

CHAPTER THREE—JESUS CHRIST AS THE REVEALER OF TRUTH

The previous chapter was concerned with those ideas that are used with the theme of truth, which combine to provide part of the distinctive nature of Johannine Christology. But for the Evangelist the Christian message is neither an esoteric nor an ecstatic religion able to be validated (if indeed validation is even desired) only by the subjective testimony and experience claimed by the recipient, and perhaps a relatively small number of devotees or fellow members. Rather, the message of the Christ-event is the historical life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word. Ultimately, the truth of the Christian Gospel rests in this one, who is both the revealer and the revelation itself. It is therefore a self-authenticating revelation that along with the testimony of the Father and the Holy Spirit provides a witness to the covenant God who both saves and seals his own. But there are other witnesses which testify to the accuracy, faithfulness, and, indeed, the finality of this revelation. In addition to those mentioned above, Christ's works (functioning as signs pointing to the saving reality of his person), the Old Testament Scriptures, and John the Baptist (because of his special divine appointment) also serve as divine testimony to Jesus Christ. Along with these divine witnesses one also discovers human witnesses, such as the disciples, the Samaritan woman, and the Evangelist himself.¹ This emphasis on the idea of witness—both divine and human—serves as another part of the uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel's Christology, which together produce a comprehensive and compelling expression of the truth of Jesus Christ for the world. In the preface to *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, Boice wrote of the need to take the theme of witness and relate it to the other themes in John. The revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ to which is borne witness is the very revelation of God himself and must necessarily be true. And one cannot speak of truth in the Fourth Gospel without recognizing the need for revelation and the

¹In John the theme of witness is used to point to the reality of divine revelation more than the judicial use of witnesses in a court case. Thus, Allison Trites may be pushing the legal meaning a bit far when he expresses the thesis of the Gospel in a forensic sense (*The New Testament Concept of Witness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 79). However, one should also remember the occasions where Jesus is accused of being inconsistent with the Law, as well as other details of Jesus' appearance before the Jewish and Roman authorities.

witnessing to it. For apart from this revelation being given and testified to, one would not know whether the content is true or false.²

1. THE WITNESS OF CHRIST AND HIS WORKS

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is both the content of the revelation as well as the central witness to this divine disclosure. But he does not speak and act on his own. His dependence upon and strict obedience to the Father, which is made clear in his self-testimony, shows that his message is to be received as true and therefore trustworthy. In addition to his proclamation is the collection of his acts (“works” functioning as “signs”) that serve as validation of his words, as well as visual illustrations of his discourses. Together, the words and works of Jesus constitute the self-authenticating testimony of the divine Son sent from God.

²Sandra Schneiders views this kind of idea as being too propositional: “In John, revelation connotes a relationship, not a one-way communication of otherwise unavailable information that the hearer, at risk of losing her or his salvation, must take or leave. In relation to this Gospel it is helpful to think always in terms of *self-revelation* rather than of the ‘unveiling’ of information...Revelation in John is the dialectic between Jesus’ self-giving through his witness to himself and to God and the receptivity through believing and reciprocal self-giving of the disciples. It is never a one-way communication but always an interchange, a mutual self-giving, leading to an ever-deepening sharing of life and love.” She goes on to speak of revelation as never being complete because Jesus’ self-revelation to his disciples is ongoing and progressive (*Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999], 49).

Two comments must be made. The first is that the revelation is indeed a self-revelation, but this self-revelation includes propositions regarding the nature of God, the sinful plight of humanity, and the absolute necessity of responding rightly to the one who has descended from heaven to provide redemption. It is surely a one-way revelation because God must make the descent. Furthermore, John is perfectly clear that what is at stake is salvation, and that failing to respond positively to this revelation renders one condemned. Secondly, it is not a reciprocal self-giving because that would place upon Jesus some measure of dependence on those he came to save, which is found nowhere in the Gospel. As for the subsequent comment that the revelation is never complete, Beasley-Murray is correct when he observes that the “‘exposition’ of God that he has given in the flesh, and ratified in the resurrection, is superior to all declarations of God in time and is to be viewed as a ‘final’ revelation” (*John: Word Biblical Themes* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989], 35).

1.1 SENT BY GOD

Of vital importance for the Johannine conception of Christ's self-witness is the awareness of his having come from God, shown by Jesus' frequent references to his having been sent by God (41 times, the Evangelist using both *apostellō* and *pempō*). This idea does occur in the Synoptic Gospels, but not nearly as often and not with a view to pointing to the ultimate origin and therefore identity of Jesus. It is thus part of the Johannine concern to show the high Christology of Jesus of Nazareth, as opposed to the Synoptic preferences to use it to indicate Jesus' messianic mission (Matt. 10:40; 15:24; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 43). This is not to say that John's use of Jesus' being sent does not involve his redemptive activity, which is surely seen in his messiahship; but it does mean that the fourth Evangelist more fully describes the unity between Jesus' person and work, in part through this "sent" language, than do the synoptists.

Jesus' knowledge of himself as having been sent establishes the dependence theme that runs throughout the entire Gospel. This is seen, for example, in the teaching that he brings (7:16), the life that he has (5:26), the authority that he possesses (17:2), the reason people come to him in faith (6:37), the will that he came to obey (4:34), and the glory that he has (17:24). All of these are aspects of Jesus' dependence on the Father, which perhaps serves as the greatest witness to Jesus outside his own witness to himself. It is mentioned the most and, in fact, it is the foundation for Jesus' own self-witness. It is because Jesus has been sent by the Father (and is consequently dependent upon him) that he speaks and acts as he does (7:16; 5:19).

1.2 CHRIST'S WORDS AND WORKS

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, which prefer the term *dynamis* to describe Jesus' acts, particularly his miracles, the Fourth Gospel records Jesus' use of *ergos*. Most of the time Jesus uses *ergos* (or the plural) to refer to the miracles as confirmation of the truthfulness of his words. But there are other times when Jesus uses the word to indicate his mission given by God to accomplish (4:34; 17:4). However, both Jesus and John also use the term *sēmeion* because Jesus' works are designed specifically to serve as pointers to his origin as revelation from God,

perfectly consistent with Old Testament prophecy. In addition, Barrett believes that John uses the word *sēmeion* not only because of its biblical foundation, but also because of its familiarity in his Hellenistic environment.³

At the end of his Gospel, the Evangelist tells his readers that although he did not record every sign that Jesus did, what was written down was meant to convince people that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore have life by believing in him (20:30-31).⁴ Commentators do not agree entirely on the number of signs that the Evangelist records, but the various discussions produce a total of eight, and it seems that all eight should be regarded as signs even though not all explicitly have the word *sēmeion* attached to them: the turning of the water into wine (2:1-11); the healing of the official's son (4:46-54); the healing of the lame man (5:1-18); the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14); the walking on the water (6:16-21); the healing of the blind man (9:1-41); the raising of Lazarus (11:1-46); and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (20:1-29).⁵

A characteristic approach, though not present for every sign, is its linking with a discourse that explains the real meaning of the sign performed. Or to express it another way, the sign serves as confirmation of, and a visible witness to, the truth of the discourse. Thus, both the words of Jesus and the works of Jesus testify to the reality of his person, that he is indeed the incarnate Word who has come to bring the fullest manifestation of the grace and truth of God. "Act and word are one; and this unity of act and word is fundamental to the Johannine philosophy, and distinguishes it from the abstract intellectualism or mysticism of much of the

³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978, revised edition), 77.

⁴For a discussion of *sēmeia* in John 20:30-31 as possibly referring exclusively to the signs after the resurrection, see Hans-Christian Kammler, "Die 'Zeichen' des Auferstandenen: Überlegungen zur Exegese von Joh 20,30+31," in *Johannesstudien: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*, ed. Otfried Hofius und Hans-Christian Kammler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), 201-208.

⁵Andreas Köstenberger, who includes the cleansing of the temple, maintains that Jesus' walking on the water should not be considered a sign because it was not a public action. Also, Christ's resurrection is not one of the Johannine signs because it is not part of Jesus' public ministry, and because it is the event to which the signs point (*The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998], 64-70).

thought of the time.”⁶ It cannot be overemphasized that the words and works of Jesus do not merely communicate ideas about God, important but perhaps somehow distant. Instead, what is communicated is the very being of God himself, understood in all the divine attributes that are unique to him alone. Moreover, that knowledge is not merely communicated by Jesus, but because Jesus himself is the divine Son of God, in witnessing to himself through his words and acts he makes known the Father in his definitive disclosure. But it is even richer because what is communicated is content that cannot be divorced from a saving relationship in which a connection exists between the life that has been granted to the Son by the Father and the love that exists between them (5:26; 15:9), and that which is bestowed upon all believers by the Holy Spirit (14:23; 16:27; 17:23).

All of this content is rendered nonexistent by Bultmann’s emphasis on the existential encounter through his demythologizing exegesis. For him, one can know absolutely nothing through Jesus’ revelation except that he is the revealer, since “Jesus’ words communicate no definable content at all except that they are words of life, words of God.”⁷ Bultmann goes on to say that one can really only know that the revelation has been given (what he famously calls the “that” of the revelation, quite apart from anything of the “what”).⁸

This, however, is hopelessly meaningless. For there to be any value at all in the revelation of God to humanity, there must be more than the announcement that the revealer has come. And,

⁶C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 384. Elsewhere addressing this relationship between sign and discourse, using the sign in John 5, Dodd explains: “The intelligent Hellenistic reader would recognize that he was being offered a new and admittedly difficult conception of the manner in which ‘life’ is mediated to men; new and difficult, and yet having its starting point in intelligible and widely accepted religious ideas. He might well ask, however, for evidence that Christ was to be recognized as mediating eternal life, with these fresh implications. The mere assertion is not enough. Hence the discussion of *martyria*.” Dodd goes on to say that “a serious enquirer in the Hellenistic world, though he might be impressed by such miraculous cures, would not be ready to find in them evidence for such claims as are here advanced. After all, such cures were frequently reported...But in the light of the discourse (especially v. 24) he would readily understand that the ‘works’ in question concerned, not some casual cure of invalids in Palestine, but the initiation into divine life which was the goal of the contemporary religious quest” (p. 332).

⁷Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, two vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951, 1955), II: 63.

⁸*Ibid.*, II: 66.

one might ask, in what way can Jesus really be considered a revealer if he does not reveal anything? Bultmann is fully aware of this because he argues that the message is not entirely without content, that Jesus' words are words of life and words of God. But that is just as unhelpful as if there were no content, and, in fact, it amounts to the same thing. Ultimately, in Bultmann's construction, of what value are the words of God if they are the words of life, but are without the content of what that life is all about, how it is brought, and how one obtains it? This whole discussion is especially relevant to the Fourth Gospel because of its concern to give the longer and more profound sermons of Jesus' earthly ministry. Even for the sake of argument, granting Bultmann's exegetical emphasis on one's personal encounter, if there is no content, or virtually no content at the very best, behind the figure whom one is exhorted to encounter, the foundation for the importance of this meeting is removed or, at the very least, greatly diminished.

Concluding, therefore, that the content of Jesus' words and works do indeed belong to Jesus, rather than being a product of the early church's theological reflection, it remains to consider the value of Jesus' works, and what the relationship is between his signs and the faith for which he calls. R. E. Brown observes four reactions to Jesus in the context of the signs: 1) refusing to believe (5:16; 9:41; 11:47-48; 12:37); 2) merely acknowledging Jesus to be a worker of miracles who has been sent by God (2:23-25; 6:14, 26); 3) coming to believe (2:11; 4:52-53; 6:68-69; 7:31; 9:35-38; 11:45); 4) believing without having seen signs (4:39-41; 17:20; 20:29).⁹ Because not everyone responds properly to Jesus' miracles it is important to make a distinction between the value that the miracles have as evidence and the value that they have as signs.¹⁰ All who see the miracles have evidence for the veracity of Jesus' words and the reality that he has come from God. But only those who believe recognize the miracles as signs pointing to Jesus' true identity.

The Fourth Gospel makes frequent reference to the idea of seeing (usually employing *horaō*

⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, two vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966, 1970), I-XII: 530-531.

¹⁰ J. C. Hindley, "Witness in the Fourth Gospel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965): 334.

or *theōreō*).¹¹ As it relates to Jesus, it is applied to those who come to understand and believe who Jesus really is; those who after seeing regard Jesus as merely a great miracle-worker with divine sanction; and those who after seeing are hardened and determine all the more to put Jesus to death. For those who believe, “to see” therefore carries a double meaning: in beholding the works of Jesus they “see” him as he is truly meant to be seen, as the promised Savior sent from God. As Kysar expresses it, “ ‘To see,’ then, in the gospel has reference to both the events of Jesus’ life and the mystery of his person. To see Jesus determines the distinction between those open to the mystery of his being and those blind to it.”¹²

Before seeing how these themes are displayed in the Gospel, as shown in Jesus’ healing of the man born blind, it remains to briefly discuss one more aspect of the relationship between signs and faith. On a few occasions belief that emerges from the signs appears to be treated as inferior, as opposed to that faith which comes without seeing signs (2:23-25; 4:48; 10:25, 29, 37-38). If this were the case, there would be a rather glaring discrepancy between these passages and the others already cited that speak of the positive value of Christ’s signs in leading to faith. The answer, which has been alluded to already, is to be found not in any inconsistency in the Gospel account, nor in Jesus’ teaching, but with the nature of faith that is being expressed in response to the sign. Marianne Meye Thompson rightly notes that the same signs lead to both superficial faith, produced by an interest in miraculous activity, and genuine faith, which in the signs comes to understand who Jesus really is. In the case of one who is marked by merely superficial faith, their devotion is only on the surface level of their fascination with anyone able to perform miracles, and what that might mean for them personally as well as socio-politically. Even if they are able to see in Jesus’ works proof that he came from God, thus attributing a measure of

¹¹Clemens Hergenröder has thoroughly examined the meaning of the Johannine idea of “seeing.” However, when he briefly surveys the terminology of making something known, he curiously ignores the special role that the *martys* word group plays in the Fourth Gospel (*Wir schauten seine Herrlichkeit: Das johanneische Sprechen vom Sehen im Horizont von Selbsterschließung Jesu und Antwort des Menschen* [Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1996], 243-246).

¹²Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), 231.

uniqueness to him, it was still for the wrong reasons. Once Jesus started saying things (or not saying things) or failing to do things that went against what these enthusiasts assumed should happen, their interest evaporated and they fell away. On the other hand, those who through the signs came to genuine faith continued on in true discipleship and produced much fruit to the ultimate glory of God.¹³ In John, Jesus' words and works go together. But as Jesus teaches in 10:37-38, even if one rejects his words, at least believe the complementing works which are *verba visibilia*. This is not opposed to the fact that it is still better to believe without the need for signs, not because the signs inherently produce a secondary faith, but because they can be misunderstood, as opposed to Jesus' words. Moreover, this whole idea of seeing ties in with the image of light, which both illumines the humble and reveals the proud for who they really are. In the latter, the light is “ ‘the judgment’ (3:19)—the dreaded brilliance which exposes the deeds of those who fear it (3:20), and so drives them into the deepest darkness of all, the willing refusal to see.”¹⁴

The particular healing of a man blind from birth in John 9 follows the confrontation between Jesus and his opponents that results in the first recorded attempt to kill Jesus. Jesus declared himself to be the light of the world (8:12), and his subsequent comments, if received, would bring one out of the darkness of sin and into the light of salvation. But the Jews present would not receive Jesus, and in their rejection showed themselves to belong, not to Abraham as they so confidently supposed, but to the devil. This blindness caused the Jews (which apparently included Pharisees in both stories, and perhaps included many of the same opponents) to deny clear evidence pointing to the truth of Jesus' statements made in John 8.

After the blind man was healed by washing in the pool of Siloam, others saw him, wondered if he was the man who was previously blind, and were then informed by the man himself. These people brought the man to the Pharisees (v. 13), who were told what happened to the man,

¹³Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 64-67.

¹⁴Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 126.

thereby already having multiple witnesses to Jesus' miracles. Apparently they wanted a first-hand account, and so they questioned the healed man directly (v. 15). The Pharisees were split, some being to some degree convinced by the sign itself, while others holding that Jesus was not from God because the healing had taken place on the Sabbath.

In spite of the witnesses they had thus far, their sinful refusal to believe that he was ever blind in the first place drove them to question the man's parents (v. 18). His parents serve as witnesses, but were afraid to say too much lest they be put out of the synagogue. The evidence continued to pile up, making it increasingly difficult to rationally ignore it or explain it away. This is why they engaged in the irrational by going to the man once again (v. 26), asking him the same questions they had asked earlier. Enough of them are convinced that Jesus is a sinner, and so there must be a problem in the man's testimony. It is difficult to tell if other previous witnesses are around for this second round of questioning, but v. 24 suggests that the man is alone before his accusers. Perhaps his interrogators were hoping he would change his story.

The first round of questioning sought to establish what had actually happened, even though the Pharisees were certainly not entering into the situation impartially. This second round, and a repetitive one at that, quickly takes on an angry, combative tone. The healed man realizes that the Pharisees are no longer, and perhaps never were, interested in figuring out what had happened. His response in v. 27 is undoubtedly sarcastic: "You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" The Pharisees then elevate themselves by affirming their allegiance to Moses, at the same time mocking Jesus on the grounds that they do not know where he has come from. The man is astounded at such theological ignorance, and so seeks to correct those who are supposed to be reliable teachers of God's ways. Jesus is obviously on the side of God; one cannot perform such wonderful deeds unless God is with him, which clearly means that Jesus is pleasing to God because God does not hear sinners.

Jesus, hearing that as a result of this challenge the man had been excommunicated, found him and asked if he believed in the Son of Man. After finding out that Jesus himself is the Son of Man, the man believes and worships. D. K. Rensberger says that the blind man arrives at

understanding “not in a reflective encounter with Jesus, as Thomas and the Samaritan woman do, but in the process of *confrontation* with the Pharisees.”¹⁵ In v. 39 Jesus puts his ministry in the context of judgment, which will give sight to some and blindness to others. With the reference to blindness, those of the Pharisees who heard it took it that they too, like the man, were blind, the difference being that the man now saw. But Jesus puts them in an entirely different category, namely, the category of those who claim to have sight. It is those who are blind and acknowledge it who can see Jesus as the cure, not only for physical affliction, but more importantly for the spiritual restoration to which the miracle points. But those who claim to possess sight and therefore see and know all—the sinfulness of Jesus, the sinfulness of the man, their own righteousness based on a supposed commitment to Moses—are the ones who remain blinded by sin. As M. Hasitschka correctly points out, here sin is “also nicht in erster Linie eine moralische Verfehlung (Übertretung eines Gebotes), sondern die fehlende Bereitschaft, Gottes Zuwendung und Selbstmitteilung in Jesus, dem menschgewordenen Wort, aufzunehmen.”¹⁶

Finally, Jesus’ knowledge of having been sent by God and that what he speaks and does are the very words and works of God accounts for Jesus’ unique designation of God as his Father. When Jesus instructs his disciples to begin their prayers with “Father” (Luke 11:2), this is only possible because God is Jesus’ Father and the disciples, because they belong to Jesus, are granted this privilege. Jesus is able to bear witness to the Father by bearing witness to himself because of this unique relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. Therefore, to see and hear Jesus is really to see and hear God. The Father and Son relationship does not exist because Jesus, though a man, was somehow able to ascend closer to God than anyone else, or because he

¹⁵D. K. Rensberger, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1988), 46; quoted in Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 182-183. That the Pharisees are the ones who enable the man to understand that Jesus’ healing miracle symbolizes the deeper, spiritual healing that he alone can give is, according to Lee, the “deepest irony of the narrative” (p. 183).

