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### John's Use of the Absolute ΕΓΩ EIMI as a Reflection of the Theology of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel

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JOHN'S USE OF THE ABSOLUTE ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ AS A  
REFLECTION OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE  
PROLOGUE TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

John A. Upton

May 1984

Approved by Erich Kiehl Advisor  
Quentin Wesselschmidt Reader

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Each year, the wealth of new material produced by the scholarly community on the Gospel of John betrays both an interest in and frustration with this lofty work. Its simple literary style and limited vocabulary in no way attest to a simple and limited message; the basic meaning of this Gospel may appear sufficiently clear to the casual reader, but the complexities and depth of its message have yet to be fathomed by the serious student.<sup>1</sup>

The frustration implied by J. A. T. Robinson is familiar to those who have probed the depths of John's message:

The effect of reading too much on the Fourth Gospel is to make one feel either that everything has been said about it that conceivably could be said or that it really does not matter what one says, for one is just as likely to be right as anyone else.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>That the language of John "has a simplicity and a grandeur which are unrivaled by any other book of the New Testament" is the opinion offered by Bruce M. Metzger, "The Language of the New Testament," in The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951) 7:50.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John," New Testament Studies 9 (January 1963):120.

In acknowledging this problem, it is with a certain degree of caution and humility that the present writer undertakes to examine and comment upon perhaps the greatest of enigmas in John, his use of the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$ .

The investigation will center on John's intended meaning of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  as the phrase relates to the unique Prologue which prefaces the Fourth Gospel. It is hoped that, in approaching the Prologue as the thematic key to the Gospel, it will provide guidance in ascertaining the relative purpose of the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$ s as they reflect the purpose of the Gospel as a whole; the Prologue should provide a direction for drawing some conclusions as to John's intent in the use of this phrase.

The organization of the thesis will follow a pattern which comments upon these various aspects: the unusual nature and frequency of the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  compared with the Synoptic Gospels, the source of the phrase (especially its possible background in the Old Testament and the Septuagint), the place of the Prologue in a proper understanding of John's Gospel, a thorough analysis of the major theological emphases in the Prologue itself, and an overview of the history of scholarly interpretation of John's  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$ s, highlighting some of the more important and influential suggestions. On the heels of these separate

investigations, we shall then endeavor to draw some conclusions about the intent of the evangelist in his use of the term.

Regrettably, some limitations must be imposed on our investigation, and the major ones are listed from the outset. First, detailed consideration of the predicated uses of the term will be omitted for two reasons: these are fairly numerous and need substantial development both on the basis of of the text and context in order to do them justice; and secondly, such research might be of limited value if one is willing to accept the premise that the proper understanding of the absolute use of the term may provide the key to unlocking the meaning of the predicated uses.<sup>3</sup> The predicated uses will not be altogether ignored, but will be of secondary importance.

Some reasonable limits also must be imposed on the investigation into the Prologue itself. Entire books have been written on this subject, many of them fruitless and fanciful.<sup>4</sup> Although the Prologue will receive substantial attention, it must be remembered that the subject of our

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<sup>3</sup>This is the opposite assumption of Zimmermann, who believes the predicated uses are demonstrations of the meaning of the absolute use. I would suggest that the absolute use is so startling that the predicated use can only be a much more subtle expression. See Heinrich Zimmermann, "Das Absolute als die neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel (2.Teil)," Biblische Zeitschrift 4 (1960):273.

<sup>4</sup>The reader is referred to the bibliography for information on various aspects of the Prologue itself.

investigation is not the Prologue itself but the phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι. Only as the history of research on the Prologue serves some useful purpose in unravelling the mystery at hand will it be brought into consideration. Some of the most important suggestions offered by various scholars concerning key terms and possible backgrounds for material in the Prologue will also receive proper consideration.

It might be helpful to present in an introductory position several of the presuppositions behind this thesis. As to the date of the writing of the Gospel, it is assumed to be a late, first-century document. Much has been done lately with early-versus-late dating.<sup>5</sup> The assumption of a first century date will play an important role in evaluating some of the suggestions for source material of the ἐγὼ εἶμι.

A basic presupposition in accordance with the witness of the Early Church is that the Gospel of John has been authored by John himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many have suggested that the text has been edited. This has been particularly true of the last

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<sup>5</sup>See E. Earle Ellis, The World of St. John, the Gospel and Epistles (London: Methuen and Co., 1938), p. 26, who provides some comments on why it was written after Paul's time. See also A. M. Hunter, The Gospel According to John (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), pp. 5-9. Hunter comments on the Palestinian background of the Gospel. The dating of John is a thesis in itself, and beyond the scope of our present concern.

chapter.<sup>6</sup> While no denial is made here that John himself could have edited his material several times, or in later life added to the material, this would have been done only under the inspiration of the Spirit. In no event shall we presuppose a secondary redactor who altered the material in any fashion, because such a presupposition attacks the very nature of the doctrine of inspiration and leaves the researcher with the hopelessly subjective task of seeking to determine an "original text." We shall deal with the text as it stands, and leave to others the exercise of their strange and destructive fascination with form criticism.<sup>7</sup>

Source criticism will not receive much credibility during our investigation.<sup>8</sup> The weight given to various

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<sup>6</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "Prophetic 'I'-Sayings and the Jesus Tradition: the Importance of Testing Prophetic Utterances Within Early Christianity," New Testament Studies 24 (1978):175. Dunn correctly notes that scholars have been following Bultmann's lead for the last fifty years in examining everything form-critically before believing anything has actual historical value. The problem with this method, he points out, is that the Gospel becomes "fluid."

<sup>7</sup>"Fascination" is truly the proper word for it. Scharlemann had, over a quarter of a century ago, expressed hope that the discovery of P66 would "put an end to the vagaries of those scholars that have tried to transpose certain parts of the Gospel in the interest of what they call a more logical sequence." Sadly, P66 has had too little effect, and form criticism continues to occupy too much space in theological journals. Martin H. Scharlemann, "Papyrus Sixty-Six," Concordia Theological Monthly 28 (August 1957): 576.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Tomson Fortna, The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), pp. 203-215. Those who are enthralled with source criticism might

extra-Biblical authorities in demonstrating some point in Biblical research is truly amazing. C. K. Barrett has said "There are not many literary products which, like Melchizedek, are without ancestry."<sup>9</sup> Such a statement would suggest that the author of the Gospel was not writing in a vacuum, but that he brought to the text his background in, among other things, the Old Testament and first century Judaism. Be that as it may, the text will provide authority on a higher plane than that of non-Biblical sources for determining the message. The determinate assumption under which we proceed is that the Bible is divine revelation and is a unity within itself due to its divine origin; it alone in its entirety provides the truest and clearest picture of any one of its given parts. Some extra-Biblical materials will be noted in passing, both for the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  and for the Prologue. If the weight given to these materials seems slight, it is due to this assumption of its origin.

Finally, it is acknowledged that John, in writing the Fourth Gospel, has "formatted" his material, that is, he has selected material and organized it in such a fashion that the salient purpose of its content (20:30-31) is

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do well to take an objective look at this material. If there is no other value to it, it demonstrates rather convincingly that source criticism is an abyss. Scholars have been unable to agree on anything!

<sup>9</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism: The Franz Delitzsch Lectures, University of Munster, 1967, trans. D. M. Smith (London: SPCK, 1972), p. 34.

served. This is not to deny the historical nature of the Gospel; John is not putting words into the mouth of Jesus which he never said. John, as A. T. Robertson points out, is interpreting history in the manner of all historians, but this fact does not mean that the Gospel is untrue.<sup>10</sup> Nor does it mean a distortion of history has taken place because history has been interpreted in this manner.<sup>11</sup> What it does deny, however, is a comment such as Harvey McArthur's claim that the Bible is absolute truth in permanent form which "points toward a perceived truth" which is unacceptable to people of the modern era.<sup>12</sup> We would also find William Manson's statement about a "rationalizing" process which took place within the church to allow serious subjective errors in judging the validity of the text, and to presume, albeit benignly, that faith has colored the historical events.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>A. T. Robertson, The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>D. George Vanderlip, John: The Gospel of Life (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), pp. 23-24.

<sup>12</sup>Harvey K. McArthur, "Christological Perspectives in the Predicates of the Johannine Ego Eimi Sayings," in Christological Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Harvey K. McArthur, edited by Robert F. Berkey and Sarah A. Edwards (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), pp. 91-94.

<sup>13</sup>William Manson, Jesus and the Christian (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 75. His comments center around the idea that there is a time period in which the disciples worship Jesus before they understand the true mystery of his person. This period of "rationalization" turns the historical events of Jesus' life

We have spent what might at first glance appear to be an inordinate amount of time on presuppositions. They are nonetheless important for evaluating one's presentation, and useful for providing limits. Wild speculation such as that of Robert Eisler simply is not worthy of attention.<sup>14</sup> The same is true of conclusions which are drawn from assumptions that destroy the inspiration of Scripture.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this thesis is not to critique the work of others or reach new heights (or depths) of critical acumen, but to provide a case for the meaning of the ἔγω εἶμις which remains faithful to the analogy of Scripture and the witness of the Early Church, and at the same time provides a positive stimulus for spiritual growth. The present writer is aware of the work of many men who receive no particular attention in this thesis. In most cases, lack of attention to their efforts stems from a rejection of their presuppositions as detrimental to the aforementioned purpose of this thesis.

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into faith for the individual Christian. This is, by itself, innocuous enough that it might be defensible, but the concern should be that it opens the door to accepting a perversion of the historical facts for the sake of faith.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Eisler, The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel: Its Author and Its Writer (London: Methuen and Co., 1938), pp. 178-180. This is really a strange discussion; Eisler suggests that Marcion was somehow involved in the final editing of the Gospel.

<sup>15</sup>Harner has presented some very good observations on the ἔγω εἶμις, but his statement that the early church probably placed this strange phrase in the mouth of Jesus is not



one of them. He proceeds along this line of reasoning because he sees no particular agreement between the Synoptics and the fourth Gospel in Jesus' mode of speech, and assumes that one of the groups of sayings must not be historical. While doctrinally we cannot accept such a statement, it might even be questionable on logical grounds alone: Jesus surely had much more to say in three years than what has been preserved in the four Gospels, and the writers admittedly selected only certain types of material as it fit their purpose. Philip B. Harner, The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought, Facet Books, Biblical Series, no. 26 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 64. It is perhaps noteworthy that Temple, who often looks for possible reasons to discard textual material en masse on source-critical grounds, is forced to admit the probable authenticity of John 8:58: "I believe that it was preserved in the Narrative-Discourse Source and included in this gospel by the evangelist because it was something that Jesus did actually say." Sydney Temple, The Core of the Fourth Gospel (London: Mowbrays, 1975, p. 168.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNUSUAL NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF THE PHRASE

#### ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ IN JOHN: IS THIS A FORMULA?

The phrase ἐγώ εἰμι is not a particularly rare one in the Holy Scriptures. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden identify sixty examples of its use in the New Testament; this hardly qualifies the phrase as a hapax legommenon.<sup>1</sup> Of these sixty uses, however, thirty occur in the Gospel of John and another four in the Revelation of St. John. The fourth evangelist seems to have a penchant for the term.

Since the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι literally means "I I am," some wonder if John's grammar might be deficient; the Fourth Gospel uses rather elementary Greek compared to the other books of the New Testament. Joseph Crehan has stated flatly that John's phrases "are not strictly grammatical in Greek," at least not in the way John uses them.<sup>2</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner, however, suggest two possible reasons for

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<sup>1</sup>W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, A Concordance to the Greek Testament, According to the Texts of Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf and the English Revisers, fifth edition (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1978), pp. 247-251.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Crehan, The Theology of St. John (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p. 93.

the usage: nominative pronouns can be used in addition to the verb when contrast or emphasis is desirable, or additional pronouns can be Hebraisms or scribal additions, with the context providing the criterion for one's choice.<sup>3</sup>

There is disagreement about whether or not John's use of the pronoun can be explained purely as emphasis. Ethelbert Stauffer reports that the emphatic use of ἐγώ in the Synoptics is rare, whereas the Fourth Gospel uses it commonly.<sup>4</sup> In Matthew, for instance, the phrase ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν occurs five times in the Sermon on the Mount, and there ἐγώ clearly emphasizes Jesus' power and authority. But in the Synoptics such uses are quite infrequent. McArthur contends that, while ἐγώ truly can be used for emphasis, the multitude of occasions in which it appears in John indicates that it is a phenomenon that cannot be explained only by emphasis.<sup>5</sup>

John tends to use personal pronouns far more than

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<sup>3</sup>F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. Robert Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, "Εγώ," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (hereafter referred to as TDNT), ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2:348.

<sup>5</sup>McArthur, "Christological Perspectives," p. 79.

the Synoptics.<sup>6</sup> But stylistic considerations are not wholly responsible for the inclusion of these emphatic personal pronouns. Suggestions that John is unfamiliar with the Greek language fall short of the realities of life in first century Galilee.

Philip Harner must be credited with some meticulous work in his analysis of John's use of predicates.<sup>7</sup> He has demonstrated that John carefully differentiates between the predicated use of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι and the absolute use. With an expressed predicate, John consistently includes the definite article with the predicate, but when ἐγώ εἰμι appears in the absolute usage, the words always appear together without a definite article. This pattern gives us reason to suppose that John's use is purposeful rather than accidental.

Werner Kümmel's statement that John has "coined" language and put it on the lips of Jesus is difficult to accept.<sup>8</sup> For one thing, the Synoptic Gospels have echoes of ἐγώ εἰμι as spoken by Jesus. Secondly, the phrase is grammatically acceptable. And thirdly, there is a definite pattern in its usage. It would appear these occurrences

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<sup>6</sup>Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 331.

<sup>7</sup>Harner, The "I Am", pp. 50-51.

<sup>8</sup>Werner Georg Kümmel, The Theology of the New Testament, According to Its Major Witnesses: Jesus--Paul--John (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 263.

of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι are not an invention of the Evangelist.

Nonetheless, it is puzzling that only in the Fourth Gospel should we find them in such frequency. How may we best explain this phenomenon? Surely one must realize that John had no need to repeat the Synoptic material--it was already a part of the heritage of the church and would have been superfluous.<sup>9</sup>

The exceptional frequency in John would tend to indicate that the phrase is difficult to explain purely on grammatical grounds.<sup>10</sup>

Also worthy of note is that the absolute ἐγώ εἰμι are spoken ONLY by Jesus (with 9:9 being the exception); a grammatical phenomenon would probably not yield so rigid a pattern.

And finally, one must consider 8:58 and 13:19 which are difficult to explain purely on grammatical considerations alone, and which are uses of the ἐγώ εἰμι which Guthrie contends have no parallel in the Synoptics.

All of this serves to underline the idea that while the ἐγώ εἰμι are grammatically defensible, they are most

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<sup>9</sup>Wilbert F. Howard, Christianity According to St. John, Studies in Theology series (London: Duckworth, 1965), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 332.

unusual in their frequency and use in John's Gospel. We need now ask whether their use is constant or varied.

Suggested Variations of John's Usage

In the best tradition of German scholarship, Rudolph Bultmann has analyzed John's use of the phrase at length.<sup>12</sup> He contends for four distinct types of ἐγώ εἰμι. The first is what he terms the "presentation formula" which responds to the question "Who are you?" with ἐγώ being the subject. The second is the "qualificatory formula" which responds to the query "What are you?" with ἐγώ as the subject. The third is the "identification formula" in which the speaker identifies himself with someone or something else, again with ἐγώ as the subject. Finally, he notes the "recognition formula" in which ἐγώ becomes the predicate in responding to the question: "Who is the one who is expected, asked for, spoken to?"

Bultmann's typology gives rise to some serious problems. In the first place, he himself admits that the Johannine phrases do not fit neatly into these four categories. Secondly, one may validly suggest that Bultmann is guilty of begging the question: he "pre-loads" the meaning

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<sup>12</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, The Gospel of John, A Commentary, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), pp. 225-226 in footnote.

of each phrase according to that which he wishes to prove.<sup>13</sup>

Another difficulty with Bultmann's four-category assessment is that it is unnecessarily complicated. While some scholars are struggling to determine whether or not these phrases are good grammar or stylistic quirks, Bultmann has developed a multitude of assumptions about the purpose of the phrase; whenever an *ἐγὼ εἰμι* does not fit a previous category, a new one is created! And to what possible purpose? He himself admits they all will not fit the categories he has created.

Finally, in the "recognition formula," Bultmann claims that *ἐγὼ* is to be considered the predicate. Yet the *ἐγὼ* takes no definite article. This suggestion, if true, would break a very consistent pattern in John's usage which Harner has been able to identify.<sup>14</sup>

PHEME PERKINS has also claimed to discover four separate types of *ἐγὼ εἰμι*.<sup>15</sup> His four categories are 1) I AM with a symbolic predicate, 2) I AM to identify Jesus to the hearer, 3) I AM with a claim to be the Messiah, and

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<sup>13</sup>In this case, of course, he contends for the non-historicity of the text and a connection with the much later Mandaean Gnosticism; this suggestion will be analyzed in greater detail later in the thesis.

<sup>14</sup>Harner, The "I Am", pp. 50-51, and p. 12 above.

<sup>15</sup>PHEME PERKINS, The Gospel According to St. John: A Theological Commentary (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), pp. 105-106.

4) I AM as the absolute content of belief. Among these four categories, he notes that the fourth is unique to the Gospel of John.

Perkins' four categories, although perhaps some improvement over Bultmann, also present some difficulties. They have not been selected from analysis of the text but by a comparison of Biblical and extra-Biblical uses, especially Gnostic usage. The apparent assumption is that these uses will anticipate John's usage, John having borrowed the concept from other sources.

The problems here seem to be twofold: lack of sufficient demonstration that John is dependent upon any non-Biblical sources; also, if the fourth category is uniquely Johannine, is it logical to assume that the first three uses color the meaning of the fourth? Would it not be more likely that if John has a peculiar usage, it is because this was the way he wished to express himself?

This suggests that the "first three categories" derive their meaning more properly from the unique use, which is quite the opposite of Perkin's suggestion. If the meaning of the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\lambda\mu\iota\varsigma$  is rooted in the absolute use, and this use colors the other uses in any way, then the non-Johannine uses of the phrase would be hard-pressed to shed light on what John is trying to say. It is preferable to work from the unique to the more common, rather than suppose sources for Perkins' first three categories.



Raymond Brown's suggestion that there are only three uses of the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  has decidedly more appeal, primarily because he examines the phrases grammatically rather than from a source-theory.<sup>16</sup> His three categories are as follows: 1) the absolute use with no predicate, 2) the use of the phrase with the predicate nominative, and 3) those cases in which a predicate may be understood but is not expressed.

Textually, this approach has the most appeal because it limits the presuppositions. However, the reader might notice that there is still one subjective element left, namely that the last category is decidedly flexible. Such a category may exist to appease those critical scholars who would like to find predicates in the absolute uses.

The above are but three suggestions by scholars for categorizing the uses of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  in the Gospel of John. In each case flaws have been noted, some more serious than others.

#### The "Two Category" Approach To Types

The most probable suggestion, however, is that there are but two uses of the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  in John: the

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<sup>16</sup>Raymond E. Brown, "The EGO EIMI ('I Am') Passages in the Fourth Gospel," in A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology (John's Gospel and Epistles), ed. Michael J. Taylor (New York: Alba House, 1977), pp. 117-119. He also says that the absolutes are primary and the predicated uses are secondary.

absolute use in which no predicate is found, and the predicated use in which a predicate is supplied. This suggestion is textual, relatively free of presuppositions and subjectivity, and, most importantly, eliminates the need for hypothesizing predicates.

Since the thesis deals primarily with the absolute usage, it is important to see if rejecting implied predicates is justifiable. Can any (or all, for that matter)  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  be explained by an implied predicate? Again, as with every other issue in Johannine scholarship, there are at least two opposing camps.

Some insist that a predicate must be implied because the absolute use results in an incomplete sentence. E. M. Sidebottom, for instance, has stated that a predicate can always be assumed behind  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  in John.<sup>17</sup> The most important instance he cites as a demonstration of this is 9:9.

Sidebottom's "assumed predicate" is the Divine Name--or at the very least "Son of God". But as one reads Sidebottom, it becomes questionable whether he intends to provide a predicate for the absolute usage or rather seeks

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<sup>17</sup>E. M. Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, in the Light of First-Century Thought (London: SPCK, 1961), p. 43. Pancaro would agree that "the son of God" would be the supplied predicate, but is quite loathe to supply one. See Severino Pancaro, The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John, Supplements to Novum Testamentum Volume 42 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p. 61.

to identify the usage with the Tetragrammenon.<sup>18</sup> Identification of the absolute usage with the Old Testament Divine Name is not the same as providing a predicate for the usage.

Perhaps it is for this reason that most scholars prefer to align themselves with the position that no predicate is indicated. Gillis Wetter says that there is no predicate indicated by the text in 8:24, and it is necessary to ask if it is proper to add one.<sup>19</sup> And again, on 6:20, he notes that while the reader might expect a predicate, nothing in the text compels the reader to supply one.<sup>20</sup>

Those who supply predicates face not only the problem of which predicate to supply, but where to supply it. Harner emphasizes 13:19 and 8:58 as examples where there is no chance of predicate.<sup>21</sup> David Wead, on the other hand, points to 4:26 and 8:18,23 and says they are "to be interpreted literally with no question."<sup>22</sup>

To those who choose to supply predicates, the

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>19</sup>Gillis Wetter, "Ich bin es," Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 88 (1915):225.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>21</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>David W. Wead, The Literary Devices in John's Gospel (Ph.D. Dissertation, Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1970), p. 74.

question must arise, "Who is really to say which are absolutes and which are implied-predicate uses?" It may be too strong to maintain that predicates are never implied in the text, but if they are implied, there is no way of proving what the implied predicate is. Any predicate which the reader chooses to supply must reflect a certain amount of subjectivity, and to assume a predicate speaks against John's careful choice of words, unique style, and grammatically rigid pattern in the use of the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$ .

Next, the question is raised as to whether or not the phrase is part of the over-all structure of John. Those who seek a pattern in this Gospel may be the most frustrated of all scholars, for comparing basic outlines of the Fourth Gospel is futile and becomes ludicrous. Christoph Rau, for example, has tried to use what he calls the "7 great 'I Ams'" as the integral basis for the structure of John, with John the Baptist's "I Ams" as the Vorhof of this structure. He connects these with the seven signs or miracles in John and says they relate to each other in an inverted way. What is the result? Here is an example:

Das Wort vom wahren Weinstock bildet den Hintergrund zur Hochzeit von Kana: Die Wandlung des Wassers in "guten" Wein geht aus von dem, der sich später als den "wahren Weinstock" bezeichnen wird; das Gute leitet sich her vom Wahren.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Christoph Rau, Struktur und Rhythmus im Johannes-Evangelium: Eine Untersuchung über die Komposition des vierten Evangeliums (Stuttgart: Verlag Urachhaus, 1972), pp. 74-75.

This approach is very complicated and artificially structured.

McArthur is another example of a creative imagination. He has also tried to connect the seven *ἔγω εἶμις* and the seven "signs." If this is a pattern, then he says one must conclude in all probability that John is an "in house" document compiled by believers.<sup>24</sup> Such a conclusion is puzzling: McArthur's reasoning is complex but unconvincing. There is no reason to believe that a body of believers would arrange a complicated sevenfold pattern of signs and *ἔγω εἶμις* with any greater dexterity than a single author. McArthur himself admits that there is not enough evidence to prove this proposal.

John Painter's suggestions are more helpful.<sup>25</sup> He too notes that there are seven signs and seven *ἔγω εἶμις*, but he also observes that not all the *ἔγως* occur in what he calls the "Book of Signs" and as for the *ἔγω εἶμις*, "the majority are not made in the context of a miraculous sign." Therefore there is no way to prove that there is a connection between the seven miracles in John and the seven uses of *ἔγω εἶμις* which pattern-lovers select. Painter notes that the sevenfold pattern seen by some might be nothing more than pure coincidence.

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<sup>24</sup>McArthur, "Christological Perspectives," p. 89.

<sup>25</sup>John Painter, John: Witness and Theologian (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 38.

Some Conclusions on John's Usage

It should seem obvious that this search for a pattern is fruitless. If the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι is part of a pattern of some kind, no one has yet proven it. Until there is major agreement on the structure of John, it is unscholarly to force the ἐγώ εἰμιs into a highly subjective pattern.

If we cannot legitimately force the ἐγώs into a cleanly structured arrangement, we might at least ask if they are a formula of some kind, that is, a fixed phrase which expresses a consistent idea.

There are at least two legitimate arguments that speak against the contention that John is expressing a formula. Edwin Freed has pointed to one problem: why do we not have the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι appearing at 18:17 and 18:25?<sup>26</sup> In these two examples, Peter has been asked if he is one of Jesus' disciples, and he replies in both cases with the phrase οὐκ εἰμί.

While the point is well taken, there are two things which may serve to explain this difficulty. For one, Peter is replying in the negative. In all but one instance, the phrase appears with no negative attached. Secondly, if the phrase is intended to express a particular formula which

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<sup>26</sup>Edwin D. Freed, "Ego Eimi in John 1:20 and 4:25," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 41 (April 1979):289.

attaches a meaning to the person and work of Jesus alone, it would be inappropriate for Peter to express himself in the same terms. These instances in chapter 18 would not break a consistent formula-pattern if the pattern is intended to express qualities belonging only to Jesus.

A more serious difficulty is the appearance of the *ἐγώ εἰμι* at 9:9. Several scholars have noted this verse, as for example Harner,<sup>27</sup> but surprisingly have not dealt seriously with its implications. In this verse, the blind man whom Jesus had healed expresses himself with *ἐγώ εἰμι*. There is no negative in the sentence, nor can the phrase be attributable to anyone other than the blind man himself.

From the context, there can be little doubt that this is an emphatic use of *ἐγώ*. The man's neighbors are arguing whether or not he is truly the one who was healed. His response can only be taken to mean "I am the one." No other rendering of the text can be intelligible. This one verse leaves the door open to the possibility that Johannine *ἐγώ εἰμι*s are everyday grammatical uses of the emphatic pronoun, and, perhaps more importantly, that a predicate is implied.

Others might be tempted to point to the *ἐγώ εἰμι*s at 1:20 and 3:28. In these two verses, John the Baptist uses the phrase with a negative to emphasize that he is not

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<sup>27</sup>Harner, The "I Am", pp. 4-5.

ὁ χριστός. Harner has said that these two instances are "the exception that proves the rule."<sup>28</sup>

One might counter this by suggesting that these are not exceptions at all, but additional evidence that ἐγώ εἰμι is intended to convey a meaning which can be connected only with Jesus himself. It is precisely because John the Baptist wishes to deny that he is the Christ that he uses this special phrase.

Thus we are left with only one serious obstacle to the position that ἐγώ εἰμι is a formula which expresses a special meaning: that of 9:9, for which no satisfactory explanation has been presented.

Despite this obstacle, the vast majority of scholars are of the opinion that the evidence for a formula is too overwhelming. Wetter is cautious here; he notes that several of the instances of ἐγώ εἰμι can stand on their own, notably 4:26 and 18:5, 6 and 8.<sup>29</sup> And yet he believes that it may be possible that a formula is being expressed.

Stauffer suggests that Acts 5:36-37 is a typical example of Rabbinic Judaism's cautious avoidance of I-formulations. He quotes jTaan., 2,1: "If a man says: I am God--he lies; I am the Son of Man--he will regret it; I

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>29</sup>Wetter, "Ich bin es," p. 229.



ascend to heaven--he will not accomplish it."<sup>30</sup> And he also notes that Acts 8:9-10 gives us a clue to the problem of self-aggrandizing "messiahs" in the first century.<sup>31</sup> This material provides some clue to the possibility that I-formulations were commonly known in first-century Palestine, and either used or avoided, depending on the person.

While some extra-Biblical information on I-formulations may be helpful in determining whether or not John intends to express a formula, the Johannine text itself is the most critical and decisive evidence for a formula.

The central text upon which to base evidence for an expressed formula is 8:58. The *ἐγώ εἰμι*s which appear at 8:24 and again at 8:28 are themselves open to the suggestion that a predicate is implied. This cannot be said for 8:58. In the other instances in chapter 8, providing a predicate such as "the Christ" would maintain good contextual continuity. Verse 58 implies no such predicate, but encourages the reader to note the contrasting verbs, *γενέσθαι* for Abraham and *ἐγώ εἰμι* for Jesus. It is clear that the contrast leads to the conclusion that there is no "becoming" for Jesus, only "being." It is difficult to imagine what kind of predicate might be inserted here which

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<sup>30</sup>Stauffer, "Εγώ," *TDNT* 2:348.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 347.

would not do violence to this basic contrast.

To this verse, Harner would add 13:19 as a core verse for demonstrating the existence of a formula. He says that these verses "establish the absolute meaning of the phrase as a distinct, self-contained expression, and thus they indicate that John may also have it in mind elsewhere."<sup>32</sup> Many would certainly agree that 13:19 can function as a self-contained expression, but it doesn't necessarily function in this manner. In this verse, a belief that Jesus is the Christ could be intended by the expression, and a Messianic predicate would maintain the integrity of the basic intent of the verse.

Brown notes that the absolute uses of *ἐγώ εἰμι* appear as incomplete statements. "Since this usage goes far beyond ordinary parlance, all recognize that the absolute ego eimi has a special revelatory function in John."<sup>33</sup> Brown oversimplifies the matter. One might choose to consider most of the absolute usages as incomplete statements, but not everyone has recognized their special revelatory function because in nearly all of the occurrences some implied predicate can legitimately be defended. It is more to the point to face 8:58 squarely as the one instance where an implied predicate is out of the question.

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<sup>32</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 49.

<sup>33</sup>Brown, "The EGO EIMI," p. 118.

Several authors have indicated a preference for considering the ἐγὼ εἶμις as formulas because they see a contrast in the way John uses them with that of the Synoptic occurrences. Stauffer, for example, believes the difference indicates that the Johannine I-sayings are more properly divine proclamations than the I-sayings of the Synoptics.<sup>34</sup> W. H. Raney states that the passages in John "express attributes and powers which believers had found in their Lord" which are not part of the Synoptic tradition.<sup>35</sup> D. A. Hayes believes that in John the I-sayings stress the person of Jesus as supreme,<sup>36</sup> and that they contrast "the Kingdom of heaven is like . . ." in the

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<sup>34</sup>Stauffer, "Εγὼ," TDNT 2:350. The question is raised: If these are historical words of Jesus, why haven't the Synoptic Gospels included more of them? If they are merely style, then why are there echoes of them found in the Synoptics? In weighing this question, one needs to be very careful. The Synoptic echoes speak well for their historicity. To suggest that John's ἐγὼ formula replaces a Synoptic phrase is tantamount to suggesting either that John or the Synoptics are creating history. If John is inventing this formula ex nihilo, why should he invent something that has a Synoptic witness and in its absolute form has no parallels in the Greek world? We shall examine this more later. For the moment it is important to note, however, that trying to find "parallels" in the Synoptics can have damaging consequences.

<sup>35</sup>W. H. Raney, The Relation of the Fourth Gospel to the Christian Cultus (Giessen, Germany: Topelmann, 1933), p. 74.

<sup>36</sup>D. A. Hayes, John and His Writings (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1917), p. 115. Brown, "The Ego Eimi," p. 120, expresses an interest in this approach and concurs that something akin to the "the Kingdom of God is like . . ." of the Synoptics may be intended.

Synoptics.

But despite these interesting suggestions, evidence of such a contrast or parallels with Synoptic formulations serve little purpose in an effort to provide convincing proof that John intends a formula.

While Zimmermann notes that, for many, the appearance of the predicated  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  leads to the conclusion that the absolute  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\varsigma$  should not be interpreted in any important special sense,<sup>37</sup> it is Guthrie who provides us with a significant piece of reasoning:

Whatever the precise meaning of ego eimi in Jn 8:58 and Jn 18:5, the evangelist shows that a special significance was attached to the saying, in that in the former case the Jews attempt to stone Jesus and in the latter the hearers fall to the ground.<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, while there are a number of minor considerations which might support the concept that the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  are a formula, there are two major ones. The first is 8:58, in which no predicate can be supplied without doing damage to the meaning of the text. While many other verses might be capable of supporting a supplied predicate, this one surely cannot. The addition of the pronoun in 8:58 can be explained as emphatic construction, so that this piece of evidence, by itself, proves nothing.

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<sup>37</sup>Zimmermann, Das Absolute (2. Teil), pp. 271-272.

<sup>38</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 332n. It is wondrous that such an important comment be relegated, as it is, to a footnote!

The second consideration is the reaction of the hearers, both in 8:58 and in 18:5. John carefully spells out for the reader that Jesus' use of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  caused a violent reaction among the listeners.

When both of these considerations are put together, it is difficult to avoid a conclusion other than that John intends us to understand  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  as a formula with a special meaning which may not at once be obvious to us.

In a later chapter, we shall attempt to ascertain the precise meaning intended by this formulation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOURCE OF THE PROLOGUE

If the Prologue is significant for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (and almost all scholars believe that it is), it is important that it be scrutinized carefully. John's Gospel is so different from the Synoptics, and the Prologue is so unique, that the theological world has spent a great deal of effort trying to determine both its origin and content.

Perhaps Herman Ridderbos is correct in stating that it is the word  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  which generates the attention of the critics and their search for sources of the Prologue outside of the Palestinian milieu.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, for all the effort put forward to date, nothing approaching an agreement has been forthcoming. Study on the background of the Prologue, says Robert Kysar, is "instructive" because "even in the best examples of Fourth Gospel criticism in the mid-twentieth century" no consensus has been achieved on a method of research, let

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," Novum Testamentum 8, number 2 (1966):183.

alone its results.<sup>2</sup> One might say that the field of research on this subject is in disarray.

