The Johannine Riddles and their Place in the Development of Trinitarian Theology

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Abstract:

While the Fourth Gospel does not present a Trinitarian view of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it did contribute—arguably more than any other biblical text—to later discussions of the Trinity in the early church. This paper takes a closer look at how those subjects would have been understood by the author and audience of the Fourth Gospel in the light of four primary sources of John's theological tensions: the dialectical thinking of the evangelist, the Prophet-like-Moses agency of Jesus as the Son sent from the Father, the evolving dialectical Johannine situation, and the literary-rhetorical devices of the narrator. Aspects of agency, representation, being, and relationship will be discussed on their own Johannine terms within a two-edition theory of composition, noting the epistemological origins of the three Johannine riddles contributing most directly to the development of Trinitarian theology. Questions will then be raised as to how patristic and modern analyses of these issues might be drawn into dialogue, suggesting implications for an appreciation of Trinitarian theology in the light of John's dialogical autonomy.

Not only is the Fourth Gospel the source of some of the greatest theological debates in the modern era (namely, the divorcing of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, the expunging of John from canons of historicity, and its resultant exclusion from Jesus research for the first three quests for Jesus), but it was also the source of most of the greatest theological controversies over at least three centuries in the patristic era. In his treatment of the christological debates during that period, Philip Jenkins describes the aftermath of the second Ecumenical Council held at Constantinople in 381 C.E.

> In the 380s, St. Gregory of Nyssa was astounded at the spread of theological discourse to every Constantinople shopkeeper:
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> Every part of the city is filled with such talk; the alleys, the crossroads, the squares, the avenues. It comes from those who sell clothes, moneychangers, grocers. If you ask a money-changer what the exchange rate is, he will reply with a dissertation on the Begotten and Unbegotten. If you enquire about the quality and the price of bread, the baker will reply: 'The Father is greatest and the Son subject to him.' When you ask at the baths whether the water is ready, the manager will declare that 'the Son came forth from nothing'.[1]

Indeed, in this terse description of theological strife that had come to dominate even conversations in the marketplace, Johannine contributions to debates over the ontological origin and nature of the Son and the Father-Son relationship are apparent. While it would be anachronistic to impose later Trinitarian language and Greek metaphysical constructs upon the theology and language of the Johannine Gospel, it certainly provided the raw data contributing to later debates *and* their resolutions. The questions are how that might have been so, and how a

[1] Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: HarperCollins 2010), 34.

historical-critical understanding of the origins and character of John's theological riddles might contribute to a fuller historical, biblical, and theological appreciation of the development of Christian theology—enhancing its meaning for modern believers.[2]

1. Patristic Approaches to John's Christological and Theological Riddles

As early as the letters of Ignatius, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (*Letter to the Ephesians* 9:2) are associated together, building on the threefold associations in the New Testament (Matt 28:19; Lk 10:21; Eph 1:17; 1 Pet 1:2). In the early third century, Origen refers to the Son's relation to the Father as being of one essence (*homoousios*)—on the basis of the Johannine Prologue, and while he maintains three *hupostases* (persons) of the same essence, he seeks to preserve the Son's dependence on the Father—also based on John's Father-Son relationship. A century later, Arius affirms the created origin of Jesus and over and against his pre-existent divinity. In arguing the Son was of "like essence" with the Father (*homoiousios*), Arius was willing to preserve a monotheistic Godhead at the expense of the divine status of the Son. One might argue that the first of the seven Ecumenical Councils (Nicea, 325 C.E.) restored the Johannine tension that Arius had neglected in his subordinated Christology, and this was reaffirmed at Constantinople (381 CE) with the doctrine of the dual nature of the Son.[3] Likewise, the next three Councils restored Johannine contributions on the Holy Spirit, the Father-Son relationship, and the dual nature of the Son.[4]

More specifically, as Emperor Constantine called together the 318 bishops together from all over the Roman Empire, they addressed the Johannine tension by adding the phrase, "that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial" with the Father. As Arius and others had been teaching that there was a time when the Son was not, and that as Jesus had said "the Father is greater than I" (drawing on the Gospel of John, there), this created an international theological crisis that had to be addressed. Note, however, the Johannine contributions also to the rebuttal of Arius: (a) Christ and the Father are "one" (i.e. of one essence—*ousia* in Greek; of one substance—*substantia* in Latin); (b) Christ is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God" (drawing on the Johannine Prologue, here); (c) Christ is "begotten not made," also drawing on John 1:1-2; and (d) there was never a time when he was not (also from Jn 1:1-2). Of course, material from other christological passages in the New Testament were also formative here (especially Col 1:15-20 and Heb 1:1-4), as well as references to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 1 Jn 5:8—later mss.), but the theological polarities of the Fourth Gospel played major roles in the forming of the Christian doctrines of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in doing so

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[2] While several important works on the Trinity and the Gospel of John have been produced in recent years, few have directly explored the epistemological origins of John's theological tensions and riddles; cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008); Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986). However, cf. Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel; Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, WUNT 2:78 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1996; 1997, 3rd printing with a new introduction and epilogue, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books); and "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars—The Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of St. John and Christian Theology* (ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 311-45 (arguments developed more fully elsewhere will simply be summarized and referenced in this essay).

[3] T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Maurice Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; J. N. Rowe, "Origen's Subordinationism as Illustrated in his Commentary on St John's Gospel," *Studia Patristica* 11:2 (1972): 222-228; Richard A. Norris, Jr., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[4] Anthony Casurella, *The Johannine Paraclete in the Church Fathers: A Study in the History of Exegesis* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1983); Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1989); William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

restored tensions that had been disregarded otherwise. In the discussions accompanying the second and third Councils (Constantinople 381 C.E.; Ephesus 431 C.E.), emphases on the *flesh* of Jesus (from Jn 1:14) were also drawn into play and finally confirmed in the Chalcedonian Definition in 451 C.E.