¹⁶M. Hasitschka, *Befreiung von Sünde nach dem Johannesevangelium: Eine bibeltheologische Untersuchung* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1989), 301; quoted in Lee, *op. cit.*, 181. “...consequently not in the first line a moral offense (transgression of a command), but the lack of willingness to accept God’s gift and self-communication in Jesus, the incarnate Word.”

tapped more of the divine power than any prophet or thaumaturge before him. Nor is it because Jesus demonstrated greater acts of devotion and obedience. Rather, the relationship exists because Jesus is the divine Son who became flesh and consequently can only say and do the Father's will. Furthermore, this sending of the Son by the Father is on behalf of fallen humanity. Not only does God desire to show love to undeserving sinners, whom are affectionately called "children of God" (1:12), but this matchless love is seen, "not in the academic perception of a rational attribute, but in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth who loved men to the point of dying for them and their sin."¹⁷

1.3 JESUS' DIVINE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

All of this would seem to render unnecessary further discussion on Jesus' view of himself, for no mere man could possibly possess the awareness that Jesus possessed if he were not God incarnate. But Jesus' self-consciousness has been anything but agreed upon. Even with the demise of the dominance of the radical skepticism of scholars such as Bultmann and those following after him, there still exists a kind of moderate skepticism which, unlike Bultmann, exhibits a greater respect for the historical reliability of the Gospels generally and the Fourth Gospel in particular. This prolonged concern over Jesus' self-consciousness proves J. A. T. Robinson's assessment of its value: "In this sense the *self-knowledge* of Jesus is the indispensable heart of the mystery: to regard it as a matter of indifference or as a 'no go' area is to leave a blank at the centre of Christian theology."¹⁸

The reference to the healed man's confession and worship of Jesus in John 9 causes one to reflect on Hanson's answer to the question, "Should the historical Jesus have been worshipped?" Hanson goes behind this question by asking whether Jesus could be God's revelation if he were not aware of his own deity. Not only does Hanson answer that he could be, but he even goes so

¹⁷James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), 54.

¹⁸J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987, reprint), 357.

far as to say that because of the necessity of human obedience in order to reveal God's nature to people, Jesus could not have been this revelation if he knew he was God or even claimed to be God.¹⁹ This appears to claim too much regarding the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. The human mind simply cannot understand that Christ is both fully God and fully man, and any critical attempt to reduce either of those two realities in order to ease the paradox not only contends with the weight of church history, but more importantly with the biblical text itself, to which the ecclesiastical councils appealed.

When the focus turns to the Fourth Gospel the area of immediate attention is quite rightly the discourses, for it is in these sermons of Jesus that his divine consciousness is seen. Therefore what one concludes about the history and theology of the discourses will largely determine one's Christology, shaped as it is so profoundly by this aspect of John's Gospel. Based on the obvious differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel, James Dunn considers the Johannine discourses to be "meditations or sermons on individual sayings or episodes from Jesus' life, but elaborated in the language and theology of subsequent Christian reflection."²⁰ A little later Dunn goes on to in effect provide his exegetical approach to the relevant texts, the most important of which are the "I am" sayings: "The upshot of all this is that, despite the renewal of interest in the Fourth Gospel as a historical source for the ministry of Jesus, *it would be verging on the irresponsible to use the Johannine testimony on Jesus' divine sonship in our attempt to uncover the self-consciousness of Jesus himself...*The Johannine christology of conscious pre-existent sonship, of self-conscious divinity, belongs most clearly to the *developed* tradition and not to the original."²¹ Dunn certainly acknowledges that Jesus possessed a unique self-consciousness of sonship in relation to the Father, but that is all that the "firm evidence" allows. In the end, "of course Jesus was much more than he ever knew himself to be during his

¹⁹Anthony T. Hanson, *Grace and Truth: A Study in the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1975), 94.

²⁰James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 30.

²¹*Ibid.*, 31-32.

earthly life. But *if we are to submit our speculations to the text and build our theology only with the bricks provided by careful exegesis we cannot say with any confidence that Jesus knew himself to be divine, the pre-existent Son of God.*"²²

However, the reason, according to Dunn, why the discourses do not provide firm evidence of Jesus' divine self-consciousness is the assumed validity of the theory of Johannine development. But assuming the opposite, that the content of the discourses is as early as the content of the Synoptics (because Jesus is the source for both), especially keeping in mind the high Christology of other parts of the New Testament which date decades earlier than John, one can and must then actually engage in exegesis rather than dismiss texts as inadmissible on the grounds that they belong to a later meditation.²³

Moreover, for the sake of argument, it is one thing to talk about a developing understanding regarding those comments made by the Evangelist and not Jesus (for example, the prologue). It is another to suggest that longer sermons attributed to Jesus are really the product of later theological reflection on his individual sayings. Even allowing for different standards of historiographical integrity, this understanding of the discourses at the very least calls into question the Evangelist's authorial integrity, which if true violates any standard, ancient or modern.²⁴ There simply does not exist sufficient evidence to vindicate Dunn's theory, which

²²*Ibid.*, 32.

²³From the perspective of the early Christian community, Cullmann is helpful when he says that a necessary characteristic of the faith of the early church was their conviction that Jesus knew himself to be the divine Son. Various titles were ascribed to Jesus not because of later tradition but because Jesus himself believed it (*The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall [London: SCM Press, 1959], 8). Elsewhere Cullmann points out that even in the Synoptics, though not as explicit as in John, one finds evidence of Jesus' knowledge of his divine status. This is seen, for example, in his authority to forgive sins and in his announcement that in him the kingdom of God had come (*Salvation and History* [New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967], 197-198).

²⁴Andrew Lincoln has argued that the Fourth Gospel "as ancient biography contains elements of both [history and fiction]. This is part of its taking the form of narrative" (*Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000], 390). There is no question that ancient biography differs from modern biography. But must all ancient biography automatically contain both elements, even if it is granted that "ancient biography" (rather than "gospel") is the best term to describe the Fourth Gospel? This was an account that was recognized from its inception as sacred Scripture, used in the churches as such, and known by the apostles and others who were either

means that one must take the Johannine discourses at face value and treat them as historically and theologically reliable in ascertaining what Jesus believed about himself.

1.4 THE MISSION OF THE REVEALER

Jesus' mission can be summarized by two statements that he himself makes. He has come that people might have life (10:10), and he has also come for judgment (9:39), which is a consequence of refusing to come to him for life.

Jesus' gift of life has both a present and future significance. The life that Jesus gives is an eternal life that will never expire and will involve perfect fellowship as believers, who possess the Spirit, are united with Jesus and the Father. But there is a present aspect as well. Jesus has come to bring abundant life now. The fullness of eternal life is yet to come, but meanwhile believers enjoy a foretaste. Life not only involves salvation from sin and the promise of heaven. It also brings meaning and purpose to the present, expressed in service to God and a progressive growth in sanctification, all of which is to the praise of the Father's glory (15:8). The raising of Lazarus in John 11 points to the spiritual life and resurrection that occurs because of Jesus. Jesus said to Martha in vv. 25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." Of course, Jesus was not claiming that physical death would never overtake a believer. But because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, spiritual death has been dealt a fatal blow, and therefore physical death does not have the last word. Not only will one never die spiritually, but because Jesus is presently the resurrection and the life, all who believe possess and enjoy it now, and are not waiting for it to take effect some time in the future or after physical death. Again, eternal life is not only future, but pertains to the believer's life in the present age, even though there are aspects that are reserved for the future.

Jesus' words and works bear witness to his being sent by the Father to reveal God's message

eyewitnesses themselves or were close to those who were. Given this, it is difficult to believe that they would be so comfortable with a mixture of history and fiction.

of salvation. He is the fullest revelation of God and all God's previous revelation finds its fulfillment in him. Therefore anyone who rejects Jesus also rejects God, not in a manner of careless indifference, which is bad enough, but in a manner of hatred. In John 15:22-24 Jesus' point is that those who were the recipients and witnesses of God's preeminent revelation in Jesus are in a worse position because of the wonderful things that were said and done in their presence. Jesus is the clearest witness to the saving work of God and if he is rejected there is no hope because no other expression of God's character is going to come. And Jesus is not only the clearest revelation, but he is the final revelation because he is the very self-revelation of God. This brings to mind the Synoptic equivalent in which Jesus condemns Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their unbelief, stating that as fierce as the judgment will be for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, it will be worse for those cities which saw but nevertheless rejected Jesus' signs. Judgment is harsher for those who choose unbelief in response to the blessing of fuller revelation. Even more, Jesus said, if these cities, which were synonymous with wickedness, would have received the same revelation as those cities of Jesus' day, they would have repented (Matt. 11:20-24).

An interesting connection between Jesus' kingship and mission is found in John 18. Jesus is summoned before Pilate and in response to Pilate's inquiry regarding his kingship, Jesus acknowledges that he is a king, but then elaborates to provide the details of the nature of the kingship (v. 37). His kingship is linked to his having come into the world in order to bear witness to the truth. J. Duncan Derrett observes that Jesus' function as king is unusual since the normal practice is that testimony is given before kings, who act as judges, not that kings themselves testify.²⁵ Jesus' kingship exists because of the work he has been given to accomplish by the Father. Because his words and deeds are consistent and united in their objective of obeying the Father's will, in witnessing to the truth Jesus is pointing to himself as the very embodiment of truth. This is surely different from the elaboration Pilate expected. As far as

²⁵J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Christ, King and Witness (John 18:37)," *Bibbia e Oriente* 31 (1989): 190.

Pilate was concerned, Jesus may have some strange ideas, but he is clearly innocent of the charges brought against him. Whatever concept of kingship Jesus is claiming, he is certainly no challenge to Caesar. As Jesus appears to Pilate, he does not impress him as regal. For a man more interested in political power, Jesus' view of truth does not sound very impressive, especially since it is centered around one so unimposing. Probably with an air of arrogance and belittlement Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" By such a response Pilate demonstrates that he is not of the truth.

But Pilate failed to realize that the truth of Jesus' kingship is not only pertinent to the Jewish people. He is the king of the Jews, as the placard indicated (19:19), but his kingship extends beyond Jewish boundaries because truth is universal. Because Jesus' kingship concerns his witnessing to the truth, the content of which is his coming into the world and the consequent need for all to believe and obey him, "his Messiahship cannot be confined to Jewish particularism; it has permanent and universal validity, and confers genuine liberation on those who acknowledge it."²⁶

Finally, Jesus' mission must be considered with respect to the Johannine use of "hour" to indicate Jesus' suffering and death, which cannot be separated from his resurrection and glorification. This use does occur in the Synoptics (Mark 14:35, 41; Matt. 26:45), but John uses it more often (approximately fifteen times, with another using *kairos*), and as a kind of theme that runs throughout, showing that the whole purpose of Jesus' coming was for the specific work described by his "hour."²⁷

²⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 354. Regarding the Johannine conception of witness in general, and the idea of witnessing to the truth in particular, Johannes Beutler addresses the background. Granting the influence of Palestinian Judaism as well as Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism, he nevertheless sees Hellenism as the best literary parallel (*Martyria: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Zeugnisthema bei Johannes* [Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1972], 338). The phrase is certainly general enough that one would expect it to be found in a wide range of literature. At best, it does pose the possibility that the Evangelist knew of this range and found it helpful for his Greek concerns.

²⁷Lincoln stresses the importance of Jesus' death as part of his own witness against the unbelieving world. At the heart of the trial going on between God and the world is Jesus' death which is the "culmination of the witness of his life" (*op. cit.*, 201).

Two occurrences will be singled out because of their importance for the Johannine concern for Greek evangelism. The first is John 2, in which at the wedding feast in Cana Jesus said that his hour had not yet come. Jesus changes into wine the water contained in the ceremonial pots, resulting in the revelation of his glory, in response to which his disciples believe in him. The Fourth Gospel is filled with examples of Jesus' replacing Jewish institutions and practices. R. E. Brown has even attempted to outline this replacement theme. In part II of his commentary (John 2-4) he points out the replacement of institutions and religious views; in part III (John 5-10) he explains how Jesus fulfills the Jewish feasts. In John 2 it is Jewish purification that is being replaced with the wine of messianic joy characterizing God's new dispensation in the coming of Jesus.²⁸ Certainly this theme of wine helping to symbolize the messianic age would speak much more effectively to those who knew the Old Testament, and various passages would perhaps be recollected (Jer. 31:12; Hos. 14:7; Amos 9:13-14). Considering other allusions to Isaiah in the Gospel, perhaps more than the above one should see Isaiah 25:6-9. Unlike the other passages, the Isaiah passage uses wine in the context of a great banquet, which is precisely the setting in John 2. If the Evangelist has this passage in mind, he is wishing to make a connection between the redemptive-historical shift taking place in Jesus Christ—to which the miracle points—and the universal application of this new dispensation, including Gentiles ("all peoples" are the recipients according to vv. 6 and 7, "all nations" and "all faces" in v. 8). Thus, as Jewish as the meaning of the miracle is, alongside it exists the understanding that God's salvation extends beyond the borders of Jewish identity. That is indeed an attractive message for Greeks who are at all open to the claims of Christ.

The second occurrence comes from John 12. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11), he returned to Bethany, where he was anointed by Mary with ointment. Knowledge of Jesus' presence there attracted a great crowd, who wanted to see him as well as Lazarus. On account of this resurrection many were coming to faith in him, causing the chief priests to seek

²⁸Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 104-105.

Lazarus' life as well. The next day the crowd, hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem for Passover, met him with palm branches, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (9:9). The multitude was enthralled, causing the frustrated Pharisees to remark to each other, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him" (v.19). Before, the emphasis was on the Jews who were coming to see him. Now, in vv. 20-21 (which is not mentioned in the Synoptics) Greeks come to the disciples asking to see Jesus. When Jesus receives word of this he proclaims, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v. 23). Jesus did not come to save the Jews only, but those whom he elsewhere referred to as sheep not of this fold (10:16). In John 11 the Evangelist writes that Jesus' death would be for the uniting of all God's children scattered abroad (v. 52). "His sacrifice alone would open up the kingdom of heaven to *all* believers, Greeks as well as Jews. It would bring within the flock of the new Israel the elect children of God at present scattered throughout heathen lands, and enable them all to enjoy eternal life."²⁹ The hour had now come, not with the enthusiastic crowd shouting "Hosanna!" nor with the feeding of the five thousand, nor even with the raising of Lazarus, but with a seemingly insignificant inquiry made by Greeks. Jesus, in his suffering and death, followed by his resurrection and glorification, would be the seed that dies and then produces much fruit, the fulfillment of God's covenant of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

2. THE WITNESS OF THE FATHER

The previous section dealt with Christ's self-authenticating witness, which includes his words as well as his works. In addition, these works are not only the miracles, but include all of Jesus'

²⁹R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 148. Echoing this idea, Ulrich Busse calls this event "eine soteriologisch-eschatologisch Situation," what he a little later refers to as "die universale Dimension des in seiner Passion..." ("Die 'Hellenen' Joh 12,20ff. und der sogenannte 'Anhang' Joh 21," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, three vols., ed. F. Van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992], III: 2092). Adding to this, Carson says that the Gospel encompasses both Jew and Gentile as a "new covenant community whose locus is no longer constrained by the parameters of Sinai" (*The Gospel According to John* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991], 438).

actions. But in another sense, Jesus' works should also be considered from the perspective of supplementary witnesses, as seen in John 5:36. Along with Christ's works one also discovers that John the Baptist (vv. 33-35) and the Scriptures (vv. 37-40) serve as witnesses to Jesus Christ, who himself is the truth. The Baptist bore witness to the truth, which is not merely Christ's message, but his person. Furthermore, the Scriptures also bear witness to Jesus, not only to his words and works, but to himself. One cannot merely regard Jesus' words or even his deeds as true (that is, as believable and reliable) without recognizing that he is the very embodiment of truth because he alone is the revelation of God's self-communication for sinners, as the Scriptures promised.

In his study on the Johannine concept of witness Boice observes a shift from Jesus' self-witness to the supplementary witnesses. This however does not indicate for the idea of witness a movement away from revelation because the supplementary witnesses are themselves revelation.³⁰ The same is true for the present study of truth. The supplementary witnesses are of course concerned with truth in that their testimony is veracious and not false. But their witness, precisely because it is revelation, is also indispensable and in its own way contributes to the divine content of truth that the Evangelist so carefully and thoroughly conveys. This contribution to the content of the Johannine idea of truth in no way suggests that Jesus Christ (as its subject) needs to be supplemented, as if somehow incomplete. Rather, the various witnesses serve as further evidence and pointers to the divine reality of Jesus' origin and claims, thereby helping to explain the truth further to those who need to believe in Jesus.

Leading up to v. 32, where Jesus speaks of another who bears witness to him, he has been speaking of the Father. In v. 30 one can summarize Jesus' entire work as pursuing the will of the Father who sent him. Then in v. 31 he introduces his discussion of witnesses by stating the legal need for them. Taking this other witness in v. 32 to be the Father, the question then becomes: How does the Father bear witness to Christ? Chrysostom held that the Father's witness was to

³⁰Boice, *op. cit.*, 76.

be seen in Jesus' baptism, where the voice of God was heard expressing his pleasure in his Son.³¹ This however is unlikely, for two reasons. The first is that even though it is reasonable to assume that the details of Jesus' baptism would have been known by those readers already familiar with the events of Jesus of Nazareth, the fact that the Evangelist does not include those details argues against seeing the voice from heaven as a witness. The second reason concerns the rather noticeable decision on the part of the Evangelist to ignore the account of the transfiguration, where the Father's voice is also heard. Moreover, in the one time that John does record the voice of God speaking (12:28, which is not found in the Synoptics), the crowd who heard it did not know whose voice it was, nor apparently what was said.³²

More common than an audible or visible manifestation is the suggestion that Jesus is speaking of the Father's internal witness, either in the lives of believers (I John 5:9-10), or in leading people to faith.³³ Exegetically, this view has some value since Jesus himself declares that those to whom he is addressing his remarks have never heard God's voice or seen his form. But it also suffers an exegetical difficulty since the idea of an internal witness is not mentioned, and in fact is not discussed until the final discourse, where Jesus says that this internal witness of the Holy Spirit will not come until after his resurrection.

Given the fact that the other witness mentioned by Jesus in v. 32 is the Father, there is obviously a connection between this verse and v. 37. The Scriptures will be addressed in the

³¹John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John*, XL, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, first series, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, reprint), 146.

³²While it is probably best to disregard this as a formal aspect of the Father's witness, it is nevertheless significant that the Evangelist records an instance that occurred shortly before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Undoubtedly the disciples did not understand the events unfolding before them, nor the timing and content of the divine voice in its redemptive-historical context. But it is difficult to believe that this would have remained unclear. Jesus said that it was for the benefit of the hearers, that is, for those willing to come to Jesus humbly in faith. No doubt this event was another that came to be understood by the disciples only after Jesus' resurrection. Thus it became beneficial for the hearers, but not necessarily every hearer. Perhaps it proved to be a later argument for those who were present, thereby becoming beneficial for more people later on.