Dogmatic statements abound, nonetheless, and it will be the intent of this chapter to review briefly the major suggestions for backgrounds of the Prologue, and to draw some tentative conclusions.

There are many who assume without question that in the Prologue we are dealing with a source which John has incorporated into his Gospel. One scholar who does this is Howard Teeple, who provides three reasons for his position: the vocabulary of the Prologue is unique (as, for example, the words "λόγος," "grace," "fulness," and "declare"); the ideas are distinctive (his examples are "children of God," "born of God," "the created world," "authority" and "the only-begotten God"); the style is unique (he claims it demonstrates elements of Hebrew poetry).<sup>3</sup>

Robert Fortna, on the other hand, with his interest in source theories, expresses surprise that John has not imitated his sources stylistically.<sup>4</sup> He believes that the

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Kysar, "The Background of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Critique of Historical Methods," Canadian Journal of Theology 16 (1975):250.

<sup>3</sup>Howard M. Teeple, The Literary Origin of the Fourth Gospel of John (Evanston: Religion and Ethics Institute, 1974), p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>Fortna, The Gospel of Signs, p. 214. The author on page 204 states that a source cannot be found just by

characteristics of John's sources remain without the blurring which normally occurs in the process of adaptation. As one might expect, a great deal of speculation accompanies his conclusions.

Quite the opposite of Teeple and Fortna are J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, who suggest most sagaciously that the myriad of suggestions offered as the source of John's Gospel may be more valuable in helping us to understand the beliefs and ethical systems to which the readers of the Fourth Gospel were subjected, than in providing us with suggested sources for elements of John's Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The sources which have been suggested for John's Prologue range far and wide. Our brief survey of these sources will be organized so that those which are farthest from the Scriptures will be handled first, and those which are related to the Scriptural texts last.

#### Suggested Greek Philosophic Backgrounds

Perhaps it is Augustine, as C. K. Barrett notes, whom we must thank for source-hypotheses in Prologue

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"looking for relationships among various style characteristics." Examination of this article is helpful for seeing the total subjective nature of source criticism.

<sup>5</sup>J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), pp. 21-22. The reader may note Howard's summary of Prologue sources in Christianity, pp. 44-46.



research.<sup>6</sup> Augustine expressed the belief that the Prologue was Platonic in nature, although he was quick to note that 1:14 was surely far from Plato's world of thought.

Many have been quick to follow Augustine's lead in thinking that the Prologue reflects if not Plato's then certainly Greek philosophy in general. The apparent reason is the appearance of the word λόγος in several verses of the Prologue, coupled with the fact that this word never appears in this same way outside of the Prologue.

In Greek philosophy the word λόγος expressed the rational principle of the universe, by which all things were created and were maintained. This was especially important to the Stoics. Teeple notes that what he calls the "universalism" of the first part of the Prologue "suggests the Stoic-Platonic background, especially the Stoic belief in the illumination of all men by the divine Logos, Reason."<sup>7</sup>

That Greek philosophy exerted strong influence during the first century is rarely doubted. Earle Ellis believes that "There can be little doubt that John used Logos in full awareness of its usage among Greek intellectuals."<sup>8</sup> Ellis, however, believes that Greek philosophy is only part

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<sup>6</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel (London: The Athone Press, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Teeple, Literary Origin, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, p. 18.

of John's sources. He sees John combining a number of Greek philosophic backgrounds. Plato's philosophy is certainly the first, since Platonism claimed that the world is a "copy" of the real world. The Stoic emphasis on the Logos as the rational principle of the universe is the second background. The third is Philo's system, which tried to wed Greek philosophy to the Old Testament, and said that the Logos was the mediator between the unknowable God and men. Thus, while Ellis might not see a ready-made source for the Prologue, he would argue for Greek philosophy as a source of thought for the Prologue.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis Humphries also finds Greek philosophy in the Prologue.<sup>10</sup> The Logos, he believes, is undoubtedly from Plato and Greek philosophy in general. In using this key term, he sees John deliberately seeking to reach a larger audience with the Logos theme.

If, as seems natural, the Prologue is to be taken as outlining the theme of the Gospel, the purpose of the writer is to identify Jesus with the Logos or Word of philosophic speculation.<sup>11</sup>

A. T. Robertson is among those who perceive a possible background in Greek philosophy. Paul used the language of the Stoics and the mystery religions: he asks why

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> A. Lewis Humphries, St. John and Other New Testament Teachers (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), pp. 19-23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

John should not also be allowed to use it.<sup>12</sup>

The discerning reader may already have noted an important distinction in this survey. There are major differences appearing among scholars who express themselves on source-theories. One group suggests a "source" as ideas and key words, which have been borrowed from non-Biblical areas and used theologically for some purpose. On the other hand, there are scholars who suggest John's source is a large block of material incorporated, with or without alteration, into the Gospel en masse. Rarely do those who favor Greek philosophical backgrounds fall into the latter group, although of those surveyed so far, Teeple would come closest to such an idea of a major document being incorporated into the Gospel.<sup>13</sup>

#### Rejections of Greek Philosophic Backgrounds

There are many who reject Greek philosophic backgrounds. Among them is Vincent Stanton, who apparently feels so strongly about this point that he does not feel compelled to provide the reader with his reasons.<sup>14</sup>

Such is not the case with William Grossouw. He

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<sup>12</sup>Robertson, The Divinity, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup>Teeple, Literary Origin.

<sup>14</sup>Vincent Henry Stanton, The Gospels As Historical Documents, 3 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1920), 3:163.

notes that if John's source is Greek philosophy, it would either be a direct adaption of the thought-pattern or a polemic reaction to it in the words of its philosophers. But neither is the case in John. The Logos is a historic figure, in the person of Jesus, and not merely an idea. Such a concept is totally incompatible with the world-principle of the Stoics.<sup>15</sup>

Paton Gloag also vociferously denied Platonism in the Prologue. His reasoning is somewhat similar in that he pointed to a basic distinction in thought-patterns between Greek philosophy and the Gospel of John. The Logos-feature of philosophy was, in reality, the mind of God, and this was never personified. In addition, he pointed to the fact that the Logos does not constitute a prominent feature in the Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Wilbert Howard centers his attention on rejecting the suggestion of a Stoic background. Although he readily agrees that "seminal reason" (σπερματικὸς λόγος) is a philosophic idea, it is not a Johannine idea. He claims that the Stoic fragments in existence always use the term in the plural, σπερματικοὶ λόγοι, and that "where they

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<sup>15</sup>William Grossouw, Revelation and Redemption: an Introduction to the Theology of St. John, trans. Martin W. Schoenberg (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), p. 69.

<sup>16</sup>Paton J. Gloag, Introduction to the Johannine Writings (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1841), p. 172. Over 140 years later, the question is still not resolved in many minds.

speak of the λόγος of the world in the singular they generally mean the 'scheme' of the world."<sup>17</sup>

It would seem probable that John does not owe his thinking specifically to Greek philosophy. There are too many major differences which speak against such a marriage of thought. Undoubtedly, the continuing fascination with this suggestion may be due in the main to the appearance of the word λόγος in the Prologue, rather than to the appearance of Platonic or Stoic thought.

#### The General Hellenistic Background

Many, who have seen no future in striving to demonstrate a specific Greek philosophy, have taken a more general approach, and claimed a source in the Hellenistic world of the first century, which was immersed in many types of philosophy.

E. M. Sidebottom, who has no particular interest in demonstrating a Hellenistic background, has admitted that ". . . the Johannine Prologue has a philosophical ring," which is undeniable. This he says, despite his direct statement that the background is the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup>

Edgar Bruns believes that the Old Testament is the most obvious background for the Prologue. And yet he is

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<sup>17</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, pp. 28-29.

willing to state that some of the Johannine designations for Jesus are most assuredly Hellenistic (he lists especially the following: Word, light, Savior of the world, and truth).<sup>19</sup>

Another who points to a Hellenistic background in the Prologue is Barrett. He notes that there is nothing in the first eighteen verses which would have particularly disturbed the Greek reader, and that there are few, if any, proven Semitisms in the Prologue.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the above comparisons with Greek thought in general, there are a number of facts that speak against more than a coincidental identification of the Prologue with the Hellenistic world.

Sidebottom, who was one of the scholars to note the comparisons between Greek thought and the Prologue, also provides several points of departure. For one, he observes that "the connections between John and the Greek Philosophers in the use of the term Word are, in fact, slight."<sup>21</sup> And he believes that the term λόγος probably had a greater influence on the Christian world of subsequent centuries than any demonstrable influence on the New Testament

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<sup>19</sup>J. Edgar Bruns, The Art and Thought of John (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 76.

<sup>20</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 29.

writers themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Donald Guthrie urges caution in identifying the Prologue with Hellenistic thought:

The use of logos in a philosophic sense had a long history before its use in John's gospel. It is one thing, however, to outline the development of the idea and to consider its various facets, but quite another problem to decide how far John is indebted to any of these ideas.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, Guthrie notes that there is no parallel to 1:14 in the Greek world.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, he concludes it is unlikely that there is a Hellenistic source at work in the Prologue.

In discussing whether or not John has been influenced by Greek philosophy, Howard notes that except for the prominence of λόγος in the Prologue, nothing else in the Gospel would support such an idea.<sup>25</sup> He further notes that words such as "life," which some have tried to identify with the Hellenistic world, correspond more properly to Jewish thinking.<sup>26</sup>

There is a mediating position to the issue of whether or not the Hellenistic world plays a role in the Prologue. Bertil Gärtner, for example, has noted that the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 321.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>25</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

Prologue is ". . . an adaption of the theological language to the Hellenistic world of ideas and an epitome of the theology of the whole gospel."<sup>27</sup> This is taken to suggest that rather than use a Hellenistic source, John who is familiar with Greek thought-patterns has chosen to use some of these and develop them. This explains the Greek "sound" to some parts of the Prologue.

Another who takes such a mediating position is Harvey McArthur. He tends to do a little more violence to the historicity of the text by stating that John's motivation to adapt his message to the Greek mind has resulted in the Evangelist changing the words of Jesus so that the Savior expresses faith in Hellenistic categories.<sup>28</sup> His conclusion, which is theologically unacceptable, is not what is important here so much as his belief that there is no particular Hellenistic source behind the Prologue.

An off-shoot of the Hellenistic suggestions for a possible source for the Prologue is the Corpus Hermeticum. This fragmentary literature seems to be primarily Hellenistic with some Egyptian and Gnostic influence, making it difficult to categorize with other suggestions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Bertil E. Gärtner, "The Pauline and Johannine Idea of 'To Know God' Against the Hellenistic Background," New Testament Studies 14 (1968):221.

<sup>28</sup>McArthur, "Christological Perspectives," p. 87.

<sup>29</sup>C. K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp.



A number of strong arguments have surfaced against this suggestion. Everett Harrison has noted that "The Hermetic literature dates from a time somewhat later than the New Testament and doubtless owes something to that source, especially to the fourth Gospel."<sup>30</sup> Stanton states that there is no parallel in the Hermetic corpus to John's use of "light" and "life."<sup>31</sup> And Guthrie points out that there is no Christian influence showing in the Hermetic literature, since it approaches God through the typical Hellenistic mode of nature, not through the person of Christ, as with John.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Gnostic Background

The final major suggestion for a source which fits into the Greek world of thought is Gnosticism. Although it is easy to dismiss this suggestion as anachronistic, Albright contends that "The decisive step toward a Jewish Gnosis had already been taken in the first century

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80-90. Barrett provides examples of this literature with introductory comments. It should be noted that the evidence connecting John's Gospel with the Corpus Hermeticum is incidental, deriving its strength mostly from parallels in vocabulary.

<sup>30</sup>Everett F. Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 24.

<sup>31</sup>Stanton, The Gospels, p. 165 in a footnote.

<sup>32</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 323.

B.C."<sup>33</sup> Albright believes that Simon Magus developed the first Jewish Gnostic system, and that he and Philo share a proto-Gnostic source. Therefore it is possible for a Gnostic system to be a source.<sup>34</sup>

Teeple goes a bit farther. His solution is that the Prologue incorporates a source which had already incorporated another source. The basic source is a Christian Gnostic hymn; the secondary source is a Hellenistic Jewish poem.<sup>35</sup> Teeple's solution appears to be an effort to amalgamate all scholarly suggestions into the background: Jewish, Christian, Gnostic and Hellenistic sources blend into one source. But the evidence for such a suggestion is noticeably lacking; these sources are undemonstrable imaginations.

Rudolph Bultmann posits a Gnostic source for the Prologue which is rooted in the Mandaean writings. He provides the following argumentation for such a view: first he claims that Judaism's wisdom-myth is only a variation of Gnosticism's revealer-myth, and the Prologue and Judaism's wisdom-myth share the same source, which accounts for their

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<sup>33</sup>William Foxwell Albright, From Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), p. 284.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>35</sup>Teeple, Literary Origin, p. 135.

similar nature.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, the Gnostic logos disguised himself as human in order to save mankind. "This specifically Gnostic motif could not of course be taken over by the philosophical systems," and this accounts for the distinction between John and Greek philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Finally, he stresses the idea that the incarnation of a redeemer is originally a Gnostic, not Christian, idea.<sup>38</sup>

Bultmann draws the following conclusion:

The result of this enquiry is that the Prologue's source belongs to the sphere of a relatively early oriental Gnosticism, which has been developed under the influence of the O.T. faith in the Creator-God. This development has taken the following direction: the mythology has been severely pushed into the background; the Gnostic cosmology has been repressed and has given way to the belief in Creation; and the concern for the relation of man to the revelation of God, that is to say the soteriological concern, has become dominant.<sup>39</sup>

There are serious difficulties with Bultmann's theory. For one thing, if one looks closely at his conclusion, it becomes apparent that he has been forced to invent a developmental scheme which serves to explain why so little of his theory fits the message of the Prologue. If something has been "pushed into the background," or "repressed," or "given way," how is it possible to state with certainty that it was originally there? Such repression requires more than minimal rearrangement of the basic

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<sup>36</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 25.      <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

Gnostic system.

Sanders and Mastin note that although knowledge of Jesus Christ is important for John, he avoids the word γνῶσις in the Gospel and all of its associations with Hellenistic religion.<sup>40</sup> Such a divergence from Gnostic thought patterns might better be termed "avoidance" rather than "repression."

Howard adds to the Sanders and Mastin list of avoided Gnostic terminology. Besides the avoidance of the term γνῶσις, John also avoids the words πίστις and σοφία, and notes that "It is generally accepted that his reason lies in their appropriation as sectarian watchwords by certain Gnostics."<sup>41</sup>

Ellis attacks the suggestion that John has a Gnostic background by stating that John expresses a redemption not from matter and time but of matter, time and history. "The Word became flesh" of 1:14 is the counterpart of "The Word was God" in 1:1. This simply runs counter to any Gnostic system.<sup>42</sup>

Heracleon, a Gnostic, has been closely examined by Elaine Pagels for a clear picture of Gnostic beliefs in redemption. She concludes that for Heracleon the historical

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<sup>40</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 77.

<sup>41</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, p. 36.

facts do not save, but merely symbolize the process of redemption to those who perceive their inner meaning.<sup>43</sup>

Clement and Origen also sought the hidden meaning of John, but used historical facts and literal meaning as the basis for further reflection. Gnostics, on the other hand, denied the historical meaning and claimed that specialized instruction was necessary to interpret the Scriptures properly.<sup>44</sup>

When one notes Bultmann's critical approach to the text, it may be fair to say that, rather than prove the existence of Gnosticism in the Fourth Gospel, he has simply used Gnostic exegesis in his approach to the text. If this is true, it is no wonder that he finds Gnosticism abundant in John.

In attacking the specific suggestion that Mandaean Gnosticism plays a role in the Fourth Gospel, Sidebottom says:

That the Mandeans in their extant writings made so little of the Word goes to prove that their connection

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine H. Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 13-14. She notes that Gnostics do not necessarily challenge the truth of the historical events but deny that "the actuality of these events matter theologically." This is a devious and subtle perversion of the Christian faith, and this approach is true also of modern existentialism.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16. It may be instructive to compare this with Luther's belief that the Bible is basically clear.

with the doctrine of the Word had not the intimate nature required by the theory we are considering.<sup>45</sup>

Sidebottom believes that, since the Mandaeans were influenced by Iranian religion, what Bultmann's theory implies is that "as revelation" the Prologue has its basis in Persian mythology.<sup>46</sup> Stated this way, Bultmann's suggestion appears extremely far afield of the Biblical text.

There is also a chronological problem connected with the Mandaean theory. Guthrie notes that the material which we have of Mandaean beliefs is at least six centuries later than the Biblical texts. It may be more likely that John influenced the Mandaeans rather than the reverse.<sup>47</sup> If nothing earlier than sixth or seventh century materials are available to support Bultmann's theory of a Mandaean source, it is not likely that such a "cold trail" will be of any value.

Although Bultmann's theory was followed extensively by many at the time of its promulgation, it seems probable that this was done more on the basis of who was propounding the view, rather than on the basis of the facts. That Irenaeus used the Fourth Gospel in his polemics against the Gnostics may demonstrate that "He may have understood it

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<sup>45</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>47</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 323.

better than the Gnostics did."<sup>48</sup>

Before we leave the Greco-Roman milieu, one more source bears scrutiny. In an important article, which apparently has received little attention, Craig Evans has pointed to the Trimorphic Protennoia of the Nag Hammadi Library. In it, he says, we have ". . . all of the elements of the Prologue in a single document."<sup>49</sup>

One of the most important parallels between the two documents is the verb σκηνώω, although the context is "quite different from that found in the Prologue."<sup>50</sup> Additionally, he notes that virtually all of the vocabulary of the Prologue is found in the Protennoia, although the reverse is not true.<sup>51</sup>

Evans does not believe that the source of the Prologue is the Protennoia itself, but that it is important in pointing us to the wisdom literature as the religious milieu out of which the Prologue came.<sup>52</sup>

It would appear safe to assume that the Trimorphic Protennoia presents the newest opportunity for a critical fad in the area of Prologue scholarship. Whether much will

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<sup>48</sup>Sanders and Mastin, Commentary, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup>Craig A. Evans, "On the Prologue of John and the Trimorphic Protennoia," New Testament Studies 27 (1981) :396.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 397.      <sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 398-399.

come of such research is not ascertainable at this early stage, but the present writer suspects that the parallels which might be drawn between the Protennoia and the Prologue will not be as substantial as several possibilities yet to be discussed in this chapter.

#### The Jewish and Samaritan Backgrounds

We now turn to the more Jewish and similar, related sources for a possible background.

John Bowman has suggested that there may be links between the Prologue and Samaritan theology. He points out that John shows Jesus in a light which makes it possible for him to be the Davidic Messiah and the Mosaic prophet, the latter of particular interest to the Samaritans.<sup>53</sup> He also finds interest in the use of the term "light" which the Samaritans regarded as the pre-existent Moses.<sup>54</sup>

It does not speak well for the Samaritan source proposal that Bowman admits that there is no known λόγος doctrine in Samaritan theology.<sup>55</sup> But an even weightier consideration is a lack of certain information about Samaritan beliefs in the first century. Almost all of our information about the Samaritans (outside of the Scriptural

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<sup>53</sup>John Bowman, "Samaritan Studies," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 40 (1957-1958):299-302.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 305-306.



references) is very late.<sup>56</sup>

Bowman notes that "the point of contact between John's Gospel and Samaritan Theology seems to be the ascribing to the pre-existent Christ Samaritan Theology ascribes to the pre-existent Moses."<sup>57</sup> And this, it must be admitted, is not enough of a parallel to consider seriously Samaritan theology as a source for the Prologue, especially in the light of the paucity of information about first century Samaritan thought.

Philo used to be considered seriously as a possible source for John's Prologue, but the popularity of maintaining such a position is waning. Writing in 1920, Stanton, for example, believed that there was a link between Philo and John, but that John had been a Christian before he had made contact with Philonic thought patterns; such thoughts are thus adapted to his Prologue.<sup>58</sup>

There are weighty reasons to reject the suggestion that Philo was an influencing factor in the Prologue.

Among these, the following may be listed:

- 1) ". . . Direct literary connection between John

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<sup>56</sup> The definitive work on this subject is John MacDonald, The Theology of the Samaritans (London: SCM Press, 1964).

<sup>57</sup> Bowman, "Samaritan Studies," p. 308.

<sup>58</sup> Stanton, The Gospels, pp. 162-165.

and Philo cannot be demonstrated."<sup>59</sup>

2) John is not dependent upon Philo because Jesus is an historic figure and not merely an idea. Any personification of the λόγος in Philo is very unstable, compared with the clear historic language of John.<sup>60</sup>

3) There is no parallel to the Prologue in any of the works of Philo. The best parallels are found in the Synoptics and Hebrews and Colossians.<sup>61</sup>

4) "In not one passage (of John) is there any parallel between or assimilation of Moses and Abraham legends, as there is sometimes . . . in Philo."<sup>62</sup>

5) The concept of Jesus as a mediator in John shows that God works through Jesus. This separates John from Philo and Gnosticism, both of which involve the concept of an intermediary or demiurge in their systems.<sup>63</sup>

6) Howard has noted that "Philo uses the term Logos to express the conception of a mediator between the transcendent God and the universe, an immanent power active in creation and revelation, but though the Logos is often

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<sup>59</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 14.

<sup>60</sup>Grossouw, Revelation, pp. 69-70.

<sup>61</sup>Morna Hooker, "The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret," New Testament Studies 21 (1974):51-52.

<sup>62</sup>Edwin D. Freed, "Samaritan Influence in the Gospel of John," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 30 (1968):583.

<sup>63</sup>T. E. Pollard, Johannine Christology and the Early Church (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p. 20.

personified, it is never truly personified."<sup>64</sup> In Philo's writings, Logos appears at least 1300 times but without the particular emphasis found in John.<sup>65</sup>

7) Philo's Logos has its pre-existence merely implied, but never specified; it is not linked with life or light as in John; there is no suggestion that it could become incarnate; and it serves only as an impersonal mediator.<sup>66</sup>

With such weighty reasons speaking against the suggestion of a Philonic source, it is little wonder that this premise has fallen into disfavor among nearly all scholars. Wayne Meeks, however, notes that the value in pointing to Philo is that, although he probably had no direct influence on John, Philo provides us with something with which to compare.<sup>67</sup>

Some concepts die hard, and despite the fact that Philo has become an untenable source, some scholars have tried to suggest that Philo is merely an example of the way in which Hellenism has worked on Judaism, especially

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<sup>64</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 38.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>66</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, pp. 322-323.

<sup>67</sup>Wayne A. Meeks, "The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Philo and the Fourth Gospel," in Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), p. 44.

outside of Palestine.<sup>68</sup>

Such a statement opens the door for the suggestion that some unknown source akin to Philo is the source for which scholars are looking. J. C. O'Neill is one who holds this view: ". . . There is little doubt that the only environment to explain both the form and content of the source is the environment of a part of Hellenistic Judaism where wisdom speculation flourished."<sup>69</sup> This is a fairly specific assertion. But O'Neill gets even more specific: the source originally dealt with Wisdom, not Logos, and was probably written in Greek. John must have been close to this Hellenistic Jewish community because he did not alter the source significantly.<sup>70</sup>

Such a suggestion is without real merit, because it is so thoroughly based upon speculation. It illustrates the tenacity with which some cling to a Hellenistic Jewish explanation.

Howard does not admit such a close connection between the Prologue and Hellenistic Judaism, but he does note that

. . . The bold assertion of the incarnation of the Logos outstrips all that Gnostic and Philonic

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<sup>68</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup>J.C. O'Neill, "The Prologue to St. John's Gospel," Journal of Theological Studies 20 (new series, April 1969):49.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

speculation had reached. There is strong reason to believe, therefore, that the Fourth Evangelist has taken over a hymn about the Logos, based as it was upon speculation about the Heavenly Wisdom, and has amplified it. . . .<sup>71</sup>

This speculation about undiscovered sources is not based upon anything concrete. The continuation of this search is in part due to the assumption that the content of the Prologue requires something beyond Judaism. But the Dead Sea Scrolls have already seriously questioned this approach. They suggest that we need not proceed farther than the Jewish diaspora to account for the Prologue.<sup>72</sup>

Guthrie flatly states that Qumran has shown that many of the things which were thought to be Hellenistic in nature were in actuality a part of the first-century Jewish mind.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Qumran's dualism is closer to John than Gnostic dualism.<sup>74</sup>

Frank Moore Cross has examined the Qumran documents extensively, and concluded that ideas like truth, knowledge, spirit, and λόγος are "not as rooted in Greek or

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<sup>71</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 46. This reasoning assumes a somewhat polemic motivation for the Prologue. We will investigate the purposes of the Prologue in the following chapter.

<sup>72</sup>Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 128.

<sup>73</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 326. So also Frank Moore Cross Jr., The Ancient Library at Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 215-216.

<sup>74</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 326.

Gnostic thought, but as concepts emerging precisely out of sectarian Judaism."<sup>75</sup>

But even though Qumran offers better evidence of a possible connection with Johannine thought, there are important differences which should not pass unnoticed. For one thing, Qumran has no Christology as well developed as that of John and the rest of the New Testament, specifically in connection with Christ's pre-existence, which is a major theme of the Prologue.<sup>76</sup>

Another important distinction is that, in the Qumran documents, a battle against the world is envisioned in the future; in John this battle is not a future event but has already taken place. Jesus Christ has overcome the world through his death on the cross.<sup>77</sup>

The reader should note that in the suggestion of a Qumran background, we have more similarities of thought than in those sources of a Hellenistic background which have been suggested. There is no strong evidence of doctrinal agreement between Qumran and John; it is nonetheless important to perceive in the Qumran documents some

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<sup>75</sup>Cross, Ancient Library, p. 221. See also John Charlesworth, "A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1 QS III, 13 - IV, 26 and the 'Dualism' Contained in the Fourth Gospel," New Testament Studies 15 (1968-1969):389-418.

<sup>76</sup>Cross, Ancient Library, p. 211.

<sup>77</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 22.

evidence that a Hellenistic background is not necessary to explain the Prologue. The Dead Sea Scrolls are helpful in demonstrating that John's theology is deeply rooted in the Old Testament.

As this point is taken with all its implications, it gives us a clearer understanding of the reasons why sources such as Philo have been given serious consideration in the past. He is tied to the theology of the Old Testament, along with the Qumran community and John. All three approach the Old Testament in different ways and with different preconceptions. But the fact that the Old Testament is in the background of all three provides adequate reasons for the similarities of vocabulary and certain theological concepts.

#### The Old Testament Background

It remains now for us to examine the Old Testament in such a way that we discover more precisely the Johannine sources and background for his Prologue.

It is obvious that when we speak of an Old Testament "source" for the Prologue, we are not speaking of a particular hymnic composition which can be located with certainty. There is no chapter in the Old Testament that compares precisely with the Prologue of John. What we are looking for as a source is more in terms of general theological concepts and vocabulary which is shared with the

Johannine Prologue.

Some have tried to go beyond this search in the hope that a particular document of Aramaic origin is beyond the Prologue and can be demonstrated. Such a view is shared by Humphrey Green and J. H. Bernard.<sup>78</sup> The suggestion that an Aramaic original is behind the Prologue would provide us with a Johannine document which is twice-removed from the Old Testament; this would make connections between John and the Old Testament even more tenuous.

Barrett has challenged the assertion that some Aramaic original is at work in the Prologue. Although the most striking feature of the Prologue is its simplicity ("almost naive mode of speech" he calls it), this does not mean that an Aramaic original is the only explanation. Examples of quite literate and acceptable Greek written in this fashion are extant.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, Barrett notes that none of the alleged Semitisms in the Prologue have been convincing. There is

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<sup>78</sup>Humphrey C. Green, "The Composition of St. John's Prologue," The Expository Times 66 (July 1955): 291, and J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to John, The International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), 1:cxliv. The subjective nature of this approach becomes even more apparent in Bultmann, The Gospel of John, where he states that John is more Semitic than the Synoptics (p. 3), but that the source of the Prologue, although perhaps of Aramaic origin, was not in Aramaic when John got to it (p. 18). This gives us a thrice-removed document from the original source (at a minimum).

<sup>79</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 23.



no syntactical support for the view that the evangelist is using an Aramaic source.<sup>80</sup>

Thirdly, he notes that verse eleven of the Prologue is an example of a gender change which cannot be Aramaic in origin.<sup>81</sup>

While there is a clear Old Testament ring to the Prologue, Barrett believes that there is an apparent Greek origin to its present condition. He suggests that the proper explanation is that John is writing as a man whose mind is working in Aramaic but whose pen is working in Greek.<sup>82</sup> In concurring with this assessment, one should add that John's background in Palestine and Ephesus would make him tri-lingual: Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew were an intimate part of his life.

If the author is a Palestinian Jew, well-versed in the Old Testament, it would be likely that Hebrew and Aramaic thought-patterns would surface in his writings. And yet for this Gospel to be written in Greek in the late first century presents no difficulty either. A Galilean fisherman would have been reared in an atmosphere in which tri-linguality was necessary for business, social and religious life.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 28.      <sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>83</sup>See pages 3 and 4 of Chapter I to this thesis.

What is particularly appealing about this conclusion is that it requires little or no subjective assumptions. It maintains the integrity of Scriptural unity, in that the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old, and as such the New Testament in general has the Old Testament as its source for theological concepts and in many cases vocabulary; it also agrees with the witness of the Early Church as to authorship and date of writing.

It is yet to be determined what specific part or parts of the Old Testament are at work in the formation of the Prologue. The most popular suggestion is that we are dealing with a Genesis parallel. That this draws the most attention is due to the opening words of the Gospel, 'Εν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος. Can this be anything but a deliberate reference to the opening verse of Genesis, בְּרֵאשִׁית?<sup>84</sup>

A one-phrase parallel is tenuous, even if it is indeed the opening phrase. But Ellis has noted that the parallel to Genesis 1 goes beyond the opening phrase. He notes that John's intent in the Prologue is to provide the reader with the meaning of the creation of the world, so

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<sup>84</sup>So notes George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 241; also Alan Richardson, The Gospel According to Saint John: Introduction and Commentary (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 37, and Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. John, The English Text With Introduction Exposition and Notes, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 72.

that John's Prologue is an extension of Genesis 1.<sup>85</sup>

A. M. Hunter has expanded upon Ellis' suggestion by noting that in John's Gospel, the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ is not in his birth, but has its proper roots in the beginning of world history itself: the creation of the world.<sup>86</sup> It is in the world's creation that the work of Jesus, as it relates to mankind, has its origins.

That the words "in the beginning" would indicate to Jews that a commentary on Genesis 1 is to follow may be overstating the case.<sup>87</sup> But Ridderbos is correct in his assessment that no opening statement of a Gospel can be more conceivably Jewish than "In the beginning."<sup>88</sup>

Peder Borgen, who agrees that Genesis 1 is the primary focus and background for the Prologue, has gone so far as to develop the entire Prologue into a six unit (six day) arrangement which has as its basis the six days of creation in Genesis 1.<sup>89</sup> Such a suggestion has to date

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<sup>85</sup> Ellis, The World of St. John, pp. 58-59.

<sup>86</sup> Hunter, The Gospel, p. 15. Crehan, The Theology, p. 50, speaks somewhat similiarly. While "In the beginning . . ." is an opening that Jews would notice, John is not interested in providing us with an overview of the world but an overview "of the very life of God."

<sup>87</sup> Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 67.

<sup>88</sup> Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope," p. 196.

<sup>89</sup> Peder Borgen, "Logos was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," Novum

received deservedly little following; it may be that Borgen has tried to see too much of Genesis in the Prologue.

Although Bultmann is not dissuaded from his Mandaean Gnosticism as the primary source of the Prologue, he also joins the ranks of those who see Genesis at work in the Prologue. It is too difficult to avoid the obvious: "in the beginning" corresponds with the opening of Genesis. He adds:

Neither the origin of the world, nor that specifically of man, appears as a tragic event. It is at this point that the distance from almost every form of Gnosticism is at its greatest.<sup>90</sup>

It is gratifying to note that many scholars have conceded the connection of the Prologue with Genesis 1. But lest the reader assume that the solution has been found to the source of the Prologue, we must note a major obstacle to this suggestion: John does not stay with the creation story. Outside of the above-mentioned theory of Borgen, no one seriously believes that the Prologue is a restructured account of the creation story. Besides the words "in the beginning" and the mention of creation, there is little else that bonds the two chapters.

As can be imagined, there have been many sugges-

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Testamentum 14 (1972):117-118. In a separate article, he had stated that to view the Prologue in the light of Genesis solves many unity problems. See Peder Borgen, "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue," New Testament Studies 16 (1970):289.

<sup>90</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 30.

tions as to other sources and parallels in Old Testament thought. Only one has captured the imagination of a sufficient number of scholars to warrant our investigation.

It has been suggested by Andre' Feuillet, Sanders and Mastin, and others, that there is a close relationship between John's Gospel and the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.<sup>91</sup>

T. W. Manson points to the specific reason for this attempted identification: it is the way in which Wisdom Literature speaks of God's self-revelation that is seen to equate with the theology of the Prologue.<sup>92</sup>

To understand this point further, it is necessary to review the discussions of Howard and Hooker.<sup>93</sup> In Wisdom Literature, God's Word is the Divine Wisdom which is incarnated in the Torah. The Torah, it was believed, existed before God created the world. As the world came into being, this Wisdom was revealed to mankind.

When one compares what is said in the Wisdom Literature about this Divine Wisdom with what John says about

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<sup>91</sup>Andre' Feuillet, Johannine Studies, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1964), p. 80. Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 19.