Further, a variety of dialectical developments on the ground contributed to the development of Christian doctrine, and these grounded factors cannot be overlooked. As debates between Arius and Athanasius (and their followers) developed after the first Ecumenical Council, the Arian position began to get the upper hand, and Athanasius was imprisoned at least five times for holding what eventually became re-established as the orthodox christological view at the Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.). Here the equal divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were emphasized by Emperor Theodosius, as the Holy Spirit's proceeding from the Father (rooted in Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26) was asserted: "Who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets." With the human and divine natures of Christ also affirmed, the question, of course, orbited around *how* this was so, and the Council of Ephesus (431 C.E.) condemned Nestorius and his followers regarding the separation of the human and divine natures of Christ, while the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) condemned Eutychus and the Monophysites regarding the view that the Jesus' humanity and divinity were fused into a single unity. Given that the Gospel of John describes the Holy Spirit being sent from the Son as well as the Father, however, the Western church added "and the Son" (*filioque*—rooted also in John 15:26; 16:7) at the Council of Toledo (589 C.E.), and this move posed one of several issues contributing to the separation of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in 1054 C.E.

Most fascinating about the Fourth Gospel, however, is not simply that it played a key role in the theological and Trinitarian debates ranging from the second through the fifth centuries of the Common Era, but that it often was used by leading figures in *both sides* of many of these debates. As T. E. Pollard reminds us, as illustrated in the dialogue between F.C. Conybeare and Alfred Loisy, not only was the Fourth Gospel essential to Athanasius's confuting of Arius, but in Loisy's terms, "if Arius had not the Fourth Gospel to draw texts from, Arius would not have needed confuting."[5] Therefore, the most fascinating feature of the Fourth Gospel is its theological, historical, and literary riddles, which account also for the fact that John is the most disagreed upon book of the Bible—in terms of its origin, composition, and meaning—in the modern era.[6] In addition to the interests of patristic interpreters, however, modern scholarship has also been fascinated with Johannine theological polarities, which has led to a variety of literary-critical approaches to their origins and character.

2. John's Theological Tensions and Modern Approaches to their Character and Origins

Most striking within John's theological content is the fact of its presentation with a high degree of dialectical tension. While these tensions also can be found in John's other themes (such as whether or not the Son judges, the embellished and existentialized signs of Jesus, John's present and future eschatology, universal and particular soteriology, determinism and free will for the believer, prescriptive and reflective dualism, anti- and pro-Jewish/Judean themes, embellished-and-deconstructed sacramentology, and petrified-and-dynamic ecclesiology), the dialectical presentation of christological, theological, and pneumatological themes in John gave rise most directly to Trinitarian debates, from Tertullian through the post-Chalcedonian period.

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[5] Pollard, *Christology*, 3.

[6] In *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel; An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2011) I limit myself to laying out thirty-six sets of problems (a dozen in each category: theological tensions, historical problems, literary aporias), which are then accounted for in terms of their origin, character, and development—leading, then, to interpretation. In chapter 7 I outline what are arguably the epistemological origins of each of these riddles, leading into the final three chapters involving meaningful interpretation.

Rather than account for these tensions metaphysically and ontologically, however, modern scholars have largely sought to understand them first in historical-critical and literary-critical terms. Modern scholars ask: "Did particular religious ideas in the New Testament have their origin in contemporary religions or differing literary sources?" Likewise, "How was a Johannine feature understood and regarded by its original authors and audiences, and how is that similar to or different from later understandings in the development of Christian theology?" As answers are posed to these and other epistemically oriented questions, new "theological-critical" insights and possibilities emerge. In the light of such insights, earlier theological (both orthodox and heretical) discussions are illumined in ways that may lead to new possibilities in the integration of biblical, historical, and theological analyses.

Consider first, however, some of the leading theological tensions within the Fourth Gospel.[7]

A. *Is Jesus Human, Divine, or Both?*

The question of Jesus' humanity and divinity is more pronounced in John than any other single writing in the New Testament. Jesus is referred to as God, who was with God from the beginning—the very source of creation (Jn 1:1-2, 18), and yet the Word also became human flesh (1:14), and water and blood flowed forth from his side (19:34). The Johannine community attests having beheld his divine glory, and yet the eyewitness attests to having witnessed his fleshly humanity. Consider further these features of the divine-and-human Jesus as the Christ.

On one hand, Jesus' divinity is pronounced in John:

- The glory of Jesus is testified to from the beginning of the Gospel (1:14c; 11:4; 14:13; 17:1) and his "glorification" is emphasized extensively (1:51; 3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:1).
- Jesus is equated with God in John 1:1-2 and 18 (in the earliest texts) and is called "my Lord and my God" by Thomas in John 20:28. Likewise, the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 is used to point to Jesus in John 8:58—an obviously blasphemous claim (see v. 59)—and Jesus' appearance on the lake is presented as a theophany (an appearance of God, 6:20).
- Further, the divine certainty and sway of Jesus are featured (1:47-51; 2:24-25; 4:17-19; 5:41-42; 6:64; 13:1-3):Jesus knows full well what he will do and what is going to happen to him (6:6; 13:1, 3; 16:19, 30; 18:4; 19:28); his adversaries cannot arrest him unless his time has arrived (7:30; 8:20); and people experience themselves as being "known by the Divine" in their encounters with Jesus (1:48; 4:19, 39; 5:6; 9:38; 10:4, 14, 27; 20:16; 21:7).
- Jesus is thus presented as God striding over the earth in John.

On the other hand, Jesus' humanity is also unmistakable in John:

- The incarnational "flesh" of Jesus is emphasized in John (1:14a; 6:51, 53-56), and his humanity is acknowledged by others (1:45; 10:33; 18:5-7).
- His human-family references are clear (1:45; 2:1-12; 6:42; 19:19, 25-27), and not even his brothers believed in him (7:5).
- Out of his side flow physical blood and water (19:34), and Thomas is allowed to touch Jesus' flesh wounds with his finger and hand (20:27). Further, Jesus weeps at Lazarus's tomb (11:35); his heart is deeply troubled (11:33; 12:27; 13:21); he groans (11:33, 38);

[7] The above theological tensions, as well as those listed below are outlined and discussed more fully in Anderson, *Riddles,* 25-43.

on the cross he thirsts (19:28); and he loves his own unto the end (11:3, 5, 36; 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 10, 12; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).
- The fleshly, pathos-filled Jesus is also a reality in the Johannine text.