³³Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 227-228; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, two vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), I: 251; and Trites, *op. cit.*, 102.

next section. For now, it is enough to say concerning them and their relationship to the Father that the reference to God's voice and form in v. 37 appears to be an allusion to Sinai, seen in the pointing to the Scriptures as witness in v. 39 and the accusatory role of Moses in response to the people's rejection of Moses' writings in vv. 45-47. Moses, the great lawgiver and spiritual leader of Israel, heard God's voice and saw his form. More than this, through faith he had God's revelation in Scripture abiding in him, and he wrote of the promised Messiah, now clearly revealed in Jesus. In rejecting Jesus his opponents showed themselves to be alienated from Moses and therefore not true Israelites, regardless of any claim they might make. But they were also actually placing themselves above their theological hero. Moses as the divinely appointed mediator between God and his people was given extraordinary privileges concerning the special relationship he enjoyed with God. He had been the recipient of God's revelation, and he acted properly with the knowledge that he had in writing of and looking forward to God's anointed one. The Jews in John 5 had not heard and seen the wonderful things given to Moses, yet they were elevating themselves above him in choosing to reject the one whom Moses had anticipated. But in another sense they received greater advantages because unlike Moses they were actual witnesses to the fulfillment of God's covenant promises given to Israel in Scripture. Based on their knowledge of Scripture they should have recognized Jesus as God's Messiah and believed in him, just as Moses would have certainly done if he had been permitted to live during this central period of redemptive history. They were so focused on Moses that they not only missed, but actually killed, the very one on whom Moses himself had set his hopes. Pancaro summarizes well the argument as it applies to Jesus: "The Jews do not believe in the Son—they consequently never really heard God's voice or saw his form at all. If they had they would 'see' the Father in him and 'hear' the word of the Father in the word of Jesus."³⁴

Based on the connection between vv. 32 and 37, it seems reasonable to conclude that a relationship also exists between these references and those surrounding them. It would then be

³⁴Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 226.

correct to assume that the witness of the Father in this section is precisely the witness of the Baptist, Jesus' works, and the Scriptures, for they should all be seen as divine witness to Christ. If this is true, it means not just that the Father's witness must not be so narrowly defined as his presence at Jesus' baptism, but also that one be open to other forms of his witness throughout the Gospel, including the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. That this is intended is shown in I John 5, where John refers to the three-fold witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Regardless of how one understands the water and the blood, the point is that they witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and those who believe have the witness of God in themselves (vv. 6-12). There is a plurality of witnesses of the Father, but theirs is a singular purpose to reveal the person of Christ and internally confirm the believer's standing before God.

As for John 5, Christ's works have already been discussed, and have there been shown that they not only witness to Christ's own claims, but because they are done through the Father, they are ultimately an aspect of the Father's witness. The Scriptures are the very words of God and are consequently another divine witness to Jesus. Lastly, the Baptist, who will be discussed after the Scriptures, must also be seen as a witness of the Father. It is true that the Baptist is a man, but he has received a divine commission, and the Fourth Gospel clearly says that he has been sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ (3:28). From the Synoptic Gospels one discovers that the Baptist is a prophet because he speaks the message God has given to him, but that he is more than a prophet because his message is that of the arrival of the one of whom the Old Testament prophets themselves prophesied. The Baptist, as the last of the prophets under the old dispensation, spoke of the commencement of the kingdom of God come in Jesus Christ. When one considers these three aspects of the Father's witness to Jesus—the Baptist, the works, and the Scriptures—Boice is correct to correlate them, in that order, to the prophetic word, the active word, and the written word.³⁵ All three are forms of the unified and unbreakable word of God. This renders each one a unique and indispensable component of the Father's

³⁵Boice, *op. cit.*, 80.

witness to Jesus Christ.

3. THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE

The last section concluded with a reference to the three aspects of the Father's witness, namely, the prophetic word, the active word, and the written word. The active word, seen in the witness of Jesus Christ himself, has already been discussed. The concern now is the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures, which will be followed by the prophetic witness of John the Baptist. It is these three aspects of the Father's witness to which Jesus himself appeals in John 5 over his opponents' objection to his Sabbath healing.

As will be mentioned in the next section, if it is true that John the Baptist functions as the preeminent witness to Jesus in John's Gospel, it is also true that the Scriptures function as the most sustained witness to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. The proof of the Scriptures' importance has frequently been noted by the number of Old Testament quotations and especially allusions that the Evangelist uses. Johannes Beutler has recently attempted to go beyond this division by further classifying the scriptural findings.³⁶ He divides his study into two areas. The first is John's use of "Scripture" and the idea of "writing" or what has been written. The second is Jesus' words and "Scripture." Because the second section repeats references from the first, it is the first section that will be the focus of the present study. Beutler makes a distinction between what he terms clear references to individual texts; unclear or unspecified references; references to Moses or the Law in general; and references to the whole of Scripture. Altogether, under this scheme there are approximately twenty-seven references in John to Scripture. Added to this is Carson's observation that six times in the Fourth Gospel either Scripture or an Old Testament figure is said to write or speak of Jesus' teaching or mission.³⁷

³⁶Johannes Beutler, "The Use of 'Scripture' in the Gospel of John," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honour of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 147-162.

³⁷D. A. Carson, "John and the Johannine Epistles," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 246.

That the appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures is important for the Evangelist says something about its authoritative value. It obviously was authoritative for Jews and Jewish proselytes. It was their rule of faith and practice, and both legitimate and illegitimate religious claims were to be recognized by Scripture alone. As was the case in the treatment of Jesus, there was a difference between making a judgment based on what Scripture said and making a judgment based on what one believed Scripture said. But the Scriptures were also authoritative for Christians because they recognized that the historical events of Israel's history and the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth were both part of the one redemptive plan of God. The Scriptures therefore pointed to Jesus, giving them apologetic value in Christian preaching and evangelism regarding fulfilled prophecy. And because Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, this preaching and evangelism is directed to all who need to come to him in faith, whether they are familiar with Scripture's themes or not.

This whole discussion on Scripture as a witness renders it necessary to address the subject of the canon. When Scripture was appealed to, the level of appreciation would depend on how the cited book was regarded. If there were still questions about the Old Testament canon, the witness of the Scriptures could be diminished. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, as a result of Wellhausen's documentary theory which questioned the traditional dating of the Old Testament, the view began to circulate widely that the Old Testament canon was not fixed until the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90. In spite of the continued popularity of this view, there is enough evidence to support the traditional position that the canon was in fact settled by Jesus' time. It is not the author's intention to comprehensively discuss the canon question. Rather, a few comments should suffice to adequately explain the present point of departure.

First, there is the often-quoted statement by Josephus in his debate against Apion: "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two books..." (1:8). Not only does Josephus refer to twenty-two books (the traditional number that corresponds to Protestantism's thirty-nine), but he also says that they were written from the time of the death of Moses to the reign of

Artaxerxes. In addition, he goes on to speak of Jewish history written after Artaxerxes, but says that this “hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers...”³⁸

Josephus therefore makes a distinction between Old Testament history and other historical accounts such as Maccabees.

Further evidence looks at Jamnia itself. Robert C. Newman has dealt with the extensive rabbinic material, and cannot find solid evidence for a council or synod that formally and authoritatively settled the Old Testament canon.³⁹ Instead, he finds evidence for a school and a combined court and legislature. Support exists for at least two discussions on the canon, one in the school and the other in the legislature. Newman summarizes these meetings: “The defensive nature of the discussion suggests that the rabbis were trying to justify the *status quo* rather than campaigning for or against candidates for admission.”⁴⁰ In fact, this kind of debate was still going on around A.D. 200, and even later.

Sid Leiman, in a revised version of his doctoral thesis, looks more closely at the Jamnia discussions and suggests that Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were debated with regard to their inspired status, not with their canonical status.⁴¹ Whether or not one is comfortable with a distinction between inspired and canonical status, it appears that enough evidence exists to respectably hold to the canonization of the Old Testament prior to Jamnia.

This has important implications for the appeal to Scripture in John’s Gospel. If it is not obvious to Jesus’ hearers and John’s readers what books are established and which are undetermined, the force of the fulfillment argument is weakened. In John, both the individual scriptural passages intended, and perhaps more importantly the appeals to Scripture as a whole (5:39; 7:52; 10:35; 20:9), argue for an established list that functioned as authoritative Scripture

³⁸Flavius Josephus, “Against Apion,” Book I.8, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, four vols., trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995, reprint), IV: 158.

³⁹Robert C. Newman, “The Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament Canon,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1976): 332.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 344.

⁴¹Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1976), 126.

by which Jesus' person and work could be measured.

As was stated previously, the presence and use of the Scriptures is a sustained argument throughout John's Gospel. John 5, however, provides an outline to help understand how the role of Scripture functions in the Fourth Gospel. From vv. 38-40 and 45-47 one finds three points which provide the outline for studying the relationship between Jesus and the Scriptures. The first is that they bear witness to Jesus Christ as fulfilled prophecy (v. 39). The second point is that although unbelieving Jews thought they understood Scripture, in rejecting Jesus they showed that in fact they misunderstood it (vv. 39-40). Third, it is Moses who will accuse these unbelieving Jews, resulting in judgment (vv. 45-47).

3.1 JESUS AS OLD TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

In thinking about how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures, John operates on a number of levels. On the first level are the passages that are direct or nearly direct quotations. There are approximately seventeen references, with a couple more that come close (1:51; 7:38). The second level is that of allusions, those references that do not correspond to a specific text, but to a definite event in redemptive history. There are quite a number of these in the Gospel, such as Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish ceremonies (2:1-11), the temple (2:18-22; 4:21-24), the manna (6:32-58), the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-38; 8:12), and the vine (15:1). These first two levels, particularly the second, are crucial for appreciating the argument of fulfillment that the Evangelist is advancing. The third level, however, ought not to be minimized, which comprises the references to Scripture as a whole. For this third level, Lindars is correct to say, "John does not mean specific proof texts which may be applied to Jesus; he means something much more fundamental and pervasive. The whole of the Scriptures reveal God and his redemptive purpose for mankind, and this is what is fulfilled in Jesus."⁴²

Boice helpfully points out that the importance of this level is enhanced when one notices that

⁴²Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 233.

Abraham (the first and greatest of the patriarchs), Moses (the mediator of the Law), and Isaiah (the most important of the prophets) “are the only three Old Testament personalities mentioned by name in connection with the ministry of Jesus.”⁴³ Abraham has already been adequately addressed in the section on the “I am” statements in chapter two. For the purposes here, it is enough to reiterate that in John 8 true Jewish identification was assumed to be by lineage. One had a proper relationship to God because of a physical tracing back to Abraham. Jesus corrected them by saying if they really were Abraham’s descendants, they would believe in him, for this is precisely what Abraham himself did. What matters, therefore, is not one’s natural identification with Abraham, but a relationship based on spiritual perceptions concerning Jesus, who had been sent from God. If these Jews from John 8 fail to understand the spiritual reality which Abraham believed, they are actually children of the devil, regardless of their bloodline.

Abraham was appealed to because of his importance as the one to whom God gave the covenant promises. But it is Moses who receives more emphasis because he was the chosen mediator through whom God gave the Law, the written contract to the covenant that had been made with Abraham. If used rightly, the Law would lead one in true righteousness and holiness. If misunderstood, it could be used to justify a crushing legalism where the goal became supposedly correct conduct at the expense of a right attitude toward God and one another. The Scriptures themselves became the way to life, rather than the prophesied Messiah.

As for the prophet Isaiah, connections are made throughout the Gospel,⁴⁴ which suggest the level of importance for the Evangelist. And even though there are only three quotations, they are used at significant places in John. The first is at the beginning of the book, where the Baptist refers to Isaiah 40:3 to identify himself. He has come to “make straight the way of the LORD” (1:23). Because the Baptist is Jesus’ forerunner, the point is that in applying the passage to Jesus the Baptist identifies Jesus with the LORD. This is certainly an early mention of Jesus’ true origin and deity. The second and third quotations are from Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10, recorded

⁴³Boice, *op. cit.*, 103.

⁴⁴See the Scripture index in Carson’s commentary.

in John 12:38 and 40, respectively. The Evangelist summarizes Jesus' ministry in v. 37: "But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him." Both passages from Isaiah are used to prove the expected rejection which Jesus received. Furthermore, the Evangelist writes that Isaiah prophesied these things "because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him" (v. 41). John clearly sees no problem in equating the glory of God with the glory of Christ.

When one considers the fact that in addition to the explicit mention of these major Old Testament figures, the Evangelist quotes from the Law, Prophets, and Writings, he is obviously interested in more than individual fulfillment passages. To be sure, each of these specific instances is important, but it seems that the cumulative value of the Scriptures is greater than the sum of the individual references because the Old Testament is the unified written revelation of God, which finds its completion in the revelation of Jesus Christ and the subsequent writing of him that is the New Testament witness. As Hengel observed, "The reference to the *graphai* stands as the climax at the end of the life of argumentation: God himself bears witness through the Scriptures (*graphai*) to the One he has sent. In their entirety they are prophecy for the sending of the Son."⁴⁵

3.2 JESUS' REJECTION AND SCRIPTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING

A right understanding of the Scriptures, including the messianic prophecies, should have led the Jews to receive Jesus as he really was. Both his words and deeds should have confirmed to them that this was the very one of whom Scripture spoke. Some Jews did come to faith, including some from within the Jewish leadership. But most did not, and it was their understanding of Scripture—or, rather, their misunderstanding—that caused them to reject the true evidences that had been given.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Martin Hengel, "The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 389.

⁴⁶Saeed Hamid-Khani comments that the "Evangelist's appeal to the Old Testament conveys his conviction that the Scriptures not only testify of Jesus (5:39, 45-46), but even more significantly, the

Both Jesus' statements and actions confirmed for his opponents that he was not from God. His claim to be one with God was reprehensible as they understood their monotheistic commitment. As for Jesus' actions, his Sabbath healings brought the sharpest condemnation from his critics. In John 5 Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath, and when challenged he said that he was working as was his Father (v. 17). One was now not only talking about a breach of the Sabbath, which was serious enough, but blasphemy. John 7 refers back to this Sabbath healing, and here Jesus deals with it from another angle. The Law stipulated that no regular work be done on the Sabbath; but the Law also said that male children were to be circumcised on the eighth day. There were times when the eighth day fell on the Sabbath, and it was considered proper to perform this work in order to honor the circumcision commandment. The issue was not whether the act of circumcising was work (which it was). The issue was whether this Sabbath commandment of the Law could be set aside for the sake of circumcision. With these kinds of decisions, the Jews should have realized that Jesus' healing on the Sabbath was perfectly acceptable. But they were so opposed to Jesus already, and had so externalized the Law, that they could not see the obvious good that Jesus was doing.

Underneath this misunderstanding of Scripture was the fact that in externalizing the Law they treated it as an end in itself. Rather than seeing the Law as the means to life, they considered it to be the life that was to be obtained. *Sifre* on Deuteronomy 32:2 expresses this idea: "If you fulfill the words of Torah for their own sake, they will bring you life..." Consequently, the Jews failed to be the light for the Gentiles because they did not recognize God's revelation when it appeared in Jesus Christ. They thought that they possessed life, but Jesus said that they did not have the love of God in them (5:42), being more concerned with one another's praise than with the praise of God (5:44). It is this idea that stands behind Jesus' use of "your Law" and "their Law." It occurs three times, twice during a controversy (8:17; 10:34) and once in the final

intelligibility of the Scriptures depends on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (*Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000], 251-252).

discourse (15:25). It is not to be taken as a distancing of Jesus from the Law itself, as if Jesus could operate any way he wanted, regardless of the Law. During the two controversies the phrase indicates that Jesus is using their own standard of belief and practice as evidence against them in their hatred toward him. Rather than reject him, his opponents should believe in him because their very own Scriptures allow for the things he is saying. In the third occurrence Jesus says that those who hate him without cause actually fulfill their own Scriptures concerning how the Messiah will be treated. Thus, their own Scriptures, like the first two occasions, testify against them.

This misunderstanding of the Scriptures and rejection of Jesus led the Jews to an actual denial of their own religion. As the Jews are pressing for Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate asks, "Shall I crucify your King?" Then the chief priests make one of the most astounding remarks in the Fourth Gospel: "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15). In v. 12 the Jews used Caesar as a means of pressing for Jesus' death. Here, however, they willingly align themselves with him because of their intense hatred of Jesus. Only God was the true king, and by virtue of his relationship to God, also the expected messianic Davidic king. But the Jewish leaders denied all of that, and therefore their identification as the chosen people, in affirming Caesar as the sovereign. All this shows the complete lack of spiritual life in those opposed to Jesus.

3.3 THE JUDGMENT OF MOSES

The last point from John 5 is the role of Moses in the Jews' rejection of Jesus stemming from their misunderstanding of Scripture. Because Jesus' opponents hung all their hopes on the Law itself, treating it as salvation rather than recognizing that it points to Jesus as the world's Savior, it is that very Law which will condemn them. Contextually, it is the Pentateuch that is in view, specifically the written Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai and the covenant that was inseparable from it. These detailed commandments were so valued in their own right that the people failed to see their true value. It is therefore Moses, the mediator of the covenant, who will accuse these unbelievers before God. The Jews' true position cannot be described better

than when Bultmann writes: “Whoever fails to hear *Jesus’ phōnē* shows that he has never heard *God’s phōnē*. Thus the Jews’ pretended knowledge of God is a lie (cp. 7.28; 8.19, 55; 16.3); not merely an error based on inadequate information, but guilt; for it is the consequence of their shutting the door against God.”⁴⁷

It was apparently the case that some Jews believed in Moses’ ongoing intercessory role, although one cannot tell how widespread this thinking was. In saying that Moses has become the accuser, Jesus could be directly reversing an existing Jewish belief. It is this idea that leads Pancaro to ask whether John 5:45-47 considers Moses as strictly an accuser or as one who testifies to Jesus and therefore against the Jews. He denies that Moses should here be seen as a witness to Jesus, calling it an “injustice to the text.” One has moved away from the witness idea in vv. 31-39, and even though it is a logical statement, it is best to see a reversal of Moses’ role from intercessor to accuser, rather than to see the witness theme present.⁴⁸ However, this seems to be allowing the element of role reversal to say too much, and to see Moses as a witness here is certainly not an “injustice to the text.” After Jesus tells the Jews that Moses is their accuser (v. 45), he connects this fact with v. 46: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me.” It is precisely because Moses wrote of, that is, testified to, Jesus that he can act as accuser against those who should know better by virtue of their possession of the Scriptures. In saying that Moses wrote of Jesus, Jesus may mean a specific passage, such as Deuteronomy 18. But the author prefers Carson’s suggestion that it is not a specific reference, but a particular way of reading the Law (and beyond this, the whole Old Testament) to which Jesus refers.⁴⁹

The Gospel’s rich and numerous uses of the whole Old Testament Scriptures show that all of it points to God’s revelation in Christ, thus serving as a witness against those who boast about their possession and knowledge of it and yet fail to recognize God’s fulfillment when it is disclosed to them. The intricacies of the scriptural witness would obviously carry the most force

⁴⁷Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 267.

⁴⁸Pancaro, *op. cit.*, 255.

⁴⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 266.

with those well-established in it. But anyone who valued solid argument and evidence could not fail to appreciate the varied ways that the Scriptures were shown to find their fullest and intended meaning in Jesus Christ.

4. THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Under the three-fold witness of the Father, having discussed the witness of Christ's works and the witness of Scripture, it now remains to consider the prophetic witness of John the Baptist. The author is aware that he has chosen to deal with these three witnesses in an order other than the one given in John 5:33-39. The reason for this deviation lies solely in the fact that in the present study the Johannine theme of witness must be seen in connection with the Johannine theme of truth. Thus, these three aspects of the Father's witness, as well as the other witnesses yet to be addressed, all testify to the veracity and reliability of the content of revealed truth, which is Jesus' person and work. Given that, it was proper to discuss first the witness of Christ himself. The Scriptures were discussed next because of their preparatory role in the Baptist's coming. In addition, although there is an abiding validity in the Baptist's witness, it is also true that his historical ministry had a beginning and an end, unlike the Scriptures, which, as Jesus said, "cannot be broken" (10:35).

The number of references to the Baptist's witness, combined with the placement and substance of those occasions, demonstrate the degree of importance of the Baptist's testimony for the Evangelist. In chapter 1 he occurs in the prologue in vv. 6-8 and 15.⁵⁰ Then beginning with v. 19 the Evangelist records the historical account of the beginning of the Baptist's witness.

