female Characters," 566).

[6] Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, "Characters," 27.

[7] Ibid.

> appearances together or not, are particularly useful for highlighting the individuality of each of them and pointing to the thematic focus of the text.[8]

Secondly, as these critics clarify, “with the help of constellation analysis, various kinds of relationships can be investigated, including …their [characters’] dramaturgical and *thematic* functions.”[9]

In this chapter and the next, I am not examining every character in John to determine how each relates to the other. Instead, I am inspecting the specific constellation of Johannine confessing characters. I will not contrast this group or its purpose with others. Rather, I will focus on confessing characters and their collective purpose in the Gospel.

4.1 Nathanael (John 1:43-51)

In comparison to other confession scenes, Nathanael’s is short. Yet in these eight verses two proclamations of faith are made, and more importantly, Nathanael’s

---

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.; emphasis added.

confession is situated as the last—and climax—of a series of four.[10] In each, divine action is what brings about faith.[11]

The first in this series of confessions is from John the Baptist. He announces that Jesus is the "Son of God" because he has seen the Spirit descend and remain on him—a divine sign that Jesus is the one he had been awaiting (1:32b, 33b).[12] Furthermore, since John gives this testimony only after seeing Jesus come toward him, Moloney proposes

---

[10] To a degree, the climactic quality of Nathanael's confession can be seen in the intratextuality that exists between this scene and the others. William Loader recounts the ways in which Nathanael's story mirrors 1:40-42 and 1:29-39 ("John 1:50-51 and the 'Greater Things' of Johannine Christology," in *Anfänge Der Christologie: Festschrift Für Ferdinand Hahn Zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach, Henning Paulsen, and Ferdinand Hahn [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991], 268; his argument appears on 268-69). He depicts the overlap between these texts and concludes that "the effect of the structural interlocking and cross-referencing is to make the final episode and the confession of Nathanael function as a climax and fulfillment of what has gone before it" (ibid., 269). He argues (1) that "Nathanael's affirmation gathers up both Andrew's and Philip's announcements of Jesus' messiahship and the witness of John," and (2) that "the way the opening chapter reaches it climax in Nathanael's acclamation corresponds to the way with which the evangelist brings the gospel itself to a climax: 'These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31)" (ibid., 269–70). In addition, the climactic quality of this confession comes from the fact that, as Brown observes, "Nathanael is the last of the disciples [in this chapter] to be called, and in him is fulfilled the purpose for which John the Baptist had come: 'The very reason why I came and baptized with water was that he [Jesus] might be revealed to Israel' (i 31)" (*John*, 1:87; so also Keener, *John*, 1:485). Other interpreters who think that Nathanael's confession is these scenes' climax include Lindars, *John*, 119; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:314; Moloney, *John*, 119; Keener, *John*, 1:491. One might say that there are five or six confessions that take place in John 1 depending on how you count John the Baptist's statements (1:29; 1:34; 1:36). However, I follow Peter J. Gomes's enumeration for the confessions in John 1 ("John 1:45-51," *Int* 43 [1989]: 282).

[11] Keener maintains that this is the case for vv. 40-42 and 43-47 (*John*, 1:430). Although Schnackenburg does not directly discuss the repeated pattern of faith through Jesus's direct action in these scenes, he argues that "the self-revelation of Jesus [that occurs throughout the Gospel] has already begun in this section [1:19-51], indirectly at first in the statements of the disciples whom he gains (1:41, 45), and then directly in his own marvelous knowledge, as revealed with regard to Nathanael (1:48; cf. the earlier statement to Simon, v. 42) and in the important word of revelation in 1:51" (*St. John*, 1:283). Likewise, Thompson finds that in vv. 35-51, "Jesus' first disciples follow him for two primary reasons: (1) *because Jesus calls them*; and (2) because others bear witness to him" (*John*, 48; emphasis added), and Bonney insists that "after the conclusion of the prologue, John immediately demonstrates that Jesus' identity is hidden from ordinary perception and that God's transcendent action alone reveals his nature. Humans must be enabled to do so" (*Caused to Believe*, 56). He then surveys the pericopes of John the Baptist and Nathanael in ch. 1.

[12] Carson, *John*, 151. Carson points out that in John, the role the dove plays in Jesus's baptism differs from what is found in the Synoptics. In the Synoptics, it was something Jesus experienced. In the Fourth Gospel, the dove is an indication to John the Baptist concerning Jesus's identity (ibid.). Morris argues that although what the Baptist says in 1:33 could be read to signify that John had not known Jesus up until this point, it is better to interpret it to mean that "he did not know Jesus to be the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit until he saw the sign" (*John*, 134; so also Barrett, *St. John*, 177; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:304; Carson, *John*, 151; Köstenberger, *John*, 69).

that "Jesus plays no active role, but acts as the catalyst that triggers the witness of vv. 29-34."[13] Consequently, both God's revelation and Jesus's coming to John denote that the Baptist makes his announcement because of divine action. [14]

The next confession comes from Andrew, who proclaims to Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). Like John the Baptist's, this confession does not happen in a vacuum. It occurs only subsequent to the Baptist identifying Jesus as "the Lamb of God" to Andrew and another disciple, Jesus initiating the conversation with his question "What are you seeking?" and him then challenging these two future disciples to "come and … see."[15] As Moloney observes,

> the initiative for their [Andrew, the other disciple, and Peter's] presence with Jesus and their understanding of him does not belong to them. A lie has been told [i.e., *they* did not find the Messiah], and this is further reinforced by Jesus' words

---

[13] Moloney, *John*, 53. Keener makes the point that "in view of the Gospel's penchant for double entendres, that the Baptist saw Jesus 'coming' (ἐρχόμενον) to him (1:29) may suggest a narrative confirmation of the one 'coming' (ἐρχόμενος) after John (1:27)" (*John*, 1:451).

[14] Bonney finds that John the Baptist's statements in vv. 31-32 and vv. 33-34 indicate a "reliance on transcendent action" and that John "does not make use of his human interpretive talents when he recognizes Jesus as 'the Son of God' (1:34)" (*Caused to Believe*, 56). He comes to the conclusion that "at the onset of the narrative proper, the reader learns that even John the Baptist, the harbinger of the messianic age, whose coming scripture foresaw (1:22-23), did not on his own recognize Jesus' significance. His human mode of interpreting the world had to be transcended by the action of God. John here demonstrates for his readers that human perception of Jesus' divine role must be enabled" (ibid., 57). Equally, Morris maintains that for John the Baptist, v. 33 indicates that "recognition came not from prior knowledge, but from supernatural revelation" (*John*, 134), and Lindars considers "the Baptist's testimony" not be "an inference" but "his response to the fulfillment of a prearranged signal" (*John*, 111). Others who emphasize God's role in bringing John the Baptist to an understanding of Jesus's real identity by providing him a sign include Witherington, *Wisdom*, 67; Keener, *John*, 1:461, 1:463; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 65; Thompson, *John*, 47-48.

[15] Although Moloney does not find the confession of Andrew to be complete by the Gospel's standards, he holds that it is John the Baptist's actions and Jesus's challenge to come and see that bring him as far as it does in his recognition of Jesus (*John*, 54–55. Daniel B. Wallace classifies "come and you will see" (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε) as a conditional imperative in which an imperative precedes καί followed by a future indicative verb (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 489–90). He argues that this construction indicates that "if X, then Y will happen," and that in 1:39, this phrase must be translated "if you come—and I want you to—you will see" (ibid., 490; emphasis original; quoted in Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 75). This would imply that because these followers came, they were granted sight. Their knowledge of Jesus is dependent upon their coming to him. The role of John that Baptist in Andrew following Jesus is also noted by Lindars, *John*, 112; Carson, *John*, 154; Michaels, *John*, 118; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 104; Thompson, *John*, 49.

> to Simon…. The initiative is entirely with Jesus. He tells Simon who he is, where he comes from (son of John) and who he will be in the future (Cephas).[16]

Once more, this signifies that Jesus controls the narrative. He (along with John the Baptist) is the instigative force behind Andrew's confession.[17]

When we come to Philip, Jesus not only commands Philip to follow him, but he is the one who finds Philip and not the other way around (1:43).[18] Only after this does Philip confess Jesus to be "him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (1:45).[19] This is especially relevant since, as Köstenberger remarks, "Jesus' practice of

---

[16] Moloney, *John*, 55.

[17] Commenting on vv. 40-42, Keener adduces that "in John's theology, both the christological witness of disciples and the personal experience of Christ become necessary for adequate faith. In the language of the First Epistle, one needs the right Christology (1 John 2:22-24) through the apostolic witness (1 John 4:6) as well as the testimony of the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:7-8); the latter is supposed to be inseparable from the former (1 John 4:1-6; cf. John 15:26-27)" (*John*, 1:475). Thus he argues that the act of witnessing is trumped by the "personal encounter with Jesus" which is where these characters "became true disciples" (ibid.). Through Andrew and Peter, contends Keener, the author shows that "Jesus knows the character of the person who approaches him; he knows his sheep (10:14, 27) whom the Father gave him (10:29; 17:9)" (ibid.). Therefore, Andrew's confession fits the pattern of faith portrayed in John 20:11-18.

[18] As Moloney remarks, Philip "repeats the lie of Andrew: 'We have found….' The only person Philip found is Nathanael (v. 45a), but he *was found* and called by Jesus" (*John*, 55; emphasis original). Others who underscore the fact that Jesus was the one who found Philip consist of Gomes, "John 1:45-51," 282; Keener, *John*, 1:482; Michaels, *John*, 127. Moreover, Moloney establishes that Jesus has control over what takes place in the pericope, writing, Jesus stands "at the center of the action. He decided (*ēthelēsen*) to go to Galilee, he found (*heuriskei*) Philip, and he said (*legei*) to him: 'Follow me' (*a kolouthei moi*)" (*John*, 55; so Morris, *John*, 141–42; Michaels, *John*, 125–26).

It should be noted that the subject of ἠθέλησεν in 1:43 is unclear (ibid., 125). Lindars outlines the various options: Andrew, the unnamed disciple, Peter, or Philip (*John*, 116–17). Carson argues that it would make more sense for Andrew to be the subject since "everyone else who comes to Jesus in this chapter does so because of someone else's witness; if Andrew is the subject, there are no exceptions" (*John*, 157–58). Contrarily, Michaels maintains that, "grammatically, the subject of the verb 'he decided' is not immediately specified, but contextually it can only be Jesus. Not only was Jesus speaking at the end of the preceding verse, but in the larger context Jesus was the leader and John's disciples the followers. Having taking the initiative by promising Simon a new name (v. 42), Jesus now continues to direct that action. His decision 'to set out for Galilee' anticipates the wedding 'in Cana of Galilee' (2:1), and may even presuppose Jesus' invitation to the wedding (2:2)" (*John*, 125).

[19] As Moloney sees it, Philip "follows Jesus because he is called by Jesus" (*John*, 55). Philip's confession in ch. 1 is complicated since he later asks Jesus to show him the Father (14:8) and Jesus responds with "have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?" (14:9b)—an observation made by Bennema (*Encountering Jesus*, 107; see also Carson, *John*, 493-94). However, given that he brings Nathanael to Jesus, it seems likely that this confession is authentic although incomplete. In fact, Bennema identifies Philip along with Andrew as "finders," and he argues that "if 1:35-51 depicts a paradigm for making disciples—coming to and remaining with Jesus, testifying about him, bringing people to him—then Andrew and Philip are exemplary disciple markers" (ibid., 108). Bennema even proposes that they "foreshadow the disciples' future mission, symbolized by the miraculous 'finding' of 153 fish in John

calling his followers ran counter to the contemporary practice whereby disciples opted to attach themselves to a rabbi of their choice."[20] Given this context, it is not surprising to discover that Nathanael's faith comes about because of Jesus's direct action.[21]

4.1.1 Dialogue and Action

As with John 20:11-18, the dialogue and action of 1:43-51 indicate that the author puts his theology of spiritual transformation on display through the figure of Nathanael. By using these storytelling devices, John makes it clear that prior to meeting Jesus, "Nathanael refuses to believe," as Knights describes it, and he only does so because of Jesus's involvement.[22] These literary elements both draw attention to Nathanael's unbelief and subsequent faith. I will discuss the narrative's dialogue first.

Through conversation, Nathanael reveals his obstinate unbelief. In the clearest of terms, Philip tells Nathanael that he has found the Messiah (1:45), and Nathanael responds with doubt (1:46b). Nathanael's identification of Jesus with Nazareth shows that he does not know from where Jesus truly comes.[23] Misapprehension of Jesus's origin is a

---

21," (ibid.). Likewise, Witherington sees Philip's witnessing to Nathanael as "fulfilling his responsibility as a disciple" (*Wisdom*, 71). Moreover, some commentators see Jesus's response in 14:9 only as a "gentle rebuke" (Morris, *John*, 571; so also Köstenberger, *John*, 431; Michaels, *John*, 777). This makes it highly probable that the reader is to perceive Philip's faith as real in ch. 1.

[20] Köstenberger, *John*, 78.

[21] As Keener writes, Nathanael's belief "illustrates … the Johannine principles that those who are genuinely 'from God' heed others who are from God (3:20-21; 1 John 4:6)" (*John*, 1:490). Or, as Bonney finds, this passage demonstrates that "human standards of judgment consistently fail to grasp the identity of Jesus and it is only the action of Jesus (1:47-51) that allows humans to transcend their limited point of view" (*Caused to Believe*, 60). Likewise, Schnackenburg comments, "It will be shown in the case of Nathanael that only faith overcomes all objections and recognizes the divine origin of Jesus in spite of his earthly lowliness—and it is Jesus himself who awakens this faith, by his words and by his majesty" (*St. John*, 1:315). Thompson also credits Nathanael's faith to Jesus's revealing words (*John*, 106; so Michaels, "Nathanael under the Fig Tree," *ExpTim* 78 (1967): 182). See also n. 80.

[22] Knights, "Nathanael and Thomas," 329.

[23] Concerning vv. 43-51, Thompson reasons, "It will soon become evident that to describe Jesus as 'Joseph's son from Nazareth' (1:45; cf. 6:42) is to misunderstand him. He is, as Nathanael rightly confesses, the Son of God (cf. Luke 1:35; 2:48-49). As Son of God, Jesus comes 'from above'" (*John*, 52). The irony of Nathanael's response will be discussed below.

consistent theme in John.[24] For example, in 6:38 Jesus reports that he has "come down from heaven," and the Jews respond with grumbling and by asking, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (6:42b). These individuals find it impossible to believe that Jesus has come from heaven because they know his parents.[25] In the same way, Nathanael cannot believe that Jesus is who Philip confesses him to be because of his association with Nazareth.[26]

Additionally, given that this is a response to Philip's testimony and that John emphasizes that the Scriptures "bear witness about [Jesus]" (5:39b), it can be argued that Nathanael's reply must be understood as a denigration of Philip's certainty that Jesus fulfills OT messianic prophecy (1:45).[27] As Koester recognizes, "[Nathanael's] objection probably meant that the scriptures said nothing about the messiah coming from Nazareth or even Galilee."[28] This will not be the only instance in the Gospel in which someone

---

[24] Loader, "John 1:50-51," 268; Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 170–71.

[25] As Presian B. Burroughs remarks, "To the Jewish people, the idea that Jesus might be from heaven is preposterous. They know his down-to-earth parents; how, then, could Jesus possibly be from heaven (v 42)? Hence, even though Jesus identifies himself as God's heaven-sent bread, the people essentially reject him as such. From a human point of view, it seems impossible that an apparently normal person, especially one with human parents, could be from heaven" ("Stop Grumbling and Start Eating: Gospel Meal Meets Scriptural Spice in the Bread of Life Discourse," *HBT* 28 [2006]: 82; so also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:315; Thompson, *John*, 52).

[26] Thompson even suggests that Nathanael's "incredulity foreshadows that displayed later by other Galileans, who wonder how Jesus could be the one who has come down from heaven, since his parents are known to them (6:42)" (*John*, 52).

[27] Craig R. Koester, "Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1:45-51)," *JSNT* 39 (1990): 26; Köstenberger, *John*, 81. Many interpreters find Philip's words to indicate that he believes Jesus is the Messiah or fulfills messianic prophecy: Barrett, *St. John*, 184; Morris, *John*, 144; Köstenberger, *John*, 80; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 129. Brown sees Philip's words as indicating that "Jesus is the fulfillment of the whole OT" (*John*, 1:86; as does Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:315; Thompson, *John*, 51). Carson holds that Philip's witness in v. 45 "is the stance of this entire Gospel: Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures (*cf.* 5:39)" (*John*, 159; also, Brown, *John*, 1:86; Barrett, *St. John*, 184; Keener, *John*, 1:483). Michaels tells us that "Later, Jesus himself will endorse Philip's claim ('If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me,' 5:46)" (*John*, 127).

[28] Koester, "Messianic Exegesis," 26. Gomes summarizes the major positions that scholars take concerning what Nathanael's answer to Philip means ("John 1:45-51," 283). Some interpreters argue that Nathanael's rejection stems from his view of Nazareth as "insignificant" (Morris, *John*, 145; so also

rejects Jesus because he does not properly fulfill that individual's messianic expectations. It happens again in 7:41-42, where some respond to Jesus with "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"[29] Accordingly, to make the assertion, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" is to say to that this Jesus of *Nazareth* cannot be the Messiah.[30]

What is interesting is that at the close of the scene, Jesus identifies himself as the one who stands between heaven and earth—directly contradicting Nathanael's earlier assessment. [31] He does this by drawing a parallel between himself and Jacob's dream in Gen 28.[32] Köstenberger summarizes the meaning behind this allusion well, writing,

> When Jacob awoke from his dream, he exclaimed, "How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17); and he called that place "Bethel," which means "house of God." What Jesus tells Nathanael, then, is that he himself will be the place of much greater divine revelation than that given at previous occasions. He will mediate greater revelation than Abraham (8:58), Jacob (4:12-14), Moses (1:17-18; 5:45-47; 9:28-

---

Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:315; Carson, *John*, 160; Köstenberger, *John*, 81). Others hold that it comes about because of the "civic rivalry in the region" between Cana and Nazareth (Keener, *John*, 1:484; additionally, Brown, *John*, 1:83). Some maintain that it is for both of these reasons (Morris, *John*, 145). Köstenberger provides these two reasons, the one I present above, and a fourth—the idea that "Nathanael, unlike some of Jesus' other early followers, probably had not benefited from the Baptist's testimony" (*John*, 81). Michaels takes a different route. He holds that "Nathanael's skepticism about Jesus probably does not arise out of small-town rivalries (Nathanael was from Cana, according to 21:2)¸ but out of a stubborn provincialism in reverse that refuses to see anything great or glorious in that which is familiar or close to home" (*John*, 129).

[29] Schnackenburg rightly remarks that the evangelist records the objection of 7:41-42 "without commentary," which means "he does not say what he knows" regarding the birth place of Jesus (*St. John*, 1:315). Culpepper suggests that these words are ironic by positing that "again the implied author's smile is inscrutable. Does he smile because he knows the tradition that Jesus was in fact born in Bethlehem and was a descendant of David?" (*Anatomy*, 170).

[30] Commenting on v. 46, Lindars writes, "There is no external evidence to explain Nathanael's low estimate of Nazareth, though the fact that it is never mentioned in the OT or early rabbinic literature indicates that it was a place of little importance. But it is very probable that Jesus' Galilean origins were held against Christian claims by the unbelieving Jews; cf. 6.42; 7.41, 52" (*John*, 118).

[31] Several commentators discern that this passage reflects Jesus as the mediator or "link between heaven and earth" (Morris, *John*, 149; e.g., Brown, *John*, 1:91; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 28; Morris, *John*, 149–50; Keener, *John*, 1:489-90).

[32] As noted by Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:320; Morris, *John*, 149; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 72–73; Moloney, *John*, 57; Keener, *John*, 1:489-90; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 132.

> 33, and Isaiah (12:37-41). Jesus is the “new Bethel,” the place where God is revealed, where heaven and earth, God and humankind, meet.[33]

Thus the contrast between Jesus’s final declaration and Nathanael’s original calculation is glaring and must be intentional.

As a result, Nathanael’s confession reflects a radical change.[34] After he converses with Jesus, he immediately identifies him as “rabbi,” and then calls him “the Son of God” and “the King of Israel” (1:49).[35] These two titles, as Carson stresses, “go far beyond what any disciple would normally ascribe to his rabbi.”[36] Each is messianic and testifies to the dramatic shift of Nathanael’s perspective.[37] It is not surprising to find them together since, as Loader reports, “this is a messianic confession in traditional terms. ‘Son of God’ is a term linked with Israelite kingship (Ps 2:7).”[38]

Regarding “Son of God,” Schnackenburg notes that in context this phrase “is probably meant to express closeness to God, union with God, and perhaps even origin from God.”[39] As a consequence, Nathanael places Jesus in the heavenly realm, and his confession lines up with what the narrator wants readers to believe about Jesus (6:32-33;

---

[33] Köstenberger, *John*, 85–86; so also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:320; Carson, *John*, 164; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 72–73. Keener, *John*, 1:489-90.

[34] Lindars, *John*, 119.

[35] As Michaels describes it, “Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of Nathanael’s character and circumstances … calls forth a spontaneous confession of faith” (*John*, 132).

[36] Carson, *John*, 161.

[37] Barrett, *St. John*, 185–86; Koester, “Messianic Exegesis,” 27; Carson, *John*, 162; Keener, *John*, 1:487; Köstenberger, *John*, 84; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 131.

[38] Loader, “John 1:50-51,” 269; so also, Brown, *John*, 1:87-88. Beasley-Murray holds that “the two titles are virtually synonymous” (*John*, 27).

[39] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:318. Likewise, Bennema states, “In John, ‘Son (of God)’ denotes Jesus’ intimate relationship with God the Father and his authority to act on God’s behalf” (*Encountering Jesus*, 131). Piasecki remarks that the expression Son of God “always refers to Jesus’ origins from God” (“Nathanael,” 102). Morris maintains that “the article is important. It indicates that the expression is to be understood as bearing a full, not a minimal content.… Here was someone who could not be described in ordinary human terms. In his case terms that indicate the closest possible relationship to God were needed” (*John*, 146–47).

20:30-31).[40] Since "Son of God" is a messianic title (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 4 Ezra 7:28-29), Nathanael reveals that he now agrees with Philip's original testimony by using this phrase.[41]

This same line of reasoning applies to the significance of Nathanael confessing Jesus "the King of Israel." At the time, to declare Jesus "the King of Israel" was to call him "the Christ."[42] In Pss. Sol. 17, the Christ was thought to be a Davidic king who would rule over Israel.[43] Moreover, in the context of the Fourth Gospel, the phrase reflects John's high Christology. As Keener summarizes,

---

[40] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 131–32. Schnackenburg limits the range of Nathanael's confession. He warns that "the evangelist did not mean to suggest that Nathanael recognized in Jesus the full dignity of (metaphysical) sonship of God; otherwise Jesus would not have promised a still fuller revelation in his nature (vv. 50, 51). The titles used by Nathanael are meant as Messianic, but provide the reader with the possibility of a deeper understanding" (*St. John*, 1:319). Nevertheless, Jesus's promise does not demand the need for deeper understanding but instead indicates that there will be additional and more impressive miraculous acts. The "these" of v. 50 refers back to Jesus's extraordinary ability to see Nathanael under the fig tree prior to Philip calling him and it points forward to the "these" of 20:31. This is how Michaels interprets v. 50. He contends that "Nathanael's faith based on Jesus' supernatural knowledge of his meeting with Philip will give way not to a deeper faith but to more conclusive verification. In the case of the Samaritans the verification came in what they heard for themselves from the lips of Jesus, while for Nathanael the verification consists of things he 'will see'" (*John*, 133–34). In fact, Schnackenburg recognizes that the "these" of v. 50 are the signs that John records—especially the miracle at Cana—and yet holds that Nathanael's faith was in need of greater depth (*St. John*, 1:319). Others who maintain that the "these" of v. 50 signifies the signs that John records in the rest of his Gospel include Beasley-Murray, *John*, 27; Carson, *John*, 162; Köstenberger, *John*, 87.

[41] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:318. Scholars who point out that "Son of God" is a messianic title and from whom the above OT references come are Lindars, *John*, 119; Carson, *John*, 162; Köstenberger, *John*, 84. Lindars discerns that "Nathanael's confession says no more than had been implied in Philip's words in verse 45" (*John*, 119).

[42] Carson, *John*, 162. In fact, as Köstenberger recounts, "the terminologies [of 'Son of God' and 'King of Israel'] converge in Jewish literature where the Davidic king is described as God's son" (*John*, 84). Köstenberger provides the following examples of where this occurs: 4QFlor I, 6-7; 1QSa II, 11-12; 1 En. 105:2; 4 Ezra 7:28-29; 13:52; 14:9 (ibid., 84 n. 112).

[43] Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 59–60. Morris reports that "in the Old Testament God is the King of his people, and it is clear that in the intervening period the Messiah came to be thought of as exercising the divine prerogative of rule" (*John*, 147). Everett Ferguson maintains that "Rabbinic materials seem to indicate that in the first century the Davidic king became an essential part of Jewish eschatology, to be preceded by the coming of Elijah," and he specifies that "it may have been only after 70 that this received special emphasis" (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 518). In light of the claims by some experts that the messiah of Ps. Sol. 17 describes a "'spiritual messiah' rather than a political militant one," Bennema offers, "although the messiah in *Psalms of Solomon* certainly has a spiritual side (his source of liberation is divine), we cannot dichotomize this from the political dimension (liberation from the Romans and illegitimate Jewish rulers) and militant dimension (the violence aspect can hardly be

> Not only "Son of God" but also "king" has developing nuances as the Fourth Gospel progresses, and the latter may come to be associated with deity. Presumably in part because Jesus' kingship (12:15) failed to fulfill traditional Jewish expectations for the messianic king (6:15; 12:13), both his people and others rejected him (18:33, 37, 39-40; 19:3, 12, 14-15, 19, 21). Given John's divine Christology elsewhere, however, and the possible contrast between Caesar's and God's kingship implied in 19:15, he may allude to Jesus as the divine King, God.[44]

This reading becomes only more certain when one observes the number of references to God as king in ancient Jewish literature.[45]

Given these data, what we find is that Nathanael's confession mirrors what the Gospel writer hopes his audience will proclaim: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31b).[46] In addition, as Schnackenburg maintains, "taken together, they ['Son of God' and 'King of Israel'] confirms Philip's announcement that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Scripture."[47] What Philip wanted Nathanael to believe, he now does and he does so because he has conversed with Jesus.

Jesus's response to Nathanael affirms the authenticity of his faith. He asks, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe?" This final phrase—do you believe?—is a sure confirmation of Nathanael's belief.[48] In fact, it is

---

denied in, e.g., 17,24-25.35). Hence, the traditional picture of a political warrior-messiah is still present" ("The Sword of the Messiah and the Concept of Liberation in the Fourth Gospel," *Bib* 86 [2005]: 41).

[44] Keener, *John*, 1:487.

[45] Keener provides a number of examples, some of which are Zech 14:9; 14:16; Jdt 9:12; Tob 13:6; 2 Macc 12:15; 1 En. 25:3; 25:5 (ibid., 1:487 n. 542).

[46] As Bennema maintains, "We see that Nathanael's response virtually echoes the ideal Johannine belief-response" (*Encountering Jesus*, 131–32). Additionally and as mentioned above, this confession reflects what others (including the narrator) have already declared about Christ in John 1 (Loader, "John 1:50-51," 269).

[47] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:318.

[48] So ibid., 1:319; Morris, *John*, 148; Michaels, *John*, 133. Hunt goes as far to state that "Nathanael's implied belief ('Jesus answered, "Do you believe *because* …"'; 1:50) makes him the first in the story to manifest this most important quality" ("Nathanael: Under the Fig Tree on the Fourth Day," in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann, *Character Studies*, 198). Hunt may be right since "this is the first time the verb *pisteuein* has appeared since the Prologue," as Moloney notes (*John*, 56).

possible, as Barrett proposes, that these words “might be better read as a statement than as a question.”[49]

Beyond this, Jesus’s concluding remarks stress the necessity for him to act so that individuals can come to faith. The plural “you” in v. 51 reveals that he is talking not only to Nathanael but also to Philip and perhaps even the reader.[50] The point of Jesus’s message is, as Keener puts it, that

> Jesus is the link between heaven and earth, the realms above and below, between God and humanity, throughout his entire ministry, as he later explains to Nathanael’s friend Philip (14:9).… Thus, in short, Jesus is Jacob’s ladder, the one who mediates between God in heaven and his servant Jacob on earth (cf. 14:6); thus the “true Israelite” (1:47) may receive the revelation of God as his ancestor did (Gen 28:12; cf. 32:1, an *inclusio*).[51]

For John, to know God requires Jesus and these final words make that clear because they demonstrate that it is in Jesus where God is found and experienced.[52] Thus in this pericope we have a dramatic shift from unbelief to belief that takes place only after Jesus converses with a character, and the content of that character’s confession along with Jesus’s response confirms its genuineness.[53]

---

[49] Barrett, *St. John*, 186.

[50] Carson discerns that “the ‘you’ to whom he promises the vision of v. 51 is plural: the vision is probably for all the disciples, and by extension, for those also who would follow them” (*John*, 163; so also Keener, *John*, 1:489). Michaels explicitly states that the plural you “includ[es] the readers of the Gospel” (*John*, 134). Gomes sees it as referring to Nathanael and “all the faithful in the saga of the new creation that is about to unfold” (“John 1:45-51,” 286; likewise, Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 60). Gomes details that this is Augustine’s view but does not provide full citation for his claim. Although not specifically commenting on the plural “you” of this verse, Köstenberger argues that whenever Jesus talks about seeing greater things in the Gospel of John, “these pronouncements raise expectations for the reader of John’s Gospel as he or she continues to follow John’s narrative. In the present case, the ‘greater things’ that Jesus promises to Nathanael are bound up with greater revelation: ‘you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man’” (*John*, 87).

[51] Keener, *John*, 1:489.

[52] Several commentators acknowledge that these verses highlight the unique role that Jesus plays in connecting John’s readers and future believers to God, and/or they show that Jesus is where God resides: Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:321; Carson, *John*, 164; Morris, *John*, 149–50; Thompson, *John*, 53.

[53] Moloney lists a number of interpreters who see Nathanael’s confession as legitimate (*John*, 61 n. 49).

In a similar way, the action of this pericope—the coming and seeing—plays an important role in showing how Nathanael obtains faith.[54] As Jesus asks two of the Baptist's disciples to come and says that they will see (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε), in a similar way so too does Philip of Nathanael, commanding, "come and see" (ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε).[55] Nathanael indulges Philip. He comes (ἔρχομαι), but it is Jesus who sees him (εἶδεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Ναθαναήλ) and who had seen him under the fig tree (ὑπὸ τὴν συκῆν εἶδόν σε).[56] After this, Nathanael makes his confession of faith, and Jesus promises Nathanael that he will "see (ὄψῃ) greater things than these" (1:50). Consequently, as Michaels observes, "Nathanael's experience moves from being seen (vv. 47, 48) to seeing (vv. 50, 51)."[57] This shift is because of Jesus, and Jesus's promise in 1:50 is his promise to reveal himself further.[58] The dialogue and action of the narrative, then, make it clear that Nathanael comes to faith because of Christ.

---

[54] Hunt takes notice of the importance of "words related to sight" in this scene and finds that this "continues the development of a theme begun already in 1:14: 'The word became flesh … and we have *seen* his glory" ("Nathanael," 193; emphasis original; see also 193 n. 26). Michaels finds that at v. 47 "verbs of motion are noticeable once again" (*John*, 129). He points to the earlier expressions of "come" (v. 29), "walk by" (v. 36), and "look" (v. 36) and now highlights "come" in v. 47 (*John*, 129).

[55] Keener observes this and then makes the point that "'come and see' was a standard phrase in ancient literature, including for halakic investigation," and that "this invitation reflects the characteristic Johannine epistemology: the synagogue leadership may know the written Torah, but disciples of Jesus, Torah made flesh (1:1– 18), have a personal experience with God (cf. 9:25; 10:4) and lay claim to the Spirit, which the opponents admit they do not have" (*John*, 1:485).

[56] Concerning Jesus's "I saw you under the fig tree," Thompson says that "it may not be significant that Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree in a land where figs were common: the point is that Jesus saw him" (*John*, 53). Moloney takes notice of the fact that Nathanael did not see Jesus but that Jesus saw him (*John*, 56). He reports, "Nathanael did not come to faith by seeing Jesus; Jesus has seen him first" (ibid.). Instead, "Nathanael has believed on the basis of the wonder of Jesus' having seen him" (ibid.).

[57] Michaels, *John*, 134. Michaels also draws attention to the fact that Jesus's promise in v. 51 may be an intentional reference to his "come and you will see" in v. 39 and an explanation of "the full extent of what they … 'will see' in the chapters to come" (ibid., 136). Furthermore, a few interpreters mention the "popular (erroneous) etymologies of the name 'Israel' in terms of 'seeing God'" as standing behind Jesus calling Nathanael an Israelite and/or his promise that Nathanael will see greater things (Brown, *John*, 1:87; e.g., Barrett, *St. John*, 185; Carson, *John*, 161). As Brown details, "Nathanael would be worthy of the name of 'Israel' because he would see God, just as Jacob saw God face to face at the time his name was changed to Israel" (ibid.). If this allusion is intentional, it would support the above notion that Nathanael is one who moves from being seen to seeing.

[58] As Loader puts it, "He [Jesus] is promising a greater basis for faith" ("John 1:50-51," 270). This basis for faith is something done by Jesus—whether it is his present knowledge of Nathanael or his future

4.1.2 Intratextuality, Intertextuality, and Irony

Beyond the dialogue and action of the narrative, there are a number of literary devices that indicate that Nathanael reflects John's theology of spiritual transformation. First, Nathanael means "God gives" or "God has given."[59] This is significant because, as Barrett recounts, "the name is rare in rabbinic writings," and "it has often been suggested that the Nathanael of John is the Bartholomew of Matthew, Mark, and Luke."[60] As a result, it is possible that Nathanael's name is meant to be read symbolically and reflective of Jesus's words in John 6:37—"all that the Father gives me will come to me."[61] If true, the intratextuality is striking and accentuates the role Nathanael plays. He identifies Jesus

---

acts. Loader finds the "greater things" of 1:50-51 to be the Easter event and not Jesus's entire ministry (ibid., 274).

[59] An observation made by most commentators: Brown, *John*, 1:82; Barrett, *St. John*, 183; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:314; Morris, *John*, 143; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 71; Hunt, "Nathanael," 195; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 127.

[60] Barrett, *St. John*, 183–84. Morris summarizes the typical argument presented for seeing Nathanael as Bartholomew. He reports that "others … suggest that Nathanael is to be identified with Bartholomew, an apostle who is never mentioned (at least by this name) in John, just as Nathanael is never mentioned in the Synoptists. Bartholomew is coupled with Philip in all three Synoptists (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14), and another link is found in that he is mentioned immediately after Thomas in Acts 1:13 while Nathanael is in the same position in John 21:2. Moreover, Bartholomew is not really a personal name, but a patronymic meaning 'son of Tolmai' (cf. Barjona = 'son of Jona'); the man who bore it almost certainly had another name. The other disciples mentioned in this chapter all became apostles, and it is suggested that Nathanael is likely to have done so too. If he is to be identified with one of the apostles, Bartholomew is probably our man" (*John*, 143). On the other hand, Hunt details that "the Talmud makes reference to a certain '*Netzer*' as one of Jesus' disciples (*b. Sanh.* 43a). Since this name is perhaps a pun on the name '*Nittai*,' which in turn is a hypocorism of the name Nathanael, these scholars suggest that Nathanael is more likely to be an actual disciple of Jesus rather than simply a fictitious or idealized disciple" ("Nathanael," 190). Nevertheless, some interpreters make the point that this kind of reconstruction of Nathanael's real identity is a fruitless endeavor. Hunt discerns that "ultimately, historical conclusions about characters in the Gospel of John are most often simply the by-product of the investigator's presuppositions about the text" (ibid.). Michaels insists, "Nathanael is unknown to the synoptic tradition, and all efforts to identify him with someone named in the synoptic Gospels (Bartholomew, for example, or Matthew) are speculative" (*John*, 127).

[61] Bennema finds that the meaning of Nathanael's name "has led a few scholars to argue that Nathanael is symbolic of the disciples that have been *given* by the Father to Jesus" (*Encountering Jesus*, 127). He points to Barrett, who makes the connection between 6:37 and Nathanael's name as an example of this kind of reading (*St. John*, 184).

as the Christ because he has been given by the Father.[62] Caution should be taken with this reading since, as Bennema remarks, John regularly "provides a translation if he wants to draw attention to Semitic terms (for example, 9:7). Indeed, 1:35-51 explains three other Semitic terms: rabbi (1:38), Messiah (1:41), and Cephas (1:42)."[63]

Second, Steven A. Hunt makes the case that the story of Nathanael is to be put in conversation with Gen 1:14-19, the fourth day of creation.[64] He argues this for a number of reasons: (1) John 1:1 begins with an allusion to Gen 1:1; (2) the first scene takes place near a river (1:28; see Gen 2:10); and (3) the numbering of days in John 1:1-2:12 adds up to a week.[65] Thus in 1:43-51, readers find themselves "on the fourth day in the narrative world of John" and ought to link it to the fourth day of creation.[66] Hunt shows there to be a number of points of contact between John 1:43-51 and Gen 1:14-19.[67] What is relevant for my purposes is the common emphasis on light and darkness in Gen 1:14-19 and how it lies behind the significance of John 1:43-51.[68]

In Gen 1:14-19, God creates celestial bodies "to separate the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:18a).[69] In John, "primary symbols" (light and darkness) along with "secondary" symbols (sight and blindness) play a significant role.[70] With this in mind,

---

[62] Nathanael's conversion is, as Hoskyns understands it, "the record of the gift to him [Jesus] of the disciples by the Father, as the name Nathanael—given by God—suggests" (*Fourth Gospel*, 71). Hunt, who is wary about reading Nathanael's name symbolically, states that "if his name is significant then, readers ought to be thinking that Nathanael represents those disciples who have been 'given' to Jesus by the Father, a major theme in the Gospel which begins to resolve in 18:8-9 (when readers learn that Jesus has not lost those given to him) and finally climaxes in 19:26-27 (when Jesus gives this mother and Beloved Disciple to another)" (ibid., 196).

[63] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 127–128; so also Hunt, "Nathanael," 195–96.

[64] Hunt, "Nathanael," 193–94. He is not alone in this reading. Moloney lists other scholars who take this position as well (*John*, 50).

[65] Hunt, "Nathanael," 192.

[66] Ibid., 192–93.

[67] Ibid., 192–94.

[68] Ibid., 193–94.

[69] Ibid., 193.

[70] Ibid.

Hunt draws attention to the fact that John's "narrator's repeated use of words related to sight [in John 1:43-51] … continues the development of a theme begun already in 1:14: 'The Word became flesh … and we have *seen* his glory.'"[71] Hunt does not go this far, but this intertextuality can also be used to reason that the author stresses these themes to indicate that Nathanael moves from a place of darkness to light—from blindness to sight—because he meets Jesus, the mediator of all creation—including light (1:3)—and "the light of the world" (8:12; see also 1:4-5).[72]

Third, and as with 20:11-18, the text's irony calls attention to Nathanael's unbelief and what ought to have been apparent. Nathanael's rhetorical question—"Can anything good (ἀγαθόν) come out of Nazareth?"—is ironic since something good has come from Nazareth.[73] As Moloney muses, "the supreme good is the one known to Christian tradition as 'Jesus of Nazareth.'"[74] Or as Culpepper posits, what Nathanael does not realize is that "Jesus of Nazareth would be the source of more good than Nathanael could imagine, and the question of Jesus' origin had depths he could not yet fathom."[75] Furthermore, Mark 10:18 informs us that in antiquity, some thought that no one was good

---

[71] Ibid. emphasis original.

[72] Hunt makes note of the connection between Jesus as the light of the world in John and the fourth day of creation, and he links Nathanael's coming to faith to this intertextuality (ibid., 194). However, he suggests that Nathanael does not have faith until he sees Jesus's miracle at Cana. The connection between Gen 1 and John 1 are not limited to what Hunt presents. There is overlap between each day of Gen 1:1-19 and John 1:1-51. The contrast between light and darkness in John 1:5 and 1:9 matches the creation of light and its separation from darkness on the first day in Gen 1:3-5. On day two, God separates the waters (ὕδωρ) by creating an expanse. He names that expanse "heaven" (οὐρανός). On the second day of John 1, John the Baptist recounts that he "came baptizing with water (ἐν ὕδατι)" and that he saw "the Spirit descend from heaven (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ) like a dove" and remain on Jesus. On the third day, God gathers the waters under heaven so as to create dry land. He then calls the dry land Earth and the gathered waters sea (καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν ξηρὰν γῆν καὶ τὰ συστήματα τῶν ὑδάτων ἐκάλεσεν θαλάσσας). In John 1:35-42, Jesus renames Simon "rock" by saying, "You shall be called Cephas" (σὺ κληθήσῃ Κηφᾶς). Paralleling action and terminology occur between these narratives, indicating intertextuality. To properly understand John 1:1-51, we need to read it in the context of Gen 1:1-19.

[73] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 170, 176; Moloney, *John*, 55.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 170.

(ἀγαθός) except God. It is possible that Nathanael alludes to Jesus's divinity without realizing it.

Jesus's perception into Nathanael's person also carries with it some irony. Jesus says that Nathanael is without deceit (δόλος). By stating this, most commentators hold that Jesus contrasts Nathanael with Jacob, who was known for his trickery.[76] In 1:51, Jesus tells Nathanael that he will have a vision similar to what Jacob experienced in Gen 28.[77] Accordingly, it can be said that Jesus's words call attention to the irony of Nathanael's initial response to Philip. Nathanael was right to say that the Messiah does not originate from Nazareth because the Messiah actually comes from God.[78] Nathanael is not full of deceit but inadvertently speaks truthfully.[79]

4.1.3 Plotting

The plotting of 1:43-51 is similar to what we find in 20:11-18. It begins with Philip's conversion and his announcement of Jesus's identity to Nathanael (1:43-45). This is the *initial situation*. The *complication* comes when Nathanael refuses to believe Philip and begins to discourse with Jesus (1:46-48a). The *complication* is resolved through the *transformative action* of Jesus telling Nathanael that "Before Philip called

---

[76] Brown, *John*, 1:87; Barrett, *St. John*, 185; L. Paul Trudinger, "An Israelite in Whom There Is No Guile: An Interpretative Note on John 1:45:51," *EvQ* 54 (1982): 117; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 27; Carson, *John*, 160–61; C. E. Hill, "The Identity of John's Nathanael," *JSNT* 20 (1998): 56; Keener, *John*, 1:485-86; Köstenberger, *John*, 82; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 130; Thompson, *John*, 52.

[77] Hill writes, "The most obvious [allusion to Jacob's story in Genesis] comes in Jesus' prediction that his disciples 'will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man' (1.51; cf. Gen. 28.12), an open recollection of Jacob's dream" ("Nathanael," 56).

[78] As Hunt comments, "Nathanael's question [in response to Philip] therefore intends only this: the Messiah could no more come from Nazareth, then he could come from Cana. And since, in John's Gospel, Jesus is 'from above.' Nathanael is right!" ("Nathanael," 195).

[79] This also fits with the fact that deceit (δόλος) can have, as Schnackenburg reports, "religious overtones in the language of the OT (cf. Ps 12; 17:1; 43:1; 52:5f.; Prov 12:6; denied in the servant of the Lord Is 53:9)" (*St. John*, 1:316; so also Lindars, *John*, 118).

you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (1:48b).[80] The *dénouement* follows with Nathanael's response of faith (1:49), and Jesus's promise to Nathanael that he will see great things (1:50). The story concludes with the *final situation*—Jesus specifying what those greater things will be (1:51). This plotting can be outlined in this manner:

Initial Situation	43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."
Complication	46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?"
Transformative Action	Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."
Dénouement	49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."
Final Situation	51 And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."[81]

[80] Many commentators recognize that Jesus's knowledge of Nathanael's person brings about Nathanael's confession of faith (or in the very least encourages it): Brown, *John*, 1:87; Trudinger, "John 1:45:51," 119; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 27; Keener, *John*, 1:480. Keener writes, "Such encounters in which Jesus demonstrates to people that he already knows them often move the inquirer toward faith (cf., e.g., 1:42; 4:17-18; 16:30; perhaps 3:10); an encounter with Jesus becomes the Fourth Gospel's ideal apologetic for those with open hearts. Jesus who knows his own sheep and 'calls' them (10:3; cf. through Philip in 1:48), here demonstrates his intimate knowledge of Nathanael, just as Nathanael quickly recognizes his shepherd (1:49; 10:4) and demonstrates 'that he is a member of the people of God'" (ibid., 1:487; the quotation at the end comes from Rodney A. Whitacre, *Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology*, SBLDS 67 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982], 81).

[81] Knights presents an alternative but similar plotting ("Nathanael and Thomas," 330–31). For Nathanael and Thomas's confession, he finds there to be a "nine-stage common narrative structure, with one of the two passages having a tenth feature not found in the other" (ibid., 329). According to Knights, the point of deviation between the two is 1:48 (ibid., 331). There is no "objector's question"—Nathanael's "How do you know me?"—in John 20:24-29 (ibid.).

Therefore, as with 20:11-18, the plotting of 1:43-51 indicates that Nathanael comes to faith because of Jesus's words. In 1:43-48a, Nathanael is in a state of unbelief. After 1:48b, he believes. Exactly what activity Jesus describes in v. 48 or what it refers to eludes interpreters.[82] Nonetheless, Carson is right when he says that "John's chief point here is Jesus's supernatural knowledge…, not Nathanael's activity."[83] As the design of this narrative indicates, Nathanael moves from unbelief to belief because of Jesus's direct action. Jesus's supernatural knowledge is the cause of Nathanael's faith.[84]

4.1.4 Nathanael's Development

As discussed above, the passage begins with Nathanael in a state of stubborn unbelief. [85] He refuses to trust Philip's testimony. His initial response reveals this preliminary state. Nathanael is an unbeliever. On the other hand, Nathanael's confession is personal and shows the dramatic nature of his change.[86] As Lindars acknowledges,

---

[82] Brown labels all suggestions regarding Nathanael's actions under the fig tree as "pure speculation" (*John*, 1:83; so also Carson, *John*, 161). Michaels says that "the reference to finding Nathanael 'under the fig tree' … remains at this point something of an enigma" (*John*, 131).

[83] Carson, *John*, 161. Similarly, Bennema makes the point that "although scholars have discussed the (symbolic) meaning of Jesus's statement that he saw Nathanael under the fig tree, it may simply have been a demonstration of Jesus' insight into people to extract the desired response (cf. 4:17-19)" (*Encountering Jesus*, 130).

[84] Michaels, "Nathanael," 182; Lindars, *John*, 119; Barrett, *St. John*, 185; Morris, *John*, 146; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 72; Michaels, *John*, 132; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 130. Köstenberger provides a number of example of Jesus's supernatural knowledge in John or places where the narrator specifies that he possess this ability: 1:42; 2:4; 2:19; 2:24-25; 4:17-18; 6:64; 6:70; 11:4; 11:11-14; 13:1; 13:10-11; 13:38; 21:18-19 (*John*, 82 n. 104). Bonney thinks that Jesus's perception brings about Nathanael's confession, but he does not consider any confession complete prior to the resurrection (*Caused to Believe*, 59-60).

It should be noted that L. Paul Trudinger reports that "'knowing the thoughts of men' was considered to be one of the expected accomplishments of the ideal King" ("John 1:45:51," 119). He cites Wis 7:20 to support his claim (ibid., 119 n. 8). Likewise, Keener clarifies that, Jesus's insight into human character "was normally attributed only to prophets, magicians, and God, the last source being the likeliest one in view of this Gospel's Christology" (*John*, 1:486; so also Köstenberger, *John*, 82).

[85] Knights, "Nathanael and Thomas," 329.

[86] As Schnackenburg states, "Nathanael is so overwhelmed by Jesus's knowledge and his power of reading hearts that he proclaims spontaneously his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, with a personal warmth of dedication (the two-fold σύ)" (*St. John*, 1:317).

"Nathanael's confession of faith is so daring, and such a complete reversal of his contemptuous question in verse 46, that it seems to the modern reader an impossible conclusion to draw."[87] His changed status is seen in part in Jesus's identification of him as "an Israelite" (1:47), and his recognition of Jesus as *his* king since he calls Jesus "the King of Israel" (1:49).[88] This shift occurs because Jesus speaks to him.[89]

Consequently, these various literary elements show that 1:43-51 puts John's theology of spiritual transformation on display in the figure of Nathanael. Nathanael confesses Jesus to be the Christ because of Jesus's direct involvement. This is demonstrated in a number of ways that mirror what is found in John 20:11-18. Our next text will be no different.

4.2 The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-30)

John 4:1-30 comes with a pertinent exegetical conundrum. It is unclear whether the Samaritan Woman's question in v. 29 is a statement of faith or an expression of doubt.[90] Grammatically, the μήτι of this phrase requires the answer to be at worst "no"

---

[87] Lindars, *John*, 119. It is not universally accepted that Nathanael's confession represents a radical shift. Hunt argues that "while certainly a positive male character in the Gospel, Nathanael remains 'flat.' Readers observe no real development in Nathanael's character" ("Nathanael," 192). In part, he asserts this based on the claim that although Nathanael's confession "surprises," it is not "out of character" (ibid.). The narrative suggests otherwise.

[88] As Michaels puts it, "Nathanael, as 'Israel,' acknowledges 'Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth' as his King and Lord" (*John*, 132). Likewise, Witherington states, "Jesus' prophetic insight into Nathanael and Nathanael's character as reflected in his question, leads to Nathanael's calling Jesus rabbi, Son of God and King of Israel—the true Israelite recognizes his king" (*Wisdom*, 72). Gomes does not make much of the link between "Israelite" and "King of Israel" but between "Israelite" and "Messiah" ("John 1:45-51," 284). He reasons that "the true Israelite, the one without guile or deceit, would be the one who would recognize the Messiah when he saw him" (ibid.).

[89] As Schnackenburg describes it, "All the misgivings of this [Nathanael's] critical mind disappear before the person of Jesus" (*St. John*, 1:319). Or, as Knights summarizes, "Nathanael refuses to believe that anything good can come from Nazareth, but is willing to accompany Philip to meet Jesus. His meeting with Jesus transforms his view of him, addressing Jesus as Rabbi, Son of God and King of Israel" ("Nathanael and Thomas," 329). See also n. 80.

[90] I have decided to limit the Samaritan Woman's confession scene to the first thirty verses of ch. 4 because following v. 30, the narrative focuses on the Samaritans as a group. Vv. 31-42 are important for understanding the nature of the Samaritan Woman's confession, but they are not necessarily part of the

and "perhaps" at best.[91] If the presumed answer is "no," then the Samaritan Woman is not a confessing character and should be excluded from this project.

I will tackle this problem below, and I will show that the narrative pattern of 20:11-18 is found again here. As with Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan Woman confesses Jesus to be the Christ because of her conversation with him.[92] I will attempt to demonstrate this with the same literary elements as examined in 1:43-51. I will survey these features in the same order as above.

Samaritan Woman's confession scene. They are a scene in and of themselves, and I will discuss these verses as complementing our understanding of vv. 1-30.

[91] BDAG s.v. μήτι, 649. It should be noted that although μήτι does "invite a negative response to the question that it introduces," this is not always the case (ibid.). With γε, it can simply "introduce a question" as it does in 1 Cor 6:3 (ibid.). There are a number of opinions concerning how best to translate this phrase. Some commentators translate it with "perhaps"—e.g, Barrett, *St. John*, 240; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167. Schnackenburg states that "the μήτι does not demand absolutely a negative answer, but can express a cautious opinion. It is meant to cause reflection (cf. v. 39) and the reader is thereby reminded of Jesus's self-revelation (v. 26)" (*St. John*, 1:444). Morris says that "it is as though a negative answer might be expected, but a positive one is hoped for" (*John*, 243–44). In contrast, Moloney is certain that grammatically the answer to the Samaritan Woman's question is no. He argues that "the use of this expression [μήτι] tells against those who claim, that v. 29 reflects 'complete belief in Jesus'" (*John*, 135; quoting Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*, WUNT 2/31 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988], 169). Likewise, Köstenberger finds that "the Greek interrogative particle μήτι (*mēti*) suggests, if not a negative answer, at least a hesitant question" (*John*, 160, also 143). This leads him to conclude that the Samaritan Woman "has not arrived at an assured confidence regarding Jesus' identity" (ibid., 160). In the same way, Elizabeth Danna sides with translating μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός as signifying "a negative answer" ("A Note on John 4:29," *RB* 106 [1999]: 222), or at best "a hesitant question" that "indicates that she has doubts about Jesus' messiahship" (ibid., 222–23).

[92] As Keener understands it, "Jesus' self-revelation to her [the Samaritan Woman] will ultimately complete her christological development in 4:25-26, 29, leading to the Samaritans' climactic christological revelation of Jesus as 'savior of the world' (4:42)" (*John*, 1:609-10). Interestingly enough, Schnackenburg holds that "the self-revelation of Jesus" is the "main theme" of the passage (*St. John*, 1:421). He also says that in v. 26, Jesus "reveals his divine being" and that although "Jesus is not compelled by the situation to give this answer," he still "reveals himself of his own accord to the Samaritan" (ibid., 1:442). This leads him to hold that "Jesus brings the Samaritan … to believe in him as the Messiah" (ibid.). Köstenberger observes that Jesus's need for water "opens up opportunities for revelation regarding Jesus' ability to grant eternal life…, the proper way to worship (in spirit and truth)…, and *his true identity*" (*John*, 142; emphasis added). Others who see the words of Jesus in v. 26 as the cause of the Samaritan Woman's faith include Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 76; Thompson, *John*, 106. It should be restated that Bonney does not see any confession of faith prior to the resurrection to be complete (ibid., 71, 125).