How have modern scholars addressed John's christological tensions? As a means of accounting for the humanity-and-divinity of Jesus in John, Rudolf Bultmann and other diachronic theorists have inferred a set of source-critical dialogues between earlier sources and the evangelist. Whereas the evangelist's Christology was incarnational and low, according to Bultmann, he purportedly made use of a proto-Gnostic Revelation-Sayings Source, which he diminished and co-opted within his narrative. Conversely, Ernst Käsemann dealt with the tensions by denying the fleshly humanity of Jesus in John, but such an approach totally overlooks John's antidocetic thrust and its clear presentation of the fleshly suffering of Jesus.[8] C. K. Barrett argues that we have here a dialectical thinker, who looked at something from one side, and then another, holding truth together in tension.[9] Raymond Brown noted that as the Johannine tradition developed, it engaged a variety of groups and audiences internal and external to the Johannine community. Some of these (Samaritans with a high Christology) pushed John's Christology higher—leading to tensions with Jewish monotheism, while Gentile converts to Christianity struggled to accept a suffering-and-human Son of God. These issues, of course, relate to the Son's relation to the Father.

B. *The Son's Relation to the Father—Subordinate, Egalitarian, or Neither?*

A most perplexing feature of the Father-Son relationship in John is the fact that it is hard to know whether John's is a Theocentric Christology or a Christocentric Theology.[10] In revealing the Father's love to the world, God is made known by the flesh-becoming Word. Therefore, the Son comes to make the Father known. Then again, the primary activity of the Father in John is the sending of the Son. Were it not for the "having-sent-me" work of the Father in John, the role of the Father would be diminished by half, if not more. Consider these tensions between the Father and the Son in John.

On one hand, the Father and Son appear to share an egalitarian relationship:

- The Son is equal to the Father (Jn 1:18; 5:18; 10:29-30, 33, 38; 12:41; 14:10-11; 16:32; 17:5, 11, 21); "I and the Father are one," declares John's Jesus.
- The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands (3:35; 5:20; 13:3; 16:15); the Son works just as the Father does (on the Sabbath, 5:17); the Father shows the Son all that he is doing and gives him the power to raise the dead (5:19-20, 25-26); all who honor the Son honor the Father (5:23), and the Father glorifies the Son (8:54; 17:1). To know the Father is to know the Son, and to know the Son is to know the Father (8:19; 14:7; 17:1); to hate the Son is to hate the Father (15:23-24).
- The Son gives life to whomever he chooses (5:21), and the Father testifies on the Son's behalf (8:16; literally, note the voice from heaven in 12:28).
- The Son and the Father are one.

On the other hand, the Son's relation to the Father is presented is one of subordination:

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[8] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Johannine Monograph Series 1 (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray et al., 1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014); Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. G. Krodel, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).
[9] C. K. Barrett, "The Dialectical Theology of St John," in his *New Testament Essays* (London: SCM, 1972), 49-69.
[10] See Marianne Meye Thompson's treatment of the issue: *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), as well as Anderson, "Having-Sent-Me Father."

- The Son is also subordinate to the Father (Jn 5:19, 30; 7:16; 8:16, 28; 12:49; 14:10, 28) and declares, "The Father is greater than I."
- Jesus honors and glorifies the Father (8:49; 17:1) and does whatever the Father commands; he testifies to what he has seen and heard from the Father (3:32; 5:19, 36; 8:26-28, 40; 10:18, 32; 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:15) as one sent from the Father (5:23, 36-37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 18, 26, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21, 25; 20:21).
- The living Father has entrusted life to the Son (5:26), and the Son lives because of the Father (6:57).
- The Son can do nothing except what the Father commands.

Modern scholars have approached the ambivalent Father-Son relationship in John in a variety of ways. Bultmann argued that we have here a Gnostic Redeemer-Myth, which was thought to have resided in the worship community of John the Baptist, whose followers became followers of Jesus. Given that the Revealer descends from heaven and returns to the Father as a means of carrying out a divine commission, Bultmann assumed that this was still part of the sayings source, typified by the worship material of the Johannine Prologue. Another approach, argued by Ernst Haenchen and others, assumed there were multiple Christologies underlying the Fourth Gospel—one egalitarian and the other subordinationist. Still another approach, developed by Peder Borgen and others, infers a Jewish Agency schema, rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, wherein the agent is in all ways like the one who has sent him.[11] In that sense Jesus and the Father are one precisely because the Son does nothing except what the Father tells him to do. Indeed, John's presentation of the Father-Son relationship displays twenty-four ways in which Jesus as the Christ fulfills the Deuteronomy 18 passage in Septuagintal Greek.[12] Because his words come true, Jesus is indeed the one Moses predicted would be sent by God, and this is why the words and deeds of Jesus as the Son are to be regarded as those of his "having-sent-me" Father.

C. *Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father, the Son, or both?*

The role of the Holy Spirit in John is presented as being commissioned by the Father and the Son. While two passages in John 14 present Jesus as declaring that the Father will send the Spirit, two passages in John 15-16 present Jesus as promising to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples. The Spirit proceeds from the Father as does the Son, and yet the Spirit is the second advocate (Jesus' being the first advocate, 1 John 2:1), and he will teach believers all things and will disclose the truth of Jesus' teachings to later generations in ongoing ways. While John baptizes with water, Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33). He whom the Father has sent gives the Spirit without measure (3:34), and in his post-resurrection appearance to the disciples Jesus breathes on them and bestows the Holy Spirit upon them (20:22).

On one hand, the Holy Spirit proceeds from and is sent by the Father:

- Jesus declares that he will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit (14:16), and he also declares that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name (14:26).
- As the Son proceeds from the Father, so does the Spirit (15:26; 16:28-27, 30).
- The Father sends the Spirit.

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[11] Bultmann, *Gospel of John*; Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, 2 Vols.* Hermeneia (ed. Ulrich Busse; trans. R. W. Funk, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Peder Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," *The Interpretation of John* (2nd edn.; ed. John Ashton, Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 83-96.

[12] Paul N. Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father: Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 33-57.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit will be sent by the Son, making his teachings known:

- Jesus also declares that he will send the Spirit from the Father (15:26), and he promises to send the *Paraklētos* after he departs (16:7).
- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus as the Christ, who reminds believers of Jesus' teachings and who makes his will known (14:26; 16:13-14), testifying on Jesus' behalf (15:26).
- The Son sends the Spirit.