⁵⁰The author is aware of the rather involved discussion concerning the integrity of the location of these verses within the prologue. Though some see them as a later insertion to counter a pro-Baptist movement, and others as the original beginning of the Gospel, it seems unnecessary when the content of the prologue's opening verses is considered on its own. Christ is described as light in vv. 4 and 5. The Baptist is then immediately mentioned because of his unique role as one sent to bear witness to the light. (Hence, there is a connection between this part of John 1 and Jesus' description of the Baptist as a lamp in John 3:35.) Likewise, v. 15 follows v. 14, which speaks of the Word's incarnation. When the Word becomes flesh and enters human history, the Baptist testifies that Jesus is of higher rank because he is the incarnate Word and so existed before John since the Word in fact had no beginning.

After v. 36 the Baptist disappears and vv. 37-51 show the results of his initial witness to Jesus. The next place the Baptist appears is 3:22-30. Here, some of John's disciples observe Jesus' rising popularity over John, and they report this to their leader. His response is that what they observed is precisely what is supposed to happen. In fact, what is occurring is cause for great rejoicing because the dawn of the messianic age has come. The third reference to the Baptist is in 5:33-35, where the Baptist is said by Jesus to be one who witnesses to the truth. He was the lamp, and therefore the light that he revealed was not his own, but the true light which shone through the lamp of his witness. Finally, the Baptist is mentioned briefly in 10:40-42. Jesus returned to the area where John had first baptized. The people who came to Jesus acknowledged that although the Baptist performed no miracle, "everything John said about this man was true."

4.1 THE BAPTIST AND THE SYNOPTICS

It does not require much study to realize that the portrayal of the Baptist in the Synoptics is quite different from that in the Fourth Gospel. The synoptists record the Baptist's preaching concerning the coming of the kingdom of God and the subsequent judgment against those who oppose its rule (Luke 3:17). The proper response was repentance, symbolized by water baptism and realized by the eschatological baptism of purification and vivification, which Jesus would bring (Matt. 3:11).

John's Gospel, however, does not include these themes. The kingdom of God is not mentioned at all, nor the coming apocalyptic judgment. Also missing is the theme of repentance and the accompanying baptism of fire. Related to this, the Synoptic focus on "preaching" and "proclamation" is replaced by that of "witnessing." All of these omissions serve to take away any focus that could be given to the Baptist other than as a central witness to Christ. This is why Morris can say, "For this Evangelist John's witness is what matters. It was for witness that John came, and nothing else that he did can be compared in importance to this."⁵¹

⁵¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, revised edition), 80.

As far as the observed differences between the accounts of the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel are concerned, the criticisms raised operate on both the chronological and theological levels. Among commentators, it is a common observation that the Synoptics and John appear to differ on the chronology of Jesus' ministry and its relation to the Baptist's imprisonment. John speaks of a period of concurrent ministry in Judea (3:22-24), preceded by a trip to Galilee (1:43-2:12). Mark, on the other hand, records Jesus' baptism and temptation (1:9-13), with the next verse telling of the Baptist's arrest and Jesus' subsequent preaching ministry in Galilee. Similarly, Matthew records Jesus' baptism in chapter 3 and the temptation in chapter 4. In this latter chapter he withdraws to Galilee after hearing of the Baptist's arrest (v. 12), with v. 17 saying that from that time Jesus began to preach his message of repentance because of the imminent arrival of the kingdom. Matthew and Mark, therefore, do not speak of a prior Judean ministry, or of a concurrent ministry with the Baptist, and the Fourth Gospel does not suggest that Jesus' Galilean ministry only began after the arrest of the Baptist.

Assuming that a choice must be made between these two accounts, Joan Taylor considers the Fourth Gospel's story to be the "invented one" for the purpose of the assumed struggle that took place between the writer and the synagogue, which regarded the Baptist so highly.⁵² Aside from the fact that there is insufficient evidence to allow for such a confident approach to this supposed *Sitz im Leben*, a closer reading of the Gospels themselves helps to alleviate alleged discrepancies. Realizing that each Evangelist engages in selectivity from the three-year-long ministry of Jesus, there is nothing in either Matthew 4 or Mark 1 to preclude the kind of Judean ministry recorded in John.⁵³ As Brown acknowledges, the Synoptic timeline is not so tight that the events recorded in John could not possibly fit.⁵⁴ That both Matthew and Mark put the calling of the first disciples after the Baptist's arrest poses no insurmountable problem, either. John 1 does not treat it like an

⁵²Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 296.

⁵³For the possible reasons why the Synoptics leave out the opening part of Jesus' ministry in Judea, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 116.

⁵⁴Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: 153.

official call, and, in fact, the Synoptic calls, where the disciples immediately leave whatever they are doing to follow Jesus, follow much more naturally if they had some kind of prior association with Jesus, the kind of association seen in John 1.⁵⁵

On the theological level, the issue that troubles some commentators is the difference between the early identification of Jesus by the Baptist in John's Gospel and the apparent longer length of time needed to arrive at these conclusions by the disciples in the Synoptics. Thirty years ago, John Hughes believed that to hold as historically credible the Baptist's designation in the Fourth Gospel of Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (1:29, 36) and "Son of God" (or "chosen of God," v. 34) was to "render inexplicable the contrary indications in the Synoptic Gospels."⁵⁶ Since that assessment, respect for the Fourth Gospel's historical integrity has increased; however the same kinds of conclusions are still being drawn by prominent commentators.⁵⁷

At further inspection, however, the differences are not as great as perhaps at first appears. It is true that rather high language is used of Jesus in John 1, but that must be appreciated in the context of the misunderstanding that the Evangelist also makes clear.⁵⁸ Even as late as John 14, after all that the disciples had heard and seen, Philip still requests a view of the Father. It is one of the many misunderstandings that would only be corrected after the resurrection. This is why there is no real discrepancy between John 1 and Peter's confession in Matthew 16. It is not that it took all this time for Peter to correctly figure out who Jesus really was because almost immediately after his famous statement he rebukes Jesus for talking about his suffering and death. Clearly, Peter does not yet understand the significance of the work necessarily bound up with Jesus' identity. Another example of misunderstanding is seen in Luke 1-2. The angel

⁵⁵Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 153-154.

⁵⁶John H. Hughes, "John the Baptist: The Forerunner of God Himself," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 213.

⁵⁷In a very recent article, Francis J. Moloney writes that both the Baptist's witness to Jesus and his reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God are "surely the results of early Christian theologizing," as opposed to what he terms the "historical reminiscence" of the ignorance seen in the Synoptics ("The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 45, 47.

⁵⁸See D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 59-89.

Gabriel appears to Mary to announce God's plan. The message is that she will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, without male initiative, and the child, among other things, will be called the "Son of the Most High." A few verses later Mary responds with the Magnificat, showing that she understands something of her role in redemptive history. Then, in Luke 2, when Jesus is taken to the temple to be presented, Simeon praises God because in the baby Jesus he sees the promised salvation. In spite of the angelic visitation both to Mary and Joseph, and Mary's response, they were both amazed at Simeon's words.

More to the point on the topic of the Baptist and the Synoptics is the presence of understanding and misunderstanding on the part of the Baptist himself. In John 1 the Baptist sees Jesus and refers to him as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and the "Son of God." But in Matthew 11, hearing of Jesus' activities from prison, the Baptist asks Jesus through messengers if he really is the coming Messiah. Rather than see these accounts as at odds, it is best to consider the Baptist's question in light of what is known from the Synoptics. The Baptist preached a message of repentance and judgment and pointed people to Jesus the Messiah. But the judgment preached has not come and the Baptist wants to know if Jesus is the coming one or if another is to be expected. Jesus' response is that in him the kingdom of God has indeed come, and the blessings accompanying it are part of its coming and a means to bring forth repentance. Judgment is also part of the kingdom, and in time it will most certainly fall on those who fail to believe. For now, however, it is delayed, and the Gospel is being preached. By this the Baptist is encouraged to hold fast to his beliefs about Jesus. He is the coming one, even though the commencement of the kingdom does not fit the Baptist's initial thinking. This in no way counters the Johannine account of how the Baptist came to know that Jesus was the Messiah. It merely conveys more than the Fourth Gospel about the Baptist's later doubts as the kingdom advanced in Jesus' ministry.

Finally, there remains to consider one more point of comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics on the Baptist, namely, whether or not the Baptist was Elijah. In Luke 1 the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to inform him of Elizabeth's upcoming pregnancy and the

special function that their son would be given. He would serve as the forerunner of the one whom God would send, acting “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (v. 17). John the Baptist would therefore fulfill Malachi’s prophecy concerning the appearance of Elijah before the coming of the LORD (3:1 and 4:5-6). Then, in Matthew 11, after giving his answer to the Baptist’s question concerning his identity, Jesus uses that opportunity to teach the crowd. He said that the Law and prophets prophesied until John, and if the people can accept it, the Baptist is Elijah, who was to come (vv. 13-14).

However, when one proceeds to the Gospel of John, in John 1 the Baptist is asked whether he is Elijah, and he answers that he is not. Walter Wink appears quite confident in concluding, “The Evangelist also sharply contradicts the earlier tradition that John was Elijah. For him the idea of a forerunner is anathema; notice how carefully he has already applied the antidote to it in 1:1, 15.”⁵⁹ But these verses do not address the historical ministry of Jesus, but his preexistent origin, which in no way is at odds with Jesus’ historical coming and the historical events surrounding it. To say that the idea of the forerunner is anathema to John surely misses the Baptist’s own statement that he has come to make straight the way of the Lord. Rather than charge that there is contradiction resulting from some assumed theological agenda in the composing of the Fourth Gospel, there are two other factors that combine to strongly argue against this, thereby defending the historicity of both the Synoptic and Johannine accounts. First, to the extent that it was believed that the actual Elijah would come again, the Baptist’s own denial is understood. As for the Synoptics, Jesus’ identification of the Baptist with Elijah would apply, not to Elijah *redivivus*, but in the sense that, as Luke 1 explained, the Baptist would come in the “spirit and power” of Elijah in preparing the way for Jesus Christ. Thus Malachi, and therefore Jesus’ statement in Matthew 11, concerns the Baptist’s functioning as Elijah, not the Baptist’s actual person. Second, if it is still argued that the Baptist’s denial in John 1 is based on the delegation’s question over function, it is perfectly legitimate to ask whether Jesus and the

⁵⁹Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 89.

Baptist understood the issue in the same way. It is quite possible that while Jesus understood the Baptist's redemptive-historical role (and therefore, in what sense the Baptist was Elijah), the Baptist himself did not fully grasp it.

4.2 THE BAPTIST AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The reason for the discussion on the Baptist and the Synoptics is two-fold. First, it was necessary to deal directly with the issue at some length because of the doubt that has been cast on the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel because of its differences with the Synoptics. If in fact some of the Johannine material on the Baptist is not to be trusted as historical, then obviously the value of the Baptist as a witness to the truth (5:33) is seriously undermined. But if it can be shown—as this treatment has attempted—that John is not at odds with the Synoptics, then the Fourth Gospel must be seen as faithfully describing the way in which the Baptist witnessed to Jesus. This in turn would be meaningful not only to any who knew of the Baptist, but to all who value truthful testimony of anything, particularly of religious matters. This leads to the second reason for the discussion, which is that it points to the unique view of the Baptist in the Gospel of John. This enables one to clearly see how the Baptist functions as a witness to Jesus Christ for the Evangelist. “In John’s evaluation the Baptist emerges as the witness *par excellence*, and John indicates his interest in him precisely as a witness and in his testimony as the first, great and definitive identification of the person and the ministry of the Lord.”⁶⁰

It is interesting to note that the Baptist’s testimony does not include the themes that are characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. As far as the present study of truth is concerned, missing are references to “light,” “bread,” and “vine.” In addition, one does not find the Baptist talking about Jesus as a shepherd or showing how Jesus is the temple or the life. Boice rightly believes that the reason is because the Evangelist “desires to preserve John’s testimony accurately and without alteration.”⁶¹ Boice also points out that the Evangelist does not deal with those themes

⁶⁰Boice, *op. cit.*, 83.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 81.

that characterize the Baptist's content in the Fourth Gospel. The Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but the Evangelist does not himself use that term in writing about Jesus. Upon reading the Gospel, one can understand how Jesus is the Lamb of God, but the Evangelist feels no need to explicitly interact with that term. The significance for this, as Boice notes, is that the Evangelist is perfectly comfortable with extracting from the traditional material on the Baptist those elements which point to the Baptist as a witness, without feeling the need to somehow connect the Baptist's content to his own.⁶²

Given this, it is necessary to look more closely at the words of the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel so that his role as a witness to the truth can be fully appreciated. Dodd noticed an outline in the prologue, which is seen in the Baptist's testimony later on in chapter 1. In the prologue John writes that 1) although the Baptist was not the light, 2) he bore witness to the light in order that 3) all might believe through him. When the Jewish delegation is sent to find out about the Baptist, he informs them that he is not the Christ (1:19-27). The next day he bears witness to Jesus, saying various things about him (1:29-34). Finally, the Baptist's steering people away from himself and over to Jesus was for the purpose that people would follow him (1:35-37).⁶³ This has led to the description of the Baptist as the "wahre Vorbild des christlichen Predigers," the "Prototype des wahren Evangelisten," and the "ideale Christuszeuge."⁶⁴

In deflecting attention from himself by emphasizing his function as a witness to Christ, the Baptist communicated to his hearers something of Jesus' identity. In addition to calling Jesus the "Lamb of God" and "Son of God" the Baptist grasped something of Jesus' preexistence in elevating Jesus' rank above his own in spite of the Baptist's earlier appearance. The proper position of the Baptist relative to Jesus is especially clear in chapter 3. The Baptist fully

⁶²*Ibid.*, 82.

⁶³C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 248-249.

⁶⁴Mirjam and Ruben Zimmermann, "Der Freund des Bräutigams (Joh 3, 29): Deflorations- oder Christuszeuge?" *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90 (1999): 129. They call the Baptist the "true model of Christian preachers," the "prototype of the true Evangelist," and the "ideal witness to Christ."

recognized his role as forerunner and subordinate to the coming one, telling resentful disciples that what he is and does has been given from God himself (v. 27). Therefore, when the people's affection turns from him to Jesus, it is the cause for the kind of rejoicing that characterizes the friend of the bridegroom (v. 29). The Baptist concludes with the famous words: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30). He fully accepted and delighted in the fact that his early popularity was for the express purpose of witnessing to Christ, and the time would come when his own influence would fade, while Jesus' influence would continue to shine increasingly brighter.⁶⁵

The theme of light used negatively in chapter 1 is used positively in chapter 5. According to John 1 the Baptist was not the light, but in John 5 Jesus calls him a lamp that was burning and shining (v. 35). He was not the light, but in bearing witness to the light he showed that he was one chosen to make the light known, to reflect it to others, thus acting as a lamp. Josef Ernst correctly identifies the Baptist's function as a lamp as his role in salvation history.⁶⁶ It was God's plan that the Baptist become a cause of excitement and rejoicing because of his anticipatory role in the coming of Jesus. But too many people who were enthusiastic over the appearance of the forerunner failed to make the connection between the Baptist and Jesus, and in so doing missed the Baptist's unique role in the history of redemption, thereby failing to see the real purpose for which the Baptist was sent. He was sent to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

This "sent" language, used in John 1:6, 33, and 3:28, also shows that although the Baptist rejected equations with Elijah and the Prophet (from Deuteronomy 18), he does nevertheless function in the prophetic role. Like Jeremiah, he was set apart before his birth, in order to "turn

⁶⁵Capturing the significance of the Baptist's statement, Morris goes so far as to say, "The last words of the Baptist to be recorded in this Gospel form surely one of the greatest utterances that ever fell from human lips" (*op. cit.*, 214). By way of an aside, with this and other comments found in the Fourth Gospel, as well as in the teaching of the Synoptics, it is extremely curious why in Jesus' baptism by John it is thought that Jesus is becoming a follower of the Baptist (Robert L. Webb, "John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994], 219).

⁶⁶Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation—Geschichte—Wirkungsgeschichte* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 211.

back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God” (Luke 1:16). Then, when the time had come for the Baptist’s ministry of announcement, an internal revelation was given which told him that the coming one would be recognized by the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove. Not only was this recognition not his own, but the message spoken was given by God, that all his revealed will should be made known. Like the Old Testament prophets, the Baptist’s message was one of forthtelling and foretelling. He exhorted his hearers unto repentance because judgment was surely coming on all who did not. But unlike Israel’s prophets, he knew precisely who was coming to take away the sin of the world.

Finally, the role of the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel must be seen in the context of evangelism. He came to bear witness to the truth of the revelation of Christ, which means that while he is not revelation’s content, his witness is nevertheless itself an aspect of revelation, for it is in part through the testimony of the Baptist that Christ was made known. This is with the aim that “all might believe through him” (1:7). This universal intent is not opposed to the supposedly exclusive objective in v. 31, which speaks of Jesus’ being revealed to Israel. As is discovered as the Gospel continues, “Israel” is not to be defined in ethnic terms. It includes all who will come to Christ, whether Jew or Greek. In fact, if de la Potterie is correct, John 1 already prepares for the theme of judgment, which becomes explicit in chapter 3 with the light’s discriminating function toward the darkness. When the delegation questions the Baptist, he tells them about himself, but nothing concerning Jesus. The next day, apparently after the delegation departs, the Baptist identifies Jesus as the one to come and describes him as John 1:29-34 records. The Baptist did not reveal Jesus to the delegation, but to others, at least some of whom went on to follow Jesus (vv. 37-51).⁶⁷ Throughout the Gospel, Jesus will be revealed to others thought by some to be outside the collection of God’s people. Then, as now, the Baptist continues to be a lamp through whom shines the revelation of Jesus Christ. As the last reference to the Baptist declares, “While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true. And

⁶⁷Ignace de la Potterie, *La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, two vols. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), I: 98.

many believed in Him there” (10:41-42).

5. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Of the four Gospels, John is the most comprehensive in its teaching on the Holy Spirit. Like the Synoptics, the Fourth Gospel mentions the descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism and the identification of Jesus as the one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit (1:33). Also, though less explicit than in Matthew, John indicates that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus throughout his ministry. (In John 3:34 the Evangelist writes that Jesus has been given the Spirit without measure, the most likely understanding of the Greek construction.)

But John goes well beyond this and includes Jesus’ extensive teaching regarding the coming of the Spirit and the tasks he will accomplish with respect to both the disciples and the unbelieving world. That the Holy Spirit will be given to the disciples is not unique to John. Luke records Jesus’ teaching that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (11:13). And in Luke 12 reference is made to the persecutions that the disciples will experience, along with the comforting promise that the Holy Spirit will teach them what to say during those times (v. 12). Nevertheless, it is the Fourth Gospel that discusses those themes so thoroughly. But there is another aspect of the Spirit’s work, to be discussed shortly, that is found only in John, namely, the role of the Spirit in regeneration, as seen in Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus in John 3. To be part of the kingdom of God one must experience a rebirth that can only come from above, that is, by God’s Spirit. From the above statements on the Johannine content on the Holy Spirit, it seems correct to conclude that the reason for such content centers in the fact that the Evangelist was concerned to show how the Spirit functions as a witness to Jesus Christ, expressed both in terms of an internal witness to believers and an external witness to the world through Jesus’ disciples. Through these activities, the Spirit witnesses to the truth of the divine revelation that Jesus is in himself.