4.2.1 Dialogue and Action

As with the previous narratives, the dialogue in 4:1-30 reveals the Samaritan Woman's inability to believe. The scene opens with Jesus asking if she will give him a drink of water. This sets the tone for the rest of the narrative and we see Jesus direct the conversation away from literal to living water.[93] The Samaritan Woman's response—"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"—and Jesus's reaction—"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water"—reveal that the Samaritan is unaware of Jesus's identity.[94] Initially, to her Jesus is just a Jewish man.[95]

---

[93] This is the obvious reason for the Jesus's initial question because, as Witherington observes, "Jesus is never said to drink the water the woman could have given him. The request for water simply serves as the occasion for the dialogue on religion in which Jesus will offer the woman something far more valuable than ordinary water" (*Wisdom*, 120). Additionally, as Schnackenburg comments on v. 10, "Jesus utters a mysterious word which raises the conversation to a higher level. It is a revelation which … announces the theme which is to be developed in what follows" (*St. John*, 1:426). Several commentators observe that "Jesus raises the conversation to another level" at v. 10 (*Caused to Believe*, 73; so also Morris, *John*, 230; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 163). Bennema also remarks that the dialogue centers on two topics: "the gift of 'living water' and the identity of the giver" (ibid.). He finds that there are two parts to their conversation and that they are divided between these two subjects: 4:7b-15 concerns living water and 4:16-26 Jesus's identity (ibid.; so also Moloney and Köstenberger, who hold the two parts to be vv. 10-15 and vv. 16-30 [Moloney, *John*, 117; Köstenberger, *John*, 160]).

[94] Conway reads v. 10 as Jesus redirecting "the conversation to the woman's lack of knowledge about him and about God" (*Men and Women*, 113–14). Köstenberger identifies v. 10 as a "second-class condition" (according to Wallace's categories [*Greek Grammar*, 694–95]), which means "the woman knows neither God's gift nor Jesus' true identity" (*John*, 150). Regarding v. 10, Michaels thinks that "with this he exposes her ignorance of two things: first, 'the gift of God,' and second, 'who it is who says to you, "Give me to drink"'—that is, who Jesus is. Both are things the reader of the Gospel should know, even though the woman does not" (*John*, 241).

[95] Carson states, "From her perspective, she dismisses him as a Jew; later on, Jews will dismiss him as a Samaritan (8:48). But if Jesus cannot be other than alien, he nevertheless wins some Jews and some Samaritans…. She sees in him a weary Jewish traveller; she does not yet perceive his glory (*cf.* 1:14)" (*John*, 218; so also Barrett, *St. John*, 232, who says this observation comes from Günther Bornkamm, *Geschichte und Glaube: gesammelte Aufsätze, 4*, BEvT 53 [München: Kaiser, 1971], 235f.).

As the conversation progresses, the author stresses the Samaritan Woman's nescience.[96] When Jesus offers her living water, she ripostes with a statement on the depth of the well and a challenge to Jesus's importance by placing him below Jacob—an implicit denial of his messiahship and unique relation to God (4:11-12).[97] Since Jesus has already been shown to be greater than Jacob in John 1:43-51, as the intermediary is greater than the person in need of mediation, the reader knows the Samaritan Woman's charge to be false.[98] Moreover, the narrative itself shows Jesus's preeminence in the kind of water he gives.[99] It is of superior value than that which Jacob was able to provide, and Jesus's reply in 4:13-14 make this clear—"Everyone who drinks of this water will be

---

[96] Most commentators take note of the Samaritan Woman's misunderstanding: Brown, *John*, 1:170, 176, 177; Barrett, *St. John*, 234, 235; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:428, 1:432, 1:441; Moloney, *John*, 115, 118–19.

[97] So Morris who argues that the Samaritan Woman misconceives Jesus's words, mentioning the depth of the well and accentuating Jesus's "unimportance" (*John*, 231). Conway insists that the Samaritan Woman "understands that Jesus is offering more than well water" but "to that idea, she responds with sensible matter-of-factness, pointing out that he does not even have the equipment he needs to draw water from the well, let alone provide her with some other superior water. From her perspective, this thirsty man is making a ridiculous claim. She therefore challenges his authority and in the face of his fantastic offer presents her own authority figure—the giver of the well, 'our father Jacob'" (*Men and Women*, 114). Barrett writes that "the woman does not know, as readers of the gospel do (and the irony of the situation is characteristic of John), that Jesus is greater than Jacob because he gives water better by far" (*St. John*, 228; so also Lindars, *John*, 182; Conway, *Men and Women*, 115; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 164). Carson mentions the irony Barrett observes and underscores a second: the source of Jesus's water is no "ordinary well" (*John*, 219). Others who observe the Samaritan Woman's misunderstanding here include Brown, *John*, 1:177, Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 164; Michaels, who says that "the woman's remark confirms that she knows nothing of 'the gift of God,' nor of Jesus's identity. Only his last two words, 'living water,' register with her" (*John*, 242); Moloney, who summarizes the Samaritan Woman's words as revealing that (1) "she cannot imagine that Jesus might be greater than Jacob," and that (2) "she shows no openness or acceptance of Jesus's promise of the gift of God" (*John*, 118). Furthermore commenting on vv. 17-18, Michaels describes the conversation, even vv. 16-18, as a "repartee," a "lively give-and-take that has gone on for nine verses now between 'you, a Jew' and 'me, a Samaritan woman' (v. 9)"—hence my use of "riposte" above (*John*, 248).

[98] Keener reasons that "the allusions to Jacob in 1:47-51 suggest Jesus' infinite superiority to Jacob, as his God or mediator, not a mere identification with him or his descendants" (*John*, 1:483). Likewise, Witherington argues that because of 1:51, the reader knows that "Jesus is one greater than Jacob, for he is the locus of God's presence on earth, through whom all divine communication comes and goes" (*Wisdom*, 120). Keener also says that 1:51 shows that Jesus is greater than Jacob in this narrative because Jesus "as Jacob's ladder (1:50-51), grants the salvation that mere descent from Jacob could not ensure" (*John*, 1:586).

[99] Lindars, *John*, 182; Barrett, *St. John*, 228; Carson, *John*, 220; Keener, *John*, 1:601. Thompson does not point to Jesus's living water in particular but what he can provide in general as surpassing what Jacob could and thus this argues for Jesus's superiority (*John*, 96).

thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."[100]

Jesus's promise is met with a request for it, not because the Samaritan Woman desires eternal life but so that she will no longer need to "come here to draw water" (4:15).[101] This contrast between her interpretation of Jesus's words and what he says is stark.[102] The Samaritan Woman, as Moloney argues, "transforms the words of Jesus from the promise of a future gift of water welling up to eternal life into her own agenda of this well, this place, and this water, satisfying her thirst."[103]

This back-and-forth continues throughout the 137eriscope and mounts to Jesus's self-revelation (4:26b) and the Samaritan Woman's testimony (4:29).[104] Yet, immediately prior to these statements, the Samaritan Woman again blatantly denies Jesus is the Christ, indicating that the Messiah is to come and that when he does he will teach where to

---

[100] Barrett, *St. John*, 228; Carson, *John*, 220; Conway, *Men and Women*, 115; Michaels, *John*, 243. Thompson summarizes the contrast well, showing that "Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman builds … on the implicit claim of Jesus to be greater than the patriarch Jacob. For while Jacob had provided a well (*phrear*), fed by a spring (*pēgē*) to water his cattle and his family, Jesus promises a spring (*pēgē*) of 'living water' (*hydōr zōn*) that can quench thirst forever" (*John*, 99–100).

[101] Barrett makes the point that here Jesus is beginning to "clear up the misunderstanding (v. 10). He is not speaking of ordinary water, 'this' water, which must be drunk day by day" (*St. John*, 234). Morris interprets Samaritan Woman's words as indicating that "her concern is with her own personal convenience" (*John*, 233; likewise, Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:426; Moloney, *John*, 118–19; Conway, *Men and Women*, 116; Köstenberger, *John*, 152). Carson judges that this shows that she is still thinking "on the purely naturalistc plane" (*John*, 220; so also Witherington, *Wisdom*, 120; Moloney, *John*, 119; Keener, *John*, 1:602, 1:605; Michaels, *John*, 245; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 165; Thompson, *John*, 100).

[102] Moloney, *John*, 118–19. Concerning the contrast between Jesus's words and what Johannine characters understand, Bonney assesses that "John goes out of his way to present in exaggerated fashion the gulf that divides Jesus' point of view from that of his earthly auditors" (*Caused to Believe*, 83). Speaking directly of the story of the Samaritan Woman, he states, "John makes no attempt to reconcile or mesh the earthly and heavenly viewpoints of Jesus the woman. Rather they are placed side by side in 'blunt' contrast" (ibid., 84). Bonney quotes Marc Girade at the end of the last citation ("Jésus en Samarie [Jean 4:1-42]: Analyse des structures stylistiques et du processus de symbolisation," *EgT* 17 [1986]: 298).

[103] Moloney, *John*, 118.

[104] The phrase "self-revelation" is used by others to identify Jesus's actions in this pericope. E.g., Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:421. I use language above similar to Michaels's, who describes the conversation as a "give-and-take" ("Nathanael," 248).

worship (4:25).[105] Therefore, without divine assistance, the Samaritan Woman is unable to believe. The dialogue in 4:1-30 makes this certain. She denies Jesus's messiahship until he reveals it to her.

Conversely, the exchange emphasizes Jesus's unique status. When Jesus answers the Samaritan Woman's questions in vv. 11-12 by declaring that he possesses and gives living water that quenches thirst eternally (4:13-14; also 4:10), Jesus establishes that he is greater than Jacob.[106] Additionally, since the Samaritans perceive the Messiah (i.e., the Taheb) as a teacher, Jesus discloses that he is what they are anticipating by describing where worship ought to take place (4:21-24).[107] Lastly, with his concluding remark—ἐγώ

---

[105] As Schnackenburg clarifies, "The Samaritan has not grasped Jesus' revelation, and hopes for the Messiah who will 'tell us everything.' She has failed to understand that Jesus is telling her that the present hour is that of fulfilment, of the coming of him who makes the true adoration of God possible. To some extent, this is an example of 'Johannine misunderstanding'; She is looking to the future, while Jesus speaks of the present" (*St. John*, 1:441; so also Moloney, *John*, 129–30; Conway, *Men and Women*, 120; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 166). Köstenberger finds that "the woman's affirmation of her belief in the coming of the Messiah in the presence of just this Messiah constitutes an instance of supreme Johannine irony" (*John*, 157). Barrett thinks that these words exhibit that she understands what Jesus implies (*St. John*, 239). Moloney does not go this far but says that the Samaritan Woman "now … suggests that he [Jesus] might be 'a Messiah-Christ' (v. 25)" (*John*, 129).

[106] Conway indicates that Jesus's response in vv. 13-14 is more direct than his previous statements, and that in his answer, he shows that "the water he can supply is indeed greater than the well water that Jacob provided" (*Men and Women*, 115). As previously mentioned, a number of commentators see Jesus's ability to give better water than Jacob as a sign that he is greater than Jacob: Lindars, *John*, 182; Barrett, *St. John*, 228; Carson, *John*, 220; Keener, *John*, 1:601.

[107] This is important because, as Brown reports, "Bowman … shows that the conversation in John iv 19-25 fits the Samaritan concept of the Taheb as teacher of the Law" (*John*, 1:172; so also Thompson, *John*, 106). The specific study Brown refers to is J. Bowman, "Samaritan Studies," *BJRL* 40 (1957): 298–329. Moloney argues that "Jesus' response to the traditional question of the right place of worship, Gerizim or Jerusalem, transcends what the woman might expect from 'a prophet' (cf. v. 19)" (*John*, 129). Michaels notes that "the notion that the Messiah 'will tell us all things' is fully in keeping with Jesus' role throughout this Gospel" (*John*, 256; so also Barrett, *St. John*, 239). He then provides a number of examples where this is so: 1:1; 1:18; 3:11; 3:12; 3:32; 3:34 (ibid., 256–57). Thus for Jesus to reveal this information is to indicate that he was the Messiah. See also n. 105.

Barrett provides the common understanding of the Samaritans' Taheb. He writes, "The Samaritans, who … made messianic use of Deut. 18.15, 18, appear to have thought of the Taheb as a teacher (but also as a political leader). The *Memar Markah* (third or fourth century A.D.) IV,12 says that he will reveal the truth" (*St. John*, 239). Others who discuss the Taheb as a teacher or instructor include Brown, *John*, 1:172; Lindars, *John*, 173, 187; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:441; Keener, *John*, 1:620; Köstenberger, *John*, 158; Thompson, *John*, 106. Schnackenburg also reports that the Taheb "being himself a priest … was to restore the true worship" (*St. John*, 1:441).

εἰμι—Jesus declares in the fullest of terms that he is the Christ, the Son of God.[108] Accordingly, it is clear throughout their conversation that Jesus is the Messiah for whom the Samaritan Woman is looking and yet she does not believe until he intervenes.[109]

As stated, grammatically the Samaritan Woman's testimony should be read as signifying doubt.[110] Nevertheless, many commentators have a difficult time interpreting it as an absolute indication of unbelief.[111] The context of v. 29 challenges a simple reading

---

[108] It is certain from the text that Jesus is revealing his messiahship to the woman. As Keener states, "Jesus has offered more forthright revelation to this woman than to other characters in the Gospel to this point (with the possible exception of Nathanael, and there he merely acknowledges Nathanael's own confession)" (*John*, 1:619). Thompson places 4:26 in the context of all four Gospels and writes that 4:26 "is … one of the few places in all the Gospels where Jesus explicitly acknowledges that he is the Messiah" (*John*, 106). Brown finds that "it is not impossible that this use is intended in the style of divinity" (*John*, 1:172). He also considers this an affirmation of Jesus's identity to the Samaritan Woman, although he believes her confession lies in v. 25 rather than v. 29 (ibid., 1:177). Lindars labels Jesus's response as an "'I am' revelation-formula" which "is normal in a theophany, when God introduces himself, both in the OT (e.g., Gen. 17.1) and in pagan literature" (*John*, 191). At the same time, he says that "it is not clear how far we should see here an allusion to the name of God in Exod. 3.14: 'I AM WHO I AM,' or to 'I am he' in Isa. 41.1; 43.10" (ibid.). Schnackenburg points out that "'the Messiah' can be easily supplied from the context. But in the mind of the evangelist, it must already suggest the absolute terms in which Jesus reveals his divine being" (*St. John*, 1:442). Similarly to Schnackenburg, Köstenberger contends that this phrase is Jesus "acknowledg[ing] frankly that he is the Messiah," but that "on a secondary level it may also serve as a revelatory formula …. in allusion to Isa. 52:6" (*John*, 158). Köstenberger also recognizes that Jesus's statement "is congruent with the Gospel's purpose statement (20:31)," an implication I make above (ibid.). Not all agree that Jesus is affirming his divinity with these words (Carson, *John*, 227 n. 1), and some consider it only a possibility (Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 166). Thus there is debate surrounding the exact meaning of this phrase. Some see it only as an affirmation of Jesus's messiahship (Carson, *John*, 227 n. 1). Others think it refers to Jesus's divinity (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:442; Moloney, *John*, 130; Conway, *Men and Women*, 121). A final group presents both views without settling the issue (Witherington, *Wisdom*, 121; Morris, *John*, 241). See also Moloney's list of the different interpretation of Jesus's words in v. 26 (*John*, 134).

[109] As Bennema puts it, "the woman struggles for understanding throughout the dialogue, but Jesus helps her progress" (*Encountering Jesus*, 168). Others who consider Jesus as the cause of the Samaritan Woman's faith include Bonney, who sees the Samaritan Woman as only having "a deeper understanding of his [Jesus's] identity" (*Caused to Believe*, 76); Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:442; Thompson, *John*, 106. A comparable reading would be Schnackenburg's which argues that the Samaritan Woman's pericope reflects a "gradual self-revelation of Jesus" (*St. John*, 1:442, 1:420). He argues this from the "key-words: v. 9, Ἰουδαῖος—v.11., κύριε–v.12, μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰακώβ–v.19, προφήτης—vv. 26, 29, ὁ χριστός—v.42, ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου," which show that Jesus's revelation has a "stronger and stronger impact" (ibid.). Thus the scene begins with the Samaritan Woman calling Jesus a "Jew" and it ends with the other Samaritans saying Jesus is the Savior of the World" (ibid.). Additionally, Bennema finds there to be a similar development in 4:1-42. The Samaritan Woman moves from calling Jesus "a Jew" to "Savior" (*Encountering Jesus*, 168).

[110] Interpreters who find that this is not a sure statement of faith include Brown, *John*, 1:173; Danna, "John 4:29," 221–22; Köstenberger, *John*, 160.

[111] Lindars, *John*, 193; Barrett, *St. John*, 240; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:444; Carson, *John*, 228; Morris, *John*, 243–44; Köstenberger, *John*, 160; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167.

of it, and there are exceptions to the rule that questions with μή demand a negative answer.[112] From it, we can observe that if the implied answer to the Samaritan Woman's question is "no," then none of her listeners respond appropriately.[113] Instead, they come to Jesus (at her request) and believe that he is "the Savior of the world" (4:42).[114] More importantly, they believe specifically "because of the woman's testimony" (4:39; see also 4:42).[115] If she does not consider Jesus to be the Christ, then why would her witness lead to faith in so many (4:39, 4:41)? [116] Moreover, the choice to tell the townspeople about Jesus suggests that she is a believer.[117]

---

[112] Lindars recognizes that "the Greek particle *mēti* implies the answer 'no'…. But implications of verse 42 hardly allow this" (*John*, 193). Bennema reasons that "although the text is not explicit, there are several indications that she [the Samaritan Woman] has begun to understand Jesus' identity and the meaning of his gift, and that she responds positively to Jesus, in faith" (*Encountering Jesus*, 167). He then presents three reasons why this is so, each of which is mentioned in this chapter: (1) "she leaves her water jar behind (4:28), possibly indicating that her thirst has been quenched"; (2) "she invites her fellow villagers to 'come and see' this man whom she tentatively believes is the Messiah"; and (3) "many Samaritans believe in Jesus on the basis of the woman's testimony (4:39), and their climatic confession of Jesus as 'the Savior of the world' in 4:42 probably includes the woman's confession" (ibid., 167, 167–68, see also 169). Fredrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk suggest that the answer to questions with μή is not always no and they point to a few examples in John where "the meaning of μή is slightly modified" (BDF, 221). This list includes 4:29 as well as 4:33; 4:29; 7:26; and 21:5 (ibid.).

[113] As Conway notes, "If the question of her full belief must remain ambivalent, there is no denying the positive effect of her question. The Samaritan people are sufficiently motivated to go to Jesus (v. 30)" (*Men and Women*, 124).

[114] Commentators who acknowledge the legitimacy of this confession include Lindars, *John*, 198; Schnackenburg, who labels it the "culmination-point" in "the climactic series of designations given to Jesus in ch. 4" (*St. John*, 1:457); Carson, *John*, 232; Köstenberger, *John*, 143.

[115] Conway calls attention to this fact, stating, "Verse 39 emphasizes that it was her [the Samaritan Woman's] words that are repeated verbatim, which caused many of them to believe in Jesus" (*Men and Women*, 124). Many commentators hold that these Samaritans come to faith because of the Samaritan Woman's testimony: e.g., Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:455; Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 137; Carson, *John*, 231; Danna, "John 4:29," 223; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167; Michaels, *John*, 268; Thompson, *John*, 106, 110. In part, this is confirmed by v. 42, which is an affirmation of the Samaritan Woman's faith (Carson, *John*, 231; Keener, *John*, 1:626; Michaels, *John*, 269).

[116] Lindars recognizes the negational effect of μήτι in 1:29 and yet finds that "the implications of verse 42 hardly allow this. John means it [the Samaritan Woman's question] to be an expression of cautious faith (cf. 7:26, where *mēpote* is used)" (*John*, 193). Or, as Bennema reasons, "considering her successful mission in 4:28-30, 39-42, it is unlikely that her community grasped who Jesus was while she was uncertain" (*Encountering Jesus*, 167 n. 22).

[117] Conway, *Men and Women*, 123–24; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167, 169-70. Carson says that this act is "more striking" than her leaving behind the water jar, with which he does not associate any significance (*John*, 228, 227–28). He sees her testimony as indicating that she has "begun to perceive that he [Jesus] was *the* prophet" (ibid., 228; emphasis original). Keener calls her "a model for witness" who "brings virtually the entire town" (*John*, 1:622). Köstenberger calls attention to the fact that "leaving

Additionally, Jesus's teaching in vv. 31-38 specifies the genuineness of the Samaritan Woman's faith.[118] In these verses, Jesus instructs his disciples that "the fields are white for harvest" and that "already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life" (4:35-36). It is possible that in v. 36 "the one who reaps" is Jesus.[119] If this is so, then the Samaritan Woman and the townspeople are the fruit gathered for eternal life.[120] It is also conceivable that that "the one who reaps" is the Samaritan Woman, since in v. 29 she challenges people to see (ἴδετε) Jesus as Philip did

---

behind one's natural occupation [in this case, drawing water] for the sake of witnessing to Jesus is … the mark of a disciple" (*John*, 159). This comment is surprising because he argues that the faith of the Samaritan Woman is incomplete and that "her testimony identifies him essentially as a prophet" (ibid., 160). Witherington sees these two acts as working in tandem. He observes that "the disciples have left Jesus to find mere material sustenance, while this woman leaves her source of material sustenance behind (her water jug) to go to town and witness about Jesus. It is noticeable that the disciples do not play a major or even very positive role in the early stages of this Gospel, not only because they misunderstand, but also because others like the Samaritan woman assume the task, such as spreading the word, that Jesus wishes them to undertake" (*Wisdom*, 121). Michaels says that "never is the woman explicitly said to 'believe,' but her subsequent actions (vv. 28-29) strongly suggest that she did" (*John*, 249). These subsequent actions are the Samaritan Woman leaving behind her water jar and evangelizing the townspeople (ibid., 258–59).

[118] So Bennema who maintains that the disciples' "intrusion in 4:27 and their conversation with Jesus in 4:31-38 enhance the reader's understanding of true discipleship, which is exemplified by the woman" (*Encountering Jesus*, 168–69). He also argues that "the Samaritan Woman … testifies about Jesus and brings people to him (cf. Andrew and Philip in John 6) and, in doing so, actualizes the challenge in 4:35-38 to participate in Jesus' mission. She thus becomes a source of living water for her community" (ibid., 170).

[119] So Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:450. He makes this point because he holds that the Father is the one who sows (ibid., 1:477). He then ties this illustration to other places in John that describe the relationship between the Father and Son in terms of their common mission, clarifying that "elsewhere too in John it is the Father who 'gives' believers to Jesus and 'draws' them to him (cf. 6:37 ff., 44, 65; 10:29; 17:6), while Jesus only takes up the Father's work and completes it. The idea expressed in v. 34 is probably still at work here [in v. 36]" (ibid., 1:451). For Schnackenburg, the Father is the giver and sower, while Jesus is the one who is sent and reaps. Others hold that Jesus is the sower (e.g., Moloney, *John*, 140, 144), and according to Keener this is the view of many (*John*, 1:626; see also 1:626 n. 429). Barrett finds that the "sower and reaper are identical; Jesus himself has sown the seed in conversation with the woman, and the believing Samaritans (v. 39) are his harvest" (*St. John*, 242). Carson simply writes that this passage shows that Jesus "himself is engaged in the harvest; that is part and parcel of the work the Father gave him to do (v. 34)" (*John*, 230).

[120] Those exegetes who hold that the fruit refers to the Samaritan believers include Barrett, *St. John*, 242; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:450; Carson, *John*, 230; Moloney, *John*, 140. Brown says that "the fruit of his [Jesus's] mission is represented by the Samaritans who are coming to him," and he identifies the "harvest" of v. 35 as referring to this group (*John*, 1:174). Others also identify the Samaritans as the harvest (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:448, 1:449; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 120; Moloney, *John*, 139, 144 n. 35; Köstenberger, *John*, 162; Michaels, *John*, 262).

with Nathanael (1:46) and Jesus with the disciples of John the Baptist (1:39).[121] If this is the correct reading, then not only does the Samaritan Woman have faith, but, as Conway notes, she is now "a partner in Jesus' ministry."[122] As Bennema concludes, the Samaritan Woman's "discipleship *is* her belief-response," and through her willingness to evangelize her fellow Samaritans, she "is depicted as a model disciple."[123] Given this information, it is highly unlikely that the μήτι of v. 29 demands a reading of the Samaritan's confession as one of doubt. It may indicate "caution or wonder" but not unbelief.[124] From the above, it is clear that the Samaritan Woman is a confessing character.[125]

---

[121] Conway sees the Samaritan Woman as the sower (*Men and Women*, 125). Keener says that context suggests that Jesus and the Samaritan Woman are being discussed in vv. 31-38 which explains the plural "others" in v. 39 (*John*, 1:626). Likewise, Witherington considers that the "others" who "have labored" up to this point are Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (*Wisdom*, 122). Additionally, Keener observes the parallel between Philip's words in 1:46 and the Samaritan's in 4:29 (*John*, 1:622; so Michaels, *John*, 259), and Köstenberger notes the overlap between the Samaritan's words here and Jesus's in 1:39 (*John*, 160; so also Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 137).

[122] Conway, *Men and Women*, 125. Bennema finds this to be ironic since the disciples ought to be filling this role but are not (*Encountering Jesus*, 168).

[123] Ibid., 169, 170; emphasis original. Culpepper identifies her as "a model of the female disciple" because of her evangelization of her fellow Samaritans among other things (*Anatomy*, 137). Even Danna, who does not think that the Samaritan Woman has adequate faith, recognizes that "the woman acts like a disciple, and shares some of the characteristics of Jesus' other disciples; indeed in some ways she is a better disciples than those disciples" ("John 4:29," 223). In like manner, Köstenberger maintains that the Samaritan Woman's faith is lacking but thinks that "she acts like a disciple, and in some ways she is a better disciple than Jesus' actual followers" (*John*, 143).

[124] Thompson, *John*, 102. Furthermore, Keener writes that the Samaritan Woman's "οὗτός ἐστιν, although phrased as part of a question, fits the Johannine language of confession by the faith it prefigures (1:15, 30, 33, 34; 4:42; 6:14, 50, 58; 7:40-41)" (*John*, 1:622). From this he concludes that "the narrative thus places her on a par with Jesus' other disciples who brought his passage to the world (cf. 17:20)" (ibid.). Keener also perceives that "this narrative fits a pattern that includes women's testimony and faith (2:3-5; 11:27; 12:8; 20:18)" (ibid., 1:623). Conway holds that vv. 28-29 indicate the Samaritan Woman's faith in "actions and words" (*Men and Women*, 122–23).

[125] If the reader is still not convinced, it is clear that the Samaritan Woman grows in her understanding of who Jesus is—"a man who told me all that I ever did"—and obtains it by Jesus revealing himself to her. As a result, no matter how far one pushes the meaning of Samaritan Woman's question to either be an expression of faith or doubt, it cannot be denied that there is an increase in understanding of Jesus's identity that is dependent upon Jesus providing that knowledge. This seems to be where Bonney lands in his analysis of the Samaritan Woman (*Caused to Believe*, 76).

Furthermore, the conversion of the Samaritan villagers at the end of this 143eriscope fits the pattern of faith expressed in 20:11-18.[126] As v. 39 and v. 41 make clear, the witness of the Samaritan Woman and the word of Jesus lead to the Samaritans' collective confession: "we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (4:42b).[127] In the LXX, the one with χερσὶν καὶ καθαρὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ … ἐλεημοσύνην παρὰ θεοῦ σωτῆρος αὐτοῦ (Ps 23:4-5), and Isaiah prophesies that in the future, it will be said by those that inhabit Zion that God is "my *salvation* (μοι … σωτηρίαν)" (Isa 12:2).[128] To call Jesus the "Savior of the world" is to call him God, and it may also be a way of saying that these "[Greek] gods, emperors…, and heroes" are not.[129]

Moreover, whether it is because of the Samaritan Woman's testimony or Jesus's word, or both, Jesus is the reason for their faith.[130] This is because, as Schnackenburg argues, Jesus's words "are charged with divine Spirit and divine life (6:63, 68), they unite with God and bestow salvation," and each one "falls on fruitful ground where men are 'of

---

[126] This narrative is a "revelation-discourse," as Lindars puts it (*John*, 192). He implicitly calls it this when he states, "The story [vv. 27-42] is more than a revelation-discourse. It is a model of the mission of the church" (ibid.).

[127] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:455; so also Brown, *John*, 1:184-85; Barrett, *St. John*, 243; Thompson, *John*, 110. Furthermore, this is an authentic confession since "Savior of the world" is similar in meaning to κύριος as it was tied to emperor worship, and because to call someone "the Savior the world" is to say that this figure "exercises a saving sovereignty over the world (cf. also 17:2; 18:37)" (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:458). In fact, Brown writes that "perhaps for Hellenized Samaria we should seek the meaning of the term in the Greek world where it was applied to gods, emperors (Hadrian was called 'Savior of the world'), and heroes" (*John*, 1:175; so also Carson, who mentions mystery religions as using this title as well [*John*, 232]; Keener, discussing the word "savior" [*John*, 1:627-28]). Additionally, Thompson notes that non-Jews of the first century identified their gods and emperors as savior (*John*, 109).

[128] Brown—from whom the above Scripture citations come—maintains that these two passages indicate that "in the OT … Yahweh is the salvation of Israel and of the individual Israelite" (*John*, 1:175). Barret reports that "in later Jewish literature the Messiah is sometimes described as he who saves Israel…, but especially in the Christian period there is a tendency to emphasize that God, not the Messiah, is the one Saviour" (*St. John*, 244). Concerning this verse, interpreters often comment that God is identified as a savior in the OT: e.g., Carson, *John*, 232; Köstenberger, *John*, 165; Thompson, *John*, 109.

[129] Brown, *John*, 1:175. As Carson puts it, "John could adopt it [the phrase "Savior of the world] and say, in effect, that the true Saviour of the world was not Zeus or Serapis, and certainly not the Roman emperor, but the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 34)" (*John*, 232).

[130] However, Jesus's word reaps a greater crop (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:456).

God' (cf. 8:47a; 18:37; negatively 8:37, 43, 47b.)."[131] This final scene is reminiscent of 1:43-51 where Nathanael comes to faith after being brought to Jesus by Philip.[132] In the

---

[131] Ibid. Likewise, Thompson comments that "as Jesus gives living water, so his words are 'words of eternal life' (6:63)" and that "the next account of Jesus' raising the official's son demonstrates that the power of Jesus' word to heal, to grant life to one on the verge of death" (*John*, 110). Moloney contends that "the knowledge of the Samaritans is based entirely on the *logos* of Jesus" (*John*, 147). Nonetheless, Schnackenburg and Morris argue that either the Samaritans' faith will grow after conversing with Jesus or is incomplete until they meet him (Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:455; Morris, *John*, 250–51; additionally, Köstenberger, *John*, 164). Schnackenburg writes, 4:39-42 "contains a theology of faith where the evangelist demonstrates that full faith can only be attained in the encounter with Jesus and by hearing his words" (*St. John*, 1:454). He also states, "This initial faith, which is illustrated by their readiness to believe (cf. v. 30, 'they came to him') is to become more widespread (v. 41, πολλῷ πλείους), firmer (42a) and deeper (42b) through Jesus's own work as revealer" (ibid., 1:455). Similarly to Schnackenburg and Morris, Witherington thinks that the Samaritan Woman "does not lead the Samaritans *to* Christ; more correctly, her witness leads them *toward* Christ, and when they personally encounter Jesus and his word, at that point they more adequately confess Jesus to be the Savior of the world" (*Wisdom*, 123; emphasis original). This interpretation is tempting, but the text does not indicate as much directly. It merely suggests that they once believed because of the Samaritan Woman's testimony and now believe because of Jesus's words (Thompson, *John*, 110), although given the other examples of faith in John, Schnackenburg and Morris may be right. Their view is also supported by the "no longer" (οὐκέτι) of 4:42, which specifies that the reason for their faith changes and that what the Samaritan Woman said in v. 29 may not be what stands behind their final confession (Moloney, *John*, 149). Concerning the Samaritans' testimony, as Barrett remarks, "human testimony has its value, yet it is also secondary [to Jesus]" (*St. John*, 244), or as Bultmann proposes, "the believer may not base his faith on the authority of others, but must himself find the object of faith; he must perceive, through the proclaimed word, the word of the Revealer himself"(*John*, 201; quoted by Barrett, *St. John*, 244).

Nevertheless, the response in v. 42 ought to be read in the way that Carson interprets it: "When the Samaritans make the point to the woman who first introduced Jesus to them (v. 42), it is not to disparage her testimony but to confirm it: they have heard for themselves and have judged her witness to be true" (*John*, 231; so also Keener, *John*, 1:626; Michaels, *John*, 269). In addition, Conway argues that "the villagers' words to the Samaritan woman do not downplay the significance of her role as witness as much as they signal the villagers' personal encounter with the words of Jesus" (*Men and Women*, 124). In truth, "the importance of the woman's actions are highlighted in metaphorical terms in Jesus' brief discourse with his disciples" (ibid.). Carson does affirm that "v. 42 underscores the fact that the peculiar witness of Jesus himself is more powerful and wonderful" (*John*, 231). Schnackenburg does make the point that "the evangelist does not intend to make a fundamental distinction between Jesus's own word, his direct testimony to himself, and the preaching of others, between a faith which grasps its object directly and a faith resting on authority" (*St. John*, 1:457).

[132] So Keener, *John*, 1:622-23. Schnackenburg does not point to Nathanael's story specifically as mirroring this passage but to John the Baptist's witness and the coming to faith of his disciples in 1:35-51 (*St. John*, 1:455; likewise Thompson, *John*, 106). He takes notices that "the superhuman knowledge of Jesus to which the woman testifies is only the starting-point, and the woman herself is merely a means of bringing people into contact with Jesus, *just as the disciples of John were directed to Jesus by their master and led one another to Jesus* (cf. 1:35-51). The question of Messiahship is already involved in this process (cf. v. 29; so too 1:41, 45). But the firm and clear answer is given to the would-be believers when they encounter and stay with Jesus himself" (*St. John*, 1:455; emphasis added). Thompson also shows how these pericopes reflect one another. She points out that (1) "having encountered Jesus," these characters "in turn summon others (e.g., 1:41-42, 45; 4:28-29)"; (2) the confession they make to other figures is "that Jesus is the Messiah (1:41, 45; 4:29)"; and (3) a command "to 'come and see' Jesus for themselves (1:46; 4:29)" follows (*John*, 106). Additionally, she judges that "the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman anticipates the witness that women bear, particularly to the resurrection. Even as it is a woman, Mary

same way, the Samaritans are brought to Jesus by the Samaritan Woman and they come to faith.[133] As Bonney concludes, "John here [in vv. 39-42] reinforces the pattern he first presented in the call of Nathanael. Personal contact with Jesus deepens the insight into his identity."[134]

Although little is done by either figure, the action of the narrative is also noteworthy in assessing how one comes to faith.[135] The narrator opens the scene by telling us that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria" (4:4). On the surface, this could be merely a topographical statement.[136] Nevertheless, it is likely that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria" because this conversation needed to occur out of "divine necessity," as Köstenberger puts.[137] If this is the case, then Jesus "had to" (ἔδει) come to Samaria to speak with the Samaritan Woman because she is someone given by the Father to Jesus, a person who will worship God in Spirit and in truth.[138]

Magdalene, who first bears witness to the risen Lord, so here the Samaritan woman bears testimony to Jesus as Messiah (cf. 11:25-27)" (ibid.).

[133] Since in this intratextuality the Samaritan Woman is associated with Philip (a believer), this parallelism would also increase the likelihood of the author wanting his readers to see the Samaritan Woman's faith as authentic.

[134] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 87. He also determines that the story of the Samaritan Woman indicates that "human understanding is facilitated only by Jesus' actions" (ibid., 86).

[135] As Culpepper remarks, "dialogue rather than action carries the scene" (*Anatomy*, 136).

[136] For Jesus to travel from Judea to Galilee (without considering his placement in 3:22-23), the fastest and usual route went through Samaria (Barrett, *St. John*, 230; Lindars, *John*, 178; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:422). Because of this, Carson argues that "Jesus' travel arrangements cannot be marshalled as evidence of divine compulsion" (*John*, 216). However, others point to 3:22-23 as an indication that this would not be the shortest route (Köstenberger, *John*, 141; Brown, *John*, 1:169; Keener, *John*, 1:590).

[137] Köstenberger, *John*, 141.

[138] Keener, *John*, 1:585, 619. Many commentaries allow for this to be a possible reading: Barrett, *St. John*, 230; Carson, *John*, 216; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 115. However, several say that this interpretation is the more likely (or at least part of the reason for Jesus's trip through Samaria): Brown, *John*, 1:169; Morris, *John*, 226; Moloney, *John*, 138–39; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 158; Conway, *Men and Women*, 105; Keener, *John*, 1:585; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 162.

Michaels holds that the text combines those who are part of Jesus's harvest—presumably the Samaritan Woman—with those who worship in Spirit and in truth. He argues that the "hour" of v. 23 and the "harvest" of v. 35 refer to the same thing, and that "it is fair to conclude that this harvest corresponds in some way to the salvation promised in his reference to the Father's search for 'true worshippers' to worship 'in Spirit and truth' (vv. 23-24)" (*John*, 262; see also 252-53).

Four facts confirm this reading. First, John typically uses δεῖ this way (3:30; 4:20; 4:24; 9:4).[139] Second, v. 34 connects Jesus's work in this narrative with God's, the will of God, and the concept of Jesus being sent.[140] As Moloney writes,

> [Because of v. 34] it is now clear why Jesus *had to (edei)* pass through Samaria (v. 4). Behind the events that have taken place in Samaria, regarded by the disciples as strange (and perhaps improper, cf. vv. 27, 33), stands the will of the one who sent Jesus…. His "food" is to be present in this non-Jewish land, dealing with non-Jewish people.[141]

Third, a major gap in the story suggests this reading—Jesus is left alone while his disciples go to get food.[142] This leads Day to ask "why?" and to propose that the best answer is that "God has arranged it thus."[143] Fourth, there was another and possibly more accessible route that could be taken from Judea to Galilee given where the narrative places Jesus in 3:22-23. [144] The 146eriscope then shows that the Father's will was to send Jesus not only to the Jews, but to anyone who would worship him in Spirit and in truth (4:24).[145] This reflects the previous narrative, in which Jesus finds Philip; so now in 4:1-30 he comes and finds the Samaritan Woman.[146]

---

[139] Morris, *John*, 226; Conway, *Men and Women*, 105; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 158; Keener, *John*, 1:590.

[140] Moloney, *John*, 138–39; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 158.

[141] Moloney, *John*, 138–39. Moloney adds, "Jesus' unconditional acceptance of the will of the Father also explains—in his own person—what he means when he speaks of true worship being the worship of the Father in spirit and truth (cf. vv. 21-24)" (ibid., 139).

[142] Day, *John 4:1-42*, 159.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Köstenberger, *John*, 141. Brown unambiguously says that "this is not geographical necessity for, although the main route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria…, if Jesus was in the Jordan valley (iii 22) he could easily have gone north through the valley and then up into Galilee through the Bethshan gap, avoiding Samaria. Elsewhere in the Gospel (iii 14) the expression of necessity means that God's will or plan is involved" (*John*, 1:169; so also Keener, who calls Jesus's trip "a detour" [*John*, 1:590]).

[145] Moloney, *John*, 116, 139; so also Keener, *John*, 1:585. A full consideration of the phrase "in Spirit and truth" will take place in Chapter Six.

[146] Keener, *John*, 1:585. There is also Jesus's statement of God "seeking" after such people who will worship him in Spirit and in truth (4:23). Okure judges that "the 'seeking' by the Father signifies, not a passive desire on his part, but his causative action in the individual without which a genuine human response is impossible" (*Johannine Approach*, 116, quoted by Moloney, *John*, 129), and Keener says that the Samaritan Woman is "the first model of a worshiper in Spirit and truth that the Father sought for himself" (*John*, 1:619). In addition, Morris ties this understanding of the necessity for Jesus to go to

Besides Jesus's coming to Samaria, the Samaritan Woman's abandonment of her water jar says something about her and how one comes to faith. It precedes her testimony and thus alludes to her new-found faith.[147] Since she now possesses the living water promised by Jesus, she no longer needs her jar.[148] In fact, she goes from drawing water to bearing witness to the Christ, and this occurs because Jesus has revealed himself to her.[149] As a result, the actions outlined in this scene show that the Samaritan Woman comes to faith (she abandons her water jar) and that this is so because of divine action (Jesus *had to* pass through Samaria).

Samaria with 9:5. He writes, "The expression points to a compelling divine necessity. Jesus had to come as 'the light of the world' (9:5). It was imperative that this light shine to others than Jews" (*John*, 226). As a result, there is enough intratextuality between 4:4 and other places in John to give credence to this reading.

[147] Thomas L. Brodie makes the point that the Samaritan Woman leaving behind her water jar shows "the depth of her response to the Revealer's call: having found a new form of living water, she leaves behind her the symbol of her former preoccupation" (*The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 224; quoted by Conway, *Men and Women*, 123). Brown holds that "this detail seems to be John's way of emphasizing that such a jar would be useless for the type of living water that Jesus has interested her in" (*John*, 1:173). Nonetheless, he is unsure of how "complete" the Samaritan Woman's faith is (ibid.). Conway argues that the Samaritan reveals her faith "through both actions and words. One more time she takes the initiative as she leaves her water jar, goes back to the city, and speaks to the people about Jesus" (*Men and Women*, 122).

[148] Several scholars say something similar to indicate that the leaving behind of the water jar specifies the Samaritan Woman's faith because she now possess living water: Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 194; Brodie, *John*, 224, quoted by Conway, *Men and Women*, 123; Linda McKinnish Bridges, "John 4:5-42," *Int* 48 (1994): 176; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 173; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 167, 169; Thompson, *John*, 107. Morris does not go this far but remarks that "it [the Samaritan Woman's abandoning of her jar] is thus an indication of the deep impression that Jesus had made upon her that she left her waterpot there" (*John*, 243; so also, Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 75). Keener states, "The woman abandoned her waterpot (4:28), signifying that she was more concerned with the water of eternal life than the natural water she had original come to seek (4:7, 11, 15)" (*John*, 1:621). He then argues that "John employs the same term in 2:6-7" as he does here—ὑδρία—and maintains that this suggests that there is "a continuation of the replacement motif highlighted there and frequently in John's water motif" (ibid., 1:621-22).

[149] Bridges describes the transition well. She writes, "This nameless Samaritan woman who left her waterpot at the well has become herself a vessel for the gospel" ("John 4:5-42," 176). Additionally, as Conway puts it, "Her actions suggest a degree of excitement and urgency on her part, particularly the detail of the water jar. Her mundane task has been forgotten in light of what has taken place in her conversation with Jesus…. In its place, she takes on the role of witness, much like that of John the Baptist" (*Men and Women*, 123). Michaels goes further, proposing, "the woman's action recalls that of Jesus' first disciples in Mark, in 'leaving' their nets to follow him (Mk 1:18; also Mt 4:20, 22). The difference is that Jesus has not called her or sent her on a mission. The initiative is hers. She is in a hurry to get back to town with news of her encounter, and the water jar will only slow her down" (*John*, 258–59).

4.2.2 Irony, Intertextuality, and Genre

Outside of the dialogue and action of the scene, the text's irony, intertextuality, and genre further support my argument. There are at least two ironic elements in the narrative that depict the Samaritan Woman's unbelief and her need for Jesus's direct action. The first is in v. 25, where the irony of the Samaritan Woman's words reflects those of Mary Magdalene. In 20:11-18, Mary Magdalene unintentionally calls Jesus κύριος and asks him where his own body is before he reveals his true identity to her (20:15). In 4:1-30, the Samaritan Woman inadvertently calls Jesus κύριος (4:19), and informs Jesus, the Messiah, that she knows that the "Messiah is coming" and that "when he comes, he will tell us all things" (4:25).[150] What this shows is that although the Samaritan Woman is confronted with the person she has been waiting for, she (like Mary Magdalene) is unable to believe without Jesus's assistance.[151]

Secondly, the passage begins with a request for a drink from the one who is able to give water eternally.[152] This irony is exploited early in the narrative, as Jesus asks the

---

[150] Concerning the Samaritan Woman calling Jesus κύριος, Barrett writes, "The vocative need mean no more than 'Sir', and has this meaning in vv. 11, 15; in this verse it seems to be on the way to its deeper religious meaning, 'Lord'" (*St. John*, 236). Brown maintains that "most likely there is a progression" in the meaning of κύριος from "Sir" to "Lord" in the speech of the Samaritan Woman "with increasing respect in vss. 11, 15, and 19" as the narrative moves forward (*John*, 1:170; so also Moloney, *John*, 119, 122, 129). Köstenberger observes the irony of v. 25, writing that "the woman's affirmation of her belief in the coming of the Messiah in the presence of this Messiah constitutes an instance of supreme Johannine irony" (*John*, 157).

[151] Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 76; Keener, *John*, 1:609-10.

[152] As Witherington determines, "The Samaritan woman … assumes she is the hostess, and Jesus needs something from her, even though it is actually Jesus who has real water to bestow—living water. Notice too that Jesus is never said to drink the water the woman could have given him. The request for water simply serves as the occasion for the dialogue on religion in which Jesus will offer the woman something far more valuable than ordinary water" (*Wisdom*, 120). Likewise, Barrett states, "As frequently in John … the thought turns upon a misunderstanding, here a misunderstanding of the person of Jesus. He is in appearance a thirsty and helpless traveller; in fact he is the Son of God who gives living water" (*St. John*, 233; likewise, Carson, *John*, 218). Culpepper points out that unlike the typical OT betrothal scene (which will be discussed below), both the kind of water (living) and its source (Jesus) are unexpected (*Anatomy*, 136). The reader would have anticipated "well water, to which the Samaritan woman has access" to be the "central concern" (ibid.).

Samaritan Woman for a drink in 4:7 and she is shocked that a Jew would ask a drink from "a woman of Samaria" (4:9b).[153] The narrator (or possibly the woman herself) makes clear why this is so surprising: "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (4:9c).[154]

Yet the astonishing nature of this exchange is not only that a Jew asks a Samaritan for a drink, but that the giver of everlasting water requests a drink of water at all. This is shown in Jesus's response to the Samaritan Woman's amazement: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water (ὕδωρ ζῶν)" (4:10b).[155] This is important because in the OT, the giver of living water is God, "the fountain of living waters (ὕδατος

---

[153] As Köstenberger puts it, "The Samaritan woman … was well aware of the ethnic gulf that separated Jews and Samaritans in that day, and she expressed puzzlement that Jesus, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink" (*John*, 149).

[154] So ibid. Keener rightly comments on v. 9 that "the text starkly summarizes the less than amicable relationship between Jews and Samaritans" (*John*, 1:599). Lindars reports that "so bitter was the feeling [between Jews and Samaritans] that Jews plying between Judea and Galilee would very often prefer to avoid Samaria by crossing over to Perea" (*John*, 178). Schnackenburg notes the "frequent clashes (cf. Lk 9:52 ff.), which sometimes caused bloodshed, when the Galileans passed through Samaria" (*St. John*, 1:425; see also Thompson for a list of antagonistic behaviors displayed by both groups [*John*, 98-99]). Morris observes that "something of the feeling between the two groups may be gauged from the words of Ben Sira: 'With two nations my soul is vexed, and the third is no nation; those who live on Mount Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that dwell in Shechem' (Sir. 50:25-26)" (*John*, 227 n. 17; likewise, Keener, *John*, 1:599). It could also be that this expression refers to Jews being unwilling to share vessels with Samaritan women in fear of being defiled (Barrett, *St. John*, 232; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 425 n. 19; Carson, *John*, 217–18; Michaels, *John*, 239–40).

Lastly, it should be noted that Michaels attributes the conclusion of v. 9 to the Samaritan Woman (ibid., 239). Lindars as well posits that this phrase may be coming from the Samaritan Woman rather than the narrator (*John*, 181). Köstenberger tells us John Calvin thought this as well (*John*, 149 n. 29).

[155] Carson links the shocking nature of Jesus's willingness to talk to a Samaritan with his surprising revelation in v. 10 that he can give "living water" (*John*, 218). This connection is seen in the vocabulary and syntax of vv. 9 and 10. As Michaels perceives, in both statements there is the emphatic use of σύ with the verb "ask" (αἰτέω) (*John*, 240 and n. 41). More importantly, a number of commentators specify that 4:10 designates that the role of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman should be switched (Lindars, *John*, 182; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:426; Carson, *John*, 218; Morris, *John*, 230; Conway, *Men and Women*, 114). Morris reasons that this is seen (again) in "use of the emphatic 'you'"—this individual ought to be asking Jesus for a drink (*John* 230; so also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:426). Thus, as Schnackenburg concludes, "It is not Jesus who is need of anything, but the woman; and she is confronted with the one person who can satisfy the deepest needs of man" (ibid.). In fact, as Brown writes, v. 10 reveals that "the real reason for his [Jesus's] action is not his inferiority or need, but his superior status" (*John*, 1:177).

ζωῆς)" (Jer 2:13).[156] From the Prologue, the reader knows of Jesus's divinity, but at this point, the Samaritan does not.[157]

This irony persists after 4:10 with the woman unable to grasp what Jesus is asking of her (4:11-12; 4:15; 4:19-20; 4:25).[158] In fact, in v. 12 the Samaritan Woman inadvertently identifies Jesus as greater than Jacob when she asks if this is the case.[159] Thus, like the above irony, this trope depicts the Samaritan Woman's inability and unwillingness to believe prior to Jesus's self-revelation. She needs eternal life and Jesus

---

[156] As Schnackenburg writes, "What is basic here [in v. 10] is the link with O.T. imagery. There God himself is 'the fountain of living water'" (*St. John*, 1:427; likewise Carson, *John*, 218–19). Others point to OT references of God as a source for living water, including Köstenberger, *John*, 150; Thompson, *John*, 100. Concerning this passage, Keener draws attention to the fact that at times in the OT God *is* "living water" (*John*, 1:604). Barrett reports that "living water as a metaphor for divine activity in quickening men to life occurs in the Old Testament" (*St. John*, 233; so also Thompson, *John*, 100). He then provides Jer 2:13 as an example along with Zech 14:8 (*St. John*, 233). Morris references Jer 2:13 at this point and remarks that "we should not miss the claim implied in Jesus' words" (*John*, 231). The reference to Jeremiah comes from Barrett.

[157] As Bonney aptly judges, "The reader is never meant to suffer the confusion experienced by the Samaritan woman. The reader, having been informed by the prologue and the ensuing narratives up to this point, knows from the outset that the Samaritan woman misses the mark" (*Caused to Believe*, 81). Several interpreters find v. 10 to be specifying that the Samaritan Woman is confused about Jesus's identity or merely unware of who he really is. For instance, Barrett, *St. John*, 233; Carson, *John*, 218; Morris, *John*, 230; Conway, *Men and Women*, 114; Keener, *John*, 1:601; Köstenberger, *John*, 150; Michaels, *John*, 241; Thompson, *John*, 99. It is worth noting that the Samaritan Woman identifies Jesus as a Jew, and that later Jesus brings up the fact that salvation comes from the Jews (Moloney, *John*, 128). When these two phrases are put together, what is seen is that Jesus affirms what the Samaritan Woman has said—he is a Jew—and that he is the promised Jewish salvation for which the world has been waiting (ibid.).

[158] Commentators who observe the Samaritan Woman's misunderstanding of "living water" include Barrett, *St. John*, 234; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:428, 1:432; Carson, *John*, 220; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 120; Conway, *Men and Women*, 114; Keener, *John*, 1:624. See n. 102 for those interpreters who observe the Samaritan Woman's confusion in v. 15 and n. 105 for those that interpret her words in v. 25 as indicating misunderstanding. Those who hold that the Samaritan Woman's words in v. 19 express continued misapprehension include Keener, *John*, 1:609; Michaels, *John*, 248-49; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 166. Carson considers the possibility that the Samaritan Woman is calling Jesus the Taheb here but ultimately decide against it (*John*, 221). Moloney calls v. 19 "a limited confession" because "there is no definite article before 'prophet' and the woman's use of the verb 'to perceive'" (*John*, 127). V. 25 does not allow for v. 19 to be a reference to the Taheb but to prophet in general (Barrett, *St. John*, 236; Carson, *John*, 221). As Schnackenburg argues, "The Synoptics … testify that this ['prophet'] was the most general verdict pronounced among the people when they saw a man of God at work. The term was applied to John the Baptist … and to Jesus himself…. It is in this general sense that 'prophet' is to understood here" (*St. John*, 1:434).

[159] Brown, *John*, 1:170. Other interpreters say that this is ironic because readers know that the answer to this question is yes: Carson, *John*, 219; Morris, *John*, 232 who quotes, Barrett, *St. John*, 234; Conway, *Men and Women*, 115; Keener, *John*, 1:601; Köstenberger, *John*, 151; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 164.

is the one who is able to give it. However, she only gains it and understands who Jesus is after he makes himself known.