<sup>92</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus as Logos," A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology (John's Gospel and Epistles), ed. Michael J. Taylor (New York: Alba House, 1977), pp. 38-41.

<sup>93</sup>Howard, Christianity, pp. 47-51 and Hooker, "The Messianic Secret," pp. 57-58.

Jesus in the Prologue, several key elements became apparent: creation is involved in the scheme of things, a Divine pre-existence is prominent, an incarnation is the focus of Divine Revelation and, ultimately, salvation for those who receive the revelation of God.

This suggestion is very attractive. It is wide-ranging and does not restrict one to a particular location in the Old Testament or a particular set of verses as the source of the Prologue. There are more than a few major points of comparison as well.

Wisdom Literature might well be the final solution to the problem of a source for the Prologue but for one fact: ". . . Wisdom is not identical with God. She is prior to all other created things, but is herself created."<sup>94</sup> For one to accept Wisdom Literature as the source of the Prologue would mean, in effect, to reject one of the basic messages of the Prologue: that God himself in the person of Jesus Christ is the Divine Revelation.

John may have used Wisdom Literature as a starting point for his Prologue's message. But why would he use such a source if the intent of his message was diametrically opposed to the presentation of personified Wisdom? Although the study of Wisdom Literature is instructive for our purposes, and one may identify a number of elements in

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<sup>94</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus," p. 39.

the Prologue which compare favorably with some of the tenets of Wisdom's exaltation of the Torah, it is impossible to claim Wisdom as the source of the Prologue.

We come at last to the final suggestion which has been made by scholars: the source of the Prologue is the entire Old Testament. We have been leading in this direction for some time. Many of the suggestions have been rooted in key terms or phrases, or in key theological concepts, of the Old Testament. In fact, W. A. Wordsworth has noted that ". . . no one can understand the mind of John unless his mind also is steeped in the thought and language of the Old Testament."<sup>95</sup>

T. W. Manson has given two reasons why he believes one ultimately must accept the Old Testament as the primary source of John's Gospel: John has the same view as the Synoptics about Jesus as the revealer of the Old Testament God, and Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.<sup>96</sup>

Lester Kuyper notes that John's myriad references to the Old Testament tell us to look into the Old Testament itself for the source and meaning for the Prologue.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>W. A. Wordsworth, "The Bodmer Papyrus and the Prologue of St. John's Gospel," Novum Testamentum 2 (January 1957):3.

<sup>96</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus," p. 50.

<sup>97</sup>Lester J. Kuyper, "Grace and Truth: an Old Testament Description of God, and Its Use in the Johannine Gospel," Interpretation 18 (1964):3.

Richard Morgan lists four reasons why the source and background of the Prologue, and the entire Gospel for that matter, must be the Old Testament: the author sets the content of his message within the framework of Jewish feasts; while the Old Testament is not extensively quoted, it appears at every critical moment in the Gospel; Jesus spends much of his ministry in the Jewish holy places (the temple, Jerusalem, the feasts, Sabbaths, and so forth); there is a great deal of Exodus imagery from the Prologue onward and Jesus is compared with Moses.<sup>98</sup>

To this point, the chapter has served to present a survey of some of the more important suggestions which have been made by scholars about a source for the Prologue. Yet many more suggestions have been made and, in many cases, greater detail is available. Because of the variety of choices the scholarly world has presented, careful evaluation is critical to a proper understanding of the Gospel of John.

### Conclusions

The most probable and compelling background for the Prologue is the Old Testament, although it is not a "source" in the sense that the Old Testament has provided a document which John has reworked. There is nothing in the

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<sup>98</sup>Richard Morgan, "Fulfillment in the Fourth Gospel," Interpretation 11 (April 1957):155-158.



Old Testament which specifically relates, chapter and verse, to what is being said in the first eighteen verses of John's Gospel.

And yet the Old Testament permeates not only the Prologue but the entire Gospel. The reader can detect many obvious references to the Old Testament in the Prologue. A partial list of these must include "in the beginning" as it relates to Genesis 1 and the reference to Moses in verse 17.

There are numerous subtle references to the Old Testament in the Prologue as well. Some of these will be taken up in a later chapter.

A cluster of key words presents the possibility of a Hellenistic background. But many of these, such as "light," "life," "darkness," and "truth," are so universally used and so general in their reference that their connection with concepts in the Old Testament is not difficult.

The word λόγος has caused scholars to search far and wide in non-Jewish literature for a source which would explain such an appearance in the Prologue. But such a source may never be more than imaginary. No source for λόγος is required. John, living in Ephesus, may well have known the Greek philosophical use of the term. One might postulate that the author of the Fourth Gospel chose his words well in the first verse: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος. With the words "in the beginning," he could capture the

immediate attention of that part of his audience which were Jewish, and with the little word λόγος he could achieve the same reaction from the Greek reader.

In speaking against a "source" for the Prologue, it is also well to note that many of the so-called parallels which have been suggested through the years are not true parallels; they rest upon one or two similarities in vocabulary or thought.

Another clear demonstration against source theories for the Prologue is the form critics themselves: not only do they not agree among themselves with the construction of the source, but must engage in massive rearrangements, deletions, and reinterpretations to force the Prologue into the form they wish to see.

In addition, attempts to prove Semitic and/or Greek poetry patterns have been fruitless. For every scholar who suggests a pattern, there is another who stresses that such a pattern is impossible.

Most of those who are knowledgeable in the field of Johannine studies would readily admit to the majority of the above-mentioned criticisms. And yet the search goes on. Why? One might venture to suggest that it is the seemingly severe stylistic departure of the Prologue from the rest of the Gospel which continues to plague many of those who study the Prologue. But it must not be forgotten that the Prologue differs from the Gospel both in content

and scope. Minor stylistic variations might well be expected. To claim that the depth of the Prologue's theology demands a source is to neglect the depth of thought within the rest of the Gospel which continually reflects the Prologue.

Looking for the true "source" of the Prologue will undoubtedly remain a popular undertaking. But the theology demonstrated within the body of the Gospel itself is so complex and deep that it is both unnecessary and foolish to claim that John was incapable of composing something of the grandeur of the Prologue.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROLOGUE

No other New Testament book has evoked such universal interest and concern for the opening verses as for the first eighteen verses of John, commonly known as the Prologue. The voluminous materials written about these verses reflect Christendom's conviction that they hold the key to the message of the Fourth Gospel.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the important analyses of the structure of the Prologue and John's purpose in writing these verses, and then to draw some appropriate conclusions which may later serve as ground work for unlocking the meaning of the *ἐγώ ειμι* phrases.

The extensive literature available on this subject makes a complete survey impractical. This presentation will focus upon some of the more plausible and important suggestions in order to provide an overview of current scholarship.

#### The Structure Of The Prologue

Although Robinson claims that there is little agreement about the length of the Prologue, the consensus

is that the first eighteen verses contrast the narrative sections which follow;<sup>1</sup> these verses constitute what is normally referred to as the Prologue.

Demonstrable proof that these verses constitute a unit separate from the rest of the Gospel is elusive. The Prologue quotes John the Baptist in narrative fashion and also contains historical elements, so that some overlapping is evident.

Perhaps the best and most noticeable differences between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel are its sweeping statements dealing with themes which many contend are not followed up in great detail in the balance of the Gospel; the creation theme (1:1-5), the incarnation (1:14) and the contrast between Moses and Jesus (1:17) are three such themes.<sup>2</sup>

It has already been mentioned that hardly a statement can be made about some aspect of John's Gospel without wholesale disagreement from some scholarly sector. Yet the near-universal agreement that there is something special about the first section of the initial chapter has led to the search for an original structure, real or imagined, behind these eighteen verses.

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<sup>1</sup>Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>The reader is referred to Teeple, Literary Origin, page 126 and following, for a more complete history of the "reconstruction" of the Prologue than will be possible in the present work.

Disagreement about the pivotal verse of the Prologue has led to some rather unique approaches to solving the structural problem. Some of these will be analyzed. But the starting point should be something more "standard," such as the approach taken by C. K. Barrett, who sees 1:14 as the pivotal verse in the Prologue.<sup>3</sup> Up to 1:14, many, including Barrett, see a history of the pre-existent λόγος. This approach keeps the structure to a minimum and relies more heavily on the purpose of the Prologue.

Instead, some scholars have centered heavily on the structure of the Prologue, often to the detriment of the purpose. Peder Borgen's argument centers around what he sees as an a-b-c-c-b-a pattern.<sup>4</sup> His contention is that 1:1-5 is a basic exposition of Genesis 1:1-5, and that 1:6-18 is an elaboration on the phrases of the first five verses of the Prologue, but in exactly reverse order of their original appearance. In order to achieve this pattern, he has found it necessary to engage in heavy stripping of what he contends are redactional insertions.

In response, Alan Culpepper has pointed out that Borgen is basing his pattern on only three key words, there really is no balance between 1:1-2 and 1:14-18, and John the Baptist cannot be made to balance well into the

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<sup>3</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel (London: The Atholone Press, 1971), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Borgen, "Targumic Character," pp. 291-295.

a-b-c-c-b-a pattern.<sup>5</sup>

Howard Teeple has a much more complicated approach to the Prologue's structure.<sup>6</sup> After removing what he claims are insertions, he classifies the remaining material into two categories: poetry of chain-linkage construction, and hymn-like material. On this basis, he concludes that a one-source theory is impossible, and that those who hold to a literary unity in the Prologue are doing so more out of a reaction to Bultmann than from facts.<sup>7</sup>

The problems involved in Teeple's suggestion are legion. For one thing, his initial approach in removing what he sees as insertions is a purely subjective exercise. As an example, he claims that 1:17 breaks the chain of thought and is therefore a gloss. What is hard to understand is why someone would supplant an irrelevant verse into a such a position. Secondly, "hymn-like material" can mean almost anything. When one has a choice of two categories like "poetry of chain-linkage construction" and "hymn-like material," there is little material that cannot be made to fit one of these categories, especially when the analyst feels free to rearrange the material as he chooses.

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<sup>5</sup>R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," New Testament Studies 27 (1981):5.

<sup>6</sup>Teeple, Literary Origin, pp. 132-134.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

Culpepper develops what he calls a "chiastic structure," with verse 12b as the center.<sup>8</sup> His approach is certainly creative, but yields very little fruit, since it is so creative that one has difficulty believing that John had any interest in theology and has spent most of his efforts in arranging a complicated structure for the Prologue. Perhaps Culpepper offers one of the best reasons for rejecting his theory when he warns us that the conclusion he is going to reach will not be "neat."<sup>9</sup> Too many things in the Prologue are "in the way" of such an arrangement.

Humphrey Green is an example of those who engage in severe alteration of the text; he tries to arrive at a climactic/antithetical structure.<sup>10</sup> The present writer is less than enthusiastic about even mild rearranging, let alone the extent to which Green engages in the practice; such a practice is too subjective, and Green's work is unnecessarily complex to be helpful.

One interesting note in connection with Green's work is that he says "There is nothing in the evidence as here set out to preclude the view that he was commenting on

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<sup>8</sup>Culpepper, "The Pivot," p. 1. He defines "chiasm" on p. 6 as a literary form in which words are placed "crosswise" in a sentence. He believes this is a type of inversion in word order.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Green, "The Composition," p. 293.



a hymn of his own composition. All the key ideas of the hymn are echoed elsewhere in the Gospel. . . ."11 What makes the comment interesting is that he focuses on what ought to be the main concern of the structural search: that of the purpose of John's Prologue. It seems that too many of those who search for a structure have no interest in the purpose of the Prologue.

With Borgen, Teeple, Culpepper, and Green, we have seen attempts to ascertain patterns of a general Jewish nature, particularly poetic or hymn-like structures. Against all of these attempts, Barrett has provided reasons against the supposition that the Prologue is Semitic poetry. He claims, initially, that the New Testament era did not understand Semitic verse. Further, he notes that Josephus and Philo did not recognize "verse" in the Hebrew language. Thirdly, the Septuagint translators seem to have been unaware of Semitic verse in the Old Testament. The fourth contention against Semitic verse is that one cannot have a Semitic original for the Prologue. Finally, Barrett points out that on occasion, Greek prose can accidentally appear to be Semitic verse.<sup>12</sup> His conclusion, not wholly unexpected, is that there is no point in looking for Semitic structure in the Prologue, because the search is both

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>12</sup>Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel, p. 16.

anachronistic and futile.

#### The Possibility of Greek Verse

Is the Prologue to be considered Greek verse?

J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin believe that the Prologue is written in some form of rhythmical Greek prose, but add that ". . . it does not seem possible to arrange it in any generally acceptable metrical scheme."<sup>13</sup> This hardly speaks well for the suggestion.

Stephen Smalley has conjectured that the Prologue contains a "poetic parallelism, with only occasional prose interludes." It is this parallelism which is Hebrew in nature, and may reflect a hymn which the Johannine church created. However, since the Prologue is composed in Greek, the hymn may be reflecting either a Jewish or Greek background in its original form.<sup>14</sup> Although this argument appears enigmatic, it would seem that Smalley is postulating an attempt by John to put Hebrew verse into Greek verse. This results in the lack of a versical form which follows the rules of either Hebrew or Greek poetry.

Rudolph Bultmann suggests somewhat the same idea. He sees the form of the Prologue as couplets (reminiscent of Semitic poetry) in which two words carry the emphasis,

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<sup>13</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup>Stephen S. Smalley, John: Evangelist and Interpreter (Greenwood, South Carolina: The Attic Press, 1978), pp. 93-94.

the second of which is the first word of the next couplet.<sup>15</sup>

Bultmann has to select the "original verses" of the Prologue to make his scheme work, and his finalized version omits verses 6-8, 13, and 15. These, he concludes, are the comments of the Evangelist, developed to shed particular light on the hymn.<sup>16</sup>

One should ask whether John truly appreciated the original hymn's rigid pattern of parallelism, if he was willing to destroy the flow of the hymn with editorial insertions. Or, if it is true that Hebrew poetry was unappreciated in the first century, as Barrett postulates,<sup>17</sup> then the hymn of which Bultmann speaks must be ancient; no one would be capable of constructing poetry he does not understand.

J. C. O'Neill has claimed that verses 6-9 are prose and thus are not part of the poetic source for the Prologue.<sup>18</sup> This is based on heavy use of redaction criticism, in which O'Neill points to minor stylistic changes as evidence that 1:6-9 is an insertion.

Again, the problem with O'Neill's work is the abuse

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<sup>15</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>See page 62 above.

<sup>18</sup>O'Neill, "The Prologue," p. 46.

which the text must suffer. And even if one were to allow his removal of certain portions of the Prologue, he has failed to make a strong case for the remainder of the Prologue as even remotely approaching Greek verse. Redaction is the usual explanation for everything that doesn't fit into a supposed pattern.

The conclusions of Wilbert Howard's work in this area point to a Hellenistic Jewish hymn to Wisdom and the Torah.<sup>19</sup> This is evidenced by the theme of 1:17-18, in which the Prologue points to Jesus Christ as superior to the Torah. The apparent difficulty in seeing a clean versical style to the finished Prologue is that John needed to alter the original hymn in such a way as to make it reflect the facts about Christ.

Since the "original" Jewish Hellenistic hymn of which Howard speaks is not extant, these suggestions are merely hypothetical.

Such is not the case with the suggestion of E. L. Miller. He believes the Prologue is an early Christological hymn, composed by John himself, after John had written the First Epistle.<sup>20</sup> It is, in Miller's belief, the result of an evolution in John's thinking over the years, which crystalizes in a hymn to the Logos of the Prologue. If the

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<sup>19</sup>Howard, Christianity, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup>Ed. L. Miller, "The Logos Was God," Evangelical Quarterly 53 (1981):66.

present writer understands Miller properly, he would see the Prologue as a Greek hymn which has been written with a Semitic/Hellenistic mindset. This prognosis at least allows the text to stand on its own merit.

#### The Lack Of Evidence: Some Conclusions

Barrett has taken to task those who search for either a Greek or Jewish hymn behind the Prologue. The evidence, he suggests, is unconvincing, and has often been postulated upon a single phrase or series of words which are less than unusual to either the Greek or Jewish mind.<sup>21</sup>

Herman Ridderbos points out that pre-Christian such Logos hymns, Gnostic hymns, and other theories of miscellaneous backgrounds give the exegesis of the Prologue a ". . . heavy mortgage. For it means, surely, that the Prologue--and with it the whole Gospel--receives its opening and tone from a motif which does not spring from the Gospel itself."<sup>22</sup>

While Robinson has approached his conclusions on the subject from a different perspective, his comments are equally valid in denying such a poetic source, for he notes that the number of solutions suggested by various scholars

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<sup>21</sup>Barrett, The Gospel Of John and Judaism, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup>Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope," p. 187. Ridderbos has provided a good summary of critical analyses of the origins of the Prologue, especially pre-existent hymn theories, pp. 183-188.

indicate that the task of finding a supposed source for the Prologue may be hopeless.<sup>23</sup> One might gather, however, that Robinson still leaves room for the possibility that such a source may exist.

That cannot be said of this quotation from Barrett:

Greek verse is an art-form that follows very precise prosodical rules, which are based not upon stress but upon quantity; it consists, that is, of regular patterns of long and short syllables. It is immediately evidence that there is no verse of this kind in John's Prologue.<sup>24</sup>

He argues, further, not only that Hellenistic Jews seem to be unaware of this form;<sup>25</sup> he notes that while most authors want to drop 1:6-8 and 15 from the Prologue, these verses maintain the rhymical pattern of the rest of the Prologue.

What has been demonstrated, in the opinion of the present writer, is that no one has postulated a successful structure for the Prologue which corresponds to the rules either of Hellenistic or Jewish poetry. Suggestions everywhere abound, but in nearly every case the author of the proposal must provide a myriad of excuses for a lack of "neatness" to the conclusions.

Once again, Barrett has taken aim at such exercises and said that

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<sup>23</sup>Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 126.

<sup>24</sup>Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

The repeated and various efforts at reconstruction, however, increasingly raise suspicions about the ability of scholars to reconstruct a prologue or Urprolog that will seem convincing as a piece of Aramaic poetry.<sup>26</sup>

Such a comment fits equally well with suggestions of Greek and Hellenistic backgrounds.

The Prologue is a solid unit, with important echoes of the entire Gospel contained within its eighteen verses, as we shall see in future chapters. To strip away particular verses in an arbitrary and subjective manner, as so many have done, still leaves nothing to convince one that an original and highly-organized poetic source lies behind the Prologue.

Some clear Semitic elements exist in the Prologue, and the opening words are in themselves sufficient reason to validate such a premise. Some Hellenistic elements are also in evidence throughout the Prologue, as for example certain ways in which the vocabulary is used. So if the Prologue has been written by the Evangelist himself--and we have no compelling reason to suggest that it was not--these two elements would be expected.

T. W. Manson suggests:

. . . The age in which the Prologue was composed was an age of eclecticism and syncretism. Men picked and chose among the floating ideas and fitted their pickings into new forms of thought and explanation. We are therefore not bound to suppose that John adhered

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<sup>26</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 31.

strictly to any one of the possible lines of explanation available when he wrote his Prologue.<sup>27</sup>

As scholars continue to search for a source for the Prologue, the underlying assumption seems to be that such a source will shed additional light on the purpose of the Gospel. Discovered alterations made in John's original source will provide insight into the thrust of the Prologue and into John's motivation for the use of the source.

If current suggestions are any indication, such a source does not exist. To use the unknown to demonstrate the known is illogical, yet many scholars do just that with their source theories. If such a source was used by John, nothing--short of finding a copy of the actual source--will be of any useful purpose.

Frequently the assumption is made that the Prologue suffers from disjunctive redaction. But there are some who have no difficulty in observing a literary unit in the first eighteen verses of John; among them is Borgen, who believes his work demonstrates a unity,<sup>28</sup> and Paul Minear,

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<sup>27</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus," p. 45. We need to be careful about Manson's wording. There is no evidence that the church ever took this attitude. Quite the opposite might be assumed, as we see in the speeches of Acts (Paul's statement about "all things to all men" notwithstanding). The value of Manson's statement is not that John engaged in such a practice, but that it was so common to do so that it seems unlikely to suppose that John could not have done so, as though such argumentation proves that a source must exist.

<sup>28</sup>Borgen, "The True Light," p. 130.



who believes the fad of ransacking pre-Johannine literature in search of a source is inadvisable:

A premium has often been placed on the ingenuity of scholars in finding parallels to the prologue and on their deftness in persuading other scholars of the cogency of those parallels.<sup>29</sup>

The soundest textual conclusion is that there is no "source" for the Prologue other than the background (both Jewish and Hellenistic) of the author himself. John's Prologue sufficiently demonstrates unity to the extent that the suggestion of massive editing becomes unfounded and unnecessary speculation. The organization of the Prologue is undoubtedly foreign to those who would like to insist that it once began as a tidy package (in twentieth century terms) and it will continue to frustrate many. But the Prologue dictates its own organization more directly than a supposed primitive source.

It is to that purpose which we now turn.

#### The Purpose of the Prologue

Anyone who hopes to find scholarly agreement on the purpose of the Prologue will be disappointed. Once again,

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<sup>29</sup>Paul S. Minear, "Logos Ecclesiology in John's Gospel," Christological Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Harvey K. McArthur, ed. Robert F. Berkey and Sarah A. Edwards (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), pp. 96-97. Minear contends that John is the best judge of what John is saying, and that scholars should be concerned with using the larger context rather than narrowing in on a key word or two as a basis for their work in this area. (Minear's advice is well-taken, but his conclusions in this article leave one suspicious that he has not taken his own advice.)

almost everyone who has tackled this subject expounds a different, speculative theory.

For simplification, the discussion will be divided into two areas: the structural purpose and the theological purpose. This will entail some overlapping. We look at the suggestions for a structural purpose first. The suggested theological purpose will then be examined since, in the main, the analysis of structure is frequently not as theologically oriented.

#### Structural Purpose

Primarily, two suggestions for a structural purpose to the Prologue have been proposed: that of an introduction and a summary.

Among those who lean toward viewing the Prologue as an introduction to the Gospel is Donald Guthrie, who points out that, although the  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  theme is almost incidental to John's theology, there are sufficient ties to the Gospel within the Prologue to make the Prologue an introduction "of sorts."<sup>30</sup>

Morna Hooker cannot find any conclusion other than that the Prologue is an introduction to the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Her argumentation is based on the idea that if one removes the

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<sup>30</sup>Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 327.

<sup>31</sup>Hooker, "The Messianic Secret," p. 40.

Prologue from the Gospel, one is left with a very strange beginning to the Gospel of John. This not only supports the notion that the Prologue is an original section of the Fourth Gospel, but she adds that "without it the chapters which follow are incomprehensible to us."<sup>32</sup> It also serves as an introduction to themes within the Gospel, such as light, truth, and so forth, and provides us with some understanding about the point of the discourses contained in the body of the Gospel.<sup>33</sup>

Robinson must be placed in the company of those who see the Prologue as an introduction, for he says: "It is more as though in the Prologue the themes of the Gospel are played over beforehand, as in the overture to an opera."<sup>34</sup>

Bultmann's opinions can rarely be classified with other scholars; his tendency is to cover every side of an issue with inventive terminology. Although he states that the enigmatic Prologue can only be understood by one who has read the entire Gospel, it is at the same time an

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 51. Along the same vein, Hooker's statement on page 41 is worthy of attention: ". . . It has perhaps been overlooked that as far as form and content is concerned, we might well expect John to write a prologue in this way. The vocabulary of these verses, also, with one or two exceptions . . . links it with the chapters which follow."

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>34</sup>Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 122.

introduction to motifs within the Gospel.<sup>35</sup> Thus it would appear that he is best placed with those who see the Prologue as serving a primarily introductory purpose.

There are a smaller number of scholars who suggest that the Prologue is not an introduction at all, but rather a summary of the Gospel. Smalley works beyond the Prologue to the entire first chapter as a summary statement, and he states:

. . . There are links in terms of both language and ideas which tie the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel to the rest of the first chapter and to the entire work. . . . The first chapter of John as a whole, then, appears to be a microcosm of the Fourth Gospel in toto, and to summarise (sic) the entire sweep of salvation history with which it is concerned.<sup>36</sup>

Although his argumentation is lacking, Minear sees the Prologue also as a summary rather than a "preface."<sup>37</sup> This observation seems to be based on his theory of an impersonal Logos theology in the Prologue which proceeds into the Gospel in different, concrete form.

In writing the Prologue, John perhaps had more than one structural purpose in mind. There may be both

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<sup>35</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup>Smalley, John: Evangelist, pp. 93-94.

<sup>37</sup>Minear, "Logos Ecclesiology," p. 108. This entire article is difficult to follow and may well be characterized as "strange." He notes toward the end that he hopes "this study will enrich the understanding of the logos-idiom as a significant type of social symbolism." (p. 110) The reader who understands that statement might be in a better position than the present writer to appreciate Minear's efforts.

introduction and summary involved in its placement at the beginning of the Gospel; however, it is safe to say that one normally expects a summary at the end of a literary work, not at the beginning.

Robinson has listed three reasons to hold that the Prologue is not totally a summary: the λόγος does not recur in the body of the Gospel, there is nothing in the Prologue about the pre-existence of Christ and his return (we would disagree about the first), and key terminology about the Word becoming flesh is absent from the Gospel (although this is implied throughout).<sup>38</sup>

The language of the Prologue--especially the λόγος concept--has kept many from making any bold statement about its introductory nature. But such language is more introductory than summary. As previously stated, summaries are expected at the end of a literary work, not at the beginning, and in 20:31 we have a suitable summary and careful expression of the purpose for the Gospel. Under scrutiny, it appears that the Prologue qualifies best as the introduction to the Gospel.

That is not to suggest that other possibilities do not exist. Barrett, for example, has postulated a Proposition/Illustration approach.<sup>39</sup> What he means by this is

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<sup>38</sup>Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 123.

<sup>39</sup>Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel, pp. 6 and 28.

that the Prologue provides the reader with a type of introductory statement (a premise is offered) and the main substance (the premise is supported with facts, logical argumentation, and so forth).

This is a commendable suggestion, for as the Gospel is read and reread, the Prologue and the body of the Gospel illuminate one another, and the purpose of the Prologue changes: the fulness of Johannine theology is both appreciated and enriched within the reader by the Prologue, as it points to the Gospel and is pointed to by the Gospel. Barrett's suggestion also gives full appreciation to the key concepts of the Prologue and how they are tied to what follows in the Gospel.

William Grossouw rejects both the introductory and summary suggestions for the Prologue. His contention centers around the pre-existent Christ. It is his belief that the Prologue exists solely to provide the reader with the transition from preexistence to incarnation.<sup>40</sup> The reader who is familiar with the theological concepts within the Prologue will realize at once that if Grossouw is correct, John has become needlessly verbose; much of the Prologue is unnecessary if this is John's intent.

T. W. Manson suggests the Prologue is actually the first chapter with its own theme. He perceives the theme

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<sup>40</sup>Grossouw, Revelation, pp. 64-65.

to be the Logos descending on Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The support for such a suggestion is wanting from the text.

#### Reflections and Conclusions

If the adage that "form follows function" is true, much might be said for Barrett's suggestion that the Prologue is a part of John's Proposition/Illustration format. Certainly the scholarly world has demonstrated that an approach to the Prologue with preconceived forms, hymns, poetic devices, and the like shed little light on the Prologue. The disagreements which exist even on the question of whether the Prologue is an introduction or summary highlight the Prologue's uniqueness.

Structurally, one would expect the Prologue to be an introduction, placed, where it is, at the beginning of the Gospel. That its vocabulary, style and message seem to vary from the rest of the Gospel is troublesome to many.

Barrett's proposal is also attractive because it allows the Prologue to serve a variety of functions. It is almost as if the reader is provided in the Prologue with whatever prodding and encouragement is necessary for it to fulfill the purpose of the Gospel, clearly stated in 20:31.

The simplest approach is that the Prologue is an

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<sup>41</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus," pp. 55-57. It would appear that Manson is expounding some form of adoptionist Christology in this section.

introduction to what follows. And this cannot be ruled out. Herbert Schneider notes that "All throughout the gospel of John Jesus repeats with variations what was already said in the Prologue."<sup>42</sup> While there are those who would argue the point, it should be noted that Schneider's statement is difficult to disprove, as future chapters will indicate amply.

The present writer will not opt for a clear-cut decision on the structural purpose. Although the suggestion that the Prologue is an introduction is attractive, it is likely more than a mere introduction. What seems probable is that the theological purpose of the Prologue has influenced the structural purpose, and not vice versa. To get a clear picture of the Prologue's purpose one is forced to take seriously not the form but the theology therein contained.

#### The Theological Purpose

John clearly states his theological purpose in 20:31: "so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

Barrett emphasizes that the scholarly community

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<sup>42</sup>Herbert Schneider, "The Word Was Made Flesh: An Analysis of the Theology of Revelation in the Fourth Gospel," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 31 (July, 1969):352.



frequently does not take John's stated purpose seriously.<sup>43</sup> Evidence that scholars fail to do so is reflected in the many suggestions of a purpose for the Gospel which does not meet the standards of this verse.

Robertson sees a twofold purpose in what John is saying: to induce continued belief in those who are Christians (the tense of the verb, πιστεύετε, is a present subjunctive), so that his readers will have eternal life.<sup>44</sup>

George Vanderlip agrees with Robertson. The purpose is both to help us believe and assure us of life.<sup>45</sup> Yet he notes that the Gospel is useful both to deepen existent faith and to evangelize others.<sup>46</sup>

Following this thinking, A. E. Harvey then divides the Gospel into two main sections: chapters 1 to 12 show Jesus in dialogue with those who did not receive him and chapters 13 to 17 shift to "those who did receive him."<sup>47</sup> In such a way, Harvey relates the Prologue (1:10-12) to the general organization of the Gospel as he sees it.

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<sup>43</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, pp. 8-9.

<sup>44</sup>Robertson, The Divinity, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>Vanderlip, John, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>47</sup>A. E. Harvey, Jesus on Trial, A Study In the Fourth Gospel (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 105.

Does the Prologue Reflect John 20:31?

If the Prologue does not reflect 20:31, John either was not serious about his stated purpose or the Prologue does not belong to the Gospel.

Sidebottom says "The fourth evangelist is not really so much concerned with creation as with manifestation, as the climax of the Prologue proclaims: 'he hath declared him.'"<sup>48</sup> While many scholars have been overly-concerned with where the Logos came from, Sidebottom has noted precisely where the Prologue is heading. It begins with creation and Christ's pre-existence and participation in the Godhead. But that is a mere starting point. Its concluding lines are that this Logos-in-the-flesh has "declared God to us" (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο).

Jouette Bassler has also pointed in this direction. He believes that too much is made about geographical areas (Galilee versus Jerusalem versus Samaria). As the generalities of the Prologue point out, John is not interested in geography but in people, whether they accept or reject Jesus.<sup>49</sup>

D. A. Hayes sees echoes of the Prologue throughout

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<sup>48</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup>Jouette M. Bassler, "The Galileans: A Neglected Factor in Johannine Community Research," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 43 (1981):253.

the Gospel which reflect this evangelistic tone. He notes three in particular: the Word was made flesh, Jesus is both God and man, and Jesus speaks in the midst of faith and unbelief.<sup>50</sup> For the Synoptics, the key is the "Kingdom of God," but for John the key becomes the "Son of God." Therefore the emphasis in the Prologue on the person of Christ carries over clearly into the Gospel.

If these scholars are correct in their assessment of the theological purpose of the Prologue, this should be demonstrable by listing the key words and concepts in the Prologue. These key words should reflect 20:31.

Bultmann lists four major themes in the Prologue: ζωή, φῶς, δόξα, and ἀλήθεια.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, George Vanderlip offers a revised list: πιστεύω, γινώσκω, ζωή, φῶς, ἀγαπάω, ἀλήθεια, μαρτυρία, and κόσμος.<sup>52</sup>

To a substantial degree, such lists are products of the author's subjectivity. But such lists ought to demonstrate the overall theme of the Gospel. Both Bultmann's and Vanderlip's lists demonstrate the theme, as we shall note in a future chapter.

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<sup>50</sup>Hayes, John and His Writings, pp. 114-115.

<sup>51</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup>Vanderlip, John, p. 22.

## Possible Polemical Overtones

Some have suggested that the Gospel of John, at least in part, may have a polemical purpose. William Albright notes that the so-called Hellenistic tone of Jewish ideas in the Fourth Gospel may be a reflection of the tactic of using one's opponent's methods and terminology to defeat his ideas.<sup>53</sup>

Not everyone agrees on the nature of John's targeted "enemy." In fact, there are three major suggestions of polemical opponents, and two of the three are not Greek.

One of the most often suggested polemical targets is the Jews. The idea that John is anti-Jewish has been followed by several important scholars.

Schneider, for example, has supposed that the synod of Jamnia (80 to 90 A.D.) is in the background.<sup>54</sup> Among other things, Jamnia was supposed to have excommunicated Christians from the Jewish community, and Schneider feels that John is reading this hypothetical event backwards into the Gospel.

Hooker also believes that the reason for the Prologue and the Gospel itself is to deal with the struggle between Judaism and Christianity--that God truly spoke to

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<sup>53</sup>Albright, From the Stone Age, p. 287.

<sup>54</sup>Schneider, "The Word Was Made Flesh," pp. 346-349.

Moses, but now "most decisively in Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>55</sup>

Wayne Meeks feels that, although the Jews may not be a target of John's polemical intent, the strong polemics which took place during the crisis period between Jew and Christian have had an effect on the Gospel.<sup>56</sup> Since, in his opinion, John was written after this period of time, the polemical vocabulary remained within the Christian community and has influenced this Gospel.