5.1 BORN AGAIN FROM ABOVE

In John 3 Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to inquire of this man who after the cleansing of the temple and the performing of various signs would have been the subject of much discussion around Jerusalem. Although a leading teacher among the Pharisees, Nicodemus, apparently as well as some others, had some measure of respect for Jesus as a teacher come from God. This opening statement no doubt was meant to produce from Jesus more detail in terms of who he was, which would then be evaluated by Nicodemus in light of what had been observed to see if Jesus should be viewed as more than a teacher with divine approval. Nicodemus is not coming with evil motives of gathering testimony from Jesus to trap him. Rather, he is one of a number of Pharisees who are open to learning more concerning the identity and claims of Jesus. More is required, however, to approach Jesus rightly. If there is any hint from Nicodemus' opening remark that one is capable of fully understanding Jesus based on the mere logical weighing of evidence, Jesus' response gets to the heart of the matter: it is impossible to participate in the eschatological salvation of God (which in a sense has already begun in Jesus' first advent) unless one is *gennēthē anōthen*.

The subjunctive is being used passively, obviously indicating that the action must be performed upon the subject by another. The adverb *anōthen* can mean either "again" or "from above." The context will decide, and here in John 3 both are possible. If a decision must be made, "from above" is to be preferred given the emphasis on Jesus' having come down from heaven to earth. Jesus has come from above to those who rejected him, who are from below. However, it may be that the Evangelist intends both meanings to be seen. Clearly, Nicodemus takes it as "again" in v. 4, and even though he misunderstands, Jesus does not correct him for seeing *anōthen* as "again." Nicodemus does need to be born again, but in a spiritual sense; hence the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in v. 5

In responding to Nicodemus' questions (v. 4), Jesus says in v. 5 that one must be born of "water and the Spirit." There are several views on this, and the major commentaries may be

consulted for the various arguments for and against each position. In the author's judgment, the best explanation is that which seeks to understand the phrase in the light of the Jewish Scriptures, for according to v. 10 Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel, should have seen the connection Jesus was making. The phrase *hydatos kai pneumatos* seems to point back to Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God promises to cleanse his people from filthiness using clean water, and to put his Spirit within them, resulting in their obedience to God's laws. Robert McCabe in a recent article has argued that the two terms indicate the "purifying and life-giving work of the Holy Spirit,"⁶⁸ what Turner and Mantey described as the negative and positive aspects of regeneration.⁶⁹ Linda Belleville has maintained that *pneuma* refers not to the Holy Spirit, but to the divine nature as *pneuma* which is given to God's people.⁷⁰ It is true that Ezekiel 36:26 does speak of a new spirit, producing obedience, which could point to the receiving of God's nature. This could then mean that in v. 27 "My Spirit" is another general reference. But it is better to see v. 27 as talking about the future imparting of the Spirit, which is the cause for the divine nature given in v. 26.

Taking McCabe's approach as correct, it is thus necessary to see *hydatos kai pneumatos* not as two different births, but as a single event. It might then be better to translate the *kai* explicatively, producing a translation such as, "water, namely, the Spirit," or "water, even the Spirit." (That *pneuma* in v. 5 does not contain the article is not a serious problem since the reference to being born of the Spirit in v. 6 is articular.) In other words, Jesus tells Nicodemus that if one is to see the kingdom of God one must be born of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses his people of defilement and vivifies them spiritually, recreating them with the result that they will please God. What was an anticipated eschatological promise in the Old Testament dispensation is realized in the historical ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

Finally, if Ezekiel 36 is in view, then one cannot fail to see how Jesus' teaching also fits with

⁶⁸Robert V. McCabe, "The Meaning of 'Born of Water and the Spirit' in John 3:5," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 105.

⁶⁹George Allen Turner, and Julius R. Mantey, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 92.

⁷⁰Linda Belleville, " 'Born of Water and Spirit:' John 3:5," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 140.

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in the very next chapter. If one is to live spiritually, God's Spirit must breathe life into the individual. Apart from this sovereign activity of God, spiritual death remains, regardless if one is an idolatrous Gentile or the most accomplished Pharisee. And the content of this regenerating work of the Spirit is the revealed truth of Jesus Christ. "The Holy Spirit does not create the truth, nor is He Himself the object of God's revelation. Instead He creates the *vision* which is necessary if a blind man is to see the truth, and the life which is necessary if a dead man is to apprehend it."⁷¹

5.2 FROM SIGHT TO FAITH

The above quote introduces the Johannine concept of "seeing and believing," which Boice treats at some depth in the source just referenced. The idea of seeing operates at two different levels in John. The first level is that of physical seeing, experienced by those who actually saw Jesus and the works he did. The second level is that of spiritual seeing, or faith. Some who physically saw also went on to see spiritually by responding in faith. In the prologue the Evangelist writes that in seeing Jesus he and other witnesses saw the glory of the unique one come from God (v. 14). Seeing the miracle at Cana led Jesus' disciples to belief (2:11). Samaritans came to faith because of Jesus' visit (4:39-42). But others saw and did not move on to faith (at least not at that time), thus showing themselves to remain in spiritual blindness. The Jews in John 6 saw marvelous things, but did not believe (v. 36). Jesus' own brothers, those perhaps expected to be among his first followers, did not believe when Jesus went to the Feast of Tabernacles (7:3-5). Finally, even the resurrection of Lazarus, which led many to faith, produced in the chief priests and Pharisees a desire to kill Jesus (11:45-53).

The reason for such opposing reactions, sometimes even from the same events, is found in 12:37-40. Those who ultimately rejected Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that they could not believe because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts (6:10). The same truth is

⁷¹Boice, *op. cit.*, 150.

taught in 8:47, where Jesus says, “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.” The same idea is again expressed in 10:26. But just as it is God who keeps eyes blinded and hearts hardened in some, so he also opens the eyes and softens the hearts of others: “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:44). Moreover, this work of God in drawing sinners to Christ is possible not only for those who have seen physically, but also for all who come to learn of Jesus through the subsequent witness of the New Testament Scriptures. What remains absolutely essential, whether one was an actual eyewitness or one who lives two thousand years later, is that spiritual sight comes to those who have been born of the Spirit, whom the Father gives to whomever he will.

For those who have been born of the Spirit there exists an internal witness that the individual does indeed belong to God. When Jesus introduces his teaching in John 14, he tells his disciples that they will know the Spirit because he abides with them and will be in them (v. 17). This is the Johannine parallel to Paul’s teaching in Romans 8: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (v. 16). The Spirit’s role in regeneration and the subsequent assurance within the believer of his or her salvation is the first aspect of the Spirit’s internal witness. Before moving on to discuss the other aspects of the Spirit’s internal witness, as well as the external witness with regard to the unbelieving world, it is necessary to consider a component of John’s pneumatology that applies to both John 3 and the other passages from the final discourses.

5.3 WHEN DOES THE SPIRIT COME?

If Jesus can say to Nicodemus that he must be born again, and that this rebirth comes only from the Spirit, how does this fit with 7:39, where it is said that the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus had not yet been glorified? It seems that Carson offers the best explanation in likening the presence of the Spirit in John to the presence of the kingdom in the Synoptics. The kingdom has come in some measure with the earthly ministry of Jesus, but it is not until after

Jesus' resurrection that all authority becomes his (Matt. 28:18). In John, the Spirit has already come upon Jesus at his baptism and after the story of Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, it will soon be said that Jesus receives the Spirit without measure (v. 34). This, however, is talking about the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, not between the Spirit and believers, which is the subject of 7:39. Applying his analogy of the kingdom in the Synoptics to the Spirit in John, Carson says: "The coming-to-faith of the first followers of Jesus was in certain respects unique: they *could not* instantly become "Christians" in the full-orbed sense, and experience the full sweep of the new birth, until *after* the resurrection and glorification of Jesus."⁷² Thus, the transitional nature of those coming to faith before the resurrection is the reality that answers any charge of inconsistency. It is only after the resurrection that the Spirit can be given in the New Testament sense of the term, which is what 7:39 is referring to.

The consistency between John 3 and 7 is an easier issue than John 20:22, which has attracted quite a bit of attention from as early as the fourth century. After his resurrection the Evangelist says that Jesus breathed and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This seems to be at odds with Acts 2 and the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. The arguments and counter-arguments for the various views are quite involved.⁷³ For this study it is enough to briefly sketch the representative positions and then to cautiously make some conclusions. The reason for this treatment concerns the idea of witness. If the assumption goes unanswered that the Evangelist is either ignorant of the Acts account or that he disagrees with it, it not only damages the unified apostolic witness (placing some degree of distance between John and Peter); it also casts doubt on the historical integrity of the Johannine record, as if the Evangelist is more concerned to communicate theological truth than a faithful account of Jesus.

In Porsch's classic study he answers the difficulty by saying that although Jesus had not yet been glorified, after his resurrection he in some sense experienced the splendor of glorification

⁷²Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 196.

⁷³For an excellent discussion of the different approaches, see Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 114-149.

and in this state gave the Holy Spirit. But only after Jesus departs will the Spirit manifest himself as the Paraclete by carrying out those functions.⁷⁴ This succeeds in eliminating the difficulty in reconciling John with Acts, but most certainly is to be rejected for the lack of exegetical basis to make that kind of a distinction between the functions of the Spirit and the Paraclete, appearing to come very close to having two different persons.

Max Turner believes that it is one theological gift, realized in two chronological stages. In the first stage the disciples are given the new creation life of the Spirit, a process which climaxes in John 20:22. The second stage, Acts 2, sees the Spirit coming as Jesus' replacement to perform the functions described in the farewell discourses.⁷⁵ This, however, seems to be unable to avoid the charge of espousing two different comings of the Spirit. Even if some flexibility is given to attempt to account for the faith possessed by those in the transitional period, the explanation still does not seem to properly handle John 7:39, nor the sense of fulfilled expectation of the eschatological prophecy in Joel 2 that is given to the Spirit's coming on Pentecost.

A third suggestion picks up the reference to the forgiving and retaining of sins in John 20:23. The idea is that only this particular aspect of the Spirit is given. It is a gradual process that begins at Jesus' resurrection and is completed at Pentecost.⁷⁶ But there is no mention of this special aspect in the Synoptics, not even in Luke, which in 24:49 tells of Jesus' plans to send forth "the promise of My Father upon you." Secondly, that Jesus' statement is given in the context of evangelism leads most naturally to the meaning that it is the preaching of the Gospel, carried on through the power of the Holy Spirit, that will effectively determine the hearer's forgiveness or judgment based on the response to the message. This does not stop at Pentecost, but is an ongoing result of the Spirit's presence.

Gary Burge addresses the problem by seeing the Fourth Gospel as compressing the

⁷⁴Felix Porsch, *Pneuma und Wort: Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zur Pneumatologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1974), 376.

⁷⁵Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 100-101.

⁷⁶Joost van Rossum, "The 'Johannine Pentecost': John 20:22 in Modern Exegesis and in Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 155.

resurrection appearances, ascension, and Pentecost into Easter. He says that evidence for such compression can be seen in Luke, which seems to put all the appearances on Easter, as well as the ascension.⁷⁷ But unlike John, Luke has a sequel, which corrects any initial sense of compression. Moreover, while the account does not clearly indicate a lapse of time from resurrection to ascension, Luke 24:50 does not have to be taken as also occurring on Easter. A period of time is possible, and fits better with Acts.

But taking away this piece of evidence for Lukan compression still leaves one with Burge's compression theory for John (and, hence, the difficulty between John 20 and Acts 2). Burge writes: "Therefore whatever may be our judgment about Acts 2, one emphasis is certain: the Fourth Evangelist considered John 20:22 to be the fulfillment of his expectation so carefully developed in the Farewell Discourses." He goes on to say, "The insufflation is the climax of the disciples' relation with Jesus. This is the time of their 're-creation' and new birth."⁷⁸ It appears, however, that Burge recognizes the need to account for the fact that Thomas is not present because he softens the above statements by describing this coming of the Paraclete as the "first opportunity for authentic faith."⁷⁹ Finally, if Luke does not prove compression, would it be so obvious to those of John's readers who know the events of Pentecost that Johannine compression is to be understood? Clearly, the statement in John compared with the account in Acts does not seem to be describing the same event.

From the options available, the best approach seems to be the kind articulated by Carson, who takes it as a symbolic promise of the Spirit on Pentecost.⁸⁰ Although it does not happen at that very moment, Jesus can make the statement on Easter because now the work of redemption has been completed. Of course, the ascension, which has not yet occurred, is still necessary. But Jesus' words are a kind of formal summary that he has performed the will of the Father, as well as a proleptic announcement regarding the age of the Spirit. This view not only preserves John's

⁷⁷Burge, *op. cit.*, 148.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 149.

⁸⁰Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 651-655.

distinctive theological concerns, but it also defends its historical agreement with Acts.

5.4 THE FAREWELL DISCOURSES

Of the various themes that emerge from Jesus' last discourses, the person and work of the Holy Spirit is the foundation for those elements that pertain to Jesus' instructions for his own. The ongoing work after Jesus' departure, the teaching on the need to abide, the commandment of love, Jesus' prayer for sanctification and preservation, and the need for a unified witness before the world all receive their efficacy from the indwelling Spirit.

There are five references which talk about the Spirit (14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; 16:13-15), and it is these which give the other aspects of the Spirit's witness. The internal witness in regeneration has already been treated. Other aspects of the internal witness to be seen are that of the teacher of truth, as well as the advocate before the world. All these are under the category of internal witness because they pertain to the believer. But there is also another side to the Spirit's witness, what is here being called an external witness, which speaks to the unbelieving world in the form of conviction. In most cases the conviction will lead to judgment. But it does lead to confession of faith and repentance of sin. The model of this continuing work of the Spirit is Jesus himself. Just as he witnessed to the world concerning its sin and its urgent need to seek forgiveness in him, so the Spirit, who continues Jesus' ministry through the disciples, witnesses to the same and points the way to Jesus.

There is disagreement over the extent to which forensic language should be seen in these verses. Andrew Lincoln believes the forensic presence to be quite strong. He argues that Jesus' ministry was a kind of trial over the nature of truth against those opposing him. Jesus' crucifixion, thought to be a victory by his enemies, was in his resurrection shown to be proof of the cosmic trial between God and the unbelieving world. This trial is continued by the Paraclete through the witness of the disciples. Thus, even after Jesus' glorification the evidence continues to pile up, eventually resulting in the realization of the eschatological judgment that has already

been declared.⁸¹ In contrast, Eskil Franck maintains that the forensic dimension forms the background for the descriptions of other functions, but that it never dominates the descriptions of those functions. He assigns as the central role the teaching aspect of the Spirit's functions.⁸² Perhaps somewhere in the middle lies Stephen Smalley, who sees both legal and nonlegal activities of the Spirit.⁸³ Whether or not one wishes to take the forensic theme as far as Lincoln does, the significance of the witness/revelation idea and its intimate connection to truth, both seen throughout the Fourth Gospel, certainly suggests an understanding in Lincoln's direction, as opposed to Franck and to a lesser extent, Smalley. Because the teaching activity of the Spirit is an aspect of his internal witness, it not only is instrumental in the confirming of faith and in the growth of personal sanctification; it also equips the disciples for more effective service as witnesses to the unbelieving world of the revealed truth of the resurrected Christ. Therefore, even in the Spirit's teaching function the forensic presence is not entirely absent.

5.4.1 PARAKLĒTOS

Some of the discussion about the degree of forensic presence comes from the term, *paraklētos*, used four times in this section to identify the coming Holy Spirit. (The only other occurrence in the New Testament is another Johannine text, I John 2:1, which speaks of Jesus as the Christian's *paraklētos* before the Father.) *Paraklētos* is a passive form, producing something like, "one who is called alongside of." A common usage was in the legal sphere where it could be used for an advocate, witness, or in a more general sense of one who offered legal help to the court. With the Latin rendering *advocatus* came the more specific idea of advocate, or attorney. This technical definition attached itself in the Hebrew and Aramaic loanword, producing the famous rabbinic saying, "He who performs one precept acquires for himself one advocate, and

⁸¹Lincoln, *op. cit.*, 110-111; 31-32.

⁸²Eskil Franck, *Revelation Taught: The Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Lund: Gleerup, 1985), 75.

⁸³Stephen S. Smalley, "The Paraclete": Pneumatology in the Johannine Gospel and Apocalypse," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 291.

he who commits one transgression acquires for himself one accuser” (Mishnah *Aboth* 4:11, Soncino edition). In addition, the passive form did not preclude *paraklētos* from being used in an active sense of “speaking on behalf of one to another,” not necessarily in a legal setting. It therefore had a broad range, not exclusively forensic, which is why, as Louw and Nida maintain, understanding it solely as “legal advocate” is too restrictive.⁸⁴ And yet, some degree of the forensic dimension is the most common. However, this does not mean that the Johannine use must be forced into a forensic sense to the ignoring of the contexts in which the word appears, since there are other uses for *paraklētos*. But it seems that John’s usage does have forensic meaning, even if some of the Paraclete’s functions perhaps have less direct reference to it than others. In deciding which definition best captures the Greek *paraklētos* (“Advocate,” “Counselor,” “Helper,” or something else), it is best to remember R. E. Brown’s concluding comments: “By way of summary we find that no one translation of *paraklētos* captures the complexity of the functions, forensic and otherwise, that this figure has.”⁸⁵

5.4.2 THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARACLETE

Given the fact that throughout this study it has been demonstrated that it is the Old Testament Scriptures which drive the Evangelist’s thought, it is to be expected that this is also true of the Paraclete. Nevertheless, other possibilities have been advanced. Perhaps the boldest attempt to uncover the background came from Otto Betz. He observed similarities with the Qumran literature, which included references to the “Spirit of Truth” and the idea of advocacy for the pious. Qumran took the intertestamental concept of angels and developed it into a cosmic dualism, with Michael as the leading angel against the wicked angel Belial. It is this basic idea that Betz believes is responsible for the Johannine Paraclete. He argues that Jesus, the first Paraclete, goes to heaven to work as an advocate for the righteous. He then sends Michael from

⁸⁴Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, two vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1: 142.

⁸⁵Brown, *op. cit.*, XIII-XXI: 1137.

heaven to earth as the “Spirit of Truth.”⁸⁶ Burge has marshalled solid evidence against this thesis,⁸⁷ not least of which is the lack of evidence showing a direct dependence between John and Qumran and the degree of difference that exists between the two over the presence of dualism generally, to say nothing of Qumran’s particular emphasis employing the angel Michael.

Even as it is argued that the Old Testament forms the background for the person and work of the Paraclete, the Evangelist’s use undoubtedly shows his awareness of its ability to connect to a wide audience of Jewish persuasion. But it must also be considered that John’s use of the term itself was to some extent influenced by his realization that the term was capable of serving as a bridge from Greek thoughts of legal advocacy to the uniquely Christian teaching of spiritual advocacy within the disciples, centered in the historical revelation of Christ.

Andrew Lincoln has suggested that Isaiah 40-55 is helpful for understanding the activity of the Spirit. He shows several thematic similarities, arguing that just as in the Isaiah passage the LORD is bringing a lawsuit against the nations, so in John the Spirit and the disciples continue this role after Jesus.⁸⁸ Even if one does not believe the lawsuit theme to be as dominant as Lincoln does, the similarities are striking, and they provide solid continuity between the work of God in the Old Testament economy and the work of the Son and Spirit in the New. Lastly, it is important to remember that whereas in the Old Testament the Spirit was generally seen as coming upon individuals for particular duties, in the New Testament there is a permanency to his presence because of the accomplished work of Christ. This is not to deny that Old Testament saints were filled with the Spirit. But the new covenant brought a manifestation of the Spirit that did not exist before, but which was prophesied in the Scriptures. What Jesus teaches concerning the Spirit in John’s Gospel is not due to the literature of Second Temple Judaism or Qumran. Its origin is God himself and the inscripturated revelation he has provided. And the only one able to adequately communicate that divine message of the Father is the divine Son.