The narrative's intertextuality and genre also stress the need for Jesus for spiritual transformation to take place. 4:1-42 mirrors OT betrothal scenes (Gen 24:10-61; Gen 29:1-20; Exod 2:15-21).[160] Witherington enumerates five ways in which this is the case: (1) "The future bridegroom or his substitute travels to a foreign land (compare the Jacob story to John 4:3-5, where Jesus goes through Samaria)"; (2) "He encounters a [woman] … at the well (compare the Jacob story to John 4:6-a)"; (3) "Someone draws water from the well"; (4) "The [woman or women] … rush home to bring news of the strange encounter there (compare Gen. 24:28ff. to John 4:28-30)"; and (5) "a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the [woman]…, generally only after he has been invited to a meal (compare Gen. 29:14 to John 4:31-34, 40-42)."[161]

Witherington concludes that unlike what is found in OT betrothal scenes, "the Johannine well story works at the spiritual, not the material, level. Jesus' accomplishment comes not in establishing a physical family by betrothal but by establishing a spiritual community, based on worshiping in Spirit and truth (cf. 10:7-30)."[162] "Therefore," as Jeffrey L. Staley writes, "the relationship with the woman, and hence all believers, will not be based upon any physical relationship … but upon spiritual birth."[163] This intertextuality allows John to highlight yet again that Jesus stands at the center of bringing people to faith. He is the bridegroom who ushers Samaritans into his spiritual

---

[160] Witherington, *Wisdom*, 118. Witherington is not the only one to makes this connection. Conway lists a number of authors who do (*Men and Women*, 107–8), as does Moloney (*John*, 121 n. 7).
[161] Witherington, *Wisdom*, 118.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLDS 82 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 102; quoted by Witherington, *Wisdom*, 116.

community. The Samaritan Woman assists Jesus by proclaiming his name to other Samaritans.[164]

4.2.3 Plotting

The structure of 4:1-30, like that of 1:43-51 before it, mirrors 20:11-18. The *initial situation* is 4:1-7a.[165] In these verses the setting is established.[166] The *complication* takes place throughout the conversation, beginning with Jesus's "Give me a drink" (4:7b) and concluding with the Samaritan Woman's statement about the Messiah (4:25). The *transformative action* is Jesus's self-revelation (4:26).[167] This statement leads to the *dénouement*—the disciples' amazement at Jesus talking with a woman, the Samaritan Woman's act of leaving her watering jar, and her witness to Jesus's identity to the people in the town. Her testimony leads to the *final situation*. The townspeople come out to see Jesus. This plotting can be depicted as follows:

---

[164] Conway, *Men and Women*, 125; Michaels, *John*, 259; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 170 . Keener observes that the women in these betrothal scenes are the matriarchs of Israel (Keener, *John*, 1:586). This leads him to argue that "the allusion [to OT betrothal scenes] … may invite the reader to contemplate the ultimate identity of this Samaritan woman whom God is seeking, not on the basis of her past but on the basis of God's calling: she will become foundational to a new community of faith and obedience (4:39)" (ibid.). Several commentators note the Samaritan Woman's role as an evangelist: e.g., Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 137; Carson, *John*, 228; Bridges, "John 4:5-42," 176; Bennemam, *Encountering Jesus*, 170. See also my discussion below concerning this figure's development.

[165] So Köstenberger who labels vv. 1-3 as "background" and vv. 4-6 as "setting" (*John*, 143, 145–46), and Bennema, who says that the stage … is set in 4:1-7a" (*Encountering Jesus*, 162). Okure also labels vv. 1-6 as "introduction and setting" (*Johannine Approach*, 79).

[166] As Conway observes, "Verse 4-6 give a detailed introduction that sets the scene for the meeting between Jesus and the woman. The location, time of day, and Jesus' physical condition are all included in the description" (*Men and Women*, 105).

[167] Lindars identifies v. 26 as one of "the points of climax" of the story along with vv. 10, 14, and 23 (*John*, 174). Likewise, Schnackenburg finds that v. 26 is "the climax of Jesus's self-revelation to the woman" (*St. John*, 1:420). He states that "with this the dialogue has reached its climax, as Jesus brings the Samaritan … to believe in him as the Messiah" (ibid., 1:442), and that "the dialogue culminates in the self-revelation of Jesus as the Messiah (v. 26)" (ibid., 1:439). Conway calls Jesus's words in v. 26 a "dramatic moment of self-revelation" (*Men and Women*, 121), and she maintains that this is the reason why Jesus had been talking with the Samaritan Woman (ibid., 122). Keener labels v. 26 as "the climax to which the narrative has been building" (*John*, 1:620). Köstenberg considers it "the climactic pronouncement of the dialogue up to this point" (*John*, 158).

Initial Situation	1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), 3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. 4 And he had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water.
Complication	Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."
Transformative Action	26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Dénouement	27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”
Final Situation	30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Consequently, the passage’s narrative arc reveals the reason for the Samaritan’s confession—Jesus’s direct action. The entire narrative pivots around this point.

4.2.4 The Samaritan Woman’s Development

The Samaritan Woman’s development as a literary figure can be charted by observing her changed social status. She begins the narrative by coming to a well alone and at a peculiar time given social norms.[168] Given these circumstances, this temporal reference may have significance.[169] As a result, Carson postulates that “possibly the woman’s public shame (4:16ff.) contributed to her isolation,” and Schnackenburg tell us

[168] Brown, *John*, 1:169; Carson, *John*, 217; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 120; Conway, *Men and Women*, 106; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 161; Keener, *John*, 1:591; Köstenberger, *John*, 148.

[169] Keener holds that, “the time of day … would probably cue the audience” and “lead the reader to consider why this woman came to the well alone” (*John*, 1:593). Additionally, Conway reasons that the temporal reference does not “serve to explain Jesus’ condition” because “it stands out as an unusual time for her [the Samaritan Woman] to be drawing water” and because this story ought not to be read in isolation from the rest of the Gospel (*Men and Women*, 106). Nicodemus’s story precedes the Samaritan’s and in that narrative, a reference to time—“this man came to Jesus by night” (3:2a)—appears (ibid.). If we put the two stories in conversation, as Conway recommends, then “the contrast between those who love darkness and those who come to the light in 3:19-21 may provide further commentary on the character of Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman” (ibid.). As Adele Reinhartz states, “unlike Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, she [the Samaritan Woman] meets Jesus at noon, when the light is strongest” (“A Feminist Commentary on the Gospel of John,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, vol. 2 of *A Feminist Commentary* [London: SCM, 1994], 573; quoted by Conway, *Men and Women*, 106). Keener also contrasts the timing of these meetings with Jesus—Nicodemus’s and the Samaritan Woman’s. He shows that the difference is between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus was willing to meet with the Samaritan Woman and he begins the conversation, whereas Nicodemus is the one who engages Jesus but does so secretly (*John*, 1:593) Conway and Reinhartz’s interpretation would challenge what I present above, but at the same time, it shows the likelihood of the symbolic nature of time in this narrative.

that "her coming at midday is generally explained by her desire, as a notorious sinner, not to have to meet other women."[170]

Nevertheless, the text does not demand this kind of interpretation.[171] If the author wants readers to assume divorce rather than death is the reason behind the Samaritan Woman's many husbands, then we know that in the first century, it was men (not women) who controlled when marriages ended.[172] Given this fact, Day asks, "Why would it be unnatural to surmise that the woman is deserving of our sympathy rather than our opprobrium? It is not possible that the woman had been married so many times because of economic and social reasons, rather than for lustful ones?"[173] Day goes farther, arguing, "Since Jewish thought allowed a maximum of three marriages for a woman, the fact that she had been married five times indicates that her life had been especially difficult, and probably meant that she was an object of either pity or ridicule, perhaps both."[174] She then offers a few explanations as to why the Samaritan Woman may have come to the well alone. [175] From these, she concludes, "There are a number of

---

[170] Carson, *John*, 217; so also Köstenberger, *John*, 148; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 161–62. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:424. Likewise, Day alludes to both the odd time for drawing water and the typical reason of sexual immorality given for this fact by commentators (*John 4:1-42*, 161). An example of this type of interpretation is Morris, who maintains that the Samaritan Woman is a "sexual sinner" (*John*, 225). He then suggests that she comes to the well at noon "to avoid other women" (ibid., 228). In the same way, Keener emphasizes that the state of the woman as alone at the well reveals her situation as one "unwelcome among other women" because of her "sexual impurity" (*John*, 1:595). Köstenberger reasons that she is a "serial fornicator" since ἀνήρ in v. 18 does not demand a translation of "husband" but could refer to men more generally and specially those with whom the Samaritan Woman had been sexually involved (*John*, 152–53). Schnackenburg does qualify his above statement with "the evangelist does not delay on such points" (*St. John*, 1:424).

[171] As Norfleete Day correctly judges, "The reader may conjecture that some unusual circumstance has brought the woman to the well at a different time, but at this point, the reader has no information by which to explain what that circumstance might be" (*John 4:1-42*, 161).

[172] Bridges, "John 4:5-42," 174; Conway, *Men and Women*, 117; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 170; Keener, who provides Sir 7:26; 25:26 as examples (*John*, 1:607).

[173] Day, *John 4:1-42*, 169.

[174] Ibid., 170.

[175] Day speculates, "Perhaps the reason the woman comes to the well at noon rather than at the traditional evening hour is, as some have suggested, to avoid contact with the other women because … it is their pity that she seeks to avoid. Her life story is, no doubt known in a small community, and we have

possibilities that allow for an understanding of the woman in a kinder way than traditional exegesis has acknowledged."[176] As a result, in vv. 17-18 Jesus's words may be those of sympathy rather than condemnation.[177]

Regardless of the reason for her isolation, by the end of the narrative, the Woman is no longer alone or avoiding her neighbors. Instead, she is now their evangelist.[178] This change is remarkable and only possible because of Christ.[179] Her association with Jesus allows her once again to be a full-fledged member of her society, and she receives the honor of being part of Jesus's ministry.[180]

---

already shown that it is one of unusual hardship. Perhaps the other women are silent because her misfortune makes them uncomfortable and they search in vain for words of comfort to offer her. Perhaps their happy chatter about children and husbands is too painful a reminder for her of what is lacking in her own life. There are a number of possibilities that allow for an understanding of the woman in a kinder way than traditional exegesis has acknowledged" (ibid., 170 n. 78).

[176] Ibid.

[177] Again, Day rightly remarks, "Traditional exegesis has often understood it [Jesus's response] as his confrontation of her sinfulness. Suppose instead, Jesus makes this reference because it most truly represents her life situation as the victim of a system that depersonalized her. What if it is Jesus' strategy not only for revealing his supernatural knowledge, but also for expressing his compassion and concern for the suffering she has endured and the hardships she has experienced?" (ibid., 171–72).

[178] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 137. Furthermore, as Bennema judges, the Samaritan woman "shows some character development … since it is rather surprising that a marginalized woman turns out to be a keen theological thinker and a successful missionary" (*Encountering Jesus*, 170). Köstenberger reports that "the Samaritan woman progresses in her understanding…, from calling Jesus a prophet … to serving, albeit somewhat ambivalently, as a witness" (*John*, 142). As quoted above, Carson finds "her eagerness to bear witness before the townspeople *whom she had previously had reason to avoid*" more surprising than her abandoning of a water jar (*John*, 228; emphasis added). Bridges, who presents a feminist reading of the text, holds that the change is from the Samaritan woman being "a passive conduit for an abusive, patriarchal culture or a pretty ornament for men's pleasure" to participating in "a mission for the Messiah. Her life and testimony become the conduit for the redemption of her Samaritan relatives and friends" ("John 4:5-42," 176).

[179] Thompson, *John*, 106. There is also a change in the Samaritan Woman's pursuits. She comes to the well to draw water but ends up leaving behind her jar and this original aim (Brodie, *John*, 224; Conway, *Men and Women*, 123; Köstenberger, *John*, 159). Köstenberger makes this claim and mentions the fact that "leaving behind one's natural occupation for the sake of witnessing to Jesus is also the mark of a disciple" (ibid.). Barrett observes that, "to bear witness … is the task of a disciple. The woman joins with John the Baptist as witness, and in fact precedes the apostles" (*St. John*, 243).

[180] As Michaels perceives, "her mission to the town is an extension of Jesus' own mission, for just as he 'left' Judea and 'went' into Galilee (v. 3), she now 'left' her water jar and 'went' into town (v. 28)" (*John*, 259; so also Conway, *Men and Women*, 125; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 170).

What is more, through the Samaritan Woman and the Samaritans as a group, John undermines first-century cultural tensions concerning gender and race.[181] The text tells us the Samaritan Woman's gender: she is a γυνὴ ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας (4:7), and the disciples are surprised by Jesus talking with "a woman" (4:27).[182] Given John's historical context, this shock is expected.[183] As Conway reports, "we have numerous attestations from both Jewish and Greek literature of the period that in both cultures women were generally regarded as inferior. Their principal domain was the home and beyond that they were subject to a great number of restrictions."[184] Moreover, discussions between men and women were thought to be socially unacceptable and "sexually ambiguous situations that could lead to further sin (Sir 9:9; 42:12)."[185] This situation should lead the reader to ask why Jesus would take the time to converse with a woman.

---

[181] Conway, *Men and Women*, 111–12.

[182] As Schnackenburg puts it, "They are not taken aback, like the Samaritan (v. 9) to see him disregarding the barriers of race. They are thinking of the reserve imposed on all Jews, and a rabbi in particular, with regard to the female sex" (*St. John*, 1:443; so also Lindars, *John*, 193; Morris, *John*, 242–43; Keener, *John*, 1:596). Thompson finds that "given the hostilities between the Samaritans and the Jews, one hardly expects the comment that it is the woman's *gender* that scandalizes the disciples: Jesus, a rabbi, is speaking with a woman" (*John*, 106). In addition, as Michaels recognizes, this should not take the reader aback since the disciples "after all, had just come from shopping in a Samaritan town" (*John*, 257). More importantly, as Conway observes, the author reiterates the woman's gender and ethnicity by identifying her as a Samaritan and a woman three times at the beginning of the scene in vv. 7-9: γυνὴ ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας, ἡ γυνὴ ἡ Σαμαρῖτις, and γυναικὸς Σαμαρίτιδος (*Men and Women*, 110–11). Lastly, Day takes notice that "a reading of the text with the idea of characterization in mind shows that the revelation of the Samaritan woman's character is accomplished almost exclusively by the method of showing. The narrator makes no definitive statements about her other than concerning her gender and ethnicity" (*John 4:1-42*, 159). She also takes the view that the Samaritan Woman's response in v. 9 is as much about her astonishment that a Jew is talking to a Samaritan as it is about a Jewish *man* conversing with a woman (ibid., 164).

[183] Barrett provides quotations revealing the low view of women that some had in antiquity (*St. John*, 240; see also Brown, *John*, 1:173, Keener, *John*, 1:596-97). Moloney references Barrett and mentions that these quotations demonstrate the shocking nature of Jesus's conversation (*John*, 134).

[184] Conway, *Men and Women*, 110–11.

[185] Keener, *John*, 1:596-97; also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:443; Morris, *John*, 242; Keener, *John*, 1:620-21; Köstenberger, *John*, 148, 149. Numerous commentators report that rabbis were forbidden from talking to women who were not their wives: e.g., Barrett, *St. John*, 240; Köstenberger, *John*, 159; Thompson, *John*, 98.

Additionally, as mentioned above, there was enmity between Jews and Samaritans in the first century, and John draws attention to this reality with the Samaritan Woman's initial question and the author's aside (4:9).[186] Moreover, when the text is placed within its genre as a betrothal scene, as Keener accurately discerns,

> the narrative subverts a plotline borrowed from biblical romance; the normal plotline would lead to affection between the two parties—a prospect that would have shocked any Jewish reader even if she [the Samaritan Woman] were not viewed as specifically immoral. Jesus' talking with a woman may have been offensive to some (4:27), but the ethnic barrier dominates much of the dialogue, for "Jews avoid dealings with Samaritans."[187]

On the other hand, the Fourth Evangelist never disparages Samaritans or women.[188] In 4:1-42, the opposite is true—John challenges these cultural biases.[189] It is of no concern to Jesus if someone is a Jew or a Samaritan but whether they worship rightly

---

[186] Moloney, *John*, 117; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 163; Köstenberger, *John*, 141, 149. Conway also notes the tension between Jews and Samaritans in this period and observes John's demarcation of the Samaritan Woman's ethnicity and gender (*Men and Women*, 110–11). See n. 154.

[187] Keener, *John*, 1:598. Like Keener, Culpepper observes that the way that John uses the OT genre of betrothal scenes is topsy-turvy. However, he shows that this happens in a number of ways throughout the passage: "Jesus asks for water but apparently receives none. Dialogue rather than action carries the scene. Living water, of which Jesus is the source, rather than well water, to which the Samaritan woman has access, becomes the central concern. And the woman is no marriageable maiden; she has had five husbands" (*Anatomy*, 136). This supports Keener's argument.

[188] So Conway, *Men and Women*, 111-12. Conway also argues that John "tends to highlight the association of women and revelation, as indicated by the comment in 4:27" (ibid., 122; see also 112). As a result, the author's view of women is discordant with what is found elsewhere in first century writings. Commenting on v. 27, Carson goes further and makes the case that "Jesus himself was not hostage to the sexism of his day (*cf.* 7:53-8:11; 11:5; Lk. 7:36-50; 8:2-3; 10:38-42)" (*John*, 227; likewise, Witherington, *Wisdom*, 120).

[189] In a number of ways, commentators discuss the inclusive nature of Christ's ministry as an aspect of John 4:1-42. Such interpreters include Brown, *John*, 1:176; Barrett, *St. John*, 228 244; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:457; Hendrikus Boers, *Neither on This Mountain Nor in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4*, SBLMS 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 199–200; quoted by Moloney, *John*, 147–48; Morris, *John*, 239, 251; Carson, *John*, 232; Moloney, *John*, 147–48; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 121, 123, 125; Köstenberger, *John*, 156; Michaels, *John*, 251, 252, 270; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 171; Thompson, *John*, 98, 99, 101, 103, 104. Nevertheless, not all are as explicit as Conway, upon whom this section is dependent, in depicting the full weight of this theme and its pervasiveness throughout the chapter and Gospel (*Men and Women*, 109–12). Although without detailed explanation, Thompson holds that not only this passage but "everything in John moves from Israel to the world" (*John*, 96).

(4:23-24), and the Samaritans' confession accentuates the comprehensive nature of Christ's mission.[190] He is the savior of *the world* (4:42b).[191]

Concerning the Samaritan Woman specifically, the narrative draws attention to her gender (4:9), ethnicity (4:9) and religious practices (4:19), but by its conclusion, she identifies a Ἰουδαῖος as the Christ and is a reaper in God's kingdom.[192] This change contrasts with the disciples, who—as Conway puts it—are "urging food on Jesus that he does not need (v. 31-34)" while the Samaritan Woman "is sowing seed for the harvest (v.

---

[190] Witherington, *Wisdom*, 121. Other commentators draw attention to the fact that Jesus undermines the division between Jewish and Samartian worship with these words: Carson, *John*, 224–25; Morris, *John*, 239. Indeed, as Moloney observes, the δεῖ of v. 24 "indicates that this is the only possible way to worship God properly" (*John*, 133). Culpepper also observes that "neither distinction matters to Jesus" but does not discuss vv. 23-24 (*Anatomy*, 137).

[191] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:457. As Witherington notices, in 4:1-42 "it becomes clear that this salvation is for everyone, not just the Jews. Whoever will worship in spirit and truth, even including the Samaritan Woman, may get the benefit of this salvation, this living water" (*Wisdom*, 121; so Craig R. Koester, "'The Savior of the World' (John 4:42)," *JBL* 109 [1990]: 668, who is cited by Köstenberger, *John*, 165; see also ibid., 156). Schnackenburg and Hendrikus Boers also offer sage words concerning this theme. Schnackenburg writes, Jesus's "self-revelation has taught the Samaritans that the true saviour sent by God does not belong to one people alone, does not set up a special form of worship in Samaria or Juda (vv. 21-24) but bestows salvation on the whole world" (*St. John*, 1:457). Boers states, "Jesus, the messiah, is neither the savior of the Samaritans nor the Jews—'an hour comes when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will your worship the Father' (v 21)—but the savior of the world—'the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (v 23). True worship, worship in the spirit, constitutes a community beyond all earthly religious communities, a community of worship in which all of humanity is united. That is what the villagers recognise; it is the point of the story" (*Neither on This Mountain*, 199–200; quoted by Moloney, *John*, 147–48).

[192] Conway, *Men and Women*, 109–12; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 163–64. Keener labels the three "barriers" in this narrative that Jesus overcomes as socioethnic, gender, and moral (*John*, 1:585). Köstenberger considers them to be ethnicity, religion, and morality (*John*, 141). Bennema holds that Jesus "crosses geographical, ethnic, religious, social, and gender barriers in order to meet this complex character" (*Encountering Jesus*, 162). Thompson recognizes the barriers as ethnicity, gender, and "religious commitments or practices" (*John*, 99). Given that the text is not as clear on the Samaritan Woman's potential immorality being an issue as it is with the other three, I side with Conway and Day by choosing not to examine it, although Conway only discusses the problem of gender and ethnicity present in the text (*Men and Women*, 117–18; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 174). Day accentuates the ethnic and gender issues in the text, while mentioning that part of the ethnic tension between Jews and Samaritans involved religion (ibid., 163). For a sympathetic reading of the Samaritan Woman having had five husbands in light of the text's social and cultural context, see Bridges, "John 4:5-42," 174; Day, *John 4:1-42*, 169–73; Thompson, *John*, 102-3.

29, cf. 37)."[193] This transformation happens because of Christ. He reveals his identity to the Samaritan Woman, and she becomes his witness, a shocking development.[194]

This is true of John's Samaritans as well. They come to Jesus and believe in him because of the Samaritan Woman and his word.[195] They do so as Samaritans with Jesus as a Jew.[196] As Conway remarks,

> Regardless of their historical relationship with the Jews, the Samaritans will show their true worth in their response to Jesus. In this way, historical reality will be overturned by narrative truth. This evolution will carry over to the epithet Samaritan, as a character indicator its meaning will be transformed by the end of the story.[197]

More importantly, as Okure writes, "At the end of the encounter, Jesus, the disciples, the woman, and the Samaritans enter into a communion fellowship, transcending a complex variety of sociocultural, gender, and religious barriers that would otherwise keep them apart."[198] Therefore, these figures—the Samaritan Woman and her fellow villagers—

---

[193] Conway, *Men and Women*, 124–25; so also Witherington, *Wisdom*, 122-23. Additionally, Witherington discerns, "At this point [v. 27] the irony of the story begins to build—the disciples have left Jesus to find mere material sustenance, while this woman leaves her source of material sustenance behind (her water jug) to go to town and witness about Jesus" (ibid., 121). Bennema also notes that "ironically, it is the woman—not the disciples—who participates in Jesus' mission" (*Encountering Jesus*, 168; emphasis originally; so also Danna, "John 4:29," 223).

[194] Keener, who thinks that John depicts the Samaritan Woman as immoral, maintains that "this woman is hardly the sort of witness one would expect a pious rabbi to commission (4:39)! Jesus, however, relates to this woman as a potential worshiper of God (4:23), not on the basis of her gender or her past relationships with men" (*John*, 1:608).

[195] See n. 131.

[196] In a way, Köstenberger argues this, writing, "by recognizing Jesus as 'Savior of the world,' the Samaritans accept that salvation may be from the Jews, but it is ultimately for all people" (*John*, 165). Likewise, Keener says that one of the reasons that their confession is "significant" is because "it shows that they embraced the 'salvation' which was 'of the Jews'" (*John*, 1:627). Given the ethnicities of the two parties, Carson calls attention to the shocking nature of the Samaritans' request for Jesus to stay with them and states that this shows "their conviction that he was none less than the promised Taheb, the Messiah" (*John*, 231), and Schnackenburg perceives that these Samaritans "invite the 'Jew' to their homes without misgivings. Theologically, this means that faith overcomes any scandal that may be given by the external circumstances of the revealer's origin" (*St. John*, 1:455). Equally, Keener holds that in this scene, "Jesus had surmounted the usual Samaritan mistrust of Jews" (*John*, 1:627). Regarding the confession itself, Carson suggests that the ethnicity of Jesus—that he is a Jew—may be the reason that the Samaritans call him the savior of the *world* (ibid., 232).

[197] Conway, *Men and Women*, 112.

[198] Okure, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (JN 4:1-42) in Africa," *TS* 70 (2009): 403.

reflect John’s theology of spiritual transformation. They come to faith only after Jesus’s direct action.

4.3 Conclusion

In these two scenes, we have confessions of faith dependent upon Jesus’s actions. Various elements in the text show this to be the case. In the next chapter the same will hold true for more of John’s confessing characters. These narratives reflect what I have attempted to show in the story of Mary Magdalene and this reveals that confessing characters in John reflect the Gospel’s theology of spiritual transformation. As a result, the rhetorical purpose of John’s confessing characters is thematic.

CHAPTER 5 – CONFESSING CHRIST: JOHANNINE CONFESSION SCENES – PART II

"... if anyone should *confess* Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue."

- John 9:22

As in the previous chapter, I will examine the narratives of two confessing characters: the pericopes of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41) and Thomas (20:24-29). I will attempt to demonstrate that the pattern of faith that appears in the narratives of Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, and Mary Magdalene do so in these stories as well. Like the figures that precede them, the Man Born Blind and Thomas serve a thematic role, depicting John's theology of spiritual transformation. To argue this, I will look at the same literary devices as I did in the last two chapters, and I will work through these stories in the order of their appearance, as I did in Chapter Four.

5.1 The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)

Unlike the earlier confession scenes that I surveyed, John 9:1-41 combines two of the Gospel's main literary features. It unites an extended dialogue with a miraculous act. As a result, a confession takes place in the context of a believer's healing.[1] My study will not center on the miracle itself. Yet, interpreters cannot fully understand the blind man's confession without considering his healing. What I will propose is that although Jesus heals the Man Born Blind early in the narrative, the man does not profess his faith until he meets Jesus a second time and converses with him.[2] This indicates that the healing is

[1] For this reason, Michaels is right to identity 9:1-41 as "a 'call' narrative … even though Jesus does not command the blind man to 'Come after me,' or 'Follow me' (as in the synoptic accounts), and the blind man is never explicitly enlisted into Jesus' company of disciples" (*John*, 539–40).

[2] A number of commentators either identify the Man Born Blind's conversation with Jesus in vv. 35-38 as instrumental to his coming to faith or they judge that he lacks true faith until Jesus finds him in v.

important, but it is ultimately talking with Jesus that leads to his proclamation, “Lord, I believe” (9:38b).[3] Again, what is seen is a character making a confession of faith only

---

35. For example, regarding v. 35 and Jesus’s finding of the Man Born Blind after his expulsion from the synagogue Barrett remarks, “The light has shone and it has created division between the children of light and the children of darkness. The Jews have cast out the man (and so have rejected Jesus); he for his part refuses to deny the light that has come to him in the opening of his eyes. But he has not yet understood what has taken place, *or come to faith in Jesus*” (*St. John*, 364; emphasis added). Likewise, Schnackenburg maintains that prior to talking with Jesus in 9:35-41, the Man Born Blind “has gone as far as he could with his Jewish mentality and believing reflection, but only Jesus can enable him to take the last step to faith in Christ” (*St. John*, 2:253; so also 2:247, 2:248). Additionally, Carson specifies that “Jesus, taking the initiative, *found him* (cf. 5.14) and brought him to decisive and knowledgeable faith” (*John*, 375; emphasis original). With that said, however, he also insists that “it is not clear that the healed man is yet ready to address Jesus as Thomas did after the resurrection, ‘My Lord and my God’” (ibid., 377). In fact, he maintains that the man’s response (καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ) is not worship but “obeisance” (ibid.). Nonetheless, he holds that this “is already a great step forward from his earlier references to Jesus (vv. 11, 17, 33)” and that “the Evangelist who knows that the Christological confessions in his Gospel will climax with 20:28 (cf. 1:1, 18), doubtless understands that the healed man is ‘worshipping’ better than he knew” (ibid.). In a similar fashion and concerning vv. 35-39, Keener comments, “The healed man still can reason only from his experience and lacks an adequate grid for interpretation (9:36); Jesus now supplies that grid (9:35-37)” (*John*, 1:795). He also writes, “The healed man responds with a heightened Christology as soon as the word makes a more adequate interpretation possible (9:38)” (ibid.).

Likewise, Andy M. Reimer puts forward the idea that the man receives “full blown faith” once he meets Jesus in vv. 35-39 (“The Man Born Blind: True Disciple of Jesus,” in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann, *Character Studies*, 437). He also judges that it is “in the concluding seen” that the Man Born Blind has “full reception of spiritual sight” (ibid.). Moreover, Bennema reasons that “the reader may expect a confession from the man after 9:7, but his response is delayed” (*Encountering Jesus*, 247). Additionally, Jacobus Kok argues that Man Born Blind is not only physically blind but also spiritually (“The Healing of the Blind Man in John,” *JECH* 2012 [2012]: 52–53). He then details that according to John, “Jesus came precisely for this reason: to heal the spiritually blind (9:41; 12:40-41), who are still ruled by sin (8:21, 24, 34-36) and controlled by their father, the devil (8:44)” (ibid., 53). He concludes that in v. 37 “with the (καὶ … καὶ) construction [which Kok identifies as being similar to what Jesus says to the Samaritan Woman in John 4], Jesus enables the man to see him for who he is” (ibid., 57). He writes, “The prefect-tense ἑώρακας describes an experience that reaches into the present (cf. 14:7, 9; 20:29), but that has been completed.… All of a sudden, the man is not only able to see biologically, but also spiritually” (ibid.).

[3] Lindars does not state this directly, but he does rightly assert that with this narrative, “the ground is prepared for the revelation of the identity of Jesus, which will be given in chapter 10. This is the fact that he and the Father are one (10.30). This can only be understood and accepted by those whose minds have been enlightened, because it is known only through experience of the analogous relationship of believers themselves to Jesus” (*John*, 338). He also proposes that “the teaching of the chapter” is “on spiritual sight leading to confession of faith in Jesus, and on spiritual blindness which refuses to believe” (ibid., 340). In fact, he claims that “the healing of the blind man can be regarded as a model of the experience of conversion” (ibid.). He ultimately connects this narrative and its message about conversion to baptism and what other NT authors say about the matter. Nonetheless, he clarifies that “John is not, of course, giving teaching on baptism as such; but his picture of the conversion experience may be influenced by his knowledge of Christian initiation, in which the notions of spiritual illumination and active confession of faith in Jesus are combined” (ibid.).

Barrett explicitly says that this chapter is not about baptism but rather John “is concerned with faith, conversion, light, darkness, judgement” (*St. John*, 355). Regarding the man’s faith and his healing, he concludes, “The sign and its interpretation are now both complete: the blind man has received physical sight, and has also, through Jesus the light of the world, seen the truth and believed in Jesus as the Son of man” (ibid., 365). Likewise, concerning the Man Born Blind’s confession, Bultmann writes, “The immediate cause of the confession is neither a theophany, nor a straightforward demand that he should

after meeting Jesus. The author shapes the narrative to illustrate this, and as a result, the Man Born Blind reflects John's theology of spiritual transformation.[4]

---

believe, compliance with which would be no more than an arbitrary act of will. But whereas man's experience would remain obscure to him without the intervention of the spoken word, so too the word itself is only intelligible because it reveals to man the meaning of his own experience" (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 339; quoted in Barrett, *St. John*, 365).

Schneiders does not directly tie this to the Man Born Blind's conversation with Jesus after being expelled from the synagogue, but she does consider one of the ideas of this passage to be that "congenital incapacity for divine life is remedied by immersion in Christ and consequent believing" ("To See or Not to See: John 9 as a Synthesis of the Theology and Spirituality of Discipleship," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John*, ed. John Painter, R. Alan Culpepper, and Fernando F. Segovia [St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000], 201). She puts forward this idea throughout her article on John 9. In addition, Keener finds that "the man's loyalty to Jesus has set him on the right road, but did not yet confirm him as a disciple. It is in 9:35-39 that the healed man moves to a more christologically adequate confession of Jesus' identity" (*John*, 1:794).

Michaels does not expand on this, but like Carson, he does comment that following the Man Born Blind's expulsion from the synagogue, "Jesus finds him and *brings him to faith* (vv. 35-38)" (*John*, 539; emphasis added). Likewise, Bennema judges there to be a progression in the blind man's view of Jesus, concluding that "the formerly blind man displays a remarkable development in his understanding of Jesus and needs Jesus' assistance only for the last step to reach adequate belief" (*Encountering Jesus*, 256). He makes this argument while also stating that "the man attains this understanding not in a reflective encounter with Jesus [as was the case with the Samaritan Woman] but in a confrontation with the hostile religious authorities" (ibid.). He also seems to present the idea that one of the main messages of this passage is that one achieves spiritual transformation through humility. He writes, "if people acknowledge their blindness, the light will illumine them and enable them to see" (ibid., 255).

[4] Several interpreters make mention that the main theme of this chapter is spiritual transformation or that its figures put on display an aspect of John's theology of spiritual transformation. Collins considers that "this healing is treated by John as a symbol of spiritual illumination which a man receives when he believes and is baptized" ("Representative Figures," 42). Additionally, Howard finds the Man Born Blind to be "a model of what it means to believe in Jesus and to grow in spiritual insight" ("Minor Characters," 73). Schneiders comes to a conclusion different from mine regarding John's theology of spiritual transformation—maintaining that (1) "coming to knowledge of God and the ability to recognize God at work in Jesus is not something of which human beings, prior to new birth from above, are capable" ("To See," 205), but holding that (2) "the impediment of the heart that renders some people incapable of entering into relationship with God, which is divine revelation, is something for which humans are finally responsible (ibid., 206). Nevertheless, she finds that John 9 "is … a primary locus for studying the distinctive spirituality of discipleship of the Fourth Gospel" (ibid., 190). In fact, she insists that "the story of the man born blind is … a synopsis of the theology and spirituality of the Fourth Gospel addressed to all, down through the centuries, who will be invited by this text to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that by believing they might have life in his name" (ibid., 206). For her, the Man Born Blind is a representative figure (ibid., 194–95), and "readers [are to] recognize themselves as those 'born blind,' that is, naturally inculpably, but also incapable of 'seeing the reign of God' unless they are born anew, born from above, born of water and the spirit (cf. 3:3, 5). Like the man, we must be washed in the Sent One to experience the illumination, the opening of our eyes, that enables us to see who Jesus is, know him as the Son of man who reveals and mediates God to us, and confess and worship him" (ibid., 193).

Without detailing the specifics of this claim but in like manner to Schneiders, Köstenberger remarks that "John 9:39-41 serves as a kind of interpretive epilogue, transforming the preceding narrative into an acted parable with a message about sight and blindness in the spiritual realm" (*John*, 295). He adds, "The present passage anticipates the climactic conclusion in 12:37-40," a text that I see as instrumental to understanding John's theology of spiritual transformation as discussed in Chapter Six (ibid.). Duke also contends that "these verses [John 1:9-12], summarizing the Gospel's central irony, are brought to vigorous

5.1.1 Dialogue and Action

In ways similar to the dialogue before it, that which occurs in 9:1-41 reveals the need for Jesus to act for a confession to take place. Resembling the narrative of the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind has an extended conversation, but like 20:11-18 it happens between the Man Born Blind and multiple conversation partners: "the neighbors and those who had seen him before" (9:8), the Pharisees (9:13), and finally

---

life in the drama of chapter 9, where the author's art is at its consummate best" (*Irony in the Fourth Gospel* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1985], 117). In addition, Thompson finds that one of the main themes of this passage is the question "What does it take to see?" (*John*, 204). In fact, she argues that "the entire story graphically illustrates Jesus' exhortation to 'judge with right judgment' (7:24): the man's witness provides a concrete example of doing so" (ibid.). Thus she observes that "the dominant motif in the passage is blindness (vv. 1, 2, 3, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 32, 39, 40, 41)," and that "while on one level the blindness is physical, by the end of the story blindness has acquired a figurative meaning as well" (ibid.). In the story, "The once-blind man now 'sees,' whereas some with physical sight are blind (9:41; cf. 8:24). As the man gains his sight, he also gains greater insight into Jesus' identity: sight becomes a figure for the insight that perceives the significance of what Jesus has done and who he is. The narrative thus demonstrates what happens when light comes into darkness (1:4-5, 8, 12). And though the light has come into the world for salvation and not for judgment, not all will see or want to see (3:17-21)" (ibid.). Thus for Thompson, the purpose of the narrative is to illuminate the reader on the topic of spiritual transformation and how it comes about.

Although Painter does not concentrate on John's characters and the rhetorical purpose of the Man Born Blind, he argues that "John 9 is … a parable, or narrative symbol, based on a miracle story" ("John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 28 [1986]: 43). In part, he establishes this by stressing that "the clue to the way Jesus brings 'true' spiritual perception is in focus in 9.4-5, 35-41 and, once recognized, can be traced through the story in 9.8-34" (ibid.). He then continues, "The miracle is interpreted so that it points beyond itself to expose all men as blind, and to reveal Jesus as the Son of Man who is the life-giving light" (ibid.). Painter is concerned with how John uses "symbols" rather than characters, but he concludes that in John, "Jesus, not the Law, gives man sight, perception, light, understanding and life. The miracle of the giving of sight to the blind man has been used as the basis of a symbolic discourse which elucidates the way John understands and uses symbols. The symbols deal with man's failure to perceive that the symbols point to the revealer. The failure is related to the man's false security in thinking that he already possesses life. This false understanding is a consequence of the power of darkness which has blinded his eyes (12.37-43). Jesus' work as the revealer, the light of the world, was to overthrow the power of darkness and to give sight to the blind (12.31, 46)" (ibid., 56). Indeed, Painter finds John's "use of symbols" to be "a response to the epistemological problem of unbelief which is rooted in the failure to perceive (9.39ff.) and is intended to overcome the failure to perceive and to evoke faith in the revealer. How this happens is demonstrated in John 9 where Jesus, the light of the world, gives *sight* to the blind man, who grows in perception to confess his faith in the Son of Man" (ibid., 50; emphasis original). As he describes it, "Man fails to hear the Word of God because he is deaf and fails to see God's glory because he is blind. John 9 teaches that, in this sense, all men are blind from birth. Creation by the *Logos* indicates that man was *intended* to hear God's Word and see his glory. This underlines the *possibility* that true perception can be brought about by the revealer. The revelation event in Jesus, and the proclamation of this event, have the power to overcome the darkness, enabling men to see the truth and believe" (ibid., 51; emphasis original). In part, my reading of the text mirrors Painter's but our emphases differ.

Jesus (9:35). In each exchange, the blind man declares something about Jesus's identity without fully confessing who he is until Jesus himself provides that information.[5]

When his neighbors ask him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" (9:10b), he responds with "the man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.'" (9:11b).[6] The Pharisees interrogate him twice, and in both instances he announces what he thinks of Jesus. In their first meeting, the Pharisees bluntly question him, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" (9:17b). The Man Born Blind responds, "He is a prophet" (9:17c). His answer parallels what the Samaritan Woman believes prior to Jesus's self-revelation to her (4:19), and the

---

[5] Unlike what I argue, Brown holds that each of these "statements … betray an ever deepening knowledge of Jesus" (*John*, 1:377). Others see a progression of faith specifically in these statements or generally throughout the narrative. This includes Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:239; Morris, *John*, 432, 440; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 182, 183; Duke, *Irony*, 118, 123; Painter, "John 9," 31–32; Conway, *Men and Women*, 126; Schneiders, "To See," 201. Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 142; Köstenberger, *John*, 278, 287; Howard, "Minor Characters," 74; Kok, "Healing," 56; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 254. In a similar way, Lindars sees that there is a "gradually … bath[ing] in light" that occurs (*John*, 338).

I suggest that these statements reveal a consistent gulf that is not overcome except by Jesus's intervention. There may be a gradual change, but it is only made complete by Jesus's direct action. For instance, Keener reasons that "the blind man himself becomes a paradigm of *growing* discipleship; when he confesses Jesus openly, he moves from recognizing him as a 'man' (9:11) to a 'prophet' (9:17) and a man from God (9:33)" (*John*, 1:775; emphasis added). Yet, he finds that "*with Jesus' revelation* [the Man Born Blind] recognizes him as 'Son of Man' and 'Lord' (9:35-37)" (ibid., 1:775-76; emphasis added; so also ibid., 1:794; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 256).

[6] Barrett reads the man's comments in 9:11 to be "intended as a description of Jesus in purely human terms" (*St. John*, 359). He judges that "the blind man has much to learn before he makes the confession and offers the worship of v. 38" (ibid.; so also Morris, *John*, 429). Carson holds that the Man Born Blind's description of Jesus as "the man called Jesus" indicates that "he had learned of his name from the talk of the time, but had not yet seen him, and still had little theological opinion about him" (*John*, 366). Resseguie maintains that the Man Born Blind's "limited understanding of his healer's identity—'the man called Jesus'—demonstrates that he is far from full faith, and he cannot answer as to Jesus' whereabouts, which is paramount to understanding who Jesus is" (*Strange Gospel*, 142). This is important given what Schneiders reports: "The question of 'location' and 'origins' pervades John's gospel. The word 'where' is a leitmotif. The first question addressed to Jesus in the gospel is that of his first two disciples, 'Where do you dwell?' (Jn. 1:38), and the final question is that of Mary Magdalene to the risen Lord, whom she does not recognize, 'Where have you laid him [Jesus' body]?' (Jn. 20:15). Throughout the gospel, people are distinguished by whether they know where Jesus comes from, where he is, and where he is going—namely, from, in, and to God—or whether they do not know either his origin or their own. Jesus is the One who knows his origin, and his disciples are those who come to this knowledge (cf. Jn. 8:14). To know where Jesus comes from is to know *who* he is. To know where he dwells is to be *with* him. To know where he is going is to *follow* him" ("To See," 199).

mild response of the Pharisees (disbelief over his healing) suggests that this is not a confession of faith.[7]

In his final encounter with the Pharisees, he reacts to their continued insistence that they cannot determine from where Jesus comes. He remarks, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:33b).[8] Although the Man Born Blind makes this bold statement, it is clear that this is not a confession of faith and that it is not until Jesus comes to him that he has faith.[9] In this final response to the Pharisees, he admits that

---

[7] In the same way, with these words Barrett deduces that "the formerly blind man, like the Samaritan woman, is simply aware of the presence of an unusual person, who excites wonder and respect" (*St. John*, 360). Like Barrett, Conway also notices the parallel between this response and that of the Samaritan Woman (*Men and Women*, 130), as does Collins, ("Representative Figures," 42; idem. "Johannine Characters," 365), Köstenberger (*John*, 287), and Bennema (*Encountering Jesus*, 250). Additionally, a number of commentators recognizes the deficiency in the Man Born Blind's understanding of Jesus in v. 17. Carson writes, "The confession *He is a prophet* may reflect a man in his spiritual infancy, but it is a step in the right direction, an improvement over his 'the man they call Jesus' (v. 11)" (*John*, 368). As he understands it, "This man's eyes are opening wider: he is beginning to see still more clearly, while the eyes of his judges are becoming clouded over with blinding, theological mist" (ibid.).

Likewise, Schnackenburg emphasizes that "it is unlikely that the term 'a prophet' has a messianic significance, since the cured man is first brought to this sort of faith by Jesus himself" (*St. John*, 2:248). Furthermore, he observes that "the Pharisees make no reply to the man's brave statement, but their unease shows itself in their use of other methods in an attempt to reduce this voice of the people to silence" (ibid.). Their response is not as hostile as it should be if the Man Born Blind was claiming that Jesus was the Messiah.

Furthermore, Keener recognizes both that the response of the blind man here (and throughout the narrative) mirrors that of the Samaritan Woman's, and that to identify Jesus as a prophet is "inadequate," given John 6:14 and 7:40 (*John*, 1:787). In addition, Reimer makes the case that the healing of the Man Born Blind mirrors the actions of the prophets in the OT. He reports that "quirky rituals with instructions that must be strictly followed in order to produce a miraculous result are, as anyone familiar with the Hebrew scriptures knows, the *modus operandi* of the ancient prophet or 'man of God'" ("Man Born Blind," 434). This leads him to conclude, "Our man born blind has not yet reached an understanding of Jesus that approaches that of the prologue. But given the information he has, he is on the right track in reading Jesus positively against the heroes of the ancient scriptures" (ibid.). Michaels simply says that it is "unlikely" that prophet should be translated "the Prophet" (*John*, 552). Thompson argues that to call Jesus "a prophet" is "a confession expressing incipient faith (9:17; cf. 4:19; 6:14; 7;40, 52)" (*John*, 210). She maintains that "while 'prophet' correctly identifies Jesus as one sent by God to declare God's word, 'prophet' will be supplemented by more appropriate designations for Jesus" at the conclusion of this narrative (ibid.).

[8] Moloney reasons that even in this pronouncement "there is still some hesitation in the man (*ei mē ēn houtos para theou*), as he continues to base his understanding of Jesus on the fact of the miracle (v. 33b)" (*John*, 295).

[9] Commentators who see the Man Born Blind as lacking faith (or a fully formed faith) until he converses with Jesus after his expulsion from the synagogue include Barrett (*St. John*, 364), Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 2:253), Carson (*John*, 375), Kok ("Healing," 57). Morris says something close to this. He remarks, "His [the Man Born Blind's] insight into the Person of Jesus has been growing, and now this final revelation puts the coping stone on what has gone before" (*John*, 440).

Jesus is from God, but he only identifies him as a “worshiper of God” (θεοσεβής) and not God himself.[10] Additionally, when Jesus stands before him a second time and asks if he believes in the Son of Man (9:35), the Man Born Blind’s response is an admission of ignorance: “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” (9:36b).[11] Most importantly, his final confession contrasts his previous statements. He no longer considers Jesus to be merely a prophet or someone “from God” (the extent to what he means by this is unclear).[12] Now, he believes that Jesus is the Lord.

---

[10] θεοσεβής can mean “god-fearing” or “devout” (BDAG s.v. θεοσεβής, 425). Nonetheless, even with this definition, the description is lacking and does not reveal the requirements of faith outlined in 20:31.

[11] Brown reasons that “this question could reflect the man’s ignorance of what the title means, but more likely it refers to the identity of the bearer of the title (see xii 34)” (*John*, 1:375). He then puts forward the idea that “the question is curious since the man already knows that Jesus is a prophet (17) has unique power (32), and comes from God” (ibid.). Barrett argues that “the man born blind emphasizes his ignorance throughout: he does not even know whether or not Jesus is a sinner (v. 25); he does not know who is the Son of man (v. 36); he emphasizes that he knows one thing only (v. 25)” (*St. John*, 366). Carson identifies v. 36 as evidence that the Man Born Blind “still does not understand very much about the light” (*John*, 375). He also says that this lack of knowledge (expressed in 9:25 and 9:36) reveals his blindness at the “spiritual level” (ibid., 378). He belongs to “*the blind*” of v. 39 “who are in spiritual darkness, and are therefore lost, and know it” (ibid.; emphasis original). Moloney makes a similar argument. He writes, “The man is puzzled by the question and he responds with a question of his own. He does not know enough (cf. vv. 12, 25, 36) to be able to make a decision. He turns to Jesus, addressing him as ‘Sir’ (*kyrie*), seeking further information on the Son of Man (v. 36)” (*John*, 295). As previously discussed, Keener maintains that “the healed man still can reason only from his experience and lacks an adequate grid for interpretation (9:36); Jesus now supplies that grid (9:35-37)” (*John*, 1:795). Although Michaels does not say that the Man Born Blind can only come to faith through Jesus’s direct action, he does make the case that “it is doubtful that the man would have been able to come to such conclusions [i.e., with this question Jesus is asking the Man Born Blind to believe in him and that he is equating ‘Son of Man’ with ‘Christ’] unaided, and in fact he is quick to admit that he cannot: ‘And who is he, sir, that I might believe in him?’ (v. 36)” (*John*, 566). At the same time, Michaels states that “ironically, he [the Man Born Blind] knows that the ‘Son of man’ is ‘Jesus,’ yet he does *not* know that this same Jesus is speaking to him, referring to himself as ‘the Son of man’!” (ibid.; emphasis original). Regarding 9:12, Schnackenburg remarks, “To the question about Jesus’ whereabouts the cured man can say nothing.… He too still has a long way to go to reach full faith in Jesus, but he takes it in the face of the opposition of unbelief until Jesus himself enables him to take the last step towards faith” (*St. John*, 2:247; so also *St. John*, 2:248). Morris suggests that it is unclear what the formerly blind man means in v.36 with κύριος. He writes that the Man Born Blind “responds respectfully, though whether we should translate ‘sir’ (as *NIV*) or ‘Lord’ is not so clear” (*John*, 439–40). He does lean toward “giv[ing] the term the lesser significance” (ibid., 440). Carson bluntly says that κύριος “is rightly rendered ‘sir’” (*John*, 376).

[12] Morris suggests as such when talking about the Man Born Blind’s confession. He deduces that “the man has already recognized that Jesus came from God (v. 33). Now he goes a step further. He gives to Jesus the reverence that is appropriate to God” (*John*, 440). Howard insists that since “John focused on the man’s response in recognizing *who* Jesus is” and because the faith of the Man Born Blind shifts from “first recognizing Jesus as a prophet and then calling Him Lord,” this means that he “serves as an example of what it means to be enlightened by Jesus (cf. 1:9, 12)” (“Minor Characters,” 74; emphasis original).

In examining the Man Born Blind's confession of faith, it should be recognized that "Lord" in v. 38 has divine connotations as a result of its context. [13] As mentioned previously, Lord (κύριος) is often used in the LXX to translate Yahweh's divine name and it is Yahweh who gives sight in the OT as Jesus does in this narrative (Exod 4:11; Ps 146:8).[14] Given Man Born Blind's prostration (καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ), the reader can assume that he sees Jesus as a divine being.[15] The appearance of προσκυνέω in John outside of 9:38 supports this notion because its object is always Yahweh.[16] The Samaritan Woman and Jesus discuss where to worship (προσκυνέω) God rightly (4:21-24), and in John 12:20 a group of individuals who are traveling to Jerusalem (12:12) "to worship at the feast" (προσκυνήσωσιν ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ), specifically Passover (12:1). In 4:21-24, the object is certainly Yahweh (4:23), and in 12:20 Yahweh is the implied recipient of

---

Nevertheless, Howard holds that the Man Born Blind has faith prior to his final conversation with Jesus in vv. 35-38. He writes, "His [the Man Born Blind's] faith grew even to the point of being willing to be put out of the synagogue" (ibid., 75).

[13] Without argumentation, Carson merely writes, κύριος "here [in v.38] rightly rendered 'Lord' rather than 'Sir'" (*John*, 377). Duke simply identifies this as the Man Born Blind's "full-aware *kurie*," which "provides a pinnacle for the man's progressive faith (cf. vss. 11, 17, 33, 36)" (*Irony*, 123).

[14] As Witherington writes, "In the Hebrew scriptures the giving of sight to the blind is associated with God's own activity (Ex. 4:11; Ps. 146:8)…. It is thus very likely that by recording this miracle the evangelist is attempting to say something special about Jesus' messianic, and perhaps also his divine status" (*Wisdom*, 180–81). The above OT citations come from Witherington. Stephen S. Kim is more direct. After quoting and referencing OT texts that describe God as the giver of sight, he stresses, "In healing the blind man, then, Jesus was revealing His deity" ("The Significance of Jesus' Healing the Blind Man in John 9," *BSac* 167 [2010]: 316). Additionally, Kok remarks that "if Jesus is able to let the blind see, it inextricably links him to God, in that only God can perform such deeds. This reveals the fact that Jesus must be from God" ("Healing," 53).

[15] Barrett finds that the man's worship indicates the reception of "spiritual as well as physical sight" (*St. John*, 354). He also maintains that it is worship and not simply an act of "reverence" given "the Johannine context" (ibid., 365). In addition, Morris judges that "this time there is little reason for thinking that 'Lord' has anything less than the maximum content. Some translations … have 'Sir,' but this is incongruous in view of the immediately following reference to worship" (*John*, 440). Likewise, Moloney argues that "his earlier question of Jesus addressed him as 'Sir' (v. 36: *kyrie*), but the same word has its full Christological meaning of 'Lord' as he bows down in an act of worship and acceptance of Jesus" (*John*, 296; so also Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 436; Michaels, *John*, 568).

[16] Schnackenburg makes this observation of προσκυνέω in John (*St. John*, 2:254). Additionally, Brown notices this use of προσκυνέω in 4:20-24 and 12:20 (*John*, 1:376), as does Morris (*John*, 440) and Keener (*John*, 1:795).

worship, given where (Jerusalem) and when (during Passover) it is to take place.[17] This is to be expected since, as Martijn Steegen reports, "almost three-quarters of the occurrences of προσκυνέω in the LXX relate to the worship of God or to that of false gods."[18]

Besides, with the phrase "I believe" the Man Born Blind acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of Man. In John, this title is important and it is associated with a number of Jesus's attributes. The Son of Man is the one upon whom the angels of God ascend and descend (1:51). He will be "lifted up" like the bronze serpent (3:14; see also 8:28 and 12:23-34). He has the "authority to execute judgment" (5:27). He provides eternal life and does so through his blood (6:27; 6:62; see also 12:22-24). He comes from heaven (6:62) and has a unique relationship with God (13:31-32). Therefore, to identify Jesus as the Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel is to exclaim a high Christological confession.[19]

One Johannine aspect of Jesus that is associated with the phrase "Son of Man" that is relevant for this discussion is the fact that, as Bennema observes, it "denotes Jesus

[17] For John 12, Martijn Steegen shows how προσκυνέω is to be taken as worship of Yahweh. He argues, "In 12,21 the verbs ἀναβαίνω and προσκυνέω are used in their customary religious context. By means of the verb ἀναβαίνω, a movement upward is expressed. John primarily uses this verb when he wants to describe the movement of the characters of his Gospel to Jerusalem and to the Temple (cf. 2,13; 5,1; 7,14; 11,55), or as in 12,21 the movement to a religious festival (cf. 7,8; 12,21). Within the context of John 12 it is clear that the Greeks went up to Jerusalem to worship during the Passover feast" ("To Worship the Johannine 'Son of Man': John 9,38 as Refocusing on the Father," *Bib* 91 [2010]: 551).

