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The Prologue of the Gospel of John

Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts. Papers read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013

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Foreword

This volume had its inception in the fall of 2012 when Jan van der Watt invited Alan Culpepper and Udo Schnelle to join with him, as a steering committee to organize the Colloquium Ioanneum. The Colloquium was inspired by the Colloquium Oecumenicum Paulinum (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colloquium_Oecumenicum_Paulinum), which was organized in 1968 and meets every two or three years to discuss portions of the Pauline letters and topics related to Pauline theology. We agreed to invite eleven others to constitute the membership of the Colloquium Ioanneum, based on the ideal of constituting a group of scholars distinguished by their contributions to Johannine studies that would be broadly representative of different nationalities, religious traditions, and approaches to the Gospel. Each will hold membership in the Colloquium as long as they participate actively. In time, others will be invited to fill vacancies.

The following comprised the founding membership of the Colloquium Ioanneum:

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Meetings will be held biennially. The 2013 meeting was held on the Island of Patmos, and the 2015 meeting at Ephesus. The theme of the inaugural meeting in 2013 was the prologue, John 1:1–18, which invites analysis and interpretation from so many vantage points. Its background, relation to the rest of the Gospel, structure(s), themes, theology, and literary and rhetorical functions have all been studied intensively. Alan Culpepper and Udo Schnelle delivered the two main lectures, each of which introduced one of the main sections of the program. Craig Koester, George Parsenios, Marianne Meye Thompson, and Jean Zumstein were asked to contribute short papers on the philosophical background of the prologue or philosophical interpretations of the prologue. John Ashton was invited to attend the conference as a distinguished guest. Jan van der Watt convened the Colloquium on the first day and offered closing comments at the end of the program.

Alan Culpepper's lecture, which was intentionally introductory, addressed the relationship between the prologue and the Gospel, noting its literary themes and theological perspectives. The question of how the prologue portrays God's work in the world leads to the observation that it speaks of five divine initiatives: (1) the work of creation through the Logos (v. 3), (2) the giving of the Law through Moses (v. 17), (3) the sending of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8, 15), (4) the coming of the light (v. 9)/the incarnation of the Logos (v. 14), and (5) the birth of the children of God (vv. 12–13). The opening verses of John refer to the role of the Logos in creation and interpret the Logos in light of the Wisdom tradition. John signals that God's creative work is ongoing and not limited to the originating act of creation. The incarnation reframes God's act of creation as Jesus goes on giving life. The prologue securely establishes the work of God through the Logos in creation and the incarnation before recognizing the role of Moses and the giving of the Law. The roles of both Moses and the Law are also reframed when they are brought in relationship to the incarnation: they have become witnesses to Jesus. Similarly, by introducing John the Baptist as a witness, the prologue anticipates the trial motif in the rest of the Gospel. The incarnation is clearly the central theme of both the prologue and the Gospel. Culpepper considers only two points related to this all-encompassing theme: (1) the points at which the prologue speaks of the incarnation, and (2) Jesus' mission as the incarnate Logos. Although the titular use of the term *logos* does not occur in the rest of the Gospel, the continuity between the work of the Logos in creation and Jesus' work in giving life continues to shape the Gospel's characterization of Jesus. This theme is further articulated, and indeed brought to its fullest expression in the prologue, in the fifth of the prologue's divine initiatives: giving power

to those who believe to become "children of God." What the prophet Isaiah looked forward to in the future had already begun in the ministry of the Revealer and was being accomplished in the mission of the church. It was no longer a future expectation but a reality already in process. This introductory analysis illustrates how the prologue provides the theological framework needed to understand Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection in the rest of the Gospel.