⁸⁶Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), 155.

⁸⁷Burge, *op. cit.*, 19-20.

⁸⁸Lincoln, *op. cit.*, 122-123.

5.4.3 THE WORK OF THE PARACLETE

At the commencement of the farewell discourses Jesus tells his disciples he is going away. But he also tells them that upon asking of the Father, another Paraclete will be given. Jesus calls him “another Paraclete” because he will continue the work of Jesus both for the sake of the disciples’ continued spiritual growth and for the world. Given this designation, and the relationship that is expressed between Jesus and the Spirit, it is difficult to see how scholars such as George Johnston can conclude that the Johannine texts give the sense that the idea of the Spirit is that of a divine power, rather than a person.⁸⁹ The names that are given, as well as the specific activities which are described, convey much more the idea that the Spirit is a person.

John 14:17 provides another name for the Spirit: the Spirit of truth. That this term also occurs in the Qumran writings should not be seen as definite proof for a direct link between the two. For one reason, the term is not contrasted with the “spirit of error” in John, as it is in Qumran. Secondly, there is no need to look outside the strong link that has been shown to exist between the Gospel and the Old Testament. The Gospel has shown how Jesus is the truth. It is therefore perfectly reasonable for the Spirit who will continue Jesus’ work and witness to be called the “Spirit of truth.” Bornkamm has explained the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit as one of forerunner/perfecter, similar to the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus is the forerunner, and the Paraclete comes as the perfecter to bring fulfillment.⁹⁰ There are at least two problems with this, however. One, unlike John the Baptist, Jesus is never spoken of as one who will prepare the way for the coming of the Paraclete, as if Jesus is somehow subordinate to the Spirit. Two, in serving as the forerunner to Jesus, the Baptist was meant to eventually pass off the scene, as it were. Though even after his death his witness was remembered, people’s attention shifted from what

⁸⁹George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 119.

⁹⁰Günther Bornkamm, “Der Paraklet im Johannes-Evangelium,” in *Geschichte und Glaube*, two vols. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1968), 1: 71.

the Baptist had to say to what Jesus had to say. This is far different with regard to Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus does not pass off the scene because, even with his return to the Father, the Spirit continues to bear witness to Jesus by teaching the disciples further and bringing to their remembrance what Jesus had said to them (14:26), and also by guiding them in the truth of Christ (16:13). The content of the Spirit's message and work concerns Christ and comes from him alone. The end result is that in the Spirit's witness Jesus is glorified. Jesus was clearly superior to the Baptist, but the Spirit is not superior to Jesus. The Spirit does not act on his own or exalt his own name. He illuminates Christ, even as he follows Jesus in time in terms of an earthly ministry. Max Turner expresses this idea well when he writes: "But of fundamental importance is to note that what is interpreted is precisely *Jesus'* revelation. John insists on this historical anchor. The Paraclete's task is not to bring *independent* revelation; first and foremost he explains and draws out the significance of the *historical* revelation."⁹¹

There is an interesting connection between 14:17 and John 3. Jesus tells the disciples that the world cannot receive the Spirit because it does not see him or know him. The Holy Spirit cannot be seen because he is spirit. But he can be seen and known through the regenerating effects that he produces and can be observed. As John 3:8 expresses it, one cannot see the wind, but it can be heard. Bultmann rightly comments: "The Spirit is visible to faith and to faith alone."⁹² Likewise, Schnackenburg broadens the metaphor beyond that of sight when he says of the world, "It has no organ by means of which it can grasp or understand him."⁹³ The world has no organ because it is the Spirit who must provide it. Then, and only then, can he be seen through the spiritual works that, to those who have been born from above, he so clearly performs.

The teaching ministry of the Paraclete, seen in 14:26 and 16:13, constitutes another aspect of the Spirit's internal witness within the disciples. It is true, of course, that the teaching ministry of the Spirit has not ended with the close of the apostolic age. Rather, the New Testament

⁹¹Turner, *op. cit.*, 83.

⁹²Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 617.

⁹³Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, three vols., trans. David Smith and G. A. Kon (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980, 1982), 3: 75.

teaching on the Spirit's instruction of Christians, combined with the passages emphasizing the centrality of Scripture for knowing God and doing his will, show the ongoing role of the Spirit as teacher through the written Word. But it is also true that the Spirit functioned as such in a special way during the writing and circulation of what became the New Testament, as an extension of Christ after his ascension. In addition, three times Jesus refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Although Barrett is correct in saying that the designation means that the Spirit communicates truth,⁹⁴ it goes beyond this to explain how it is that the Spirit does so. It has already been said that God (the Father) is true (3:33). Here, in John 14, Jesus has said that he is the truth (v. 6), and now calls the Paraclete the "Spirit of truth." Along with this, that Jesus can speak of the Father's sending of the Spirit because of Jesus' asking or in Jesus' name (14:16, 26), and of his own sending of the Spirit, who comes from the Father (15:26; 16:7), shows the closeness that exists between them. This strengthens, and in the author's judgment, establishes, de la Potterie's claim that the revelation seen in these passages is of a Trinitarian structure.⁹⁵ Just as the Fourth Gospel has shown the unity that exists between Jesus and the Father, so here it is evident that the Spirit is also part of that relationship. The Spirit can communicate the truth because he himself is truth by virtue of his very nature as God. The truth into which the Spirit guides is the revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ, and the implications of this message for the disciples' life and ministry. Hence, the Johannine conception of truth does not change as one moves from Jesus' earthly presence to the Spirit's presence within the disciples. It is a continuation of the revelation which both Jesus is and brings, as well as a continuation of Christ's witness concerning the truthfulness of his claims and the need to respond properly to them.

The third aspect of the Spirit's internal witness is that of advocate. At the end of John 15 and the beginning of John 16 Jesus prepares his disciples for the imminent persecution that will befall them because of their association with him. It has already been said that the darkness

⁹⁴Barrett, *op. cit.*, 463.

⁹⁵de la Potterie, *op. cit.*, I: 372.

hates the light (3:19-20). It is not surprising, then, that the world will also hate those who belong to the light. In this context of conflict with the unbelieving world, Jesus says that the Paraclete will bear witness of him, as will also his disciples. It must be noted that this is one of the passages where the Paraclete is called the “Spirit of truth.” Contrary to the world’s rejection of Jesus, and in direct opposition to it, the Spirit will testify to the accuracy of the revelation in Christ, to which Christ himself witnessed and is continued in the disciples’ witness.

This third aspect of the internal witness is connected to the Spirit’s external witness regarding the world’s conviction. They are, as it were, two sides of the same coin. The Spirit functions as an advocate by aiding the disciples in their witness, and in this way acts as a witness himself, the message of which is conviction concerning those areas discussed in John 16:8-11. Moreover, this action of the Spirit within the disciples is consistent with both the Synoptics (Mark 13:11 and par.) and Acts (6:8-10). Before moving on to discuss the Spirit’s external witness, it should be mentioned that just as the first two aspects of the Spirit’s internal witness (regeneration and teaching) were not limited to the disciples or to the apostolic era, so this third aspect of advocacy in witness should not be so limited, either. Scores of martyrs throughout church history went to the most violent of deaths willingly and joyfully, uttering final words of confidence and peace that testified to the work of the Spirit.

John 16:8-11 says that the Spirit will convict the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment, indicating that the Spirit performs a function with respect to the unbelieving world. Kelly D. Reese has challenged this traditional interpretation based on Roman trials.⁹⁶ The context and the forensic language of the passage allow for Reese’s assumption that it is primarily talking about the defense of Christians before their earthly accusers. She then concludes: “Yet, the traditional interpretation strangely depicts the advocate as acting on behalf of the accusers of the believers.”⁹⁷ It seems, however, that a difference must be made between acting with respect

⁹⁶Kelly D. Reese, “The Role of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11,” *The Theological Educator* 51 (1995): 39-48.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 46.

to someone and acting on behalf of someone. The traditional view does not say that the Spirit acts on the unbelieving world's behalf, but with respect to it. The Spirit does not come to the side of the world, arguing its case, seeking to prove that its position is correct. Instead, the Spirit, through the disciples, witnesses against the world with the desire that the world sees its wrong and changes its attitude to one of embracing Christ, rather than rejecting him. To be sure, there is the element of vindication for the Christian witnesses. They are on the side of truth (John 18:37). But it is not for the sake of winning the case and engaging in a self-righteous triumphalism. The victory is for the sake of the world's acknowledgment of Christ and repentance of sin. It appears that Reese's study has missed that distinction; therefore, the traditional interpretation should stand.

The idea of convicting should perhaps be understood in two ways. The first sense is the kind of conviction that convinces the world of its error, thereby leading to repentance. This happens every time a sinner comes to faith by the regenerating work of the Spirit. The second aspect is the legal meaning of proving guilt, and therefore establishing the justice in meting out punishment. The guilty party does not always acknowledge such guilt or care that they are guilty. This is the response of the vast majority of the world, but they are guilty nonetheless.

The first item of which the Spirit will convict the world is sin; specifically, the sin of unbelief. When Jesus was on earth, by his words and works he communicated to the world who he was and why he had come. Though he had come from God and told the truth concerning God's revelation in himself (8:40), he was rejected as demon-possessed and a blasphemer (8:48, 59). With the continuing witness of the Spirit after Jesus' ascension, it will be demonstrated that the truth which Jesus taught was and is true. Part of this, no doubt, would come from the conviction with which the disciples would speak and act, as well as their determination to suffer martyrdom rather than to renounce Christ. But all of this came not from within the disciples themselves, but from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the world would be convicted regarding righteousness. The proof of this was Jesus' ascension. Jesus' suffering and death were viewed as a vindication of the world's

rejection, particularly a criminal's death of crucifixion. Jesus' resurrection and ascension showed that his suffering and death were part of God's redemptive plan, and that the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry was consistent with what he had always said. All this demonstrates the world's views on Jesus' life and death to be unrighteous.

Lastly, the Spirit would bring conviction regarding judgment. In Jesus' triumph the ruler of this world has already been judged. Consequently, all who belong to the world are included in that same judgment. There is no uncertainty about the future of those who reject Jesus, nor is there any chance of leniency. The judgment has already come, not in a fatalistic sense in which there is no longer any hope at all. The witness is meant in part to bring individuals to faith. But for those who remain of the world the judgment is certain.

The witness of the Spirit is an integral aspect of the Johannine treatment of truth. Not least is the fact that as the Spirit of truth he continues the work of Jesus, and in serving as another Paraclete he replaces Jesus in the lives of believers. This is not to suggest that Jesus' work was incomplete. Rather, the Spirit was the appointed means of the Father and the Son to apply the benefits of Christ's work, as well as to continue to instruct the disciples in the truth of Christ. Also, it is by the Spirit's witness that believers are able to testify to the truth of the Christian way before a hostile world. Just as the regenerating work of the Spirit brought an individual to faith through the direct or indirect witness of a human agent, so that individual has been given the joyful responsibility to do the same. And as that message goes forth which convicts the world with regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment, the internal witness of the Spirit will continue to bring repentant sinners into God's kingdom. Judgment is certain to fall on all who reject the truth. But it has not fallen yet, which means that on the individual level there is still time to partake of the well of salvation which Jesus so freely offers in the Fourth Gospel. It must be said, then, that from beginning to end this Gospel is as evangelistic as any book in the New Testament. John's material on the Spirit, especially the term "Paraclete," shows that he intended to communicate not just to Jews, but to Greeks as well, the reality and implications of the internal and external witness of the Spirit, who as the Spirit of truth continues to advance the

truth of the historical revelation and witness of Christ.

6. THE WITNESS OF HUMAN TESTIMONY

The previous sections in this chapter were concerned with the divine testimony to the truth which Christ both is and brings. This last section will seek to show how human witnesses testify to the truth. The discussion will be determined by means of a three-point outline, looking at the presence of the apostolic witness, the implications of this for the book's authorship, and finally some general comments regarding other human witnesses, this last point including the value of women's testimony in John's Gospel.

It must be noted at the outset, however, that even though this section deals with human witnesses, they must not be entirely separated from the divine testimony. The apostles received a direct charge from Christ, and so carry on a direct extension of his ministry. As for the Evangelist (for now, regardless of what one believes about his apostolic identity) and other human witnesses, their testimony to the Christian revelation has been recorded by divine intention in the New Testament Scriptures, thus carrying divine origin and approval. Speaking from the perspective of redemptive history, one could draw a line from the Baptist as the last and greatest of the prophets to Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's saving revelation to his people, concluding with the apostles, who directly continued the ministry of the risen Christ and whose writings comprise so much of the New Testament tradition. Although the witness of Christ and the witness of the Baptist were discussed earlier, for at least two reasons the apostolic witness has been reserved until now. The first is that while there may very well be an early allusion to the apostolic witness in John 1:14, it does not become prominent until the farewell discourses, specifically Jesus' prayer in chapter 17. Related to this, delay was also wise because this has bearing on the authorship of the Gospel, a subject that is of particular interest in the later chapters due to its connection with the idea of witness in 19:35 and 21:24. The second reason is that John the Baptist has a divine commission of a special nature having specific links to the Old Testament Scriptures as the prophesied forerunner. For this reason he appears in John 5, along

with the witnesses of the Father, Christ's works, and Scripture, whereas the apostles do not.

However, this in no way detracts from the significance of these human witnesses. Like the divine witnesses, they too testify faithfully and accurately to him who is the truth. Whether one is talking about the witness of the Samaritan woman or the apostolic witness, the thoroughness shown by the Evangelist in describing these witnesses proves in the case of the woman her importance for his evangelistic purpose, and in the apostolic witness his overall agreement with and faithfulness to the apostolic tradition concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

6.1 THE WITNESS OF THE APOSTLES

Nearly fifty years ago, Cullmann perceptively observed that “no writing of the New Testament emphasizes so much as the fourth Gospel the continuation of the work of Christ incarnate in the Church...But it is this very Gospel which distinguishes clearly between the continuation by the apostles, which is part of the central period, and the continuation by the post-apostolic Church. The high-priestly prayer (chap. 17) establishes this line of descent: Christ—the apostles—the post-apostolic Church.”⁹⁸ If the Fourth Gospel stood alone in its emphasis on the apostolic witness, those sympathetic to form critical approaches could question the historical value, suggesting that as a later writing John's Gospel could be attempting to strengthen its historical character by linking it to apostolic testimony. But in fact this same apostolic presence is seen several times in Acts, which except for Jesus' commission in 1:1-8 and the appointing of Matthias in 1:21-26, all recount the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and how the apostles are witnesses to these events (2:14-32; 3:11-15; 5:29-32; 10:36-41; 13:23-31). Nor in the unique character of the Fourth Gospel does one observe a disconnected treatment of apostolic tradition. Rather, because the Evangelist is writing later he is able to “add to the material from the earlier sources along the lines of what can be called a theological reflection upon the role actually played by the apostles in the primitive Church and thus to provide information about their role in

⁹⁸Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1956), 79.

terms of a theological evaluation.”⁹⁹

6.1.1 A DIVINE AND DIRECT COMMISSION

The first element of apostolic witness in the Gospel of John is a direct commission by Christ himself. This is seen most forcefully, though not exclusively, in John 17. Jesus prays for himself (vv. 1-5), his disciples (vv. 6-19), and for the future church that will be born through the disciples' (apostles') witness (vv. 20-26). Jesus dwells at greatest length on the disciples, closing this section by asking that the Father not take them out of the world, which hates them, but to preserve and sanctify them as they remain in it. This is because they have work to do in the world, which Christ himself has sent them to accomplish. And the direct result of their being sent is the establishment of the church, which will share in the same relationship between Jesus and the Father.

This commissioning is also made to the disciples after his resurrection in chapter 20. Jesus appears to them and declares, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (v. 21). Regarding v. 22, even if one accepts the view that Jesus' words are a symbolic promise of the Spirit on Pentecost, this still does not diminish the idea of sending in the previous verse. Because the disciples did not begin to evidence this sending until Pentecost, there is no need to seek an immediate, special imparting of the Spirit with Jesus' commission here. They have already been assured of the Spirit's help in the final discourses; therefore that v. 22 probably does not serve as the fulfillment of this assurance does not pose a problem.

6.1.2 EYEWITNESSES TO THESE THINGS

Consistent with Luke's emphasis on eyewitness testimony, the fourth Evangelist also stresses the need for those who have been with him from the beginning to provide a true and faithful witness (15:27). Moreover, this witness is set alongside Christ's own witness through his words

⁹⁹Boice, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

(v. 22) and works (v. 24), as well as the Spirit of truth (v. 26). There is particular attention paid to stress the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is to be clearly understood that Jesus really did die, and that a spear was indeed thrust into his side (19:35). Likewise, John is equally clear that it really was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to the disciples (21:1-14). Thus, in his own way John communicates the same apostolic credentials as does Luke, strongly suggesting not only that the Fourth Gospel is consonant with what is observed in Acts, but that those references to some kind of collective affirmation (1:14; 21:24) could respectfully be demonstrating apostolic support, rather than an assumed Johannine community responsible for the composition of the Gospel. This has obvious implications for the whole question of authorship, to be considered shortly.

6.1.3 HUMAN WITNESS AND REVELATION

All of the preceding remarks demonstrate that the apostolic ministry was itself an aspect of divine revelation. Just as Jesus was sent from the Father, so the disciples have been sent by Jesus, such that the ongoing apostolic ministry serves as an extension or continuation of Jesus' ministry, as well as of the Father's. Also, the divine aspect of this work is seen not only in the sending, but in its content and the means by which this content is acquired. It is the Spirit of truth who will indwell the disciples, and in doing so will not only remind them of things previously spoken by Jesus (14:26), but will also guide them into all the truth (16:13), providing them with all that they need to perform their calling.

Finally, because the sending of the disciples is a divine appointment, and the content that they are given to proclaim is of divine origin, their message is none other than the message of Christ himself, the incarnate Logos. Just as Christ as the preincarnate Logos prepared for his coming through the Old Testament Scriptures, so now the resurrected and exalted Logos continues the work of revelation through the apostolic witness, which itself becomes part of God's

inscripturated revelation.¹⁰⁰ “Through their writings the apostles continue to speak, and in their testimony the exalted Logos is eternally present in the Church...In John’s view the New Testament is to take its place along with the Old Testament and the apostles are to take their place along with the prophets as together constituting a unique revelation which is in fact one organic revelation, mediated at all times by the heavenly Christ, the Logos, and centered in Himself as He is revealed to men in the days of His earthly incarnation.”¹⁰¹

6.2 THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The above discussion certainly allows for a greater consistency between John and Acts concerning the unified presence of the apostolic witness. This means that although John’s approach is theological, it is still at one with the teaching in Acts, and must not therefore be regarded as pushing a later concern (apostolic witness) into the earlier period of Jesus’ earthly ministry. However, this leads to the following question: How, if at all, does the apostolic witness in John bear on the whole issue of authorship? As the Lukan literature proves, the absence of apostolic authorship did not prevent a book’s entrance into the New Testament canon. But unlike Luke, John’s Gospel claims to have been written by an eyewitness, and, more than that, one who was at the last supper with Jesus. John 21:24 says that the beloved disciple bore witness to these things, and wrote them down. Traditionally, it has been understood that the beloved disciple and the Evangelist are the same person, the apostle John. But if in fact this view is rejected, one must think about the truthfulness of the message that is the subject of his eyewitness testimony and writing. Of course it is possible that the message remains fully intact in spite of the messenger. However, that possibility is not very satisfying when the evidence, both internal and external, argues quite well for the apostolic authorship of a book which is part of Scripture. When a book makes the kind of claims that this book does concerning the true testimony given to the revealed truth of Christ, and backs those claims up with compelling

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 123.

internal evidence to which strong support has been given by the early church tradition, overwhelming reasons must be presented to convince otherwise. The above section pointed to the shared opinion of the importance of apostolic witness. This is because apostolic testimony is a crucial witness to Jesus, for it is nothing less than divine revelation itself. If the Fourth Gospel's authorship is specifically used as a support for its teaching about God's revelation in Jesus, to remove this piece of apostolic origin affects to some degree the truthfulness of this divine revelation to which it testifies. The discussion will be brought into focus by the two passages that address specifically the truthfulness of the eyewitness (19:35 and 21:24), the latter further claiming that the eyewitness is also the author.