[18] Ibid., 535. Steegen also suggests a number of ways in which John 4 and 12 overlap with John 9: e.g., the repetition of key phrases such as "Son of Man" and concepts like Jesus as the revealer of God (ibid., 545–54). He does this to make the case that 9:38-39a is authentic and original to the Gospel as well as to show the significance of προσκυνέω in v. 38. His conclusions differ from mine, ultimately stating that "the προσεκύνησεν of the man can be seen neither as ordinary homage to a human being nor as the adoration of Jesus as God" (ibid., 553). He comes to this view because he maintains that in John, Jesus reveals God and is the place rather than the object of worship (ibid., 547–52). However, he still makes a strong case that 9:38-39a is original to the Gospel, and that John 4 and 12 help readers better understand John's point here.

[19] Moloney reports that "earlier references to the Son of Man (cf. 1:51; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62) have indicated that Jesus uses this term to refer to his role of making God known in the human story" (*John*, 295).

as mediator, the point of contact between heaven and earth (1:51; 3:13)."[20] Thus "in this capacity, Jesus offers the blind man an opportunity to encounter the divine reality."[21] The Man Born Blind's response of worship and his declarative "Lord, I believe" reveals that this is what takes place. As a result, the Man Born Blind is not politely calling Jesus "sir" and then knelling before him.[22] He is proclaiming Jesus to be divine and bowing in worship. He is making as high of a confession of faith as those who came before (e.g., Nathanael's "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!") and who will come after him (e.g., Thomas's "My Lord and my God!").[23] In fact, as Morris points out, "This is the only place in this Gospel where anyone is said to worship Jesus."[24]

Likewise, in this pericope Jesus's speech confirms the exalted nature of this confession. In v. 39, Jesus attests to the fact that the Man Born Blind had been part of "those who do not see" but now is of those who see because Jesus "came into this world" (9:39).[25] As Carson maintains, these words "are cast as a summarizing statement to the healed man of what has taken place, enabling him to grasp that the miracle that opened his eyes, and the ensuing debate with the religious authorities, constituted *an acted*

---

[20] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 253.

[21] Ibid.

[22] As Morris understands it, προσκυνέω "can be used of paying very high respect to people, but in John it is more natural to understand it of paying divine honors" (*John*, 440). In this scene, "he gives reference that is appropriate to God" (ibid.). In like manner, Keener concludes that προσκυνέω is best understood as worship in this passage. He maintains, "The term by itself need not indicate worship of a deity; but in its broader Johannine context (4:20-24; 12:20-21), including John's Christology (1:1, 18; 20:28), it fits the Johannine portrait of Jesus' deity and invites John's own audience to worship Jesus" (*John*, 1:795).

[23] Witherington holds that the Man Born Blind's response to Jesus in 9:38 "is an important preview or foretaste of what the evangelist is wishing to be the outcome of the pilgrimage of faith (cf. John 20:28)—an adequate confession and worship of Jesus" (*Wisdom*, 184).

[24] Morris, *John*, 440. Köstenberger contends that this is the only "*precrucifixion* reference to worship of Jesus in this Gospel (cf. 20:28)" (*John*, 295; emphasis added).

[25] Likewise, Brown finds that "for John this is the real purpose of the gift of sight; it enables the man to see and believe in Jesus" (*John*, 1:375).

parable about sight and blindness in the spiritual realm."[26] Indeed, Brown's summary of the pericope captures Jesus's words perfectly: "This is a story of how a man who sat in darkness was brought to see the light, not only physically but spiritually."[27]

In the rest of v. 39, Jesus contrasts the Man Born Blind with the Pharisees, who see fine but do not perceive who Jesus is.[28] They are "those who see" but "become blind"

---

[26] Carson, *John*, 377; emphasis added. Additionally, Schneiders reasons that "at the end, Jesus intensifies the paradox in terms of the Johannine 'crisis and judgement' theme. He claims that he has come that the blind might see (not just, or even primarily, that the physically blind might be cured as has indeed happened in this case, but that the congenitally spiritually blind might have their eyes opened to divine revelation) and the seeing might become blind (that is, that those walking in their self-assured knowledge might be progressively engulfed in the darkness of unbelief)" ("To See," 195).

[27] Brown, *John*, 1:377. Several scholars observe that the Man Born Blind is not only given physical sight but also spiritual. E.g., Barrett, *St. John*, 354; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:255; Bruce Grigsby, "Washing in the Pool of Siloam: A Thematic Anticipation of the Johannine Cross," *NovT* 27 (1985): 232; Carson, *John*, 372; Morris, *John*, 440; Kim, "John 9," 315; Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 437. In addition, Bennema finds that the "the physical healing of the blind man in 9:6-7 is a precursor to the broader topic of spiritual blindness and spiritual sight" (*Encountering Jesus*, 247). Köstenberger does not utilize the language of "physical" and "spiritual" sight, but he does say that the Man Born Blind "emerges as the one who sees in more than one sense" (*John*, 294). In fact, Keener shows that even the terminology that the blind man's neighbors use to describe the healing (ἀνοίγω) appears in Jewish and Christian literature not only to reflect the recovery of physical sight (2 Kgs 6:20; Isa 35:5; 42:7; Matt 9:30; 20:33) but also spiritual (Gen 3:5, 7; Num 22:31; 2 Kgs 6:7; Ps 119:18; Acts 2618; Eph 1:18; 1:782-83; *John*, 1:782-83). Moreover when commenting on v. 39, Barrett discerns that "the purpose of the mission of Jesus is often expressed in John in these and similar terms ['I came']: 10.10; 12.46f.; 18.37; cf. 5.43; 7.28; 8.42; 12.27; 16.28; 17.8" (*St. John*, 365). Thus Jesus as the giver of faith and judge of unbelief is a consistent theme in John.

Moloney sees Jesus's declaration in v. 37 as "challenging the man to recognize that God is made known to him in the Son of Man" rather than as that which enables faith (*John*, 296). However, he ties this passage to the rest of John, rightly observing that according to the Fourth Evangelist, "it is impossible for anyone to *see* God or come to the knowledge of God (cf. 1:18; 5:37), but Jesus reveals what he has *seen* (cf. 1:34;3:11, 22; 8:38). He *speaks* what he has seen with the Father (cf. 6:46; 8:38). Those who believe in Jesus will *see* (1:50-51), while those who *refuse to see* are condemned (cf. 3:36; 5:37-38; 636). The supreme revelation of God will take place when the believer *looks upon* the Son of Man (3:13-15)" (ibid., 295–96; emphasis original). I had not noticed the obvious parallel between Jesus's giving of physical and spiritual sight in this pericope before it was brought to my attention by two of my students (Grace Croley and Noelle Elmore) in an online class discussion for REL 211: Introduction to New Testament Literature, Fall 2007 at The King's College, NYC.

[28] A number of interpreters recognize the reversal that takes place between the Pharisees and the Man Born Blind. For instance, Brown writes, John 9:1-14 "is also a tale of how those who thought they saw (the Pharisees) were blinding themselves to the light and plunging into darkness. The story starts in vs. 1 with a blind man who will gain his sight; it ends in vs. 41 with the Pharisees who have become spiritually blind" (*John*, 1:377). Schnackenburg holds, "The cutting edge of the judgment is shown in the fact that those who do not see become sighted and the sighted become blind.… The man born blind has not just received the sight of his eyes, but sight in his believing heart, and those who outwardly see only apparently see; in reality they are blind and are losing their ability to perceive spiritual and divine realities" (*St. John*, 2:255). He then establishes how this is a running theme throughout the Gospel: 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46 (ibid.). Morris warns that "we should not miss this further example of John's irony. He depicts those who thought of themselves as enlightened trying to badger the once blind man into denying his certainty that he

(9:39). To indicate this, John has the Pharisees ask, “Are we also blind?” (9:40b), and Jesus respond with the affirmative, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt (ἁμαρτία) remains” (9:40-41).[29] Schnackenburg argues that that “the paradoxical reversal of the situation is to divine decree (ἵνα).”[30] Jesus came into the world so “that [ἵνα] those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”[31] He also contends that the Pharisees know exactly what Jesus is saying “since the metaphorical use of blindness was already familiar from the Old Testament (Is 42:16,18ff; 43:8 etc.).”[32]

---

now had light” (*John*, 436). He also remarks, “The healing of his blindness has resulted in sight, both physical and spiritual” (ibid., 440). Likewise, Keener states that “in 9:39-41 John epitomizes and makes more explicit the guiding irony that dominates the whole of ch. 9” (*John*, 1:795). Although he does not spell this out, it is clear that for him the irony of ch. 9 is that the blind man sees Jesus spiritually and the Pharisees who can see do not.

Commenting on the conclusion of John 9, Conway asserts that “the Pharisees, insisting on their ability to see spiritual truths are unwilling to admit their blindness to the light of the world and will remain in sin (v. 41). They stand in contrast to the formerly blind man, who from the beginning openly admitted that he does not know about Jesus (9:12, 25), but in the end comes to full recognition of him” (*Men and Women*, 134–35). Keener suggests that the start of this comparison in John 8. He discerns that “the contrast between physical and spiritual blindness (dependence on Christ and opposition to him) of 9:39-41 is already implicit at the beginning of this section. Jesus became invisible in some sense to his enemies in 8:59, so they could not see him; but here Jesus cures a man physically blind and so despised by his enemies (9:2, 34)” (*John*, 1:775). In like manner, Kim maintains that “the man and his faith stand in stark contrast to those without those obstacles who witnessed the miracle” (“John 9,” 315). Other exegetes who observe this reversal include Lindars, *John*, 338; Duke, *Irony*, 118, 125; Painter, “John 9,” 32; Moloney, *John*, 291, 293, 302; Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 139, 142; Howard, “Minor Characters,” 73; Kok, “Healing,” 58; Reimer, “Man Born Blind,” 436–37; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 254–55; Thompson, *John*, 220.

[29] As Barrett observes, “The Pharisees, interjecting a question, are met with a specific condemnation based on the general principle just stated” (*St. John*, 354). Furthermore, Lindars sees vv. 35-41 as revealing that “the Pharisees’ refusal of belief” is “culpable blindness” (*John*, 349, 350).

[30] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:255.

[31] Ibid. Nevertheless, Schnackenburg insists that “the same event can be looked at, as it were, both from below, in terms of human nature, and from above, as the result of God’s ordinance. Both, for John, are insuperably and inextricably combined. Immediately [when] one isolates divine providence as the deliberate blinding of specific individuals one is failing to do justice to the evangelist’s theological intentions” (ibid.).

[32] Ibid., 2:256. Keener as well points to a number of OT passages about spiritual blindness that may stand behind the irony that John presents of a man blind from birth having spiritual sight while the Pharisees lack it (*John*, 1:796). He identifies the following texts: Isa 6:9-10 (which is quoted in John 12); 29:9; 42:18-19; 56:10; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2.

Because of what Jesus says to the Pharisees in 9:41 and since it is clear that the Man Born Blind has faith, the reader can assume he now lacks guilt (ἁμαρτία).[33] This implication then signifies that the blind man is not to die in his sins as is the case with those who do not believe in Jesus (8:23-24), and thus he has eternal life. This lack of sin (and therefore reception of life) further reveals the depth of his confession and its alignment to what the author requires (20:30-31). John desires his readers to believe so "that by believing" they "may have life in his [Jesus's] name." If the Man Born Blind has eternal life, shown by his lack of ἁμαρτία, then he has authentic faith—he believes Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of God."[34]

Furthermore, Jesus's speech at the beginning of the narrative also sheds light on the rhetorical purpose of the Man Born Blind and discloses that what Jesus does is as much a revelatory act as it is an instance of healing.[35] This narrative begins with the

---

[33] Barrett comes to this conclusion but because he maintains that John (like Paul in Rom 4:15) believes that "the blind [those without the Law] have no sin" (*St. John*, 366). For more on the Man Born Blind's lack of sin, see my analysis of his character development below.

[34] Commenting on 9:35-36, Schnackenburg makes the case that "Jesus intends to give the man not just sight, but also 'the light of life' (8:12)" (*St. John*, 2:253). He argues for this because of the title Jesus applies to himself—Son of Man. He writes, "The main function of the Johannine Son of man is 'to draw all men to himself' (cf. 12:32). Jesus' question to the cured man ["Do you believe in the Son of Man?"] also contains a promise: if he believes Jesus as the Son of man, Jesus will take him with him into his glory" (ibid.). In a similar way, Kim holds that Jesus's ability to give eternal life is what the healing of the blind man indicates. He does not go into detail but states, "The miracle of Jesus' healing a man who was blind from birth was the perfect case study to demonstrate that as the divine Messiah He is the source of life and light (cf. 1:4). Both the 'living water' and the 'light' symbolize eternal life (cf. 1:4-9;4:10-14)" ("John 9," 314). He continues, "The closing verses of this chapter (vv. 35-41) reveal not only the genuine faith of the blind man, but they also reveal the significance of the spiritual blindness of everyone, all of whom are born in sin and are without hope (Eph. 2:1-3). Just as the man with congenital blindness could be healed only by Jesus' divine touch, only the divine Messiah the Light of the world, can grant eternal life to those who believe in Him" (ibid., 315). He then concludes, "To summarize, the miracle of healing the man born blind reveals Jesus as the divine Messiah who, as the Light of the world, delivers people from the darkness of sin and death by granting eternal life to those who believe in Him" (ibid., 318).

[35] As Thompson observes, "The plural 'works' encompasses the imminent healing of the man born blind, all other healings, as well as Jesus' 'work' of bringing life" (*John*, 207). Thus "the man was not born blind as a punishment for or as the result of sin; the man's blindness will show that God's purposes are to bring light into the darkness of human existence" (ibid., 206). Brown suggests that prior to the healing "a theological understanding of the sign" is established (*John*, 1:377). He clarifies that the man's healing was not the "real interest" of the author since "the evangelist narrates the miracle with modest brevity" (ibid.).

disciples assuming that sin is the reason for this man's blindness. Nevertheless, Jesus explains that "it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ) might be displayed in him" (9:3b). In 9:3, "works of God" is plural (τὰ ἔργα), and Jesus makes clear that (1) these works are to be done by his disciples (hence the "we" of 9:4) and that (2) they take place because he is "the light of the world" (9:5).[36]

If these "works" are put in the setting of the kind of "work" that Jesus is said to perform elsewhere in the Gospel and that which he wants his disciples to pursue, then the reader ought to recall 5:17 and 4:31-38. In John 5:17, Jesus's work is that of healing a lame man on the Sabbath—"My Father is working until now, and I am working" (5:17).[37]

---

[36] As Lindars reports, "Most commentators … assert that the plural pronoun associates the disciples in Jesus' work (cf. 3.11)" (*John*, 342). If this is true, it would only tie this phrase more closely to 4:31-38. As Brown observes, "The 'we' is probably Jesus' way of associating his disciples with him in his work. That he desires this association is seen in iv 35-38" (*John*, 1:372). Commentators who place the disciples in the "we" of 9:4 include Barrett (*St. John*, 357), Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 2:241), Carson (*John*, 362), Morris (*John*, 426), Moloney (*John*, 291–92), Conway (*Men and Women*, 128), Keener (*John*, 1:779), Farelly (*Disciples*, 54), and Thompson (*John*, 207). Conway shrewdly acknowledges that "although the exhortation to 'do the works of him who sent me' is directed to the disciples, as we will see, it is the man born blind who cares it out" (*Men and Women*, 128).

[37] Commentators call attention to the similarities and the likely intentional pairing that occurs between the Man Born Blind of John 9 and the Lame Man of John 5. For instance, Witherington finds that "the first scene of this drama includes various key features. It is right to compare this story with John 5, especially because the evangelist once again reserves the information that this miracle transpired on the Sabbath until after the relating of the miracle itself (cf. v. 14), and once again Jesus takes the initiative in this act of compassion. The evangelist is preparing to explain once again how the judicial processes against Jesus arose, despite the fact that he was engaged in a work of compassion. Like the story in John 5, the issue of the relationship of suffering and sin once more arises, as does the issue of work on the Sabbath" (*Wisdom*, 182).

Likewise, Collins argues that "the story of John 5, 1-18 and that of John 9, 1-34 are constructed in a remarkably similar fashion. Each of the dramas has a comparable sequence of scenes. Each begins with a miracle story (5, 1-9b; 9,1-7) which is like that found in the Synoptics, with respect both to kind and to form. The classical tripartite schema of serious sickness (5, 5; 9, 1)—stereotyped command (5, 8; 9, 7a)—effect (5, 9; 9, 7b) is found in each narrative. Each miracle story leads to a controversy between Jesus and the Jews. The controversy is linked but loosely to the miracle story itself. In each case the juncture is established merely because the miracle is said, *post factum*, to have occurred on the Sabbath (5, 9b. 10. 16. 18; 9, 14. 16). Both narratives reflect a similar historical background, namely, that of the relationship between the Christian church and the hostile Jewish synagogue" ("Representative Figures," 41). He ultimately sees these characters as contrasting representative figures, holding that "for the Evangelist and his tradition, the blind man represents the Jew whose experience of Jesus's healing power is such that he is led to faith. His faith places him in a critical situation in which his belief leads him to defend his healer, to be excommunicated from the synagogue and to deepen his faith still further. In contrast, the lame man

In 4:31-38, Jesus urges his disciples to work by gathering a spiritual harvest.[38] Thus, in John 9 we have examples of both these works present. In this passage, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath—a point made by the narrator and the Pharisees (9:14; 9:16)—and Jesus gathers fruit for eternal life—he draws this individual to himself (9:41).

Moreover, Jesus specifies that they must do these tasks "while it is day" (9:4) and he immediately follows this with: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5). As the light of the world, Jesus's purpose is to "gives light to everyone" (1:9). There are those who cannot comprehend it (1:5) and others who do (3:21).[39] As Barrett points out, the healing itself "is an efficacious sign of the truth of the saying ['I am the light of the world'] and the divisive, judging effect of the light, alluded to

---

represents the Jew who, having experienced Jesus's healing presence, is also placed in a critical position. While presumably thankful for his cure and presumably sinning no more, he is ignorant about Jesus's identity, apparently sides with the Jews (5, 15), and thus finds himself allied with those who persecuted Jesus (5, 16). Thus both the lame man and the blind man are representative figures in the tradition of the Fourth Gospel, but they are antithetically symbolical to the point that one cannot be understood without the other" (ibid., 42–43).

Staley references Collins (and Culpepper) in his analysis of this scene and then lists what he sees as the points of contact between these texts: "The setting is similar in both instances—pools in Jerusalem—and both unnamed characters are introduced as having long-term disabilities (a thirty-eight year infirmity and blindness from birth). And because both men are healed on the Sabbath, the stories share the similar theological themes of work, sin, and identity of Jesus" ("Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: Reading Character in John 5 and 9," *Semeia* 53 [1991]: 58).

Culpepper outlines eleven points of contract between John 5 and John 9 (*Anatomy*, 139–40; Staley also draws attention to this list in his work ["Stumbling," 58]). One is that in 5:17 "Jesus must work as his Father is working" which parallels what is found in 9:4—the notion that "Jesus must do the works of the one who sent him" (*Anatomy*, 140). Two other similarities are (1) that "Jesus heals on the sabbath" and (2) that the religious leaders "accuse him of violating the sabbath" (ibid., 139).

Concerning any overlap between these narratives, Lindars notes that 9:14 and 5:9 contain "identical expression[s]": ἦν δὲ σάββατον ἐν ᾗ ἡμέρᾳ (*John*, 345). However, he says this while maintaining that "the detail [that this sign took place on the Sabbath] is not part of the original story, but is inserted for the sake of dialogue" (ibid.). Schnackenburg finds a similar verbal parallelism that possibly links these texts together. He observes that "the use of the verb, ἐργάζεσθαι [in v. 4] recalls 5:17" where the same verb is found (*St. John*, 2:241). Lastly, Reimer sees the Sabbath violation of each narrative as indicating "a link" between these texts ("Man Born Blind," 433; see also ibid., 434).

[38] Morris ties the "works of God" in v. 4 with belief in Jesus using 6:29—"Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'" (*John*, 426).

[39] Barrett argues that Jesus's concluding words in ch. 9 indicate that "the 'light and darkness' imagery of 3.19-21 lies behind and explains the present narrative" (*St. John*, 365). John 3 will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

elsewhere (3.19ff., cf. 12.35f., 46)."[40] Additionally, the fact that the miracle immediately follows Jesus's announcement makes Barret's reading certain.[41] Thus, according to John,

---

[40] Ibid., 353. Barrett writes further, "This short chapter expresses perhaps more vividly and completely than any other John's conception of the work of Christ. On the one hand, he is the giver of benefits to a humanity which apart from him is in a state of complete hopelessness: it was never heard that one should open the eyes of a man born blind (v. 32). The illumination is not presented as primarily intellectual (as in some of the Hermetic tractates) but as the direct bestowal of life or salvation (and thus it is comparable with the gift of living water [4.10; 7.37f.] and of the bread of life [6.27]). On the other hand, Jesus does not come into a world full of men aware of their own need. Many have their own inadequate lights (e.g. the Old Testament, 5.39f.) which they are too proud to relinquish for the true light which now shines. The effect of the true light is to blind them, since they willfully close their eyes to it. Their sin abides precisely because they are so confident of their righteousness" (ibid., 354). Or, as Köstenberger puts it, "More than a mere miracle, this sign represents a highly symbolic display of Jesus' ability to cure spiritual blindness" (*John*, 278).

Likewise, Michaels connects Jesus's declaration here (that he is the "light of the world") with its appearance in 8:12. The difference, though, is that Jesus's words in 9:5 lack what is found in second half of 8:12—"whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." This leads Michaels to conclude that "instead of the latter ['whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'], a story will be told in which those promises literally come true. What better vindication of Jesus as 'the Light of the world' than giving sight to a man born blind? At the same time, the pronouncement revisits the Gospel's opening claim that 'In him was life, and that life was the light of humans' (1:4), illuminating 'every human being who comes into the world' (1:9)—even, as Jesus will now demonstrate, one who 'came into the world' unable to see'" (*John*, 545). In the same way, Bennema holds that "although Jesus declared in 8:12 that he is the life-giving light of the world, he was not given the opportunity to explain himself. In 9:5, Jesus reiterates that he is the light of the world, and John 9 essentially clarifies how" (*Encountering Jesus*, 246). Moreover, he finds that "the blind man's physical healing is a sign pointing to Jesus as the giver of true sight and life" (ibid., 248).

A number of scholars maintain that the act itself is meant to reveal Jesus's identity as it displays (φανερωθῇ) the works of God. For example, Collins holds that "this sign is one in which Jesus reveals himself as the light of the world (9:5). The sign of the healing of the man born blind gives dramatic expression to Jesus' affirmation of this (8:12)" ("Johannine Characters," 365). Schnackenburg observes that "Jesus' positive answer in v. 3 … expresses the Johannine idea that in Jesus God accomplishes his works (cf. 5:17,36) and through them glorifies both himself and his Son (11:4). Jesus' actions have a revelatory character (cf. 2:11; 11:40).… God's saving will is to be made manifest in the poor man (ἐν αὐτῷ)" (*St. John*, 2:241). In addition, concerning Jesus's declaration "I am the light of the world," he writes, "The full revelation formula (ἐγώ εἰμι), does not occur, but there is an echo of it. The appeal and the promise are also absent. Here, though, this function is performed by the sign itself, towards which this programmatic explanation points" (ibid., 2:242). In the same way, Kim finds that by having Jesus's saying "I am the light of the world" happen just prior to his healing of the Man Born Blind, "this made sure that they [Jesus' disciples in the narrative] connected His claim and His deed. Like the previous miracles, healing the blind man revealed Jesus' identity" ("John 9," 315). In fact, he sees this entire miracle as an affirmation of Jesus's words in 8:12—"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (ibid., 310).

This fulfillment of John 8:12 in John 9 is seen also in the parallels that exist between these two chapters. J. Dwight Pentecost describes them well: "This incident of the healing of the blind man was an authentication of all that Christ claimed for Himself in the public teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. There He claimed to be the Light of the World (John 8:12), and here He brought light to one born blind. There He claimed to liberate men from sin, Satan, and death (John 8:36), and here He liberated a man from darkness. There He claimed to be the sinless One (John 8:46), and here He defended His sinlessness and offered to forgive the sins of those who would trust in Him. There He claimed to be the preexistent God (John 8:58), and here He was worshiped as God" (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 292; quoted in Kim, "John 9," 316).

Jesus is the light of the world, and one of the works of God that he performs is drawing people into the truth of his identity.[42] This is what he does to the Man Born Blind during their second meeting.[43]

---

[41] As Barrett writes, "The connection with what goes before is very close. Having declared that his mission in the world is to be its light Jesus proceeds at once to illustrate his words by giving light to the blind man, and by judging those who, confident in their own vision, turn their back upon the true light" (*St. John*, 357–58). Likewise, Grigsby describes the situation of John 9 as follows: "This healing dramatically validates Christ's claim within the pericope itself to be the 'light of the world'" ("Washing," 227).

[42] Lindars argues something close to this. He observes that by mentioning that he is the light of the world, Jesus affirms that "the work that he has to do is something that he must do himself, and no one can do for him. It is not the kind of continuation of his ministry which the disciples, and the Church after them, will perform after his exaltation; it is a work which forms part of the revelation about himself, without which his full identity as the Son of God cannot be known. Hence he must seize the God-given opportunity to 'manifest the works of God' which the chance meeting with the blind man has provided" (*John*, 343).

Lindars then presses this further. He connects Jesus's healing of the blind man with mud to Gen 2:7. He writes, "Jesus does exactly what was done in the creation of man in Gen. 2.6f. Hence we are to understand … that the healing is a creative act. The gift of sight corresponds with the light of revelation coming into the world" (ibid., 343). In part, Morris echoes this by recounting that "some of the patristic writers heard in the mention of mud a reference to Genesis 2:7 where man is made out of the dust of the earth. If this is the right way of viewing the passage, we are to discern in Jesus' action a work of creation" (*John*, 427). In a similar way, Moloney supports this reading by holding that because this man has been blind from birth, "the gift of sight, light, and faith to the man is a new creation" (*John*, 296). Keener, however, finds only a possible allusion to Gen 2:7 in Jesus's healing of the blind man by making mud (*John*, 1:780).

Michaels makes a point that is comparable to Lindars's. He shows the overlap between 3:21 and 9:3, and he then contends that "the parallel [between these verses] suggests that the man born blind is the Gospel writer's prime example and embodiment of the person who 'does the truth' and therefore 'comes to the Light.' Consequently, a different interpretation of 'the works of God' presents itself: that is, that they are not so much the miracles of Jesus as the working of God in the man's life, even *before* he met Jesus, setting him apart as the Father's gift to the son…. As such, they are not fully 'revealed' or disclosed in the miracle of restored sight, but only later, when the former blind man finally 'comes to the Light' (3:21) by believing in Jesus (see 9:38). For him the act of believing is not so much a 'conversion experience' as a revelation of that which he is already, a person who by the power of God 'does the truth' (3:21), in sharp contrast to the person 'who practices wicked things' and who therefore 'does not come to the Lord, for fear his works will be exposed' (3:20). On this interpretation, verse 3 seems to have more to do with the blind man's spiritual history than with the mission or miracles of Jesus" (*John*, 542; emphasis original). See also his comments on John 9 on ibid., 41, where he makes the same point as he does here.

In a similar way, Reimers finds that "as such, the Pharisees again serve as fully contrasting characters to the man born blind. Their journey from sight to blindness is as profound as the man's journey from blindness to sight. As Jesus promised to his disciples, the man born blind has indeed provided an occasion for the work of God to be revealed" ("Man Born Blind," 436–37).

[43] As Brown observes, "Before narrating the miracle, the evangelist is careful to have Jesus point out the meaning of the sign as an instance of light coming into darkness" (*John*, 1:376-7). As indicated above, this makes it not only about the healing of a blind man but also the giving of spiritual insight (ibid., 1:377). In addition, Lindars finds that Jesus's words "that the works of God might be displayed in him" are best understood as indicating that "the healing will lead to faith in Jesus" (*John*, 342). His reason for this is that he sees the "works of God" as Jesus's "creative power" and that which is "displayed in him" as meaning "come to light in Jesus' act" (ibid.).

In a related way, Moloney holds that "the works of God" manifest in the Man Born Blind are "this man's journey from blindness to sight" (*John*, 296). Just prior to saying this, he describes "this man's

Beyond the passage's dialogue, what we find in the action of the narrative further confirms Jesus as the cause of blind man's faith. As in Nathanael's conversion, Jesus controls the narrative. He is the one who passes by and sees the Man Born Blind.[44] He heals the man without being asked.[45] He then performs a number of activities that emphasize that he is the main actor of the narrative—he spits on the ground, makes mud, anoints the man's eyes, and commands the blind man to wash.[46]

After the Man Born Blind is healed and has been removed from the synagogue, it is Jesus who finds him again—as is the case with Philip—and who initiates the conversation—as he does with Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman and Mary Magdalene.[47] This is significant since the Man Born Blind ends up worshiping Jesus after this

---

journey" as his movement from "belief in Jesus as 'a man' (v 11)" to "prostrat[ing] himself in belief before Jesus, the one who makes God known, the Son of Man, the Sent One of God, the light of the world" (ibid.). Likewise, as Bennema judges, the Man Born Blind "has experienced Jesus as the sight-giving Light" through the miraculous giving of sight, but "he must still experience him as the life-giving Light" (*Encountering Jesus*, 248). Furthermore, he writes, "The formerly blind man displays a remarkable development in his understanding of Jesus and needs Jesus' assistance only for the last step to reach adequate belief" (ibid., 256).

[44] So also Conway, who finds that this happens with the Man Born Blind and the Samaritan Woman (*Men and Women*, 127). In fact, his introduction to the narrative occurs through the eyes of Jesus (ibid.). As will be seen below, this narrative reflects the confession scenes that come before it and those that come after it.

[45] Likewise, Barrett *St. John*, 353; Staley, "Stumbling," 65; Schneiders, "To See," 192. As Barett puts it, Jesus is the one who "takes the initiative" (*St. John*, 358; so also Duke, *Irony*, 119; Köstenberger, *John*, 282).

[46] So Thompson *John*, 207. Additionally, Kok notes, "In the healing narrative, it is Jesus who acts as the subject and initiates both the interaction with the blind man and the resultant healing act" ("Healing," 48).

[47] Barrett emphasizes that it is "Jesus therefore, taking the initiative (cf. 5.14), as he must, *finds* the man" (*St. John*, 364; so also Carson, *John*, 375; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 184; Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 140 n. 96; Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 436). However, Köstenberger is hesitant to suggest that v. 35 demands direct action on the part of Jesus and simply writes that "Jesus probably sought him out" (*John*, 294). With that said, he holds that "if so, this would be in keeping with the portrait of Jesus as the 'good shepherd' in the ensuing discourse'" (ibid.). I do not take Köstenberger's view but rather that of Barrett.

In addition, Conway notices the parallel between the Man Born Blind and the Samaritan Woman here—they both do not "initiate the encounter with Jesus" (*Men and Women*, 127). In fact, throughout her discussion on John 9:1-41, Conway draws a number of connections between the figure of the Samaritan Woman and the Man Born Blind (ibid., 125–35). Keener implicitly connects this act of finding with the Samaritan Woman's narrative and he directly ties it to Philip's. He argues, "The Father seeks true worshipers (4:23), and Jesus, who does the Father's will (9:3-4), seeks this man out in 9:35; parallel language in 1:43 and 5:14 strongly suggests that this description implies Jesus' intention" (*John*, 1:794).

exchange, and it is ultimately a dramatic portrayal of John 4:23-24—Jesus as God incarnate seeking out a true worshipper, the Man Born Blind.[48]

Thus Jesus's actions move the narrative forward. If he had not acted, the blind man would have remained without both sight and faith. Jesus's actions are directly tied to this believer's spiritual transformation.[49] The fact that this is how Jesus works in other Johannine confession scenes reflects a consistent pattern and intentionality on the part of the author.

5.1.2 Irony

As in the other confession scenes, John's irony in this narrative (specifically vv. 35-38) reiterates that Jesus's activity is the cause of the Man Born Blind's faith. Jesus finds the Man Born Blind after he is expelled from the synagogue and asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35b).[50] At this moment, one would expect him to

---

[48] As Steegen describes it, "When Jesus heard that the Pharisees had cast the man born blind out of the synagogue, he went out looking for the man and found him (9,35). In 4,23b it is the Father who seeks the true worshippers. In chapter nine, the characteristics attributed to God in 4,23b are attributed to Jesus, since Jesus went out looking for the man and found him (cf. 5,14). This search is not to be understood as a passive waiting. As demonstrated by the use of the indicative present active of the verb ζητέω, it is to be understood as an active search for true worshippers. The Father accomplishes his search by the sending of his Son (cf. 6,65; 15,1-2)" ("Worship," 548-49). Or, as John Christopher Thomas puts it, "The man's belief in Jesus is made explicit when he is given opportunity to confess, 'I believe, Lord' and to worship (προσεκύνησεν) Jesus, in keeping with the true worship of which Jesus spoke in his words to the Samaritan woman in 4.23" ("Healing in the Atonement: A Johannine Perspective," *JPT* 14 [2005]: 29). Keener also sees 4:23 reflected in Jesus's seeking out of the blind man in v. 35 (*John*, 1:794).

[49] Schnackenburg makes the assessment that "Jesus seeks the man out *with the intention of leading him to faith*" (*St. John*, 2:253; emphasis added). In fact, he connects this act to John 6:37 and 10:3, stating, "Jesus, hearing of the man's exclusion, takes responsibility for him, since he will not reject anyone the Father brings to him (6:37 οὐ μὴ ἐκβάλω ἔξω! [*sic*]). He calls by name everyone who belongs to his flock (10:3)" (ibid., 2:252-53). Additionally, Thompson connects Jesus's finding of the Man Born Blind not only to Jesus's creation of one flock but also to his later promise in 14:18 that he will not "leave you as orphans." She holds that "since the man's parents are willing to make him an orphan, he will need a family and a place to belong. Jesus' subsequent act of seeking and finding the man (9:35) embody his promise to his followers that he will not leave them as orphans (14:18). In his ministry, Jesus gathers together those who have been cast out or scattered by others and makes of them one flock" (*John*, 215). This act of gathering is a consistent theme in John, which this narrative and the other confession scenes reflect.

[50] My description of the irony found in vv. 35-39 matches Duke's (*Irony*, 123; quoted in Conway, *Men and Women*, 134). He observes the pattern of a character saying κύριος followed by Jesus's self-revelation. He calls it an "irony of identity" (*Irony*, 123; quoted in Conway, *Men and Women*, 133). He also

proclaim that Jesus is the Christ: he seems to identify with Jesus's disciples in v. 27 by asking, "You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" and he has already been expelled from the synagogue in v. 33.[51] However, he responds with ignorance, "And who is he, sir (κύριε), that I may believe in him?" (9:36).[52] Ironically, the person in whom the Man Born Blind wants to believe asks him if he has faith in that individual. In his response, the Man Born Blind says more than he realizes. He calls Jesus Lord (καὶ τίς ἐστιν, κύριε) without knowing that he is the Lord.[53] Furthermore, after the Man Born

---

shows how this ironic situation matches what appears in the narratives of the Samaritan Woman and Mary Magdalene, a position that I take (*Irony*, 123). I outline his argument in greater detail in note 56.

[51] Some commentators see these events as indicating the Man Born Blind's faith. For instance, Köstenberger holds that the Man Born Blind's second question in v. 27 ("You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?") "implies that he already considers himself to be Jesus' disciple" (*John*, 290). Likewise, as Morris (who is referenced by Köstenberger) recognizes, "His 'too' is significant. He was now counting himself among Jesus' disciples" (*John*, 437; so also Michaels, *John*, 559). Conway makes a comparable argument. She writes, "Significantly, the man's question to the authorities is also the first indication that he may understand himself to have become a disciple of Jesus. The retort from the authorities accents this fact as they point out, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses' (v. 28)" (*Men and Women*, 131–32). In like manner, Reimer maintains that the blind man's comment in v. 27 "allows the Pharisees to declare explicitly what has only become evident implicitly – the man born blind is, as they suggest with score, a 'disciple of Jesus'" ("Man Born Blind," 436). He says this but ultimately concludes that the Man Born Blind is "rewarded with full blown faith" (ibid.), and he has the "full reception of spiritual sight in the concluding scene" (ibid., 437). In the same way, Farelly reads v. 27 as "the blind man's implicit acknowledgment of his discipleship before the Pharisees" (*Disciples*, 53–54).

Concerning the expulsion from the synagogue and its possible illustration of the Man Born Blind's faith, Lindars reasons that "it [the phrase 'put him out'] suggests the excommunication mentioned in verses 22, and this in its turn implies that the man's affirmation in verse 33 is equivalent to a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah" (*John*, 349). Morris contends that this act is "a stronger disciplinary action against a stubborn heretic" (*John*, 438). One possible rebuttal to these claims comes from an observation of Thompson. She notices that "the man is eventually driven away (v. 34) for his presumption, not his confession of Jesus as Messiah" (*John*, 212).

[52] The question καὶ τίς ἐστιν can be taken to have two different meanings. As Barrett summarizes, this phrase can suggest "(i) I do not know what Son of man means. Who is this person? What are his functions, etc.?" or "(ii) I know sufficiently what Son of man means. But who among men is the Son of man? How can he be identifies?" (*St. John*, 364). Barrett rightly concludes that "the reply here suggests (ii)" (ibid.).

[53] In fact, Barrett says that "if the word [κύριε] is to be interpreted as used in a historical dialogue it should be rendered 'Sir,' though it must have a different sense in the confession of faith in v. 38. But it is doubtful whether John intended to make this distinction" (ibid.,).

Blind ironically calls Jesus "Lord," Jesus reveals his identity and the Man Born Blind replies again with κύριος but this time with its intended meaning.[54]

The result is that by using irony John demonstrates that prior to Jesus's self-revelation the Man Born Blind is unable to identify who Jesus is. He converses with Jesus and politely calls him κύριος. Yet, it is not until Jesus reveals who he really is that the blind man has faith.[55] This use of irony is not unique to the pericope. In the narratives of the Samaritan Woman (4:11; 4:15; 4:19) and Mary Magdalene (20:15-16), we find Jesus conversing with a soon-to-be confessor, an initial polite κύριος from that figure, and then a declaration of faith.[56] Again, this reflects a consistent pattern which suggests authorial intent—this is how John utilizes his characters.[57]

---

[54] As Reimer remarks, "Double entendre drips from the man's use of 'lord' (κύριε). While possible nothing more than a respectful address in 9:36, it becomes a theologically rich confession in 9:38" ("Man Born Blind," 436). See n. 11, 13, and 15 above on pp. 168-69.

[55] Brown states that "it seems appropriate to indicate a development from vs. 36 to vs. 38 in the use of the term [κύριος]" (*John*, 1:375).

[56] I am not the first to notice this pattern nor am I alone in finding it in the narratives of the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and Mary Magdalene. Duke does as well, observing, "In all three cases, a character, not knowing who Jesus is, addresses him as *kurie* and makes reference to Messiah/Son of man/Jesus—thought to be absent. In all three Jesus then quickly reveals his identity in the most appropriate way. To the woman at the well who is given to misunderstanding he speaks directly, 'I am he, the one speaking to you' (4:26). With his dear friend at the tomb, he need only call her name (20:16). Now to the man born blind Jesus beams and says, '*You have seen him* and he is the one speaking to you' (vs. 37)" (*Irony*, 123; emphasis original; quoted in Conway, *Men and Women*, 134). Schnackenburg notes the similarities between the Man Born Blind's conversation with Jesus and Samaritan Woman's. He details that "the following scene with Jesus' clear revelation of himself recalls Jesus' behaviour towards the Samaritan woman (4:23-26); questioning expectation of the Messiah is met by Jesus with immediate fulfillment" (*St. John*, 2:253).

[57] Another instance of irony worth noting is the fact that the Pharisees demand that the Man Born Blind "give glory to God." This is most likely "an oath formula," as Brown reports, but it also may be "a play on words" since "the blind man will give glory to God" (*John*, 1:374; so also Köstenberger, *John*, 289). In the same way, Moloney sees a "subtle irony here as the man born blind will eventually give glory to God in his witness to Jesus" (*John*, 298; so also Keener, who maintains that the witnessing and suffering of the Man Born Blind are ways to bring glory to God according to the Fourth Gospel [*John*, 1:789]). Additionally, Michaels recognizes the irony of this command and sees it being fulfilled in the man's testimony and future worship of Jesus (*John*, 558). Thus the Man Born Blind does as these individuals ask.

5.1.3 Plotting

Like the plots of the confession scenes that come before it, this one underscores the need for Jesus's direct action for spiritual transformation to take place as it is yet again the passage's *transformative action*. The *initial situation* is vv. 1-7, the healing of a man born blind from birth.[58] The conflict of the text follows, and the question throughout is how this happened and who Jesus is. Concerning the second of these, the characters provide two clear but contradictory positions: either Jesus is not from God (the Pharisees) or he is (the Man Born Blind). This debate occurs during the *complication*, vv. 8-34.

John resolves this tension with the *transformative action* (9:35-37). Jesus finds the Man Born Blind and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man (9:35). His response, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" precedes Jesus's direct personal revelation—"You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." (9:37).[59] This leads to the *dénouement*—the blind man's confession and worship (9:38), Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisees (9:39), and the Pharisee's response (9:40). The *final situation* is Jesus's answer to the Pharisees and his teaching on the good shepherd (9:41-10:21).[60] This plotting (excluding 10:1-21) is depicted below.

---

[58] Witherington groups vv. 1-7 together and labels them "introduction and narration of the miracle" (*Wisdom*, 180).

[59] As Carson points out, what Jesus has to say during the transformative action in 9:37 looks very much like his revelatory words to the Samaritan Woman in 4:26 (*John*, 376; so also Moloney, *John*, 298; Keener, *John*, 1:795). This is again an instance of overlap between John's confession scenes.

[60] Lindars goes farther in his view of the reach of this pericope. He argues that "the result [of the Man Born Blind being shown to have faith and the Pharisees unbelief] is that the ground is prepared for the final revelation of the identity of Jesus, which will be given in chapter 10. This is the fact that he and the Father are one (10.30). This can only be understood and accepted by those whose minds have been enlightened, because it is known only through experience of the analogous relationship of believers themselves to Jesus. This point is asserted in the allegory of the shepherd and the sheep in 10.1-18. But the allegory also takes into account the blindness of the Pharisees. They are 'blind guides' (Mt. 23.16), who 'shut the kingdom of heaven against men', and 'neither enter' themselves 'nor allow those who would enter to go in' (Mt. 23.13). They are not, therefore, in the right condition to accept the revelation of the unity of Jesus with the Father" (*John*, 338). In addition, Moloney sees a strong connection between 9:1-41 and 10:1-

Initial Situation	1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.
Complication	8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22 (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So for the second time they

21. He maintains that "no break occurs between 9:41 and 10:1. The final encounter between Jesus and the man born blind in 9:35-38 is matched by the encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees in 9:39-10:21. Jesus addresses an unnamed audience in v. 39, and 'some of the Pharisees' respond in v. 40. Their words, in turn, generate Jesus' reflection that begins in v. 41 but develops into the discourse of 10:1-18. It is on the basis of 9:39-41 that 10:1-21 unfolds" (*John*, 300). Furthermore, Moloney reports that "there is increasing scholarly consensus that 9:1-39 and 10:1-21 form a literary unity" (ibid., 308).

	called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.
Transformative Action	35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."
Dénouement	38 He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"
Final Situation	41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

As a result, the structure of this text indicates that the narrative's tension (who is this Jesus?) is resolved with Jesus's direct action. He affirms and furthers the blind man's earlier assessment—that Jesus is from God and that the Pharisees are blind. As the narrative is designed, the Man Born Blind exclaims Jesus's true identity only because Jesus engages him in conversation and divulges his true nature. Without this, he does not even know where Jesus is (9:12) or that Jesus is the Son of Man (9:35).

5.1.4 The Man Born Blind's Development

The characterization of the Man Born Blind and how he develops as a character also promotes John's spiritual transformation. The author's initial description of this figure is bleak. He is someone who has been born blind (9:1) and his blindness is assumed to be caused by sin (9:2).[61] One would assume that with the removal of his blindness, his community would no longer take this view. However, this is not the case. Because he thinks that Jesus is from God, the Pharisees charge him with being "born in utter sin" (ἐν ἁμαρτίαις σὺ ἐγεννήθης ὅλος) and he is cast out of the synagogue (9:34).

What we discover, then, is a stark contrast between how the Pharisees handle him and how Jesus does as well as between Jesus's view of the blind man and the Pharisees.[62] The Pharisees consider the Man Born Blind ritually impure—"You were born in utter sin" (9:34b)—and it is possible that the disciples' do as well—"who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2b).[63] Yet Jesus judges him clean—"It was not

---

[61] As Resseguie remarks, "Similar to the invalid at the pool, the blind man is a waif of society, at the margins of both the culture and the text. He is nameless with identifiable traits of the marginalized: blind and a sinner. The disciples enhance his marginalization by treating him as an *object* of curiosity to settle an obscure theological debate" (*Strange Gospel*, 139; emphasis original).

[62] See n. 28 on above pp. 172-73.

[63] Ferguson reports that "behind the Pharisaic separation from sinners lay their concern for ritual purity" (*Early Christianity*, 484). Moreover, as Morris notes, "It was widely held that suffering, and especially such a disaster as blindness was due to sin. The general principle was laid down by R. Ammi: 'There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity' [Shab. 55a]. The disciples evidently accepted this, but in the present case were perplexed as to the application of the dogma" (*John*, 424–25). According to Abraham P. Bloch, Rabbi Ammi dates to the third century according to (*The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* [New York: Ktav, 1980], 68). Keener recounts that "ancients held that wrongdoing caused a variety of maladies. Thus the gods and Fate often sent punishment like (ἴσος) the crime; Jewish sources, including both early sages and sectarian sources as well as later rabbis, recite the same principle. In many Greco-Roman sources, God or the gods punished with physical afflictions, including blindness; in Jewish sources, sickness often stemmed from sin" (*John*, 1:777). Kok describes the first-century situation that is reflected in the disciples' question and the Pharisees' response: "Illness and diseases are often linked to impurity and brokenness and seen as the act opposite of wholeness and life. Impurity, in turn, is connected to sin.… If someone occupies an impure state, it serves as a sign that God has in some sense withdrawn from the person. Sick people, like the blind, were socio-religious fringe figures, who usually had to beg in order to survive" ("Healing," 49). Kok then summarizes the connection between blindness and death in antiquity along with some poignant

that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (9:3b). In fact, as Michaels discerns, forgiveness of sins is not brought up after the man's conversion because "Jesus has long before made it clear (v. 3) that his sins (whatever they may have been) are not the issue here."[64]

After the Man Born Blind's interrogation, the Pharisees expel him from their presence (9:34), but Jesus finds him (9:35).[65] When the Man Born Blind confesses Jesus to be the Lord and worships him, Jesus declares that the reason he "came into this world" is "for judgement" (9:39). What is his decision? He affirms that the blind man (and those like him) ought to be given sight and that Pharisees (and those like them) should be made blind.

In this, Jesus teaches that the reality of things is quite different from what everyone assumes.[66] The Pharisees have sight, but Jesus has now made them blind, and

---

observations from Jewish sources (ibid., 50–52). He points out that in Rabbinic writings, "the mute, drunk, nude, blind and sexually impure were not allowed to bring sacrifices," and at Qumran, "the blind were, on a religious level, thought of as inferior and were prohibited from entering the temple, the symbol of God's divine presence" (ibid., 51). Kok does not specify which temple he is discussing at this point—future or present from the perspective of the original author(s)—but simply discusses "the temple." Ultimately, many commentators point out that "a direct causal relationship between sin and sickness was still alive in Jesus' time," as Brown puts it (*John*, 1:371). E.g., Barrett, *St. John*, 356; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:240; Carson, *John*, 361; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 182; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 246. Additionally, some interpreters place the Pharisees and Jesus's disciples on the same theological plane because of their view of the Man Born Blind and sin. Farelly holds that the Pharisees and the disciples "held similar assumptions about physical blindness" (*Disciples*, 53). Reimer maintains that "both Jesus' disciples (a sympathetic but naive group character) and the Pharisees (the antagonist group character) take it as a given that a man born blind as such was 'born into sin,' his own or his parents, but either way fully tarnished and justly punished with blindness" ("Man Born Blind," 432). The specific phrase "ritually impure" comes from a private conversation with Julian Hills.

[64] Michaels, *John*, 569.

[65] As Brown observes, "This [Jesus's finding of the Man Born Blind] is contrasted with the action of the Pharisees in driving him out, and it illustrates Jesus' promise in vi 37: 'Anyone who comes to me I will never drive out'" (*John*, 1:375).

[66] Keener recognizes this reversal. He writes, "Contrary to what the elite supposed (9:34), the man was not born blind due to a sin (9:2-3), nor was his healer a sinner (9:16, 24); by contrast, the elite themselves are sinful and spiritually blind (9:39-41)" (*John*, 1:775). See also footnote 28.

the blind man could not see, but he has now been given sight.[67] Moreover, in the beginning of the pericope, Jesus establishes that there was no wrongdoing that produced his ailment. In fact, his blindness is not to be associated with sin, as the inquiry of 9:2 suggests.[68] Its purpose was good: he is blind so that God's works can be made manifest (9:3).[69]

On the other hand, the Pharisees' sight solidifies their guilt. Because they think that they see, Jesus affirms that their "guilt (ἁμαρτία) remains" (9:41).[70] Since in John unbelief is sin (8:24; 16:9), Jesus's statement here makes sense in the context of the Gospel.[71] Furthermore, the inverse of this declaration must also be true: any guilt (ἁμαρτία) the Man Born Blind might have had no longer remains because he now sees.[72]

---

[67] Commentators point out that the blind man now sees and the Pharisees do not. E.g., Brown, *John*, 1:377; Lindars, *John*, 338.

[68] Of note is the fact that Duke considers sin to be a "recurring motif … in this chapter," and he maintains that 9:2 "serves both to clarify the purpose of Jesus' signs and to initiate" this theme (*Irony*, 118).

[69] Barrett understands 9:3 as "John's positive account of the purpose of the man's suffering" (*St. John*, 356). Likewise, Schnackenburg describes Jesus's "answer in v. 3" as "positive" (*St. John*, 2:241). Concerning v. 38, Morris asks, "Why was the man born blind? He [the author] does not answer it in set terms, but at least he ends the story with the man entering into such a blessing that he may well have given thanks for all the way that God has led him. The healing of his blindness had resulted in sight, both physical and spiritual" (*John*, 440). Köstenberger argues that Jesus's response indicates that "the thought here is that even evil ultimately contributes to the greater glory of God" (*John*, 281). Michaels interprets Jesus's words as indicating that "he [Jesus] views the man's blindness from birth not as tragedy but as opportunity. This is commonly understood to mean that the man's blindness affords Jesus an opportunity to work a miracle" (*John*, 541). In a similar way, Kok finds that Jesus's words here express that "the man's blindness was an ideal opportunity for Jesus to use him in order to illustrate God's power and reveal his true identity" ("Healing," 48).

[70] The fact that John says that their sin remains (μένω) may be significant. As Duke notes, "Given the hallowed tone with which the Johannine community used the word *menein*, to say of anyone that 'sin remains' is a particularly horrible judgment" (*Irony*, 125). Furthermore, Michaels specifies the logic of Jesus's affirmation. He judges that "Jesus can tell these Pharisees, 'Your sin remains' simply on the basis of what he views as their pretension to 'see,' and their consequent unwillingness to do what the man born blind has just done" (*John*, 575–76). Likewise, Reimer understands Jesus as saying that the Pharisees' "failure to see their own blindness is … the cause of their sin remaining" ("Man Born Blind," 437).

[71] Michaels, *John*, 575. As Michaels specifics, "'Sin' in John's Gospel is consistently understood as unbelief (see, for example, 8:24; 16:9), and this passage is no exception" (ibid.; the above citations come from this reference). So also Kok, "Healing," 52.

[72] Köstenberger suggests something similar to this when he writes, "Thus, while the Pharisees' guilt remains, the man walks home not only with his physical sight restored but also spiritually changed—a believer and worship of Jesus" (*John*, 278; so also Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 437).

In the end, the position of each set of characters is inverted and shown to be the opposite of what one would have thought. The Pharisees are sinners and the Man Born Blind is not.[73] Jesus makes this known.

On top of this, the identity of the Man Born Blind slowly changes through the course of the narrative. In the eyes of the other characters in this scene, the Man Born Blind moves from being perceived as a blind man to being identified as one of Jesus's disciples.[74] This change is observed through how the narrator and others classify him, as well as how they treat him. As the scene opens, the narrator brands him as "a man blind from birth" (9:1) and his "neighbors" categorize him as "a beggar" (9:8).[75] In fact, his

---

[73] As Reimer puts it, "The supposedly sinful blind man sees and is shown not to be a sinner, while the seeing men are blind and so remain in sin. In an ironic twist on the disciples' question that opens the chapter, Jesus suggests the Pharisees too might have been shown to be the innocent blind had they but given up their claims to sight" (ibid.). Moreover, Thompson argues that "this discourse is punctuated by queries about who can properly be called a 'sinner': the healed man (9:2-3,34), Jesus (vv. 16, 24, 25, 31), or the Pharisees (v. 41)? The connection between 'sin' and 'sight' shows that the true sinners are those who fail to perceive God's work of giving light in darkness through the work of Jesus. Even as 'the works of God' were redefined as the singular 'work' of having faith in Jesus (6:29), so here the work that does not please God, that which is sin, is *not* to heal on the Sabbath, but to reject the one sent by God who has done such a healing. Those who do not believe are not labeled wicked, immoral, or unjust: their sin is unbelief (cf. 8:24)" (*John*, 217; emphasis original).