Unlike patristic discussions, the question of who sends the Spirit or whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father or the Son, or both, has not been as significant a problem for modern interpreters. However, if John 15-17 reflects a later addition, the emphasis on the Father's sending the Spirit would be part of the earlier material (in my view, being finalized around 80-85 C.E.), while the later material (added around 100 C.E. after the death of the Beloved Disciple) contains the emphases that the Son is the one who send the Spirit. This also coheres with the view of 1 John 3:24 and 4:13—Jesus in whom believers abide sends them his Spirit as a source of guidance and empowerment. Therefore, the movement to the Son as the sender of the Spirit may relate to the addressing of needs of Johannine believers caught in crises with the world, as the Epistles were arguably written by the final editor of the Gospel in between its first and final editions.

3. John's Dialogical Autonomy and the Epistemological Origins of its Theological Tensions

While the overall theories of several Johannine scholars merit discussion, especially that of Rudolf Bultmann, readers will have to engage them elsewhere.[13] Nonetheless, an overall theory of John's composition based on the strongest of critical studies, in my judgment, includes the following elements.

A. *The Dialogical Autonomy of the Fourth Gospel*

First, John's narrative reflects an autonomous Jesus tradition developed alongside Mark, but as alternative rendering of Jesus' ministry, reflecting the evangelist's perspective and ministry.[14] Second, rather than reflecting literary dialogues between alien sources, the evangelist, and the redactor (versus Bultmann), the Fourth Evangelist is a dialectical thinker, and many of John's theological tensions reflect the dialogue between perception and experience in the thinking of the evangelist (with Barrett).[15] Third, John's major literary riddles can be solved fairly simply with a modified form of Lindars' two-edition theory, seeing John 1:1-18, chapters 6, 15-17, and 21, and eyewitness and Beloved Disciple references as added by an editor—plausibly after the death of the Beloved Disciple (Jn 21:24). Fourth, rather than infer a Gnostic Redeemer-Myth as the basis for the Johannine sending motif (versus Bultmann), more plausible is the inference of a Prophet-

[13] See my extensive treatment of Bultmann's diachronic theory of John's composition as a means of addressing John's theological, historical, and literary riddles (chs. 4-7 of *Christology*) and also in my foreword to the recent edition of his *Gospel of John*, i-xxviii.

[14] Paul N. Anderson, "Mark, John, and Answerability: Interfluentiality and Dialectic between the Second and Fourth Gospels" *Liber Annuus* 63 (2013): 197-245; and "Mark and John—the *Bi-Optic* Gospels," in *Jesus and the Johannine Tradition* (eds. Robert Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 175-188.

[15] Paul N. Anderson, "The Cognitive Origins of John's Christological Unity and Disunity," *Horizons in Biblical Theology; An International Dialogue* 17 (1995): 1-24.

like-Moses agency schema rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22.[16] Fifth, John's relations to other gospel traditions were more variegated than just one type; interfluence between John's tradition and the early Markan and later Matthean traditions is likely (with John's first edition augmenting Mark and John's later material harmonizing with Mark and the other Gospels), and John's tradition was plausibly a source for Luke and possibly a resource for Q.[17] Sixth, John's dialectical situation involved engaging at least six or seven crises over seven decades: Judean-Galilean tensions and followers of the Baptist in a Palestinian setting (30-70 C.E.), Jewish leaders and the Roman imperial presence in a diaspora setting (70-85 C.E.), and docetizing and institutionalizing Christians within the early church (85-100 C.E.). These were accompanied by various dialogues with other gospel traditions spanning all three periods.[18] A seventh dialogical feature of John's narrative is that it is designed in such a way as to engage later audiences rhetorically—engaging them in an imaginary dialogue with the subject of the narrative, Jesus.[19]

While other factors contributed to John's historical and literary riddles, John's theological tensions have as their epistemological origin four primary sources: the dialectical thinking of the evangelist, the Jewish agency schema, the dialectical Johannine situation, and the rhetorical devices employed by the narrator.[20] Within the larger overall theory of John's dialogical autonomy, understanding the roles each of these factors played within the development of the Johannine material facilitates a fuller understanding of the issues debated within the historical development of Trinitarian theology, and engaging the results of critical biblical scholarship is essential to understanding the content of orthodox Christian theology as well as its lesser alternatives. Epistemology is thus essential for understanding both philology and ontology when it comes to Trinitarian theology and its biblical antecedents.

B. *Epistemological Origins of John's Theological Tensions*

Given that highly diachronic approaches to John's composition as means of accounting for John's theological tensions fail to convince overall,[21] John's theological tensions are more likely explicable as emerging from several other dialogical factors.

1. The first epistemological source of John's theological tensions involves a *cognitive dialogue*: the dialectical thinking of the Johannine evangelist, who worked reflectively, synthesizing earlier perceptions and experiences with later ones. As Plato described thinking as "the soul's dialogue with herself" (*Theatetus* 189), first looking at things from one side, and then another, until one's understanding has reached its glory (*doxa*), this is precisely the way the Fourth Evangelist regarded many of his subjects. Therefore, it is misguided to infer disparate literary sources when tensions are found between John's high and low christological motifs, as well as virtually every other theological motif. The evangelist thus operated in a both-and way instead of either-or dichotomies. Drawing in James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, this phenomenon evidences Stage 5 (Conjunctive) Faith, representing matured reflection upon first-order

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[16] Anderson, "Having-Sent-Me Father."

[17] Paul N. Anderson, "Interfluential, Formative, and Dialectical—A Theory of John's Relation to the Synoptics," in *Für und Wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums,* Theologische Texte und Studien 9 (ed. Peter Hofrichter, Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2002), 19-58.

[18] Paul N. Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*; Semeia Studies 63 (ed. Roland Boer; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 133-159.

[19] Paul N. Anderson, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context," *Critical Readings of John 6,* BINS 22 (ed. R. Alan Culpepper; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 1-59.

[20] Anderson, *Christology*, 252-265.