Bultmann believes that the Gnostic background of the Prologue shows up in the rest of the Gospel.<sup>57</sup> This is the second suggestion: that there is a Gnostic polemic in the Gospel. Bultmann, who sees the Prologue as a community proclamation, contends that no one in particular is being addressed. This ignores the impact of 20:31 by reducing the Gospel to a credal statement. Bultmann believes that John is deliberately using Gnostic language to proclaim the Christian Gospel.<sup>58</sup>

Sidebottom makes additional concrete suggestions about the nature of the Gnostic polemic in John. He proposes two primary concepts in the Prologue which may be an indication of Gnostic polemic: the creation of the world

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<sup>55</sup>Hooker, "The Messianic Secret," p. 58.

<sup>56</sup>Meeks, "The Divine Agent," p. 59.

<sup>57</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 14. This Gnostic thrust is supposed in in the Pauline literature as well.

by the Logos, and the Logos becoming flesh.<sup>59</sup>

The third suggestion for a polemic in John comes once again from Rudolph Bultmann. In addition to the Gnostic overtones, he believes that there is a polemical tone against the John the Baptist sect.<sup>60</sup> He indicates that the verses dealing with John the Baptist (1:6-8,15) are pro-John in the sense that they demonstrate John as a witness to Christ, but anti-John as they emphasize that he is not the revealer.

All three of these suggested polemical targets have inherent difficulties. First, such suggestions are usually based on preconceptions of a particular author's theological approach to the Gospel. Secondly, the suggestions are rarely based on more than a mere two or three words or verses. Also, such suggestions tend to down-play the clear and stated purpose of the Gospel in 20:31. And finally, it must be noted that any Gospel which attempts to evangelize

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<sup>59</sup> Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> Bultmann, The Gospel of John, pp. 17-18. Raymond Brown is hesitant to go as far as Bultmann does in asserting dogmatically that a polemic against a John the Baptist sect (which may have been a Gnostic group as well) is involved in the Fourth Gospel. He is, however, somewhat convinced of this possibility. Although he correctly points out that there is no real evidence for a John the Baptist sect (Acts 18:5-11 is usually indicated by those who favor this theory), he thinks it may be reasonable to assume that at least some of the verses about John the Baptist have a polemical tone. See Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According To John, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 1:1xvii.-1xx.

will, of necessity, speak against unbelief and the many forms which unbelief takes. There will always be a thin line separating the unbelief itself from those groups which traditionally are guilty of fostering unbelief.<sup>61</sup>

#### The Theological Significance of the Prologue

Moody Smith states that John is ". . . principally interested only in the Christian theological significance of Jesus' historical ministry."<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, Smith rejects John as historical.

It is important to understand that to have a theological interest in something doesn't necessitate a twisted, rejected, altered or ignorant sense of history. The Prologue does exhibit a theological interest in the person of Jesus; John uses history to demonstrate the truth of his theology. This is a radical departure from Smith's position. The Prologue begins with the beginning of history, and provides whatever historical events are essential in order to make a theological point.

The Prologue has been considered a beautiful piece

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<sup>61</sup>Along these lines, Robinson notes that ". . . The Gospel was primarily written from an evangelistic rather than an apologetic motive and that where as the Epistles contain clear anti-docetic polemic this is not true of the Gospel." Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue," p. 124. This statement supports our contention that the Gospel does not primarily demonstrate a polemical tone; an accidental or secondary apologetic tone is not denied.

<sup>62</sup>D. Moody Smith, John, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 89.

of theological writing. But Ridderbos points out that the Prologue is not intended as a meditation for Christians; it is kerygmatic in its point of view, as the evangelist stands in between light and darkness, "the light shines in the darkness. . ." (1:5) is the initial focus of the first section of the Prologue.<sup>63</sup> This is a kerygmatic concern.

C. K. Barrett has developed a concept in which the Prologue is intended to provide the reader with the theological significance of the history which follows in the Gospel.<sup>64</sup> In this Prologue are centered all the theological questions which the Gospel answers.<sup>65</sup> And in the Prologue, John the Baptist points to Christ in theological terms that anticipate the narrative sections which follow. "Witness, light, and believe" are all centers of interest.<sup>66</sup>

Further, he notes that the Prologue contains

. . . a theological evaluation of the historical figure of the Baptist; it places the narrative that is to follow in the setting in which it can be understood. This means that the 'Baptist' verses were not an afterthought. . . .<sup>67</sup>

Barrett clearly finds no difficulty in the historicity of

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<sup>63</sup>Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope," p. 191. This position is really a rejection of Richardson, The Gospel, p. 37, where he claims that the Prologue is a "theological meditation upon the meaning of the fact of Christ."

<sup>64</sup>Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 5.      <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 23.      <sup>67</sup>Ibid.



John's Gospel, while at the same time pointing to its theological content. And in another work, he says:

. . . The Prologue is a theological evaluation of the historical life of Jesus, and nothing discloses this fact so clearly as the related fact that it at the same time presents a theological evaluation of the historical life of the Baptist. This, however, leads to the important conclusion that the prologue is nothing other than a Christian work, and that means, further, that the Jewish and Gnostic material which one can discover in the prologue has already been thought through in the mind of the author.<sup>68</sup>

Not all scholars are in agreement with Ridderbos and Barrett, as one might expect.<sup>69</sup> Yet if the Prologue is a part of the Gospel and its purpose, we would expect the Prologue to provide the reader with some type of introductory groundwork which corresponds with the stated purpose of the Gospel as a whole.

### Conclusions

The Prologue appears to be primarily a theological reflection of the nature of Jesus and the call to believe in him. This suggestion is textually supportable, as everywhere in the Prologue we find words which connect what is being said with belief. Examples are 1:5 καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν; 1:9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν; 1:10 ὁ

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<sup>68</sup>Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup>Howard, for instance, claims the Prologue is John's substitute for the transfiguration story, and that it anticipates the transfiguration event. Outside of the use of the word δόξα in the Prologue, it would seem difficult to substantiate such a point of view. See Howard, Christianity, p. 27.

κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω; 1:11 καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέληβον; 1:12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτὸν and τοῖς πιστεύουσιν; 1:13 ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν; 1:16 χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος; 1:17 ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο; 1:18 ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

This challenge to believe, to accept, to hear what is declared, and so forth, comes as no surprise if we take 20:31 seriously. This is precisely what we would expect in the Prologue. Within the Gospel itself, we see what the Prologue says reflected more substantially and in greater detail.

But the Prologue is not saying anything the Gospel does not say. In many ways, the Prologue is a glimpse at what John is calling us to believe, and in whom we are to believe (his nature, purpose, significance).

The Fourth Gospel is different in many ways from the Synoptics. Countless scholars have attempted to find the right word, the right phrase, or the right verse which demonstrates the exact nature of the difference. John Calvin noted:

And since they all had the same object, to show Christ, the first three exhibit his body, if I may be permitted to put it like that, but John shows His soul. For this reason I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door to the understanding of the others.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> John Calvin, The Gospel According to St. John, trans. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, vols. 4 and 5, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F.

In the same way as the Fourth Gospel as a whole exhibits a varied approach to the proclamation of Christ, so also its unique Prologue proclaims Christ first and foremost.

T. C. De Kruijf has submitted this theory about the Prologue:

It is a stylistic quality that the Fourth Gospel and the First Letter share, that in both very often the author starts describing persons or ideas or events in a vague and general way, from a distance, and then he brings them slowly into focus, in order to arouse the curiosity of the reader, to get him to assent to what he already thinks he knows or hopes, and ultimately he comes out with the whole and clearly stated truth.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps the Prologue cannot be classified as neatly as the scholarly world would like, but the message of the Prologue is readily available for examination. It has been shown that there is much evidence that the Prologue has as its purpose the support and summary of the purpose of the entire Gospel, as John summarizes in 20:31.

De Kruijf's suggestion is very plausible; the Prologue may in some way be the generalities to which specifics will be added in the narratives of the Gospel.

The present writer has come to prefer a view of the Prologue which presents the reader with specific challenges to his faith. Among these, it would appear that the most

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Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959) 4:6.

<sup>71</sup>Th. C. De Kruijf, "The Glory of the Only Son (John 1:14)," Biblical Theology Bulletin 6 (February 1976):120n.

important aspect of belief, and the most bold in light of the Synoptics' treatment of the subject, is that Jesus is God himself in the flesh, who has come to "exegete the Father."

Students of history will be quick to note that in every age the enemies of Christianity have attacked the faith at precisely this point: is Jesus God or is he not? If it can be proven that Jesus is not God, then, despite whatever else he may have been and done, there is no need to listen to what he says.

However, if Jesus, in fact, is God incarnate, the λόγος made flesh (1:14), then it behooves every man, woman and child to listen to what he says and believe it.

This premise may be tested by a closer examination of the Prologue itself, with special emphasis on the divinity of Christ. It is assumed that if the premise is correct, the Prologue will show a heavy emphasis on the need to believe in the divinity of Christ.

If this can be demonstrated in the Prologue, the rest of the Gospel should be expected to continue this specific issue in far more than a cursory way. The Prologue will be the challenge laid at the reader's feet and the Gospel will be the demonstration that the Prologue's premise is correct: Jesus is God in the flesh!

## CHAPTER V

### THE PROLOGUE: AN INITIAL DEFINITION OF CHRIST'S DIVINITY

John uses the Prologue to define the person of Jesus in such a way that the reader is given a starting point for the interpretation of the body of the Gospel. The entire Gospel is the story of Jesus, written for the purpose of leading the reader to faith in Jesus.

But who is this Jesus? The answer is complex; it is a question with which the Synoptics have not directly and thoroughly dealt. In 20:31, John tells us that his goal is that we might believe that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God." But this phrase is merely a summarizing statement of the development of John's witness throughout the Gospel; it does not tell the entire story. In 20:28, Thomas has said "my Lord and my God." But this also cannot serve as a full description of the person of Jesus. In 6:69, the disciples say that Jesus is to them "the Holy One of God." A thorough study of this phrase, in conjunction with Mark 1:24 where a demon describes Jesus with this same phrase, leads one to the conclusion that a great more is intended by "Holy One of God" than at first meets the eye.

But even this is an oversimplification.

All Existing Possibilities Are Inadequate

John wants his readers to understand more fully the person of Christ. The explicit descriptions of Jesus presented in the Synoptics do not portray those aspects of his person which John wishes to explore.

In John's eyes, Jesus is the Messiah. Vincent Stanton points out that, unlike the Synoptics, in Johannine narratives Jesus accepts Messianic titles.<sup>1</sup> In 4:42 he accepts the title "the Christ, the Savior of the world." And in 4:25-26 he declares himself to the Samaritan woman as the Christ.

Although the non-Jewish milieu of the John 4 narrative may explain these contrasts with the Synoptic promulgation of a "secret" Messiahship, Stanton's point is well taken that Jesus' attitude toward accepting the title "Messiah" or "Christ" is not parallel to the "Messianic Secret" of the Synoptics.

A. E. Harvey has noted that John is not satisfied with simply picturing Jesus as the "Messiah." He believes that "the Holy One of God" (6:69) is a new title to express that Jesus is more than just the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

One of the great difficulties with simply

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<sup>1</sup>Stanton, The Gospels, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Harvey, Jesus on Trial, pp. 36-39.

describing Jesus as "Messiah" or "Christ" is that such a title carried tremendous political overtones. The Synoptics' "Messianic Secret" partially demonstrates that Jesus himself was not interested in allowing political overtones to interfere with his work. His use of the title Son of Man avoids this problem.

E. W. Hengstenberg believes that the Prologue's use of  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  is serving notice that John is going to present more than a Jewish Messiah to his readers. He contends that

Wherever the name Logos occurs, it is in connection with the highest and most divine that can be declared of Christ. This is inexplicable if the name were itself such as could be given to a human mediator; it shows that the name itself designates Christ's fulness of Divine attributes.

Even if the concept of a Gnostic mediator was popular in the Hellenistic world of John's time, its use would fail to help John describe the person of Jesus. Alan Richardson says that by introducing Jesus as "The Word was God," John has ruled out speculation about this as a reference to  $\sigma\omega\phi\acute{\iota}\alpha$  or  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  as a lower divinity.

The importance of such a statement lies not in the notion that John has any interest in Gnosticism, but that he has successfully eliminated such a concept from the mind

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<sup>3</sup>E. W. Hengstenberg, Commentary on the Gospel of John, trans. Cyril J. Barber, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1865), 1:13.

<sup>4</sup>Richardson, The Gospel, p. 39.

of his reader by his carefully chosen language.

Severino Pancaro finds 5:17-18 important from the Jewish standpoint.<sup>5</sup> In response to Jesus' statement that he, like his Father, never stops working--even on the Sabbath--the Jews react that Jesus has made himself equal to God.

A Gnostic would find the concept of a continuing work of creation abhorrent; that creation is not finished, or that the λόγος and God himself are active in such work would be repulsive.

Paton Gloag has shown that the phrase δὲ αὐτοῦ in 1:3 places the λόγος in a position as a divine instrument of creation. "He is the medium of communication between God and His creatures."<sup>6</sup> No form of Gnostic or proto-Gnostic mediator could be described in such terms.

The emphases within some of the rabbinical writings to various aspects of the Old Testament could be claimed as comparisons to John's use of the λόγος at 1:1. E. M. Sidebottom's statement effectively undermines this contention:

The whole point of such terms as Wisdom, Memra, Logos, and Name, is lost when they become independent mediators with substantive existence of their own. Their

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<sup>5</sup>Pancaro, The Law, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup>Gloag, Introduction, p. 171.



original raison d'etre is the sense of the numinous which surrounds the person of God himself, the Name.<sup>7</sup>

John has no Old Testament "Agent" concept in mind here.

Nor does Hengstenberg believe that credence can be given to Jesus as the "angel of Yahweh." The Jewish notion of this angel, he says, is "never as He by whom God has created all things."<sup>8</sup>

In fact, J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin say that if one compares the Prologue's concept of Jesus and of λόγος to anything, the most proper comparison is with the New Testament's picture of Jesus as the agent of creation--they cite 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:16, and Heb. 1:2 as examples.<sup>9</sup>

It can be said with reasonable assurance that the image of Jesus painted in the Prologue cannot correspond with any Jewish personification of Old Testament themes. Adding further support is the nature of the particular complaints brought against Jesus by his enemies. They hear no such parallels but something new and repulsive to their ears: "You, being a man, make yourself God" (10:33).

John is faced with a challenge to describe the nature of Jesus adequately; there are no suitable previous concepts. God the Father is a well established concept in

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<sup>7</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>Hengstenberg, Commentary, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 71.

the mind of the Jewish reader, and John shows no hesitation in bringing the Father into the picture immediately (1:1). But Newman points out that 1:2 instantly erases any notion that Jesus and God the Father are one and the same person.<sup>10</sup>

Mark Appold's words on this distinction are well chosen: the λόγος is explained only "in absolute terms as ὁ λόγος, identical with God yet differentiated from Him."<sup>11</sup>

E. L. Miller adds linguistic support for this difference by showing that a predicate noun can take an article (even before the verb) if the intent is a convertible proposition (1:4 does in fact take this article). No article appears at 1:1 because the phrase θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος is not convertible. John is not stating that God is the Word, but that the Word is God.<sup>12</sup>

Robert Cook phrases the distinction differently; he believes the Prologue makes Jesus "an independent center of

<sup>10</sup>Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John (London, New York, Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Mark L. Appold, The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Motif Analysis and Exegetical Probe into the Theology of John (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup>Miller, "The Logos Was God," pp. 71-72. He adds that further support for a non-convertible proposition is in mind at 1:1b, where John states ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν. The πρὸς means more than "with" but conveys a personal relationship which Jesus has with the Father, and which Christians do not have (1 Jn.1:3). See pages 74 and 75.

consciousness capable of individualizing Himself through the personal traits of intellect, sensibility, and will."<sup>13</sup>

All of this demonstrates the difficulty John faces in presenting the reader with a clear understanding of the person of Christ. He cannot use concepts which are common to the thought-patterns of his day. But what John has to say is not in contrast to the Synoptics. Matthew, Mark and Luke have no "different person" in mind than John; they have exhibited specific interests in other areas of witnessing to Jesus as Christ.

#### Laying the Groundwork: The Prologue

John's Christ is both the Old Testament Christ and the Synoptic Christ, but his intent is to provide to the reader a more complete profession of his person.

The problem is how to express the truth of the God-Man in human terms. There is no term which can fully comprehend the mystery of this Savior. But there is a term which will attract everyone's attention: λόγος.

Here is where the Prologue begins, with the λόγος. And as scholars scramble to find parallels for the use of λόγος in the Hellenistic and Jewish world (as though this will explain John's thinking), the author has chosen this as his basis for providing the definition of the person

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<sup>13</sup>W. Robert Cook, The Theology of John (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), p. 49.

of Christ.

Perhaps the real answer to the λόγος question is this: it is a term used only to attract the reader and to provide a basis upon which to build. John calls our Savior ὁ λόγος. What does he mean by this? John is the one who can best answer the question. He provides us with at least three important points about ὁ λόγος.

The first of these centers around the preexistence of the λόγος. Eric Titus believes this is the primary reason for John's use of the term: "The chief value of 'Logos' seems to lie in its ability to suggest that Jesus was preexistent, that he was one in nature with God, and to support the general theme of revelation."<sup>14</sup>

But the theme of preexistence in the Prologue cannot be supported purely on the grounds of the term λόγος. It is what John says about the λόγος that heightens the concept of preexistence.

Cook has noted that the phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ (1:1) is not a reference to a point in time, but to Jesus' indefinite eternity.<sup>15</sup> Peder Borgen's information strongly supports this: the Jerusalem Targum uses ἐν ἀρχῇ to refer to the time before creation.<sup>16</sup> Bultmann is also of the opinion

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<sup>14</sup>Eric Lane Titus, The Message of the Fourth Gospel (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Cook, The Theology of John, pp. 48-49.

<sup>16</sup>Borgen, "Targumic Character," p. 294.

that ἐν ἀρχῇ expresses nothing about the origin of the world but about the "otherness" of the λόγος.<sup>17</sup>

There is additional textual support for the contention that John's Prologue is proclaiming Jesus' preexistence. Gloag notes that the verb tense, ἦν, shows that the λόγος did not start to exist at creation but was already there in the beginning, that is, before the creation.<sup>18</sup>

This preexistence is differentiated from that existence within which he was visible to mankind. William Grossouw notes that the affirmation of the λόγος being at the same time "with God" and God Himself separates the opening verses from that which follows in the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> While those who saw Jesus may think they understand the person at whom they are looking, John's Prologue states that he existed at the "beginning" (that is, before creation), thus negating any preconception that his earthly existence is the sum and substance of Jesus' person.

In keeping with this consideration, Bultmann centers his attention on 1:4; he believes that "the life was the light of men" shows that Jesus is an eschatological revealer who demonstrated this significance already in the creation of the world, since creation is a type of

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<sup>17</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Gloag, Introduction, p. 171.

<sup>19</sup>Grossouw, Revelation, p. 66.

revelation from God.<sup>20</sup>

John has clearly claimed that Jesus, ὁ λόγος, has existed before the world was ever created. The Holy Spirit has inspired him to say this. But the Holy Spirit through the evangelist is not presenting something new. The New Testament elsewhere well supports this contention.

The Prologue itself points to a witness to Jesus' preexistence; in 1:15, John the Baptist says πρῶτός μου ἦν. What meaning can this convey other than that Jesus was preexistent? It is not a denial that John the Baptist was chronologically first in his physical birth; that is admitted by his words ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος. πρῶτός νοσθ ἦν can have no other significance than that it supports the claim of 1:1.

An additional witness for such a claim is John himself, who bears his witness in 8:58. Jesus is quoted: πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί. This verse demonstrates that the Prologue is more than mere speculation about Jesus' preexistence, but it is a theological statement to what John has himself witnessed.<sup>21</sup>

T. E. Pollard has extensive lists of Johannine

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<sup>20</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 25.

passages which demonstrate the claim to Christ's preexistence both implicitly and explicitly.<sup>22</sup> Phrases such as "having come," "being from God," and "having been sent" are seen to be implicit references, and such phrases are numerous.

External witnesses to this theological contention also exist. Moody Smith denies theological innovation in John's Prologue by pointing to such passages as 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15-17, and Heb. 1:2-3 as examples of New Testament passages with much the same expression of Jesus' preexistence.<sup>23</sup>

George Ladd believes that the Synoptics also support Johannine theology at this point. "Jesus' very use of the term Son of Man involved an implicit claim to preexistence. The Johannine Jesus only affirms more explicitly what is implicit in the Synoptics." Careful study of Daniel 7 lends support for Ladd's statement, since the "one like a Son of Man" is not described in terms apropos to mere humanity; Jesus' use of the term in his defense before

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<sup>22</sup>Pollard, Johannine Christology, pp. 16-17. The more explicit references are 1:15,30; 8:58; 17:5,24.

<sup>23</sup>Smith, John, p. 91. In contrast to Smith, Teeple makes the assertion that the concept of preexistence in John's "logos Christology" is not in the rest of the New Testament, nor even in the rest of John. He believes that the idea was accidentally invented when a Hellenistic/Jewish poem was combined with a Gnostic Christian hymn (Teeple, Literary Origin, p. 140). This statement appears totally to ignore 8:58--a difficult obstacle to such a theory. Few, if any, would agree with Teeple.

the council points to the super-human quality of the Son of Man (Mark 14:62 and Matt. 26:64).<sup>24</sup>

In summary, what often is implicit in the Synoptics is claimed boldly at the outset of the Prologue: Jesus is a being who exists prior to the creation.

The second important claim for the person of Jesus is that he is God. One might suppose that preexistence is a sufficient enough claim to imply divinity. But with the assertion of a claim to true divinity, John avoids any misunderstandings about Jesus as a type of angelic being.

The crucial verse is 1:1c: θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

Robertson's observation is obvious to many:

The flat assertion that 'the Logos was God' has probably created more prejudice against this Gospel than anything else in it. But this is the thesis of the book.<sup>25</sup>

Untold effort has gone into demonstrating a case against translating this verse "The word was God." But these efforts have been proven futile by E. C. Colwell's grammatical observation, known as "Colwell's Rule," which is: "A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it

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<sup>24</sup>Ladd, A Theology, p. 241.

<sup>25</sup>Robertson, The Divinity, pp. 39-40. While "this is the thesis of the book" may be overly emphatic in the view of this writer, it must be considered a foundation of John's theology. Those who fail to observe the centrality of Christ's Divinity in John's Gospel will never understand John's Gospel.



precedes the verb."<sup>26</sup> In 1:1c, θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος, the predicate nominative θεός stands without an article before the verb ἦν.

The implication of the rule, in Colwell's opinion, is that it demonstrates that when a predicate nominative precedes a verb, it should probably be translated as definite rather than indefinite, especially if the context suggests it.<sup>27</sup> In this case, the context indeed suggests it, especially in a Gospel wherein Thomas declares without contradiction "My Lord and my God" (20:28).

Colwell interprets for us the application of the rule at 1:1c. He believes that his rule demonstrates that the correct understanding of the phrase is καὶ τὸ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος, that is, "God" and not "divine" (θεῖος) or "a god."<sup>28</sup>

Newman's interpretation of the verse underscores Colwell:

In this type of equational sentence in Greek (A=B) the subject can be distinguished from the predicate by the fact that the subject has the article before it and the predicate does not. Since "God" does not have the article preceding it, "God" is clearly the predicate and "the Word" is the subject. This means that "God" is here the equivalent of an adjective, and this fact

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<sup>26</sup>E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature 52 (1933):13.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

justifies the rendered he (the Word) was the same as God."<sup>29</sup>

Most scholars are hesitant to speak against Colwell's carefully documented work. Robert Cook emphasizes how strongly this has affected the Johannine field when he says "The only grammatically and exegetically correct translation, and therefore the only theologically correct translation is 'The Word was God.'"<sup>30</sup>

Sidebottom says "Jesus is in fact God. One cannot help feeling that the tendency to write 'the Word was divine' for θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος springs from a reticence to attribute the full Christian position to John."<sup>31</sup> And the serious implications in such a mistranslation are emphasized by Cook: "the word was divine" is a translation that makes Jesus less than God.<sup>32</sup>

Leon Morris also rejects any translation of θεός as "divine." He notes that the adjective "divine" would be θεϊός. This word is available and was used by the New Testament writers, and if this is what John wished to say, he could easily have said it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Newman, A Translator's Handbook, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup>Cook, The Theology of John, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Sidebottom, The Christ of the Fourth Gospel, p. 48.

<sup>32</sup>Cook, The Theology of John, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup>Morris, The Gospel According to John: the English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes, The New

There also have been attempts to translate 1:1c "the Word was a god." This, too, is unsupportable. Cook says:

The translation "the Word was a god" is openly intended to denigrate the obvious assertion of deity. This, too, does not stand the test of grammar or the test of the analogy of faith, and it totally ignores the development of the argument in the context.<sup>34</sup>

Bultmann is not favorable to such a translation either. He contends that καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος implies no subordination but equality with God. Jesus is God. The phrase cannot mean that he was a god, because θεός is not a generic concept like ἄνθρωπος.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the translation "the Word was God" is well established as correct. But does this verse run counter to the rest of the Gospel, or is there support for this claim elsewhere?

Robertson says that 1:3 claims full creative power for Jesus on a par with the Father.<sup>36</sup> This provides support for the established translation of 1:1c, since it is precisely this equality with God the Father which is at issue. If anything less than equality is intended, John is

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International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) p. 77n.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, The Theology of John, p. 50. He adds that such a translation also "teaches polytheism" and runs counter to the sense of 10:30.

<sup>35</sup> Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> Robertson, The Divinity, p. 40.

talking about "a god" or "a divinity."

Phillip Harner points out the multitude of references to "oneness with the Father" in this Gospel and calls to our attention the enigma which results from the use of this phrase. The Jews react to such a phrase as an attack on monotheism (5:17-18 and 10:33). It implies a special relationship with the Father which the rest of humanity does not have.<sup>37</sup>

This "oneness" with the Father of which John speaks often is not totally a conclusive piece of evidence in support of 1:1c. But it must be admitted that the enigma it presents is difficult to resolve outside of the 1:1c assertion.

One must not overlook the richness of the Johannine narrative; it provides implicit support for the deity of Christ. In 10:17 Jesus says that he lays down his life "that I may take it again" (ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν). This purpose clause, which provides the reason for his death, expresses the Resurrection event in an active way. Here it is not the Father who gives Jesus his life in the grave, but Jesus himself who actively takes it again. No human being can claim such power; it belongs only to God. The statement is reiterated in 10:18 in a way that makes it unmistakable: "I have the power to lay it down and the

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<sup>37</sup>Harner, The "I Am", pp. 53-54.

power to take it again." (To translate ἐξουσία here as "authority" is indefensible from the context.)

Sanders offers additional evidence when he notes that the entire Gospel of John seems to lead up to 20:28. Thomas, in his exclamation "My Lord and my God," is offering the reader a clear interpretation of 1:1c. John has no qualms about the meaning that the λόγος is God.<sup>38</sup>

While the reader of the Fourth Gospel is carefully led to understand that Jesus is God, further definition of John's meaning is necessary. John wants his audience to understand that he is ascribing to Jesus full divinity and equality with God the Father, but he is not equating Jesus with the Father. They are equal but not identical. To underscore this point without abandoning monotheism is tricky, but John has carefully done this.

Harrison believes that 1:1c does this, in part.

. . . By the device of using θεός without the article, John announces the deity of the λόγος and at the same time avoids confusing him with God the Father, which could not be the case anyway, since the λόγος was with God.<sup>39</sup>

Ladd also notes the meticulous phrasing of 1:1.

The Greek words express two ideas: the Word was deity, but the Word was not fully identical with deity. The definite article is used only with logos. If John had used the definite article also with theos, he would

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<sup>38</sup> Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," p. 24.

have said that all God is, the Logos is: an exclusive identity.<sup>40</sup>

John 1:1-2 presents the reader with an immediate paradox. Donald Guthrie says of these verses that "There can be no reasonable doubt that John intended his readers to understand that the Word had the nature of God."<sup>41</sup> But he is not the same as the Father.

Miller has argued that the grammar of these two verses shows that John is interested in showing the reader the interpersonal relationship within the Trinity. He believes that the doctrine of the Trinity is implicit in what John is saying at this point.<sup>42</sup>

In addressing the equal-but-not-identical-to problem of the first two verses, Appold suggests that the absolute use of the  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  is against the idea of Christ as subordinate to God in any way.<sup>43</sup>

T. W. Manson takes additional notice that John's Prologue does not simply say that "God was in Christ" but that Jesus of Nazareth was a revelation of God himself.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ladd, A Theology, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 327.

<sup>42</sup>Therefore the church did not invent it ex nihilo as some suggest. See Miller, "The Logos Was God," pp. 76-77.

<sup>43</sup>Appold, The Oneness Motif, p. 81n.

<sup>44</sup>Manson, "The Johannine Jesus," p. 49. Derrett has done some work with the implications of agency in the Fourth Gospel. Among other things, he notes that, for the

This is significant because it underscores the opportunity that John had to express something different than what he does. If a number of the suggestions contrary to the analogy of faith had merit, then one is forced to ask why the Evangelist did not avail himself of such language more clearly depicting these alternatives.

The dichotomy of the Prologue's opening is stressed by Bultmann, who notes that the λόγος is God but he is not the Father: he was God (ἦν) and he was with God (πρός).<sup>45</sup>

To the question "Why didn't John use the term 'Father' instead of 'God'?" Miller replies that in the New Testament, θεός commonly refers to the Father. In the Prologue, the "Son" has not been mentioned yet, so using the term Father would introduce an unnecessary contrasting concept.<sup>46</sup>

Cook underlines the fact that θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος is "not a convertible statement with either noun capable of

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Jews, a person's agent is like himself, and the essential quality of an agent is trustworthiness. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, Law in the New Testament (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), pp. 52-53. But one should not be tempted to read the strong emphasis on agency back into the Prologue as though this is the intent of John's opening lines.

<sup>45</sup> Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 19. Many others have likewise made this contention. Guthrie, for instance, points out that while ὁ λόγος was God, he was not equated with God, because θεός is the "more embracing" term. Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 327.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, "The Logos Was God," p. 76.

being construed as subject."<sup>47</sup> If one attempts to convert the phrase, one contradicts the Gospel and the New Testament. "John was trinitarian and this translation would make him a unitarian."<sup>48</sup>

From the above discussion, it appears obvious that more than a little difficulty has been felt by 1:1c. The problem is one, not so much of the phrase itself, but of the implications of the phrase. Perhaps the statement of Ray Summers is as good as any in pointing up the reason for the storm clouds:

The stress is on nature, character. The Word was as 'divine' as God was 'divine.' The Word was deity as God was deity. The fault is not with the idea; it is with the weakness of language in expressing the idea.<sup>49</sup>

So far we have seen two emphases in the Prologue: the preexistence of Jesus and the divinity of Jesus. John, in his emphasis on the divinity, has clearly shown Jesus to be equal to the Father but not identical to the Father. This is going to cause problems with the Jewish notion of monotheism, and yet John has not denied monotheism. Nor has he denied the humanity of Jesus; Jesus is also a human being, and in many subtle ways John includes this in the Prologue also.

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<sup>47</sup>Cook, The Theology of John, p. 50.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ray Summers, Behold the Lamb: An Exposition of the Theological Themes in the Gospel of John (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), p. 22.



It should be obvious that most readers would have little trouble accepting the humanity of Jesus were it not for John's talk of his preexistence and divinity. At this point, however, there might remain room for confusion. Pollard points out that the humanity of Jesus is everywhere apparent in the body of the Gospel. He believes that 11:33, 12:27 and 13:27 particularly stress Jesus' humanity. "The Logos-concept has not been able to obliterate the true picture of Christ's humanity."<sup>50</sup>

But the reader need not wait until the eleventh chapter to see clear signs of Jesus' humanity. In 1:10, John tells us that this λόγος came into the world and his own creation (ὁ κόσμος) did not recognize him (αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω).

John's carefully chosen words in 1:14, however, are all any reader would need to understand that true humanity is intended. John says ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. The word σὰρξ is the strongest word John could have used. It carefully removes any Gnostic or docetic possibilities.<sup>51</sup>

The use of the aorist in 1:14 contrasts the timeless aspect of Christ's divinity as Jesus "became" the God-man.

Contrasted with 1:18 wherein John says "no one has

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<sup>50</sup>Pollard, Johannine Christology, pp. 18-19.

<sup>51</sup>Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 1:19-20.

ever seen God," 1:14 states that "we saw" (ἑθεασάμεθα--a verb which implies a physical seeing) this λόγος in the flesh.

Little else needs to be said about the humanity of Jesus in the Prologue. A great many other examples might be given of implicit references to a true humanity, but 1:14 makes further discussion unnecessary. John has spoken of Jesus in terms that his readers are not likely to forget.

#### The Paradox Heightened

The paradox in the Prologue is that in the one person of Jesus Christ there is both a human and divine nature.

That he is a human being should bother few. But that he is also God at the same time is difficult to comprehend. The ancient world had never heard such a concept; certainly nothing in Judaism's system could readily accept such a doctrine.

Jesus had not taught such a doctrine to his hearers in a one-sentence statement. But Andrew Osborn's contention that the disciples had slowly come to realize that Jesus was God in the flesh is borne out textually by the climax of 20:28.<sup>52</sup> This was, after all, the only possible

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<sup>52</sup>Andrew R. Osborn, "The Word Became Flesh," Interpretation 3 (January, 1949):47.

response to the facts before them. John has managed to demonstrate in his Prologue that the beautiful balance of God and man in the person of Jesus is part of the content of belief to which John calls us.<sup>53</sup>

Twice in the Prologue (1:14 and 1:18) John uses a word which should not be overlooked: *μονογενής*.