John Ashton asks the fundamental question whether the first eighteen verses of the Gospel are really a prologue. His essay serves as an unplanned rejoinder to Culpepper's, thereby illustrating at the outset of this volume the extent to which even the basic questions surrounding the "prologue" are still unsettled. Agreeing with Harnack, and in opposition to Barrett, Ashton contends that the Prologue was built round a previously existing Logos-hymn, and that at some point the evangelist substituted this for an earlier introduction to his Gospel. Do these verses, Ashton asks, which were originally composed as a hymn to the Logos, really constitute "a proper introduction to a narrative in which the Logos is never mentioned, and where there is not even a hint of the idea that forms the climax of the hymn, the startlingly novel concept of incarnation"? The Prologue does not perform the usual function of a preface or introduction, which is to summarize the content of what follows. Rather, the differences between the prologue and the rest of the Gospel, in both terminology and theological vision, confirm that it was originally a hymn to the Logos, to which Ashton assigns verses 1–4, 10–11, the beginning of 12, most of 14, and 16. Affirming the necessity of adopting a multi-staged understanding of the composition of the Gospel, and the prologue, Ashton contends that "the Prologue was added to the Gospel just before (or at the same time as) the new material of the second edition, notably chs. 6 and 17." Both the author of the hymn and the evangelist pointed to the glory that was manifest in Jesus, and this was probably what drew the evangelist to the hymn composed by another member of the Johannine community, but they saw it differently. Ashton explains: "What astounded the author of the hymn was his vision of wisdom in the flesh, whereas what preoccupied the evangelist was such an overwhelming sense of the divine glory of the man whose story he was telling."

William R. G. Loader addresses the significance of the prologue for understanding John's soteriology. Among the alternative views described by Ashton in the previous essay, Loader is persuaded "by the view that the prologue functions rhetorically as an introduction to what follows … and that for that purpose the author has employed the Jewish wisdom/logos tradition already developed christologically." After surveying three ways in which the Logos tradition might have been developed Christologically, Loader observes that all three share "an understanding of soteriology ac-

cording to which one receives life and enters a relationship with God through responding positively to God's word, God's wisdom." In Johannine soteriology, as in Judaism, God offers a relationship. In Judaism one accepts this gift by taking on the gift of God's word in Torah. In John's soteriology it is the same, but one accepts by identifying Jesus with Torah, or as God's new initiative to offer the life and truth to which Torah pointed. Therefore, "in both Judaism and in the christological version the offer and the response are essentially the same or of the same kind: believing, accepting the offer, entering the relationship, living out the consequences, and enjoying the privileges of being God's children." This essentially Jewish soteriology of the prologue is repeated time after time in the Gospel as Jesus offers eternal life and confronts those who reject it. The prologue's soteriology is therefore thoroughly consistent with what one finds in the Gospel. Similar in focus and structure as it may be to Judaism, however, John's soteriology leads to a new social reality, identifying with the community of believers and participating with them in the new life mediated by the Spirit.

Jan van der Watt considers the question of whether John 1:1 is indeed intended to be clear in its meaning: was the intention not rather that it should have riddle-like qualities? The first verse of the Gospel appears to confront the reader with ambiguities that invite further clarification, clarification that is not directly available in the verse itself, but is rather, *inter alia*, to be looked for in the rest of the Gospel. In this essay the question is approached from the angle of the grammar and syntax, and whether these aspects contribute to the idea that this verse has riddle-like qualities. Three grammatical constructions in John 1:1 receive specific attention: the first is the fact that the phrase, Ἐν ἀρχῇ (v. 1a), is anarthrous, although it seems to be definite. The second is the use of πρός in πρὸς τὸν θεόν (v. 1b); and the third is the prepositional use of the predicate in the phrase καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (v. 1c). All three aspects are investigated, considering different explanations in each case. In all three cases van der Watt concludes that the grammar is clear according to what could be expected from Greek speakers at the time the Gospel was written. The syntactical character of 1:1, with short conjunctive sentences following in a stair-like parallelism, seems to provide some support for the riddle-like nature of 1:1. The syntax opens up various and interrelated options for understanding the different statements in relation to one another. No final decision on the "correct" reading is really possible, as re-reading and re-thinking in light of the rest of the Gospel seems to be invited. Apart from the syntax, arguments in favor of riddle-like qualities for John 1:1 should be looked for elsewhere, including theological, socio-historical, narrative, and other aspects of the text. It is however noted that the nature of the grammar would also not exclude the possibility of, or argue against, 1:1 being riddle-like, if these other aspects indeed show that to be the case.