[21] While an impressive attempt to discern three editions of John's composition, including the layered development of eleven theological themes, has been contributed by Urban C. Von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John,* 3 Vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, the dialectical thinking of the evangelist is neglected as a plausible factor in the formation of John's theological tensions.

encounters involving more distanced perspectives.[22] Plausibly, such a thinker had his own story of Jesus to tell, rather than repackaging a derivative rendering based on alien sources, or even the Synoptics. Therefore, intratraditional reflection and intertraditional engagement go hand-in-hand within the developing Johannine memory of Jesus. At times polarities are held together in tension; at other times either reinforcing or contradistinctive emphases are made in dialogue with other traditions—especially the Markan. It is precisely because John's memory of Jesus coheres with and departs from Mark's presentation that we have here an alternative Jesus tradition, likely reflecting an individuated memory of Jesus from day one. In that sense, John is different from Mark on purpose—*because of* its apostolic origination rather than discounting it.

2. A second factor of John's theological tensions involves the *Jewish agency Christology* of the evangelist, based on the prophetic-agency schema (*shaliach*) of Deuteronomy 18:15–22. As the one who is sent from God deserves to be treated in all ways like the one who sent him, the egalitarian-and-subordinated features of the Father-Son relationship are presented in John as flip-sides of the same coin—a Jewish agency schema. The Son is to be regarded as equal to the Father precisely because he does and says nothing on his own, but only what the Father commands. This motif is also presented strikingly in the Q tradition, as the mutuality of knowing between the Father and the Son in Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22 appears thoroughly Johannine. Connected with the preaching of Peter and the witness of Stephen (Ac 3:22; 7:37) but missing from later christological hymns, this Mosaic-Prophet motif is likely early in the development of gospel traditions rather than later—perhaps reflecting debates over Jesus's authorization among the Jewish leaders of his day. Therefore, John's showing that Jesus' proleptic words had indeed come true demonstrates the fulfillment of this scriptural typology (Jn 14:29; 16:4; 18:9, 32), calling for belief in his divine agency as the Son of the Father. The overall exhortation in John, of course, is to call for a response of faith to the divine initiative, which Jesus as the Son conveys and is.

3. A third epistemological source of John's theological tensions involves the evolving *dialectical situation of the Johannine tradition*, as its preachers, narrators, and editors sought to engage evolving audiences with the message of the Johannine story. As each of John's three phases experienced two largely sequential-yet-somewhat-overlapping crises, history and theology are operative in the development and crafting of John's story of Jesus. As a result, in engaging (a) Judean leaders and (b) followers of John the Baptist (Phase One), emphases upon Jesus' divine authorization and mission would have been acute. Following a move to a Gentile-mission setting (and, there is no more suitable prospect than the traditional setting of Ephesus and Asia Minor—phases two and three), (c) dialogues with the local Jewish presence and (d) under the umbrella of emerging requirements of emperor laud under Domitian (81-96 CE) emphases upon Jesus as the Son of God became more strongly asserted. Here the I-Am language of the Johannine Jesus evolved into an apologetic showing that he fulfilled the typological ideals of Israel, and as an anti-Domitian challenge to Roman imperialism, Thomas is presented as proclaiming Jesus as *Lord and God* (20:28—the same language Domitian required of his subjects). (e) The cross-cultural rendering of John's Jewish agency motif into a Hellenistic-friendly *Logos* hymn by the Johannine leaders bridged the gaps between Gentile and Jewish believers, although belief in a divine Jesus allowed some Gentile believers to minimize his fleshly existence, leading to docetizing tendencies—an issue addressed with intentionality in the later Johannine material. (f) And, as a correction to rising institutionalism in the late first-century situation, the Johannine emphasis upon the more primitive memory of Jesus' emphasis on the active role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the faithful became an incisive emphasis.

4. A fourth factor of John's theological tensions involves *the literary means* by which the conveyors of the Johannine message sought to engage later hearers and readers in a set of imaginary dialogues with Jesus by means of crafting a dialogically engaging text. As

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[22] James F. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981); cf. my cognitive-critical engagement in *Christology*, 137-165, 252-265.

misunderstanding is always rhetorical, here the narrator crafts the story as a means of creating a set of imaginary dialogues with the protagonist, Jesus, evoking a response of faith involving to the divine initiative, which Jesus conveys and is. Rather than simply addressing one primary set of issues, such as portrayed in John 9 and the engaging of Jewish-Johannine relations, John 6 betrays several levels of engagement, inviting later audiences to receive the Bread that Jesus gives and is versus lesser alternatives (6:27).[23] Rather than the food that perishes, later audiences are invited to seek the spiritual nourishment that Jesus' signs convey; rather than opposing one exegetical ploy with another, audiences are invited to receive what God eschatologically gives rather than seeking what Moses gave; rather than allow docetizing Gentile believers to escape the implications of the Way of the Cross, the Johannine Jesus is rendered to require ingesting his flesh-and-blood sacrificial example if one wishes to partake also of the gift of life he offers. Finally, Peter is presented as "returning the keys to Jesus" in his confession in John—challenging Diotrephes and his kin—and affirming the life-giving Word of Christ for the community of faith.

In addition to these sources of John's theological riddles, several other sources of John's historical and literary riddles are present.[24] Considering these particular factors, however, assists the interpreter in understanding more fully the content of John's theology as well as the history of its interpretation from the patristic through the modern eras. At the heart of all four of these modes, however, is the synthesizing work of the evangelist, who wove these factors together into an engaging narrative whole.

B. *Origins of John's Theological Tensions and Trinity-Discussion Implications*

Given that the epistemological origins of John's primary theological tensions have been identified, an appreciation of their character in relation to Trinitarian theology deserves consideration, along with two other factors. First, many other theological tensions present themselves in John beyond the three outlined in this essay; these are simply some of the primary ones that led to Trinitarian discussions. Second, while each of the above four sources John's theological tensions is arguable, this does not preclude other factors. Therefore, in addition to a primary source of each of John's theological tensions, a secondary source will also be explored below, with a special focus on their Trinity-discussion implications.[25]

- *The Humanity and Divinity* of Jesus:
    - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist—Perception/ Experience Dialogues
    - 2. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity

[23] Note that John 6 evidences four crises in the Johannine situation, rather than a single dialogical concern reflected in John 9; cf. Anderson, *Sitz im Leben*, 25-58.