T. C. De Kruijf has a great deal to say about the parallelism of this concept of "unique" or "only" with Isaac's near-sacrifice in the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> But it is likely that this parallelism brings into play more than is needed for the understanding of John's use of the term.

Bultmann believes that the use of the term in 18b heightens the description of the unity between the Father and Son.<sup>55</sup> But one fails to see the unity theme playing an important role in these verses.

The one thing that *μονογενής* underscores is the uniqueness of the *λόγος*. It is the emphasis on this only Son of God which lies at the heart of John's use of the term. B. F. Westcott says

The thought in the original is centred [sic] in the personal Being of the Son and not in His generation.

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<sup>53</sup> Leon Morris, "The Jesus of Saint John," Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> De Kruijf, "The Glory of the Only Son," pp. 112-117.

<sup>55</sup> Bultmann, The Gospel of John, pp. 82-83.

Christ is the One only Son, the One to whom the title belongs in a sense completely unique and singular, as distinguished from that in which there are many children of God.<sup>56</sup>

Part of this uniqueness is his exclusive divine nature, as supported by the connection of μονογενής with his δόξα in 1:14. Harrison takes notice of the following:

. . . Lest the reader leap to the conclusion that by entering humanity the λόγος has divested himself of deity (something inherently impossible), John adds the observation that the Incarnate One still possessed the divine glory in a unique sense as μονογενής.<sup>57</sup>

The other aspect of his uniqueness is pictured for the reader in 1:18. Here the word μονογενής seems well suited to John's conclusion to the Prologue. "Unique" almost seems to be an understatement in the context of 1:18b!

Martin Scharlemann develops documentation, based on the value of Codex P66, that the correct reading at 1:18 is μονογενής θεός ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς.<sup>58</sup> This reading, undoubtedly the correct one,<sup>59</sup> compounds the

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<sup>56</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John, The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 12.

<sup>57</sup>Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," p. 26.

<sup>58</sup>Scharlemann, "Papyrus Sixty-Six," p. 576.

<sup>59</sup>We say "undoubtedly the correct one" not only on the strength of Scharlemann's argumentation, but also upon the standard rules of textual criticism. By far the most difficult reading is θεός, and the temptation of a scribe to alter it to a more intelligible reading must have been great indeed.

mystery of Christ's person; the reading θεός reflects the purposeful paradox of 1:1.

John has begun and ended the Prologue with the greatest of all paradoxes. His language is strong, deliberately calling our attention to the difficulty of understanding (let alone believing) the true nature of the Messiah in whom we are led to faith.

If Jesus was the same as the Father, the difficulty in understanding would be lessened; but he is not. If John were to deny monotheism, the confusion in the mind of the reader would be lessened; but again, John makes no such denial. There is, for John, an "only God" and both Jesus and the Father are that "only God." But they are not the same person.

John's language indicates that he has worded his Prologue carefully. He has made no mistake in what he says; he has no doubts about what he presents. The difficulty is with our understanding this paradox and believing it.

Earle Ellis says that this paradox is presented also in the Synoptics, which use the virgin birth to demonstrate Christ's divinity and humanity.<sup>60</sup> John does not repeat the story of Christmas. But his Prologue provides an even more dynamic view of the challenge such an

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<sup>60</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, p. 58.

incarnation (1:14) presents.

Morna Hooker compares the "Messianic Secret" in the Synoptics to the "secret" in John, which is the "question of Jesus' origin: those who reject him fail to recognize that he is 'from above.'" She points especially to John 8 as evidence for this.<sup>61</sup>

Whether there is in fact a "secret" in John or not, it is immediately apparent that John does not wish to keep the secret from his readers. In the Prologue, all the pieces of the picture are placed before us.

As the reader proceeds into the Gospel itself, he is given the opportunity to see precisely how Jesus himself proclaims this truth about himself in words and signs.

Many scholars have noted that ἀλήθεια plays an important role in the Gospel of John. But the Prologue already has told us what the "truth" (1:17) is: Jesus is God and Man in one Person. That the Gospel leads eventually to the bold proclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God" should come as no surprise. What John wants us to believe (and he challenges us with it from the outset) is that Jesus is my Lord and my God in the fullest possible sense.

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<sup>61</sup>Hooker, "The Messianic Secret," p. 44.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PROLOGUE'S EMPHASIS ON BELIEF

The previous chapter outlined the essential elements of Christ's divinity within the Prologue. It now remains to demonstrate that the proper understanding of the human and divine natures of Christ is intended to support John's central purpose of calling his readers to saving faith.

John's purpose is made explicit in 20:31: the central issue at stake is belief and unbelief, not only in those who are recorded within the chapters of the Gospel but in the readers of the Gospel as well.<sup>1</sup>

The God-man, as John presents him to us, confronts us with a decision: to believe or to deny. At stake is eternal life or eternal death. There can be no middle ground. The reader must do something with the information John provides; the decision is crucial to the eternal welfare of the reader's soul.

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<sup>1</sup>In pointing to this feature of the Gospel, A. E. Harvey asks how it is possible that the world could reject someone so far-reaching and divine as Jesus. The answer, he believes, is that John intended even the frequent displays of unbelief within the narrative to call the reader to faith. Harvey, Jesus on Trial, p. 82.

Fortunately it is the Holy Spirit's empowering of the reader to accept this God-given Savior rather than a proper understanding of the text which brings about saving faith. That is not sufficient reason in John's mind to present his witness to Christ in careless terms.

John has no interest in writing a "better Gospel" than his predecessors, nor does he wish to become deliberately enigmatic, as the search for backgrounds often presupposes. The stakes are too high. John is concerned that his readers believe in Jesus Christ as both God and man in one person.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel Arichea says that the only way to understand the word πιστεύω properly in the Fourth Gospel is to focus upon its object which is Christ. To misunderstand the object is to misunderstand belief.<sup>3</sup> John may not be totally

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<sup>2</sup>Interestingly, John never uses the word "faith" (πίστις) in his Gospel, but the verb "believe" (πιστεύω) is omnipresent. This pattern emphasizes his concern that an active decision be made on the part of the reader. See the above two entries in Moulton and Geden for a comparison with the Synoptics; John's pattern is startlingly different.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel C. Arichea Jr., "Translating 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," Bible Translator 30 (April 1979):209. This article is worthwhile reading. Arichea makes a careful demonstration that nuances of meaning lie in John's use of "believe" and that 20:31 loses its force if the object of belief becomes out of focus for the reader. Ladd, on the other hand, has noted that πιστεύοντες can be either a present or an aorist tense in 20:31. He suspects a present tense, which would make John's intent to confirm faith amidst deviations. Ladd, A Theology, p. 237. One serious problem with Ladd's suggestion is that the belief itself overshadows the object of that belief. Another is that



disinterested in the process by which one becomes a believer, but his primary concern is that his readers become children of God through faith.<sup>4</sup>

If belief is so central to the Fourth Gospel, why does the reader observe so many unbelievers within the narrative portion of the Gospel?

The rejection of Jesus in the gospel is so universal that there seems to be no room left for believers. Men belong to darkness. . . . The ultimate answer of the gospel is an affirmation of a mystery: faith is a free gift of God.<sup>5</sup>

"Universal" rejection is not quite accurate. Faithful believers can be found: John the Baptist (1:29), Andrew (1:41), Philip (1:45), Jesus' mother Mary (2:5), the Samaritan woman (4:29) and the people of her city (4:41-42), the desperate father (4:50) the paraplegic (5:9) to

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John's careful presentation of the paradox of divinity and humanity within the one person of Christ loses its purpose. It would be difficult to understand why John would deliberately present an extremely severe enigma to people who were in danger of losing their faith. Sound pastoral practice in crisis counseling should not concern itself with fine points of doctrine. Finally, it should be observed that there is no evidence in the Gospel that a polemical motive exists; nor is there any evidence to suggest that the supposed deviations among the original readership existed. All of this is not to say that the Fourth Gospel cannot be used profitably for confirming faith in the midst of deviations; what the present writer is denying is that the entire document has this as a primary objective.

<sup>4</sup>Culpepper, "The Pivot," p. 30, has shown that John does take some interest in the process of justification. Unfortunately, his major emphasis is to use this to prove that 1:12b is the so-called "pivot" of the Prologue.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Schneider, "The Word Was Made Flesh," p. 355.

mention a few.

John's Gospel does seem to offer an inordinate number of unbelievers, however, and one finds it strange that so much unbelief is presented to those who are called to believe. The Jewish leaders and Judas appear to be John's leading examples of diabolic unbelief.<sup>6</sup>

But Jesus is shown to concern himself with the souls of even those who reject him. The unbelievers are called to believe. Chapter 6 is an interesting example of a conversation between the Savior and the unsaved. The entire focus of the conversation is 6:29. In response to "What works must we do?" Jesus' surprising answer is this: "This is the work of God--that you might believe!"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>"Diabolic" is a good word to describe unbelief in the Johannine witness. Unbelief, in whatever form, never receives kind notice from the Evangelist, and belief receives encouragement even if that belief is somewhat sketchy and misguided. It is the devil himself who causes unbelief. Harvey suggests that at 13:2, δὶάβολος should not be translated "devil" but "slanderer" since Judas refuses to believe the evidence. He cites Ps. 108:6 and Zech. 3:1 in the LXX. But the text is unsupportive of his contention since the devil is said to have been "put" into his heart from without. Harvey, Jesus on Trial, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup>Here, among other verses, is support for John's interest in the process of justification. Notice that the leaders' question about their good works (plural) receives a reply in the singular: work (ἔργον). "Believe" is subjunctive (πιστεύητε) and is said to be the work of God and not their own work. Hoskyns notes ". . . It would be to misunderstand what the Evangelist has here said, if it were supposed that the Act of faith were an act grounded in an independent, individual decision to believe. The Act of faith is itself the work of God (v.44, cf. Rom.xii.3). Neither the fourth Evangelist nor Saint Paul is driven finally to a Pelagian or even semi-Pelagian conception of

Another key verse within the narrative portion of the Gospel which is exceptionally informative is 8:21. Pheme Perkins correctly points to the use of the singular ἁμαρτία to describe the major sin of Jesus' enemies.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that 8:24 uses the plural, it is not necessarily true that this apparent reiteration has the same meaning.<sup>9</sup> And the singular at 8:21, having full manuscript support, points to 8:30 where John tells us that many believed because of what Jesus said.

If the aforementioned examples of John's emphasis on belief are in keeping with the central thrust of the

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faith." Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, ed. Francis Noel Davey, second ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 293. The subjunctive coupled with the ἵνα clause emphasizes that the purpose of God's work is that people believe. This is notably familiar: see 20:31. Pancaro says that this entire conversation hinges upon the fact that the unbelievers cannot comprehend that when Jesus is speaking of working for "bread," he means "believe." Pancaro, The Law, p. 460.

<sup>8</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 100. While the reference to the sin of unbelief is rarely questioned, there is a division among scholars about the significance of the singular, since 8:24 uses the plural. Hoskyns is an example of those who put little emphasis on the use of the singular at 8:21. See Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, p. 334.

<sup>9</sup>Theologically, there is "sin" and there are "sins." A human being daily commits many sins. Without faith, there is no forgiveness for any of these. However, any sin is forgivable if a person puts his faith in Jesus. The one sin which cannot be forgiven is unbelief, because it fails to appropriate the mercy of God. Jesus is correct in both the singular and plural forms within this chapter: unbelief causes eternal death, but unbelief also causes all other sins to remain unforgiven.

Gospel then Harvey may be correct in pointing to 14:6 ("I am the Way") as thematic.<sup>10</sup> It conveys the essence of concern in 20:31 for the object of saving faith. Jesus claims exclusivity for his role with the words "No one comes to the Father except through me." Such a claim undergirds John's concern for the seriousness of his call to believe.

Our present purpose must now be to determine to what extent the heavy emphasis on believing (only summarily discussed above) is reflected within the Prologue itself. Various minor inferences shall receive first consideration.

#### Minor Accents in the Prologue

By its basic structure, a Gospel seeks to call its readers to believe. But one might reasonably expect a less severe opening statement than that which John provides.

Not only is the divinity of Christ central to John's theology, but to the call to believe. The rejection of Jesus within the Gospel and the difficulty of the disciples to understand and believe the truth are illuminated immediately: John does not minimize the obstacles to

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<sup>10</sup> Harvey, Jesus on Trial, p. 181. This book is geared toward demonstrating that the entire Fourth Gospel is the Evangelist's attempt to "build a case" (based upon Jewish court procedure) for the claim that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God." Although the general direction of Harvey's work is illuminating and textually sound, the present writer believes Harvey may be stressing the legal aspects beyond what is necessary--especially to the non-Jewish reader.

believing, but heightens them by thrusting his readers immediately into the difficulty: the Word is God.

This λόγος is tied (in 1:4) to both φῶς and ζωή.<sup>11</sup> Textually both words are predicates of λόγος, although grammatically this identification is made indirectly in an A>B>C fashion. The purpose behind such predication is the fleshing out of the object of faith. Most of the Prologue details the meaning of the opening statement of 1:1, but in the case of φῶς and ζωή, John spends additional time in his exposition.

At 1:5, a surprising change of tense takes place. Jesus as the light shines (present tense: φαίνει) in the darkness. It is the very nature of light to do this, and the process is an ongoing one. The darkness, its foe, does not however take a present verb but an aorist participle: κατέλαβεν. What significance the aorist particle has for the discussion has caused some disagreement.<sup>12</sup> If it is intended to point to a one-time event, the most logical choices are creation or Calvary; if, on the other hand, it expresses a timeless truth, its meaning demonstrates the

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<sup>11</sup>Humphrey Green comes to this conclusion on the basis of poetic analysis, but the casual reader might be expected to perceive the connection without Green's schematic. Green, "The Composition," p. 294.

<sup>12</sup>Barclay Neuman and Eugene Nida, A Translator's Handbook, p. 12, present the two positions. Leon Morris, The Gospel, pp. 85-86, suggests Calvary is intended, but the promotion of this meaning suffers from a lack of contextual support.

ineffectiveness of the powers of evil (which are led by Satan) against the light.

While both are defensible grammatically and textually, the second is more in tune with the entire Gospel, wherein the attempts of Jesus' enemies are consistently thwarted.<sup>13</sup>

Verse 9 of the Prologue might be classified under the title "Minor Accents" purely by virtue of the fact that believing is not specifically mentioned in the verse or the context. J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin contend that this verse refers to a "general revelation available at all times, if only men could see it. . . ." <sup>14</sup> But against this idea, C. K. Barrett points out that this is not in keeping with the rest of John's Gospel, where light functions in judgment, and is also not in keeping with the following verse's meaning.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The disputed meaning of the verb κατέλαβεν does not help matters. The basic meaning seems to be "grabbing" or "seizing," but this is difficult to ascribe to darkness. A more appropriate meaning in accord with the subject is a "snuffing out" of the light. Jacob Dyer sees the verb portraying the refusal to accept the light, ". . . a case of mass rejection, with acceptance by an almost negligible few." Jacob A. Dyer, "The Unappreciated Light," Journal of Biblical Literature 79 (June 1960):170-171. This fails to give full appreciation to the efforts of Satan himself to counteract the light. Unbelief is not only individual rejection of the call to believe, but a sign of the struggle portrayed in 1:5.

<sup>14</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup>Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text,

The light coming into the world (which echoes Is. 60:1-2 and is in keeping with the function of John the Baptist's call to announce this revelation) goes beyond the illumination of mankind provided by the λόγος through creation. Any illumination provided by creation is vague. Verse 4 points the reader to the fact that mankind has a general revelation through creation. Verse 10 underlines John's insistence that such a revelation is ineffective for salvation: creation does not recognize its own creator.

In reflecting 1:4, 1:9 indicates that for the human being the illumination which is meaningful can only take place within the context of history.<sup>16</sup>

Underlying all of this is John's adjective ἀληθινόν. The word, normally translated "true" is perhaps better rendered as "genuine" or "certain." The thrust of John's argument, underscored by the adjective, is that the object of belief can be only this λόγος of creation now come in the flesh. The exclusivity of the φῶς more than his trustworthiness (although this would not be denied by John) is the key point: there is only one creator and the λόγος is he.

Verse 12 uses the phrase πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα

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second edition (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1978), p. 161.

<sup>16</sup>Rudolph Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John, trans. Kevin Smyth, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:253-254.

αὐτοῦ. Both Arichea and Rudolph Bultmann understand this to mean Jesus himself.<sup>17</sup> Although the phrase is unusual in the New Testament, its meaning is clear from the context.

The believer is empowered by God to become his child.<sup>18</sup> The reader may understand John to be saying that by an action on the part of the individual (believing), God authorizes his inclusion into the category "child of God." Quite the opposite is true: the meaning of τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ is the same as ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν. This is the only possible sense in view of the entire Gospel (note especially 6:29). Both "receiving" and "believing" are actually the Holy Spirit's action on our behalf, as Romans' emphasis on grace underlines.

The full import of John's understanding of the nature of belief is perhaps not readily clear from 1:12. What is important for John is that the reader understand that the "power" to become a child of God is connected to

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<sup>17</sup> Arichea, "Translating 'Believe'," p. 206 thinks this is quite clear, and Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 59 in a footnote states that πιστεύεις εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ has precisely the same meaning as πιστεύειν εἰς αὐτόν. The name IS the person.

<sup>18</sup> The translation of ἐξουσίαν has created controversy. Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 77 and Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 57f, defend the translation "authority" and Bultmann adds the claim that this is an adoptionist concept developed further in 3:1-21. For Morris, The Gospel, p. 98, the word emphasizes the status which is given to the believer, although he also suggests "authority." But see pages 116 and 117 above where defense for the translation "power" is given at 10:17.



"receiving" Christ or "believing into his name."

At the same time, John's use of the term τέκνα deserves the reader's attention. It is not the same word as that used for the λόγος. The λόγος is called the only υἱός (3:16 for example). Culpepper notes that believers are never υἱοί but τέκνα in John's Gospel.<sup>19</sup> Believers do not become equal to Jesus Christ by believing, because the λόγος is on an entirely different plane of existence than mankind can ever be.

The concluding verse of the Prologue, 1:18, offers the climax to John's opening remarks. The proverb "seeing is believing" receives little credence from John, because no one has ever seen God.<sup>20</sup> His statement contrasts seeing with the eyes and seeing with the eyes of faith.

Nowhere in the Prologue is John's challenge to believe greater than 1:18. It would appear that John is contradicting himself by saying "Yes, it is true that no one has seen God, but the only God has revealed him to us."

Here the essential nature of the λόγος comes into

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<sup>19</sup>Culpepper, "The Pivot," p. 17, points out that the phrase "children of God" does not occur in the Old Testament, but the term "sons of God" does. This heightens the distinction made between the believers and Christ.

<sup>20</sup>Richardson, The Gospel, p. 45 believes that this is the real message of the verse: seeing is not believing, but believing is seeing. He supports this contention with 9:37-41, 14:9 and 20:29. The last passage offers exceptional support for his contention, since it is Jesus' response to Thomas' thundering statement of faith.

focus: the λόγος, active in creation, has become flesh. He is God, in every way equal to the Father. To see him is to see God. John highlights how enigmatic the object of faith is by calling him θεός.<sup>21</sup> It is the purpose of the λόγος to reveal the Father to us (the φῶς is said to φαίνειν in the darkness, 1:5, and 1:9 says he φωτίζει every man).

It is only through the eyes of faith that this eternal truth becomes event by the power of God (1:12).

#### "Life" as a Belief Concept in the Prologue

The Prologue is John's opening challenge to the reader to grasp the full significance of Jesus Christ and believe in him. In almost every verse, further aspects of that challenge surface. But there are at least three major concepts interwoven throughout the Gospel, and highlighted within the Prologue itself, which the Evangelist uses to undergird the importance of his call to believe.

Space does not permit an intensive examination of each concept; an overview of each will be sufficient.

The first of these is "life" (ζωή), which occurs at 1:4, and is echoed in 1:3, 10, 12, and 13.

Physical existence is the normal meaning of the term, and John is capable of using it in this way (1:3-4

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<sup>21</sup>The critical apparatus reveals the attempt to remove the difficulty by altering the text to a more acceptable statement involving the "Son" in place of the word "God."

indicates that the λόγος is responsible for the physical existence of mankind: we live and move and have our being through his creative activity).

Although the word ζωή occurs only once in the Prologue, the topic of "life" runs throughout the eighteen verses in a way which demonstrates a different meaning in the mind of the writer. "Life" for John is eternal life, present here and now in the one who believes on the name of Jesus (1:12) and explicitly spelled out in 11:25, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; the one who believes in me will live even if he dies."

The frequent use of the adjective αἰώνιον (as for example at 3:16) encourages the reader of the Gospel to think constantly in terms beyond mere physical existence.

Eternal life is no more accidental than physical existence.<sup>23</sup> God is the cause of both. But whereas physical life is given to all mankind, eternal life comes

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<sup>22</sup>There have been some who accuse John of inventing this emphasis in the mouth of Jesus, but a closer look at the Synoptic Gospels reveals echoes of this. Crehen points to "God is a God of the living, not the dead" in Matt. 27: 53, the raising of Jairus' daughter and the young man of Nain, and passages like Luke 18:18,30 and 10:25,28. There is just enough, he believes, to show "that John is not falsifying the primitive Christian message with his teaching on eternal life." Crehen, The Theology, pp. 54-55. Crehen has discovered that 1:17 and 17:2-3 are the only two places in the Gospel where the words Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ occur together (p. 56). Those who wish to delve more fully into the use of ζωή in the Fourth Gospel may wish to note the significance of this.

<sup>23</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, "ζάω" TDNT, 2:863.

only through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Prologue has taken Genesis 1 a step further: the life which we have been given as an act of creation is meaningless and fleeting without the life which the Incarnate Creator came to give us.<sup>24</sup>

Verses 12-13 of the Prologue speak of "becoming" and "birth"; while ζωή does not appear, eternal life is behind the sense of these passages. Note that John rules out for the reader possible notions that the eternal life in Christ comes from something within man (1:13). A new birth takes place through believing.

The body of the Gospel adds to the Prologue's groundwork. Chapter 11 is especially significant; Lazarus, who was in the grave, is brought back to life. Jesus uses this as an opportunity to speak to his hearers of the true meaning of life, and his words culminate in the famous statement ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή.<sup>25</sup> Jesus equates

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<sup>24</sup>Cook sees this in terms of creation's accountability to the Creator. But relationship, not accountability, is the point. While it is true that those who reject Jesus Christ have no life (3:36), those who through faith have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are given eternal life. Physical existence is not absolute; eternal life is. We cannot share equality with the person of Christ, but we can share his gift of life in absolute terms: life which is eternal. To stress accountability is to stress the negative. John wishes to stress the positive: "so that you might believe . . ." Cook, The Theology of John, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Attention is called to the use of ἐγώ εἰμι. While this thesis does not investigate predicated uses, the use of the ἐγώ εἰμι phrase in conjunction with ζωή is significant and should not be overlooked in further study.

himself with life, not only because he is the giver of life in the physical sense and he is the bestower of eternal life to all who believe, but because he draws these gifts from what he is: he IS life.

The Prologue does not pretend to furnish the reader with a dogmatic definition of ζωή, nor does the rest of the Gospel. The Fourth Gospel does contain many statements about the nature of life. As the Prologue clearly states, this ζωή comes from God himself (1:12), who empowers the believer to become a child of God through a new birth (1:13). It is evident that Jesus himself is the source of such a life (1:4).

In 17:3, John quotes Jesus as saying that eternal life is to KNOW (γινώσκωσιν) the Father and Jesus Christ, whom he sent. Jesus imparts to us a revelation of God, as the Prologue says by the words "He was the true light which enlightens every man" (it is difficult to avoid overlapping of these concepts). He gives us eternal life through his revelation in the flesh.<sup>26</sup>

The differentiation between physical existence

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<sup>26</sup>Bultmann's discussion of the use of ζωή in John is wide of the mark because he maintains that the content of Jesus' words are not important. Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kenrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 1:63. The content of the proclamation is central; the believer is not called to "believe" in the life-giver in some generic sense of the term, but to believe, as 20:31 says, Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. We are called to believe the content of the proclamation.

(1:3-4) and eternal life (1:12-13) strengthened in 10:10 by the inclusion of the adverb "abundantly" (περισσόν), and Jesus' expressed desire that his hearers take possession of this gift he has come to bestow.

As a summarizing statement, one might be tempted to ask why, given the importance of ζωή throughout the Gospel, the word does not appear more frequently in the Prologue. But if one is careful to note the argument presented in 1:1-18, it is clear that John's thoughts are never far from the special gift which the λόγος came to bring: eternal life through faith in him.

#### "Light" as a Belief Concept in the Prologue

The second major concept whose frequency in the Gospel betrays the author's pointed interest is φῶς. Its actual use in the Prologue occurs at 1:4,5,7,8 and 9, and is echoed to some extent in 1:3,10,14 and 18.

John's Prologue sets before the reader the contrast of light and darkness, frequently referred to as a "dualism." What is the nature of this dualism?

"Light and Darkness" may be called a dualism in the sense that they are mutually exclusive, but John does not present us with a philosophical system.

Sanders has called it an ethical dualism. "Sometimes it seems to approach a metaphysical dualism, but it is saved from this . . ." by the idea that the purpose of

God is to save the world.<sup>27</sup> It is not speculative; John's dualism does not purport to be mere explanation.

Within the Prologue as well as the Gospel, the darkness takes an active role in opposing the light (1:5). It is more than a concept; darkness is a reality with a power all its own. Its limitation is that it cannot snuff out the light (1:5) but must always remain in the shadow of the absolute.

There is no substantiation for A. E. Harvey's contention that 1:4-5 is a reflection on the idea of light and darkness as adversaries in a heavenly court (in the manner of Job 1, for example).<sup>28</sup> John never gives his readers an indication that darkness has any connection, heavenly or otherwise, with the φως.

The personification of darkness is Satan. The personification of φως is Jesus Christ. Yet the two differ dramatically: Jesus is the φως because he is the revelation of God (1:9,18).<sup>29</sup> There is no corresponding concept for darkness. Hans Conzelmann says

The identification of light with revelation and of revelation with the Revealer means the exclusion of all metaphysical and cosmological speculation. Herein lies

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<sup>27</sup>Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup>Harvey, Jesus on Trial, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World," in Interpretation 17 (October 1963):444, supports this statement by saying "There is no thought that the darkness is equal to God's light."

the basic distinction between Jn.'s Gospel and Gnosticism. No factual statement is made about the world of light. Jn. does not call God light, but God's manifestation in Jesus. Light is a pure concept of existence.<sup>30</sup>

The Prologue presents to the reader the conflict between light and darkness: the light "shines in the darkness" and the "darkness cannot snuff out the light" (1:5). Since the Prologue begins with an echo of Genesis 1, Richard Morgan believes that John's intent is to show that the light "won the victory" in the primeval battle.<sup>31</sup>

But while the φῶς is absolute and the darkness is not, John presents no "complete victory" motif outside of Calvary (see 19:30 and Jesus' final claim "τετέλεσται"). The appearance of the φῶς in the flesh is not a rematch of a primordial battle, but the arrival of the λόγος to produce the final results of the battle between God and Satan.

Particularly important in view of Gen. 1:3 is that the φῶς is connected to the Word of God. It is not insignificant that John calls Jesus the λόγος in 1:1.<sup>32</sup> The correlation cannot be pressed too closely. Jesus is not created φῶς, but the Word of God, the creating φῶς, as

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<sup>30</sup>Hans Conzelmann, "φῶς" TDNT, 9:350-351.

<sup>31</sup>Morgan, "Fulfillment in the Fourth Gospel," p. 164.

<sup>32</sup>The connection is made by Achtemeier, "The Light of the World," pp. 439-440, and Borgen, "The True Light," p. 125.



1:9-10 underlines.

If Jesus is the  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  of the world (as both the Prologue and the Gospel itself state), then John is saying by his use of the term  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  that Jesus is revealed to mankind but men are blind to the revelation.<sup>33</sup> But in expressing unbelief in this manner, John carefully avoids equating darkness with unbelief. Unbelief is the outward manifestation of the powers of darkness; it is an active rejection of the  $\phi\omega\varsigma$ . Unbelief does not "snuff out" (1:5), it "rejects" (1:11).

Bultmann says:

If the proper self-understanding of man consists in understanding himself in relation to his origin, the illumination of his existence can only come from his origin, from his Creator.<sup>34</sup>

When the heavy baggage of existentialism is removed from the above statement, it reflects the connection between 1:5 and 1:10. One may view 1:10 as a restatement of 1:5 in more concrete terms: recognizing Jesus as the  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  is the same as believing; not seeing the  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  is the same as unbelief.

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<sup>33</sup>Hooker, "The Messianic Secret," p. 50.

<sup>34</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup>What Bultmann does, and what John would never agree to do, is to remove the content of the revelation. To John the content of the revelation is the purpose of the revelation itself. Notice that 1:18 states that Jesus has come to "exegete" or reveal the Father to us. He does this in concrete terms: Jesus has a mission to tell us who we are (sinners), who he is (God's unique Son and Savior),

Care must be taken to avoid identifying darkness with the sinfulness of mankind. Mankind is "in" darkness because of sin. This is why the φῶς has come to enlighten, φωτίσει (1:9). The enlightening of mankind becomes a restoration of that relationship with God which was lost in the fall into sin. Verses 12-13 are in support of such a statement, and Thomas in 20:29 might be said to have "seen the Light."

The Old Testament Torah is connected with φῶς in Ps. 119:105. This parallel has caused some scholars, among them Francis Glasson, to contend that Jesus as the φῶς of the world is being contrasted to the Torah in such a way that he is set against it, making this the main theme of the Gospel.

This is not John's thesis.<sup>38</sup> The suggestion is

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and who the Father is (not only Creator but instigator of saving grace).

<sup>36</sup>Wordsworth, "The Bodmer Papyrus," p. 7, views 1:1-5 as saying that creation has fallen away from the light and into darkness because of sin, and believes that Genesis 1-3 supports this.

<sup>37</sup>Francis T. Glasson, Moses in the Fourth Gospel, Studies in Biblical Theology Series (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1963), p. 63.

<sup>38</sup>Bultmann is one who argues against this approach. He believes that the lack of a definite article at 1:4 demonstrates that the Evangelist is not engaging in figurative speech; the use of ζῶν is not being compared to φῶς, but is the φῶς. The Torah, he notes is merely "a light." But Bultmann's argument is suspicious against his interest in demonstrating Gnostic influences on the Gospel, and parallels to the Torah would prove unsatisfactory to his

said to be supported by 1:17, but it is not. The identification of the  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  in the Prologue with the Torah as  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  in the Old Testament may be made only as one understands that the Torah was not the Law into which Judaism had made it. The Torah was the revelation of God to his people. Insofar as Judaism had perverted this message of revelation, the incarnate  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  was a contrast. The revelations, if understood properly, are complementary, not contradictory.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  both in John's Prologue and in the Gospel narratives centers in revelation. Jesus is  $\phi\omega\varsigma$  because he is uniquely qualified to enlighten mankind. It is impossible to divorce totally "light" from "life" in John's Gospel. John, in fact, identifies them in 1:4. Jesus is a "life-giving light" in the sense that he is the Redeemer. He comes to accomplish the work of salvation and to reveal himself to those trapped by the powers of darkness, 12:46 "I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me may not remain in darkness."

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argumentation. See Bultmann, The Gospel of John, pp. 40-42.

<sup>39</sup>Richardson and Painter support the parallels between the Torah and the Prologue. See Painter, John: Witness and Theologian, p. 40 and Richardson, The Gospel, p. 40. Pancaro is one of the better sources for a list of commentator's additional suggestions on possible sources for John's symbol of light. See Pancaro, The Law, p. 485.

<sup>40</sup>Achtemeier, "The Light of the World," p. 447.

Within the main body of the Gospel, the word φῶς appears frequently, continually supporting the Prologue's emphasis. Of primary significance for this overview is 8:12, not only because Jesus offers the believer the "light of life" (once again these two concepts are interwoven), but because he makes use of the formula ἐγώ εἰμι in making the absolute claim "I am the light of the world."<sup>41</sup> There can be no other light, and only the believer will understand this.

In summary, John's use of φῶς is part of his challenge to believe. The Prologue sketches for us the appearance of the φῶς as a revelation of God. The words of Jesus in the Gospel add to John's initial claims: Jesus as φῶς is absolute, and mankind is called upon to believe (8:12, 12:35 where the threat of darkness is specifically mentioned for those who do not believe, 12:36, and 12:46).

#### Truth as a Belief Concept in the Prologue

The third concept introduced to the reader by the Prologue is "truth" (ἀλήθεια). This word and its cognates appear at 1:9,14, and 17, and seem to be underlined implicitly throughout the Prologue.

Is this a Greek or Hebrew concept? John's background would seem to allow for a choice, and the choices

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<sup>41</sup>The significance of the appearance of ἐγώ εἰμι within the absolute claim should not be lost to the reader.

differ. James Boice adeptly summarizes the difference: Hebrew "truth" is not that which leads to wisdom but to moral integrity, while Greek "truth" is that which is trustworthy and leads to ultimate truth (more in keeping with the modern English concept of truth).<sup>42</sup>

To avoid unnecessary verbosity, one may summarize the discussion by noting that the vast majority of those who have studied the concept in John believe that he is expressing both languages with the term ἀλήθεια.<sup>43</sup>

John is not expressing the type of truth observable in human relationships. It is not a relative truth which drives men like Pilate to ask sarcastically "What is truth?" (18:38). It is viewed in absolute terms.