On a related note, although the Pharisees are trying Jesus, it turns out that they are the ones on trial and ultimately found guilty (9:41). This comes from Duke. He identifies the irony of the passage to be the contrast between the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees who claim to know rightly with the heavenly insight of the blind man who expresses constant ignorance (*Irony*, 124-25). He then illustrates this irony by depicting the "author's juxtaposition of parallel scenes" (ibid., 125). The illustration of this irony that he creates appears on ibid. 126. This leads him to conclude that "the theme [expressed by this irony] is clearly trial and judgment. The Pharisees begin by trying Jesus *in absentia*. When the evidence upholds him, and their star witness defends him, they quickly pronounce Jesus guilty and put the man on trial, whom they also find guilty and condemn to exile. Jesus' appearance then vindicates the man and reveals dramatically that it is the Pharisees who have been on trial—and their guilt remains" (ibid., 126).

[74] Conway describes the Man Born Blind's development in this way: "As the man born blind is variously approached and interrogated, the reader can detect a steady development in his character. He moves from being an object of a theological debate (vv. 1-3) to a subject confessing belief in Jesus as the Son of Man (v. 38)" (*Men and Women*, 126).

[75] As Conway illustrates, "Like the Samaritan woman, the character in chapter nine is introduced only by means of an epithet, ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς (v. 1)—he is never given a proper name. His blindness is his defining feature and initially the narrator provides no additional information that might distract from this particular characteristic" (ibid., 127). Moreover, but although somewhat speculative, Barrett suggests that the descriptor "blind from birth" may be John's way of underscoring that "mankind is not by nature receptive of the light (cf. 1.5, 10f.). Man is spiritually blind from birth" (*St. John*, 356; so also Carson, *John*, 361). Likewise, Schneiders states, "This blindness is symbolic of the universal congenital incapacity for divine life that must be overcome through birth anew/from above/by water and the Spirit (cf.

initial status is shown to be so insignificant that, as Reimer observes, "the blind man is introduced, but he exists 'outside' the dialogue that takes place between Jesus and his disciples. He is the object of conversation, but clearly he is not party to the conversation."[76] Nonetheless, after his healing, the man's neighbors are unable to tell if he is who claims to be. There is confusion: "Some said, 'It is he.' Others said, 'No, but he is like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man'" (9:9).[77]

With the Pharisees the same debate occurs—"the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight"—and the Man Born Blind moves from being "brought to the Pharisees" (9:13) to being cast out by them because of his ideas about Jesus (9:34).[78] The author foreshadows this event and gives it significance in 9:22. His parents do not want to talk about how the Man Born Blind was healed because they do not want to be removed from the synagogue as those who confess Jesus are.[79] Consequently, once the formerly blind man is expelled from the synagogue, the reader

---

3:3, 5). It is not due to sin, but provides the arena for God's salvific work (cf. 9:3)" ("To See," 190). Duke also finds there to be a connection between this man's blindness and what John thinks about all people—that they are spiritually blind. However, he makes his case by pointing to the fact that the Man Born Blind "is not even called *tis anthrōpos*, but simply *anthrōpos*, thus de-emphasizing his particularity and hinting that for John all humankind is born blind" (*Irony*, 118).

[76] Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 431.

[77] Schnackenburg expounds on how shocking these conflicting responses are. He writes, "Since he had been a beggar, he had previously been seen by many people; he is a familiar sight.… It is so incredible that a discussion begins in the group about whether he is that beggar or only looks like him" (*St. John*, 2:246).

[78] The group identified in v. 19 as "the Jews" is the same constellation of characters labelled "the Pharisees" in v. 13 (Carson, *John*, 368; so also Moloney, *John*, 297; Conway, *Men and Women*, 130; Michaels, *John*, 552).

[79] A number of exegetes maintain that John is intentionally comparing the blind man's reaction to Jesus and that of his parents. As Conway describes the scene: "In terms of characterization of the man born blind, his parents are set up as a foil. Their fear and timidity before the authorities presents a sharp contract to the courage of their son" (*Men and Women*, 131; so also Reimer, "Man Born Blind," 435; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 251; Thompson, *John*, 215).

ought to think of 9:22 and know that this means that he is to become one who confesses Jesus as the Christ.[80]

As detailed above on vv. 35-39, the man's conversation with Jesus confirms two things. First, he is not yet a believer—as his response to Jesus in 9:36 makes clear: "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" (9:36). Yet second, he is on his way to becoming one and he believes because of his discourse with Jesus. By 9:38, his transformation is complete and this section of narrative highlights this with ἄνθρωπος. The *man* who was born blind (ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς) now confesses Jesus to be the Lord and believes that he is "Son of *Man*" (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).[81] He is now a disciple of Jesus—a person expelled from the synagogue and a worshiper of Christ. This shift is dramatic and takes place because of Jesus's direct involvement.

Consequently, with the figure of the Man Born Blind we see a confessing character act out John's theology of spiritual transformation. This is his role in the text.[82]

---

[80] Likewise, Staley finds that v. 22 is important for understanding what has happened and what will happen in the narrative. He writes, "The narrator's explanation of the parents' fear (9:22-23) opens up another narrative gap, one that forces the reader to reevaluate the healed man's earlier conversation with the Pharisees. It also will make the reader even more attentive to the healed man's future confessions" ("Stumbling," 67–68). Additionally, many commentators see v. 22 as standing behind the expulsion of the Man Born Blind in v. 34—i.e., the reader is to understand v. 34 in light of v. 22. E.g., Lindars, *John*, 349; Barrett, *St. John*, 349; Carson, *John*, 375; Conway, *Men and Women*, 133; Keener, *John*, 1:794; Michaels, *John*, 564. Some even see it as indicating that the Pharisees view what the man has just said as a confession of faith (ibid.; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 253). Lindars sees v. 22 as indicating that the man's statements in v. 33 are "equivalent to a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah" (*John*, 349).

[81] Duke finds a link between Jesus being the Son τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and the word ἄνθρωπος elsewhere in the narrative. Nonetheless, he locates it in a different place. He writes, "The *how* question of the neighbors has been answered, 'The *anthrōpos*, the one called Jesus….' Now when Jesus appears he is Son of man. Scholars often note that 'Son of man' in verse 35 is a bit surprising; we expect 'Son of God.' Quite possibly, the title is used here because the theme is one of judgment. In view of the man's remark in verse 11, however, and the Pharisees' contemptuous use of *man* for Jesus in verse 16 and 24, 'Son of man' in verse 35 serves a crucial ironic function, fulfilling and expanding the healed man's word and mocking the contempt of his accusers" (*Irony*, 124).

[82] Morris represents a view close to this. Concerning v. 39, he maintains that "in one sense he did not come to judge people (3:17; 12:47). But for all that his coming represents a judgment, for people divide according to the way they react to that coming (see on 3:18; 8:15). The coming of light shows who are spiritually blind and thus judges them; judgment is not the purpose of the coming of light, but it is an inevitable consequence. In this passage the thought is worked out in terms of sight and blindness. The result

His conversion is shown to be dependent upon Jesus's direct action. As we turn to the final confession of the Gospel and this project, the same will be found. Thomas once more puts on display the theology of spiritual transformation that the author articulates throughout his work.

5.2 Thomas (John 20:24-29)

Thomas's narrative is the last in a series of post-resurrection appearance (20:11-18; 20:19-23; 20:24-29) and confessions scenes (20:16; 20:18; 20:25; 20:28) that conclude with the Gospel's purpose statement (20:30-31).[83] Given its context and the examples of belief that come before it, it is not surprising to discover that Thomas comes to faith through Jesus's direct involvement. In the pericopes that precede 20:24-29, this is the case for both Mary Magdalene's (20:11-18) and other disciples' belief (20:19-23). In each scene, these characters declare Jesus to be "the Lord" (20:18; 20:25; see also 20:20)

---

of Jesus' coming is that blind people see" (*John*, 441). Furthermore, he argues, "We must understand the concluding words to mean 'those who claim to have spiritual sight (apart from me) may be shown up for the blind people that they really are'" (*John*, 441).

[83] Bonney makes the same observation. He sees Thomas's narrative as "the last of four scenes relating to his [Jesus's] resurrection," and he finds that "John closely connects the appearance to Thomas with the gospel's purpose statement (20:30-31)" (*Caused to Believe*, 144, 145). Furthermore, he contends that in these scenes "John conditions his readers to perceive the action of the risen Jesus in the transformation of those who are to become his witnesses. This transformative act John illustrates most clearly in the case of Thomas. Jesus completely overturns Thomas' mode of comprehension as he manifests himself, not as Thomas' merely human teacher who died and is somehow come back to life, but as his God, his source of life (cf. 11:25)" (ibid., 145).

Suggesting that the three confession scenes of ch. 20 are linked is an observation that some commentators make. Piasecki holds that the way John 20 is structured provides 20:24-29 "even greater accent" than that of Nathanael's in John 1 ("Nathanael," 103). She finds that "what begins a group apparition of the Risen Lord, a starting point with firm traditional foundation in the post-resurrectional accounts of the other evangelists, ends with a focusing in on the faith and the response of a single disciple whose characterization appears in no other Gospel 'official' post-resurrection apparition account" (ibid.). Thomas Popp also draws a connection between John 1 and 20. He observes that here, as in ch. 1, we have "Johannine characters coming to faith in a consecutive, chain-like manner" ("Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann, *Character Studies*, 513–14). Keener reveals the interrelated nature of the confessions of chs. 20 and 21 with the repetition of "Lord" (*The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997], 2:1167).

because he has revealed his identity to them (20:16; 20:21-23).[84] This situation is then reflected in Thomas's confession as well. He makes a similar declaration of faith—"My Lord and my God!" (20:28b)—for the same reason—Jesus's self-revelation (20:27).[85]

---

[84] Lindars proposes that Lord "may be used here [v. 20] and in verse 25 in order to prepare for Thomas' confession of faith" (*John*, 611). In addition, Michaels notes that the confession of Mary Magdalene in v. 18 mirrors the disciples' in v. 25 (*John*, 1015). He also advances the idea that the faith of 20:18 and 20:20 comes about because these individuals see Jesus in the same way that Thomas does (ibid., 1019). Bonney refers to 2:22 and 12:16 to emphasize that the appearance of Jesus in 20:19-23 was "the cause that brings about the understanding of the disciples" (*Caused to Believe*, 157). Schnackenburg argues that "the eirenic greeting, the normal Jewish salutation, to begin with serves the same purpose as the way in which Mary was addressed (v. 16)," and that "when the risen one shows his hands and his sides to the disciples (v. 20a), that is not without motive – he causes his recognition by Mary by calling her by name and by his voice" (*St. John*, 3:323, 3:322).

[85] As mentioned in Chapter Three, Lindars finds that the Fourth Evangelist includes traditions concerning the resurrection in the way that he does so as to "to present one theme to the reader"—specifically, "the act of faith" (*John*, 595). He holds that "John has expanded the underlying tradition by bringing into it a particular person, who is the subject of John's own elaboration of it, and embodies his real interest in the nature of the act of faith" (ibid.). See also ibid., 598-99.

Furthermore, Bennema maintains that "the common element in the three encounters [of John 20] is that a tangible experience with the risen Jesus leads to or confirms faith" (*Encountering Jesus*, 290). He even says that these characters "need a tangible experience with the risen Lord to confirm a saving relationship with him" (ibid.). Additionally, Moloney states that "the risen Jesus led these fragile disciples [Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas] through their hesitation into authentic belief" (*John*, 538). This is said in the context of discussing v. 29 and future disciples who will not see Jesus. Bonney argues that John 20:24-29 depicts Jesus as "the object of Thomas' faith and as the one who makes his faith possible" (*Caused to Believe*, 158; see also 160, 161, 167-68, 169).

Likewise, Popp states both that in John 20, "faith is made possible through the coming of Jesus," and that "this coming to faith is a gift and an invitation" ("Thomas," 518). Nevertheless, he wavers between Jesus as the cause of Thomas's faith and Thomas as the one who accepts Jesus's offer (ibid., 519). He writes, "The text is about awakening the faith of the believers and strengthening their responsibility to move toward mature faith. It reveals the Christ event as a salvific, transformative event centering on a personal relationship" (ibid.). I do not see Thomas as one who accepts Jesus's offer to believe, but as an individual who obeys his command.

Sylva proposes that there are a number of similarities between Thomas and Nathanael, one of which is "the type of prerequisite that each has before they will believe: an experience of the divine in their lives" (*Thomas*, 97). Concerning Nathanael's narrative, he holds that by observing that Nathanael was under the fig tree, "Jesus appears to be evoking for Nathanael a specific experience of the sacred that this character had" since "trees often were considered to be sacred places" (ibid.). Regarding Thomas, Sylva suggests that Thomas sees what was promised to Nathanael in 1:51 (ibid., 97–98). He writes, "The appearance of the name of Thomas right before the name of Nathanael [in 21:2] … juxtaposes the disciple whom Jesus promises to see 'the gate of heaven' with the disciple who will not believe in such an access until he sees it" (ibid.). Ultimately, Sylva judges that "Jesus provides him [Thomas] in John 20 with the faith that re-energized and supported his loyalty" (ibid., 106).

Although I will not discuss 20:23, Thompson makes the following claim when commenting on it and what she says there reflects the view that I present below. She writes, "Since, in John, sin is understood primarily as unbelief that leads to death (8:21, 34; 9:41; 15:22, 24; 16:9), Jesus takes away sin by revealing, in word and deed, that he is the agent of God's life, and Jesus calls for faith in himself. It is the work of God in Jesus, through the Spirit, to bring people to faith, and so to take away sin and to confer life" (*John*, 423).

5.2.1 Dialogue and Action

The dialogue and action in this passage verify this reality. Both stress Thomas's refusal to believe before Jesus's appearance and his subsequent faith afterward. This is most obvious in Thomas's response to the disciples' testimony. After "the other disciples" profess seeing "the Lord," Thomas insists, "Unless (ἐὰν μή) I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe (οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω)" (20:25b).

This admission is shocking and reveals the depth of Thomas's unbelief. Barrett describes it well:

> Thomas required the grossest and most palpable evidence that the body he knew to have been killed in a specific manner had indeed been reanimated. He would be satisfied neither with a substituted body which was not the body of the Lord who died on the cross, nor with a spiritual body or apparition. The risen Christ must be both visibly and palpably identical with the old.[86]

In fact, Thomas's rebuttal shows that he wants more. The disciples have seen Jesus's wounds and that is not enough for Thomas (20:20). He wants to see and touch them.[87]

What is also important is to whom this is said and how the author describes their telling of Jesus's appearance. Thomas is reacting to "the other disciples" and the content of Thomas's request mirrors what they had previously experienced.[88] In 20:20, Jesus

---

[86] Barrett, *St. John*, 572; so also Carson, *John*, 656. Sylva finds there to be a "graphic quality" to Thomas's request which "indicates his entrenched disbelief" (*Thomas*, 84). He also assumes that John wants his readers to presume that Thomas has heard Mary Magdalene's report. This leads him to conclude that Thomas's words in v. 25 "drip with sarcastic venom in their mockery of Mary's report about touching Jesus" (ibid., 87). Sylva, however, is not focused on Thomas's understanding of Jesus but his belief about the afterlife, the idea of which he claims Thomas rejects (ibid., 85–86). Or, as Witherington puts it, Thomas's reaction indicates that "no testimony, no dead body, no apparition would have satisfied some disciples after the shattering event of the crucifixion" (*Wisdom*, 344).

[87] Bonney summarizes this situation well. He writes, "If the disciples say they have 'seen' the Lord, Thomas says he will have to 'touch' him" (*Caused to Believe*, 159. Likewise, Sylva notices that "Thomas morbidly conjoins the touch of Mary and the visual verification by the disciples of Jesus' wounds in a need to touch these wounds in order to believe" (*Thomas*, 85).

[88] A point made by Michaels, *John*, 1005.

"showed them [these other disciples] his hands and his side" and now Thomas will not believe without experiencing the same. After hearing their testimony, Thomas finds that before he can believe, he needs the same type of encounter.[89]

The fact that Thomas responds in this way to these individuals signifies the extent of his unbelief. The narrator identifies the witnesses of 20:25 as "the *other* disciples." This terms—"other"—along with Thomas's designation as "one of the Twelve" (20:24b) places him squarely in this group. Shockingly, he will not trust the witness and personal experience of those closest to him and to the Lord.[90] He should trust them, but he does not.

Moreover, in light John 6 and 20:19, it is clear that the Evangelist has given these categories great significance. Both groups (less Judas) have committed themselves to Jesus in spite of his difficult teaching (6:66-71), and now in John 20 they are facing danger from "the Jews" (20:19).[91] If Thomas—one among them—is to hear and trust anyone, it would be members of this group. Yet he follows in their footsteps. As they do not make a confession of faith in light of Mary's testimony and only do so after they see

[89] Popp proposes that at this point Thomas does not even negate the experience of the other disciples and Mary Magdalene. It is merely a request to have what they had ("Thomas," 516).

[90] Köstenberger postulates that "perhaps he [Thomas] thinks that the disciples actually saw a ghost, not the resurrected Jesus in the flesh," and that "his statement expresses lack of confidence in his fellow disciples' judgment as much as skepticism regarding the possibility of Jesus having risen from the dead" (*John*, 578).

[91] Again, as Köstenberger puts it, we ought to take "fear of the Jews" in 20:19 to mean what it does elsewhere in the Gospel: an indication of "people's dread that the Jewish religious authorities would use their authority to inflict recriminations on anyone who dissented from the 'party line'" (ibid., 572 n. 3). Furthermore, Keener interprets 20:19 as indicating that the disciples "were afraid of persecution" and that "they require an adequate Christology as a foundation for boldness" (*John*, 2:1196). He points to the fact that "these authorities … engineered the execution of their teacher, and the authorities' Roman allies normally sought to stamp out followers of leaders regarded as treasonous" (ibid., 2:1200).

Jesus's hands and side, so likewise does Thomas.[92] The result is that Thomas's words and to whom he says them reveals the magnitude of his doubt.

Thomas's doubt is even more surprising given that Jesus has just commissioned these disciples to be sent as he has been sent by the Father (20:21). [93] As Bonney aptly remarks, "no sooner has the witnessing mission of the disciples begun that it is frustrated by one of their own."[94] In fact, O'Brien describes the disciples' "proclamation of their testimony to Thomas" as "an abject failure."[95] This is an astonishing situation, but what the text reveals is that although they are called to engage in the act of "gathering fruit for eternal life," they do not work alone. Faith requires a divine act.[96]

Beyond the testimony of the disciples and Thomas's reaction to it, Jesus's initial reply to Thomas's confession emphasizes Thomas's preliminary doubt and subsequent faith. Jesus meets the conditions Thomas outlines.[97] He appears before Thomas and

---

[92] Witherington reads 20:19-23 as indicating that these disciples had disregarded Mary Magdalene's testimony (*Wisdom*, 342; so also Thompson, *John*, 419). The fact that, as Moloney observes, "despite their having heard Mary's message from the risen Lord, they are locked in a room 'for fear of the Jews'" implies this (*John*, 530). Bennema only goes so far as to say that it is a possibility that they rejected Mary's testimony (*Encountering Jesus*, 290). At first, Michaels states that we do not know one way or the other how the disciples reacted to Mary's testimony (*John*, 1007). He then suggests that the disciples' "reception of the message [of Mary Magdalene] is likely presupposed even though not explicitly" (ibid.). Nonetheless, he takes notice of the fact that "we do not find the disciples rejoicing in Mary's good news that she has 'seen the Lord' (v. 18)" (ibid.). This would indicate that they did not accept her testimony or understand its full implications.

[93] So also Farelly, who describes the situation well, stating, "As the witnessing ministry of the disciples has just begun, in obedience to Jesus' commissioning (20:21), it is met with the strong refusal to receive it, not least by a member of the Twelve!" (*Disciples*, 122). Bonney also makes this point (*Caused to Believe*, 158). For this section I am dependent upon both of their observations concerning 20:21 and 20:24-25.

[94] Ibid.

[95] O'Brien, "John 20," 284–85.

[96] As Bonney puts it, "in distinguishing Thomas' act of faith from the disciple's testimony, John uncovers a region in which Jesus is seen as both the agent and object of that faith" (*Caused to Believe*, 168). Furthermore, after describing the failure of the disciples' witness, Bonney exclaims, "Soon, however, the reader will see an utterly changed Thomas" as if to indicate that more was needed to bring about his faith—namely, Jesus (ibid., 158).

[97] An observation made by others, including, Barrett, *St. John*, 572; Morris, *John*, 752; Moloney, *John*, 537; Köstenberger, *John*, 579; Michaels, *John*, 1005, 1017; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 289, 291.

commands: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side" (20:27b). He then adds "do not disbelieve, but believe." These final words indicate Thomas's initial (ἄπιστος) and final status (πιστός).[98] Moreover, they signify that the basis for Thomas's changed status (ἄπιστος to πιστός) is Jesus's appearance before him. Jesus reveals to Thomas that he has risen from the dead. He orders Thomas to believe and he does.

On the other hand, Thomas's confession discloses the authenticity of his faith—especially when placed in the greater background of the Gospel. He not only calls Jesus "Lord," as the other believers do in John 20 (20:18; 20:25), he also identifies Jesus as "God" (20:28).[99] This reflects the Gospel's high Christology and the extent of Thomas's belief.[100] As Brown remarks

> It is Thomas who makes clear that one may address Jesus in the same language in which Israel addressed Yahweh [i.e., יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים].… It is no wonder that Thomas' confession constitutes the last words spoken by a disciple in the Fourth Gospel (as

---

[98] Bonney makes the argument that "in this verse, Jesus does not simply tell Thomas to 'believe.' He does not tell him to 'do' something. Rather, Jesus tells Thomas to 'become' something, to become believing.… Jesus commands Thomas to be someone new, to change his mode of existence. He is to be no longer 'of the earth.' He is to 'become' a child of God (cf. 1:12)" (*Caused to Believe*, 167). In addition, as Carson reports, "elsewhere in the New Testament they ['disbelieve' (ἄπιστος) and 'believe' (πιστός)] often function substantivally: 'Do not be an unbeliever, but a believer'" (*John*, 657).

[99] I agree with Morris, who holds that "here we must clearly give the term [Lord] all that it will hold" (*John*, 753).

[100] Lindars finds that "Thomas's confession takes up the Christology of the whole Fourth Gospel" and is "a summary of the Gospel as a whole" (*John*, 615, 616; so also Thompson, *John*, 425–26). Many commentators take this position. Lindars shows in what ways this is so (*John*, 615). Likewise, Moloney summarizes how Thomas's confession parallels other depictions of Jesus throughout the Gospel (*John*, 537). Popp states that in his confession, "Thomas is on the highest peak of the Christological mountain of the Fourth Gospel" ("Thomas," 527; so also Keener, *John*, 2:1196). Barrett argues that in Thomas's confession, "the return to the opening proposition of the gospel is intended, and there can be no doubt that John intended this confession of faith to form the climax of the gospel" (*St. John*, 573; so also Köstenberger, *John*, 577, 579; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 291; Thompson, *John*, 425). Or, as Witherington puts it, "With John 20:28 we have come full circle in this Gospel. The Word who was God is finally seen to be God by those who believe and receive the power to become children of God" (*Wisdom*, 345). Some also see Thomas's confession as harkening back to the Prologue (Carson, *John*, 659; *John*, 753; Keener, *John*, 2:1211; Farelly, *Disciples*, 125; Popp, "Thomas," 520; Sylva, *Thomas*, 106). Others take Thomas's confession to be "the climactic confession of the Gospel" (Thompson, *John*, 423). This includes Witherington (ibid., 344); Carson, who calls it "the climactic exemplification of what it means to honour the Son as the Father is honoured (5:23)" (*John*, 659); Keener (*John*, 2:1211); and Popp ("Thomas," 520).

> it was originally conceived, before the addition of John 21). Nothing more profound could be said about Jesus.[101]

The degree of Thomas's faith is also seen in the double μου of his confession. It emphasizes that *he* is a believer. Jesus is not someone else's Lord or God but Thomas's, and he is Thomas's Lord and God because Thomas believes in him.[102] This is profound for a number of reasons including, as Michaels observes: "Jesus recognized the Father as 'my God,' and he invited his disciples to do the same [in 20:11-18]. Yet Thomas does not hesitate to address Jesus himself in exactly the same way."[103]

Lastly, Jesus's concluding statement affirms the truthfulness of Thomas's confession. He asks "*Have you believed* because you have seen me?" (20:29). Although

---

[101] Brown, *John*, 2:1047–48; quoted in Witherington, *Wisdom*, 615. Skinner goes further in the significance he gives to the similarity between Thomas's confession and this OT expression. He first observes the parallel between Thomas's declaration and Lord God in the OT (*John and Thomas*, 70). He then remarks, "In this simple exclamation, Thomas confesses what the reader has known all along—Jesus is the unique revelation of the Father to humanity. He is the true, full, and physical manifestation of YHWH" (ibid., 70–71). Several interpreters find that Thomas's confession reflects the OT phrase "Lord God" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים). E.g., Lindars, *John*, 615; Barrett, *St. John*, 572; Köstenberger, *John*, 579.

[102] As Carson puts it, "The repeated pronoun *my* does not diminish the universality of Jesus' lordship and deity, but it ensures that Thomas' words are a *personal* confession of faith. Thomas thereby not only displays his faith in the resurrection of Jesus, but points to its deepest meaning; it is nothing less than the revelation of who Jesus Christ is. The most unyielding sceptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession" (*John*, 659; emphasis original). Or as Witherington, writes, "Notice that Thomas confesses Jesus to be *his* Lord and God, acknowledging his sovereignty over his own life and the personal relationship that this betokens" (*Wisdom*, 345; emphasis original). Lindars takes notice of the personal nature of Thomas's confession, although without pointing to the double μου in v. 28 (*John*, 615–16).

[103] Michaels, *John*, 1018.

possibly a rebuke, this question signifies Thomas's faith.[104] He believes in Jesus: με πεπίστευκας.[105] In fact, 20:29 can be taken as a statement rather than a question.[106]

Moreover, as Thompson maintains, Jesus's final words do not necessarily disparage the reason for Thomas's belief.[107] Indeed, in this "benediction," Jesus does *not* say that these future believers "are *more* blessed" for believing without seeing.[108] Rather, as she puts it, "such faith simply arises in different or is catalyzed by different experiences," such as by engaging the Fourth Gospel.[109] Thus Jesus's reaction to Thomas's confession is proof of its authenticity.

Outside of the dialogue, there is little to no action in this pericope. Besides being locked behind closed doors, Jesus appearing before his disciples, and Thomas's inactivity (the fact that he does not touch Jesus's wounds), nothing else happens. Furthermore, their situation—being "inside again" and behind locked doors—is truly less of an act and more

---

[104] Köstenberger (*John*, 580) and Bennema (*Encountering Jesus*, 292) see Jesus's response as a rebuke. In fact, Köstenberger reports that a majority of commentators take Jesus's words in this way (*John*, 580 n. 14). However, Thompson argues against this reading. She sees Jesus's reaction not as criticism (*John*, 427). Instead, it is a statement of fact: "Thomas's 'seeing' has led to his 'believing'" and all that Thomas is doing is following "the pattern of his fellow disciples: when they saw the risen Lord, they rejoiced and believed" (ibid., 427, 427–28). Michaels also reads this response not as a rebuke but as a "beatitude" that is "not for Thomas" (*John*, 1018; see also 1019). He even translates v. 29 as a statement rather than a question (ibid., 1018; as does Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 169). Popp as well holds that Jesus's words in v. 29 are an affirmation of Thomas's faith ("Thomas," 521-22).

[105] As mentioned, Popp observes that with this phrase, Jesus identifies Thomas as a believer (ibid.). He specifically recognizes πεπίστευκας as indicating as such (ibid., 521).

[106] As some interpreters do: Barrett, *St. John*, 573; Carson, *John*, 659.

[107] Thompson, *John*, 427.

[108] Ibid., 428; so also Morris, who finds that "there is possibly significance … in the fact that when Jesus goes on to speak of those who believe without seeing he says they are 'blessed' (cf. 13:17), not 'more blessed.' This does not look like a comparison, with Thomas worse off than the others" (*John*, 754).

[109] Thompson, *John*, 428. Thompson also argues the point that in a way, John 20 is emphasizing that the testimony of others can and should be trusted (ibid.). This is important because this is how all future disciples will believe (ibid.). Bonney proposes that "the manner in which John distinguishes the testimony of the disciples from the conversion of Thomas clearly shows that their testimony regards a real, living person. The testimony and its object are not the same. This is not to say that testimony does not inform the experience of the risen Jesus. Nor is it to say that the testimony itself cannot be the vehicle by which one experiences Christ risen. It is to say however, that the object of faith has an independent existence apart from the testimony. Faith according to John stems from an encounter with the living Son of God" (*Caused to Believe*, 170; see also 171).

a description of the narrative's setting. In fact, "the locked doors" (τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων) follows ἔρχεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς so as to emphasize the miraculous way that Jesus appears more so than to explain the fear that the disciples have, as was the case in v. 19 ("the doors being locked where the disciples were *for fear of the Jews* [διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων]").[110] Thus the lone act of this passage—Jesus's appearance—is what brings about Thomas's faith.

5.2.2 Irony

The irony of these verses is enlightening and further demonstrates the need for Jesus to bring about belief. Thomas says that he will never (οὐ μή) believe unless he sees and touches the wounds of Jesus (20:25). Jesus in turn appears to him and offers him exactly he what has asked for (20:27).[111] Yet Thomas never touches Jesus—there is no prodding of Jesus's side, as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio depicts in his *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*.[112] What Thomas says he needs is not what brings about his

---

[110] Barrett (*St. John*, 568, 572) and Köstenberger (*John*, 578–79) argue that John mentions the doors being locked to emphasize the kind of entrance Jesus makes. Interpreters often make this point in relation to v. 19. E.g., Lindars, *John*, 609–10; Carson, *John*, 646; Köstenberger, *John*, 572. Some of these same commentators observe that the description of the locked doors in v. 19 also serves the purpose of draw attention to the fear that the disciples are facing (Lindars, *John*, 609–10; Carson, *John*, 646). Although commenting on vv. 19-23, Bonney sees the Evangelist's remarks about the locked door as indicating that "Jesus' revelatory action transpire according to his own will and transcend human limitations" (*Caused to Believe*, 156). Furthermore, the mention of the locked doors may be an allusion to 10:7-9, where Jesus is the door that leads to salvation (10:7-9). As Popp remarks, "Thomas accepts the invitation of the One who entered through closed doors (see 20:26) and he, in return, enters through Jesus, the door (see 10:9)" ("Thomas," 519).

[111] Lindars judges that v. 27 is "clearly ironical. It is a challenge. The believing disciple does not need to touch him" (*John*, 614).

[112] Popp reports that artistic depictions of 20:24-29 almost always have Thomas touching Jesus ("Thomas," 529). Yet in the text the narrator never tells us whether Thomas performs the inspection he so forcefully demanded (so also Thompson, *John*, 425). Some exegetes maintain that Thomas never touches Jesus in this scene (e.g., Lindars, *John*, 614, 616; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 344; Morris, *John*, 753; Köstenberger, *John*, 579; Michaels, *John*, 1018). Others simply say that the text does not indicate one way or the other (for instance, Carson, *John*, 657; Moloney, *John*, 537; Thompson, *John*, 425). Ultimately, I side with those who propose that Thomas never touched Jesus, as indicated above. However, if the reader is to assume that it happens, this does not take away from my argument. Jesus still needs to intervene for Thomas to believe.

exclamation. It is Jesus's presence. As Jesus testifies, "Have you believed because you have seen *me* (ὅτι ἑώρακάς με πεπίστευκας)?" (20:29b).[113] Thomas believes because he sees Jesus—not because Thomas touches him.[114]

Furthermore, the form of Thomas's demands in v. 25 (beginning with ἐὰν μή) matches that of Jesus's commands throughout the Gospel (3:3 ["unless one is born again"]; 3:5 ["unless one is born of water and the Spirit"]; 6:44 ["unless one is born of water and the Spirit"]; 6:53 ["unless one is born of water and the Spirit"]; 6:65 ["unless it is granted him by the Father"]; 8:24 ["unless you believe that I am he"]; 12:24 ["unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies"]; 13:8 ["unless it abides in the vine … unless you abide in me"]; 15:4 ["If I do not wash you"]).[115] If this parallelism is intentional, then the reader ought to see irony in Thomas's words. He is usurping Jesus's authority by using the same turn of phrase that Jesus regularly uses. Nonetheless, it is clear that Jesus alone is the one who has the authority to make demands of people, not Thomas. He is the one who decides what must happen and Thomas needs to obey, as he does ("do not [μὴ γίνου] disbelieve").

[113] Morris uses this line to demonstrate that "it seems very improbable" for Thomas to have touched Jesus, as some scholars contend, but to have believed because he has seen Jesus (*John*, 753). Carson maintains that "the impression given is that the sight itself proved sufficient (v. 29), that Thomas was so overcome with awe and reverence that he immediately uttered his confession" (*John*, 657).

[114] An argument Witherington makes. He states, "The text does not say he touched Jesus. Indeed, Jesus's response suggests that he did not: 'You believed because you see,' not 'You believed because you touched'" (*Wisdom*, 344).

[115] Michaels, *John*, 1015–16, 1016 n. 43. The above citations come from Michaels (ibid.). Additionally, Sylva draws attention to the similarities between Jesus's words in 4:48 ["Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe"] and Thomas's in 20:25 ["Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"] (*Thomas*, 100–101).

5.2.3 Plotting

As with the other elements of this passage, its plotting further reveals the need for Jesus's direct action. The *initial situation* is 20:24-25. In these verses the conflict is established: Thomas refuses to believe without seeing and touching Jesus's wounds. After this is the *complication.* Tensions in the narrative rise with the passing of eight days, Thomas's continued unbelief, and the arrival of Jesus (20:26). The initial situation and complication are resolved by the *transformative action*. Jesus speaks directly to Thomas, commanding him to do what Thomas says is necessary for his faith (20:27).

The *dénouement* is Thomas's confession, whereby he makes known his newfound faith (20:28), and the narrative concludes with the *final situation* in 20:29. Jesus's concluding words direct the narrative away from Thomas and to the Gospel's purpose statement, which establishes that this Gospel is for those who "have not seen" Jesus but who are encouraged to "believe" because of the signs that have been described in this

book.[116] In this Gospel, people can continue to meet with Jesus and come to faith through him.[117] This plotting can be visualized as follows:

---

[116] As Barrett understands 20:29, "The disciples of the first generation had the unique distinction of standing as a link between Jesus and the church; John indicates in this saying that their successors equally may believe, and that their faith places them on the same level of blessedness with the eye-witnesses, or even above it" (*St. John*, 574; so also Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 170). Likewise, since 20:30-31 are not the final words of the Gospel as it now stands, Michaels judges that "the last two verses of this chapter are not quite so momentous as some modern interpreters have made them out to be. The Gospel writer is not so much summarizing his overall purpose in writing the Gospel as simply turning to his readers to explain to them that Jesus' beatitude on 'those who did not see and believed' (v. 29) applies to them, for they have seen none of these things firsthand" (*John*, 1006). He also proposes that the reason Jesus's words are in the past tense is because "Jesus is speaking here not in narrative time—a week after his resurrection—but in the reader's time, looking back on his ministry from the reader's perspective long after the fact. The reader knows of 'those who did not see, and believed,' because the reader is, almost by definition, one of them" (ibid., 1019). Likewise, Popp recommends that "if the concluding Beatitude of the Thomas pericope is read in terms of an intra-textual play with the first Beatitude (13:17), this encourages the readers to return to their own world. Their faith in Jesus is constituted and stabilized through their reading of the recorded testimony of the eyewitnesses in the Gospel" ("Thomas," 522–23). Moloney comes to a similar conclusion as Barrett concerning v. 29. He finds that there are "two different eras" in which "some" come to faith by experiencing "*the physical presence of* Jesus" and others "with the Scripture and the Gospel in hand" (*John*, 538; emphasis original). These later believers are "to regard their situation as equally privileged" (ibid.; so also 543). Furthermore, as Köstenberger finds, John 20:30-31 teaches that "faith based on Jesus' 'signs' ought not to be disparaged" (*John*, 581). In fact, as Bennema maintains, "Jesus cannot have been condemning the request for a sign, otherwise John's statement in 20:30-31 that he has recorded Jesus' signs in order to evoke belief would not make sense" (*Encountering Jesus*, 292). Thompson also examines Jesus's words in v. 29 in light of the Gospel's stated purpose and the fact that these future believers must depend on the testimony of others rather than see Jesus themselves (*John*, 428). See above and n. 109 on p. 199. Concerning vv. 30-31, Skinner also remarks, "The reader must confess the same thing as Thomas without the benefit of sight enjoyed by Thomas" (*John and Thomas*, 74). Additionally, as Keener writes, "Thus Jesus provides a beatitude … for those who believe without signs, on the testimony of others about signs Jesus already worked (20:30-31)" (*John*, 2:1212). On a side note, Farelly finds there to be some irony in Jesus's words here because "as a disciple, he [Thomas] is himself called to witness to those who 'have not seen'" (*Disciples*, 127).

[117] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 293–94. Bennema suggests that according to John, "when people are confronted with the believer's Spirit-imbued testimony, they are … confronted with the life-giving words of Jesus himself," earlier referencing 6:63 (ibid., 294). He states that this explains why reading the Gospel can bring about faith. Schneiders makes the same claim about the ability to experience Jesus in the text of John that Bennema does, but she grounds it exclusively in John's purpose statement. She argues that because John selected certain things to record and excluded others, it is "*only* those things that 'are written' in the Gospel, and *as* they are written in the Gospel" that "are necessary and sufficient for later disciples, who will come to believe through their reading (or hearing) of the text and thus become and remain disciples of Jesus just as truly as his first disciples" (*Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. and ed. [New York: Crossroad, 2003], 10; emphasis original). She says that "this is very important because it locates the revelatory encounter with God in Jesus, not in one's experience of the words and actions of the earthly Jesus (which was available only to a few followers in first-century Palestine) but in the engagement with the Gospel text (which is open to all people of all time). Revelation is *rooted* in the life of Jesus in Palestine in the first century. But it *occurs* in the faith and life of believers in the community shaped by the text of scripture" (ibid.; emphasis original).

O'Brien makes a similar point. He holds that "the Fourth Gospel is not simply a report of others' experience, but it provides the possibility of a substitute experience for the reader. The narrative strategies of the Gospel show, rather than merely tell, the reader what believing is, creating an experience for the reader that is certainly not the same as being there but can be significant nonetheless" ("John 20," 285).

Initial Situation	24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”
Complication	26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”
Transformative Action	27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”
Dénouement	28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”
Final Situation	29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

As with prior confessing characters, Thomas’s confession comes about through Jesus’s direct action. His unbelief is the cause of tension in this text. It is resolved through Jesus’s engagement with him. There is nothing more that is needed. Jesus is all that it takes for the crisis of this pericope to be resolved.[118]

However, he makes two things clear regarding faith: (1) “believing is a process of uncovering errors and weaknesses and coming to a deeper, more authentic relationship with the Word,” and (2) “this process [of believing] is furthered only by one’s own experience of the Word; no one else’s experience can be a substitute” (ibid., 302). Throughout this project, I have argued against his first point but agreed with his second.

Additionally, O’Brien suggests that the experience which promotes the process of faith is twofold. First, “the Fourth Gospel conceives of this sort of recognition [i.e., an experience of the Word] as something that comes through the witness of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual encounter with the risen Lord” (ibid.). Second, “the author also helps recreate the experience of encountering Jesus and the journey of faith for the readers by subjecting them to the initial confusion experienced by the first disciples and continually bringing them to new ways of seeing, new methods of interpretation so that they might gain a clearer understanding of what is not of this world” (ibid.). This second part of the experience that John creates is what O’Brien is mainly concerned with. The first is only mentioned in his conclusion.

Furthermore, he cares about the ability of the reader (and characters) to muster their strength to pursue Jesus in spite of their misunderstanding. As he writes, “the author does so [i.e., produces an experience of Jesus and various believers] by creating interpretive difficulties, deliberately setting up misunderstanding, so that readers might learn how to correct them in light of the truth presented in Jesus, and by creating characters whose interpretive errors and corrections not only show the way but bring readers along with them” (ibid.). Thus O’Brien sees John as creating an experience, but it is not only of Jesus nor is faith entirely dependent upon his direct action. It is something a person gains through persistence (ibid., 302).

[118] It should also be observed that this narrative reflects the pattern of personal testimony that appears in a number of John’s confession scenes. In each, someone bears witness to Jesus’s identity to another person, and this individual then comes into contact with Jesus with the result that he or she makes a

5.2.4 Thomas's Development

Thomas's characterization in this narrative reveals his need for Jesus to act so that he may believe. At first, the author depicts Thomas as someone who should have believed because of the testimony of the other disciples. John accomplishes this by identifying who Thomas is. He is "one of the Twelve" (20:24).

This title demonstrates that he is no ordinary disciple. He is part of the inner circle, handpicked by Jesus. As Jesus asks in 6:70, "Did I not choose you, the twelve?" Since Jesus has chosen these Twelve, it is possible to see behind this title Jesus's words in 6:44 and 6:65. These chosen few are selected. They have been drawn by God. This coupled with the previous characterization of Thomas in ch. 11—a figure who is willing to be with Jesus even if it involves his own death—should lead the reader to think that Thomas will automatically believe based on the confession of the rest of the Twelve alone.[119]

---

confession of faith (Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 164). Bonney reports that this happens with Nathanael, the Samaritans, the other disciples, and now Thomas (ibid.). It also happens with Andrew, as he first hears about Jesus via John the Baptist (see Chapter Four). Bonney notes that "by again employing this pattern [in Thomas's narrative], John stresses that Jesus deliberately acts to bring about faith and that he alone is its source. It is not the words of others that bring about faith, but, rather, it is the action of Jesus behind the words. Jesus comes to be known simultaneously as both the proactive cause of faith and its object. The two cannot be separated" (ibid.).

[119] Popp maintains that in 11:16, "Thomas' determination corresponds to that of Jesus (11:15; see 11:7) in that he himself has resolutely determined not to abandon him even if confronted with death (11:16)" (Thomas," 508). He finds there to be a parallel between Thomas's words in 11:16 and Peter's in 13:36-38. This leads him to argue that "Thomas does not represent skepticism and resignation in the Lazarus pericope, but rather embodies a recognition of the present reality and willingness to courageously follow as a disciple" (ibid., 509). Popp says that "this call to martyrdom must not be overlooked" and that Thomas "embodies a radical link to Jesus even before possessing the full revelation that comes later" (ibid.). In fact, Popp details a number of ways that the author depicts Thomas in a positive light in John 11, although he does not explicitly say whether these attributes are positive or negative characteristics (ibid., 507). Likewise, Barrett interprets Thomas's "earlier references" as indicating that he is "a loyal but obtuse, rather than a doubtful and hesitating, character" (*St. John*, 571–72). Others who read Thomas's words in 11:16 in a positive light include Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 124; Carson, *John*, 656; Morris, *John*, 484; Farelly, *Disciples*, 118–19; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 288.

This view is not universally held, as Köstenberger summarizes: "[in 11:16] it is unclear whether Thomas's words are sincere or sarcastic. If the former (unlikely), then this would be evidence for unusual

On the other hand, this designation should pique the reader's interest for another reason. Although it identifies Thomas as one of the twelve chosen by Jesus (and potentially one of those drawn by the Father), it is also associates him with Judas Iscariot.[120] When "the Twelve" are mentioned in ch. 6, an ominous reference to Judas appears (6:70-71).[121] It turns out that he is simultaneously one of the twelve chosen by Jesus, and yet "a devil" (6:70). In fact, John only labels Judas and Thomas with the designation "one of the Twelve."[122] Additionally, as Sylva points out, "In John 20 the betrayal has already occurred and the number of disciples is down to eleven. Therefore, the use of 'the twelve' in 20.24 is anachronistic and by its temporal incongruousness calls Judas to the reader's attention." [123]

Along with this the reader encounters Thomas's other name: δίδυμος. This leads some interpreters to ask, "On the narrative, symbolic level, with whom is Thomas to be matched as a 'twin' character?"[124] Popp provides an extensive list of Johannine

---

commitment on the part of Jesus' disciples. If the latter, then Thomas, not reassured by the words of 11:9-10, would as in 14:5 and 20:24-25, represent the sober, realistic human mind" (*John*, 332). Additionally, Bonney makes a strong case that Thomas's previous appearances in the Gospel expose his "world-bound point of view," which "creates an obvious tension between the heavenly point of view from which Jesus speaks" (*Caused to Believe*, 139). Bonney makes this remark specifically in light of Thomas's statements in ch. 14 but he draws the same conclusion regarding Thomas's words in 11:16 (ibid., 137–38).

[120] As Sylva puts it, "Mentioning the name 'Thomas' right before the phrase 'one of the twelve' links Thomas both to the potential for a poignant withdrawal of a disciple from the twelve and to the actual example of this in Judas. Overtones of disloyalty are brought into proximity to Thomas through this connection; 'one of the twelve' is a manner of identifying Thomas that simultaneously identifies him as one of the core group of disciples and questions his loyalty, a quality by which Thomas has defined himself (11.16; 14.5)" (*Thomas*, 92). Furthermore, Sylva hypothesizes that John intentionally links Thomas and Judas for the same reasons I do here. His argument appears in ibid., 91–93.

[121] So Sylva (ibid., 92).

[122] Michaels, *John*, 1015. Popp finds that this similarity "evokes the question of the relation between Judas and Thomas, a question that can only be answered with the knowledge of the overall narrative" ("Thomas," 516).

[123] Sylva, *Thomas*, 92.

[124] John Paul Heil, *Blood and Water: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus in John 18-21*, CBQMS 27 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1995), 139–40; quoted in Popp, "Thomas," 507.

characters that are literarily similar to Thomas.[125] One of them is Judas, since he, like Thomas, is "also one of the 'Twelve' (6:71)" and "like Judas (13:30; 18:2-5), Thomas was also away from Jesus (20:24)."[126] Moreover, Thomas's other name may signal that he is not as faithful as the other disciples. As Barrett writes, "It is conceivable, though not probable, that Thomas appears as the doubting disciple on account of his name. Δίδυμος … means primarily 'double.'"[127] If this is how we are to understand this other name, then a link between him and Judas is even more likely.[128]

These facts create tension in the text. As one of the Twelve, the reader expects Thomas to confess that Jesus is the Christ—especially since the devil of this group has been cast out and Jesus indicates in 6:70 that only one of them is a devil (εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν). Yet, since the betrayer comes from the Twelve and because the author may be pairing Thomas with Judas, the readers might wonder when they come to John 20 if there is another and if Thomas is to be a second fallen figure, especially given the meaning of

---

[125] Ibid., 525–27. His list includes Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritans, Peter, Judas, the Man Born Blind, Philip, the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, the other disciples in ch. 20, and the reader. He even goes as far to say that "Thomas does not only function as the 'twin' of the first readers who lacked confidence and were under pressure because of the Johannine schism and the imperial cult; he is also one of the central Johannine figures for all later readers, someone with whom they can identify because of his exclamation and question marks, as well as the overpowering encounters with the Risen One, as it was conveyed through the witness of his fellow disciples" (ibid., 527). Likewise, Sylva shows the similarities between Thomas and other Johannine characters, including Judas (*Thomas*, 91–103).

[126] Popp, "Thomas," 526. So in the same way Sylva who holds that Thomas's other name leads him to think that there is "the possibility of a Judas-Thomas literary twinship" (*Thomas*, 92). His case is founded upon the same elements as Popp's (Thomas as one of the twelve and one who leaves Jesus) along with other parallels that are less convincing (ibid., 92–93). Similarly, as summarized by Moloney, "Gregory J. Riley … claims that the author, who is addressing Thomas' disciples to bring them into line with his thoughts … refers to 'the Twelve' to link Thomas with Judas, the only other disciple to be associated with 'the Twelve' (cf. 6:70-71)" (*John*, 539; Moloney is specifically discussing Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered : Thomas and John in Controversy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 108–10).

[127] Barrett, *St. John*, 571.

[128] It should be noted that in the Acts of Thomas, the author identifies Thomas as "the twin brother of Christ" at various places (Acts Thom. 3.31, 4.39 [J. K. Elliott, *ANT*, 460, 469]). Sylva finds there to be a "twinning" of Jesus and Thomas in the Gospel of John (*Thomas*, 58, 79, 91).

δίδυμος.[129] The question then becomes, is Thomas to reflect Judas by rejecting Jesus or contrast him by having faith?[130]

As it turns out, Thomas believes. He is not another betrayer. He confesses Jesus as his Lord and does so because Jesus appears to him. This is what brings about his faith and reveals that he is not just one of the Twelve but one given by God to Jesus. Like those before Thomas, this narrative makes it clear that to move from unbeliever to believer requires Jesus's direct action.[131]

5.3 Conclusion

As I conclude my investigation into John's confessing characters a number of things become clear. First, each of these confession scenes follows a set pattern and shares literary elements. Whether it be the ironic use of "Lord" or the emphasis on Jesus as the one who finds the soon-to-be confessing character, the author shapes them all in such a way that they parallel one another. Second, the confessing characters that I surveyed make their declarations of faith because of their conversations with Jesus. Without conversing with Jesus, they would have no faith. Third, the repetition of these patterns suggests that the Fourth Evangelist is intentional in how he puts these scenes together, and this thus shows that the role of the Gospel's confessing characters is thematic. When the events of these narratives are compared with what the John's trusted

---

[129] As Sylva remarks, "In John 6 twelveness has been proven staunchness, but also thereby an opportunity for future betrayal" (ibid., 92). Both meanings are attached to it.

[130] Popp, "Thomas," 516. Popp's final assessment of Judas as Thomas's twin is that they stand "in contrast" because "Thomas did not betray Jesus" as Judas did (ibid., 526). Thus Thomas is not Judas's double. He is his opposite.

[131] Although not explicitly discussing Jesus's direct action, Michaels notices that Thomas's pattern of faith (believing because he has seen Jesus) emerges at various places in the Fourth Gospel, especially in 1:34; 19:35; 20:8; 20:18; and 20:20 (*John*, 1019).

figures say, this will be all the more certain. What these figures disclose will be the subject of my final chapter.

CHAPTER 6 – BECOMING A BELIEVER: SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"

– 1 John 4:2

This final chapter will be an exploration of those clearly places in John where the author specifies how spiritual transformation occurs by examining what his trusted figures say. This is an important last step in my argument because these characters speak about spiritual transformation in the same way that John portrays it in the narratives of his confessing characters. What is seen is the Fourth Evangelist consistently communicating in narration and declaration that spiritual transformation is dependent upon God's activity.[1] This then supports my overarching argument: John's confessing characters are thematic, reflecting the Gospel's theology rather than representing various responses of faith.

What follows is an investigation into the remarks of John's trusted figures. I begin by showing why one should rely upon what this group of characters say to reveal the author's ideas. I then analyze these figures' statements on spiritual transformation. These declarations disclose a consistent understanding of the subject—a view that has already been depicted in the lives of John's confessing characters in Chapters Three through Five. I conclude with an examination of the relationship between John's theology of spiritual transformation and his purpose statement (20:30-31). This is an important last step in my

[1] Turner uses the language of "divine initiative" to talk about how one gains salvation in John ("Soteriology," 273). Language comparable to this expression will be used throughout this chapter and in the rest of this project.

project because if what I claim as the rhetorical purpose of John's characters conflicts with the author's stated purpose for his work, then there is either tension in the text or my argument is suspect.

6.1. Why These Statements?

To argue that the Fourth Gospel contains clear statements that articulate the author's thoughts, I need to demonstrate why readers should take what these characters say as *the* guideline for understanding John's theology. What I propose is that the Gospel itself and first-century narratives in general recommend an approach that sees certain passages as more indicative of the author's thoughts than others. For John, what is said by the narrator, Jesus, and John the Baptist are sure places where the Evangelist expresses his theology.[2] I will begin with John 1:1-18 and its first-century context.[3] I will then look at the Fourth Gospel's depictions of the narrator, Jesus, and John the Baptist.

In antiquity the beginning of a work appeared in a number of forms. Dennis E. Smith records the following types: the preface (προοίμιον or φροίμιον); the dramatic prologue; the *incipit* or brief phrase; and the "virtual preface" (προίμιον δυνάμει).[4] Among these possibilities, Smith suggests that John 1:1-18 parallels the dramatic

---

[2] What I am claiming here is not out of the norm. As mentioned in Chapter Two, several commentators find what is said by the narrator, Jesus, and John the Baptist to be consistent with the author's perspective. For instance, Culpepper holds that "all of the topics which are usually treated in discussions of the theology of the Gospel of John are, in fact, aspects of the implied author's ideological point of view as it is conveyed through Jesus and the narrator" (*Anatomy*, 33). Likewise even Staley, who admits that he "found the Johannine narrator at times contradicting himself along with his contradictions of minor characters' statements (John 3:22, 26; 4:2) and Jesus' words (7:1, 3-4, 8-9, 10)," deduces that this figure is reliable (*Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John* [New York: Continuum, 2002], 88). Additionally, what the Beloved Disciple has to say falls into this group as well, but his speech is never about spiritual transformation.