[24] A full analysis of the epistemological origins of all thirty-six of John's in chapter 7 of *Riddles*, 157-172. Contributing to John's historical riddles are: (a) a complementary and corrective alternative to Mark (in John's first-edition material), and a complement to the Synoptics in John's final-edition material (esp. chs. 6 and 21); (b) intratraditional dialogue, reflecting the cognitive dialectic earlier perceptions and later understandings; (c) intertraditional dialogue, reflecting interfluentiality between the Johannine tradition and early Markan and later Matthean traditions; and (d) the dialogue between history as theology and theology as history. Contributing to John's literary riddles are: (a) the dialogue between orality and literacy in the Johannine narrative, whereby preaching units were rendered in written form and gathered alongside other material to comprise a larger narrative whole; (b) John's first edition poses an apologetic narrative affirming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah-Christ; (c) the continued preaching of the Beloved Disciple and the work of the Johannine Elder addressed emerging issues in the Johannine situation rhetorically; and (d) John's later material calls for unity and abiding in Christ and his community of faith—cf. Anderson, "Interfluential, Formative, and Dialectical."

[25] For a list of primary and secondary origins of a dozen of John's theological tensions, see Anderson, *Christology* (2010), lxxix-lxxxi.

As outlined above, Jesus is presented as both human and divine in John—more so than in any part of the New Testament. Therefore, the dual nature of the Son, as a central feature of Trinitarian discussions owes a great deal to the Fourth Gospel, and the primary factor in John's christological tensions is *the dialectical thinking of the evangelist*. Here we observe first-order reflection on Jesus' identity and mission as the Messiah-Christ and Son of God. While some rhetorical development of the Johannine narrative, employing the literary feature of anagnorisis (presenting knowing and discovery events) within the Johannine narrative, John's story of Jesus nonetheless reflects the memory of transformative encounters with the divine associated with the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. These impressions came to be narrated in the form of Jewish and Hellenistic wonder-narratives, but comparative religions cannot account for epistemic origins of the distinctively Johannine rendering of Jesus' ministry. Transformative encounters associated with the presentation of the calling of the disciples (Jn 1), Jesus' signs (Jn 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 21), dialogues with Jesus (Jn 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 18, 20, 21), and other episodes suggest that some sort transformative knowing event lies behind the distinctive Johannine tradition from a cognitive-critical perspective.[26]

This first-order character of John's theological reflection accounts for several of its features. While the distinctive form of the Johannine I-Am sayings is not found in the Synoptics, none of John's nine metaphors is absent from the speech of the Synoptic Jesus. Therefore, we have in John the evangelist's paraphrastic rendering of Jesus' mission in terms rooted in historical memory but crafted to suit the teaching ministry of the evangelist.[27] Additionally, the absolute renderings of Jesus' I-Am sayings of Jesus are not exclusive to John; they are also found in the Synoptics, including allusions to the theophany of Moses before the burning bush in Exodus 3:14 (Mk 6:50; 12:26; 14:61-62). These associations, plausibly connected to the historical ministry of Jesus, given their independent attestation in the Synoptics and John, nonetheless took on new meanings within the developing Johannine as encounters with the spirit of the risen Christ caused deepened reflection on the meaning of Jesus as the Messiah-Christ in post-resurrection consciousness. This is where the Johannine Prologue emerged as a fitting communal confession—plausibly devised by the Johannine Elder as a means of affirming the witness of the Beloved Disciple, designed to lead later audiences into experiential encounter as witnessed to in the Johannine narrative. It was thus added to the narrative as a means of engaging later audiences with its subject—seeking to evoke an existential encounter as a means of furthering dialectical experience and subsequent reflection. Therefore, the flesh and glory of Jesus emerged from the dialectical reflection between experience and perception of the evangelist, and the both-and appreciation of that tension is furthered by means of the engagement-oriented character of the narrative's construction.

A secondary origin of the humanity and divinity of Jesus in John is the result of the tradition's development within *the dialectical Johannine situation of Johannine Christianity*, with high and low aspects indebted to early and late factors. In addition to early transformative encounters with Jesus and later rhetorical emphases upon his divinely commissioned status, the Johannine tradition also shows evidence of mundane memories of Jesus' pathos-imbued existence as well as later emphases on his suffering humanity. Thus, the history of the Johannine situation reflects challenges to Ebionite-type affirmations of Jesus' status as a prophet but not the Messiah-Christ or Son of God, and correctives to docetizing tendencies to embrace Jesus' divinity at the expense of his humanity. Therefore, emphases upon Jesus' divinity and humanity are both *early and late* within the emerging Johannine situation, and dialectically so.

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[26] Here James Loder's work is significant, as it provides a basis for considering originative differences between the pre-Markan and early Johannine traditions: *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (New York, Harper & Row, 1981); cf. also my cognitive-critical engagement of Loder's work in *Christology* 137-193, 252-265. For John's contributions to the historical quest for Jesus, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus; Modern Foundations Reconsidered*, LNTS 321 (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

[27] Paul N. Anderson, "The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective." *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9 (2011): 139-206.

Here Trinitarian discussions correctly rejected all-too-clever explanations of "how" the humanity and divinity of Jesus are to be envisioned—an appeal to mystery finally makes the best sense of the tensive character Johannine Christology as well as its epistemological origins. Whether the Fourth Evangelist would have agreed with ontic and metaphysical interpretations of his dialectical reflections upon God's saving-revealing work operative through the time-bound ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the timeless work of the resurrected Lord, others will have to judge. It may well be that he would have affirmed such confessions, as John 20:31 reflects a pistic development in ways formulaic; John's narrative is crafted so as to facilitate belief in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God," in order that believing, people might experience life in his name.[28] Then again, the contextual settings of patristic discussions are not the only settings to be considered; modern settings also pose contexts for interpreting these first-century texts, so the historical-critical scholar and the historical theologian must work together in understanding how first-century texts were interpreted over the next three or four centuries, noting both conjunctions and disjunctions between them.