Catrin Williams explores the theme of seeing (or not seeing) God in the prologue and body of John's Gospel. This theme is central to John's Christology, which maintains that while no one can see God, God can be seen in Jesus. As these two assertions are expressed in v. 18, it appears that this verse serves as a bridge between the prologue and the body of the Gospel, and hence verses 17 and 18 may be the evangelist's addition to the earlier hymn to the Logos. Absent from v. 18, however, is any statement to the effect that Jesus himself has seen God. The theme of "seeing God" appears elsewhere in the Gospel narrative to highlight the exclusive revelation of God in Jesus, such as one finds in 6:46. Acceptance of the one sent by God is crucial for not only seeing but also hearing the Father (5:37–38). Verse 18 may be formulated to deny the validity of any heavenly ascent or vision. The contrast between Moses and Jesus, therefore, continues into v. 18. The grace and truth that was previously associated with the Law and the glory of YHWH (Exod 34:6) has now become manifest through Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Isaiah is presented more positively in the Gospel in that it affirms that Isaiah "saw" the manifestation of divine glory in Jesus' earthly life (12:41). Williams interprets the effect of this verse, which comes at the end of Jesus' public ministry in John, as follows:

> The visionary language of Isaiah's call is therefore turned on its head and takes on new meaning, for, in view of the denials expressed elsewhere in the Gospel, the evangelist asserts that it is a true "seeing" of the earthly Jesus, not heavenly ascents or visions, that is required in order to experience a true "vision" of God's glory.

Consequently, Williams concludes, the emphasis in the prologue is on Jesus as the one who enables others to see God: "For the evangelist, then, the proper way to behold Jesus' earthly form is to see it as the locus of God's glory – the glory that Isaiah saw ahead of time."

Ruben Zimmermann examines the role of John the Baptist as a character in the prologue and the rest of the Fourth Gospel. While John the Baptist is widely recognized as a witness to Jesus in the Gospel of John, his role on both the story level and the discourse level is "anything but 'flat' and monotone." His testimony to Christ is multifaceted; it does not simply repeat stereotypical titles. Instead, Jesus is illuminated by tradition-rich symbols and spatial and temporal metaphors. As a man, but one divinely commissioned, John is a liminal figure. He stands between the temporal and the eternal, the divine and the human. He is a "connecting link" and a "threshold," the "gatekeeper." Neither is the characterization of John simply static. As Zimmermann observes:

> John arrives in prominence, but in every scene he fades more and more into the background. The "development" of this character consists of a successive disappearance. The testifying John leaves the scene – but precisely in this way he fulfills his function since others take over his role, a fact recognized at the latest by John 10.

John testifies, then others testify to his testimony, and in this way they fulfill his role as they too become witnesses.

Michael Theobald finds in the "witness" terminology, and the placement of its occurrences in the Johannine writings, a key to understanding the origin of these writings and the communities that lie behind them. Taking Gerd Theissen's observation that the early Christian writings were often found in "canonical clusters" of a gospel with other writings, Theobald postulates the early existence of the Johannine corpus of the Gospel and three letters. Witness terminology, often in the "we" statements that function as authorization formulas, occurs at significant points in this corpus, especially in the prologues to John and 1 John and at the end of the Gospel and 3 John. The occurrences in the Gospel connect the testimony of John the Baptist with that of the Beloved Disciple, and the authorization of the "we" who speak in John 21:24 and indirectly in 19:35. John 21, seen in this light, confirms the truth of the witness of the Johannine tradition contained in the Gospel and interpreted by the Elder following the schism of the community referred to in 1 John 2:19, and affirms its truth for others outside the Johannine communities. This "we" may be the "Johannine school" in which the writings were composed, the Johannine communities, or the group that prepared the corpus for circulation. 3 John embraces the testimony of Gaius, Demetrius, and those who receive them, and 3 John 12, coming at the end of the corpus, provides a fitting conclusion and authorization for it with the Elder's affirmation, "and you know that our testimony is true." Taken together, therefore, these references provide important clues to the origin of the Johannine corpus in a community of witnesses ("Gemeinschaft der Zeugen").