[3] Much of my argument for this section on the Prologue derives from Smith, "Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory," *Semeia* 52 (1990): 1–9.

[4] Ibid., 1–7.

prologue most closely, specifically reflecting the "expository prologue"—a kind of introduction that "set[s] up the action or situation of the play."[5]

Smith, in part, establishes this by looking at Aristotle and his discussion on the *212eriscop* in *Rhetoric.* In this passage, one learns how ancients grasped this sort of prologue.[6] Aristotle writes,

> The exordium is the beginning of a speech, as the prologue in poetry and the prelude in flute-playing; for all these are beginnings, and as it were a paving the way for what follows.… But in speeches and epic poems the exordia provide a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what it is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray; so then he who puts the beginning, so to say, into the hearer's hand enables him, if he holds fast to it, to follow the story.… Similarly, tragic poets make clear the subject of their drama, if not at the outset, like Euripides, at least somewhere in the prologue, like Sophocles.… It is the same in comedy.[7] (*Rhetoric* 3.14 [J. H. Freese, LCL])

As Smith reports, in comedy the expository prologue provides the audience with "information unknown to the characters in the play," giving "an ironic twist to the action."[8]

John 1:1-18 is no different. The Fourth Evangelists lays before the reader the events that will come—John the Baptist's testimony (1:6-7); the rejection of Jesus by his own people (1:10-11); the coming to faith of those born of God (1:12-13); Jesus's incarnation (1:14); his gift of grace and truth (1:16-17); and his revelation of the Father

---

[5] Ibid., 3–4. Smith is not the first to see John's Prologue as coming from the milieu of ancient drama. He cites Clayton R. Bowen ("The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material," *JBL* 49 [1930]: 298), and Charles B. Puskas (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989], 135) as coming to this conclusion prior to his work. It is true that the Gospels are not ancient drama in the traditional sense, but NT critics have shown that elements of John echo what is found in Greek and Roman theater. E.g., see W. R. Domeris, "The Johannine Drama," *JTSA* 42 (1983): 29–35, Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

[6] Smith, "Beginnings," 3.

[7] Smith quotes only a portion of this statement (ibid., 3–4).

[8] Ibid., 4.

(1:18). Accordingly, John grants the reader privileged information that not all the Gospel's characters have. The audience knows Jesus's identity ("the Word was God"), from where he came ("the Word was with God"), and how he relates to the Father ("He was in the beginning with God").[9] Each of these topics is a point of confusion for John's characters and they are the places where the author develops his irony. As a result, the Prologue, more so than any other piece of the Gospel, reveals what is at the heart of the author's theology.

Another way in which these figures show themselves to be standards for understanding John's thought is through what the Gospel itself says about them. John continually affirms the dependability of the narrator, Jesus, and John the Baptist. For the case of the narrator and Jesus, the text bluntly states this. John 19:35 and 21:24 witness to the narrator's trustworthiness—"his testimony is true."[10] In the same way, the author

---

[9] As Culpepper writes, "The Johannine narrator is neither unreliable nor deliberately suppressive, but rather begins the narrative with an overview of the identity of the central figure and the course of action to follow (John 1:1-18). From the beginning, the narrator shares his omniscient vantage point with the reader, so the reader is immediately given all that is needed to understand the story" (*Anatomy*, 19). Or as Skinner puts it, "The implied reader is given privileged information that characters in the narrative do no possess…. Scholars have long recognized that the primary source from which the implied reader of the Fourth Gospel derives privileged information is the prologue (1:1-18).… The prologue sets the theological and literary agenda for the Fourth Gospel. The implied reader of the Fourth Gospel is able to comprehend the meaning of Jesus's origin and mission in a way that the characters in the narrative cannot" (*Thomas*, 39).

Elsewhere Skinner writes, "Like an overture that rehearses the major symphonic movements of the forthcoming story, the Prologue serves as an audience-elevating device by providing privileged information to which characters in the story have no access. The Prologue thus introduces all the themes that are needed to interpret properly John's story of Jesus, and provides the audience with comprehensive inside information regarding the Gospel's developed Christology. The audience's subsequent experience with misunderstanding characters—who have neither read the Prologue nor have access to the information it reveals—serves as a constant reminder of its insider knowledge of Jesus' origin and identity" ("Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization: Reading John's Characters through the Lens of the Prologue," in idem, *Characters and Characterization*, 112).

Although already quoted in Chapter One, Farelly's statement regarding the beginnings of narratives is helpful. He finds that they "have a primacy effect in constituting a hermeneutical frame which readers need to understand the remaining narrative, and which inevitably shapes or influences their interpretation of the narrative" (*Disciples*, 21). See n. 102 in Chapter One.

[10] The ESV makes it seem as if these two verses have identical phrasing. There is a slight difference in the Greek. 19:35 reads ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστιν ἡ μαρτυρία and 21:24 ἀληθὴς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν.

repeatedly depicts Jesus as possessing truth (1:14; 1:17; 8:40; 8:45-46; 14:6; 18:37). Unlike the narrator, Jesus is the Word made flesh, the one who is and makes God known (1:18), and as Resseguie remarks regarding 1:18, "Jesus makes God known because he is in the bosom of the Father—'close to the Father's heart'—which elevates his point of view above all other views."[11]

In a similar but less overt manner, the reader observes John the Baptist's reliability at various points in the Gospel. The author introduces him as "a man sent from God" who "came as a witness, to bear witness about the light" (1:7). He fulfills this foreshadowing and shows that he is a trustworthy character by pointing out who Jesus is (1:15; 1:26, 1:29; 1:36). In 5:32-33, Jesus testifies to John's truthfulness. He declares, "There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth." This affirms the Baptist's dependability. He speaks what is true—his words reveal the author's ideas.

An additional way in which the trustworthiness of these characters is on display is observed in the fact that at times, the words of the narrator blend with those of Jesus and John the Baptist to such an extent that it is unclear who is speaking.[12] With Jesus this takes place in 3:16-21 and with John the Baptist in 3:31-36. Culpepper draws attention to this point and quotes an astute observation from Seymour Chatman on what this may mean for these figures and their relationship to the narrator's ideas.[13] As Chatman details,

---

[11] Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 115.

[12] Much of what I discuss in the remainder of this section depends on Culpepper (*Anatomy*, 15–49).

[13] Ibid., 41–42. Before quoting Chatman, Culpepper mentions that the change of voice is unclear in 3:13-21, and he then details that "there are numerous parallels between these verses and the prologue and the farewell discourse" as well as "a change of temporal point of view in verses 13 and 14" (ibid., 42). This guides him to judge that "the imposition of one time on another, one voice on another, requires the reader

> The implication is "It doesn't matter who says or thinks this; it is appropriate to both character and narrator." The ambiguity may strengthen the bond between the two, make us trust still more the narrator's authority. Perhaps we should speak of "neutralization" or "unification," rather than ambiguity.… Such statements imply that character and narrator are so close, in such sympathy, that it does not matter to whom we assign the statement.[14]

Lastly, Culpepper argues that Jesus and the narrator discuss the same themes and do so using identical terminology.[15] He does this by juxtaposing the narrator's interjections with Jesus's farewell discourse, revealing their commonalities.[16] Through this comparison, he infers that

> the striking congruence in the points of view of the narrator and the farewell discourse … is significant for establishing the perspective from which the reader is to view Jesus' life and death. Both Jesus and the narrator are omniscient and speak in retrospect … from the life situation of the Johannine community, while viewing Jesus' life in the context of his origin and destiny in glory.…The implication is that unless the readers see Jesus in the light of the narrator's temporal and ideological point of view, they cannot understand who Jesus was.[17]

Culpepper advances this connection further by showing that in the Fourth Gospel, "the narrator serves as the authoritative interpreter of Jesus's words."[18] In a number of places, the narrator breaks into the story to clarify Jesus's statements (2:21; 6:6; 6:71; 7:39; 8:27; 11:11; 12:33; 13:11; 18:32; 21:19; 21:23).[19] He is one who "understands Jesus' words and knows how they are to be interpreted."[20]

---

to hear Jesus speaking to the reader's time through the narrator and hence the gospel" (ibid.). John is expressing Jesus's view through the narrator, and given that John believes Jesus is God, the reader can trust that these interjections represent what the author thought.

[14] Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 206–7; quoted in Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 42.

[15] E.g., ὥρα (7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 16:2; 16:32; 17:1), δοξάζω (7:39; 14:17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), πνεῦμα (7:39; 14:17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), and ἀποσυνάγωγος (9:22, 12:42; 16:2) (ibid., 40).

[16] Ibid., 36–41.

[17] Ibid., 38.

[18] Ibid., 35.

[19] Ibid., 34-35, from where the above citations come.

[20] Ibid., 35. He is not only the interpreter of Jesus's words, but as Culpepper notes, "the narrator also interprets the words of the parents of the blind man (9:22), Caiaphas (11:51-53), Judas (12:6), and Isaiah (12:41). Then, in John 21:23, the narrator corrects the misunderstanding that was current among 'the brothers' regarding the coming of the risen Lord before the death of the Beloved Disciple. By this point it

As a result, the voices of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the narrator blend together and declare in unison the author's thoughts. They are his mouthpieces and they provide the reader with a gauge for rightly hearing his theology. It is appropriate, then, to compare what these individuals have to say about spiritual transformation with how John depicts it in the narratives of his confessing characters. This exercise will further support my notion that John's confessing characters portray the Gospel's theology, especially his theology of spiritual transformation.

6.2. Spiritual Transformation: A Trinitarian Approach

Now that it is clear that Jesus, John the Baptist, and the narrator explicitly reflect John's thoughts, I will explore those passages where these trusted figures describe how spiritual transformation takes place. These verses can be divided in a Trinitarian approach between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[21] I have chosen this structure because the Gospel itself reflects it, highlighting the role that each person of the Trinity fulfills in transforming an individual into a believer or causing a person's faith to grow.[22] I will follow the typical Trinitarian formula, looking at what John has to say first about the role of the Father, then the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit.

---

has long been clear to the reader that the narrator is the authoritative interpreter of Jesus' words and therefore his interpretation has authority over any other interpretations" (ibid.).

[21] Barus and Köstenberger also observe this pattern. Barus mentions it, but he does not say more than "this work and initiative to give eternal life to those who believe in Jesus could be labelled *trinitarian* in nature" ("Faith Motif," 200; emphasis added). Köstenberger examines "John's Trinitarian mission theology" in his monograph on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine letters (*A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, BTNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 539–46). After quoting John 3:16, he states, "John's entire gospel is pervaded by this divine mission: God, the Father in his love sending Jesus, his Son, to save all those who believe in him, for eternal life. The Spirit, too, is shown to play an important part in Jesus' mission as well as in the mission of his followers, jointly witnessing with them (15:26-27) and empowering the community's proclamation of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus (20:22-23)" (ibid., 539–40). In what follows, he outlines the task that each member of the Trinity performs in fulfilling this mission, but he never examines the role that they have in the process of spiritual transformation.

[22] This method also highlights the high Christology that the Gospel has, which the confessing characters have already illustrated in their declarations of faith.

6.2.1. The Father

In John, five texts reveal the Father's role in the process of spiritual transformation. These are 1:5; 1:13, 3:27, 6:22-71, and 17:1-26. Together, they identify the Father as the giver of faith to believers and the giver of believers to Christ. He is, as Michaels puts it, "the initiator of Christian salvation according to this Gospel."[23] I will examine each of these texts in sequence to show how they illustrate this point.

1:5 and 1:13 fall within the context of the Prologue but more specifically its third stanza, 1:9-13.[24] This stanza is a brief discourse on belief and unbelief. All humanity is divided into two groups: those who do not know or receive Jesus (1:10-11) and those who believe in his name (1:12-13).[25]

In negative terms, 1:5 depicts the necessity of divine action for salvation by indicating that there is an inability to believe without God's help. Jesus is described as "the light." He "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not κατέλαβεν it."[26]

---

[23] Michaels, *John*, 42. Michaels surveys determinism and the work of the Father in John (ibid., 40-42). However, the places in John that he examines mostly differ from that which I selected for this section.

[24] Many divide the Prologue into four sections: 1:1-5, 1:6-8, 1:9-13, and 1:14-18 (Lindars, *John*, 77–79; Barrett, *St. John*, 149–50; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 4–5). Others see a chiastic structure (Carson, *John*, 113; Köstenberger, *John*, 20–21). Köstenberger is an example of this view. He structures 1:1-18 as follows: (A) 1:1-5, (B) 1:6-8, (C) 1:9-14, (B') 1:15, and (A') 1:16-18 (ibid., 21).

[25] Köstenberger argues this regarding John. He finds that "John divides all of humanity into two classes of people: those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and those who do not. Those who believe have eternal life; those who do not will be condemned at the final judgment" (*Theology*, 470). Barus considers these verses as explicative the Gospel's "faith motif" as well as its Christology and soteriology, and he seems to view them as indicative of the behavior of John's characters ("Faith Motif," 49, 62). He maintains that "there are only two possibilities for the characters depicted in the Gospel when encountering the protagonist, that is, belief or unbelief. *The conflict between belief and unbelief is the basic plot of the Gospel*," although he does not reference 1:12-13 specifically but the Prologue in general (ibid., 62; emphasis original). And he finds that "1:12 may well be regarded as a tour-guide in exploring the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel" and that "since 1:12 is tied by the relative pronoun οἵ to the explanatory statement of 1:13, one could hardly separate these two verses" (ibid., 49).

[26] Regarding the referent of "darkness," Schnackenburg points out that "'darkness' in John means primarily the world estranged from God, the place of man's existence not yet … illuminated by divine life (cf. 8:12 'to walk in darkness'; also 12:46; 1 Jn 2:11 a-b—described as a sinister power in 11c). Then it comes to mean men themselves, as they yield to this darkness and are oppressed and blinded by it (cf. 9:39; 12:40; 1 Jn 2:11c). It is of this blinded world of men ensnared by evil that the σκοτία of 1:5 is to be

Translators often render καταλαμβάνω as "overcome."[27] However, since knowledge and knowing are consistent themes in the Prologue, a reading of καταλαμβάνω as "comprehend" is preferred (if at least assumed along with a meaning of "overcome").[28]

We see this emphasis in 1:10 and 1:11.[29] Jesus is not known (γινώσκω) by the world and he is not received (παραλάμβανω) by his own. Since γινώσκω and παραλαμβάνω parallel one another the reader can suppose that their meanings overlap. In fact, although παραλαμβάνω is regularly translated "receive" or "accept," it can mean "*receive by hearing*" and even "*by way of lesson*."[30] Thompson places παραλαμβάνω in the category of "words in the prologue [that] stress human comprehension."[31]

---

understood" (*St. John*, 1:245; so also Köstenberger [*John*, 31], and Michaels [*John*, 56], who maintain that darkness refers to the world in this context). In fact, in the protasis of an if-then clause, Schnackenburg concludes that "the evangelist is thinking in v. 5 of the encounter of the Logos, the light, with the world of men—*as can hardly be doubted after v. 4*" (*St. John*, 1:246; emphasis added).

[27] This occurs in the ESV, HCSB, LEB, NABRE, NIV, NRSV, and RSV. The NASB takes it as "comprehend," but it appears to be in the minority.

[28] Thompson presents this possible reading (alongside the option of seeing καταλαμβάνω as overcome). She writes, "Since several other words in the prologue stress human comprehension, including 'believe' (*pisteusōsin*, vv. 7, 12), 'accept' (*paralambanō*, v. 11), and 'receive' (*lambanō*), one could understand John to be saying that the darkness did not receive or understand the light" (*John*, 30). My argument above reflects hers. In addition, *LSJ* advises translating καταλαμβάνω "*seize with the mind, comprehend*" in 1:5, although it includes "perh[aps] *overcome*" (s.v. καταλαμβάνω, 897; emphasis original). It may be wise to take Carson's approach. He proposes that "John may be playing with the two meanings [of καταλαμβάνω], as other authors of the time did…. The suggestion of BAGD preserves the ambiguity: the darkness did not *master* the light" (*John*, 138; emphasis original). Barrett makes the same point, remarking, "Here it seems probable that John is … playing on the two meanings.… The thought here is primarily cosmological, but corresponds closely to what John is about to say of the historical mission of Jesus.… Let not the luminary be conquered by the darkness; nor let truth flee away from falsehood" (*St. John*, 158). Others who find both meanings of καταλαμβάνω present in 1:5 include Witherington, *Wisdom*, 55; Keener, *John*, 1:387.

[29] Brown offers four ways of reading καταλαμβάνω in 1:5, one of which is "to grasp, to comprehend" (*John*, 1:8). He states that "the best argument for this translation is found in the parallels in vss. 10, 11: 'yet the darkness did not comprehend it … yet the world did not recognize him … yet his own people did not accept him" (ibid.). He understands it as "overcome" but writes, "we admit that reading 5b as the reason for 5a ('*for* the darkness did not overcome it') destroys the parallelism with 10c and 11b" (ibid.). Likewise, Schnackenburg, who reads καταλαμβάνω as "grasp," finds that "the expression here is the equivalent of οὐκ ἔγνω, v. 10, and οὐ παρέλαβον, v. 11" (*St. John*, 1:246). In a similar way, Carson reasons that if καταλαμβάνω is taken to mean *understand*, then v.5 "anticipates the rejection theme that becomes explicit in vv.10-11" (*John*, 120).

[30] *LSJ* s.v. παραλαμβάνω, 1315; emphasis original. ESV, HCSB, LEB, NIV, NASB, and RSV have "receive," and NRSV and NABRE have "accept."

[31] Thompson, *John*, 30.

Moreover, in 1:18 Jesus makes known (ἐξηγέομαι) "the only God, who is at the Father's side." It is important to note that ἐξηγέομαι is "oft[en used] as [a] t[echnical] t[erm] for the activity of priests and soothsayers who impart information or reveal divine secrets" and "w[ith] ref[erence] to divine beings themselves."[32] This places the word clearly in the realm of comprehension—particularly that of the divine. Thus the emphasis on knowledge throughout the Prologue—chiefly knowledge about Jesus or that which Jesus reveals about God—recommends a reading of καταλαμβάνω as "comprehend." This verse directly indicates that humans cannot grasp Jesus and it implicitly discloses the need for divine assistance to do so.

The next passage, 1:13, more conclusively illustrates the second of these points—an indication of the necessity for God's assistance to believe. 1:12 specifies that it is Jesus who gives ἐξουσία to those who have faith to become children of God and in 1:13, we learn that these individuals who have been given ἐξουσία are those "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God" (1:13). This string of negations with three different lexical expressions for human birth or procreation (blood, flesh, and man) is followed by the single contrasting element "of God."[33] This verse, then, reveals that to be a child of God requires his action. Nothing but God can

---

[32] *BDAG* s.v. ἐξηγέομαι, 349.

[33] Carson observes this structure of a series of negations followed by God and interprets it to mean that God is necessary for new birth to occur (*John*, 126). Michaels as well takes notice of this structure (pointing out only the string of negations), and he writes that through it, "the author accents the distinction between physical and spiritual birth" (*John*, 72). Köstenberger sees procreation as being referenced in each of these expressions. He renders "blood" as "natural descent" since there was "the belief that natural procreation entails the intermingling of bloods" (*Theology*, 472). He reads "will of the flesh" as "of human decision" (ibid.). And he argues that "'flesh' does not denote what is sinful (as so often in Paul's writings) but merely relates to what is natural as opposed to what is supernatural" (ibid., 472–73). Also regarding "of the will of man," he translates it "a husband's will" because that phrase "implies the OT concept of male headship," and he finds that "the reference could more generally be to parental determination or will" (ibid., 473). Michaels maintains that the last two phrases refer simply "to choice or initiative, not to sexual or any other kind of desire, legitimate or illegitimate" (*John*, 72).

enable this to happen.[34] Becoming a child of God does come through natural birth (3:5-8) or because of family heritage (8:31-59).[35] It must come from God.[36]

---

[34] A number of commentators also see in this passage the necessity of God's activity for spiritual transformation to take place and do so for similar reasons. As Lindars argues, "The whole verse is aimed at eliminating the misunderstanding latent in the ambiguous word 'power' and in the use of the birth metaphor.… John has to explain that this 'birth' has nothing whatever to do with physical generation through the sexual act. The three phrases that express this are virtually synonymous" (*John*, 91–92). He, then, identifies what this means: "John tends to write with almost painful literalness in order to point a fundamental contrast, and we shall see the same point in 3:3-6. What he means is that only God can do God's work, and man has no power of his own to achieve it" (ibid., 92).

Brown notes that "although this verb [ἐγεννήθησαν] can mean 'born' … the idea of agency implied in 'begotten' is clearly more appropriate" (*John*, 1:12). In addition, Barrett identifies the blood in 1:13 as the "blood of [the] father and mother" in the natural birth (*St. John*, 164). He then maintains that "this [οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων] and the two following phrases [οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς] serve to accentuate ἐκ θεοῦ. No human agency is or can be responsible for such a birth as this" (ibid.). Furthermore, he understands οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκός as specifying that "it does not lie within man's will to become, or make, a child of God" (ibid.).

Carson also interprets this verse in this way. He argues, "The series of negations [in 1:12] makes the same general point as 3:6: 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.' Being born into the family of God is quite different from being born into a human family.… Spiritual birth is not the product of sexual desire, 'the will of the flesh', here rendered 'of human decision'; it is certainly not the result of a husband's will…. New birth is, finally, nothing other than an act of God" (*John*, 126).

Likewise concerning 1:13, Schnackenberg writes, "Natural birth does not make one a child of God, nor any other natural process. It is a strictly supernatural event, wrought by God alone" (*St. John*, 1:263). He then infers that "the sharp antithesis is probably to be explained by the positive theological interests of the evangelist, who presents the birth of God as the incomprehensible work of the divine Spirit, utterly beyond man's reach (cf. 3:6). He stresses the supernatural origin of the children of God to show their contrast to the 'world' (v. 10) and their kinship with the Logos, the mediator of divine grace and truth (v. 16). The consciousness of belonging to God and being born of God characterizes 'Johannine' Christianity and gives it the certainty of being superior to the 'world' (cf. 1 Jn 4:4; 5:4)" (ibid.). Others who agree that this verse indicates that spiritual birth/becoming a child of God is something that can only happen through God include Morris (*John*, 90); Keener (*John*, 1:404); Köstenberger (*John*, 39); Thompson (*John*, 32).

[35] As Beasley-Murray argues, "To 'become children of God' is a work wholly of God's operation. The successive phrases contrast birth from God with human begetting, and emphasize the inability of men and women to reproduce it" (*John*, 13). Carson finds that οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων signals that "heritage and race, even the Jewish race, are irrelevant to spiritual birth," which John 8 further specifies (*John*, 126). Likewise, Keener observes that "the 'will of the flesh' [in 1:13] probably also reflects the context's contrast between children born from God (1:12) and genetic Israel (1:11), whom some early Christians called Israel 'according to the flesh' (Rom 2:28; 4:1; 9:3, 5, 8; 1 Cor 10:18; Eph 2:11)" (*John*, 1:404). So also Köstenberger finds that "John's point [in mentioning οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων] is that being a child of God is not a result of blood relations, as if Jews, for instance, could simply presume upon descent from Abraham or Moses…. Rather, spiritual birth must be sought and received from God on the basis of faith (in Jesus as Messiah)" (*John*, 39–40). As Morris summarizes, 1:13 is saying that "nothing human, however great or excellent, can bring the birth of which he speaks" (*John*, 90). Regarding 1:13, Thompson writes, "This [1:13] is the first hint that John reshapes the identity of the 'children of God,' neither linking that identity to ethnic heritage nor denying it to any on that basis" (*John*, 32). What her reading does that the others do not is it avoids potentially reading this passage in an anti-Jewish way.

[36] Indeed, Brown sees 1:13 as echoing 6:37 and 6:65. He is arguing against Boismard, who Brown says "asks how can the Word empower men *to become* God's children if they were already begotten by God?" (*John*, 1:12; emphasis original). Brown responds, "But this is to impose too exact a logic on the sequence. Verse 13 explains what is meant by God's children; it explains that those who accepted Jesus

John 3:27 continues this message and further makes explicit the implicit understanding of 1:5. At this point in the Gospel, John the Baptist tells his hearers that "a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (3:27). Heaven here is synonymous for God.[37] The Baptist's statement is not precisely about spiritual transformation. He is responding to his disciples' surprise over the number of people coming to Jesus to be baptized.[38] Even so, this adage divulges a deeper conviction of the author.[39] He holds that everything an individual has—life, food, vocation, etc.—is God given (δίδωμι).[40] When read in the context of other Johannine statements one can affirm that the author includes faith in this axiom.[41]

Our next set of verses are found in the 221eriscope of John 6:22-71 and they give the reader specific details concerning the role of the Father in spiritual transformation.

---

were those who were granted to Jesus by the Father (vi 37, 65); they were not the ones begotten from below, but the ones begotten from above (iii 31)" (ibid.).

[37] Carson, *John*, 211; Keener, *John*, 1:579. Köstenberger, *John*, 137. Keener gives the following examples of this use of heaven: Dan 4:26; 3 Macc. 4:21; 1 En. 6:2; 1QM 12:5; Rom 1:18; and Luke 15:18 (*John*, 1:579 n. 421).

[38] Barrett reads the text in this way. He judges that "this is a general principle (ἄνθρωπος means 'any man'), but it may be applied to the contrasting ministries of Jesus and John. If the work of the former is eclipsing that of the latter, the will of God must require that it should do so" (*St. John*, 222; so also Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1:415).

[39] Carson sees 3:27 as an aphorism, saying that "in a genuinely theistic universe this must be true: as frequently forgotten as it is, the maxim is almost self-evident" (*John*, 211). He repeats this idea elsewhere (*Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, NFTL [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981], 127).

[40] Carson understands 3:27 like this. He observes, "John casts his response in the form of a maxim, an aphorism. As such it is extremely broad: God's sovereignty stands hidden behind all human claims, for a human being does not have anything but what he has received" (*John*, 211). In addition, Paul says something like this in 1 Cor 4:17 with λαμβάνω there as well. Carson observes this fact (ibid.).

[41] Morris does not go as far as I do to specify that belief is a gift from God but he does propose that salvation itself could be presumed in this text. He writes, "John sees the hand of the Father in everything. If people were flocking to Jesus, that was because the Father willed it so. The words also apply to the believer whose salvation is a gift from God. It could never have been acquired otherwise. It is unlikely that the Baptist meant the words in this sense; his intention is to show the reason for Jesus' greater success. But the language he uses is certainly capable of this further application" (*John*, 212). Michaels speculates that "the one who 'receives' can be the believer, receiving salvation (as in 6:44 and 65), or it can be John or Jesus, receiving those who come (see 6:37, 39; see also 10:29; 17:2, 6, 24)" (*John*, 217). In fact, when commenting on v. 44, he argues that "the words ['No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him'] are … an echo of John's caution to his disciples three chapters earlier [i.e., 3:27]" (*John*, 385; see also ibid., 411).

What one discovers is Jesus repeatedly stating that belief is contingent upon the Father's action.[42] He makes this point three times. In 6:37 he tells those listening that "all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (6:37). In 6:44 and 6:65, he reiterates this but in negative terms. Jesus makes clear, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (6:44), and "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (6:65).[43]

In John 6:22-71, to come to Jesus can mean only one thing—to believe in him.[44] This is seen in 6:35 where "whoever comes to me" is shown to mean "whoever believes in me."[45] Furthermore, Jesus word's 6:64—"but there are some of you who do not believe"—are followed by what he says in 6:65—"this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."[46] Since coming to Jesus means believing in him, this indicates that believing in him requires the power of God.[47]

---

[42] This is Michaels's reading of these passages. He sees them as favoring the notion that John maintains that people believe because they are "born of God" (*John*, 41). This is specifically in reference to the Man Born Blind, whom he is discussing (ibid.). However, when analyzing that figure and his coming to faith, he quotes 6:37, 6:44, and 6:65, and then concludes, "The initiative in human salvation is God the Father's, and his alone" (ibid.). His ultimate goal is to demonstrate that John believes that "God is at work in a person's life *before* that person 'receives' Jesus, or 'believes,' or 'comes to the Light'" (ibid.).

[43] As Barrett puts it, "There is no difference in meaning between the two clauses ['unless the Father who sent me draws him' in v. 44 and 'unless it is granted him by the Father' in v. 65] and they illuminate each other" (*St. John*, 305; so also Michaels, who sees the "two pronouncements [in v. 44 and v. 65] … as amounting to the same thing" [*John*, 411]). Regarding the similarities between v. 44 and v. 65, Schnackenburg observes, "The exact words do not occur in the discourse [i.e., in v. 65], but the idea is in 44. Instead of the image of 'drawing,' he now uses a typical Johannine phrase (cf. 3:27; 19:11) for God's gracious giving" (*St. John*, 2:74). Carson finds that "the thought of v. 44 is the negative counterpart to v. 37a" (*John*, 293; so also Michaels, *John*, 377, 385).

[44] Lindars, *John*, 261; Barrett, *St. John*, 293; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:44; Moloney, *John*, 214.

[45] Barrett (*St. John*, 293), Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 2:45), and Moloney say this explicitly (*John*, 214). E.g., as Moloney writes, "Set in close parallel, to come to Jesus and to believe in Jesus mean the same thing" (ibid.). Each emphasizes that the two phrases disclose each other's meaning. Likewise, Michaels links "come" with "believe" in 6:35, but he does not specify that "come" means "believe" (*John*, 374). The Johannine synonymity of "come" and "believe" is also seen in 7:37-38, a point made by Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 2:44).

[46] Likewise, Morris observes that "in verse 64 and 65, and in verse 35, believing and coming to Jesus are parallel expressions" (*John*, 341). However, he finds that "the expression [come to Jesus] … indicates *another* facet of the same essential process" (ibid., 324; emphasis added).

[47] Several commentators interpret these verses as showing the need for divine action for faith and/or salvation to take place: Barrett, *St. John*, 295, 305; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:50, 2:74; Carson,

The last group of sayings that I will explore in this section repeat what is stated in 6:22-71. In 17:1-2, Jesus prays, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glory you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." In this supplication, it is everyone that the Father has given to Jesus to whom the Father then gives eternal life. Since in the Fourth Gospel faith is the means by which eternal life is gained—3:15; 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:40; 6:47— it seems likely that Jesus here is indicating that the Father is the one who grants faith and this allows for Christ to provide life (as already communicated in 6:22-71).[48] This idea is repeated throughout John 17.

In 17:6 Jesus announces, "I have manifested your [the Father's] name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." In 17:3, Jesus equates eternal life with knowledge of

---

John, 290, 293, 302–3; Morris, *John*, 329, 342; Köstenberger, *John*, 213, 220. Barrett says this in no uncertain terms. Regarding v. 65 he writes, "Faith in Christ is not merely difficult; apart from God it is impossible (cf. Mark 10:27)" (*St. John*, 305). In a similar way, when commenting on v. 44, Morris writes, "The thought of the divine initiative in salvation is one of the great doctrines of this Gospel…. People like to feel independent. They think that they come or that they can come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility. No one, no one at all, can come unless the Father draws him" (*John*, 328–29). He interprets v. 65 as specifying that "unbelief is to be expected apart from a divine miracle. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father gives the grace to do so. Left to themselves, sinners prefer their sin. Conversion is always a work of grace" (ibid., 342).

[48] Barrett reads 17:2 as revealing that "in John the status of believers rests entirely upon the act and gift of God, and upon the historic work and call of Jesus" (*St. John*, 503). He makes this point specifically to show how John's thoughts in 17:2 contrast "those of many gnostic systems" (ibid., 502). Schnackenburg finds that it is "remarkable … that there is no reference here to 'believe,' but only to those whom the Father has 'given' to the Son; elsewhere in the gospel 'believe' corresponds to 'having life'" (*St. John*, 3:171). Furthermore, when commenting on 17:2, he maintains that "there is a strong consciousness of election in Jn 17 (see especially vv. 9f, 14, 25)…. In praying explicitly for those whom 'the Father has given him', Jesus reminds the community of its dependence on God and the fact that it is guided by God" (ibid.). Witherington understands those "given to him by the Father" as "those who have faith and believe in the Son" by having the phrases stand in apposition (*Wisdom*, 269). However, he is silent on whether the reason for their faith is because of God's action or not. Morris is not as specific in his interpretation of the second half of 17:2, but he does read this passage as signaling that Jesus "does not confer it [life] on all indiscriminately. Once again we have the thought of divine predestination. Life is given 'to those you have given him'" (*John*, 636). Köstenberger also points out that "God's sovereign election of certain ones to eternal life" appears in 17:2 (*John*, 487).

God, declaring, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." As a result, 17:6 and 17:1-2 speak in tandem.[49] Jesus pairs the idea of eternal life with knowledge of God in 17:3 while indicating that he provides knowledge of the Father's name only to those whom the Father has given to him in 17:6.[50] This means that to know God (i.e., have eternal life) requires God's action—both the activity of the Son ("I have manifested your name to the people") and the permission of the Father ("yours they were, and you gave them to me").[51]

In 17:9 Jesus implores the Father "for those whom you [the Father] have given me, for they are yours" and in 17:24 he requests, "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." Once more, both of these passages specify that those who are now Jesus's were first God's. To be one of Jesus's followers requires that you be handed over from the Father.[52] It necessitates his direct

---

[49] Moloney notes that "there is a close link between vv. 3-5 and vv. 6-8" (462). He does not specify the significance of this link, but after making this comment he remarks that "Jesus has said that eternal life flows from the knowledge of God, the result of the acceptance of the revelation that takes place in Jesus Christ (v. 3). He has made known God" (*John*, 462).

[50] Several exegetes understand the manifestation of God's name to be the same as making him known. Carson argues that "God's 'name' embodies his character; to reveal God's name is to make God's character known" (*John*, 558; so also Witherington, *Wisdom*, 269; Keener, *John*, 2:1056; Köstenberger, *John*, 490–91). Moloney finds that this expression "means to make known all that can be known of the reality of God" (*John*, 462). Morris says that "the 'name' stands for the whole person" and "to manifest the name of God is accordingly to reveal the essential nature of God to people" (*John*, 640). Michaels simply states that "the Father's name" is "the Father himself" (*John*, 862), Thompson suggests that "'making God's name known' may simply mean making God known" (*John*, 351).

[51] A number of commentators recognize the promotion of divine sovereignty in this verse: Barrett (*St. John*, 503); Morris (*John*, 640); Moloney (*John*, 462); Keener (*John*, 2:1056).

[52] Commenting on 17:9-10, Thompson likewise observes that "we find here a pattern typical of John: what Jesus has, be it the authority to judge or to have and give eternal life, he has by virtue of the Father's gift to him (3:27, 35; 5:22, 27; 6:39; 10:29; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2, 7-8)" (*John*, 351–52; so also Moloney who identifies the disciples as part of what God gives to Jesus [*John*, 466]. Other commentators who see some form of divine election or predestination in both or one of these verses are Lindars (*John*, 523); Barrett (*St. John*, 506); Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 3:178); Carson (*John*, 569); Keener (*John*, 2:1056). Although commenting on v. 10, Morris makes a helpful observation. He writes that "it is characteristic of this Gospel to describe the disciples with reference to the divine act rather than their own. It is also a point frequently made that there is community between the Father and Son" (*John*, 642). Some recognize the

work, and thus repeated throughout John 17 is the conviction that those who are Jesus's disciples are such because they came from the Father and he has given them to Jesus.[53]

In sum, these passages disclose that the Father is the source of all that we have (3:27). This includes the capacity to believe in Jesus (6:22-71, 17:1-2, 17:6; 17:9), to grasp him (1:5), and to experience spiritual transformation (1:13; 17:24). Through these trusted figures, John illustrates the need for the Father's agency for spiritual transformation to take place. Without the initiative of the Father, people remain unchanged.

6.2.2. The Son

To understand the Son's role in how believers change, I will begin with John's Prologue as I did with the Father. I will then look at Jesus's "I am" sayings and conclude with two specific verses in John 15. In all of the texts that I examine, the Son is shown to be the giver of life—the one who provides spiritual transformation. As a result, his work is necessary for people to be spiritual transformed because his ministry provides life and enables people to become children of God.

John 1:1-18 reveals that Jesus is the one who gives individuals the ability to become children of God. This is specifically seen in 1:12, where the narrator identifies Jesus as the point of access for this to take place. He states, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right (ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι)." Prior to 1:12, γίνομαι appears repeatedly in 1:3. We learn that all

similarity these passages and 17:6: Brown for 17:9 (*John*, 2:758) and Schnackenburg for 17:10, which mirrors the content of v. 9 (*St. John*, 3:178).

[53] Commentators who agree with this reading and see in these verses the prerequisite of God's action prior to salvation include Barrett, *St. John*, 502–3, 505; Keener, *John*, 2:1056; Köstenberger, *John*, 487, 490, 499.

"all things were made (ἐγένετο) through him" and that "without him was not any thing made that was made (ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν ὃ γέγονεν)."[54] Now in 1:12, the reader comes across γίνομαι, but instead of it referring universally to everything, it applies to those who become children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι) and Jesus's ability to give these individuals the ἐξουσία to do so. Given the stress on Jesus's necessity for all things to exist, it is not a stretch to read 1:12 as advancing the idea that Jesus is once more the reason for something's existence. In this case, it is those who are children of God.

This is particularly seen in the fact that Jesus is the one who confers ἐξουσία to people so that they can move from being born "of this world" to "children of God." ἐξουσία must be given for this to happen and Jesus is the one who provides it.[55] This fits with 1:4 which announces that in Jesus "was life" and the "life was the light of men." Without Jesus, no life is possible—especially ἡ αἰώνιος ζωή. To gain this eternal life, one must be given ἐξουσία, and thus Jesus has to act for an individual to be transformed. He plays a vital role in the process of spiritual transformation.

Outside of the Prologue, John further draws attention to Jesus's role in the process of spiritual transformation. This happens in Jesus's "I am" statements, and in 15:16 and

---

[54] In 1:5, even John the Baptist is introduced with ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος.

[55] Barrett (*St. John*, 163) and Keener (*John*, 1:403-4) understand ἐξουσία in this way. Likewise, Schnackenburg maintains "they ['all who did receive him'] must receive from the Logos the real capacity to be children of God. In fact, ἐξουσίαν could have been omitted (cf. Bultmann, *ad loc.*), because in John διδόναι alone (with infinitive) can indicate God's bestowal of grace (cf. 3:27; 5:26; 6:31, 65; 19:11); but it can also be added as a mark of emphasis (cf. 5:27; with ἔχειν, 10:18), to lay stress on the power conferred by God. Men of themselves cannot attain to sonship of God (cf. 1 Jn 3:1); sonship only becomes a real possibility when the capacity thereto conferred by divine power is revealed by the mediator" (*St. John*, 1:262).

In a similar way, Morris emphasizes the changed "status" of the recipient of ἐξουσία. He argues that "John does not speak of power, as in the sense of power over sin (though in fact they receive that, too). His thought is that of status. They have received full authority to this exalted title. He does not say 'to be' but 'to become.' Not only is there a status, but there is a change of status. It is what Jesus speaks of as passing from death to life (5:24)" (*John*, 87; so also Köstenberger [*John*, 39] and Beasley-Murray [*John*, 13] with slight variation). If this is the case, then the granting of ἐξουσία permits spiritual transformation to take place because people have a changed status when Jesus acts.

15:19. In Jesus's "I am" sayings, the author continually brings up the fact that Jesus bestows life because he is the source of life. I will begin with 6:22-71 and touch on sections from the other "I am" sayings: 8:12-30, 10:1-21, 11:17-21, 14:1-14, and 15:1-17.[56]

In 6:22-71, Jesus tells his audience that he is the bread of life (6:48). He then discloses that unlike those who ate manna in the wilderness and died (6:49), those who eat him will live forever (6:50-51). In 6:53, he states this in the negative—"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." In 6:54, he reiterates this in the positive—"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Thus throughout the discourse, Jesus emphasizes the necessity to receive him to have eternal life (6:47-51; 6:53-58; 6:63).

This belief that Jesus is the place of where life is found appears throughout the other "I am" discourses. In each, there is a point in the dialogue where Jesus articulates his ability to give life. For instance, he announces in 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In 10:1-21, he is both the door for the sheep and the good shepherd. As the door, he saves all who enter by him because he came "that they may have life and have it abundantly" (10:10), and as the good shepherd, he lays down his life for his sheep (10:11; 10:15), protecting them from death (10:12-13).[57]

---

[56] Barrett provides a similar list (*St. John*, 291), as does Simmons, who surveys the "I am" sayings in each of these texts as I do but places them in a separate category from those "I am" statements that lack a predicate ("Christology," 99–101, 94). The specific texts that he surveys are "6:35, 6:41, 6:48, 6:51, 8:12, 8:18, 8:23, 10:7, 10:9, 10:11, 10:14, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1, and 15:5" (ibid., 99).

[57] See n. 59.

In 11:25b-26a, Jesus tells Martha bluntly, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."[58] Furthermore, in 15:5-6, Jesus identifies himself as the vine and his disciples as the branches. Only if his disciples abide in him are they able to bear fruit. Apart from Jesus, they can do nothing and will perish. In each of these "I am" statements, Jesus reveals that he is the point of access to God and the source of eternal life. No one is able to gain life without him.

In several of these statements, Jesus provides the reason why he is able to give life. In 6:51, he informs his audience, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Elsewhere, Jesus specifies that he lays down his life for his sheep (10:11; 10:15; 10:17-18), and in view of 1:29, 11:50-52, 12:24, and 18:14, it is clear that the author is emphasizing the sacrificial and saving nature of Jesus's death.[59] The Fourth Gospel, then, presents Jesus as the source of life because he has made a way to it through his crucifixion.

---

[58] As Simmons recognizes, "One of the greatest of the 'I am' affirmations is found in 11:25 at the scene of the raising of Lazarus from death. Jesus affirmed to Martha that all of her hopes for a future resurrection rest in him. Within Jesus reside all of the hopes and aspirations of humanity" (ibid., 101).

[59] The ὑπέρ of 10:11; 10:15; 11:50 and 18:14 shows this. These passages come from Keener, who uses them in his reading of 1:29 as a reference to a sacrificial Passover lamb (*John*, 1:453, 1:452–54). Moreover, as Carson maintains for 10:11, "the words 'for (*hyper*) the sheep' suggest sacrifice. The preposition, itself ambiguous, in John always occurs in a sacrificial context, whether referring to the death of Jesus (6:51;10:11, 15; 11:50ff.; 17:19; 18:14), of Peter (13:37-38), or of a man prepared to die for his friend (15:13). In no case does this suggest a death with merely exemplary significance; in each case the death envisaged is on behalf of someone else. The shepherd does not die for his sheep to serve as an example…. No, the assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger; that in their defense the shepherd loses his life; that by his death they are saved. That, and that alone, is what makes him *the good shepherd*'" (*John*, 386; emphasis original).

Of note for this project is what Jesus says about his speech in 6:22-71 and his agency in 14:6. In 6:63, Jesus specifies that he grants life through his words.[60] He says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."[61] Jesus's "words" here include everything that he says and not just what is in John 6.[62] This idea appears in the Gospel: 5:24; 8:51; 14:23; 15:7.[63] As a result, in 6:63, as Brown argues, "John is once more affirming that man cannot gain life on his own. If Jesus is divine revelation come down from heaven like bread to nourish men, his purpose is to communicate to them the principle of eternal life. The man who accepts the words of Jesus will receive the life-giving Spirit."[64] Or as Morris reads 6:63, "Jesus' words are creative utterances (cf. the words of God in Gen. 1). They not only tell of life; they bring life (cf. 5:24)."[65]

---

[60] As Bennema understands it, "Before the cross, the disciples had experienced the Spirit though Jesus' life-giving words" ("Giving," 209).

[61] In light of the rest of the Gospel, Thomas says this makes sense. As he maintains, "Jesus' statement that his words are Spirit and life are consistent with the fact that from the beginning of the FG Jesus (the Word) is closely identified with life (1:3-4), and in 14:6 he will make this identification explicit" ("The Spirit in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Explorations," in *The Spirit and the Mind: Essays in Informed Pentecostalism*, ed. Terry L. Cross and Emerson B. Powery [Lanham, MD: University Presss of America, 2000], 93).

[62] Likewise, Lindars sees Jesus's life-giving "words" in 6:63 as "the teaching of Jesus as a whole" (*John*, 274). Barrett suggests that "ῥήματα need not refer exclusively to the words of the preceding discourse; all the words of the incarnate Christ may be meant, and John no doubt does not forget that Jesus himself is the creative word of God (1.1)" (*St. John*, 305). So also Schnackenburg contends that "Jesus' words (ῥήματα) are simply his revelatory discourse (λόγος) considered in its individual statements; the two terms are interchangeable (cf. 12:48a with 12:48b, 17:6 with 17:8)" (*St. John*, 2:73).

[63] The above texts are from Schnackenburg, who utilizes them to emphasize the necessity of faith for Jesus's words to be effective (ibid.).

[64] Brown, *John*, 1:300.

[65] Morris, *John*, 341. Likewise, Lindars reads 6:63 as showing that "just as man can only receive spiritual things when illuminated by the Spirit, so it must be clearly understood that all Jesus' teaching belongs to the category of spiritual things" (*John*, 274), and that "Jesus' teaching has its origin in the spiritual realm, and its aim and effect is to bring men into this realm, which is the gift of eternal life" (ibid.). Witherington is right to see that in 6:63 "the issue here is salvation through revelation and the transformation it brings" (*Wisdom*, 160).

This fits with the Gospel's message that Jesus speaks the Father's words (7:17-18; 12:49; 14:10; 14:24).[66] As Carson observes, "Human beings live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Dt. 8:3). The identical claim is now made for the words of Jesus, precisely because he is the Word incarnate (1:1-18; *cf*. 5:19-30)."[67] Furthermore, the supremacy of Jesus's words can be seen in the fact that ἐγώ in 6:63 is emphatic.[68] Jesus's words bring life—not anyone else's.[69] As Barrett puts it, "Jesus supersedes Torah as the source of life [which was thought to be life giving according to *Mekhilta* Exod. 15.26]. His visible flesh and his audible words (ῥήματα) bear witness to the Spirit and the Word through which he becomes revelation and salvation."[70]

Consequently, this means that 6:63 directly coincides with the narratives of John's confessing characters. These believers' declarations of faith consistently come after Jesus converses with them. This happens in each of the scenes that I examined. In John 1:43-51, Jesus says to Nathanael, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (1:48), and Nathanael responds, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the

---

[66] Again the passages referenced above come from Schnackenburg who makes a similar point with them in his discussion of 6:63. He writes, "The word of Jesus, which comes from the Father (12:49; 14:10b,24; cf. 7:17-18), is filled with divine spirit … and therefore able to give the gift of divine life (8:51), to transmit it to the believing hearer here and now (5:24)" (*St. John*, 2:73).

[67] Carson, *John*, 302.

[68] Brown observes that ἐγώ in 6:63 is emphatic and its potential supremacy over Moses's words (*John*, 1:297).

[69] Although Barrett does not fully embrace the notion that ἐγώ is emphatic, he sees this text as showing that Jesus's words are life giving and contrast those of Moses. He suggests, "The ἐγώ is possibly though not certainly emphatic: *My* words are able to give life, whereas those of Moses were unable to perform what was promised" (*St. John*, 305; emphasis original). Köstenberger also recognizes that 6:63 "contrasts with the Jewish belief that life is found in the words of the law (5:39; cf. *Mek. Exod.* 15.26, citing Prov. 4:22; *m. 'Abot* 6.7)" (*John*, 220). Brown specifies that "thinking back to the mention of the manna given by Moses (31-32) and remembering that Deut viii 3 relates the manna to the words of God, some hold that Jesus is stressing the value of his own words as contrasted with those of Moses. Jesus might be challenging the type of Jewish thought we find later exemplified in the Midrash Mekilta on Exod xv 26: 'The words of the Law which I have given you are life for you.' In this same pattern of contrast, compare John vi 68 which attributes the words of life to Jesus with the statement in Acts vii 38 where it is Moses who received the living words to be given to the people" (*John*, 1:297).

[70] Barrett, *St. John*, 305.

King of Israel!" (1:49). The Samaritan Woman hears Jesus announce, "I who speak to you am he" (4:26b) and then reports to her fellow villagers, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (4:29). In 9:1-41, the Man Born Blind confesses Christ as "Lord" (9:38b) only after Jesus tells him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you" (9:37b). Before Mary Magdalene exclaims "Rabboni," Jesus calls her by name (20:16). In the Thomasine narrative of John 20, it is after Jesus commands, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" that Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God" (20:27-28). What is seen is a clear coupling of John's theology and his narration. John's confessing characters depict directly how a trusted figure (Jesus) talks about spiritual transformation. They gain life when Jesus speaks to them.[71]

In John 14, Jesus is questioned about the way to God. His answer expresses his agency in matters related to new life.[72] He proclaims, "I am the way, and the truth, and

---

[71] It should be recognized that Jesus's words give life only to those who believe. As Schnackenburg writes, "The sentence is connected with what precedes (63a) by association. Jesus' promise presupposes that people accept his words now in faith (cf. 5:24; 8:51; 14:23; 15:7)" (*St. John*, 2:73). As quoted above, he also states, "The word of Jesus, which comes from the Father (12:49; 14:10b,24; cf. 7:17-18), is filed with the divine spirit (3:34 and see Commentary) and therefore able to give the gift of divine life (8:51), to transmit it to the believing hearer here and now (5:24), *though this presupposes that the believer remains in Jesus' word* (8:31)*, keeps it* (14:23) *and allows himself to be led ever more deeply into its truth* (cf. 14:26; 16:13)" (ibid.; emphasis added). Nonetheless, as shown above, John considers the ability to believe a work of the Father and thus 6:63 still falls under the purview of the necessity for divine activity for spiritual transformation to take place. Keener synthesizes these two ideas nicely. He clarifies, "Jesus' words are from the Father (3:34; 12:47-50; 14:10; 17:8), like those of Moses (5:47), and only those taught by the Father would embrace them (6:45; 8:47)" (*John*, 1:695).

[72] As Brown writes, "The emphasis here [when Jesus says that he is the way] is different from that of xvi 13 where the Paraclete/Spirit is said to guide the disciples along the *way* of all *truth*. Rather Jesus is presenting himself as the only avenue of salvation, in the manner of x 9: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.'" (*John*, 2:630; emphasis original). Or as Keener puts it, "Jesus goes to the Father by virtue of his identity and character; the disciples will come to the Father by means of Jesus and their participation with him" (*John*, 2:939). Keener also ties this passage to John 10, writing, "Jesus was the 'way' in the sense in which he was the 'door'—only robbers tried to enter the sheepfold by other means (10:1, 7, 9)" (ibid., 2:942). He also comments, "Jesus as the 'way' is the only 'door' (10:7, 9) through which his sheep may find safety within the fold (10:1)" (ibid., 2:943).

Morris argues both that (1) "in this connection 'the truth' … will have saving significance. It will point to Jesus' utter dependability, but also to the saving truth of the gospel" (*John*, 569), and (2) that "'the

the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6b). As many point out, the emphasis here is on Jesus being the way.[73] He allows access to God and does so because he provides truth and life.[74] This is confirmed by the fact that 14:6 is Jesus's response to Thomas's question: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" along with the stress of the second half of 14:6 being the act of coming to the

---

life' … will likewise take its content from the gospel. Jesus is both life and the source of life to believers" (*John*, 569). Lindars maintains that the first part of 14:6 ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life") "is elucidated in the following words, which specify the destination as the Father, and the means of access as Jesus himself" (*John*, 472).

Some point to a dual understanding of Jesus's agency in 14:6—not only does he provide a way for people to come to the Father but he also illustrates the way to live (Brown, *John*, 2:628; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 249). A number of interpreters find that 14:6 depicts the exclusivity of salvation in Christ: Barrett, *St. John*, 458; Brown, *John*, 2:631; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 249; Keener, *John*, 2:941-42, 2:943; Köstenberger, *John*, 430. This further contributes to the idea that Jesus is the agent by which spiritual transformation is made possible.

[73] Brown, *John*, 2:621; Barrett, *St. John*, 458; Carson, *John*, 491; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:64; Michaels, *John*, 775; Thompson, *John*, 308–9. Even Köstenberger, who argues that when John uses three words conjoined by καί each word retains its own meaning, states, "It is true, though, that of the three terms used in 14:6, 'the way' is the head term" (*John*, 429). Schnackenburg shows how some interpreters in the Patristic period saw life and truth as further explaining Jesus as the way, specifically Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuesta to some extent (*St. John*, 3:65).

[74] As Keener argues, "The idea here includes access (though it involves more, namely, remaining in his presence, 14:23), but also the access becomes direct in Jesus, no longer mediated through him at one remove (14:17; 16:26-27)" (*John*, 2:940; so also Lindars, who reads this passage as identifying Jesus as the way of "access" to God because of the second half of the verse ["no one comes to the Father except through me"] [*John*, 472]). Furthermore, as Thompson maintains, "The following explanatory comment ('No one comes to the Father but by me') suggests that the three predicates [the way, the truth, and the life] could be better understood to indicate that Jesus is the way that leads to the Father, precisely because he himself embodies the truth and life that come from the Father (cf. 1:4-5, 17; 5:33; 11:25; 17:3). Thus we might translate, 'I am the way that leads to truth and life'" (*John*, 308–9).

In the same way, Michaels holds that in 14:6, "'the Truth' and 'the Life' simply spell out for his disciples the benefits of salvation to which 'the Way' leads. Jesus had already told Martha explicitly that he was 'the Life' (11:25), and he implicitly claimed to be 'the Truth' by telling a group of 'believing' Jews at the Tent festival that 'the truth will set you free' (8:32), and 'if the Son sets you free, you will really be free' (8:36, italics added)" (*John*, 775).