6.2.1 THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AS EYEWITNESS AND AUTHOR

John 19:26 says that the beloved disciple was standing near the cross during Jesus' crucifixion. This identification links this disciple with Jesus at the supper in John 13:23. Before examining this verse, it should be mentioned that there are those who question the degree to which this testimony is the result of an eyewitness account. It has been suggested that vv. 31-37 share more in common with the Gospel of Peter than the Synoptic Gospels, and therefore there is less value to be placed on eyewitness testimony since the Fourth Gospel to some extent follows the Gospel of Peter.¹⁰² The Gospel of Peter is probably to be dated around A. D. 140-150, with an earliest date of no less than A. D. 120. For this theory to hold, then, it must be assumed that the Gospel of Peter was known to the fourth Evangelist in an earlier form, and that the Evangelist valued it enough to rely on it. Both assumptions appear rather tenuous. It seems better to allow the four Evangelists selective freedom in writing their accounts, and that in this case John found this aspect of the crucifixion story especially relevant for his purpose.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Arthur J. Dewey, "The Eyewitness of History: Visionary Consciousness in the Fourth Gospel," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 63.

¹⁰³This is in direct conflict with Dewey, who goes so far as to say that to see 19:35 as the product of eyewitness testimony is a "desperate attempt to retain the historicity of the Johannine crucifixion scene" (*ibid.*, 64). Barrett likewise holds that the incident is of "doubtful historicity" due to his conviction that

The issue in 19:35 is not so much the subject of the first clause, “he who has seen has borne witness,” but of the second, “he knows that he is telling the truth.” In the first clause the person is identified by *autou* (“he”), while in the second the word used is *ekeinos* (“he” in NASV, literally “that one”). It may not be beyond dispute, but based on the context the most likely candidate for the subject of the first clause is the beloved disciple. Other offerings exist for the second clause on the belief that it would be awkward to use *ekeinos* to refer to the same person previously indicated by *autou*. But the construction is certainly permissible, and in fact may be a deliberate method used to deflect any attention from the witness to Jesus. Brown understands *ekeinos* as referring to the beloved disciple, though he sees him as different from the Evangelist. He criticizes the view that this verse is some kind of Johannine dramatization designed to press a specific theological purpose as “not only beyond proof but implausible.”¹⁰⁴

This verse does not explicitly address the issue of authorship, but it serves as an introduction to the authorship question because it shows that the beloved disciple is to be viewed as a witness who renders truthful testimony. This is with the expressly stated aim that the readers might come to believe, which must be linked with 20:30-31. If in this latter passage Boice is correct to see a reference to the role of the apostle as verifier of the tradition with the goal of belief, it is certainly possible, perhaps even probable, that the figure in 19:35 should also be seen as an apostle who testifies for the sake of his readers’ belief.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, it should also be noted that the two references which together show the beloved disciple to be a truthful eyewitness and writer are strategically placed. In 19:31-35 the beloved disciple testifies to the fact that Jesus was not unconscious, but dead. John 21:24 completes this eyewitness testimony by further witnessing to the truth that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead, and that he appeared to his disciples, commissioning them for service (20:21-23) and

the beloved disciple was not as reliable a source as the Evangelist believed (*op. cit.*, 118). This seems to depend too much on the assumption that the beloved disciple and the Evangelist were two different people, which has by no means been proved.

¹⁰⁴Brown, *op. cit.*, XIII-XXI: 944.

¹⁰⁵Boice, *op. cit.*, 127.

reinstating Peter for his appointed work (21:15-19).

It is really John 21:24 on which the whole discussion of authorship turns. The majority view of current scholarship has seen in the last part of v. 24 (“we know that his witness is true”) a reference to some kind of Johannine community that was responsible for the Gospel’s composition. The beloved disciple may or may not be the apostle John, and the Evangelist may or may not be the beloved disciple. But there is agreement that all three are not the same person. The apostle may well be the source of the tradition that is then put into writing by the beloved disciple and finalized by the Evangelist, both of whom are members of the community, with the community’s validation given at the end of v. 24. It is generally more complicated than this, with theories involving layers of tradition, authorship, or redaction, or elements of more than one. At this point, it is fair to say that there could have been a group of Christians who knew John and who valued and carried forward his teaching. But that is quite different from suggesting that this group was responsible for the present form of the Gospel.

The popularity of this view undoubtedly receives much of its strength from those arguments against apostolic authorship, inasmuch as its own internal and external evidence is rather weak. It is thought to be the best choice given the assumed impossibility or near impossibility of an apostolic explanation. If, however, the arguments against apostolic authorship are shown to be less than compelling, then the community theory loses much of the support that it needs to hold itself up. The relative complexity of the community approach, as compared to a more straightforward one, is one reason why Martin Hengel’s preference for seeing John the Elder as the author is considered so attractive.¹⁰⁶ Richard Bauckham agrees when he writes: “But much of the cogency of Hengel’s proposal lies in its essential simplicity, which, of course, runs quite counter to recent trends in Johannine studies, with their speculative reconstructions of the complex history of the Johannine community in relation to a variety of postulated Johannine

¹⁰⁶Hengel himself admits that his view is hypothetical, but feels that it “has more to be said for it than against it” (*The Johannine Question*, trans. John Bowden [London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989], 108).

authors and a variety of postulated stages of composition and redaction of the Gospel.”¹⁰⁷

Bauckham rightly acknowledges that simplicity is not always desirable because the historical events are not always simple. Here, he favors Hengel’s simpler preference because he feels that it responsibly addresses the internal and external evidence.¹⁰⁸

In the case of Hengel’s thesis, the internal evidence is dependent upon the external testimony to a John thought to be different from the apostle. Carson capably demonstrates that this is not the only way to assess the evidence, and that the same John (the apostle) is in mind for the disputed reference.¹⁰⁹ While certainty either for or against another John may not exist, the questionable interpretation of the evidence for John the Elder causes the attractiveness of Hengel’s position to fade. This is all the more the case if another straightforward approach—indeed, a more straightforward one—with better evidence is advanced, namely, apostolic authorship.

As a point of departure, if Bauckham’s preference for a simpler answer is fair, but that there is good reason to call into question the validity of Hengel’s view based on the belief that it depends too heavily on what must be seen as shaky external support, then the apostolic possibility deserves another look. It must also be stated at the outset that absolute certainty is not the standard of proof. What must be shown is that the apostolic position more reasonably accounts for the evidence, as well as that the objections raised against it can be adequately answered. An exhaustive treatment is neither desired nor needed. The major commentaries should be consulted for that kind of thoroughness. Rather, the goal of this discussion is to establish reasonable support and credibility for the traditional view of the Fourth Gospel’s authorship because of the relationship between it and the presence of the apostolic witness in John to the revealed truth of Jesus.

The treatment will admittedly move away from John 21:24, not because of a lack of focus,

¹⁰⁷Richard Bauckham, “The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author,” in *The Johannine Writings: A Sheffield Reader*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 46.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 69-70.

but because the other references to the beloved disciple are considered in the context of dealing with the plural witness at the end of the Gospel. For it must not be forgotten that the issue is more than just determining the authorship of a book which excludes an identifying salutation. The beloved disciple claims to be an eyewitness as well as the author. Hence, the identity of this one is crucial.

6.2.2 AN ANALYSIS OF THE EVIDENCE

In his recent commentary on John's Gospel and Epistles, R. Alan Culpepper lists a number of objections to seeing the beloved disciple as the apostle John. First, the Synoptic Gospels mention the inner circle of Peter, James, and John in recording the transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, does not include these events, and it does not mention the inner circle as a specific group. Second, following from the first, James is not mentioned by name. Third, the beloved disciple does not seem to fit John, who along with his brother James are described as "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Fourth, John was a Galilean, yet most of the Gospel deals with events in Judea. Fifth, while the Synoptics make no mention of any disciples at the cross since they all fled at his arrest, John's Gospel puts the beloved disciple near the cross. Sixth, it is unlikely that a Galilean fisherman would know the high priest and his household. Finally, Luke 9 records James and John as wanting to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village for their rejection of Jesus (v. 54). Yet John's Gospel records Jesus' successful visit in chapter 4.¹¹⁰ In addition to these arguments, two other common objections are that the author would never call himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and that since Peter and John are said to be uneducated and untrained in Acts 4:13, it follows that John could never have produced anything like the Fourth Gospel.

At a first reading these might appear to be fairly compelling, if not on an individual basis,

¹¹⁰R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 31.

then by their cumulative effect. Besides these, Culpepper believes that the distinctive style and content of the Gospel indicates not only a relatively independent development from the Synoptic tradition, but also a fairly long period of composition, involving the contributions of the beloved disciple, the Evangelist, and a final redactor. This would have taken place from within the Johannine community, and in fact some of the community's concerns are reflected in the Gospel itself.¹¹¹

Students of the New Testament have realized that given the important role of the beloved disciple in John's Gospel, it is necessary to attempt to identify this figure. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to sketch the various suggestions. John O'Grady has put forth the idea that the beloved disciple is a combination of historical person and literary creation. It is assumed that the Fourth Gospel does not only tell about the earthly ministry of Jesus, but it also has something to say concerning the Johannine community, and this view of the beloved disciple best aids that dual quest. From this it follows that not everything in the Gospel is historically accurate for the time of Jesus. But at these points the events are historically accurate for the situation of the Johannine community.¹¹² Similar to this, Tom Thatcher has recently expressed his attraction to the notion that the beloved disciple is a legendary figure based on an actual person.¹¹³ Few would want to go as far as Kügler, who asserts that the beloved disciple texts are fiction, originating entirely from the redaction. He was therefore not the author, nor involved in the background of the book, and certainly not a disciple of Jesus. The beloved disciple is merely an anonymous figure confessed by his own circle, and projected back to Jesus' time.¹¹⁴ These kinds of approaches do not responsibly handle the seriousness of the Fourth Gospel's content, or the nature of the Gospel genre generally. It is not a novel or folklore. In "retrojecting" (to use

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 39-41.

¹¹²John F. O'Grady, *According to John: The Witness of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 143.

¹¹³Tom Thatcher, "The Legend of the Beloved Disciple," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 95-97.

¹¹⁴Joachim Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Literarische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte. Mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 478.

Thatcher's term) the later developments of the beloved disciple to the earlier stages of the Jesus tradition, the line between historicity and later development is blurred, which would certainly have been objected to by those who knew the events and people concerned with Jesus of Nazareth.

Others have sought to see the beloved disciple as a historical person apart from any literary enhancements. Following Fortna, Charlesworth believes that the beloved disciple passages and the account of Thomas in John 20:24-29 were added to the earlier tradition. But he departs from Fortna in saying that the beloved disciple and Thomas are the same person. Having taken this route, he recognizes the need to reconcile John 20:8 and 20:25, 27. In 20:8 the beloved disciple is said to have entered the tomb and believed. But 20:25, 27 records Thomas' refusal to believe unless he actually sees Jesus. Charlesworth attempts to answer the difficulty by suggesting that in 20:8 the beloved disciple does not necessarily believe that Jesus rose from the dead, based on v. 9. The beloved disciple could have believed other things, including Mary Magdalene's announcement that the tomb was empty. Charlesworth takes v. 9 to mean that because the disciples did not understand from the Scriptures that Jesus needed to rise again, the idea of Jesus' resurrection was not yet a considered possibility.¹¹⁵ But it is at least equally possible that v. 9 indicates that even though the two disciples believed that Jesus rose again, they did not yet know how this was so according to the teaching of Scripture. Moreover, given the number of times that *pisteuō* occurs in the Fourth Gospel—either by itself or in other constructions, and hence the importance of the idea in John—it seems that since v. 8 does not say who or what the beloved disciple believed in, it is better to take it in its highest theological sense, especially since the context is the resurrection. Brown agrees that what the beloved disciple believed was more than Mary Magdalene's news that the tomb was empty: "However, the evangelist certainly did not introduce the Beloved Disciple into the scene only to have him reach such a trite conclusion.

¹¹⁵James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995), 241-243, 296.

Rather he is the first to believe in the risen Jesus.”¹¹⁶ Overall, it must be concluded that the internal evidence does not point to Thomas, and the external evidence further confirms why this view is not widely held.

Schneiders focuses on the anonymity of the beloved disciple, and concludes that the best reason for it is that the figure either was or was connected with Mary Magdalene. Schneiders employs feminist criticism, suggesting that the earliest Jesus movement, like the Gnostics, included women apostles. The church was reinventing itself along patriarchal lines, and if the Fourth Gospel was going to gain acceptance the true identity of the beloved disciple would need to be kept hidden.¹¹⁷ A few pages later she goes on to speak of the beloved disciple as a “textual paradigm realized in a plurality of textual figures who are drawn from real historical characters in the life of Jesus and/or the community.”¹¹⁸ The dangers of literary theories have already been pointed out. As for the beloved disciple and Mary Magdalene, it is difficult to see how they could be the same person in light of John 20:1-11. Even a connection with Mary Magdalene is unsupported by the text and relies on Schneiders’ patriarchal speculations, which does not seem to be a very solid foundation for analyzing the beloved disciple passages.

Finally, Schnackenburg offers what he calls an “intermediate solution.” He neither sides with those who reject any connection between the Gospel and the apostle John, nor with those who push for literal apostolic authorship. For the most part following F. M. Braun, Schnackenburg believes that the content goes back to the apostle John, even as a Hellenistic disciple exercised considerable independence in writing the actual Gospel. To use Schnackenburg’s language, the Evangelist both transmitted the tradition and preaching of John, and was a theologian in his own right with regard to those whom he addressed.¹¹⁹ But this also fails to deal with the Gospel’s own claim to have been written by an eyewitness. In addition, although it certainly has elements of a Hellenistic style, it is at the same time thoroughly Jewish. It is questionable whether a

¹¹⁶Brown, *op. cit.*, XIII-XXI: 987.

¹¹⁷Schneiders, *op. cit.*, 222-223.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 228.

¹¹⁹Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, 1: 100-102.

Hellenistic disciple could exercise such independence and still produce such an account, one which not only demonstrates a fine knowledge of Palestinian geography, but more importantly a well-grounded knowledge of the Old Testament.

Before continuing, it will be helpful to review where the discussion is thus far, and where it must go before moving on to other human witnesses. After looking at John 19:35 and mentioning 21:24 (to which we will return shortly), it was necessary to look at the various approaches taken to identify the beloved disciple in order to arrive at a conclusion regarding authorship. This also included a listing of the objections to apostolic authorship. Two simple answers are that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the Elder or John the Apostle. A more complicated approach involving layers between the beloved disciple and the final form of the Gospel is the role of the Johannine community. From here were mentioned other positions which in varying degrees assume the existence of a community that was active in the Gospel's composition, and have tried to establish the identity of the beloved disciple from this context. These specific suggestions which sought to provide the needed details of the community theory were rejected as highly unlikely. This does not automatically rule out the community theory, but given that specific possibilities—even those that rely on a combination of history and literary convention—have not been convincing puts more pressure on its adherents to make the case. For now, it must still be viewed as a possible explanation for the identity of the beloved disciple and the authorship of John primarily because the arguments against apostolic authorship have not yet been addressed. John the Elder was earlier eliminated because of debatable proof for his existence, which clearly affects any supposed internal evidence. This means that one is left with a community theory that will most likely be content to leave the beloved disciple unidentified, and the traditional theory of apostolic authorship. Before looking at the apostolic objections, a few historical remarks are in order.

In R. E. Brown's major commentary on John, he holds that accepting the traditional view that the beloved disciple is the apostle John presents the least difficulty and best handles the internal

and external evidence.¹²⁰ However in his 1979 study, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, he changed his position and concluded that the beloved disciple was not the apostle. What is rather surprising is that this major shift was made on two assumptions for which even if there was good evidence for them, it would still not overturn the evidence favoring an apostolic identification. The first assumption is that in the Fourth Gospel John is set over against Peter, and the second is that the second-century evidence is aimed “toward simplifying Christian origins by reduction to the Twelve Apostles.”¹²¹ This brings Brown closer to Cullmann, who also rejects the beloved disciple as the apostle. He believes that if the problem is to be solved, it should not be assumed that the beloved disciple comes from the twelve. Cullmann sees a greater distance between John and the Synoptic Gospels, and the latter should not be used to solve a problem found only in the former.¹²²

It seems that one of the arguments against apostolic authorship is broader than the internal and external evidence. The traditional view can more easily be dismissed if a historical wedge is driven between John and the Synoptics. Granting that the Evangelist employed a certain independence in that what he chose to focus on is different, it does not necessarily follow that the other Gospels were not in his mind at all. If the previous section on the apostolic witness has any merit, it must be conceded that a closer relationship existed among the apostles than is typically implied in these theories of independence. It is one thing to talk about an independent content or approach between John and the Synoptics. It is another to allege a kind of competition between John and Peter, for example, and to disallow the Gospels from shedding light on each other’s situation. If this is true, then Culpepper’s idea that the Fourth Gospel’s distinct style and content indicate a relatively independent development and a longer period of composition is probably inaccurate, or at the very least cannot be judged as carrying the weight needed to support the community view.

¹²⁰Brown, *op. cit.*, I-XII: XCVIII.

¹²¹Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 33-34.

¹²²Oscar Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 75.

There remains one more important piece of support for the community theory. This brings us back to John 21:24. The belief that the plural attestation shows the community's support for the beloved disciple's witness has by no means been proved, and the apostolic presence adequately accounts for it. Linked to this community interpretation is the proposal that the verse indicates that by this time the beloved disciple had already died, which means that the verse does not intend to make the beloved disciple the direct author.¹²³ One cannot help but wonder, however, if this line of thinking strains the text, and is too dependent on the presumed existence of a Johannine community. It is assumed that "we" in v. 24 indicates the presence of an attesting community, which follows that at least part of chapter 21 was written by the community, which probably means that by this time the beloved disciple had died. But if the option is allowed that the "we" points to apostolic verification of the beloved disciple's witness (as in 1:14), there is no need to postulate all or part of chapter 21 as coming from another hand, which means that there is nothing uncomfortable about the beloved disciple still being alive at this time. In another work Culpepper says that because the "we" indicates the existence of such a community, "there is no need, nor any evidence, to maintain that this group had some official standing, as a group of apostles or presbyters."¹²⁴ In fairness, though, even if one accepts Culpepper's statement, there is also no evidence of a Johannine community for explaining the Gospel's composition. And more hypothesizing must be built, and has been built, on the assumption of a Johannine community than on apostolic testimony.

All that remains now is to consider the objections to apostolic authorship listed earlier, followed by some concluding comments. First, that the Fourth Gospel does not mention Peter, James, and John is really not a problem if the apostle as the author is deliberately avoiding referring to himself because he wants to deflect any possible focus from himself to Jesus.¹²⁵

¹²³George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, revised edition), lxxii.

¹²⁴R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 71.