Christos Karakolis demonstrates how the prologue functions as the basis for dramatic irony in the Johannine narrative. Dramatic (or situational) irony, he explains, "presupposes the existence of a story in the background of the narrative level, which is already known to the implied author and readers, but not to the characters of the narrative." Whereas almost all of the characters in John are ignorant of Jesus' true identity, from the prologue readers of the Gospel receive a plethora of detailed information about the Logos that no character in the Johannine narrative possesses. Karakolis highlights elements of the prologue's story of the Logos that are instrumental in the function of dramatic irony within the Fourth Gospel. For example, the reader knows that every time Jesus, the incarnate Logos, speaks, his words are as authoritative and true as the words of God himself. The story of the healing of the lame man (5:1–18) illustrates how these elements function to set up dramatic irony in the body of the Gospel. When the lame man tells Jesus that he has no one (ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω) to put him into the pool when the water is troubled, the reader, who knows Jesus' identity, perceives the irony of the lame man's response to Jesus –

the creative Logos in whom there is life! John's dramatic irony then takes a bitter turn when, by "not receiving" Jesus (cf. 1:11), the Jews (in 5:18) seek to kill Jesus and thereby miss the opportunity to become real children of God (1:12). In this way, the prologue's Logos-concept is presupposed in the Johannine narrative, although it is never clearly mentioned *per se*. Finally, Karakolis suggests that rather than enmity, "sympathy on the part of the audience (observer) towards characters who are trapped within their own ignorance (victims) is an important effect of dramatic irony," and this sympathy may blunt the reader's sense of hostility toward those whose who do not share the privileged information conveyed by the prologue.

Udo Schnelle's essay on the presuppositions, methods, and perspectives of philosophical interpretation of the Gospel of John opens the second part of the volume. New Testament scholarship is moving beyond the categories that once dominated the study of the relationship of the early Christian writings to the intellectual currents of their day (e.g., the influence of Hellenism on Judaism, or tradition history). We may now ask whether the authors of the New Testament deliberately participated in the general philosophical/theological discourses of antiquity. Five considerations guide this inquiry. First, in antiquity philosophy and theology belonged together and were seen not merely as a theoretical business but as concrete forms of life. Consequently, understanding the popular mainstream of ancient philosophy in the New Testament period (i.e., Stoics/Cynics, Epicureans, Platonists) as concrete forms of life opens up numerous thematic and practical convergences. When compared with other philosophical-theological thinkers of the first two centuries C.E. (Seneca, Plutarch, Dio of Prusa, Epictetus), Paul and John hold their own admirably. Second, the sophisticated composition of the Fourth Gospel, with its memorable language and images, indicates a high level of education. In particular, the adoption of philosophical concepts such as logos, truth, and spirit distinguishes John as somebody who intentionally interacts with the educational tradition of his time. Third, the place of the early Christian writings in the broad history of ancient literature needs to be fundamentally reconsidered. Earlier scholars, especially Martin Dibelius, assigned the New Testament writings to the category of *Kleinliteratur* because they do not measure up to the stylistic sophistication of the Greek literature of the classical period (5th–4th c. B.C.). When compared with the literature of its own period, however, they are not in any sense deficient. Fourth, parallels with the ancient philosophical schools and indications within the writings themselves suggest that the Pauline and Johannine writings were not purely individual achievements but the work of a Pauline and a Johannine school respectively. Fifth, the success of Johannine Christianity in such an intellectually and culturally demanding surrounding becomes comprehensible only because it was able to participate in the discourses of ancient religion and philosophy. The

remainder of the essay offers methodological guidelines for a philosophical interpretation of the Gospel of John and discusses its reformulation of the philosophical concepts of Logos and Truth, and its definitions of God as examples of the importance of such study for a fuller understanding of John's creative achievement. Philosophical interpretation of the Gospel of John is not only an important addition to the common methods and questions, but it modifies our understanding of these texts: they are not merely religious but intellectual achievements in the context of ancient philosophy and theology.

In his contribution, "Between Torah and Stoa: How Could Readers Have Understood the Johannine Logos?" *Jörg Frey* focuses on the term and concept of the λόγος in John 1:1–2 and beyond, which has been a stimulus and an enigma for interpreters from the church fathers until modern history-of-religions interpretation. Drawing on the observation that the majority of recent commentators rather quickly point to Hellenistic Judaism (esp. Philo) and the Jewish Wisdom tradition as the only appropriate background for understanding the term in John, Frey argues for a wider perspective. He calls for a consideration of not only the biblical and early Jewish tradition but also the Greco-Roman usage of the term or concept from Heraclitus and the Stoics down to Middle-Platonism and the Hermetica, including the usage for deities such as Hermes and Osiris. Only when considering that wide range of meanings, does the hermeneutical value and force of the term in the opening of the Gospel become clear. Frey, there-fore, takes a reception-historical perspective and points to the readings of Valentinian authors (Heracleon and Ptolemaeus) who interpreted (and modified) the Johannine concept from their Platonic worldview. Even if this may be a "misunderstanding," it shows how the term could stimulate readers with a very different education. And although the setting of those late second-century Valentinians clearly differs from that of the Johannine communities at the end of the first century, Frey argues that we cannot preclude that Jews and Jewish or Gentile Jesus followers in the diaspora were also basically acquainted with philosophical thoughts and concepts and thus could read the term within the wide range of meanings and perceive the various resonances the term could inspire in different contexts.