Even in the Patristic period, 14:6 was read in a way similar to this. Schnackenburg surveys the interpretation of this passage in that era and he reports that Theodore of Mopsuesta maintains that "through the way and the truth, men reach life or, progressively, through Jesus, the way, we know the truth and rejoice in eternal life," and that "John Chrysostom and, much later, Theophylact provided interpretation that were much closer to the text, insisting that both terms acted as a guarantee of the promise that Jesus was the way; because he was also the truth, he could not be mistaken and, because he was the life, we could not be stopped on this way by death" (ibid., 3:65). Lindars sees these terms as "explanatory" of "the way," but he interprets them as actions that Jesus's disciples do to follow the way of living that Jesus establishes (*John*, 472). Other scholars who see "the truth" and "the life" as describing how Jesus is "the way" include Barrett, *St. John*, 458; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:64-65; Moloney, *John*, 395; Keener, *John*, 2:943.

Father: "No one comes to the Father except through me."[75] As a result, 14:6 is a declaration of the necessity of Jesus for spiritual transformation to take place—eternal life is knowledge of God and Jesus is the one who reveal the Father (i.e., provides truth about God and life from him).[76] In fact, as Michaels notes, 14:6 begins the shift away from a place to persons—the Father and the Son.[77] He writes, "'The way' is not what Thomas thought it was, a literal route or pathway, but a Person, Jesus himself. The destination, accordingly is not a place (not even precisely 'my Father's house'), but also a Person, the Father himself: 'No one comes *to the Father* except through me.'"[78] Jesus, himself, is the way, and as such, he is truth and life—providing both to whom he will.

---

[75] Commentators make one or both of these points. Brown writes, "That 'the way' is the dominating phrase in 6 is suggested by the fact that Jesus is reaffirming his statement about the way in 5, in response to Thomas's question about the way in 5. Moreover, the second line of 6 leaves aside the truth and the life and concentrates on Jesus as the way: 'No one comes to the Father except through me'" (*John*, 2:621). So also Carson, whose argument I am utilizing, makes the case that "the second half of this verse shows that the entire verse must be taken as an answer to Thomas's question. This means that *way* gains a little emphasis over *truth* and *life*" (*John*, 491; emphasis original). In the same way, Schnackenburg comments that "This [emphasis] is obvious from the context: ἡ ὁδός is a repetition of the key-word in v. 4 and is confirmed as the only focal point by v. 6b (δι' ἐμοῦ)" (*St. John*, 3:64). Although not specifically discussing the priority of "the way" in this text, Moloney remarks that "Thomas's question (v.5) reflects an ongoing unwillingness to face all the implications of the end of Jesus' story (cf. 13:33, 36). They should know where he is going (*pou hypageis*) but a request for further instruction on 'the way' (*tēn hodon*) is justifiable, and it opens the possibility for Jesus' self-revelation as 'the way'" (*John*, 394–95). Both Thompson and Barrett make the second of these two points—that the second half of 14:6 places the focus of the text on Jesus being the way (Barrett, *St. John*, 458; Thompson, *John*, 308–9). Moreover, Michaels demonstrates that "Jesus could have just said, 'I am the Way. No one comes to the Father except through me,' and the dynamic of the exchange would have been the same" (*John*, 775).

[76] Interprets demonstrate that Jesus is the truth and the life because he provides truth about God or gives the life that God gives: Brown, *John*, 2:628; Carson, *John*, 491; Keener, *John*, 2:943; Thompson, *John*, 309. Their work stands behind this paragraph. Others make related points that help flesh out this idea. Moloney observes that "the earlier use of these Johannine expressions, from the Prologue (cf. 1:4, 14, 17) through the story itself, points to Jesus as the authoritative and saving revelation of God (*alētheia*: 1:14, 17; 5:44; 8:32, 40, 44-46; *zōē* 1:4; 6:33, 35, 48, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10; 11:25)" (*John*, 395). Barrett finds that "because Jesus is the means of access to God who is the source of all truth and life he is himself the truth and the life for men (cf. vv. 7, 9)" (*St. John*, 458). And Witherington claims that "to say that Jesus is the truth and the life is in part just another way of saying that Jesus is the way. Since God is the source of all truth and life, and Jesus is the way to God and the one who embodies God and all his gifts to us, Jesus is also the truth and the life" (*Wisdom*, 249).

[77] Michaels, *John*, 775.

[78] Ibid.; emphasis original.

Furthermore, Michaels also observes that "'no one can come to the Father except through me' stands as a kind of sequel to the principle stated much earlier that 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him' (6:44), or 'unless it is given him from the Father' (6:65). That is, only the Father can bring anyone to Jesus, and only Jesus can bring anyone to the Father"[79] Therefore, this ties 14:6 even closer to this consistent theme of the necessity of divine action for spiritual transformation to take place.

Lastly, Brown finds that Jesus announcing that he himself is "the truth" and "the life" is directly connected to his mission. He argues that "in calling himself the truth, Jesus is not giving an ontological definition in terms of transcendentals but is describing himself in terms of his mission to men."[80] He then proposes that Jesus's claim that "'I am the truth' is to be interpreted in light of xviii 37: 'The reason I have come into the world is to testify to the truth.'"[81] The rest of 18:37 is "everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." This connects 14:6 with 6:63.[82] Part of Jesus's mission is to speak the truth, and those who are drawn by the Father hear him.

In the same way, Brown makes the case for Jesus's identification with "the life." He maintains that "once again this is a description of Jesus in terms of his mission to men."[83] As evidence, he quotes John 10:10 in full ("I came that they may have life and have it abundantly") and 11:25-26 in part ("Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and

---

[79] Ibid.

[80] Brown, *John*, 2:630.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Brown does make the point in his commentary on 14:6 that "those who believe in Jesus as the incarnate revelation of the Father (and that is what 'truth' means) receive the gift of life, so that *the words of Jesus* are the source of life" (ibid., 2:631). He then quotes 6:63 and 5:24. Both passages speak of Jesus's life-giving words.

[83] Ibid., 2:630-31.

the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"), and he references 10:28 ("I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand").[84] Consequently, Jesus is truth and life, and his work is to provide them.

As a result, John 6:63 and 14:6 reveal that confessing characters experience spiritual transformation by meeting with Christ. This interaction is the avenue for their transformed existence. What is seen in the story of the text is what is reflected in these declarations. As John 6:63 illustrates, Jesus speaks and this results in confessions of faith, and as John 14 makes clear, Jesus is their way to God—no one can receive truth and life without him.

The final two verses that I will survey, which emphasize Jesus's sovereignty in spiritual transformation, are John 15:16 and 15:19. In 15:16, Jesus teaches his disciples that they did not choose him (οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε), but that he chose them (ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς), and in 15:19, Jesus states that the world hates his disciples because he chose them out of the world (ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου).[85] Robert A. Peterson suggests that it is possible to see these texts as establishing Jesus not only as the elector of these disciples—those whom Jesus spoke with in John 15—but of all disciples.[86] He argues that these texts "follow the analogy of the vine and the branches, which addresses

[84] Ibid.

[85] This is not the first time that Jesus talks about his choosing of his disciples in John. As Keener notes, "Jesus several times refers to the chosenness of his disciples (6:70; 13:18; 15:6, 19)" (*John*, 2:1015). Schnackenburg also points this out, refencing its occurrence in 6:70 and 13:18 (*St. John*, 3:111). Likewise, Brown ties 15:19 to 8:23 and 15:16. He sees "the theme of the call of the disciples" expanding in this passage. As he writes, "Jesus is taking them out of the world, at least in the sense that while they will be in the world, they will not belong to it" (*John*, 2:696).

[86] Peterson, "Is Christ 'the Electing God'?," *Presb* 30 (2004): 86. His full interpretation for these verses is in ibid., 83–87. This paragraph and the next are dependent upon this article. Peterson is not alone. Others who directly state that 15:16 alludes to more than those with whom Jesus is speaking include Brown, *John*, 2:683; Moloney, *John*, 427.

the original disciples of Jesus as representatives of future followers of Jesus," and from this concludes, "I see no reason to restrict Jesus' words in John 15:16-19 to the Eleven."[87]

If these verses mean what Peterson proposes, then not only does John consider the Father's drawing of individuals to Jesus as necessary for faith, but he also thinks that Jesus's election is required.[88] This further mirrors John's confession scenes in which Jesus consistently acts first. He finds the future believer, he initiates the conversation, and his speech results in a confession of faith.[89] These narratives fall in line with Peterson's

---

[87] Peterson, "Electing God," 86. Moreover, both Moloney and Keener also see Jesus's vine metaphor as important to 15:16. Moloney finds that "as the ongoing mission of Jesus, now entrusted to the disciples, is described, language taken from the metaphor of the vine returns" (*John*, 425), and Keener writes, "But our text may … simply allude to the chosenness of God's people as a whole (cf. 2 John 1, 13; Rev 17:14; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Acts 13:17; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:1), here applied to the branches on the true vine, in contrast to Jewish pictures of Israel as God's vine" (*John*, 2:1015-1016).

[88] A number of commentators observe that one of these verses indicate the Johannine theme of divine election. Regarding 15:19, Morris remarks, "The disciples 'do not belong to the world,' for Jesus has chosen them out of it (incidentally a further indication of the divine initiative: divine election means a good deal throughout this Gospel)" (*John*, 602). Concerning 15:16, Schanckenburg makes the following point: "'Election' is hardly ever mentioned in the case of the OT 'friends of God' (Abraham and Moses). It is, however, made explicit here with regard to Jesus' disciples, though not for the first time in the gospel—attention has already been drawn to their having been chosen by Jesus in 6:70 and 13:18" (*St. John*, 3:111). Moloney straddles between divine election and free choice in his reading. He writes, "The disciples, through no act of the will or physical effort on their part, have been drawn into a new relationship (v. 15)," while also specifying that although "the initiative lies with Jesus … in the end the disciples must turn to the Father in their need, asking in the name of Jesus (v. 16c)" (*John*, 425). He argues this in his reading on 15:16. Keener finds that 15:16 "invites deeper theological reflection, fitting his theme elsewhere of Jesus' foreknowledge (e.g., 1:51; 2:19; 6:70-71)" (*John*, 2:1015). Köstenberg reports that "in terms of teacher-pupil relationships, Jesus here broke with contemporary custom, for it was common in first-century Palestine for disciples to attach themselves to a particular rabbi, not vice versa" (*John*, 459). This may be significant and thus highlight the theme of divine election. Thompson also makes a similar assessment about divine election as a theme of 15:16. She emphasizes the fact that these disciples are not disciples "by virtue of what they have done" (*John*, 329). Instead, they are disciples "by virtue of his love for them and the fact that he chose them" (ibid., 330). She then reports that in John, the way Jesus chooses his disciples mirrors what God does in the Old Testament, choosing. God choose "certain persons, including Abraham and David" and "the people of Israel to be his holy people" (ibid.). God's reason for choosing these as opposed to others is "because he has loved them," the same reason for Jesus's choice (ibid.).

Beyond this, several interpreters see 15:16 and/or 15:19 as indicating that Jesus's disciples lack any space for boasting because of their position as disciples. These interpreters include: Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:111; Carson *John*, 523, 525; Köstenberger, *John*, 459.

[89] Several interpreters see 15:16 and/or 15:19 as signaling the need for Jesus's initiation for discipleship to take place. Barrett makes this point: "In the gospel narrative … (and this is as true of the Synoptic Gospels as of John), Jesus chooses, calls, and appoints his disciples. The initiative is entirely his; the ἐγώ is emphatic" (*St. John*, 478). Furthermore, he exclaims, "This emphasis governs the interpretation of the whole passage. Men are not Jesus' friends because they have a natural affinity with him, but because he has named them (εἴρηκα) his friends" (ibid.). These comments comes from his interpretation of 15:16. Likewise and also writing on 15:16, Lindars remarks, "The initiative always rests with Jesus himself. The

interpretation and continue to show overlap between what John displays with his characters and what his trusted figures say.

6.2.3. The Holy Spirit

The author outlines the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual transformation in Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus. In this exchange, Jesus articulates three related ideas: (1) "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3b); (2) "unless one is born of water and the Spirit (πνεύματος), he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:5b); and (3) "the wind (τὸ πνεῦμα) blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος)" (3:8).[90] In the first of these passages, John 3:3b, Jesus shows the necessity of new birth to be a member of God's kingdom, and later in the chapter in the oft quoted John 3:16, kingdom members are understood to be believers in Jesus. This makes faith a prerequisite for salvation, and it means that to be "born again" is to have faith.[91]

---

disciples' part is that of response to a love already given, and as such entails submitting themselves voluntarily to his will in loving obedience. There can never be any suggestion of a disciple laying claim to Jesus' friendship in order to use it for his own ends" (*John*, 492). Or as Morris writes in his commentary on 15:16, "We always tend to feel that the initiative is with us. Jesus now assures his followers that this is not the case. It was not they who chose him, as was normally the case when disciples attached themselves to a particular rabbi. Students the world over delight to seek out the teacher of their choice and attach themselves to him or her. But Jesus' disciples did not hold the initiative. On the contrary, it was he who chose them. And not only did he choose them, but he appointed them to their task" (*John*, 600). Concerning 15:19, Michaels states, "The reminder that 'I chose you' echoes verbatim the preceding 'You did not choose me but I chose you' (16), making clear that their relationship to the world has been severed on Jesus' initiative, not their own" (*John*, 819). However, while writing on 15:16, Michaels does indicate that Jesus's "choice of these disciples is not so much divine 'election' in the classic theological sense of the term as simply the selection of 'Twelve' (now eleven) out of all who followed him, to accompany him in his ministry and carry on his work after his departure" (ibid., 815).

[90] These three verses will drive my discussion of the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual transformation as outlined in John 3, and Bennema likewise points to 3:3-8 as specifying that "the Spirit is necessary for salvation" ("The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel—A New Proposal?" *EvQ* 74 [2002]: 195). He holds that "the 'birth of the Spirit' is the means to enter the kingdom of God (3:3-8)" (ibid.).

[91] Keener reads "born again" as "born from above" given the range of meaning of ἄνωθεν ("John, Gospel Of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas

In John 3:5, Jesus describes how this birth takes place. To be born again (and thus have faith) requires one to be born of water and Spirit (πνεύματος).[92] In this text, πνεῦμα most likely refers to the Holy Spirit and does so for three reasons.[93] First, Jesus's ministry consistently involves the Holy Spirit and this is brought to the reader's attention early in the Gospel.[94] Second, John links the Holy Spirit with the theme of water in his Gospel—hence "born of *water* and the Spirit" in 3:5. For instance, in 1:33, Jesus "*baptizes* with the Holy Spirit" and this contrasts John the Baptist's water baptism.[95] The author's pairing of the Holy Spirit with water in 1:33 (and 3:5) becomes overt in 7:39.[96] There, the author

---

Perrin, 2nd ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013], 432). He then claims that "born from above" would be another way of saying "born from God" since "this [from above] was an acceptable Jewish way of saying 'from God'" ("John," 432). If we take 3:3 in this way, then it is another indication of the need for God's action for spiritual transformation to take place. To see the kingdom of God requires being born from him. On the other hand, W. J. Dumbrell argues that in John 3, "the dialogue begins with Nicodemus' presentation of his understanding of Jesus (v. 2), by which the agenda for the chapter is introduced. But the type of knowledge required about Jesus to enter the kingdom is the heavenly knowledge to which v. 3 refers, gained by rebirth through water and the Spirit" ("The Spirit in John's Gospel," in *Spirit of the Living God: Part One*, Explortaions 5 [Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1991], 80).

[92] John R. Mumaw links 3:3 and 3:5. He proposes that "this [the being born again of 3:3] refers to the work of the Spirit as the regenerative principle in human life" ("The Holy Spirit at Work as Predicted in the Gospel of John," in *Encounter with the Holy Spirit: Consultation on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Geo R. Brunk [Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1972], 191). He states this and then quotes 3:5 as evidence. Likewise, Dumbrell finds that "the work of the Spirit and the production of belief go hand in hand" and because of this "John's account of the activity of the Spirit becomes a critical factor in discerning how the original community of faith came into existence" ("Spirit," 78).

[93] This is an important step because not everyone agrees that πνεῦμα here or else where in John refers to the Holy Spirit. George Johnston maintains that "developed trinitarian doctrine belongs to the third and fourth centuries, not the first" ("Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John," *Perspective* 9 [1968]: 30). He then claims, "[An] examination of *pneuma*, spirit, in John shows that it can mean wind or breath or divine power. The most typical sense is the last" (ibid.). In addition, Dodd finds that "John defines deity as πνεῦμα. If we are to use the trinitarian formula, he speaks, not of Father, Son and Spirit, but of Father, Son and Paraclete, the term πνεῦμα being appropriated to Deity as such" (*Interpretation*, 226). With that said, he recognizes that in John, "the only way for man to rise from the lower life to the higher is by being born ἐκ πνεύματος, which is also to be born ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ" (ibid.). Consequently, throughout this section of Chapter Six, I will put forward my reasons for reading πνεῦμα as the Holy Spirit in John 3:3-8, 4:23-24, and 6:63.

[94] I discuss this in detail below in my analysis of 6:63. For now, I will take this point as a given.

[95] As Michaels notes in his comments on 3:5, "The reader will notice … that John earlier contrasted his own role of 'baptizing in water; (1:26, 31, 33) with Jesus' role as the One who would 'baptize in Holy Spirit' (1:33)" (*John*, 182).

[96] As Keener reports, "The one passage in which the Fourth Gospel explicitly interprets its water motif for the reader is 7:37-39, where water represents the Spirit" (*John*, 1:550). Or as Michaels observes, in John "'Water' … can evoke images either of cleansing (9:7; 13:5), or of sustaining life by the quenching

clarifies that when Jesus speaks of “living water,” he is talking “about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.” Consequently, when readers see water and πνεῦμα together, they should expect πνεῦμα to refer to the Holy Spirit.

Third, in John, Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is intimately connected to believers throughout their lives for the sake of helping them (14:15-31, 16:5-15, and 20:22-23). If they need the Holy Spirit’s help throughout their lives, it seems likely that the reader will also find the Fourth Evangelist teaching that the Holy Spirit is essential for one’s initial faith and this is the case in John 3. In addition, simply because John maintains that Jesus’s disciples do not receive the Holy Spirit until after he departs—“for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (16:7)—does not mean that the Evangelist thinks that that the Holy Spirit is not at work in Jesus’s ministry and, thus, in the lives of his followers before his ascension.[97] In fact, 14:17 specifies a future closeness between the Holy Spirit and the disciples while also affirming a present experience of

---

of thirst (4:10-14; 6:35; 7:37-38), and in this respect it is explicitly identified as ‘the Spirit’ (7:39)” (*John*, 184). In truth, 7:39 should set the standard for what πνεῦμα means in much of John. It connects passages on πνεῦμα in the first half of the Gospel—“Now this he said about the Spirit”—with those in John 14-17 and 20 that are sure statements about the Holy 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.”

[97] Bennema makes this argument. He first contends that there are “two eschatological conditions for the reception of the Spirit(-Paraclete) mentioned in 7:39 and 16:7” (“Giving,” 196). 7:39 reveals that “the reception of the Spirit … depends on Jesus’ glorification” (ibid.), and 16:7 “indicates that *unless* Jesus departs, the Spirit-Paraclete will not come; but when Jesus goes away, he will send him (16:7). The ‘unless I depart’ implies spatial separation; Jesus will not be present at the giving of the Paraclete. Moreover, 15:26 says that Jesus will send the Paraclete from the Father, which implies a prior departure from this world. Thus, the Spirit-Paraclete can only be given *after* Jesus’ ascension and exaltation” (ibid., 198; emphasis original). However, he also holds that “the phrase ‘the Spirit was not yet’ [οὔπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα of 7:39] should most probably not be taken in an absolute sense, as if the Spirit did not previously exist or was not previously active” (ibid., 196–97). Instead, he proposes that “the Spirit was not yet active or available in the same way that is possible only after Jesus glorification. The Spirit and the life that was available in Jesus could be fully released or made available only after the cross. Before the cross, the availability of salvation and the activity of the Spirit were tied to the human Jesus” (ibid., 197). Thus Bennema’s view of John’s understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit prior to Jesus’s crucifixion and ascension is that the Holy Spirit ministers through Jesus’s life, and Bennema specifies that this includes “Jesus’ life-giving words” (ibid., 209).

him.[98] In 14:17 Jesus says that the Holy Spirit "dwells" (μένει) with the disciples and "will be" (ἔσται) in them.[99] This implies that John maintains that the Holy Spirit was at work during Jesus's ministry prior to his ascension. John 3 describes what that looked like.

As a result, this makes reading πνεῦμα as the Holy Spirit in 3:5 likely, and thus, according to 3:5, a person must be born of the Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is possible that "of water and the Spirit" is a hendiadys that ought to be translated

---

[98] As Morris assesses, "They [the disciples] do know him. The present, 'he lives with you,' indicates a continuing reality, just as 'will be in you' means a future certainty" (*John*, 577). Or, as Carson remarks, "the Holy Spirit, even as Jesus spoke with his disciples, was living with them inasmuch as Jesus was present with him, for to him the Father had given the Spirit without limit (3:34). But the time would come, after Jesus had been glorified and had petitioned his Father to send 'another Paraclete', when the Spirit himself would be in the disciples themselves" (*John*, 510). Additionally, as Keener writes, "If μένει be read as present and ἔσται as a future, the present presumably refers to God's Spirit as present in Jesus and the future to the time when the Spirit would indwell the believers directly. This would fit the Johannine temporal perspective on pneumatology: although the availability of the Spirit could be proleptically implied as early as Nicodemus (3:5), the Spirit would be fully available only after Jesus' glorification (7:39, 20:19-23)" (*John*, 2:972-73). On top of this, there are a number of texts that define the disciples as "in a saving relationship with him [Jesus]," as Bennema puts it ("Giving," 208). These passages include 2:11; 6:68-69; and 16:29-30. These references come from Bennema (ibid.). Thus given John's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of spiritual transformation, it would make sense to presume that the Holy Spirit was at work prior to Jesus's death and resurrection.

[99] There is ambiguity concerning the tense of both "remains" and "will be" in 14:17. Some point out that μένει can be accented as μενεῖ (Morris, *John*, 577 n. 51), as was done so by "some scribes" (Moloney, *John*, 406). As Carson comments, "It is uncertain" which is correct (*John*, 509). Furthermore, some manuscripts contain ἔστιν rather than ἔσται (Carson, *John*, 509–10; Morris, *John*, 577 n. 52; Michaels, *John*, 784 n. 91). Lindars reasons that ἔσται "is clearly a correction" of ἔστιν making it is the "more difficult" reading (*John*, 480). Likewise, Michaels judges that "while the future may be correct, it may have been occasioned by the desire of the scribes to distinguish between the Spirit's presence 'beside' (παρά), or with, the disciples now, and 'in' them (ἐν ὑμῖν) later, when the Spirit actually 'comes.' No such distinction is evident in the text" (*John*, 784 n. 91). He states this but does not come to a firm conclusion whether it should be taken as a present tense or future tense verb. Carson also takes a neutral position, pointing out that "the textual evidence is finely divided between" the two (*John*, 509). And Brown (relying on Rieger) sees ἔσται as the more difficult reading since it follows multiple present tense verbs (*John*, 2:640), although Morris holds the opposite: "The present [ἔστιν] seems to be due to a desire to harmonize this verb with the two preceding presents, γινώσκετε and μένει" (*John*, 578 n. 52).

If 14:17 is to be read with ἔστιν, then this provides further evidence in favor of seeing the Spirit as working in some capacity prior to the departure of Jesus. However, if μένει should be read as μενεῖ and ἔσται is original, then this verse offers no support for the claims I make above. However, given Michael's and Lindar's comments on ἔστιν and the possibility that μένει is the correct way to accent "remains," it seems best to see 14:17 as providing an indication of the work of the Holy Spirit during Jesus's ministry—whether it is because of μένει or ἔστιν ultimately does not matter. For a detailed summary of the various interpretive options for 14:17 given the ambiguity of "remains" and "will be," see Moloney, *John*, 406–7.

"from the water of the Spirit," as Keener offers.[100] This would make the Holy Spirit the primary agent of that clause. Thus what this text indicates is that to enter the Kingdom of God requires the Holy Spirit's direct activity. He is necessary for spiritual transformation to take place.[101]

In the final of these three texts, 3:8 reveals that the birth process, which the Holy Spirit enacts, goes unseen and is beyond humanity's control. Jesus compares the Holy Spirit to the wind—using the same word for both subjects (πνεῦμα).[102] Like the wind, the effects of the Holy Spirit's work are visible, but the act itself is not.[103] This matches what Jesus says in 14:17, where he tells his disciples that the world "neither sees" the Holy Spirit "nor knows him."

The comparison also illustrates that the Holy Spirit works as he chooses and not as any person demands.[104] He, like the wind, moves as he desires. [105] θέλω in 3:8 makes this point. As Köstenberger argues, "Just as the wind blows 'where it pleases [ὅπου θέλει

---

[100] Keener, "John," 432. Likewise, Keener examines 3:3 and 3:5 together. He sees 3:5 as where "Jesus further explains birth from God as birth 'from water and the Spirit'" (ibid.).

[101] Also in 3:6, we learn that "whoever is born 'of the flesh' is (only) flesh, i.e., belongs (only) to the worldly sphere having no part in the kingdom of God" (Anthony Sand, "σάρξ," *EDNT* 3:232).

[102] This seems like the best reading given that πνέω is never used of the Holy Spirit in NT and because φωνή makes more sense as "sound" with wind than "voice" with Spirit (Michaels, *John*, 187).

[103] As Michaels writes, "The analogy is of course that the wind is invisible; we cannot see or know 'where it comes from or where it goes,' or why it changes direction, yet we hear the sound of it and see its effects. Jesus could have then concluded simply, 'So it is with the Spirit,' but this would have made no sense with the same word being used for both wind and Spirit. Consequently, he concludes by mentioning 'everyone born of the Spirit' (echoing 'what is born of the Spirit' in v. 6). Because 'born of the wind' is not a plausible option, the reader knows that Jesus is once more using *pneuma* to mean 'Spirit' (as in vv. 5-6), and that 'wind' was only a momentary metaphor" (ibid.). Likewise, Carson writes, "The point is that the wind can be neither controlled nor understood by human beings.… But that does not mean we cannot detect the wind's effects. We hear its sound, watch the swaying grasses, see the clouds scudding by, hide in fear before the worst wind storms. So it is with the Spirit. We can neither control him nor understand him. But that does not mean we cannot witness his effects. Where the Spirit works, the effects are undeniable and unmistakable" (*John*, 197). Lastly, Köstenberger makes a similar observation. He reads 3:8 in this way: "In the present instance, Jesus' analogy is that both wind and spiritual birth are mysterious in origin and movement—wind goes sovereignly where is pleases—yet though the wind's origin is invisible, its effects can be observed; it is the same with the Spirit" (*John*, 125).

[104] This point comes from Köstenberger (ibid.).

[105] Ibid.

πνεῖ],' so the Spirit's operation is not subject to human control, eluding all efforts at manipulation."[106] When the ideas of these verses are considered as a whole, the reader learns that to have faith requires the active work of the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit does to believers goes unseen and is beyond their control, but the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the process of spiritual transformation and only the results of his activity are seen.[107]

Outside of John 3, the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual transformation is discussed in 4:23-24 and 6:63.[108] In ways similar to what I have already discussed, 4:23-24 highlights the need for the Holy Spirit to work for spiritual transformation to take place, and 6:63 discloses that the Holy Spirit brings about this transformation in conjunction with the work of Christ.[109] I will examine 4:23-24 first.

In 4:23-24, Jesus tells the Samaritan Woman that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ)" and that "God is spirit (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός), and those who worship him must worship (δεῖ προσκυνεῖν) in spirit and truth (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ)." As with John 3, I need to establish that the πνεῦμα of "in spirit

---

[106] Ibid.

[107] In a similar way, Mumaw argues that 3:1-21 (and 3:5 specifically) indicates that "the Spirit generates life in a rebirth" and that "the primary and essential source of the new birth is divine. It is the work of the Holy Spirit" ("Holy Spirit," 191). Likewise, after describing the actions of the Holy Spirit in John 3:8, Thomas concludes, "Therefore, the reader learns that all who become children of God in the FG, all who believe in his name, are born of the Spirit" ("Spirit," 91).

[108] I am not alone in seeing these verses as important for understanding the Holy Spirit's work in spiritual transformation. In summarizing what John has to say about the Holy Spirit, Köstenberger writes, "John 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)" (*John*, 435).

[109] It is worth noting that Bennema concludes that "in general, Johannine scholarship has recognized that the Spirit has a salvific role in John's Gospel. One only needs to look at John 3, 4 and 6 to realize that the Spirit is necessary for salvation" ("Giving," 195). However, his brief remarks on John 4 regarding the work of the Holy Spirit center on 4:10-14 and not 4:23-24 (ibid., 196). So also, Mumaw holds that "the Gospel of John deals with the work of the Spirit as it affects the inner life of man. The references to His presence and power in the first thirteen chapters speak directly to what happens to an individual who believes in Jesus Christ" ("Holy Spirit," 190–91).

and truth (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ)" is the Holy Spirit before I can assess what 4:23-24 says about his role in spiritual transformation. There are at least two facts that recommend seeing πνεῦμα as the Holy Spirit in these verses: (1) the way in which John links Spirit (πνεῦμα) and truth (ἀλήθεια) elsewhere in the Gospel, and (2) the expression "God is spirit" (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός).

In John, Spirit (πνεῦμα) and truth (ἀλήθεια) appear together at various times to form one phrase as a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. As a result, this combination in 4:23-24 most likely indicates that πνεῦμα means Holy Spirit there.[110] In fact, Keener and Michaels maintain that the phrase in 4:23-24 is a hendiadys.[111] Consequently, it has the same meaning as the Spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας)—a sure reference to the Holy Spirit in 14:17, 15:26, and 16:13, as 14:26 makes evident.[112]

Moreover, that the repeated phrase "in spirit and truth" comes before and after the phrase "God is spirit" further implies that πνεῦμα refers to the Holy Spirit in the expression ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ. There are differing ways that the designation of God as πνεῦμα could be read. This phrase may describe God's nature—that he is incorporeal, incorruptible, invisible, inaccessible, divine as opposed to human, etc.—or his mode of action. [113] Its exact meaning is not necessary for my purposes. Instead, Keener's

---

[110] As Barrett reasons, "The connection here of πνεῦμα and ἀλήθεια recalls that one of the characteristic Johannine titles of the Holy Spirit is τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (14.17;15.26; 16.13)" (*St. John*, 238). Like Barret, Köstenberger links the Holy Spirit to ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ through the correlation drawn between the Holy Spirit and truth in John 14-16 (*John*, 157).

[111] Keener, *John*, 1:618; Michaels, *John*, 253. Dodd comes close to saying this, calling ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ a "virtual hendiadys" (*Interpretation*, 223).

[112] As Keener writes, "Just as we understood 3:5 as a hendiadys based on John's usage elsewhere, reading 'water and Spirit' as 'water, that is, the spirit' or 'the water which represents the Spirit,' here we may understand 'Spirit and truth as a stylistic variant of the later and clarifying phrase, 'the Spirit of truth' (14:17; 15:25; 16:13)" (*John*, 1:618). Or as Michaels summarizes, "Just as 'truth' specified what 'grace' or gift it was that Jesus possessed and brought into the world (1:14, 17), so 'truth' here defines 'Spirit' as 'true' Spirit, or 'Spirit of truth' (see 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn 4:6)" (*John*, 253).

[113] Those interpreters who see πνεῦμα ὁ θεός as describing God's essence include Carson, who identifies God's essence as spirit as being "invisible, divine as opposed to human (*cf.* 3:6), and life-giving

interpretation of it and how he relates 4:24 to 3:6 suffices. He writes, "[In 4:24] John probably expands his teaching from 3:6 ['That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit']: Spirit can relate to spirit, and since God is spiritual but not physical, those who relate to him must do so through the gift of his Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:11-12)."[114]

Since πνεῦμα denotes the Holy Spirit in these verses, it is likely that there is an instrumental element to the ἐν of John 4:23 and 4:24, although this is not necessary. In fact, even if we are to take ἐν with a locative sense, to be located in the Holy Spirit in the NT is to be empowered by him—a point raised by Keener.[115] As Keener reports, "In early Christian teaching 'worship in Spirit' seems to have coincided with worship (empowered) by the Spirit."[116] Although he provides no references to support this view in the quoted work, in another publication he gives the following examples: Eph 6:18; Phil 3:3; and Jude 20.[117]

As a result, 4:23-24 indicates that true worshipers will worship by the Spirit of truth—that is, because of his work. The δεῖ of 4:24 makes this clear: worship by the

---

and unknowable to human beings unless he chooses to reveal himself" (*John*, 225); Keener, who simply says that "God's nature is spirit rather than flesh" (*John*, 1:618); Köstenberger, who makes the same point as Keener—"God is a spiritual rather than material being" (*John*, 156); Michaels, who says that God's essence as spirit is "invisible" and "incorruptible" (*John*, 253). Beasley-Murray contends that this expression concerns God's "*mode of action and working*" (*John*, 62; emphasis original). Beasley-Murray is quoting Schlatter at this point, although it is unclear which of Schlatter's works Beasley-Murray is quoting. He simply provides, "Schlatter, 162" (ibid.) without putting Schlatter's works in the bibliography for Beasley-Murray's chapter on John 4:1-42 (ibid., 56).

[114] Keener, *John*, 1:618-19. Thomas argues something similar to Keener in his interpretation of "God is spirit." He finds that "such a statement reveals that not only is the Spirit essential to true worship, owing to the Spirit's role in the believer's birth from above, but the Spirit is also essential to true worship owing to the Spirit's shared identity with God" ("Spirit," 92).

[115] As Keener observes, "The sense of the locative in Greek more naturally overlaps with the instrumental than in English" (*John*, 1:616). With a similar line of thought, Dumbrell reads John 4 as indicating that "God transcends the material sphere, and worship of him must be by divine revelation (Spirit and truth), not by human adjudication (v. 24)" ("Spirit," 81).

[116] Keener, *John*, 1:616.

[117] Idem., *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Baker Academic, 2001), 33.

empowerment of Spirit a necessity.[118] It is something that must happen. People cannot worship rightly without the Holy Spirit.[119] This means 4:23-24 mirrors John 3. The need to be born of the Spirit is a requirement for kingdom members, and without the Spirit, believers cannot worship God in a right manner.[120]

6:63 continues this theme. As already discussed, it identifies not only the Holy Spirit's role but also Jesus's. In this passage, Jesus teaches that the πνεῦμα is the one who gives life. He contrasts πνεῦμα with σὰρξ, which he says is "no help at all" (οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν). Since it has already been established in 3:5-8 that the Holy Spirit is the giver of life, πνεῦμα in 6:63 is not a general reference to the divine (even though God is spirit) but to the Holy Spirit specifically.

To understand fully what John is conveying here, an understanding of what σάρξ is in this passage is necessary since it contrasts πνεῦμα. The word itself has a range of meanings.[121] It can refer to a body or "the material that covers the bones of a human or animal body," as it does in the rest of John 6:51-56.[122] If this is what it signifies in 6:63, then Jesus could be alluding to his own flesh. Beasley-Murray takes this view. He writes,

> The flesh alone, even of the Son of Man, does not achieve the end which God has purposed, namely of giving life to the world (= 'profits nothing'). Just as the Incarnation of the Son of God is not to be abstracted from its end in crucifixion-

---

[118] Michaels, *John*, 254; Carson, *John*, 226.

[119] As Keener comments, "If 'Spirit' is closely linked with 'truth' here, it may be partly because for this Gospel Jesus epitomizes truth (14:6; cf. 1:14, 17; 8:32; 18:37) and truth is also connected with the Spirit who inspires and illumines by pointing back to Jesus (14:26; 16:13-15). The linkage thus emphasizes the importance of divine inspiration in the worship activity, while grounding it in the historical person of Jesus (see comment on 14:26)" (*John*, 1:618).

[120] As Thomas observes, "Here [in John 4] the reader learns that the Spirit is not only the means by which one is 'born from above,' but the Spirit makes true worship possible. One implication of this statement is that true worship of the Father is possible only for those who are children of God, those born from above by means of the Spirit" ("Spirit," 92).

[121] Its definition "extends from the substance *flesh* (both human and animal), to the body, to the entire person, and to all humankind" (Sand, *EDNT* 3:230).

[122] *BDAG* s.v. σάρξ, 914. See also *LSJ* s.v. σάρξ, 1585, which identifies it as "collectively, of the *body*," "*portions of meat*," or "*pieces of flesh* or *membrane*" (ibid.).

> resurrection for the life of the world, so both are bound up with the sending of the Spirit for the union of God and man in Christ in the kingdom of God.[123]

On the other hand, in 6:51-59 Jesus indicates that his flesh gives life. It would be odd for Jesus to say one thing about his σάρξ in 6:51-59 (my flesh gives life) and then the complete opposite in the same speech (my flesh does not give life). It is more likely that σάρξ plays double duty. In 6:51-59, Jesus's σάρξ brings life when it is given, but in 6:63, his hearers rely on their own human σάρξ for their salvation and right understanding of Jesus (cf. 8:15).[124] σάρξ can be a general reference to that which is human (e.g., Isa 40:5-

---

[123] Beasley-Murray, *John*, 96.

[124] Moloney maintains this view and I agree with much of what he argues for this point. He writes, "In the Fourth Gospel one must distinguish between the *sarx* of Jesus and the *sarx* of human beings. *Sarx* is used thirteen times in the Fourth Gospel, and its use is consistent. The *sarx* of Jesus tells the story of God (1:14, 18), and it is essential for life (cf. 6:51, 52, 53, 54, 56). But the *sarx* of human beings is confined to the human sphere, that which is 'below' (1:13; 3:6; cf. 8:23), and is the source of judgment limited by the superficial criteria provided by the physically observable (8:15; cf. 7:24).… There is no contradiction between the use of *sarx* in vv. 51-58, where Jesus speaks of his own flesh, and v. 63 where he speaks of the superficiality of the limited human expectations the disciples have of Jesus (v. 62)" (*John*, 231). See also his main commentary on 6:63 partially quoted below in footnote 129.

Regarding 6:63, Keener makes a similar point. He remarks, "One may also note that flesh cannot comprehend divine truth adequately (cf. 3:12); elsewhere in the Jesus tradition as well, this comprehension requires a revelation from the Father (Matt 16:17; cf. 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22). A merely human, 'fleshly' perspective on Jesus and his words is inadequate (2 Cor 5:16). Thus, disciples must imbibe his Spirit, not his literal flesh (cf. 20:22); his life is present also in his words (6:67; cf. 15:7)" (*John*, 1:695-96). His reading is slightly different than mine. As shown, he takes "flesh" to be Jesus's literal "flesh." Additionally, Sand finds that the use of σάρξ and πνεῦμα in 6:63 underscores "that the understanding of Jesus' speech (v. 60) is possible only in the Spirit" (*EDNT* 3:232).

Köstenberger comes close to this reading. He proposes that "Jesus' words here resemble his earlier comments to Nicodemus (3:6; see also 5:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45). In the present instance, Jesus' point seems to be that human reason unaided by the Spirit is unable to discern what is spiritual" (*John*, 219). In a similar way, Lindars makes the point, "Flesh here is the earthy part of man, man as he is by nature, his intellect remaining unilluminated by the revelation of God. It is only if he is open to the influence of God, that he can perceive divine things. Thus *in the composition of man* it is the Spirit that gives life, and the flesh is of no avail" (*John*, 273). Likewise, Brown remarks, "The contrast between Spirit and flesh in 63 is the same contrast we found in iii 6. Jesus is not speaking of eucharistic flesh but of flesh as he spoke of it in ch. iii, namely, the natural principle in man which cannot give eternal life. The spirit is the divine principle from above which alone can give life" (*John*, 1:300). He concludes, "Jesus is once more affirming that man cannot gain life on his own. If Jesus is divine revelation come down from heaven like bread to nourish men, his purpose is to communicate to them the principle of eternal life. The man who accepts the words of Jesus will receive the life-giving Spirit" (ibid.). However, he stresses that this does not happen until after Jesus's ascension when the Holy Spirit is granted.

6; John 17:2; 1 Cor 1:29), and at times it "calls attention to man's *creatureliness and frailty*; to the fact that is he is fragile, fallible, and vulnerable."[125]

This way of reading σάρξ is perceived by readers in the crowd's questions and expressed lack of faith. In 6:28, they ask what *they* must do to perform the works of God (6:28).[126] Once they realize that the required act is belief in Jesus, they are upset. They respond by asserting that they know Jesus. They demand, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (6:42). Their familiarity with him makes it impossible for them to believe that he came down from heaven (6:41), and their lack of faith pervades the chapter, appearing repeatedly (6:28-31; 6:52; 6:60).[127] It makes sense, then, that the means by which one comes to faith (6:44; 6:63; 6:65) and Jesus's role in saving believers is front and center in his response to their challenges (6:53-59).

---

[125] Thiselton, *NIDNTT* 3:678; emphasis original. Ibid., 672, 675; *TDNTW* s.v. σάρξ, 517-18; Sand, *EDNT* 3:230. Additionally, as Dodd argues, "In the Old Testament πνεῦμά and σάρξ, representing רוּחַ and בָּשָׂר, form a standing pair of contraries. The contrast between them is precisely that between God and moral man.… For Hebraic thinkers the contrast is not so much one of 'substances' (οὐσία), but rather of power and its opposite. God is known as רוּחַ because He exhibits His irresistible and mysterious power, as the 'living God', while human flesh is feeble, powerless, the victim of natural processes" (*Interpretation*, 224). As mentioned above, Dodd says this but thinks that πνεῦμά refers to God or the divine and not the Holy Spirit specifically (ibid., 226).

[126] This interpretation of 6:28 that suggests that the crowd thought *they* could earn their salvation was first brought to my attention in a lecture by Frank Thielman in the class *Exegesis of John* at Samford University in the fall of 2008. He thinks that the crowd believes it has already done enough work at this point in the narrative. They have traveled across the Sea of Galilee to find Jesus. They now wonder what more was required of them. Thielman also maintains that the problem that the crowds have in ch. 6 revolves not around being confused by Jesus's teaching but their unwillingness to believe that Jesus could be who he claims to be. Brown reads 6:28 in a similar way. He writes, "The crowd has been led by Jesus to penetrate beyond the superficial, material level of food, but their response (28) is in terms of works that they can do. Jesus, in turn (29), puts the emphasis on faith" (*John*, 1:264-65). Furthermore, I take "works of God" to refer to the works that God requires as opposed to the works that God performs (Barrett, *St. John*, 287; Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* [New York: Paulist, 1979], 1:265; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:39; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 91; Carson, *John*, 285; Moloney, *John*, 209; Michaels, *John*, 367).

[127] This is quoted in Chapter Four, but it is worth repeating here: Burroughs reports, "To the Jewish people, the idea that Jesus might be from heaven is preposterous. They know his down-to-earth parents; how, then, could Jesus possibly be from heaven (v 42)? Hence, even though Jesus identifies himself as God's heaven-sent bread, the people essentially reject him as such. From a human point of view, it seems impossible that an apparently normal person, especially one with human parents, could be from heaven" ("Grumbling," 82).

6:63 reflects the overarching perspective of the 248eriscope. In John 6, the reader learns that people come to Jesus because the Father draws them to him (6:44; 6:63; 6:65). They have life because Jesus gives his flesh (6:53-56) and he is himself the source of life (6:35). Now in 6:63, Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is the one who grants life.[128] Without the Holy Spirit transforming the crowd, they will never have this life, remaining in their current state.[129] If this reading is correct, then we again have an iteration of John

---

[128] Bennema reads 6:63 this way, seeing it as underscoring the fact that "it is the Spirit that gives life" and does so in conjunction with Jesus's ministry ("Giving," 196). Likewise, while discussing 6:63, Barrett remarks, "There is no revelation apart from the Spirit and the Word, and no reception of revelation apart from the initiative of God himself (6.44)" (*St. John*, 304).

[129] As Moloney puts it, "The disciples [in John 6] fail because they are attempting to assess Jesus' words and actions by the superficial judgment of human expectation. Such an approach to Jesus is 'fleshly,' and 'the flesh is of no avail' (v. 63b).… What matters is the life-giving power of the Spirit, made available to the disciples in and through the revelation of God in and through the word of Jesus (v. 63). But Jesus is aware that no matter how much has been revealed to the disciples some do not believe, and one among them would betray him (v. 64). The relationship between Jesus and the disciples is crucial, but the initiative of God is the ultimate explanation for the disciple who comes believingly to Jesus and never turns away (v. 65).… The true disciple is the one to whom discipleship is given by the Father and who believes in the Son (vv. 64-65). It is not information that makes a disciple, but a Spirit-filled response to the Father made known in the word of Jesus" (*John*, 228–29).

Moreover, as Thompson concludes in her reading of 6:60-66, "Those who do not have the Spirit 'do not believe' (v. 64); they have not been 'given' to the Son by the Father (vv. 39, 65); they have not been 'taught by God' (v. 45). Like Nicodemus, they seek Jesus because of his deeds (3:2; 6:26) but find Jesus' claims to have come from God and to be returning to him offensive and mysterious. Jesus' explanation—that he must be lifted up and so give life to the world (3:14-16) or that, having died for the world, he will return to the Father (6:51-62)—lies beyond their comprehension, at least apart from God's teaching (6:44-45) and the giving of the Spirit. Without the Spirit that gives life, people cannot know the one who is life" (*John*, 162).

Regarding 6:63, Morris writes, "People whose horizon is bounded by the things of the earth cut themselves off from his teaching and their kind of living 'counts for nothing. Only as the life-giving Spirit informs us may we understand these words. This applies to much more than the words of this discourse. In his teaching as a whole Jesus emphasizes the Spirit, though specific references to the Spirit are not frequent" (ibid., 340-41). Or as he also finds, "In his teaching as a whole Jesus emphasizes the Spirit, though specific references to the Spirit are not frequent. He is not concerned with the good that people may produced by the best efforts of the flesh, their earthly nature. All his teaching presupposes the need for a work of the divine Spirit within us" (*John*, 341). Although already quoted above, it is worth mentioning again that Brown underscores that "thus, in vs. 63, John is once more affirming that man cannot gain life on his own. If Jesus is divine revelation come down from heaven like bread to nourish men, his purpose is to communicate to them the principle of eternal life. The man who accepts the words of Jesus will receive the life-giving Spirit" (*John*, 1:300).

3:6 and 4:23-24.[130] Nothing that relies on the flesh can be born again or truly worship God. To be born again and rightly worship requires the work of the Holy Spirit.

As discussed above, in the second half of 6:63 Jesus announces that "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωή ἐστιν)." Given the meaning of πνεῦμα in the first half of the verse, Spirit in πνεῦμά ἐστιν is almost certainly the Holy Spirit as well. Carson rightly understands this phrase to mean that Jesus's words are "the product of the life-giving Spirit."[131] I will argue for a modified version of this view. Jesus's words are "the product of the life-giving Spirit," but when Jesus speaks those who hear him experience the Holy Spirit's work in their lives.[132]

In John, the Fourth Evangelist affirms that the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus and empowered his work.[133] This occurs in 1:32-33 with the Baptist's testimony. He testifies, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:32-33).[134] The Evangelist defines this link between Jesus's work and the Spirit further in

---

[130] A number of commentators connect Jesus's words here to what he says in John 3: ibid.; Carson, *John*, 301; Köstenberger, *John*, 219; Michaels, *John*, 408.

[131] Carson, *John*, 302. Beasley-Murray and Barrett represent two other ways to read this passage. Beasley-Murray takes the view that those who receive Jesus's words will receive the Spirit. He writes, "The words of Jesus in the discourse are 'Spirit and life'—for those who receive them in faith, since they who accept them and believe in the Son receive the Spirit and the life of which he speaks (5:39-40 and 7:37-39)" (*John*, 96). Barrett finds that Jesus's words witness to the Holy Spirit (*St. John*, 305).

[132] Carson, *John*, 302. See also footnote 144.

[133] Köstenberger reminds us that there are at least four places in the first half of John where the Spirit is linked to Jesus's ministry: 1:32-33, 3:34, 6:63, and 7:39 (*Theology*, 542). Likewise, he writes elsewhere, "In the first half of this Gospel, John's treatment of the Spirit has largely resembled that of the synoptics. Like them, he included the Baptist's reference to Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:32-33; cf. Mark 1:8 pars.) and emphasized that the Spirit in all his fullness rested on Jesus during his earthly ministry (1:32; 3:34; cf. Luke 4:18)" (*John*, 435).

[134] Concerning 1:33, Thomas argues that "whether or not Jesus will baptize individuals with the Holy Spirit within the confines of the narrative of the FG (something which none of the Synoptics appear to describe despite the citation of the same prophecy), it is clear from this point that Jesus is connected with the Spirit in a unique way" ("Spirit," 90).

John 3:34 where the narrator (or potentially John the Baptist) joins Jesus's speech with God's endowment of the Spirit to him.[135] It reads, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God (τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ), for he gives the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) without measure."[136] Now in 6:63, Jesus's words (ῥήματα) and the πνεῦμα are linked again. His words are πνεῦμα because his ministry is "the product of the life-giving Spirit," as the one specially anointed by the Holy Spirit.[137] As Thomas writes, it is not "surprising that the one upon whom the Spirit descends and remains (1:32), the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33), and the one who has been given the Spirit without measure (3:34) should speak words that bring life."[138]

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit not only empowers Jesus's ministry in John, but Jesus is the one who grants the Holy Spirit to his followers. He baptizes them in the Holy Spirit (1:33), and it is through him that the Holy Spirit proceeds so that the Holy

---

[135] The majority view the subject of "gives" (δίδωσιν) to be God and the implied indirect object Jesus (Keener, *John*, 1:582 n. 460).

[136] Barrett interpreters this passage to mean that it is *because* God gives the Spirit to Jesus "in no measured degree but completely that Jesus speaks the words of God" (*St. John*, 226; emphasis added). Carson uses 1:32 and 3:34 to support his claim that 6:63 indicates that Jesus's words "are the product of the life-giving Spirit" (*John*, 302). He writes, "Strictly speaking, the Spirit does not come upon the disciples until after Jesus' ascension (7:37-39); but already Jesus himself is the bearer of the Spirit (1:32f.), the one to whom God gives the Spirit without limit and who therefore speaks the words of God (3:34)" (*John*, 301). My argument above using 1:32-33 and 3:34 mirrors his here.

[137] Ibid., 302. Or as Brown remarks, "Here too Jesus' words (68) and the Spirit (63) are mentioned side by side as giving life, even as vs. 40 mentions faith and its indispensable connection with eternal life. John does not unravel the interrelationships of these various life-giving factors; that is the work of later theology" (*John*, 1:300). This view of Jesus is not unique to John. All four canonical Gospels attest to Jesus's empowerment by the Spirit. We especially see this in each of Jesus's baptismal narratives (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22), Jesus's explanation of how he casts out demons (Matt 12:28; Mark 3:28-39; Luke 11:20), and his declaration that his ministry is done in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:16-21). James D. G. Dunn presents a survey of these passages on exorcisms as well as Luke 4:16-21 (*Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*, NTL [London: SCM, 1975], 44–62). Although done unintentionally, Graham A. Cole shows that each Gospel establishes that Jesus is empowered by the Spirit. Using the Synoptics, John, Acts, and various NT epistles, he outlines the "the key events in Jesus' life and work … [classically called the Christological mysteries]: the conception, the baptism, the temptations, the transfiguration, the passion, the resurrection, and the ascension," and how, with the exception of Jesus's transfiguration and ascension, "the Spirit comes into view as a key player in the story" (*He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, FETS [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007], 149–50, 149–77).

[138] Thomas, "Spirit," 93.

Spirit can care for them (14:26; 15:26; 20:22).[139] At the time of John's composition, a common Jewish view of the Holy Spirit's work was that of purification.[140]

As a result, it is not surprising to find the Gospel itself making the point that Jesus replaces Jewish locales of ritual cleansing.[141] In 2:1-11, Jesus transforms water in Jewish

---

[139] Dumbrell sees Jesus in John as both "the bearer of the Spirit (1:33; 3:34b; 7:39; 20:22)" and "the giver of the Spirit" ("Spirit," 79). He points to 1:33 for the second title "since reference is made in 1:33 to the prospective baptism of the Holy Spirit, to be given through Jesus" ("Spirit," 79–80). Thomas does not go as far as Dumbrell, and he is not sure if this happens in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, but regarding 1:33, he makes the point that "it is only natural that the one upon whom the Spirit remains is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" ("Spirit," 90).

[140] This comes from Keener and the next paragraph will rely on him ("The Function of Johannine Pneumatology in the Context of Late First Century Judaism" [PhD diss., Duke University, 1991], 65–69). He makes these same points in a published piece: *Purity and Power*, 8–10. In it, he includes a chapter specifically on purification and Johannine Pneumatology (*Purity and Power*, 135–89). Keener recounts that in non-canonical Jewish literature, "the idea of Spirit purifying or empowering God's people to do His will occurs more than any other Spirit-image expect the Spirit of prophecy"—specifically *Jub.* 1:21; *Jub.* 1:23; 1QS II, 7 and 1 QS IV, 21 ("Johannine Pneumatology," 66; the references to primary texts come from Keener "John," [ed. Green, Brown, and Perrin], 432). He observes in the OT itself a number of places where "the image of eschatological cleaning by God's Spirit portrayed as water [exists]" (see Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25-26; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech 12:10) ("Johannine Pneumatology," 66; the scriptural passages come from ibid., 66 n. 29). He makes the following helpful conclusion in that chapter: "In the final analysis, it was Christ's death that would bring the true spiritual cleansing (19:34), and this would be administered by the Spirit who would reveal the glorified Christ (7:37-39; 16:12-15)" (*Purity and Power*, 162). He then assesses that John's community believed that Jewish purification rituals were helpful but that "nothing associated with purity among the opponents of the Johannine community was adequate to sustain its own holiness; for this, the Spirit of purification was necessary, and the Spirit of purification was available only to those who were followers of Jesus, who alone was qualified to bestow the Spirit (1:32-34; 3:31-35)" (*Purity and Power*, 162).