- *The Father/Son Relationship in John*:
    - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
    - 2. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity

The egalitarian and subordinated relation of the Son to the Father in John must be envisioned from the perspective of *the Jewish Agency Motif* as flip-sides of the same coin. Therefore, we do not have two differing Christologies rooted in disparate literary sources; such is a modern fiction. Nor, according to some patristic inferences, is the Son's oneness with the Father to be sacrificed as a factor of his faithful obedience to the Father. Rather, the Son is to be equated with the Father identically because he is sent from the Father as his representative agent, fulfilling the Prophet-Like-Moses typology rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Further, Jesus confirms that he is the one predicted by Moses, as his words come true, confirming his authentic agency as the mouthpiece of the divine Word. As this motif is echoed in the Q tradition and also in the preaching of Peter and Stephen in Acts, it likely rooted in the memory of early Jesus tradition, although its presentation in John reflects an understanding of ongoing revelation. The point of the Son's connectedness to the Father is to emphasize the divine origin of his mission and message. Therefore, humanity is exhorted to be open to the divine address—effected in the mission and message of Jesus as the Son of the Father—and humanity will be judged according to their responses by divine source of the agent's commission.

A second factor in the Father/Son relationship in John is *the dialectical Johannine situation*, wherein three chapters plausibly influenced the development of the motif. (a) Beginning with the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, his challenge to the religious leaders in Jerusalem was likely met with disputes over his authorization to act and speak as he did. In emphasizing the basis for his ministry, it is not unlikely that the Galilean challenger of Judean institutions appealed to Mosaic agency the source of his concerns. (b) In moving to a diaspora setting, new sets of engagements with Jewish leadership emerged within local synagogues claiming Mosaic authority in their interpretations of Torah. Here, Pharisaic insistence on adherence to the Law of Moses were met with appeals to Moses' having written about Jesus, whose authenticity is attested by his word having come true. Therefore, if one loves the Father, one will also lovingly receive the one sent by him—so the Johannine evangelist asserts. (c) As the Johannine narrative is embraced among Gentile believers, in addition to Jewish ones, the Jewish agency motif gets translated into Hellenistic-friendly terms—fitting especially well with understandings of the divine *Logos* as taught by the likes of Heraclitus and Philo. Perhaps influenced by the christological hymns of Colossians 1:15-21 and Hebrews 1:1-4, this worship-

[28] Paul Anderson, *Navigating the Living Waters of the Gospel of John; On Wading with Children and Swimming with Elephants*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 352 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 2000).

confession was then added to a final edition of the Johannine narrative by the compiler, connecting the Son with the Father in pre-existent and cosmos-effecting ways.

It is especially the Johannine Prologue that determined the patristic discussions of Jesus' divinity and humanity and also his relation to the Father. The Word was *with* God and the Word *was* God, so the Johannine evangel proclaims (Jn 1:1-2). Further, the Son's role in creation and pre-existent oneness with the Father, reflecting a cross-cultural expansion of John's agency motif, contributed to heated theological discussions over the ensuing centuries. John's presentations of Jesus' will and that of his Father being in tension contributed to monothelite debates, just as John's tensive Christology contributed to adoptionistic, Apollinarian, and monophysite debates. What contributed most powerfully to the inference of distinctive persons regarding the Father and the Son is John's presentation of Jesus' relation to the Father and his representative mission. Therefore, it is precisely because of John's presentation of Jesus' agency as sent by the Father, carrying out his will and returning to the one who sent him, that Trinitarian discussions were forced to envision individuated faces and persons within a unitive Godhead. In that sense, the Jewish agency motif never really was excluded from Trinitarian discussions; it was simply modified and incorporated into the ensuing discussions.

- *The Holy Spirit's Proceeding from the Father and also from the Son*:
    - 1. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
    - 2. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist—Perception/ Experience Dialogues

The Holy Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son also is presented more clearly in John than in any other part of the New Testament, and like the presentation of the Father and Son as distinctive personae, the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is most extensively emphasized in John 14-17. The revelatory-empowering work of the Holy Spirit, however, is not distinctive to John; it is also emphasized by the Synoptic Jesus in Matthew 10:16-20, where the Spirit of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Mk 13:11; Lk 12:11-12) will guide believers and speak through them. Parallel to the Synoptics (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; 11:13) in the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is emphasized as a gift from God, empowering believers as an indwelling manifestation of the divine presence (Jn 3:5-8, 34; 7:37-39). This p goes back to Jesus tradition operative within all four Gospels. Within the Johannine situation, though, the guiding and instructive work of the Holy Spirit becomes especially significant. Jesus is here remembered as promising the Holy Spirit as a *paraklētos*—an advocate, helper, and comforter—who will guide and instruct believers in their time of need (14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13). The Spirit of truth will bring to mind the teachings of Jesus, and as the Spirit of truth will lead them into all truth. Therefore, the mutuality of agency between the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit cohere within these four chapters, culminating with Jesus' followers then being one with him as he is with the Father—witnessing through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the world (17:21-26).

Within these chapters it is also easy to see how a monarchial view of the Trinity, as embraced within Eastern Orthodoxy, is arguable. Both the Son and the Spirit are sent by the Father, with the Spirit's also proceeding from the Father (15:26). Such texts embolden the originative role and character of the Father. And yet, the Son's unity with the Father, and the Son's sending of the Spirit moved the discussions at Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon further—leading to Western *filioque* affirmations a century or so later. Interestingly, the two passages where the Father sends the Spirit are in the first edition of John (14:16, 26), while the two passages where the Son will send the Spirit are in the later material (15:26; 16:7). Here we see evidence of development within the Johannine situation, likely a factor of the evolving needs of John's audience. As an apologetic to Jewish family and friends, asserting the Father's role in the sending of the Son and the Spirit would have been compelling. After all, as affirmed in Hebrew scripture, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—at work in the world and in the lives of individuals. Within the later Johannine situation, however, as this Spirit-led community seeks to discern direction and guidance as to how to address the emerging needs of this dynamically

changing set of communities, connecting leadings of the Spirit with the teaching and ministry of Jesus becomes an objective referent by which to judge subjective leadings. Therefore, the dialectical character of John's pneumatology is primarily ordered by *the developing needs of the emerging Johannine situation*.