The Johannine concept of truth is religious. It is neither philosophical nor dogmatic, in that it is not concerned with logically demonstrated propositions and arguments but with following the revelation of God.<sup>44</sup>

It is this revelation of God which makes something

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<sup>42</sup>James Montgomery Boice, Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 62.

<sup>43</sup>Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," p. 33, states that John knew both concepts existed. There are notable exceptions to the contention that both concepts are in mind. Howard, Christianity, p. 184, believes that John primarily uses the Greek idiom, although 1:17 is nearer to the Hebrew. Kuyper, "Grace and Truth," p. 15, suggests that the Hebrew concept is more in terms of "faithfulness and reliability" and that John is fusing this with Greek "truth." Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, pp. 83-84, support Kuyper in this contention.

<sup>44</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 107.

true in the absolute sense.<sup>45</sup> Jesus as the revealer of God is the revealer of truth; in this way, John underlines salvation by inviting his readers to believe the truth and be saved. Although the words of Jesus are true, they are more than just true:

What John means is that Jesus' words partake of the nature of divine reality and that speaking the truth when applied to the ministry of Jesus really means the revelation of the divine reality to man. . . . [It means that] the truth proclaimed by Jesus as revelation is a saving truth and that consequently the revelation itself is a saving revelation.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the truth of salvation, ἀλήθεια carries with it a sense of fulfillment. Morgan has pointed out that John frequently makes use of the Greek adjective "true" (ἀληθίνος) to express that Jesus fulfills in himself those Old Testament themes of the "true Israel," "true vine" and "true light" which appear in John's Gospel.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, "ἀλήθεια," TDNT, 1:246.

<sup>46</sup> Boice, Witness, pp. 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, "Fulfillment in the Fourth Gospel," p. 161. Crehan, The Theology of St. John, pp. 31-32, has also noted this. There have been additional suggestions for the concept of truth in John, but many of these are weak because they fail to relate to the central purpose of the Gospel. Osborn, for example, says (of 1:17) that what Jesus revealed "was spiritual and moral greatness" which are particular attributes of "grace and truth" and that Jesus is "truth" versus the hypocrisy of mankind, which the Savior demonstrates by a blend of speech and action. See Osborn, "The Word Became Flesh," pp. 45-46. The present writer would see Osborn's emphasis on sanctification; John's emphasis is more toward justification. What Howard says, in following the idea of Osborn, is that in John truth ". . . is first the standard of knowledge and of

The primary emphasis of ἀλήθεια in John centers upon Jesus as divine reality and fulfillment of that which the Old Testament promised as revelation from God; it is in this sense that the Prologue calls Jesus the φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν (1:9) and he is said to be full of ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια (1:14).

The most important use of ἀλήθεια appears at 1:17, because in this verse the idea that ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια came through Jesus Christ is set in antithesis to Moses and the Torah.

Can this be saying that the Torah is not "true"? Certainly not! The Torah is "true" enough for John, but it is not "truth" in the sense that Jesus Christ is truth.

There are two ways in which the Torah is not equal to the revelation of God in Christ. The first of these is the common alteration of the meaning of Torah in John's day. After the Exile, the Jewish people had developed a law-oriented religion based upon the Torah. Judaism in John's day had seen the revelation of God in the Old Testament to be one primarily of rules and regulations, the keeping of which distinguished the Jew from the heathen.

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utterance and then the standard of action. There can be no discord between knowing and doing." Howard, Christianity p. 183. His statement is not in discord with John's theology; it is in discord with John's purpose in using the word ἀλήθεια. Jesus speaks (3:21) of "doing the truth" and 8:21 speaks of "doing my word." But contextually the emphasis in both cases is that "to do" is "to believe."

When John uses the term Torah (Greek "νόμος"), it is not impossible that the Jewish reader would understand by this term the revelation of God's grace in dealing with His people. It is probable that John has in mind here not the failure of Judaism to comprehend the gracious aspects of the Torah, but the rampant abuse of Judaism's neo-Orthodoxy which insisted that one had to develop an imagined righteousness to maintain the gracious relationship.

On 1:17, Severino Pancaro states:

In our estimation, however, to affirm that the parallelism is synthetical and not antithetical is to disregard the fact that God is said to have given the Law through Moses, but that ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια are said to have come through Jesus. If the words are taken at their face value, one must hold that Jn in no way implies that ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια also came to be through the Law.<sup>48</sup>

If John's use of νόμος is said to reflect the misunderstanding of the Torah within Judaism, the antithesis which John presents is understandable: the truth of Jesus Christ is in no way compatible with Judaism's legalism. There is little truth in turning the Old Testament into a legal system.

But it is important to note that 17:17 supports the concept of Torah as truth. Jesus says that his Father's word is truth. Thus it is doubtful that John is merely condemning Judaism.

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<sup>48</sup>Pancaro, The Law, pp. 539-540.



Boice believes that this demonstrates that the Old Testament is true in a way that cannot conflict with the truth of Jesus Christ as revelation of truth. He argues that "Your word is truth" also reflects the internal righteousness produced by a study of the Torah (compare Ps. 119:142), and concludes that truth is divine reality--the same reality in Jesus as in the Old Testament--but that the Old Testament is written revelation, whereas in Jesus Christ it is a living revelation.<sup>49</sup>

John is clearly being antithetical, but not at the expense of the Old Testament's value. Torah is not equal to Jesus Christ, but that does not negate its basic truthfulness and validity. In 14:6, Jesus makes the claim that he is absolute truth in a way that nothing else is: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>50</sup> Jesus does not invalidate the Old Testament. But in what sense can Jesus say that he is truth and that his Father's word also is truth?

The connection is made for us (5:39) clearly: the Old Testament is a revelation of Jesus Christ. Moses and the prophets are μαρτυροῦσαι to Jesus as the absolute truth. The Torah (as well as the entire Old Testament) is

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<sup>49</sup> Boice, Witness, pp. 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> The reader should carefully note that this claim to absolute truth is presented with the formula ἐγώ εἰμι.

truth because of what it reveals: God's grace made visible in his Son.

It is the study of the Torah and the supposed "internal righteousness" which this produces which is being denied in the Prologue, unless such a study leads properly to faith in Jesus Christ as the absolute truth. This is the purpose of the Scriptures, but such a purpose was not admitted by Jesus' adversaries (5:40).

There is nothing in the Prologue, nor in the words of Jesus which follow, which support Judaism's claims. The Old Testament never was and never could be what Judaism imagined it to be. It was as if those in darkness were insisting on calling darkness light and light darkness. In this sense, John challenges the perversion of the truth with his antithetical statement in the Prologue: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>51</sup>

The entire Fourth Gospel deals with the "absolute truth" about Jesus Christ. John cannot expect his readers to believe anything that is not true. But he intends more than to claim that Jesus' words are factual truth. Jesus is truth. This is a call to believe.

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<sup>51</sup> Painter, John: Witness and Theologian, pp. 46-48, notes this distinction, and is worthwhile reading. He points to the use of the word "true" in Jesus statement "I am the true Vine" as further evidence. Later Judaism had developed a lot of imagery, based upon the Old Testament and 2 Baruch 39:7, that the vine spoken of by Isaiah 5 to be Israel was altered so that the Messiah was looked upon as the vine who was the new, true Israel.

The ultimate truth for John is in knowing and believing who Jesus really is. He is a revelation from God; but he is more than that, because he himself is truth. He exceeds the revelation in the Old Testament, not in the sense that he contradicts what the Old Testament (and the Torah specifically) says, but because he is the revelation of God in the flesh.

It is this incarnate revelation to mankind which makes Jesus the absolute truth. God has caused the Torah to be written by Moses, and it is an accurate revelation. But it is also a shadow of the ultimate reality which has been revealed to us in the flesh, full of grace and truth (1:14).

Bultmann sees the phrase "grace and truth" in this way: grace is the gift and truth is the content of the gift.<sup>52</sup> If truth is seen to be a gift to mankind, it begins to parallel both ζωή and φῶς, for "life" is a gift from God as is the "light," and all three are gifts which come to us in the person of Christ.

John's use of the word ἀλήθεια in the Prologue is not immediately apparent. He calls Jesus the "true light" (1:9), says that Jesus is "full of grace and truth" (1:14) and finally puts Jesus as truth in antithesis to Moses and the Torah, in the sense that Jesus is the absolute

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<sup>52</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John, pp. 73-74.

revelation of God's grace. The full explanation of all of this is not forthcoming in the Prologue but in the Gospel.

Nevertheless, the reader of the Gospel has been given another challenge to believe what John has said about Jesus as the absolute truth.

#### The Prologue as a Series of Challenges to Believe

The Prologue contains merely eighteen verses, and yet it is a compact piece of theology. Not only has John stated that Jesus is God in the flesh, but has made use of at least three terms (probably more could be added) to support his challenge to the reader to believe.

The keystone of the Prologue, and in fact of the entire Gospel, is that Jesus Christ is God. But John wants more than mere belief that Jesus is God. The statement of purpose in 20:31 has spelled out clearly that his desire is that the reader have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In order for this to happen, the content of faith must be shaped not only by the facts about Jesus' divinity, but the implications as well.

These three key terms, ζωή, φῶς, and ἀλήθεια all provide substance to John's challenge to believe. It is within the context of Christ's divinity that Jesus is seen as a revelation to mankind, antithetical to Judaism's concept of the Torah, a gift which is sent for our redemption.

These terms are not wholesome and benign

philosophical ideas. They are the essence of Jesus himself, couched in expressions of human language; they are reflections of the incarnate gift himself.

That the three concepts overlap one another and become intertwined within the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel is due to their unified purpose of pointing to Christ. These three words are found with uncommon frequency in John because they are descriptive of the full meaning of the incarnation for the believer. Yet they are more than descriptions. They are calls to believe what they proclaim.

Although this thesis does not intend to investigate fully the predicated uses of the formula  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  in the Fourth Gospel, the appearances of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  in connection with each of these three concepts within the Gospel underline that "light," "life," and "truth" are more than of passing significance to John. They heighten the challenge to believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ROLE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND MOSES

Amid the claims of Jesus' divinity and the constant challenges to believe, the two figures of John the Baptist and Moses seem to be interlopers. The intervening sections concerning John the Baptist (1:6-8,15) have puzzled many, especially those scholars who have attempted to uncover a poetic arrangement within the Prologue.

At first glance, Moses is less prominent than John the Baptist. The only mention of him appears at 1:17. But there are a number of more subtle references to Moses in 1:14-18, as this chapter will demonstrate.

It will be the intention of this chapter to ascertain how these men fit into the Prologue's theology.

#### John the Baptist

A number of scholars have supposed that the insertion of John the Baptist into the Prologue is a polemical intrusion.<sup>1</sup> The suggestion can be dismissed quickly by a

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<sup>1</sup>Two such scholars are Kümmel, Theology of the New Testament, p. 281, and Richardson, The Gospel, p. 40. Such a position has not found extensive support in the last few years.

summary of C. K. Barrett's arguments: 1) there was a strong anti-Baptist movement in the second century, but none that we know of in the first century, 2) "It is true that in the Fourth Gospel John denies that he is the Christ; but no Christian ever believed that he was," and 3) John has presented John the Baptist in a way which fully agrees with the Synoptic materials, and there is no progressive denigration of John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of scholars today see John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus. This is in keeping with the text (1:6,7,8,15,20,23,27,29,32,34 and 36). The Evangelist stresses the Baptist's role again and again: he points to Jesus Christ as the One to whom the Old Testament has pointed.<sup>3</sup>

The historical narrative witness of John the Baptist to Jesus begins at 1:19. Why, then, does he appear in the Prologue as well? Morna Hooker suggests:

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<sup>2</sup>Barrett, The Prologue of St. John's Gospel, pp. 19-21.

<sup>3</sup>Is this an essential departure from the picture of John the Baptist portrayed in the Synoptics? Some say it is; among them is Hunter, The Gospel, p. 18. Harvey claims that in the Synoptics, John is a forerunner to prepare men's hearts for Jesus, and he serves as a sign of the dawning of a new age. Harvey, Jesus on Trial, p. 20. This does not mean that either the Synoptics or the Fourth Gospel have invented the figure they portray. John the Baptist is competent to "wear both hats," and the alteration of the Baptist's image is merely one of emphasis, and not one of invention.

Within the Prologue, the references to John the Baptist serve to link the subsequent historical statements with the metaphysical truths there outlined: they make clear that it is Jesus who is the true light . . . and who is the full revelation of God.<sup>4</sup>

But the Prologue's sections on John the Baptist likely serve more of a function than merely to make such a distinction; that distinction is made clearly enough in the verses which follow.

Rudolph Bultmann is correct that it is not the content of John's witness which is the crux of the Prologue passages; it is John the Baptist's purpose as a witness which is stressed.<sup>5</sup> This function of 1:6-8,15 would not deny the content of the proclamation; that content follows later in the chapter, and is of supreme importance for John's Gospel and John the Baptist's role.

John himself defines his role in 1:23, where he quotes from Isaiah 40:3. His denials of 1:20-21 to possible suggestions also serve to define his role, since the reader cannot intermingle the various possibilities.

The quote from Isaiah 40:3 is complementary to the

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<sup>4</sup>Morna Hooker, "John the Baptist and the Johannine Prologue," New Testament Studies 16 (July 1970), p. 358. Newman adds that 1:15's second interruption of the Prologue shows how important John considers John the Baptist to be. Newman, A Translator's Handbook p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>This, perhaps more than anything else, gives credence to the basic concept of Harvey's book, Jesus on Trial. That John is stressing the Baptist's witness to Jesus is beyond question. Why he does this so strongly may be explained within the legal structure of the day, as Harvey contends.



Synoptic picture of John's proclamation. From subsequent verses, it is made apparent that "making a straight path" is too general to give the full picture.

What is the nature of John the Baptist's witness? A variety of answers have been suggested, among them that he was witness to the specific historical event of the incarnation, that he witnessed about the role of Christ, that he was a witness to the divinity of Christ, and that he was a character witness to Jesus Christ in a legal sense.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Borgen, "Targumic Character," p. 292, believes that 1:6-18 is an application of 1:15 to the historical event of the incarnation. If this is correct, John the Baptist becomes a witness to the incarnation of the λόγος. One is tempted to ask "In what way?" Modern mankind must keep in mind that as a witness to such an event, the Baptist would be basing his testimony not on empirical data, but on inspiration. Such a witness would receive more credence from the first century citizen than it would likely receive today. As a witness to the role of Christ (suggested by Hooker, "John the Baptist," p. 356), John would naturally tend to deny such a role for himself (which he does in 1:20); in this way the intrusions within the Prologue point forward to what follows. John Howton, "'Son of God' in the Fourth Gospel," New Testament Studies 10 (January 1962):234, centers his comments in 1:34, contending that the statement that Jesus is the "Son of God" demonstrates John understood Jesus to be more than the Messiah, but witnesses thereby to his divinity as well. This analysis is well in tune with the theology of the Prologue. Finally, Harvey, Jesus on Trial, pp. 32-33, takes into account the legal aspects of witnessing in the ancient east, claiming that it was not the evidence but witness to the character of a person which was important. John the Baptist becomes an important witness in light of this information, according to Harvey, because "he was sent by God" and could appeal to God as the source of his information.

There is a certain value to each of the suggestions listed. Especially germane to this thesis is the suggestion that Jesus is the Son of God, which 1:34 clearly proclaims. What is not at once clear is what such a statement means, especially to one who is reading the first chapter for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

It would seem that, of all the passages in which John the Baptist proclaims Jesus, the clearest and most startling statement lies in 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God. . . ." It is not merely the instantaneous connection with the Jewish Passover which catches the eye here. John says that he is the Lamb ὁ αἵρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου.

No Messiah of Judaism, no Gnostic Revealer, no concept within the minds of the hearers bore such a task. This is a statement which is at once both clear and astonishing. It is a witness to God in the flesh (the λόγος incarnate), the deity of Christ. It is this which John wants his readers to understand and believe, because it is this belief which gives eternal life.

Furthermore, the disciples are introduced to the reader at 1:35-51 not only as corroborating witnesses to John the Baptist's testimony, but because they are examples

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<sup>7</sup>Eduard Schweitzer, "υἱός," TDNT, 8:387-388, presents a development of the term's meaning within the Johannine literature, but the meaning is evinced from a thorough study both of the passages in which it is used and the context of these passages throughout.

of the desired reaction to John's testimony (1:40,45).

Admittedly, 20:31 says specifically "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," but by that time the reader has a better idea of what John means by "Son of God." John the Baptist supports the call to believe (20:31) with his testimony (1:34), but the true nature of such a witness is made clear through the outrageous claim of 1:29: "He takes away" (or "forgives") "the sins of the world."<sup>8</sup>

To summarize, John the Baptist is brought into the discussion both in the Prologue and the narrative portion of the first chapter because of his value as a witness to Jesus. Such a witness must not be understood as the provider of empirical evidence.<sup>9</sup> He is the witness to the object (or content) of belief in Jesus as God Incarnate and Savior of the world. He offers no "proof" (in the modern sense) for Jesus' divinity. The Evangelist provides for his readers not only the nature of his witness (1:29, 34) but also shows that the witness was effective (1:37).

Examination of John the Baptist as a character reference reveals that the content of his witness was quite substantial, and that 1:29 should not be taken lightly.

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<sup>8</sup>See Morris, The Gospel, p. 148, for a fuller development of the meaning of the verb  $\alpha\lambda\omega$ .

<sup>9</sup>H. Strathmann, " $\mu\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\upsilon\varsigma$ ," TDNT, 4:498, makes clear that John's use of "witness" does not take into account the factuality or historicity of events, but is used to emphasize the nature and significance of Christ's person.

Someone who can "take away the sins of the world" does not fit into the categories of rabbi, prophet or faith healer. For all the modern, highly developed Christology at our command, one must not mistakenly assume this statement fell upon ears which could not appreciate its value.

John the Baptist is corroborating the claims made in the Prologue to the divinity of Christ. His eye witness account substantiates the Evangelist's claims for Jesus.

For the writer of this Gospel, John the Baptist is important enough to be mentioned twice in the Prologue. The reason for John the Baptist's importance lies not only in the content of his witness, but in the fact that his mission corresponds directly with the mission perceived by the Evangelist himself: "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you might have life in his name." This was the life's work of John the Baptist.

The Baptist's message supports the Evangelist's purpose precisely because they proclaim the same message. John the Baptist is more than a witness; he is a fellow evangelist.

#### Moses

Moses' name appears only a dozen times in the Fourth Gospel, but such a statistic belies the importance of this Old Testament figure for the theology of John.

The only appearance of his name in the Prologue is 1:17. But the number of Exodus-event references even in the Prologue is substantial enough that Hooker has claimed this Gospel has a twofold theme: "Christ as the revelation of God's glory, and as the fulfillment of the Torah, to which Moses only pointed forward."<sup>10</sup>

Ellis has confirmed this point of view by appealing to rabbinic claims for the Torah in light of the Prologue:

There can be little doubt that John deliberately presented Jesus as the new Torah who fulfilled and superseded the Jewish law. This impression is confirmed by the discovery that John's description of the Logos and the relation of the Logos to God is remarkably similar to what the rabbis said about the Torah. For example, the Torah was regarded as pre-existent, in the bosom of God from the beginning, and the agent of God in creation.<sup>11</sup>

And Meeks notes that Philo's treatment of Moses and the Torah is typical of the Hellenistic Jewish community's habit of providing Moses with supra-human dignity.<sup>12</sup>

If one is to understand the role of Moses in the Prologue properly, it is imperative to note not only that

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<sup>10</sup>Hooker, "Messianic Secret," p. 55.

<sup>11</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, pp. 26-27.

<sup>12</sup>Meeks, "The Divine Agent," pp. 45-49. Williamson makes a comparison of Jesus' humanity and divinity with Philo's treatment of Moses, and finds many similarities, including giving Moses a "second birth" which makes him just short of God himself. Perhaps his most interesting statement is that Philo becomes caught in a dichotomy in his writing: he tries to make Moses a god while knowing that God cannot become a man. See R. Williamson, "Philo and New Testament Christology," Expository Times 90 (September 1979):364.

Moses appears at 1:17, but that the purpose of 1:17 grammatically is to explain 1:16. This is to be noted by the use of ὅτι which begins 1:17.

Verse 17 presents to the reader a contrast between Jesus and Moses. For the analysis of the contrast and an understanding of John's distinction of Moses and Jesus, 1:16 must be consulted.

If the direction of modern scholarship is a key to the understanding of this verse, the last three words bear the closest scrutiny: χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος. The meaning of these words has caused considerable consternation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>For the reader who wishes to see an overview of some of the suggestions offered, the following is provided: Martin Luther, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, in Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 22, trans. Martin H. Bertram, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 135, translated the phrase "Gnade um Gnade." However, in his sermons on John, he emphasizes the aspect of Christ's "fulness" (πληρώματος) and suggests that this phrase indicates two types of grace: Christ's (his fullness) and our own (which we draw from Christ's).

Calvin, The Gospel According to St. John vol. 4, p. 24, suggests two possibilities for the phrase: the preposition could be considered "comparatively, as if he said that whatever graces God heaps upon us flow equally from this source. It could be taken as indicating the final purpose of God in that we receive grace now that God may at last finish the work of our salvation, which will be the completion of grace."

Neither of these two great reformers seem to have had a firm conviction of the meaning of the phrase; if they did, it remains a secret.

Many a modern-day scholar has fared no better. Barrett, The Gospel of John and Judaism, p. 26, suggests that John's readers would also have had trouble with this phrase because it is too brief to give the author's meaning clearly. He nonetheless suggests that a possible meaning

The phrase χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος, in its most natural and apparent use means "grace in place of grace," the general sense centering on a replacement of some kind. Frequent attempts to alter the basic sense are unconvincing.<sup>14</sup>

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is "new grace is given instead of old, so that one is always dependent on nothing other than grace."

Bultmann, The Gospel of John, p. 78, in a footnote, denies Barrett's suggestion; it cannot mean that Jesus is replacing Old Testament grace, although he admits that ἀντὶ means "instead of." It must mean that the Revealer is inexhaustibly unfolded in everchanging variety. Bultmann's suggestion is Gnostic in nature and meaningless textually, but it does heighten the difficulty in translation at this point.

Sanders and Mastin, A Commentary, pp. 84-85, suggest "grace instead of grace" because of the contextual contrast between Moses and Jesus; they add, however, that we should not be so dogmatic as to forget that all of God's dealings with mankind are gracious.

Robertson, The Divinity, p. 45, suggests "grace for grace," meaning the new grace takes the place of the old.

Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 1:28, believes that correspondence rather than substitution is indicated, which means Christians receive grace from the grace.

Brown, The Gospel According to John, 1:16, notes that one of the recognized meanings for the word is "in return for," and this should be included in any translator's consideration, but this does not allow for the concept of the Hebrew word תּוּבָהּ.

Morris, The Gospel, pp. 110-111, does a masterful job of working almost every suggestion into the thought pattern, but he includes an indication that the plain meaning is "grace instead of grace."

The foregoing should be ample demonstration that there is no agreement on the translation of this little phrase. One of the most common problems associated with commentaries on this verse is the failure of the authors to take into account the context.

<sup>14</sup>This is especially true of the suggestion that it means here "grace after grace" or "grace upon grace" as though the piling up of grace is intended. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A

What is more, such attempts are unnecessary. It is preferable to begin with the clear sense of the term and see if this meshes with the analogy of Scripture.

If John is saying "grace in place of grace," how can this be explained? First one must note that it does not say "grace in place of law." Since the law is specifically mentioned in 1:17, either John is not making a reference to 1:17, he is contradicting himself, or he does not use "grace" and "law" as terms which are mutually exclusive.

It is this last option which holds the most promise, and which can be supported substantially from the text of the Prologue. The problem lies in what John means by νόμος (law).

What was given through Moses? The Judaism of John's day believed that Moses was the great law-giver, who had revealed to God's people the necessity of keeping all the ceremonial and religious laws (codified and enforced to some extent by the Jewish leaders). But this is Judaism's expression of the Old Testament.

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translation and adaption of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur, 4th ed. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 73, who make this suggestion. The difficulty in accepting the suggestion lies in the quote from Philo in which ἀντί is used in such a convoluted way that Philo's sentence goes to great lengths to make it clear that he is not using the term in the normal way. John gives us no such indication in the Prologue.



What was given through Moses was primarily not law but Torah. As in English, Greek has difficulty with the proper rendering of the Hebrew term  $\eta\lambda\eta\theta$ . What God intended as his gracious revelation had been reduced by Judaism to legalism.<sup>15</sup>

If the intent of 1:17 is "Torah" and not "law," then the reference in 1:16 to "grace instead of grace" allows us to note that John is expressing "the grace of Jesus Christ in place of (or instead of) the grace of the Torah."

If this is a correct understanding of 1:16, the implications for the Prologue follow along these lines: the gracious revelation of God through Moses and the Torah was not legalism, but true grace. No matter how gracious, it was only a shadow of the grace to come. The fulness of grace (note  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$  in 1:16a) has come through Jesus Christ. This is why THE grace and THE truth are through Jesus (1:17b). Grace and truth are expressed in absolutes, not because the Torah was not true or an act of grace, but because the fulness of truth and the fulness of God's grace can only be seen in the person of the incarnate  $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ .

Ellis comes close to such a conclusion when he says

The conclusion is unavoidable that John is introducing the  $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  as the one who transcends the Torah, for he

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<sup>15</sup> See pp. 151-154 above.

is God's final Word to men, one who not only declares the truth with authority and finality but who exhibits it in his life. He has come to reveal the Father, not simply to interpret the Torah or to set up a new one.<sup>16</sup>

Such an interpretation is supported by other references within the Prologue to the figure of Moses, and the entire Exodus experience.<sup>17</sup>

Verse 14 is one of the most important verses in the Prologue in connection with this because of two strong references to Exodus. The first is the use of the verb ἐσκήνωσεν, "he pitched his tent among us."<sup>18</sup> No Jew would miss the reference to the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the yearly celebrations of this event.

The Tabernacle was one of the most gracious events of the Old Testament era, because it was a demonstration that God lived among his people. The vitriolic attack on the Temple cult made by Stephen in Acts 7 points to the perversion which Judaism had engendered. Israel had wanted the Temple; God had asked only for a Tabernacle so that he

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<sup>16</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, pp. 26-27.

<sup>17</sup>Harrison, "A Study of John 1:14," p. 35, notes that looking for Exodus references in the Prologue was apparently a favorite pastime of many early Christians.

<sup>18</sup>Glasson, Moses in the Fourth Gospel, p. 65. He notes that perhaps John used "tabernacled" because its Hebrew root is related to the Shekinah of God. To the Jews, the Tabernacle meant that God was living with them, and the use of "tabernacle" in the Prologue would, in effect, say that Jesus is God living with us.

might go with his people wherever they went.<sup>19</sup>

The reference to glory (δόξαν) at 1:14 is connected with this. The gracious presence of God in the Old Testament was expressed as Shekinah. Smoke had filled the tabernacle when it was dedicated (Ex. 40:34). John's purpose in his choice of verbs at 1:14 can have no other purpose than to call to mind this great event.<sup>20</sup>

Exodus 33 dare not be overlooked. Moses (33:18) begs to see God's glory. God's response was "No." Notice 33:20, "Man cannot see me and live," versus John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time." Yet 1:14 says "we saw his glory."<sup>21</sup>

These references make it clear that 1:17 is offering a contrast. But the contrast is not "grace in place of law" but "grace in place of grace." The entire dealings of

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<sup>19</sup> See especially Martin Scharlemann, Stephen: A Singular Saint, Analecta Biblica 34 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968), pp. 117-128.

<sup>20</sup> Although Richardson agrees that Exodus is partly in mind, there is some reason to believe that there is a strong reference to the promise in Exekiel 37:27 that God would again tabernacle with his people. Richardson, The Gospel, p. 43. He asks us to note also Rev. 21:3.

<sup>21</sup> Even at that, Moses' face shone brightly when he came down from the mountain (see Ex. 34:29-35). This reference has caused some to suppose that 1:14 is a veiled reference to the Transfiguration (which John otherwise does not mention). In the opinion of the present writer, this is possible, but unnecessary for the direction of John's thought. M. E. Boismard, St. John's Prologue, trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957), p. 135, is one who suggests the Transfiguration.

God with his people in the Old Testament were based upon grace, not upon laws and temples and merit as Judaism supposed.

Moses and the Torah were "true;" Jesus is TRUTH. Moses and the Torah were signs of God's gracious dealings with his people; Jesus is GRACE in the flesh. Moses saw God's Shekinah in the form of a cloud of smoke; we see it in the incarnation of the λόγος. Moses was refused a look at God; we get to see Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

Someone may correctly point out that John agrees with what Exodus says: "No one has ever seen God" (1:18)-- almost agrees, that is. For 1:14 does not say "we saw his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father." That is what one might expect. The word "son" is not there. In 1:18, the manuscript evidence bears witness to the fact that some scribes finally were overcome with the omission of "son" and put it into the text.<sup>23</sup>

John's words are (1:14) that we saw "the glory of an only one of a father" and (1:18) although "no one has seen God," "the only GOD who is in the bosom of the Father

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<sup>22</sup>It is good to remember that the basic meaning of the verb θεάομαι is a physical seeing with the eyes. This coincides with John's immediate emphasis (1:14) that he is an eyewitness to the incarnate λόγος.

<sup>23</sup>Although μονογενής can be translated "only-begotten" (as in the KJV), the emphasis is not on birth, but on "uniqueness."

has declared him."

Have we seen God or not? Moses did not. Moses saw God's love, but not his face. What grace God showed to Moses and to his chosen people throughout every page of the Old Testament! They saw the plagues in Egypt, the pillars of smoke and fire, the manna, the cloud in the Tabernacle, the miracles of deliverance, the many offers of gracious forgiveness. They saw the glory of God in the Torah. But they never saw God.

Thomas did. He said "My Lord and my God" (20:28). John did. He tells us that the Word was God (1:1) and became flesh and WE saw his glory (1:14).

#### Drawing Conclusions

John the Baptist and Moses are two individuals who make an apparent intrusion into the grandeur of the Prologue. The so-called intrusion is not slight: John the Baptist is mentioned in two different places and Moses, mentioned but once, is implied in several places. Their presence has caused some to point to an edited text because of the apparent break in the theological argument.

There is no disruption of John's message. These two figures reinforce the argument that Jesus is God incarnate. John the Baptist appears as a witness, and his witness (as we have seen) reaches its height in 1:29, where he calls Jesus the one who "takes away the sins of the

world." This is a feat beyond the capabilities of a man. (As we develop the intent of the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι*, we will see some nuances also in John's denials about who he is at 1:20.)

Moses had been a high point in Israel's history, but even he (Deut. 18:15) pointed to someone far greater than himself. He was not allowed to see God's face, but we are (1:18). Moses provided manna through God's miraculous intervention, but Jesus himself fed the multitude (6:1-13).<sup>24</sup> Moses built the tabernacle, but Jesus moved in (1:14. Also note that much of what Jesus said in the narrative portion of the Gospel was during Feasts connected with the yearly celebration of the Exodus event; see 5:1 and 7:2). Moses was the giver of the Torah, but Jesus brought the grace and the truth of God (1:14,17) in absolute terms.

John wrote his Gospel so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ. The Jews believed that the Christ would be a new Moses, and indeed had gone beyond the Old Testament to develop all kinds of beliefs in their longed-for Messiah. John needs to challenge this concept and provide us with the truth about Moses in relation to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps John intended to spell out the differences

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<sup>24</sup>One notes the transitory nature of manna in contrast to the Bread of Life offered in the dialogue which follows.

between Jesus and Moses so that many of the misplaced beliefs about Moses could be seen: Moses is not God, Jesus is! And the witness of John the Baptist also includes a denial that he is on a par with Christ (note especially 6:45-58).

The second thing that was necessary was to provide witnesses. John says "Jesus is God." The reaction of many to such a claim would be "Who says so?" John tells us. John the Baptist said so. And Moses said so also, but more indirectly. (That John has Deut. 18:15 in mind can be seen at 1:21.)

Therefore, both John the Baptist and Moses serve to point to Jesus as the only proper content of faith. Not only are they witnesses THAT Jesus is the Christ, but they also are careful witnesses to WHAT the Christ is.

Frequently the arguments are extensive about whether John is expressing "fulfillment" or "replacement" in 1:16. The use of ἀντί in 1:16 indicates replacement and πληρώματος indicates fulfillment. It is pointless to argue one side against the other.

Does he replace Moses? Yes. But not in the sense that Moses is neither true nor Christian. To talk about fulfillment versus replacement avoids the central issue: Jesus is the focal point of all Scripture. Both John and Moses point to Jesus as the Absolute One, compared with which everything else is less (John the Baptist, in fact,

says precisely that in 1:30. The words could just as well be said by Moses, Deut. 18:15.<sup>25</sup> And Jesus said this about himself in relation to Abraham--8:58).

Jesus is not a new beginning. He is not a replacement for Moses, as though Moses and the Torah had served no purpose. Jesus was the point of Scripture from the very beginning. Moses had understood God's grace and proclaimed it. So had John the Baptist. Many had heard this, but few had listened.

John is not throwing out Moses, the Old Testament, the Torah, and everything else that goes with them. He is reinterpreting them in the light of the absolute truth which had always been the truth. John needs to start over completely with a Messiah not found in Judaism's interpretation of the Old Testament. And so he begins, "In the beginning. . . ."

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<sup>25</sup>Deuteronomy 18:15-18 emphasizes that the Coming Prophet will be both "from" the people and "like" God. The full implications of such a statement were missed by Judaism.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE POSSIBLE BACKGROUNDS OF ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ

The Fourth Gospel uses *ἐγώ εἰμι* far more frequently than other New Testament books, and in an earlier chapter it was demonstrated that John intends something special by the use of this formula. Before determining John's meaning, it will be appropriate to investigate the possible sources of the phrase. These may shed light upon the purpose and, ultimately, the meaning of the *ἐγώ εἰμι*s within the Gospel.