[141] Andrew C. Brunson calls this phenomenon John's "Replacement Theology" (*Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John: An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John*, WUNT 2/158 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 147). He argues that "although John presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture and of Jewish expectations, he clearly shows that he is much more than this. John's Jesus consistently takes up significant elements and/or symbols in Jewish institutions and festivals, shows his authority over them, and replaces them with his work and person" (ibid.). He is convinced that "John's replacement theology is replete throughout the Gospel, and especially in the feasts" (ibid.). He mentions Jesus's cleansing of the temple, and his replacement of Mount Gerazim and Jerusalem as part of John's replacement theology, but he also points to Jesus's actions at the Jewish feasts as performing the same task (ibid., 147–48). He contends that at the second Passover, Jesus replaces Moses and the wilderness manna (John 6:22-71; ibid., 148). For the third Passover, he thinks that Jesus takes the place of the sacrificial lambs (ibid.). For Tabernacles, he maintains that Jesus reveals himself to be "the true source of living water … and the light of the world," which stands against the backdrop of "the water-pouring ceremony" and the importance of light at Tabernacles (ibid.). For the Feast of Dedication, he argues that Jesus takes on the title of the good shepherd, which is "a title that is identified closely with Yahweh in the OT" (ibid.). Jesus also calls himself the vine, an object "most often identified with Israel (Isa 5)" (ibid.). He then references W. D. Davies, who suggests that "Jesus replaces 'holy space'" throughout John (ibid.). These places include the temple (2:21), the pool of Siloam (9:7), and Bethel (1:51) (*The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 288–302; cited in Brunson, *Psalm 118*, 148).

purification jars into a great supply of high quality wine. This is followed by him emptying the temple and declaring, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," a reference to "the temple of his body" (2:19, 21).[142] In his conversation with the Samaritan Woman, Jesus discloses that salvation is from the Jews but true worship takes place "in Spirit and truth" and not at the traditional Jewish or Samaritan sites.[143] In 5:39, he tells his interlocutors that they search the Scriptures because they think that in them one has life. Yet not only do the Scriptures testify of Jesus, but he is the one that possesses life (5:40).

As this shows, purification comes through Jesus. Given that the author affirms his empowerment by the Holy Spirit and his role in granting the Holy Spirit, it can only be assumed that John also thinks that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers through Jesus's actions.[144] As Bennema describes, 6:63 illustrates that the Holy Spirit "gives life"

---

[142] Davies holds that this event signifies "that a New Order had arrived. The 'Holy Place' is to be displaced by a new reality, a rebuilt 'temple (*naos*),' which John refers to as 'the temple of his body (*tou naou tou sômatos autou* [2:21])'" (*Territorial Doctrine*, 289–90).

[143] Davies reports that "according to the Samaritan Pentateuch, Joshua instructed that a shrine be set up on Gerizim, the sacred mountain of the Samaritans," and that "the Samaritans had inserted into the Decalogue itself the obligation to worship on Mount Gerizim" (ibid., 301).

[144] A few commentators directly discuss the experience of the Holy Spirit by his followers through his ministry work. As mentioned already, Moloney comments that "what matters is the life-giving power of the Spirit, made available to the disciples in and *through the revelation of God in and through the word of Jesus* (v. 63). But Jesus is aware that no matter how much has been revealed to the disciples some do not believe, and one among them would betray him (v. 64). The relationship between Jesus and the disciples is crucial, but the initiative of God is the ultimate explanation for the disciple who comes believingly to Jesus and never turns away (v. 65)" (*John*, 228; emphasis added). Barrett comes close to saying something like this in his comments on v. 63. He writes, Jesus's "visible flesh and his audible words (ῥήματα) bear witness to the Spirit and the Word through which he becomes revelation and salvation" (*St. John*, 305). As quoted above, regarding 6:63 Schnackenburg reports that "the word of Jesus, which comes from the Father (12:49; 14:10b,24; cf. 7:17-18), is filed with the divine spirit (3:34 and see Commentary) and therefore able to give the gift of divine life (8:51), to transmit it to the believing hearer here and now (5:24)" (*St. John*, 2:73). Although possibly identifying "spirit" as something other than the Holy Spirit in 6:63, Witherington argues, "One of the keys to the whole discourse is mentioned in v. 63b—that which gives spirit and life is Jesus' *words*, not some sacramental action. The issue here is salvation through revelation and the transformation it brings" (*Wisdom*, 160).

and does so “through Jesus’ revelatory teaching.”[145] In fact, Dodd sees the phrase πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωή as a “another virtual hendiadys” which makes πνεῦμά “the vehicle of life” especially since elsewhere “πνεῦμά is the medium of rebirth (iii. 5).”[146] This, then, makes an aspect of Jesus’s ministry the task of purifying believers in the Holy Spirit. In light of 3:34 and 6:63, this is certainly the case for his teaching ministry.[147] When Jesus speaks the Holy Spirit works and Jesus’s hearers gain new life.[148]

Thus in John, the Holy Spirit works in the ministry of Jesus to bring about spiritual transformation. If people are to become members of God’s kingdom, the Holy Spirit must work in their lives. His action is needed. Moreover, there is a union of Jesus’s ministry with that of the Holy Spirit’s. As Jesus works, the Holy Spirit acts through him. Their ministries work together for the sake of bringing about new life.

6.2.4. Summary of John’s Trinitarian Understanding of Spiritual Transformation

To incorporate these concepts into a systematic framework, what one sees in John is that the Father gives individuals the ability to come and believe in the Son. Through the cross, the Son makes a way to eternal life and stands as the giver of this life. In the

---

[145] Bennema, “Giving,” 196. Indeed, as quoted above, he specifies that “before the cross, the disciples had experienced the Spirit though Jesus’ life-giving words” (ibid., 209).

[146] Dodd, *Interpretation*, 224.

[147] This reading also makes sense given what the OT says. As Köstenberger reports, “According to the Hebrew Scriptures, life was created by God’s Spirit (Gen. 1:2; cf. 2:7) through his word (‘And/Then God said’; Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Later, Moses instructed his fellow Israelites that ‘man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3). Ezekiel memorably depicts the Spirit as life-giving (e.g., 37:1-14, esp. v. 5), and Jeremiah exemplifies receptivity to God’s word (Jer. 15:16; cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:3)” (*John*, 219).

[148] As shown above, this interpretation is supported by the surrounding context of 6:63. Jesus’s statement is made to a crowd of disciples who refuse to believe him. The reason for their lack of faith is that the Father has not drawn them to Jesus. However, their unbelief also indicates that the Holy Spirit will not transform their lives. John displays their inability to change in their obstinate opposition to Christ. Instead of having faith in Jesus they fixate on things that perish (bread), and they reject Jesus as the one sent from heaven. They remain in their flesh. This prohibits them from receiving the Holy Spirit, and separation from the Holy Spirit means exclusion from his life-giving work. Thus, even though Jesus speaks, they do not receive his words and the work of the Spirit.

process of coming to faith, the Holy Spirit works to bring about belief through the ministry of Jesus. This process is unseen to the naked eye, as 3:8 indicates.[149] We see its effect in outward signs—like confession—but no one sees the hidden hand of God grasping the heart and making it new.[150]

Therefore, in John there is an insistence on the need for divine activity for someone to become a believer: the Father's calling, the Son's granting of life, and the work of the Spirit and the Son. A case could be made that John has Jesus go to the individuals he visits because they are those who have been chosen by the Father and Jesus himself. It is, then, to these people that Jesus reveals his identity and grants new life via the work of the Holy Spirit.

Regardless, what we observe in the narratives of John's confessing characters is faith coming about only because of Jesus's direct action, and in the mouths of John's trusted figures, we hear proclaimed the idea that divine action is required for spiritual transformation to take place. This makes sense given the Gospel's persistent depiction of Jesus as the Father's agent.[151] As Keener summarizes, "In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus comes in his Father's name, that is, as his agent (5:43; 12:13; 17:11-12), works in the Father's name (10:25), and seeks to glorify his Father's name (12:28; 17:6, 26)."[152] As a

---

[149] Kenner interprets 3:8 in this way. He writes, "Jesus emphasizes the mystery of where those born from the Spirit came from: God's own children, miraculously birthed into the world, could pass unrecognized by a world not equipped to detect their presence and difference" (*John*, 1:556).

[150] See n. 103. I should admit that my systematization of "salvation … [as] planned by the Father," "accomplished by the Son," and "applied by the Holy Spirit" is a standard Protestant theological encapsulation of soteriology (Peterson, "Electing God," 81). Nonetheless, I believe this outline has its roots in the text of John and other NT documents, and therefore it is justifiable to argue that this is a part of John's theology. A more complete systematic model may be seen in Peterson's summary: "salvation was planned by the Trinity—especially the Father," "accomplished by the Trinity—especially the Son," and "applied by the Trinity—especially the Holy Spirit" (ibid.). Peterson's discussion of Jesus as "the electing God" in John 15 bears out some of the complexity of this topic (ibid., 83–87).

[151] Keener, *John*, 1:400.

[152] Ibid.

result, John's understanding of spiritual transformation is depicted in the lives of his confessing characters in the same way that it is articulated in clear terms in the speech of his trusted figures.

6.3. The Purpose of John in light of the Gospel's View of Spiritual Transformation

Given what has been argued thus far, the question of how John 20:30-31 fits within the scheme of the Gospel's understanding of transformation looms large. Why would the Fourth Evangelist record Jesus's signs so that his readers might believe if he demonstrates elsewhere that faith comes only through a divine act? Does this passage undermine my reading of John? Or do these verses show an inconsistency in the Gospel itself? I have covered this in part in Chapter Three, but I did not address there the problem of what seems to be a call to faith in spite of John's predestinarian language.

12:37-43 sheds light on this problem. These verses identify the role of the Fourth Gospel in spiritual transformation and they speak in unison. In 20:30-31, the author discusses the fact that Jesus's signs bringing about faith, and this is also the case for 12:37-43. This makes 12:37-43 relevant for how we are to understand 20:30-31. In 12:37-43, the reader learns,

> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded (τετύφλωκεν) their eyes and hardened (ἐπώρωσεν) their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

According to what was already examined, belief is a gift given by the Father so that an individual can confess who Jesus is, be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and know God. 12:37-43 affirms what has already been argued and pushes the demand for divine activity even further. God (or potentially Jesus alone) actively blinds eyes and hardens their hearts: “lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn” (12:40b).[153] This comes out forcefully when we observe that the MT of Isa 6:10, quoted in 12:40, has the verbs “to blind” and “to harden” in the imperative, the LXX in the passive, but John in the active indicative, making God (or Jesus) the clear agent of the blinding and hardening.[154]

[153] Michaels makes this point, stating, “Jesus had said elsewhere that ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him’ (6:44), or ‘unless it is given from the Father’ (6:65), and Isaiah’s ancient words now put the judgment in even starker terms. Not only has God not ‘drawn’ these people or ‘given’ them faith, but he has ‘blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts’ to make sure they would not repent and be healed” (*John*, 710). The antecedent to the two αὐτός of 12:41 may be Jesus, as Carson holds (*John*, 449). In fact, Bruner says that a majority of commentators take the two αὐτός to be referring to Jesus (*John*, 734). He may be right. The following exegetes read the “his” and “him” in 12:41 as Jesus: Brown, *John*, 1:487; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:416; Carson, *John*, 449; Keener, *John*, 2:885; Köstenberger, *John*, 391–92; Michaels, *John*, 710. Nonetheless, whether Jesus is the subject of 12:40 is unclear.

With that said, Michaels argues that the subject is Jesus and his argument is convincing, which is the reason I have placed “or potentially Jesus alone” in parenthesis above. He maintains that “the Gospel writer’s startling claim is that ‘the Lord,’ or ‘Lord of hosts’ in Isaiah’s vision was none other than Jesus, that the ‘glory’ filling both ‘the house’ (or temple) and ‘all the earth’ was Jesus’ glory, and consequently that when Isaiah spoke he was speaking of Jesus. If this is so, then in some sense he who ‘has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, lest they see with the eyes and understand with the heart, and turn, and I will heal them’ (v. 40) is Jesus himself, or God acting through him. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds, given that Jesus earlier claimed for himself a role in this hardening process after the healing of the man born blind: ‘For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see might see, and so that those who see might go blind’ (9:39)” (ibid.).

Bruner is not firm on who is speaking but suggests that Jesus may be the subject of 12:40 (*John*, 734). Schnackenburg seems to hold a mediating position, saying that God actively hardens hearts and blinds eyes but that Jesus is the one who heals. Without clearly stating this, he makes God the subject of “blinded” and “hardened” but Jesus of “heal.” He writes, “The evangelist’s commentary in v. 41 leaves scarcely any doubt about his meaning: God was responsible for the blinding and hardening, and Jesus, God’s representative, could have brought healing. According to the divine ordinance expressed in the ἵνα μὴ, however, Jesus is not destined to heal these people, hardened as they are to the core and incapable of change” (*St. John*, 2:415). Beasley-Murray also makes a similar remark, commenting, “God had blinded their eyes and made their heart (= mind) obtuse in case they should see, and understand, and turn, and the Christ should heal them” (*John*, 216).

[154] Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 195.

Consequently, the characters discussed in John 12 and the readers of the Fourth Gospel stand on the same experiential plane.[155] Each group has witnessed the signs of Jesus presented in John. The unbelievers of ch. 12 have done so in their engagement with Christ, and the readers through the record of these signs in the text of the Gospel. If the faith of those in 12:37-43 is dependent upon God's action to grant faith, then so too must be the faith of those presumed by John in 20:30-31—specifically future readers.[156] I propose that if John believed spiritual transformation is caused by an act of God and if his readers stand on the same empirical level as John's characters, then he wrote because he believed that God would work through his writings. As Schneiders argues, the Gospel becomes in itself a place where people can encounter Jesus Christ.[157] These meetings happen, but according to John, their results are dependent upon God, as they are in the Gospel's narrative.

6.4 Conclusion

What we learn is that John's trusted figures tell a consistent story—spiritual transformation is a work of God. Since several Johannine characters make confessions of faith, one is able to compare how these characters come to faith with what John's trusted

---

[155] O'Brien comes close to suggesting this. She states, "I will argue that the Fourth Gospel is not simply a report of others' experience, but it provides the possibility of a substitute experience for the reader. The narrative strategies of the Gospel show, rather than merely tell, the reader what believing is, creating an experience for the reader that is certainly not the same as being there but can be significant nonetheless" ("John 20," 285).

[156] This is Köstenberger's reading of the Fourth Gospel's theology. He contends that "John stresses that *apart* from divine election, it is impossible for anyone to be saved and receive eternal life. This shows that prior to the human choice to believe, resulting in salvation and eternal life, is the divine choice of election, enabling some, but mysteriously not others, to believe and place their trust in Christ" (*Theology*, 459). As previously mentioned, he points to 8:47, 10:26, 14:17, and most importantly 12:37-40 as evidence (ibid.).

[157] Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 10–15. See also O'Brien, "John 20," 285, 296; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 293-94, 296.

figures say about the matter. What is found is these characters displaying in their narratives what John's trusted figures say elsewhere. This reveals that the rhetorical purpose of John's confessing characters is to put forward John's theology—especially his understanding of spiritual transformation. Furthermore, even though the Evangelist tells his readers that he writes "so that they might believe," this desire to write for their faith does not detract from his theology of spiritual transformation. The author has created a space where his readers can converse with Jesus. Whether they come to faith or not is dependent upon divine activity as it is for John's characters.

CONCLUSION

In the last six chapters, I have laid out my argument that Johannine figures—especially "confessing characters"—serve a thematic purpose in the Fourth Gospel. I began with a summary of Johannine character studies. I then looked to modern literary critics outside of biblical studies to provide a philosophical framework for studying John's characters and to examine what they have to say about the purpose of characters in literature.

After this I provided my reading of Mary Magdalene's conversation with Jesus in John 20 with an eye toward how this text reflects John's understanding of "spiritual transformation"—how one moves from unbelief to belief or from faith to greater faith. Next, I illustrated how Mary Magdalene's confession reflects a pattern found in a number of Johannine confession scenes—those of Nathanael, the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, and Thomas. Each of these echoes Mary Magdalene's. These figures make a proclamation of faith because of Jesus's direct action and these narratives make this point in a variety of ways: dialogue and action, irony, plotting, and character development. This strongly suggests authorial intent and a consistent use of characters.

The need for Jesus to act for spiritual transformation to take place is not only seen in how confessing characters come to faith. It is also articulated on the lips of John's trusted figures. In my final chapter, I examined these sayings to show that what John depicts in the lives of his confessing characters is consistent with what his trusted figures say. This reveals that John's confessing characters serve the role of portraying this important theme on the stage of the Fourth Gospel. What is articulated becomes what is seen in the lives of these figures.

As I come to the close of this project, I wish to address two questions to be addressed. First, what other avenues of research can be pursued in light of these findings? And second, what implications does this study have for Johannine hermeneutics and the life of the church? I will begin with the first.

Avenues of Research To Be Pursued in Light of These Findings

This project examined two themes that intersect in the Fourth Gospel: the literary purpose of characters and the cause of spiritual transformation. However, it was limited in scope. I looked exclusively at *confessing characters* in the Gospel of *John.* I did not examine any other set of characters. I never considered spiritual transformation in the Johannine epistles. And I said nothing about the Synoptic Gospels. As a result, there is plenty that touches on the two main subjects of this project in these other places that future researchers can explore.

Confessing Characters in Other Gospels

The first subject that I suggest exegetes consider is that of the confessing characters in the Synoptic Gospels and their relation to spiritual transformation as articulated in those Gospels. Critics ought to answer the following questions: Do these figures serve a thematic purpose as they do in John? And is spiritual transformation understood in the same way in the Synoptics as in John? These characters would be a significant group to study given Jesus's response to Peter's confession in Matthew: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16:17). Or, as we find in Mark, the father of the boy with an unclean spirit declares, "I believe; help my unbelief!'" (Mark 9:24). On the

surface, these texts seem to reflect the same view of spiritual transformation that John does. As a result, one can only wonder if the confessing characters in the Synoptics depict this view and if they do, what it reveals about their rhetorical purpose.

Spiritual Transformation in the Epistles

A second matter to be studied is that of the understanding of spiritual transformation in the Johannine epistle and how it compares with what is presented in the Fourth Gospel. Popp maintains that John 20:24-29 is an "example of narrative-dialogical Christology … that reads like a narrative realization of 1 John 1:1."[1] If these are true, then the appropriate response is to see if other themes in the Johannine epistles come to life in the story of Fourth Gospel. Given what I have shown of John's confessing characters—that they are thematic—it is likely that there are examples in the Johannine epistles of the kind of spiritual transformation that is present in the Gospel of John. If there is similarity, this may further advance what I present in this project regarding the Johannine understanding of spiritual transformation and John's use of characters.[2]

Other Groups of Characters in John

A third area that I propose future interpreters continue to look at is the rhetorical purpose of other groups of Johannine characters—unbelievers, recipients of Jesus's healing, the disciples, etc.[3] Do all literary figures in John reflect a thematic purpose?

---

[1] Popp, "Thomas," 525.

[2] A good place to start would be Craig S. Keener, "Transformation through Divine Vision in 1 John 3:2-6," *Faith Mission* 23 (2005): 13–22.

[3] Farelly surveys the disciples in his work (*Disciples*), and other authors cover various groups of characters in theirs. Nevertheless, many do not do so to understand the purpose of these characters as outlined in Chapter One.

Does each reveal something about John's understanding of spiritual transformation? Or are there other themes that these group depict?

Johannine Spiritual Transformation and the Johannine Community

A fourth avenue of research that can be pursued in light of this project is what John's understanding of spiritual transformation says about the Johannine community. From this project, it is clear that John considers spiritual transformation to be something which God grants. God's activity is what permits and causes faith. Consequently, this says something about the author and his intended audience and its self-perception. As Schnackenburg summarizes,

> The community, made one in the divine nature, is to give it [the cosmos] a further inducement to know the one sent by God ([ch. 17] v. 23). This points to the community's firm consciousness of its own election and mission and its sense of being a sign of the presence of God in the world. All those who belong to it know that they are God's possession, that they have been given to Jesus by God and that they have been entrusted by Jesus to the Father.[4]

It is certain from this project that the community saw itself as part of a group of individuals who God selected.

Nonetheless, beyond this basic assessment questions remain unanswered. Does this self-understanding come with a sense of humility?[5] This is possible. In a brief monologue, John the Baptist presents a deterministic outlook on life: "a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (3:27). He immediately follows this with a statement on the superior position of Jesus and how Jesus "must increase" while John himself "must decrease" (3:30). This may give us insight into the

---

[4] Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3:178.
[5] As Julian Hills inquired in a private conversation.

community's own view of itself—chosen but humble. Humble not because they do not deserve to be chosen, but humble because they are not Jesus. More evidence would be needed to establish this line of reasoning.

Another related question is how the author considers the election of Christians in relation to Israel's election in the OT (e.g., Deut 7:6b "The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth"). Does John see those who come to faith as receiving a different or similar election to that which is found in the OT concerning Israel? There are certainly numerous parallels between the Gospel of John and the OT, as well as several places where Jesus replaces elements of the Jewish religion with himself.[6] Do these aspects of John specify a replacement theology that sees believers as the new Israel?

Origin of the Pattern of John's Confession Scenes

A final question that may be considered is that of the literary origin of John's confession scenes. These narratives follow a specific pattern and the author consistently repeats the same literary tropes in each of these periscopes. Because of this, readers ought to wonder whether John modeled his confession scenes after any ancient type-scene.

Kasper Bro Larsen has studied this phenomenon and argues that the Fourth Gospel utilizes the genre of anagnorisis, which he translates recognition scene.[7] The

---

[6] Andrew C. Brunson discusses "Replacement Theology" (*Psalm 118*, 147). As quoted in Chapter Six, Brunson maintains that "although John presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture and of Jewish expectations, he clearly shows that he is much more than this. John's Jesus consistently takes up significant elements and/or symbols in Jewish institutions and festivals, shows his authority over them, and replaces them with his work and person" (ibid.). Again, as already reported in Chapter Six, Brunson finds that "John's replacement theology is replete throughout the Gospel, and especially in the feasts" (ibid.).

[7] As Larsen writes, "The Greek expression covers a fairly broad semantic field, and in other European languages, ancient and modern, it may be rendered as, e.g., cognitio, agnitio, reconnaissance, agnition, éclaircissement, Entdeckung, Wiederekennung, Anerkennung, discover, disclosure, revelation, recollection, acknowledgement, coming-to-know and, as will occur as the standard translation in the

example par excellence is that of the bath scene in the Odyssey. Larsen calls it "the very *locus classicus* of the recognition scene or ἀναγνώρισις."[8] He provides his outline of the typical structure of a recognition scene as well as examples from antiquity and the Bible.[9] Ultimately, he concludes that "the recognition scene is a recurring, generic vehicle in John, which serves to host and thematize central problems in the Gospel concerning the knowledge of God through Jesus, as well as the believers' access to Jesus in his physical presence and absence."[10]

This study ought to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, I propose that other forms be considered alongside that of anagnorisis. Specifically, I recommend that future researchers look to theophanies (as well as epiphanies in general) and compare John's confession narratives to this literary type-scene.[11] This form is promising for a number of reasons. First, for John to pattern his confession scenes after theophanies makes sense given John's theology. The author often draws attention to Jesus's divinity. And John maintains that no one has ever seen God and Jesus is the one who makes him known.[12]

---

present study recognition" (*Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 93 [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 2). As stated in a private conversation with Julian Hills, Larsen is not the first to see the use of ἀωαγνώρισις by the Gospel writers. Dodd finds that "the dramatic center of the whole incident [in Luke 24:13-55] is the ἀωαγνώρισις" and then goes on to say that "it seems proper in this case to use the technical term applied by ancient literary critics to the recognition-scene which was so often the crucial point of a Greek drama" ("The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in Form-Criticism of the Gospels," in *More New Testament Studies*, ed. idem [Manchester: University Press, 1968], 108).

[8] Ibid., 1.

[9] Larsen specifies what he sees as the regular structure for recognition scenes on ibid., 63–71. He gives a number of examples of recognition scenes on ibid., 56–57.

[10] Ibid., 219.

[11] Julian Hills recommended these forms as a possible origins for John's confession scenes in a private conversation.

[12] Jerome H. Neyrey makes this argument when discussing Jesus's words to Nathanael in 1:51: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'" He proposes that "Jesus is apparently not being compared with Jacob in 1:51. He is not seeing a vision; he is offering one. Rather, the disciples are cast in the role of Jacob, for they will see a heavenly vision just as Jacob did.… [In John 1:51] Jesus corresponds to the appearing Lord in Jacob's theophany" ("The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51," *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 589–90). He then shows that this is a consistent thought in John, referencing 1:18 ("No one has ever seen God; the only God"), 3:13 ("No one

Thus in the Fourth Gospel, an aspect of Jesus's ministry is to reveal God to believers. In Johannine confessions, this is what happens. These people meet with God and Jesus makes God known to them as they converse.

Second, the content of John's confession scenes matches much of the typical structure of OT theophanies.[13] As George Savran recounts, theophanies in the OT usually follow this pattern: (1) the setting of the scene; (2) the appearance and speech of Yahweh; (3) the human response to the presence of the divine; (4) the expression of doubt or anxiety; and (5) externalization.[14] Johannine confession scenes reflect much of this structure.

To begin with, Savran describes "the primary function" of *the setting of the scene* as "to separate the protagonist from family or others in preparation for what, in nearly every case, is a solitary experience."[15] This happens explicitly with three of the five confessing characters that I surveyed. The Samaritan Woman is by herself at the well. The Man Born Blind is expelled from the synagogue. And Mary Magdalene is alone at the tomb. In the other two scenes, the confessing character may not be alone, but he (Nathanael and Thomas) is singled out by Jesus and the ensuing conversation takes place entirely between Jesus and the confessor.

---

has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man"), and 5:37b ("His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen") (ibid., 590).

[13] A point Julian Hills has made in a private conversation. It should be noted that there are a number of aspects of OT theophanies that do not appear in Johannine confession scenes. Gwyneth Windsor reports that regarding theophanies, "Clouds and thick darkness, fire, thunder and lightning are always constituent features, whilst in some there are references to trumpet blasts, the defeat of enemies, and the wilderness god who appears from the south" ("Theophany: Traditions of the Old Testament," *Theology* 75 [1972]: 411). None of these is in John's confession scenes. .

[14] Savran, "Theophany as Type Scene," *Prooftexts* 23 (2003): 126–36.

[15] Ibid., 126.

The second component—*the appearance and speech of Yahweh*—is less similar to what is seen in John's confession scenes. Savran reports that prior to God appearing in a theophany, there may be first "a vision or a dream, or … the appearance of a divine emissary."[16] The only thing close to this in John is when a confessing character engages in conversation with Jesus before realizing that Jesus is the one with whom he or she is talking, as is the case with The Man Born Blind and Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, one could make the argument that Philip serves as a "divine emissary" for Nathanael and "the other disciples" for Thomas.

Regardless, there is the appearance of the divine before the confessing character along with a message. In each confession, Jesus says something to the individual prior to her or his confession of faith: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (1:48); "I who speak to you am he" (4:26); "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you" (9:37); "Mary" (20:16b); and "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (20:27b). And as Savran puts it, "once communication has been established, the visual element is of lesser import."[17] What matters is the message from God and each confession scene includes some divine speech from Christ.

The third element of theophanies is *the human response to the presence of the divine* and Savran tells that these differ in action but are similar in meaning. They represent "an unusual display of humility or fear, an awareness of 'creature consciousness.'"[18] This does not happen in John, but Savran observes of various

---

[16] Ibid., 128.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 130.

responses that they include "bowing" and "exclamation."[19] Both of these take place in Johannine confession scenes, e.g., "Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" (1:49); "He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him" (9:38), "Rabboni!" (20:16b); and "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (20:28).

The fourth part of the structure of OT theophanies is the one least likely to be found in a Johannine confession: *the expression of doubt or anxiety*. None of the confessing character expresses these emotions after making her or his confession of faith. Nonetheless, Savran states that "in the story of Samson's birth, Manoah's wife does not display an overt indication of skepticism but this role is taken over by Manoah himself, as he raises question after question about the angel's identity and the promise of a son."[20] Although confessing characters do not make these kinds of comments after their confessions, others in the narrative do. In John 9, after the Man Born Blind makes a pronouncement of faith, "some of the Pharisees near him" question Jesus about his assessment of themselves: "Are we also so blind?"[21] Moreover, there are instances of "doubt or anxiety" prior to confessions, especially in Nathanael's and Thomas's scenes.[22]

The final component of a theophany is that of *externalization*. Savran describes it this way:

> As the narrative begins with the separation from the societal context of the protagonist, so it finds its conclusion in the return of that protagonist to the world, but in a transformed manner. As there was a temporary eclipse of human characteristics such as speech and will in the drawing near to the divine, the concluding stage of the theophany narrative is marked by an increased awareness

---

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 132.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

> of the public sphere, by the establishing of a social role or a ritual structure for translating the private experience into an ongoing collective framework.[23]

Although Sarvan designates typical externalizations as “the establishing of a social role or a ritual structure,” there is in John the movement away from the personal to the public in most confession scenes.

The Samaritan Woman leaves her water jar and goes and tells her neighbors about her conversation with Jesus. This results in several Samaritans coming to Jesus and believing in him. After Mary Magdalene’s confession of faith, Jesus commissions her to the other disciples a specific message and she does. Thomas’s confession does not result in any actions on his part, but it leads into the purpose statement of the Gospel, which is public in nature: “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31b).

As can be seen by these similarities, theophany as a possible background for John’s confession scenes is promising. This is an area future researchers should pursue and investigate. Solving this riddle may open up a better understanding of John’s genre as a whole and the Fourth Gospel’s literary heritage—that is, is John drawing mostly from Greek and Roman sources—hence his use of recognition scenes—or is he utilizing mostly Jewish documents—thus his reliance upon theophanies? It would also allow for better interpretation because readers could compare John’s confession scenes to whichever other literature they most closely resemble.

[23] Ibid., 134.

Johannine Hermeneutics and the Life of the Church

What my study says about Johannine hermeneutics and the life of the church is that Christians should not be studying Johannine characters principally to look for exemplars of faith or doubt. John did not construct these narratives in the way that he did to motivate readers to repeat or avoid the actions of these literary figures. The evangelist does not call us to be like Mary Magdalene and come to faith by living as she does. On the contrary, there is nothing that these figures do to be spiritually transformed. They are believers simply because of Jesus's actions. Accordingly, sermons on John's confessing characters should take this into consideration.[24] They should emphasize a reliance upon Jesus to be spiritually transformed rather than focusing on what individuals must do to grow in their faith.[25]

Conclusion

This study has examined characters in the Gospel of John. My main goal has been to unearth their rhetorical purpose. By studying a specific set of characters—John's confessing characters—I have sought to demonstrate that the figures in the Fourth Gospel serve a thematic role. In particular, confessing characters portray what John's trusted figure say elsewhere regarding the Gospel's understanding of spiritual transformation: faith requires divine action. As a result, John's confessing characters need Jesus to act in order to believe and this is seen in their conversations with Jesus. Ultimately, this is a

[24] The emphasis on other elements in the text besides the characters' actions is not a new idea. It was a persistent theme that Robert Smith, Jr. taught in *Christian Preaching* and *Preaching Practicum* at Samford University in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 respectively. Smith wanted us to place the emphasis on God's actions in the text over an analysis of the character's virtues and vices.

[25] This is similar to what Smith recommends regarding characters and the proper focus a sermon should have on God's activity rather than the individual's actions (ibid.).

message of hope. Because according to John, the light of the world has come and he comes bearing light.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources and Reference Works

Aland, Barbara, et al., eds. *The Greek New Testament*. 4th rev. ed. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2006.

———, eds. *The Greek-English New Testament: Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*. 28th ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by J. H. Freese. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Balz, Horst, and Gerhard Schneider, eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.* ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-1993.

Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961

Brown, Colin, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–1985.

Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (Danker-Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich)

Green, Joel B., Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Herma, David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Holmes, Michael W., ed. *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Hühn, Peter, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, eds. *Handbook of Narratology*. Narratologia 19. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2009.

Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.

Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

Verbrugge, Verlyn D., ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Secondary Sources

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Andrew, Joe, ed. *Poetics of the Text: Essays to Celebrate Twenty Years of the Neo-Formalist Circle*. SSLP 17. Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Rev. ed. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 3rd ed. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Bar-Efrat, Shimeon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. JSOTSup 70. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989.

Barrett, C. K. *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. London: SPCK, 1955; 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang, 1974.

Barus, Armand. “The Faith Motif in John’s Gospel: A Narrative Approach.” PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2000.

Bauckham, Richard and Carl Mosser, eds. *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*. WBC 36. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.

Beck, David R. *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel*. BibInt 27. Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997.

Belle, G. van, M. Labahn, and P. Maritz, eds. *Repetition and Variation in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*. BETL 223. Louvain: Peeters, 2009.

Bennema, Cornelis. *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

———. "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature." *BibInt* 17 (2009): 375–421.

———. *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

———. "The Character of John in the Fourth Gospel." *JETS* 52 (2009): 274–84.

———. "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel—A New Proposal?" *EvQ* 74 (2002): 195–213.

———. "The Identity and Composition of Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John." *TynBul* 60 (2009): 239–63.

———. "The Sword of the Messiah and the Concept of Liberation in the Fourth Gospel." *Bib* 86 (2005): 35–58.

Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. BLS 9. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983.

Blaine, Bradford B., Jr. *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple*. AcBib 27. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Bloch, Abraham P. *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*. New York: Ktav, 1980.

Boers, Hendrikus. *Neither on This Mountain Nor in Jerusalem: A Study of John 4*. SBLMS 35. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

Bonney, William. *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John's Christological Narrative*. BibInt 62. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Bornkamm, Günther. *Geschichte und Glaube: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 4*. BEvT 53. München: Kaiser, 1971.

Bowen, Clayton R. "The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material." *JBL* 49 (1930): 292–305.

Bowman, J. "Samaritan Studies." *BJRL* 40 (1957): 298–329.

Brant, Jo-Ann A. *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.

Breytenbach, Cilliers, Henning Paulsen, and Ferdinand Hahn, eds. *Anfänge Der Christologie: Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 65. Geburtstag*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991.

Bridges, Linda McKinnish. "John 4:5-42." *Int* 48 (1994): 173–76.

Brodie, Thomas L. *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Brown, Jeannine K. *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*. AcBib 9. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*. New York: Paulist, 1979.

———. *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. AB 29-29A. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Brunk. Geo R., ed. *Encounter with the Holy Spirit: Consultation on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1972.

Brunson, Andrew C. *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John: An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John*. WUNT 2/158. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971.

Burnett, Fred W. "Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels." *Semeia* 63 (1993): 3–78.

Burroughs, Presian B. "Stop Grumbling and Start Eating: Gospel Meal Meets Scriptural Spice in the Bread of Life Discourse." *HBT* 28 (2006): 73–94.

Carson, D. A. *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*. NFTL. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.

———. *The Gospel According to John*. PNTCS. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Chilton, Bruce. "The Gospel According to John's Rabbi Jesus." *BBR* 25 (2015): 39–54.

Cole, Graham A. *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. FETS. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007.

Collins, Raymond F. "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters." *Int* 49 (1995): 359–69.

———. "Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel—I." *DRev* 94 (1976): 26–46.

———. "Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel—II." *DRev* 95 (1976): 118–32.

Conway, Colleen M. *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization*. SBLDS 167. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999.

———. "Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel." *BibInt* 10 (2002): 324–41.

Cross, Terry L. and Emerson B. Powery, eds. *The Spirit and the Mind: Essays in Informed Pentecostalism*. Lanham, MD: University Presss of America, 2000.

Culpeper, Jonathan. *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*. TE. Harlow England, NY: Longman, 2001.

Culpepper, R. Alan. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. FF. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

———. "The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in John." Pages 18–35 in Skinner's *Characters and Characterization*.

Danna, Elizabeth. "A Note on John 4:29." *RB* 106 (1999): 219–23.

Davies, Margaret. *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*. JSNTSup 69. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992.

Davies, W. D. *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

Day, Janeth Norfleete. *The Woman at the Well: Interpretation of John 4:1-42 in Retrospect and Prospect*. BibInt 61. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002.

Day, John, ed. *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*. LHBOTS 422. London: T&T Clark, 2005.

Derrett, J. Duncan M. "Miriam and the Resurrection (John 20, 16)." *DRev* 111 (1993): 174–86.

Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

———. "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in Form-Criticism of the Gospels." Pages 102-33 in idem, *Studies*.

———. *More New Testament Studies*. Edited by idem. Manchester: University Press, 1968.

Domeris, W. R. "The Johannine Drama." *JTSA* 42 (1983): 29–35.

Donahue, John R, ed. *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005.

Duke, Paul D. *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.

Dumbrell, W. J. "The Spirit in John's Gospel." Pages 77–94 in *Spirit of the Living God: Part One*. Explortaions 5. Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1991.

Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. NTL. London: SCM, 1975.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

———. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1976.

Eder, Jens. *Die Figur im Film: Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse*. Marburg: Schüren, 2008.

Eder, Jens, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider. "Characters in Fictional Worlds: An Introduction." Pages 3–64 in idem, *Characters*.

———, eds. *Characters in Fictional Worlds Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*. Edited by idem. Revisionen 3. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2010.

Esler, Philip F., and Ronald Piper. *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: A Social-Scientific and Theological Reading of John*. London: SCM, 2006.

Estes, Douglas. *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John*. BibInt 92. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Farelly, Nicolas. *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding*. WUNT 2/290. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler, ed. *Searching the Scriptures*. Vol. 2: *A Feminist Commentary*. London: SCM, 1994.

Fokkema, Aleid. *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction*. PmSt 4. Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures III*. Poétique. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972.

Gill, Christopher. "The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus." *ClQ* 77 (1983): 469–87.

Ginsberg, Warren. *The Cast of Character: The Representation of Personality in Ancient and Medieval Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

Girade, Marc. "Jésus en Samarie (Jean 4:1-42): Analyse des structures stylistiques et du processus de symbolisation." *EgT* 17 (1986): 275–310.

Gomes, Peter J. "John 1:45-51." *Int* 43 (1989): 282–86.

Graff, Gerald. "Literature as Assertions." Pages 135-61 in Konigsberg, *American Criticism*.

Grethlein, Jonas, and Antonios Rengakos, eds. *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature*. TCSV 4. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2009.

Grigsby, Bruce. "Washing in the Pool of Siloam: A Thematic Anticipation of the Johannine Cross." *NovT* 27 (1985): 227–35.

Harrison, S. J. "General Introduction: Working Together." Pages 1–18 in idem., *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics*.

———, ed. *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory, and Classical Literature*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Hartenstein, Judith. *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Maria Magdalena, Petrus, und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium*. NTOA 64. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.

Heidbrink, Henriette. "Fictional Characters in Literary and Media Studies: A Survey of the Research." Pages 67–110 in Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider's *Characters.*

Heil, John Paul. *Blood and Water: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus in John 18-21*. CBQMS 27. Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1995.

Hill, C. E. "The Identity of John's Nathanael." *JSNT* 20 (1998): 45–61.

Hirsch, E. D. *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Hochman, Baruch. *Character in Literature*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Hoskyns, Edwyn Clement. *The Fourth Gospel*. Edited by Francis Noel Davey. London: Faber & Faber, 1947.

Howard, James M. "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John." *BSac* 163 (2006): 63–78.

Hulster, Izaak J. de "The Two Angels in John 20:12: An Egyptian Icon of Resurrection." *NTS* 59 (2013): 20–49.

Hunt, Steven A. "Nathanael: Under the Fig Tree on the Fourth Day." Pages 189–201 in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann's *Character Studies.*

———. "Nicodemus, Lazarus, and the Fear of 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel." Pages 199–212 in van Belle, Labahn, and Maritz's *Repetition and Variation.*

Hunt, Steven A., D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann. "An Introduction to Character and Characterization in John and Related New Testament Literature." Pages 1-33 in idem, *Character Studies.*

———, eds. *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*. WUNT 314. Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

———. "Table on the Characters in the Fourth Gospel (in Order of First Appearance)." Pages 34-45 in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann's *Character Studies*.

Hylen, Susan E. *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction." *LM* 4 (1884): 502–21.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Jannidis, Fotis. “Character.” Pages 14–29 in *Hühn, Pier, Schmid, and Schönert’s Handbook of Narratology.*

———. *Figur und Person: Beitrag zu einer historischen Narratologie*. Narratologia 3. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2004.

Johnston, George. “Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John.” *Perspective* 9 (1968): 29–37.

Jong, Irene J. F de. *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide*. Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Jong, Irene J. F. de, and J. P. Sullivan, eds. *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature*. Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1994.

Keener, Craig S. *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*. Baker Academic, 2001.

———. “John, Gospel Of.” Pages 419–36 in Green, Brown, and Perrin’s *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*.

———. “The Function of Johannine Pneumatology in the Context of Late First Century Judaism.” PhD diss., Duke University, 1991.

———. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.

———. *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.

———. “Transformation through Divine Vision in 1 John 3:2-6.” *Faith Mission* 23 (2005): 13–22.

Kelber, Werner H. “The Birth of a Beginning: John 1:1-18.” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 121–44.

Kent, Grenville J. R., Paul J. Kissling, and Laurence A. Turner, eds. *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2010.

Kim, Stephen S. “The Significance of Jesus’ Healing the Blind Man in John 9.” *BSac* 167 (2010): 307–18.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Matthew as Story*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Kitzberger, Ingrid Rosa. “Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala–Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative: A Feminist, Narrative-Critical Reader-Response.” *NTS* 41 (1995): 564–86.

Knapp, John V. "Introduction: Self-Preservation and Self-Transformation; Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literary Character." *Style* 24 (1990): 349–64.

Knights, Chris. "Nathanael and Thomas: Two Objectors, Two Confessors - Reading John 20:24-29 and John 1:44-51 in Parallel." *ExpTim* 125 (2014): 328–32.

Knights, L. C. *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism*. Cambridge: Gordon Fraser, the Minority Press, 1933.

Koch, Thomas. *Literarische Menschendarstellung: Studien zu ihrer Theorie und Praxis*. REC 18. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1991.

Koester, Craig R. "Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1:45-51)." *JSNT* 39 (1990): 23–34.

———. "'The Savior of the World' (John 4:42)." *JBL* 109 (1990): 665–80.

———. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.

Koester, Craig R. and Reimund Bieringer, eds. *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*. WUNT 222. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

Kok, Jacobus. "The Healing of the Blind Man in John." *JECH* 2012 (2012): 36–62.

Konigsberg, Ira, ed. *American Criticism in the Poststructuralist Age*. MSH. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1981.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*. BTNT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

———. *John*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Kresic, Stephanus, ed. *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Classical Texts*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1981.

Larsen, Kasper Bro. *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*. BibInt 93. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Lee, Dorothy A. "Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20." *JSNT* 58 (1995): 37–49.

———. "Turning from Death to Life: A Biblical Reflection on Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)." *ERev* 50 (1998): 112–20.

Lincoln, Andrew T. “The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective.” Pages 211–32 in Bauckham and Mosser’s *John and Christian Theology*.

———. *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000.

Lightfoot, R. H. *St. John’s Gospel: A Commentary*. Edited by C. F. Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Lindars, Barnabas. *The Gospel of John*. NCB. London: Oliphants, 1972.

Loader, William. “John 1:50-51 and the ‘Greater Things’ of Johannine Christology.” Pages 255–74 in Breytenbach, Paulsen, and Hahn’s *Anfänge der Christologie*.

Margolin, Uri. “Character.” Pages 66–79 in Herman’s *Companion to Narrative*.

———. “Characterization in Narrative: Some Theoretical Prolegomena.” *Neophilologus* 67 (1983): 1–14.

———. “Fictional Individuals and Their Counterparts.” Pages 43–55 in Andrew’s *Poetics*.

———. “Individuals in Narrative Worlds: An Ontological Perspective.” *PT* 11 (1990): 843–71.

———. “The What, the When, and the How of Being a Character in Literary Narrative.” *Style* 24 (1990): 453–68.

Marguerat, Daniel, and Yvan Bourquin. *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*. Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM, 1999.

Martin, Michael W. *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel*. NTM 25. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010.

Matera, Frank J. “John 20:1-18.” *Int* 43 (1989): 402–6.

Maynard, Arthur H. “The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel.” *NTS* 30 (1984): 531–48.

Meister, Jan Christoph. “Narratology.” Pages 329–50 in Hühn, Pier, Schmid, and Schönert’s *Handbook of Narratology.*

Merenlahti, Petri. “Characters in the Making: Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels.” Pages 49–72 in Rhoads and Syreeni’s *Characterization*.

Merenlahti, Petri, and Raimo Hakola. “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism.” Pages 49–72 in Rhoads and Syreeni’s *Characterization*.

Michaels, J. Ramsey. “Nathanael under the Fig Tree.” *ExpTim* 78 (1967): 182–83.

———. *The Gospel of John*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Moloney, Francis J. *The Gospel of John*. SP 4. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998.

Morgan, John H. ed. *Church Divinity*. CDMS. Notre Dame: J. H. Morgan, 1981.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. Rev. ed. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Mumaw, John R. “The Holy Spirit at Work as Predicted in the Gospel of John.” Pages 189–209 in Brunk’s *Encounter*.

Neyrey, Jerome H. “The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51.” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 586–605.

O’Brien, Kelli S. “Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric.” *CBQ* 67 (2005): 284–302.

Okure, Teresa. “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (JN 4:1-42) in Africa.” *TS* 70 (2009): 401–18.

———. *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*. WUNT 2/31. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988.

———. “The Significance Today of Jesus’ Commission to Mary Magdalene.” *IRM* 81 (1992): 177–88.

Painter, John. “John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.” *JSNT* 28 (1986): 31–61.

Painter, John, R. Alan Culpepper, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds. *Word, Theology, and Community in John*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000.

Pamment, Margaret. “The Fourth Gospel’s Beloved Disciple.” *ExpTim* 94 (1983): 363–67.

Parsons, Mikeal C. “Reading a Beginning/Beginning a Reading: Tracing a Literary Theory on Narrative Openings.” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 11–31.

Pelling, Christopher, ed. *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

Pentecost, Dwight J. *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

Perrin, Nicholas. *Jesus the Temple*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Peterson, Robert A. "Is Christ 'the Electing God'?" *Presb* 30 (2004): 81–89.

Phelan, James. "Character, Progression, and the Mimetic-Didactic Distinction." *MP* 84 (1987): 282–99.

———. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. LC. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Piasecki, Elizabeth C. "Nathanael: The 'Twin' of Doubting Thomas?" Pages 101–6 in Morgan, *Church Divinity*.

Picó, Carmen. "'He Visto Al Señor' (Jn 20, 18a): La Palabra Autorizada de María Magdalena." *EstEcl* 90 (2015): 41–73.

Popp, Thomas. "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks." Pages 504–29 in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann's *Character Studies.*

Powell, Mark Allan. *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

Price, Martin. *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Puskas, Charles B. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989.

Redman, Judith Christine Single. "Eyewitness Testimony and the Characters in the Fourth Gospel." Pages 59–78 in Skinner's *Characters and Characterization*.

Reimer, Andy M. "The Man Born Blind: True Disciple of Jesus." Pages 428–38 in Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann's *Character Studies.*

Reiser, Brian J., John B. Black, and Wendy G. Lehnert. "Thematic Knowledge Structures in the Understanding and Generation of Narratives." *Discourse Processes* 8 (1985): 357–89.

Resseguie, James L. *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

———. *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*. BibInt 56. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001.

Rhoads, David M., and Joanna Dewey. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Rhoads, David, and Kari Syreeni, eds. *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*. JSNTSup 184. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999.

Reinhartz, Adele. "A Feminist Commentary on the Gospel of John." Pages 561–600 in Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*.

Riley, Gregory J. *Resurrection Reconsidered : Thomas and John in Controversy*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Robinson, John A. T. "The Relationship of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John." Pages 65-76 in idem, *New Testament Studies*.

———, ed. *Twelve More New Testament Studies*. London: SCM, 1984.

Rosik, Mariusz. "Discovering the Secrets of God's Gardens: Resurrection as New Creation (Gen 2:4b-3:24; Jn 20:1-18)." *SBFLA* 58 (2008): 81–98.

Rowland, Christopher. "The Temple in the New Testament." Pages 469–83 in Day's *Temple and Worship*.

Savran, George. "Theophany as Type Scene." *Prooftexts* 23 (2003): 119–49.

Schmitz, Thomas A. *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction*. Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.

Schneider, Ralf. *Grundriß zur kognitiven Theorie der Figurenrezeption am Beispiel des viktorianischen Romans*. ZAA 9. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St. John*. Translated by Kevin Smyth. 3 vols. HThKNT. New York: Crossroad, 1968, 1980, 1982.

Schneiders, Sandra M. "The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Johannine Spirituality." Pages 168–98 in Donahue's *Life in Abundance*.

———. "To See or Not to See: John 9 as a Synthesis of the Theology and Spirituality of Discipleship." Pages 189–209 in Painter, Culpepper, and Segovia's *Word, Theology, and Community*.

———. "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20." Pages 153–76 in Koester and Bieringer's *The Resurrection.*

Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Segal, Charles. "Ancient Texts and Modern Criticism: Some Recent Trends in Classical Literary Studies." *Arethusa*. 1 (1968): 1–25.

Simenel, Philippe. "Les 2 Anges de Jean 20/11-12." *ETR* 67 (1992): 71–76.

Simmons, Billy E. "A Christology of the 'I Am' Sayings in the Gospel of John." *TTE* 38 (1988): 94–103.

Skamp, Ann. "'But Mary Stood Weeping Outside the Tomb' (John 20:11)." *Colloq* 32 (2000): 23–30.

Skinner, Christopher W., ed. *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*. LNTS 461. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

———. "Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John: Reflections on the Status Quaestionis." Pages xvii–xxxii in idem, *Characters and Characterization*.

———. *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question*. PTMS 115. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009.

———. "Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization: Reading John's Characters through the Lens of the Prologue." Pages 111–27 in idem, *Characters and Characterization*.

Smith, Dennis E. "Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory." *Semeia* 52 (1990): 1–9.

Staley, Jeffrey L. *Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

———. "Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: Reading Character in John 5 and 9." *Semeia* 53 (1991): 55–80.

———. *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel*. SBLDS 82. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

Steegen, Martijn. "To Worship the Johannine 'Son of Man': John 9,38 as Refocusing on the Father." *Bib* 91 (2010): 534–54.

Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

———. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. ISBL. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Sullivan, J. P. "Introduction: Critical Continuity and Contemporary Innovation." Pages 1–18 in de Jong and Sullivan's *Modern Critical Theory*.

Sylva, Dennis. *Thomas – Love as Strong as Death: Faith and Commitment in the Fourth Gospel*. LNTS 434. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.

Syreeni, Kari. “Peter as Character and Symbol.” Pages 106–52 in Rhoads and Syreeni’s *Characterization*.

Tannehill, Robert C. “Beginning to Study ‘How the Gospels Begin.’” *Semeia* 52 (1990): 185–92.

———. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

Tate, W. Randolph. *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Thatcher, Tom and Stephen D. Moore, eds. *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.

Thielman, Frank. *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Thomas, John Christopher. “Healing in the Atonement: A Johannine Perspective.” *JPT* 14 (2005): 23–39.

———. “The Spirit in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Explorations.” Pages 87–104 in Cross and Powery’s *The Spirit*.

Thompson, Marianne Meye. *John: A Commentary*. NTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015.

———. “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading.” Pages 233–44 in Bauckham and Mosser’s *John and Christian Theology*.

Thompson, Richard P. “Reading Beyond the Text Part II: Literary Creativity and Characterization in Narrative Religious Texts of the Greco-Roman World.” *ARC* 29 (2001): 81–122.

Tolmie, D. F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012.

Trudinger, L. Paul. “An Israelite in Whom There Is No Guile: An Interpretative Note on John 1:45:51.” *EvQ* 54 (1982): 117–20.

Turner, George Allen. “Soteriology in the Gospel of John.” *JETS* 19 (1976): 271–77.

Turner, Laurence A. “Preaching Narrative: Plot.” Pages 13–29 in Kent, Kissling, and Turner’s *Reclaiming the Old Testament*.

Waweru, Humphrey Mwangi. “Jesus and Ordinary Women in the Gospel of John: An African Perspective.” *SMTh* 96 (2008): 139–59.

Whitacre, Rodney A. *Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology*. SBLDS 67. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

Windsor, Gwyneth. “Theophany: Traditions of the Old Testament.” *Theology* 75 (1972): 411–16.

Witherington, Ben, III. *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

Wright, William M., IV. “Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel.” *CBQ* 71 (2009): 544–59.

Zimmermann, Ruben. “Symbolic Communication between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20.” Pages 221-35 in Thatcher and Moore’s *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*.

———. “The Narrative Hermeneutics of John 11: Learning with Lazarus How to Understand Death, Life, and Resurrection.” Pages 75–101 in Koester and Bieringer’s *The Resurrection.*