A secondary contributor to the evangelist's stance on the place of the Holy Spirit as part of the divine being and operation, however, is the *cognitive dialectic between perception and experience within the experience and thought of the evangelist*. Given that we probably have at least some first-hand memory of the words and works of Jesus as a resource for the preaching and teaching of the evangelist,[29] we likely have a continuity of revelatory openings—Aha!-experiences, as James Loder would describe them—within the post-resurrection consciousness of the Johannine evangelist and others among his associations. Therefore, while Jesus-tradition memory may have informed his asserting that the Father would send forth the Holy Spirit, just as he sent the Son (Jn 14), the emphasis appears to have shifted toward the discerning of spirits and an emphasis upon the words and works of Jesus as the measure for accountability in the later Johannine situation (Jn 15-16). Indeed, the testing of spirits is required in the Johannine situation (1 Jn 4:1), and an emphasis upon Christ as the *paraklētos* (1 Jn 2:1) before the Father informs the conviction that another advocate will be sent (Jn 14:16), who will convict people of the truth—both of sin and of righteousness in the later Johannine situation (16:7-15). Therefore, from a cognitive-critical perspective, we also see a shift in the thinking of the evangelist, who comes more and more to associate the convincing/convicting work of the Holy Spirit with the normatizing work of Jesus as the Christ, because this is the one who clarifies and magnifies his work as the present and ongoing teacher within the community of believers.

Once more, implications for Trinitarian understandings are considerable, here. While the patristic discussions moved toward ontic and metaphysical categories if inference, the Johannine presentation of the Holy Spirit's work as sent by the Father and the Son, continuing the saving-revealing work of the Son on behalf of the Father's love for the world, reflects a more dynamic understanding of these realities. While the being and work of the Holy Spirit may finally remain a mystery, as does the dual nature of the Son, perhaps the work of God's Spirit on behalf of the Son furthers his redemptive mission of grace and truth in the world beloved by God (1:14, 17; 3:16). Of course it is the Spirit of God that is here operative, and yet, the gift of the Spirit is precisely what Jesus as the Christ came to avail to the world—as a gift of the Father's love. Therefore, one can appreciate the patristic inference that the love of the Father for the world indeed has a name—it is the Holy Spirit—who continues the saving/revealing work of Jesus as the Christ in the world, full of grace and truth. Again, the Johannine presentation of these realities is less in terms of being and more in terms of agency and mission; and with that fact, many a Trinitarian analysis, from the patristic to the modern eras, would agree.

As a result of the above analysis, it is clear that the church fathers and mothers were indeed seeking to address the Johannine theological riddles by means of the best analytical tools of their day, just as modern scholars have. Note, however, that one of the features observable is the restoring of dialectical tension that had been diminished or sidestepped by alternative proposals, or which had been distorted speculatively in attempting to account for a particular feature in the biblical witness. Therefore, the orthodox syntheses tended to restore balance to understandings of John's theological, christological, and pneumatological features. In the light of John's dialogical autonomy, however, would they have come up with the same elements of Trinitarian theology, or might they have come up with something different? Such a question, however, cannot be answered with any sort of certainty; it simply remains a mystery and a question. Perhaps, however, the structure of orthodox faith—as well as some lesser alternatives—might be altered if the pervasively dialogical character of John's presentation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is to be taken seriously and faithfully within its epistemological appraisal of the biblical text.

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[29] See the overlooked first-century clue to John's apostolic authorship in *Christology*, pp. 274-277.

4. Conclusion: Trinitarian Theology in Johannine Perspective

While it cannot be imagined that the fathers and mothers of the church would have viewed the Johannine riddles leading up to the construction of Trinitarian theology in the light of modern historical-critical analysis, or even that the Johannine evangelist and compiler would have thought in patristic terms, what can be explored is a renewed look at orthodox Trinitarian theology in Johannine perspective. Put otherwise, given that the church fathers and mothers were seeking to address John's riddles in the light of the best analytical tools of their day, what if contemporary theologians sought to address the elements of Trinitarian theology in the light of our having considered the Johannine riddles (their character and origin) using the best tools of the present day? In particular, what if an appreciation for the epistemological origins of the Johannine riddles themselves where to be applied to the ways one approached the doctrine of the Trinity in the modern era? Given that the source of orthodox theology has as its Johannine roots a living and dynamic set of factors, the question is how to restore the Johannine tensions to later understandings—moving living faith to orthodox creeds…and back again.[30] And, to do so implies not simply viewing John's narrative in Trinitarian perspective, but also viewing Trinitarian theology in Johannine perspective.

That being the case, what would happen if Trinitarian theology were viewed with a healthy sense of: (a) Johannine dialectical regard? Rather than including or excluding people from Christian communions on the bases of creedal or cultic measures, an invitation to Conjunctive Faith (Fowler's Stage-Five Faith) poses an alternative to dogmatism. After all, the light of Christ enlightens all (1:9), and Jesus has many sheep "not of this fold" (10:16). (b) Given the dynamic agency of the Son's relation to the Father and the Spirit's relation to both, the existential question is whether modern believers are open to being drawn into the communion of that agency, whereby they become receptive and responsive to the divine initiative as Christ's witnesses and redemptive partners in the world—Jesus' friends (15:14-15). (c) In reading Trinitarian theology contextually, it is vital to appreciate the syntheses within the trajectories of contemporary theses and antitheses—viewing conclusions in the light of the questions they were addressing. In addressing the needs of the world today, how might embracing the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit further grace and truth and love in the world today—the very heart of Trinitarian theology? (d) How might the central elements of Trinitarian theology be expressed today in ways that draw audiences compellingly into its subject (God's saving-revealing work, power, and presence) in ways that are biblically sound, rationally coherent, and experientially adequate? If the Johannine prologue points the way forward, perhaps the facilitating of transformational encounter may hold the key over resorting to propositional debates.

While it cannot be said that John's story of Jesus envisioned or articulated the fully developed components of Trinitarian theology, it also cannot be denied that its role was central to its development. As Trinitarian theology did not originate out of a vacuum in the patristic era, so its embrace in the modern era will be facilitated by remaining in dialogue with the best of historical-critical inferences. If that happens, not only will Trinitarian theology be connected more effectively with is epistemological Johannine origins; it will more powerfully engage contemporary audiences in the modern era. After all, as the mission of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit endeavors to convey grace and love to the world, the reception of that message involves knowing the truth, and all truth is liberating (8:32).

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[30] In Anderson, Guessing Points, 344-345: "Implications: From Living Faith to Orthodox Creed . . . and Back Again."