Where did John get this phrase? The suggested possibilities range from the author's invention, to the Old Testament, to Jesus himself, to Gnosticism.<sup>1</sup> A brief analysis of the major possibilities against the text of the Fourth Gospel will lead to some conclusions.

#### Gnostic Sources

Jesus is the Revealer. John tells us that He has come to "exegete the Father" (1:18). Throughout the Gospel, the use of *ἐγώ εἰμι* is easily connected to the theme

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<sup>1</sup>The list of suggestions hardly has an end. Some of the more unlikely ones include Philo, Qumran, and the Isis cult in Egypt.

of revelation (or perhaps even a "special" knowledge which Jesus alone has--14:6 for example). This emphasis is supported by the previous discussion on life, light and truth.<sup>2</sup>

Most Gnostic systems have as their basis the notion that the Revealer has come to impart secret knowledge to those who are capable of grasping the information. It is no wonder, then, that the connection between Gnosticism and John is frequently attempted, for this sounds vaguely like the theme of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

One must ask from the outset "Does Gnosticism use the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  in the manner of John?" A number of Gnostic documents contain the phrase.<sup>4</sup> PHEME PERKINS categorizes three types of Gnostic  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$ s: 1) the monotheistic claim of Isaiah 43 is shown to be a perverted boast of a god who does not know the source of his own power, 2) the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  statement by the female revealer to identify herself and draw her own to their home and 3) paradox and contradiction types to stress the universality of the Gnostic revealer, a use which he states is unique to

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<sup>2</sup>Chapter VI, pp. 138-156.

<sup>3</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 98, says that Greek philosophy and the religious cults could both understand the claim of Jesus to bring true revelation.

<sup>4</sup>The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and the Gospel of Thomas for example.

Gnosticism.<sup>5</sup>

The first of the categories violates the message of John, but the last two bear some resemblances to John's theology. Jesus is hardly a "female revealer," but his intent is to give eternal life (11:25). The universality of Jesus as revealer is also seen within John, as 1:4,9 underline his role as the creator and illuminator of all mankind (perhaps not in a "paradox and contradiction" style in the sense in which Perkins intends). But these similarities are insufficient evidence to make a positive connection between Gnosticism and John. For every similarity there are several dissimilarities.<sup>6</sup>

The Gospel of Thomas, as one of the best preserved and earliest Gnostic documents, has received a great deal of attention as a vehicle for demonstrating the connection between John and Gnosticism. The difficulty in accepting

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<sup>5</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 105. George W. MacRae, "The Ego-Proclamation in Gnostic Sources" in The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in honor of C. F. D. Moule, ed. Ernst Bammel, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, number 13 (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1970), p. 123, notes that Gnosticism was fascinated with the Is. 43:10-11 passage: "I am God and there is no other." Gnosticism, according to MacRae, makes extensive use of this passage.

<sup>6</sup>Judith M. Lieu, "Gnosticism and the Gospel of John," Expository Times 90 (May 1979), pp. 235-236, points out that there are elements in John that would and would not [her emphasis] fit Gnosticism. John's Gospel holds a tension in its theology which is consistent. It is impossible to say that Gnostic sources have caused part of this tension, since the elements in the Fourth Gospel are all essential parts of its structure and its thought.

the suggestion lies primarily with the fact that the Gospel of Thomas is a second century document. It is more likely that John has influenced the Gospel of Thomas, and not vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

Additional difficulties are evident in the way in which the Gnostic documents use the *ἐγώ εἰμι*. It is seen frequently as a polemical tool against the misappropriation of power by the Old Testament god. John has no such use. Within the Fourth Gospel the *ἐγώ εἰμι*s are used to reveal a truth in positive terms. Jesus is the *ἐγώ εἰμι* who proclaims his power and ability. If anything, Jesus' use of the term is more in keeping with what the Gnostics see in the Old Testament as a misappropriation.

Throughout John, his theology runs counter to any known Gnostic system. John is in antithesis to docetic Gnosticism, because Jesus shed real blood and is antithetical to Cerinthian Gnosticism because Jesus and Christ are one and the same.<sup>8</sup>

Earle Ellis has proposed the following response to

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<sup>7</sup>This contention is supported by Raymond E. Brown, "The Gospel of Thomas and St. John's Gospel," New Testament Studies 9 (January 1963):174, who states, "We believe that G Th does show some contact with ideas and vocabulary such as those found in John," but concludes, p. 177, that the document is from an intermediary source which made use of John. MacRae, "The Ego-Proclamation," p. 132, notes that the Gospel of Thomas is probably independent of the New Testament usage of *ἐγώ εἰμι* and may be using what was already in the second century a traditional form.

<sup>8</sup>Robertson, The Divinity, pp. 34-35.

the suggestion of a Gnostic connection with John:

The resemblances between John and Gnosticism are more likely a verbal bridge by which John expresses his essential antagonism to gnostic-type thought.<sup>9</sup>

The present writer would disagree. Ellis has given too much credence to the notion that John has Gnosticism in mind. John does not say, nor does he hint, that his purpose is to demonstrate that Gnosticism is a corruption of the Christian message, but to present twenty one chapters of positive witness to Christ. To give Gnosticism credit for the content of John's Gospel is to assume that Gnosticism was such a threat to the Church of John's day that he was forced to formulate a polemical document.

That incipient, or Proto-, Gnosticism existed is demonstrated by Paul's letter to the Colossians. But John's Gospel is so diametrically opposed to any Gnostic system that he need not bother to point this out to the reader. John presents the Christian Gospel; he is an evangelist. If Gnosticism suffers as a result, so be it. But John's purpose is primarily a positive, not negative, one.

Alan Richardson more nearly expresses the conclusion held by the present writer when he says that recent Gnostic discoveries tend to show that Gnosticism

. . . was more pathetically and crudely fantastic even than Irenaeus and other ancient Christian writers had

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<sup>9</sup>Ellis, The World of St. John, p. 23. As an example, he suggests the term γνῶσις which does not appear in John.

depicted it. . . . The representation of St John as either a Christianized Gnostic or Jewish sectarian becomes less and less credible.<sup>10</sup>

#### Mandaean Gnosticism

A brief comment must be reserved for the suggestion that Mandaean Gnosticism is somehow connected with the use of *ἐγώ εἰμι* in John.

It is not the value of such a suggestion so much as the stature of the man who suggests it which forces the Johannine specialist to take note. The suggestion's originator and main proponent is Rudolph Bultmann, who is supported strongly by Eduard Schweizer.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the criticism leveled against the general suggestion of Gnosticism may be repeated here.

The arguments purported to demonstrate this connection are extremely complex, and trace a line through Palestine, Syria and the Peshitta, to modern day Iran. The arguments are drawn on parallels and various claims of a small group of modern day Mandaeans.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Richardson, The Gospel, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Bultmann, The Gospel of John. The reader should note the index, page 739, for a complete list of references to the Mandaean connection with the Fourth Gospel. See also Eduard Schweizer, Ego Eimi...Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johannesichen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1939).

<sup>12</sup>Schweizer, Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft, p. 51. Much of this suggestion rests upon the premise that

The telling fault of the suggestion comes from Schweizer himself: he must admit that the Mandaean literature, as we have it today, was compiled in the eighth century by a sect which is only found in Southern Babylon.<sup>13</sup>

To put the proper perspective on the suggestion, one must understand that the claim is being made that the Gospel of John has its roots in Persian mythology, and the proofs are documents written seven hundred years after the fact!

The suggestion is losing favor today, not only because of its radical nature, but because the lack of valid historical evidence speaks against it. In addition, the suggestion is unnecessary. Other sources are better connected to John's time and background.<sup>14</sup>

There are some parallels to the Mandaean literature. But religions of the world cannot avoid superficial parallels, and the Mandaean "source" has little else to recommend it.

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a polemic against John the Baptist lies behind the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. The Mandaeans apparently were overly fascinated by the character of the Baptist, and made him somewhat of a hero. Schweizer admits, p. 53, that this issue is not as clear to him as it is to Bultmann.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>Zimmermann, "Das Absolute" (2 Teil), p. 271 notes that an examination of Old Testament, late-Jewish, and rabbinic sources shows that Mandaean literature is not needed to explain the absolute  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\tau\varsigma$ .

Other Non-Jewish Sources

A substantial number of cults and religions in the Middle East make use of an ἐγὼ εἰμι formulation.<sup>15</sup> In nearly every case, the words ἐγὼ εἰμι are used in connection with a special heavenly revelation.

Many of the uses predate the New Testament. Darius of Persia, for example, uses ἐγὼ to acknowledge his divine calling as the king of the world, a title given to him by Mazda.<sup>16</sup> The formulations vary, some using ἐγὼ εἰμι, some only ἐγὼ, but all with the intent of self-glorification.

As another example, the Isis cult in Egypt became Hellenized during the first century, and steles are extant in which ἐγὼ εἰμιs play a major part.<sup>17</sup>

How much such cults permeated the philosophical and religious thinking of John's time is questionable. It is probably true, as Perkins suggests, that one could know the basic tenets of the cult without belonging to it.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Stauffer, "Εγὼ," TDNT, 2:343-346, is perhaps the best survey of the various groups which make use of the ἐγὼ εἰμι phrase.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>17</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 103. See also Adolph Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 138, for a reproduction of a section of one of the Isis steles containing the formula.

<sup>18</sup>Perkins, The Gospel According to St. John, p.103.



The  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  formula does not occur in classical Greek literature. Such a phenomenon suggests that its meaning was restricted to the religious sphere.<sup>19</sup>

Was John indebted in some fashion to these various cults? The following reasons are offered in denial: 1) there are no examples of the use of the absolute (non-predicated)  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  in Hellenistic sources.<sup>20</sup> Although predicated uses appear both in John and in Hellenistic cults, it is John's use of the absolute  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$  which is disconcerting to many. Its meaning cannot be derived from the predicated uses. John's unique absolute use is the key to understanding the predicated uses. 2) To assume John's primary source for the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\iota$ s is Hellenistic would be more acceptable if there were no other possibility. John is not a Greek--he is a Jew, born and raised in Palestine, and undoubtedly trained in the Old Testament, as his Semitic Greek reveals. His opening verse betrays his background. John is not ignorant of the Hellenistic world, but he is primarily a Jew with a Jewish mind and a Jewish

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<sup>19</sup>G. Braumann, "I Am," in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, gen. ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols., trans. from the German (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:278.

<sup>20</sup>Harner, The "I Am", pp. 27-29, has a lengthy discussion about the lack of the absolute use in Hellenistic literature and concludes that the Hellenistic world was unfamiliar with the absolute use; he rejects it as a source on these grounds.

religious background.<sup>21</sup> 3) The purpose of John's ἐγὼ εἶμις is different from Hellenistic usage. It goes far beyond mere self-glorification, but reveals promises of salvation as well. The parallels in the ancient world do not approach such a use, and cannot serve to enlighten the Fourth Gospel.<sup>22</sup>

The Hellenistic parallels are not true parallels, because the usage is different. Given the background of the Evangelist, the most logical place to search for parallels is the Old Testament.

#### Possible Old Testament Sources

Does the Old Testament provide possible parallels to John's use of ἐγὼ εἶμις? The answer is clearly yes. Not so clear in the mind of scholars is the precise location of a suitable reference.

Two major and compelling suggestions divide those who search: both Exodus and Isaiah are seen as direct links to John's use of the absolute ἐγὼ εἶμις.

On first glance, Exodus 3:14 seems to be the most

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<sup>21</sup>Culpepper, "The Pivot," p. 21, says that Philo's true value lies in demonstrating conceptual materials which were readily available to first-century Jewish thought. The present writer notes that it was Philo's intent to wed Jewish and Hellenistic thinking, but Philo doesn't use ἐγὼ εἶμις in the manner of John.

<sup>22</sup>Feuillet, Johannine Studies, p. 85. He notes that although some sense may be made of these ἐγὼ εἶμις by the Greek mind, their use is not primarily Greek.

compelling source for John's ἐγώ εἰμις. William Beck translates the last part of the verse this way: "Tell Israel: 'I AM sends me to you.'"<sup>23</sup> This is the name of God, given to Moses at his request, and verse 15 emphasizes "This is my name forever."

The Hebrew behind this translation "I AM" is אֲנִי. Its translation as "I am" is a reasonably certain rendering of the word, and would seem to settle the issue in all respects. Martin Noth points out the similarity with the divine name:

This name unmistakably hints at the divine name Yahweh in so far as an Israelite ear could immediately understand the transition from ehyeh to yahweh merely as a transition from the first to the third person (in which the w of yahweh in place of the y of ehyeh may have been felt as dissimilation after the initial y) so that the name Yahweh would be understood to mean 'he is'. Verse 15 explicitly puts forward this connection by inserting the name Yahweh for the ehyeh of v. 14.<sup>24</sup>

The connection between John's ἐγώ εἰμις and Exodus 3:14 is the most natural, and may be made easily by the layman whose English translation avoids the supplying of predicates to John's absolute ἐγώ εἰμις.

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<sup>23</sup> William Beck, The Holy Bible, An American Translation (New Haven, Missouri: Leader Publishing Company, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> Martin Noth, Exodus: A Commentary, trans. J. S. Bowden, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 43. Manson, Jesus, relates that this formula is one which was once described by a preacher as "doubling back on itself as though waiting for some mysterious incarnation."

If the Septuagint (referred to as LXX from this point) had translated the Hebrew phrase אהיה אשר אהיה as ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐγὼ εἰμι, nothing further would need to be said. But the LXX translation is ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὦν. And in 3:14b, the translation of אהיה is ὁ ὦν. The appearance of ὁ ὦν casts doubt upon the connection of ἐγὼ εἰμι with Exodus 3:14.

Friedrich Büchsel notes that ὁ ὦν is a deliberate abstraction, in keeping with the sense of the Hebrew אהיה אשר אהיה, but he holds that the LXX translation is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew text.<sup>25</sup>

Philip Harner is one of many who point to Isaiah as the source for John's use of ἐγὼ εἰμι, because the LXX text of Isaiah contains this use of ἐγὼ εἰμι.<sup>26</sup>

Isaiah 43:10 is of greatest importance for the suggestion of an Isaiah source (although ἐγὼ εἰμι occurs six times from Is. 40-55). The Hebrew behind the ἐγὼ εἰμι is אֲנִי הוּא, which means literally "I he."

In this verse, Yahweh is making clear that in relation to the other so-called gods, he is the only one who exists. David Daube believes that אֲנִי הוּא means "I am the

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<sup>25</sup>Büchsel, "εἰμι, ὁ ὦν," TDNT, 2:398. He notes that the only time in which ὁ ὦν is used as the name of God in the New Testament is in Revelation. He adds the term is purposely undeclineable.

<sup>26</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 60.

Absolute" and not "I am this or that."<sup>27</sup>

Heinrich Zimmermann concurs with this majestic translation of אֲנִי הוּא by noting that in Jesus' time, when it was forbidden to pronounce God's name, Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι would have been perceived as criminal slander (or blasphemy, 10:33,36) if the words were perceived to be the equivalent of אֲנִי יְהוָה.<sup>28</sup>

No argument against such a statement can be forthcoming if ἐγώ εἰμι is the equivalent of אֲנִי יְהוָה. But does ἐγώ εἰμι reflect אֲנִי יְהוָה? It does not, according to the LXX. In Is. 43:10, ἐγώ εἰμι is a translation of הוּא אֲנִי. In the following verse, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲנִי אֲנִי appears, but the LXX translation is ἐγὼ ὁ θεός. הוּא אֲנִי and אֲנִי יְהוָה are not the same phrase.

Nowhere in the text of Isaiah does Yahweh claim that his name is אֲנִי הוּא. William Albright, commenting on this phrase, has said: "There is no mysterious divine name 'He,' but only a copulative pronoun of a type familiar in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic," and he adds that the unusual word order of אֲנִי הוּא הוּא is not of major significance to the early Hebrew as it is to the later Hebrew.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London: The Athlone Press, 1956), p. 327.

<sup>28</sup> Zimmermann, "Das Absolute" (2 Teil), p. 270.

<sup>29</sup> William Foxwell Albright, "Some Remarks On The Song Of Moses in Deuteronomy XXXII" in Vetus Testamentum 9 (1959):343.

Albright's comments are in reference to Deut. 32:39 where the phrase also appears. Interestingly, the LXX translation of this verse (אני הוא הוּא) is εγω ειμι. The reader must carefully note that Yahweh is not proclaiming his name to be אֲנִי הוּא הוּא here any more than he is in Is. 43:10-11.

Much has been made of the connection between John's εγω ειμι and Isaiah by suggesting that John 8 and Isaiah 43 share the same message: both Jesus and Yahweh will prove that "he is" by their actions,<sup>30</sup> and that the Targums of Is. 43 show that John indicates a dependence upon the discussion of Abraham as revealer to show that Jesus is the true Revealer.<sup>31</sup>

The majority of scholars center their search for the source of John's εγω ειμι in the Old Testament. Some opt for Ex. 3:14, some for Is. 43:10, and a few try to use a combination. There is an element of truth in each of these approaches.

The present writer believes that Exodus 3:14 is behind the εγω ειμι in John, and the following reasons are offered in support:

1) God's name is יהוה, not אני הוא. Although much of the majesty and sovereignty of God is brought forth

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<sup>30</sup>Pancaro, The Law, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 41.

through various passages containing אֲנִי הוּא, God never declares that אֲנִי הוּא is his name. Quite the contrary, he declares in Ex. 3:15 that the name revealed to Moses is his name forever.

The summation of John's purpose (20:31) includes the phrase "Have life in his name." More will be made of this later. At this point, the reader is merely invited to note this apparently vague connection.

2) Scholars make too much of the LXX translation without noting all the pertinent facts. אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה is translated as ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν at Ex. 3:14 and אֲנִי הוּא is translated as ἐγὼ εἰμι at Is. 43:10. At Is. 43:11, יְהוָה אֲנִי אֲנִי is translated ἐγὼ ὁ θεός, and at Deut. 32:39 אֲנִי הוּא אֲנִי הוּא is translated ἐγὼ εἰμι. Consistency is not the hallmark of the LXX here; it is a poor translation of the Hebrew, and the text has suffered in transmission. The LXX can hardly be applauded for translating "I am" as "the one who exists" and "I he" as "I am."

3) The assumption is made that the LXX is the source of John's ἐγὼ εἰμι because both the New Testament and the LXX are Greek. One must remember that John is not a Greek. He is a Palestinian Jew who, like Jesus, was raised in Galilee by Jewish parents. This region in the first century was known for its simple and pietistic faith. Shall we believe that John knows the Old Testament primarily through the LXX or the Hebrew? It is not likely that

the LXX played a major role in his religious upbringing in Galilee.

Added to this is the fact that the Gospel of John presents to the reader a translation of what Jesus presumably said in Aramaic. How can the LXX be expected to hold greater significance than the Hebrew? It cannot.

4) The linguistic connection of ἐγώ εἰμι with the Old Testament is more properly seen at Ex. 3:14. Despite the LXX's poor translation, אֲנִי הוּא does not mean ἐγώ εἰμι, but הוּא אֲנִי, if it is translatable at all, can properly be rendered ἐγώ εἰμι.

If echoes of Is. 43 and other passages are to be found in John, they may be due more to John's use of the analogy of Scripture than to anything deliberate.

#### Non-Old Testament Jewish Sources

Harner has found no fascination with the phrase אֲנִי הוּא in the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Qumran or the Mishnah.<sup>32</sup> This strengthens the argument that the background for John's ἐγώ εἰμι are not with אֲנִי הוּא.

Zimmermann has devoted extensive time to the study of rabbinic and late Jewish literature. Some of his

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<sup>32</sup>Harner, The "I Am", p. 18. Daube has offered references to the Passover Midrash, but a liturgical setting such as this does not qualify as a "fascination" and certainly the Jews would be hesitant to remove portions of such an important liturgy.



conclusions are significant for the present study:

1) The late-Jewish literature makes use of *ἐγώ εἰμι*, but is so heavily influenced by Hellenism that its divine, forbidden meaning is lost. It has become a formula that angels and demons both use with little regard for the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

2) The rabbinic literature maintains the distinction of *ἐγώ εἰμι* as a divine formula, but by no means avoids its explanation and examination, for this was part of the delight of Jewish monotheism.<sup>34</sup>

3) Some rabbinic materials demonstrate that *יהוה* was considered the Yahweh-name and that *ἐγώ εἰμι* was the Greek equivalent to signify God's name, but the rabbinic materials we have are too late to prove that this was true at the time of Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

In view of the information available, Barclay Newman's observation is a safe one: "In later Judaism the expression 'I am' is definitely used as a name for God."<sup>36</sup> But what of earlier materials? Gillis Wetter fails to note the significance of the anachronistic evidence by saying

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<sup>33</sup>Zimmermann, "Das Absolute" (2 Teil), p. 267.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 269-270. References to the specific materials are included in the footnotes of Zimmermann's article.

<sup>36</sup>Newman, A Translator's Handbook, p. 124.

that the existence of ἐγὼ εἶμις in Jewish literature shows that the meaning of John's ἐγὼ εἶμις are not necessarily tied to an Old Testament explanation, but perhaps to John's own milieu.<sup>37</sup>

Harner has realized the full import of this difficulty and has searched for connections between ἐγὼ εἶμι and אֲנִי וְיָמֵנו at the time of Jesus. He suggests four possibilities: synagogue readings from Isaiah and Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 32 as part of the liturgy during the Feast of Tabernacles, Qumran's love for Isaiah, and Exodus as part of the Passover celebration.<sup>38</sup> But one is left with nothing certain.

Materials written after the time of Jesus offer the scholar a wide range of opportunities for the study of ἐγὼ εἶμις. Are these the same as those which Jesus knew and used, or did Jesus' use of the term have an effect on the subsequent rabbinical writings?

Among the writings, one notes j. Taan., 2,1: "If a man says: I am God--he lies; I am the Son of Man--he will regret it; I ascend to heaven--he will not accomplish it." The rabbis undoubtedly viewed the Christology of John's Gospel as another heresy.<sup>39</sup> But no one can demonstrate

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<sup>37</sup> Wetter, "Ich bin es," p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> Harner, The "I Am", p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Stauffer, "Εγὼ," TDNT, 2:348.

that Jesus flew in the face of such rabbinical warnings. The above quote might well reflect the later Jewish backlash to Jesus' absolute claim,  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$ .

The Old Testament remains the surest and most logical foundation for the theology within the Fourth Gospel.

### Synoptic Parallels

Somewhere within the discussion of backgrounds, it is incumbent upon one to note that the Fourth Gospel is not alone in revealing Jesus' use of the formula  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$ .

Although  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$  appears in John twenty-four times, the Synoptic Gospels make use of the phrase thirteen times. Such occurrences make it clear that John is not inventing "logia" for Jesus. The immediate background of the term is the Savior himself.<sup>40</sup>

There is some question among scholars whether John has in any way altered the use of the term vis-a-vis the Synoptics. The differences in opinion materialize along the lines of whether or not a predicate may (or must) be inserted within some of the passages.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>See Moulton and Geden, A Concordance. It also appears eight times in Acts and four times in Revelation.

<sup>41</sup>The present writer has dealt with the problem of supplied predicates in Chapter II above, and rejects the practice. Feuillet, Johannine Studies, p. 84 does not supply predicates, and therefore notes that there are no predicated  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$  formulas in the Synoptic Gospels. Harner, The "I Am", p. 35 concludes that most of the Synoptic  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$  passages can take a predicate but that at least one, Mark 6:50, cannot.

Although the concept of alteration by the Evangelists is contrary to the doctrine of inspiration, the number of appearances of the term within the text of the Fourth Gospel indicates an interest and emphasis by John not found in the Synoptics.

What explanation can be given for such a disparity in the use of the term? The formula  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\iota\mu\iota$  cannot be used extensively without some degree of explanation, and this was beyond the purpose and scope of the Synoptic writers.

John, on the other hand, makes a point of the term, and offers to his readers some explanation of its use, if the reader cares to search for it, with a keen focus on the Old Testament.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MEANING OF ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ AS THE PHRASE RELATES TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE PROLOGUE

The identification of *ἐγώ εἰμι* with the divine name in Exodus 3:14 is frequent among scholars, but the suggestion may be criticized by the claim that such a connection is too cryptic to be purposeful.

While the Synoptics do not use the term *ἐγώ εἰμι* as often as the Fourth Gospel, the term Son of Man is used frequently and has equally enigmatic qualities. This fact, coupled with John's love for double entendre,<sup>1</sup> makes an immediately demonstrable meaning for *ἐγώ εἰμι* in John unnecessary. An enigmatic meaning is more in keeping with John's recording of the words and deeds of Jesus.

Jesus' speech was frequently difficult for his hearers to understand. He himself said in Matt. 13:10 that he spoke in parables because not everyone is given the gift of knowing the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. In 10:6,

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<sup>1</sup>Examples of double entendre in John are chapter 3 "born from above" vs. "born again," and chapter 4 "Give me this living water." Many others have been found by the various commentators.

John uses the word *παροιμίαν* (dark saying) to underline the fact that the hearers of Jesus did not understand him.<sup>2</sup>

Given the difficult and enigmatic nature of Jesus' words as they have been preserved for us in the Synoptics and frequent Johannine references to confusion among the listeners, arguments against a deliberate meaning for the *ἔγω εἶμι* phrases become unsupportable. The difficulty of these sayings accentuates their historicity, and their preponderant number in the Gospel of John underlines that their presence serves a hidden purpose.

#### The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel

Before arriving at a statement of purpose for the *ἔγω εἶμι*s, the purpose of John's Gospel must be scrutinized carefully, lest one is tempted to invent some purpose for the *ἔγω εἶμι*s which are not in keeping with their context.<sup>3</sup>

The statement of purpose in 20:31 appears to be so clear that no further comment is necessary. Such an attitude overlooks the depth contained in such a seemingly simple verse.

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<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 634, note that in John the word emphasizes the concealment of lofty ideas.

<sup>3</sup>Failure to do this has been the downfall of much modern scholarship on John. It would seem that, with rare exception, a Johannine scholar can command no respect from his peers until he first demonstrates a lack of respect for the text. It is no wonder that those who choose to expend substantial effort in researching Johannine literature are forced to endure volumes of "creative theology."

The first item of note in 20:31 is that the clause denotes purpose and is followed by a subjunctive, πιστεῦσητε.<sup>4</sup> It is the purpose of the Fourth Gospel to enable the reader, through the Holy Spirit's work, to believe. There is no claim that the words of the Evangelist are the cause of faith; they are the enabling vehicle. They challenge all who read the Gospel to believe. One should note that the present subjunctive here refers to an act continuing in the future: as a result of the reading of the Gospel, the writer wants his readers to begin to believe and to continue in that belief.

While John makes no mention of the Holy Spirit's work of bringing such faith into being and continuance, it is implied not only by the grammar of the sentence, but also by the context. Thomas, who knew the empirical facts about Jesus as well as anyone, did not automatically exhibit saving faith until he had seen the Risen Christ.

Secondly, 20:31 presents the object of faith: Jesus. The name Jesus is his "human name," if one recalls the Gospel for New Year's Day, Luke 2:21. The name was given to Mary and Joseph by the angel Gabriel, but it was

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<sup>4</sup>There is disagreement about the verb form. P66 supports a present subjunctive, rather than the aorist subjunctive which might be expected. To accept the present subjunctive does not, as some suggest, suppose that it supports the contention that the Gospel was written to a group of believers. Either subjunctive refers to the future. See Morris, The Gospel, pp. 855-856.

a fairly common name, its Hebrew counterpart usually being "Jehoshua" or "Joshua."

That John refers to "Jesus" in his statement of purpose lays stress on the humanness of Jesus. It is a human name for a human being. The humanness of Jesus is never denied in John; in fact it is as carefully delineated as in any Gospel. "Jesus wept" (11:35) expresses the deep human emotion within Jesus for his friend, Lazarus. Some of the greatest portrayals of Jesus' agony and death are found in John's Gospel; for example "I thirst" (19:28), and his concern for the well-being of his mother (19:26). John has not emphasized the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity. He constantly keeps in mind that Jesus was the Eternal Word "made flesh" (1:14). He knows a human Savior, and writes about him.

John's statement of purpose, 20:31, seems to reach its zenith with the words that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God." Christ (Χριστός) is used nineteen times within the Gospel, but only once on the lips of Jesus himself, at 17:3 within the text of Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" to his Father. In 4:25, the Samaritan woman at the well speaks of the Christ, and Jesus replied "I am he," but the term ὁ Χριστός came from her lips, not Jesus, and she is not a part of Judaism's misconceptions about the Christ.

"Christ" is an important term in John. One is tempted to suggest that John stresses the term because no



one in the narrative portion of the Gospel seems to understand its true Biblical significance. Arguments abound among Jesus' listeners as to the nature of the Christ and whether or not Jesus fits their own conception of ὁ χριστός (7:26-27, 31, 41-42, 12:34). The leaders want to know "plainly" (παρρησία, 10:24) if Jesus is the Christ.

There were a few who demonstrated a more accurate understanding of the truth, such as Andrew (1:41), John the Baptist (3:28), the Samaritans of the village (4:42) and Martha (11:27): these all confessed Jesus as Christ. But even Andrew and Martha at best express only a glimmer of the correct, Biblical meaning. Most of the people who are mentioned in the Gospel seem to be unable to come to grips with the Biblical truth. Their hope for an earthly, conquering Messiah stood in their way.

John seems to use ὁ χριστός in such a way that he wants the readers to think through the proper definition of ὁ χριστός for themselves. The grammar of 20:31 emphasizes this: the ὅτι demonstrates that John is pointing to the importance of the proper content of faith. "Believing in Jesus" is a meaningless phrase without providing some substance to that belief. "Believe THAT . . ." points to the importance of the proper understanding of the term Christ.

John provides the reader with a synonym for the term Christ: "the Son of God." This is a very rare phrase

in the Fourth Gospel (occurring only at 9:35 and here). Yet it clearly is reflected in the multitude of sayings in which Jesus refers to himself as the Son in His relation to the Father.

An entire study of the concept of "Son of God" in John would be necessary to appreciate the term fully. By way of synopsis, one should note that Jesus expresses his Sonship in terms which are more than revolting to the Jews; in their view, they are blasphemous. In 3:16, Jesus is God's "only" (μονογενῆ, "unique") Son; 3:35, the Father gives everything to the Son; 5:19, the Son can only do what the Father does; 5:21-22, the Son gives life to whom he pleases and the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son; 5:23, all men should honor the Son equally to the Father; 6:40, everyone who believes on the Son will live forever; 8:29, the Son ALWAYS does what pleases the Father; 12:23, the Son is glorified by his own death.

The above examples only begin to reflect the length to which John goes in his Gospel to develop and present the fullest, surest and truest meaning of the term "Son of God." At 20:31, the term can merely serve as a summarizing statement of all that has preceded it. It points to a human being, Jesus, who is at the same time God. He is the object of faith; his divinity and humanity combined in one person is an integral part of faith.

The desired result of belief in Jesus Christ is

"life," according to 20:31. This concept has been discussed previously, but it should be noted that eternal life is always the underlying thought. One might paraphrase John's purpose in this manner: believing in Jesus Christ gives eternal life in heaven, but in part its blessings are already here in this life. That is what John wishes for his readers, and that is why he has spent his time and effort to write his Gospel.

The concluding phrase of 20:31 is "so that you may have life in his name." The phrase "in his name" in this verse has received very little attention from modern commentaries.<sup>5</sup> It is as though the phrase is deemed expendable. Yet John has carefully worded his purpose. If he added "in his name" at 20:31, it was because the phrase was important to his purpose, even though its meaning may not be immediately apparent.

How very important the phrase is to John can be seen in that it appears in the Prologue at 1:12. Whether the Prologue is an introduction, a summary, or an overture, it is universally acknowledged to be a very carefully constructed document. One may be sure that "believe in his

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<sup>5</sup>Morris, The Gospel, pp. 99-100, who throughout his commentary has stressed the importance of the "name," fails to give full significance to the appearance of the phrase "in his name" at 20:31. The reader is merely referred to previous material. This is one of the best commentaries on John written in the past twenty years. The lack of stress on this phrase within John's stated purpose is puzzling to say the least.

name" has a great deal to do with the purpose of this Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

What is meant by "his name?" The most obvious answer is "Jesus" or "Jesus Christ," especially if one notes that 20:31 has made mention of both words "Jesus" and "Christ." But if this is what John means by the phrase, it serves little useful purpose at 20:31 and would appear to be somewhat redundant.

A clue to the answer is to be found in John's strong emphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God. The Prologue develops the "pre-incarnation history" of the Creator. The opening verse of the Gospel has borrowed the first verse of Genesis to offend nearly every adherent of Judaism with its outlandish claim that Jesus is God. He is all-in-all, the creator, the light of the world, the life of all human beings. And, in the miracle of ages, he has become flesh (σάρξ, 1:14). The Gospel of John is the story of God in the flesh.

People who heard him and saw him called Jesus all kinds of "names," including "a demon-possessed Samaritan"

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<sup>6</sup> Could it be that little is commonly made of the phrase at 20:31 because it would seem on the surface that no special significance need be accorded to it in connection with John's stated purpose? If the phrase "in his name" is nothing more than a euphemistic addition to the encouragement to "believe," then John has ceased to be meticulous in the construction of his Gospel in favor of becoming needlessly poetic. Such an assumption would be difficult to support, indeed!