¹²⁵Regarding the transfiguration and Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, Morris believes that the first omission is easier because in John the whole of Jesus' ministry is a revelation of his glory. As for the second, the

Also, if the apostle John was not only the author, but known to be so by the apostolic tradition and the early church that was born from their work, there would have been no need to identify himself. Indeed, if this line of thinking is incorrect, then the issue actually becomes more difficult since one must then account for the reason why the author does not mention John by name.¹²⁶ This leads into the protest that the Evangelist cannot be John because he would never refer to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” But this does not have to be read as a proud or exclusivist statement. John chooses to indicate his presence in such a way as to direct attention to Jesus. Moreover, the theme of love occurs quite often in John, especially in the final discourses, and it should be remembered that this special designation for the disciple is first used in John 13, which begins by saying that Jesus loved his disciples to the end.

Second, that James is not mentioned is all the more natural if his brother is the author, given the observation that in the Synoptics James and John are mentioned together. Also, James was martyred most likely too early to be the author. Third, although it is true that Jesus called the Zebedee brothers “sons of thunder,” decades of Christian maturity and leadership could certainly temper that kind of reputation.¹²⁷ This also explains why John included Jesus’ successful ministry in Samaria when Mark records a visit when Jesus was rejected, as a result of which James and John want the village to be consumed.

Fourth, while John was a Galilean, he would almost be expected to know Judea well if his family’s fishing business included accounts in Jerusalem, including the high priest. This would explain John’s familiarity with him as well as his servants (John 18:15-16). Also, John does not inherently possess a bias in wanting to focus on those events that occur in Galilee. He comprehends the significance of the events in Judea, especially Jerusalem, for the purpose in writing his Gospel. Fifth, just because the Synoptic Gospels which mention the disciples’ fleeing

Fourth Gospel does not completely ignore the theme of Jesus’ prayer (12:27). The opening verses of John 17 may also show Jesus’ response to what he knows is the Father’s will (*op. cit.*, 13).

¹²⁶Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 77.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 74. Carson says that this kind of change is certainly reasonable, for the working of the same Spirit in the Christian Gospel turned Paul from a persecutor of the church into the apostle to the Gentiles.

at Jesus' arrest do not indicate that any were at the crucifixion does not mean that they could not have been present. At the time, the Jewish authorities seemed to be concentrated strictly on Jesus. It is also true of the Synoptic accounts generally that they include more of the mocking and verbal abuse heaped on Jesus during his crucifixion. John prefers to show how even in his supreme moment of suffering Jesus attended to his own.

Lastly, John's being called uneducated and untrained in Acts 4 cannot be used to argue for an inability to write the Fourth Gospel. The theological depth of Romans or Galatians, for example, shows the tradition's development by the middle of the first century. And Carson rightly points out that the authorities are amazed at the competence of Peter and John given their level of education, not that they were expected to be more accomplished than they were.¹²⁸

Whether or not all proponents of some kind of Johannine community explanation would agree with Culpepper's overall view of the beloved disciple references, he most likely is not alone when he concludes: "They serve to validate the authority of the Gospel and they tell us a great deal about the Johannine community's regard for the witness who stood behind their traditions, but they tell us little about events at the death and resurrection of Jesus."¹²⁹ He would probably agree for the most part with D. Moody Smith, who asserts that because John's references to history and the eyewitness have a theological purpose in mind, even though there is some historical value, "they cannot be taken as a general confirmation of what we would call the historicity of this Gospel."¹³⁰ Both of these are rather large assumptions, and it seems far better to side with J. A. T. Robinson's assessment: "While it is the truth of faith that he is primarily concerned with, this is not to be dissociated from the truth of fact. For to him the faith is the truth of the history, what *really* happened, from the inside."¹³¹

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 73-74.

¹²⁹Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, 72.

¹³⁰D. Moody Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 27.

¹³¹J. A. T. Robinson, "His Witness Is True: A Test of the Johannine Claim," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 454.

6.2.3 CONCLUSION

The focus on the idea of the apostolic witness as an intended witness to the truth of the Father's revelation in Jesus Christ has determined the shape of this particular look at the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. For this reason the concern was exclusively with the internal evidence. The major commentaries will provide the scholarly discussion on the external evidence. Granting that such evidence for apostolic authorship is not as old as one would prefer, arguments from silence can hardly be claimed as strong support against such authorship. And the evidence that is known, considering the antiquity of the whole endeavor, is quite solid. It must be judged as significant that this is acknowledged by Brown and Schnackenburg, who both deny the traditional view.¹³²

When all the evidence is in, however, it seems justified to conclude, along with Robinson, that even if some difficulties do remain with seeing the apostle John as the beloved disciple and therefore the author, it is still the view that is "least open to objection and therefore the most scientific."¹³³ As was stated earlier, the standard needed is not absolute certainty. The burden of proof is not on adherents of the traditional view to show that the beloved disciple truly is what he claims, but on those inquirers to show convincing reasons to interpret the material other than the most natural and straightforward way. Indeed, their reasons must be more than convincing because the evidence for the apostle John is quite strong, on both the internal and external levels. In the author's judgment the evidence presented does not meet this standard. Apostolic authorship still seems to be the most responsible way to handle the textual material on its own merits, without reading inferences from it based on the supposed ability to peel back the layers of

¹³²Brown notes that the only suggestion which has any measurable amount of evidence from the ancient tradition is the apostle John, and that Irenaeus' famous statement is "far from having been disproved" (*The Gospel According to John*, I-XII: XCII). Schnackenburg comments: "Still, the relatively early conviction in the Church of the authorship of the son of Zebedee remains a factor which must be taken seriously into consideration" (*op. cit.*, 1: 85-86). Given these, it seems to be historically irresponsible for D. Moody Smith to speak of bracketing out of consideration the ancient tradition of apostolic authorship (*op. cit.*, 26).

¹³³Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 118.

tradition leading to a Johannine community.¹³⁴ If there is an intimate connection intended between the apostolic witness and apostolic authorship in the Fourth Gospel, together they serve as a powerful witness to the truth of the Christian revelation. For all who have read this Gospel, both then and now, recognize the faithfulness and accuracy of this account, and that the Evangelist responsible had indeed been with Jesus.

6.3 OTHER HUMAN WITNESSES

In moving from the apostolic witness and the related issue of authorship, certainly important aspects of the human witness to Jesus, one discovers some other aspects of this human testimony. The aim of the last part of this section on human witnesses will be to discuss these aspects, and then bring them into sharper focus by showing how the Fourth Gospel's use of women as witnesses helps to advance the idea of truth.

6.3.1 THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE DIVINE REVELATION

The first point to be made is that the human witness is a response to the divine revelation, which manifests itself in both external and internal forms. The external revelation is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the relationship between it and human testimony is clear. There must be an observed event to which one can testify. The focus is not on the person's experience, whether it be the Samaritan woman's meeting someone who knew everything about her, or the blind man's experience of being miraculously healed by Jesus. Rather, the focus is on the person of Jesus himself, and the experiences served as signs pointing to Jesus' identity. (In John 4:42 Jesus is correctly confessed to be the Savior of the world, and in 9:38 the healed man realizes that the proper response toward Jesus is worship.) Naturally, without this external revelation there can be no resulting human witness, thus showing that the initiative lies solely with God.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 80.

¹³⁵Boice, *op. cit.*, 136-138.

The internal aspect of the divine revelation refers to the working of the Holy Spirit within the individual to enable that one to correctly understand the external revelation that has been given. Once again the initiative clearly rests with God. It is not that the initiative begins with God in the sending of the Son, after which the individual through sheer force of will or superior intelligence is able to appropriate it personally. For apart from the internal witness of the Spirit, working through the external revelation, the individual would never be able to spiritually grasp the true significance of Jesus' incarnation.

The Evangelist uses a number of ideas to communicate this concept. John 3 speaks of receiving a witness (vv. 11, 32, 33). Particularly interesting are vv. 32 and 33, where v. 32 speaks of the widespread rejection of Jesus' testimony, while v. 33 indicates that there are nevertheless some who do receive it. And v. 35 may partially include the idea that God, in giving all things into the Son's hand, also gives those whom he has made able to receive Jesus' testimony (see also 6:37). The Evangelist also speaks of hearing (5:25; 6:45; 8:43, 47; 10:3; 18:37), seeing (8:56; 9:39; 11:40; 12:37-40), knowing (4:42; 10:4; 14:7, 17, 20), and believing (1:7; 4:42; 7:39; 9:35), all referring to spiritual perception. And texts such as John 10:26-27 and 18:37 point to the divine initiative in human response. In John 10, the reason an individual does not believe is because he or she is not of Jesus' sheep, and it is only the sheep who are known by Jesus and therefore hear his voice and follow. And in John 18:37 the same idea is taught using the idea of truth. It is not that in hearing one gets to be of the truth. Rather, it is only those who are already of the truth who hear Jesus' voice.¹³⁶

It follows, then, that just as the human response cannot be separated from the external revelation, so also the human response cannot be separated from the internal revelation. There is an unbreakable connection between the external revelation, the internal revelation, and the human response. There were many who saw Jesus' signs and heard Jesus' words, but they did these things only in the literal, physical sense, and so rejected him. It is only those who have

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 138-139.

received God's gracious internal revelation who are able to see and hear spiritually unto eternal life.

From this faith response necessarily comes the role of witnessing to others. Knowledge of the truth leads to missionary activity. The first aspect of this work is the proclamation of God's salvation in Christ throughout the world. As was the case in Israel's prophets, so it was also for those who were chosen to herald the fulfillment of God's covenant of redemption in Jesus. John the Baptist as the divinely-appointed forerunner publicly confessed that Jesus was the sin-bearing Lamb of God (1:29). By comparison, there were those of the Jewish rulers who believed, but did not openly confess it because they valued their own place in the synagogue and people's approval more than the approval of God (12:42-43). The disciples were to continue the confessing role of John the Baptist, and Jesus prepared them for the persecutions that would come because of it (15:27-16:2). But whether they witnessed in life or death, because their message was the very truth of God incarnate they would triumph and the Gospel would advance. Jesus himself set them apart for this work, and in his prayer he knows that this sanctification will produce more believers and, hence, more witnesses to the truth (17:19-20).

In addition to this verbal witness, there would also be manifested an active witness of a distinctively Christian conduct. There would be a unity among the apostles as well as the post-apostolic church (17:11, 21), patterned after and flowing from the unity that exists within the Godhead (17:21-22). Related to this first aspect of the active witness is the genuine Christian love that would be present for each other (13:34-35), what Johannes Nissen considers "the most powerful of testimonies to the world."¹³⁷ A final, all-encompassing active witness is the idea of practicing the truth (3:21), also seen in I John 1:6. As Boice explains: "At every point the reality of the revelation which has come in Christ is to be reproduced in the life of believers. Their witness is to involve Christ's ethic, and this will be produced in them by the power of the Spirit

¹³⁷Johannes Nissen, "Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John," in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Århus 1997*, ed. Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 203.

which is active in Scripture. They are to combine a word and a deed witness in their testimony just as a word and a deed witness are organically united in His own. They are to be His representatives, living monuments in which Christ's glory may be seen."¹³⁸

6.3.2 JOHN'S USE OF WOMEN AS WITNESSES

It must be seen as intentional that a Gospel so concerned with bearing witness to the truth of the Christian revelation should record so fully stories where women function as witnesses to the truth. What is observed in the Fourth Gospel is a stark contrast with what one finds at some places in the Mishnah. *Pirke Aboth* 1:5 views talking to a woman as being a diversion from studying Torah. *Sotah* 3:4 actually considers teaching one's daughter Torah the equivalency of preparing her for lechery. Also, as a matter of general principle, though not true in every instance, a woman was not permitted to testify in court (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:8). Outside of court, a woman's eyewitness testimony was not banned, but not everyone viewed it favorably.¹³⁹ Yet in John Jesus both speaks with and instructs the woman of Samaria, and the inclusion of Martha's confession of Christ in John 11 and Mary Magdalene as the first to see the risen Lord in John 20 both show the value of women as witnesses to Jesus.

In referring to Luke's resurrection account, specifically the unbelief by the disciples of the women's report (24:11), Bauckham cites it as a deliberate example of male prejudice for the purpose of overturning it.¹⁴⁰ Of course it is quite possible that the disciples would not have received men's testimony, either. But it is certainly true that this kind of news coming from a woman would have made it all the more difficult to accept. It is therefore striking that the Gospel accounts do not hide the fact that women were the first ones on the resurrection scene. If one were making up the story, in the interest of credibility this is not how one would write it.

¹³⁸Boice, *op. cit.*, 141-142.

¹³⁹Robert Gordon Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 95-96.

¹⁴⁰Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 285.

The obvious explanation for their inclusion is that the resurrection really did occur, and these are the details of that truth.

Jesus' raising of Lazarus in John 11 was up to that time the greatest of his signs. When the Pharisees were told what had happened, they knew it was now serious enough to call forth a special meeting to decide how to approach the situation (vv. 46-47). From then on their hatred began to take shape in a formal and organized way as they looked for the opportunity to kill Jesus (v. 53). Their scheming apparently did not remain a secret to Jesus because John says that consequently Jesus no longer walked publicly among the Jews, but retired with his disciples to a town outside Jerusalem (v. 54).

The raising of Lazarus therefore intensified the rulers' determined opposition against Jesus and on a human level triggered the events that would culminate in his arrest and crucifixion. It is noteworthy, then, that this sign should not only prominently involve women, but use these women (particularly Martha) to teach important truths about Jesus. Both Martha and Mary testified to the reality of Lazarus' death (vv. 21, 32). Jesus uses this occasion of great sorrow to show that by raising Lazarus he not only has such authority over death, but also has such authority over his own imminent death, and his subsequent resurrection will prove that it is not only so for himself, but for all who believe in him (vv. 25-26). It is after v. 25, in which Jesus proclaims himself to be the resurrection and the life, that Martha makes her confession, recognizing Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, and the one who was to come into the world. "Taken together these three affirmations give us as high a view of the person of Christ as one well may have."¹⁴¹ And they occur at this crucial time in Jesus' life and ministry, and by a woman.

Just as women were important witnesses to Jesus in the raising of Lazarus, so were they also important witnesses to Jesus in his own death and resurrection. Of the four women mentioned as standing by the cross (19:25), at least two are related to Jesus (and possibly Mary of Clopas, if

¹⁴¹Morris, *op. cit.*, 490.

Hegesippus, who is quoted in Eusebius, is correct that she is Joseph's sister-in-law). To the extent that women could provide eyewitness testimony in nonlegal situations, these relatives would be acceptable in being able to testify to the fact that Jesus was really dead.¹⁴²

Mary Magdalene was among the women at the crucifixion. She was also the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. Whether or not one agrees with Maccini that her encounter can be seen as "the key to understanding the whole pericope,"¹⁴³ it is nevertheless true that she is the one to whom Jesus first appears, and is told to tell the disciples. Schneiders believes that Jesus' instruction to Mary gives her an "apostolic identification."¹⁴⁴ But it is a straining of the text to view Jesus' words as some kind of formal apostolic commission on the same level as Matthew 28:19-20 or Acts 1:8.

Lastly, the woman of Samaria needs to be considered because of her conversation with Jesus and the resulting witness she bears to her village. Again, if one is trying to prove that Jesus is the Christ and that the Christian Gospel is for all who will believe, one does not voluntarily choose a woman to strengthen the argument. One only does this if that is precisely what happened. The opening chapters of John's Gospel indicated that Jesus has come to bring salvation to Israel (such as the disciples); but this must be qualified because Jesus has a broader goal in mind. He did not come for those genealogically connected to Abraham. He came to those who show themselves to be spiritually related by believing on Jesus. This group comes not only from within the covenant people of Israel, but from all who will come, even Samaritans and Gentiles. This woman and other Samaritans from her village responded rightly to Jesus, even as many Jews did not.

As the story progresses the woman comes to understand more of Jesus, not because of her own deductive abilities, but because of Jesus' desire to reveal himself to her. She moves from regarding Jesus as simply a Jew (v. 9), to a prophet (v. 19), to the Christ (v. 29). Along with the

¹⁴²Maccini, *op. cit.*, 201.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁴⁴Schneiders, *op. cit.*, 103.

townspeople, she too saw Jesus as the Savior of the world (v. 42). Just as the man born blind spoke of Jesus as the one who healed him, so the woman spoke of Jesus as the one who knew about her past. However the villagers may have regarded her before, they believed her testimony and asked Jesus to stay with them. In v. 9 the woman was taken back that Jesus, a Jew, would speak to her, a Samaritan. And when the disciples return from buying food, v. 27 says that they “marveled that He had been speaking with a woman.” But by v. 40, because of her testimony the villagers are asking that this Jew stay with them.¹⁴⁵

Jesus informed the woman that God’s salvation could not be monopolized according to the proper location of worship. Yes, salvation is from the Jews and not the Samaritans; but if these Jews think that God is to be localized in Jerusalem, they too misunderstand. God’s salvation belongs to all who come to him through Jesus. It is therefore universal in scope. Secondly, the woman was told that this salvation was now. This woman took the information she had and told those back in the village. They believed what they were told and went to see Jesus for themselves. As a result of Jesus’ stay with them, many believed that he was indeed the Savior of the world. Carson observes that others were called “savior,” such as various Greek gods and even emperors. Hadrian was called the “savior of the world.”¹⁴⁶ Whether or not any of these other occurrences were known to the Samaritans, they knew that in Jesus they had found the true Savior of the world. He was not a Savior exclusive to a particular sect or even a particular people. He was the world’s Savior and the time of this universal salvation had come.

Before his ascension, Jesus would inform his disciples that they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. His own earthly ministry patterned that as he called lost men and women to himself from among the Jews, Samaritans, and

¹⁴⁵Gail R. O’Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 87. S. J. Nortjé probably goes too far in viewing the woman as an emissary of Jesus to the Samaritans (“The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 20 [1986]: 25). There is nothing in the passage to suggest she is acting as Jesus’ agent. Maccini is correct to guard against seeing her as a missionary in the formal sense of the term, as well as an apostle, because the text does not indicate these (*op. cit.*, 144). But she does have a kind of missionary function, further showing the evangelistic emphasis in John’s Gospel.

¹⁴⁶Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 232.

Gentiles. Jesus' journey from Judea to Galilee took him past Samaria. But it was not a necessary evil or a minor inconvenience. It was part of the Father's plan of redemption, and thus part of Jesus' ministry and mission, to save from among the Samaritans. This woman was among that number, and she served as a witness to those around her. She is to be remembered for her believing response to the Messiah, and her testimony that this one was truly the Savior of the world.

The human witnesses are an important part of John's theme of witnessing to the truth. In addition to the meeting of the human and divine witness in the New Testament Scriptures, the human witnesses are also important because of their evangelistic role of testifying to the truth. Some did so in a small Samaritan village. Others witnessed to large groups of people during a major feast in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-41). Still others travelled further to preach Christ to Greeks at Antioch (Acts 11:20). Many of these early witnesses paid for their testimony with their own blood. But what was true in every case was that each was convinced that the message of Jesus was true and therefore was to be communicated to others. The truth of the revelation of God in Christ produces a determined witness that cannot be quenched in the flames or pierced by a sword. To the contrary, such hostility strengthens the witness because the Holy Spirit through persecution further confirms within the believer the truth of the message that is being proclaimed.

CONCLUSION

At the end of chapter two the present study prepared the way for chapter three by arguing that because truth comes only from God, it must be revealed to human beings if they are to acquire it. What was discovered is that in John one must not divorce the revelation from those chosen to reveal it. Because the revelation is of divine origin and intent, those biblical witnesses to it become part of revelation's content. Therefore, to diminish the character and necessity of these witnesses is to also diminish the divine revelation to which each of these witnesses points.

What remains in the last chapter is to show that the Johannine conception of truth is never to

be conceived of in terms of mere intellectual acquirement. To be of the truth means that the whole of life reflects that divine reality. The Christian revelation is not a matter of the mind only. It is a matter of the heart and hands as well. The consistency, then, between doctrine and life not only shows that the doctrine really is understood. It is also a witness before the world that the truth of Jesus Christ is worthy of all trust and service.