(8:48). But as this carefully constructed Gospel builds to its climax, like a beautiful oratorio, John directs his readers to give the ultimate accolade to Jesus.

Along the way, Jesus receives some respect, a few pronouncements of greatness, and an occasional "You are the Christ" (and whatever that meant in the mouth of someone like Martha of Bethany, 11:27, we can never be sure).

But no one in the Gospel comes close to what Jesus is called immediately prior to the stated purpose of this Gospel (and that cannot be over-emphasized: John has "saved the best for last!"). Thomas, who for centuries has received the name "Doubting Thomas" for his arrogant statement of unbelief, is the only person in the record of the Fourth Gospel to confess with clarity: "My Lord and my God."

Has Thomas overstated the case? Jesus does not castigate him for the statement, but acknowledges this belief. But what is more important is that John has chosen this incident, to which he was an eye-witness, to provide the ultimate illustration of his thesis that "the Word was God" (1:1) in the "flesh" (1:14).

As recorded in John, Thomas was the first to reach the proper conclusion: Jesus is God! It is precisely this conclusion which John wishes his readers to reach. It is belief that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh that results in eternal life.

"Believe in His name," says John. His name is "Jesus" and his name is "Christ." But the name which properly belongs to Him and the one he deserves is the one which Thomas bestowed.<sup>7</sup>

His name is "God."

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<sup>7</sup> Actually, as the pieces of the Old Testament are put together concerning "Christ" (the Anointed One), it is not beyond reason that the Jew of the first century could begin to realize that the divine nature of this Anointed One of God is revealed. That the majority did not hold this view is not due to the cryptic nature of the revelation so much as the misdirection and faulty interpretation given to the Scriptures by Judaism.

In 2 Sam. 7:12-16, the promise David receives concerning the Christ is that he will be an eternal king with an eternal reign. Ps. 89:29 also emphasizes the eternal rule of Christ. Is. 7:14 says the Christ will be born of a virgin and bear the name Immanuel ("God with us" being not only his name, but a revelation of his essence). Is. 9:6-7 further notes that he will be called the "Mighty God" and the "Everlasting Father," whose reign will be eternal; this verse specifies that it is not successors but Christ himself who will reign eternally. Is. 11:1-16 not only gives accolades to Christ (righteous, faithful, just, and so forth) which are foreign to the abilities of a mere man, but notes that the Holy Spirit will be upon him, and that he will bring a spiritual peace to mankind. Jer. 23:6 once again calls the Christ "The Lord Our Righteousness," a title unbecoming a mere human being. Even the cryptic Gen. 3:15 was not seen as a prophecy of some innocuous snake roundup, but that the Promised One would fight and defeat Satan himself.

While this thesis is not centered on the Old Testament meaning of "Christ," the brief overview provided here is sufficient to undergird the contention that the Evangelist is not inventing something new in his depiction of Jesus as the Divine Son of God.

The ramifications of these Old Testament passages are important. What divine qualification can be beyond the true scope and character of Jesus Christ? If he is "God with us" and "The Lord Our Righteousness," he properly can (and should) be accorded all divine accolades due also to the Father! He said (John 10:30) "I and the Father are One!" This is no exaggeration in the light of the OT.

A Brief Exegesis of the Absolute ἐγώ εἰμι s  
in Relation to Their Contexts

In the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John, Thomas comes face to face with the Resurrected Lord who is fresh from the grave. He has risen from the dead, and Thomas calls him "God."

The first twenty chapters of the Gospel all point to this significant climax. John is pointing the reader to this important incident in which Thomas bestows upon Jesus the highest title possible: God. This is the true and proper designation for Jesus Christ; it is unqualified and goes right to the heart of the matter.

In the light of this acclamation, John's apparent "fascination" with the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι becomes clear.

It has been demonstrated previously that the background of the ἐγώ εἰμι s is to be found in Exodus 3:14.<sup>8</sup> Objections to this parallel have been seen to be based primarily upon the poor translation of the LXX. This has received far too much weight in relation to the Hebrew. It is in Exodus, not in Isaiah, that God gives his name to mankind.

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<sup>8</sup>Exodus 3:14, it may be recalled, is the verse in which God responds to Moses' plea for the revelation of his name. The LXX's euphemisms for God's name in Isaiah do not alter what God has said to Moses: his name is יהוה ("I AM") and this is his name forever (Ex. 3:15). The reader is referred to the previous discussion (pages 186-192) for the extended arguments.

Yahweh (יהוה) means "He is."<sup>9</sup> Throughout the Old Testament, God is referred to by this name. It is a proper alteration of Ex. 3:14. When God speaks of himself, he says "I am." When his people speak of him, they say "He is." Only God can say "I AM."

Jesus says "I AM" (ἐγώ εἰμι). In a Gospel in which the writer's purpose hinges on the divinity of Christ, there can be little doubt that John is connecting Jesus' use of the term to the name of God in the Old Testament.

If this is correct, this conclusion should be demonstrable from the verses in which ἐγώ εἰμι occurs in the Fourth Gospel. Since there are many predicated uses, the study will be limited to the absolute uses of ἐγώ εἰμι.

The first of these occurs at 1:20. Here the words ἐγώ εἰμι come from the lips of John the Baptist. It is important to note that the Baptist places an emphatic οὐκ in the sentence. He is denying that he is the Christ. It is not proper for him to call himself ὁ χριστός. But it is also not proper for him to call himself ἐγώ εἰμι. If John's meaning of ὁ χριστός is filled with divinity,<sup>10</sup> then

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<sup>9</sup>It must be noted that the translation of "Yahweh" is not a sure one. Scholars are uncertain of the root word from which the name is derived, and this is usually noted by all who deal with the Divine Name. Nonetheless, the term is rendered "He is" by nearly everyone, and such a translation is considered the standard one; there are no alternative suggestions of any merit.

<sup>10</sup>And it surely is! See page 206, footnote.



John the Baptist is using the formula to deny his own divinity and point to someone else.<sup>11</sup>

John the Baptist reinforces his relationship to the true *ἐγώ εἰμι* by repeating this contention in 3:28. His own disciples are witnesses to his denial: *οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ὁ χριστός*. Furthermore, 3:31 expands the thought which is behind this. The Christ, who comes after John the Baptist, comes from above and "is over all." He contrasts the heavenly with the earthly. The One who properly uses *ἐγώ εἰμι* is not a mere human being, as John the Baptist is.<sup>12</sup>

The first appearance of the phrase on the lips of Jesus occurs at 4:26. The Samaritan woman has said that when Christ comes, "he will tell us everything." Jesus' response is the only acceptance of the title "Christ" in the Gospel, but his words are startling: *ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι*. This is either poor grammar or it means something more than what appears on the surface.

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<sup>11</sup>One may contend for this special meaning of the Baptist's *ἐγώ εἰμι* because of his responses to other questions put before him. When asked (1:21) whether he is Elijah or the Prophet, he denies that he is, but in denying these titles he uses a standard form of denial, avoiding the term *ἐγώ εἰμι*. The Baptist only connects *ἐγώ εἰμι* with the question about *ὁ χριστός*. Only the Christ has a right to the words *ἐγώ εἰμι*.

<sup>12</sup>Whether 3:31 are the words of John the Baptist or the editorial comments of the Evangelist are immaterial. If these are the Evangelist's words, they emphasize the same point. (This is added because some commentaries express confusion about where John's editorializing begins and the words of various speakers end. Leon Morris notes this trend: see Morris, The Gospel, pp. 242-243.)

The first item of note is that *ἐγώ εἰμι* is in the emphatic position. Jesus intends that the phrase be stressed. And secondly, his use of the phrase is intended to identify himself with the title *ὁ χριστός*. In the context, Jesus' response is met by unbridled enthusiasm. The woman at the well invites the entire town to go out to see Jesus, and the result (4:42) is the statement of faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Savior of the world."

A miracle is connected with the next mention of the *ἐγώ εἰμι* formula. In John 6, after Jesus has fed the 5000, he had sent his disciples away. Because of a sudden storm, the disciples are in peril in the Sea of Galilee. Their fear is heightened by the appearance of Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. But he says, "I am, do not fear" (6:20). I am what? Many translate *ἐγώ εἰμι* as "It is I," but such words are not justified.

The inclusion of miracles in the Fourth Gospel is rare; he calls them "signs" and uses the miracles to point to Jesus' divine origin and mission. The miracle of Jesus walking on the water and the statement "*ἐγώ εἰμι*" to the disciples may be a deliberate connection to stress Jesus' divinity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The unusual nature of Jesus' reply had an apparent impact on all the disciples. Mark 6:50 and Matthew 14:27 both note that Jesus' words of comfort to his disciples included the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι*.

Whether one might consider 8:18 an absolute use is questionable. Jesus says, in effect, "I am my own witness" in order to provide the necessary testimony to his message in accordance with the legal thought pattern of chapter 8. If the usage is intended to be absolute, the gist of the text is "There are two witnesses to the truth--I AM and my Father--and to know one is to know the other." Such an interpretation identifies Jesus with the implications of the divine name in Ex. 3:14, rather than to read the verse as "I am my own witness and my Father is my witness."

The last rendition of the verse is understandable and quite possible, but the Evangelist understands this incident to be of particular importance and offensiveness because 8:20 comments that no one seized Jesus over this statement because it was not yet time for them to do so. The words "If you knew me, you would also have known my Father" (8:19) were sufficient to provoke the Jews, so it is not necessary to connect Jesus' use of *ἐγώ εἰμι* with the Jews' desire to seize Jesus (8:20).

Although the interpretation of *ἐγώ εἰμι* at 8:18 is not totally certain, the context does not provide any valid reason to reject the interpretation that Jesus is identifying himself with Ex. 3:14.

Jesus uses the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι* twice at 8:23: "I am from above" and "I am not of this world." No special

meaning is required in either instance. In each case the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega$  may be understood as an emphatic use, because Jesus clearly intends to contrast himself with his listeners. Of interest to the present study is the implications of the two statements within which the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  appear. Both are intended to stress Jesus' divinity. A human being cannot claim to be "from above" or "not of this world."

It should also be noted that John uses the word  $\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\nu}$  to connect the thought of 8:23 with that of 8:24.

One of the most important instances of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  is 8:24. Translations of this verse consistently supply a predicate, even though the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  does not provide one. If this phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  means nothing in particular or is merely incidental, a predicate must be supplied; but if it is proper to identify Jesus' use of the phrase with the divine name in Exodus, this verse takes on tremendous implications.

The importance of the verse is obvious: Jesus says his listeners will die in their sins if they do not believe what he is saying. "Die in your sins" has a horrible ring to it. No one wants to be a part of such a death. Every listener will be anxious to ascertain the meaning of what Jesus is saying because of the dire consequences of failing to believe.

But what must one believe? "If you do not believe that I am" is what Jesus says. As it stands, Jesus'

statement does not appear to have great meaning; on the surface, it seems incomplete. But it is unlikely that Jesus would claim so dire a consequence if he is calling upon his listeners to believe something which is not specific. "Believe that I am he" is a possible meaning, but this is vague under the circumstances, and leaves the door open to a variety of interpretations.

If the *ἐγώ εἰμι* is to be equated with the divine name, the meaning becomes "If you do not believe that I am God, you will die in your sins." This meaning is fully in accord with the stated purpose of the Gospel, and with the theology of the Prologue, namely that Jesus is the God-man sent by the Father. The purpose is belief in Jesus Christ as God's Son, and the proper content of that belief is the divinity of Jesus.

Chapter 8 contains another absolute *ἐγώ εἰμι* at verse 28. Jesus predicts his crucifixion, and offers it as proof that he is the "I am" ("When you lift up the Son of man, then you will know that I am"). One might well ask why the crucifixion, not the resurrection, is a demonstration of his divinity. Jesus says (8:28-29) that the crucifixion demonstrates his complete obedience to the Father.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>It is incorrect to view this as saying that it is impossible to understand who Jesus is until after the crucifixion. The grammar of the verse shows that the crucifixion itself is intended to demonstrate who he is. It is also worthy of note that John intends by the verb both the crucifixion and exaltation (or glorification) of Jesus.

Although his capacity to die on the cross indicates his humanity, it is his willingness to do so which indicates his divinity. His death, for the salvation of the world, is a necessary part of the divine plan; that he is in full accord with the plan is coupled with the fulness of divine grace shown to mankind in his dedication to his task, a truth reflected in the Prologue (1:14,17).

The result of these sayings is that "many believed" (8:30), which is totally harmonious with the purpose of the Fourth Gospel and the reason for their inclusion.

Perhaps the most outstanding demonstration that the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι* indicates divinity is 8:58. The discussion in the last part of this chapter centers around the ancestry of the Jews. Jesus' statement begins with the *ἀμήν, ἀμήν* formulation, to indicate its importance. What follows is astounding: "before Abraham became, I am."

Abraham's existence is marked by a word (*γίνεσθαι*) which indicates origin or birth; in stark contrast, Jesus uses *ἐγώ εἰμι* to claim his existence, not only prior to Abraham but also irrespective of birth or "becoming." Abraham "became"; Jesus simply "is."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>John's contrast is clearly between the birth of Abraham and the eternal existence of Jesus. The use of the verb *γίνομαι* is normally not in contrast with the verb of being, *εἰμι*, although the construction of Jesus' sentence here leaves no doubt about the contrast. Gal. 4:4 uses the verb *γίνομαι* of Jesus, stressing his humanity. Jesus is not denying his physical birth here, but it is not his humanity which is in question in John 8 but his divinity.

There can be no predicate to the statement, nor can there be any question that the claim is one of divinity. Only God can claim such an existence. That the full import of the statement did not escape the attention of Jesus' listeners can be seen by their immediate reaction (8:59): an attempted stoning of this one who blasphemes.<sup>18</sup>

The next instance of an absolute *ἐγώ εἰμι* occurs at 13:19. Immediately upon the prediction of his betrayal, Jesus says that he has made the prediction "so that you might believe when it happens that I am."

To supply a predicate here confounds the sense of the passage. Jesus wants his disciples, who are open to his proclamations but who do not fully understand them yet, to "believe THAT I am." Notice that belief is once more connected with the *ἐγώ εἰμι* phrase, but the content of that belief (in other words, what "I am" means) is to be demonstrated by the fulfillment of Jesus' words.

If Jesus is capable of predicting the future, as he has just done, it proves that he is God. God alone can accurately predict the future. When Jesus' prediction came true, the disciples, with the help of the Holy Spirit, would believe that he is God.

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<sup>16</sup>The Jews had no need to benefit from the clear direction of John's Prologue (especially 1:1-3) in order to understand the outrageous nature of this statement. The reader of this Gospel, provided with the Prologue, has no excuse for mistaking Jesus' meaning here.

The phrase ἐγώ εἰμι also appears at 14:3. Here it may have no special meaning, since the sense of the verse is plain without adding anything to it.

Yet it should be noticed that Jesus is describing his ascent to heaven and his return. If there is a connection with the divine name here, the added sense is that they will forever live in the presence of God. Verse 6, a predicated use, upholds this interpretation; Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is eternal truth and the only source of eternal life.

Chapter 18, verses 5,6 and 8 contain the last three occurrences of the absolute use of the term. Predicates may be added in all three cases without any problem. In fact, the general sense of Jesus' words in each case is "I am he."

But John wants us to understand more by the use of this term than merely "I am he." At 18:6, he comments that immediately upon hearing Jesus say "I am," they all went backward and fell down. Such strange behavior makes it clear that Jesus was only captured at this time because his time had come to carry out his role as the obedient suffering servant of the Father. He had no need of an army to protect him from this mob.

But it is also possible to understand their involuntary behavior as that which is mandatory in the presence of Almighty God. Without force or coercion, Jesus allows



himself to be captured and led away to his death. Before he does so, however, he underlines his proper role and authority in the situation. He is God, before whom they cannot stand. They have no power over him except by his choice. The incident serves as a firm warning of his true power and authority.

This survey of the absolute  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  shows that in a number of instances, the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota\varsigma$  can be predicated and make perfect sense as they appear. In all cases, some predicate can be forced into the meaning, but forced predicates in certain circumstances pervert the meaning. The instances in which a predicate alters the meaning of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  are 8:24,28,58, 13:19, and 18:5,6,8. In each of these circumstances, an inserted predicate must provide a meaning which reflects the divinity of Christ to its fullest extent; if such a meaning is not provided by the predicate, one has altered the sense of the verse.

If  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  is a reflection of the divine name in Exodus, no predicate could be supplied which more fully ascribes to Jesus his true divinity. Predicates such as "Christ," "the Savior," or "the Messiah" are incomplete against the statement "I am God." The necessity of supplying "God" as the predicate in order to maintain the full sense of the verse supports the contention that Jesus has already supplied that meaning by using the name of God,  $\text{יהוה}$ .

The Grave Exception

There is one instance of an absolute ἐγώ εἰμι which has been omitted in the foregoing comments because it is not spoken by Jesus. At 9:9, the man who was born blind and was subsequently healed by Jesus is the center of controversy.

Based on Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, and 42:7, it was believed that only God could open the eyes of the blind. This was disturbing to the enemies of Jesus, and they resisted believing it was possible that such a miracle had occurred.

During the immediate aftermath of the healing, the neighbors, who ought to be capable of recognizing the man, argue about his identity. To the argument "Is this or isn't this the one?" the healed man replies (9:9) ἐγώ εἰμι. Commentators have quickly pointed to this verse as proof that the absolute ἐγώ εἰμιs in John do not necessarily carry a special meaning.

Without this instance of an absolute ἐγώ εἰμι in the mouth of the man born blind, the conviction that John's intended meaning of ἐγώ εἰμι is connected with Exodus 3:14 would undoubtedly be more wide-spread.

The example cannot be explained away effectively. No manuscript evidence supports the deletion or alteration of 9:9. The context makes it clear that he cannot in some

way be referring to God. He is saying "I am the one you are talking about." He certainly cannot be claiming to be God. The rest of the chapter provides us with a clearer image of the man than to assume such a thing.

"Creative theology" at this point serves no purpose but to expose one's frustration at the existence of this example of an emphatic use of *ἐγώ εἰμι*.

Only one of two conclusions may be reached which respect the text: either John has no special meaning behind his use of the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι*, or he has a purpose in using the phrase differently at 9:9 from his use in the rest of the Gospel.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the Gospel, the emphasis on Divinity in the Prologue and throughout the narrative, the context of those verses in which *ἐγώ εἰμι* appears, and the most obvious exegesis of these passages all indicate a connection of *ἐγώ εἰμι* to the divine name of Exodus. Can 9:9 be of such importance that all other signs of a special formula in John's Gospel are negated by this one verse in which *ἐγώ εἰμι* is not used to reveal the divinity of Jesus Christ?

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<sup>17</sup>Rarely will a commentator not say this. Morris, The Gospel, p. 482, says it is "plain that it does not necessarily convey the divine overtones. . . ." Brown, The Gospel According to John, 1:373, notes "this is an instance of a purely secular use of the phrase." Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 359: "This simple use of the words warns the reader against assuming that *ἐγώ εἰμι* was necessarily to John a religious formula."

The choice of the phrase *ἔγω εἰμι* at 9:9 is clearly deliberate. A Jerusalem Jew hardly responded to his life-long neighbors with the Greek phrase *ἔγω εἰμι!*<sup>18</sup> John wants us to notice this phrase, in contrast to occasions in which Jesus is using the term. That the *ἔγω* is emphatic is beyond question. But why did John choose to become inconsistent in the meaning of this term, when the connection with Ex. 3:14 could more easily be made if the blind man had simply responded *αὐτός εἰμι*?

The answer is not easily discernable, much less demonstrable, but the present writer believes that its use here is connected with John's love of double-entendre and his slow and deliberate revealing of the true nature of the *λόγος*.

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<sup>18</sup>By way of clarification, the present writer is supposing that Jesus spoke originally in Aramaic. This means that John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has chosen the Greek phrase *ἔγω εἰμι* to represent the Aramaic words of Jesus. By the same token, a Jew who was living in Jerusalem in the first century would most likely converse with his neighbors in his native tongue, Aramaic. In other words, the blind man did not likely express himself in Greek. It would have been easy for John to provide an alternative translation at 9:9 in order to undergird the special significance of *ἔγω εἰμι* as it appears on the lips of Jesus. In this case, the supposition would be that what Jesus said in Aramaic and what the blind man said in Aramaic were not exactly the same. On the other hand, if the blind man was using exactly the same words in Aramaic as Jesus used to reveal his divinity, John could have chosen to avoid mentioning this part of the conversation, in order to provide further emphasis for his special use of the phrase *ἔγω εἰμι*. No matter which of the above scenarios is chosen, the surprising appearance of *ἔγω εἰμι* at 9:9 is deliberate and John intends us to notice it.

There are only two instances in which Jesus' choice of the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι* draws immediate reaction. The first is 8:58; the reaction is an attempted stoning. The second is 18:5-6; the reaction here is that the mob falls to the ground.

In both cases, *ἐγώ εἰμι* is not necessarily the reason for the reaction. The language of 8:58 is sufficiently outrageous to draw hostility, irrespective of a special intended meaning. The episode of chapter 18 presents a miraculous event which could have occurred without any words from Jesus at all; the effective implication would be the same.

Nowhere is the reader met with positive proof that the hearers understood Jesus' *ἐγώ εἰμι*s to be connected to Exodus 3:14. The Jews were never told "plainly" (10:24), but they did get the message (10:33): "You, being a man, make yourself God."<sup>19</sup> And from the unfolding of the Gospel narrative, one is left with the impression that they suspected this is what Jesus had been saying all along. As his enemies, their purpose in asking for a plain answer was to confirm their suspicions.

Theologically, the Gospel of John does not allow us to understand Jesus to be anything other than God himself; the Prologue makes this sufficiently clear. But the

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<sup>19</sup> Ironically, quite the opposite is true: Jesus, being God, made himself (became) man.

implications of all that Jesus said and did unfold slowly, both in the eyes of those around him and in the eyes of the reader. It takes twenty chapters before Thomas says "You are my God!" In the meantime, by his words and his deeds Jesus is proving this, but only to those with the eyes of faith.

John seems to delight in subtlety. Every chapter is filled with statements which have more than one level of meaning or actions that seem to have confusing purpose.<sup>20</sup> The picture of Jesus which John chooses to paint provides more than enough reasons for unbelieving mankind to reject Jesus as Savior, Christ, Messiah, God or anyone else. John does not even supply his readers with a large number of miracles to entice them to believe.

The present writer offers this suggestion for the 9:9 difficulty: John's intent is to connect ἐγώ εἰμι with the divine name in Exodus, but for those who do not see this through the eyes of faith and who choose to resist the Holy Spirit, he has provided 9:9 as a "proof text" that

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<sup>20</sup>Some examples have already been given: the conversation with Nicodemus, the woman at the well. In 10:32-38, it almost appears as though Jesus is using the OT to say that it is defensible for anyone to call himself "God." In 11:6, Jesus ignores the fact that Lazarus is dying and yet, 11:35, weeps at his grave site. Why did Jesus tell the blind man to break the Sabbath Laws in order to heal him (9:6-7) when a word would have been sufficient? Or why does Jesus use such deliberately outrageous language in chapter 6, when he surely knew that the result (6:66) would be that many would not follow him anymore?

nothing more is meant by the term ἔγω εἶμι than the human identification of the man born blind.

Nothing can ever be meant by the phrase ἔγω εἶμι, except to those who are given the Holy Spirit's power to see it. Spiritual blindness will never see it. Perhaps it is ironically appropriate that John has chosen the man who was born blind, but who was healed by Jesus, to cast this stumbling block in the path of those who remain blind. John, in this way, is offering agreement to the notion that "only God can open the eyes of the blind."

It must be remembered that this writer offers this suggestion with the caveat that no other satisfying answer has been forthcoming and that this suggestion comes from a careful consideration of the text in its total context.

Yet in perspective, 9:9 is not sufficiently important an exception to warrant a severe rebuttal. Despite its presence, the ἔγω εἶμιs are more than a grammatical quirk.

The Listeners' Ability to Understand the Meaning  
of the Absolute ἔγω εἶμιs

The implications of ἔγω εἶμι for first century thought may be clearer than one first may suppose. It is difficult for the twentieth-century mind to place its own limitations on the abilities of those who first heard Jesus use this formula; they may well have understood the tacit

claims underlying the use of ἐγώ εἰμι.

One is not committed entirely to supposition on this point. Several facts help to provide some distinct possibilities, even though surety may be beyond grasp.

For one thing, the Jewish people were highly sensitive to the Divine Name. Whether rabbinical warnings and punishments concerned with the use of the Name were totally developed by this time is irrelevant. Such caution developed from no sudden impulse on the part of the rabbis; respect for God and his Name, along with the Old Testament warnings against blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), are sufficient background to demonstrate that at the time of Jesus the average Jew was cautious about using God's name.

Secondly, it would seem totally unwarranted to suggest that the Palestinian Jew of the time was unaware of what God's Name was. The name Yahweh and its basic meaning could be no secret. Even if some euphemistic word like "adoni" had replaced "Yahweh" in the synogogue readings by this time (and this seems fairly certain), warnings against the misuse of God's Name are pointless if the Name remains a secret.

Thirdly, the context of the ἐγώ εἰμις often reveals that they were understood by the audience. John has taken the time to include several important reactions to the formula.

Following the use of ἐγώ εἰμι in claiming that



Jesus is his own witness (8:18), John notes that "no one seized him because his time had not yet come." One cannot claim that it is the reference to the "Father" in 8:19 which causes the reaction, since they clearly do not understand who Jesus means by "Father."

Confusion on the part of the listeners is noted at 8:25. Jesus said "If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins," (8:24) and the immediate response was "Who are you?" The  $\sigma\upsilon$  is in the emphatic position. It is as though behind the question lies stunned incredulity. "We could not have heard that properly at all! It sounded like you said you are God!" Thus, they ask him to clarify the statement.

The reaction to 8:28, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am," is that many who listened to Jesus believed (8:30).

"Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58) is met with an immediate attempt to stone Jesus (8:59).

The reaction to the formula at 18:5 is that the mob falls on the ground. Nothing more is made of this by John, but one would be foolish to believe that this involuntary physical reaction on the part of soldiers, temple guards, and others in the crowd did not have an impact on their thinking. This physical sensation encountered as a result of "I am" certainly did not cause these people at once to believe in Jesus as their Savior, but it surely caused some

consternation and was undoubtedly remembered.

None of these reactions is absolute proof that every time Jesus said *ἐγώ εἰμι*, the listeners understood him to be saying "I am God." These reactions do provide the reader with hints that at least the suspicion was there in the minds of the hearers.

If *ἐγώ εἰμι* means "I am God" or if it has some connection with the Divine Name in Exodus 3:14, such an interpretation fits well within the entire scope of what John is trying to say theologically. "The Word was God" (1:1) is his starting point, and "My Lord and my God" is his conclusion (20:28). Did the Jews understand? There is no question that they did. In 10:33 they state "You, being a man, make yourself God!" What caused them to draw that conclusion? "I and my Father are One" (10:30) would be sufficient cause for their accusation, but one should note that John adds the word *πάλιν* in 10:31: they again took stones. John is connecting this incident to 8:59, the first stoning attempt, and this was an immediate response to *ἐγώ εἰμι*.

It cannot be claimed that the *ἐγώ εἰμι*s are not enigmatic statements. But there is sufficient religious background and sufficient commentary on the reaction of the listeners in the Fourth Gospel to Jesus' use of the phrase to warrant the conclusion that they were not beyond understanding.

Jewish people who read John's Gospel would have the same religious background as those in the narrative, and would have opportunity to understand these statements in light of this Gospel's guiding hand. Those who studied Jesus' words carefully in the light of the Old Testament might well recall that one of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, Isaiah 7:14, said that the name of the Messiah would be "God with us" (Immanuel). In Jewish thought, one's name was an extension of one's being: one is what one is named.<sup>21</sup> In the case of Jesus, "God with us" is not an overstatement and "I am," if a reference to Exodus, is in perfect keeping with the sense of the entire Fourth Gospel.

Notice should also be made of Jesus' statement in 5:39-40 in which he says "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and they witness about me, and yet you do not wish to come to me so that you may have life." An Old Testament background to Jesus' words and deeds, by his own insistence, is the proper place to look for understanding.

While the original listeners may not have had the time to research the implications of Jesus' words during his ministry, the readers of the Fourth Gospel are encouraged to do so from the first verse of chapter 1, "In the

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<sup>21</sup>Bietenhard, "ὄνομα, ὀνομάζω, ἐπονομάζω, ψευδώνυμος," TDNT, 5:242-282, especially pp. 253-254.

beginning. . . ."

Unquestionably, a Jewish religious background will assist the first century reader in grasping the full import of the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\tau\varsigma$ . But the Gentile reader is not totally without hope in seeing the divine implications of the phrase. The Hellenistic cults popular at the time used the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu$  phrase frequently to connote a divine significance. Even if the richness of the Old Testament could not be brought to bear on John's text, it would not be impossible for the Gentile to grasp the general significance of the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu$  phrases.

When the Gospel of John is taken in its entirety, it is the divinity of Christ which is stressed. The claim to divinity by Jesus cannot be called ambiguous. John's Gospel builds to Thomas' confession (20:28), the confession of faith which the Evangelist wants his readers to reach.

If Thomas finally understood the claim, one should expect the readers of the Gospel to understand it as well. Whether the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\tau\varsigma$  point to the divinity of Christ, or his divinity points to the  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\mu\tau\varsigma$ , their Old Testament background makes them transparent enough to support John's claim that Jesus is God.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ AS THEY RELATE TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE PROLOGUE

The Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel has not chosen the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  as the clearest and broadest revelation of Christ's divinity. The phrase is enigmatic and quite likely is intended to be.

Nevertheless, its proper interpretation comes not from arguments based on Hellenistic, cultic, Gnostic or rabbinic parallels, but from the context of the Fourth Gospel itself, and the realization that both Jesus and John are to be seen in the light of the Old Testament.

The heavy accent on the divinity of Jesus Christ in the Fourth Gospel needs no reemphasis. No one questions the fact that John goes to great lengths to present Jesus as God in the flesh (1:14). What needs to be examined is how clearly John believes this divinity appears to the Palestine of Jesus' day.

From the Gospel, one gathers that "Jesus is God" is not a common conclusion; had it been, no crucifixion would have taken place. Only Thomas expresses the fullest understanding and appreciation of the essence of Jesus Christ as

God made flesh.

To the careful reader of the Prologue, such an outcome is expected. It is the Prologue which gives warning that few people will understand that which John is about to relate.

John wants his readers to believe. The Prologue contains many undercurrents of key theological concepts which stress such belief (e.g. life, light, and truth--all of which become connected with a predicated use of in the narrative portion). But the Prologue tells us to expect little belief. Verse 10 states "The world came into existence through him, and the world did not know him," and verse 11 adds "His own (οἱ ἴδιοι) did not receive him."

Almost no one takes note that the Prologue has a tremendous number of negative statements. Note that 1:3,5, 8,10,11,13,18 all include a negative. One should question the reason for this high degree of negative expressions.

These occur to emphasize the opposition of the darkness and the world, which has fallen under the power of darkness, to the light, the life and the truth. John wants his readers to know from the beginning that Jesus was not recognized for what he is, he was not greeted with open arms, and very few believed in him. For the reader to draw the proper conclusion will not be easy. Few listeners had done it, as the Gospel will show.

The stakes are high, and the Prologue emphasizes this as well. The right conclusion brings with it "the power to become the children of God" (1:12). These children of God "believe in his name, and the Prologue leaves us without an explanation of that phrase. Here is the challenge, without explanation and accompanied by a host of negative warnings.

In a sense, John is writing a puzzle for us. The puzzle is deliberate, and we are given sufficient warning in the Prologue that the proper conclusion will only come by God's power (1:13). The key elements are all here: Jesus is God who became flesh and revealed the unrevealable God (1:18).

It is perhaps this conundrum which has driven scholars to distraction. More "creative," non-Biblical theology has been invented in the name of this Gospel than perhaps any other book in the New Testament (with the exception of Revelation).

We cannot suppose that this Christian Evangelist is presenting to his readers an enigma which is not in keeping with the analogy of faith. No matter how cryptic the words become, they will always agree with Scripture. Jesus himself gives that much of a clue when he says the Old Testament points to him (5:39).

As a puzzle, which has as its purpose saving faith, all the pieces fit together through the guidance of the

Spirit. The Gospel of John is a masterful piece of writing: it looks simplistic, but it is interwoven tightly. The Prologue lays the groundwork by presenting the basic tenets, and the reader is then challenged to put the pieces together as the Gospel unfolds.

The *ἐγὼ εἶμις* are part of the puzzle. That they are an integral part of the puzzle is twice underlined: in the Prologue the children of God "believe in his name" (1:12) and in the statement of purpose, John wants the reader to have "life in his name." His name is God ("I AM").

Is that too enigmatic? It is at least possible to understand the *ἐγὼ εἶμις*, and if the reader cannot understand them as a part of the divine puzzle, he will most certainly understand Thomas. Thomas' statement is the last and most obvious clue to the puzzle about the true nature of Jesus Christ.

John, as a theologian under divine inspiration, is more than capable enough of constructing a puzzle of this depth. If his purpose was not to give the greatest of challenges to the reader's mind and heart, he might well have chosen a different conclusion to his Prologue: "No one has ever seen God; the only God who is in the bosom of the Father has exegeted him" (1:18).

To those who contend that this entire argumentation ignores the fact that the LXX, albeit incorrectly,



translates the Divine Name not as  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega \epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\iota$  but  $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu$ , 1:18 can prove instructive. In confessing that the "only God" has revealed the unseen God, John uses  $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu$ . This may be timely coincidence, but it may also be a demonstration that John is more shrewd and profound than even his admirers give him credit.

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