In the last part of his contribution, Frey thus explores "clarifications in the reading process." In an experimental reader-response reading, he considers how readers of different backgrounds could understand the λόγος in the beginning of John, connect it with their own views of the Logos, perceive difficulties or differences, and follow the way the λόγος concept is unfolded in the course of the prologue until its "incarnation" is mentioned and he is finally identified with Jesus Christ in 1:17. In this perspective, the Johannine prologue with its opening appears as a text with an enormous hermeneutical potential. It is not only a philosophical lure but a hermeneu-

tical tool with the power to attract readers from a wide range of backgrounds and draw them to the message of the Gospel.

Methodologically, Frey's article is a plea for reading John in a cross-cultural perspective and for utilizing the reception perspective in connection with the history-of-religions issues in order to not only "explain" the most probable background of a text or its author but also discover the communicative force and hermeneutical potential of the text.

Craig R. Koester, following Schnelle's lead, examines the philosophical content of "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) and its use in the Gospel of John. Given the pervasive presence of Jewish associations in John's references to *pneuma*, it is challenging to ask how this theme might have engaged readers whose outlook was informed primarily by philosophical discourse. The Stoics gave *pneuma* a central place in their understanding of the world, which they understood to be a unified whole. Everything that comprised the world was understood in material terms. The union of wind and fire creates the special combination called *pneuma*, which they understood to be a kind of energy that operated in the world, and most fully in human reason. The Gospel, on the other hand, does not derive its understanding of the divine *pneuma* from the natural world or any aspect of the human constitution. The Gospel's chief interest is in how people receive life in its fullest sense. Such life involves a framework of thought that differs from Stoicism, although the *pneuma* plays an integral role in the process by which believers attain eternal life through the revelatory work of the Logos incarnate in Jesus. After reviewing recent proposals that the Gospel of John has been influenced by or adopts a Stoic view of *pneuma*, Koester concludes that these efforts are largely unsuccessful: "the differences in perspective are far more striking than any similarities." Alternatively, Koester asks how the Fourth Gospel's comments about the *pneuma* might have engaged readers whose outlook was informed by philosophy. Here he finds that the Gospel uses language that would have evoked a range of associations for such readers, and that the narrative both appropriates and transforms those associations. In particular, "a reader whose perspectives had been shaped by Stoic thought might have found Jesus' remarks to the Samaritan woman appealing, because they call people beyond disputes about holy places to the higher calling of worship 'in *pneuma* and truth' (John 4:23–24)." Nevertheless, while Stoics could speak of a *pneuma* that was inherent in people, John's Gospel insists that the *pneuma* that brings life and empowers true worship comes from a divine source, outside of the person. The familiar often becomes unfamiliar as John reshapes notions of the *pneuma* Christologically and integrates them into the Johannine worldview.

George Parsenios examines the role of the Greek virtue of παρρησία, open, frank speech, in the Gospel of John. Frank speech was vital in the public life of the Greek city-states. In addition, Greek and Roman philos-

ophers cultivated *parrēsia* as a tool of moral formation; philosophy depended on bold truth-telling. Parsenios ventures that "If one is careful not to claim too much, … one can discern considerable points of contact between the *parrēsia* of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and the *parrēsia* of ancient orators and philosophers." For example, when the brothers of Jesus urge him not to act in secret but to adopt *parrēsia*, they repeat a standard opposition common among orators and philosophers. Even here, in John 7:1–4, when Jesus does not declare himself openly in Jerusalem, he refuses to do so for reasons that were recognized in ancient discussions of *parrēsia*: he refuses to speak boldly because he refuses to engage in self-aggrandizement. On other occasions, before both friends and foes, Jesus does speak boldly. In response to the high priest, he declares, "I have spoken openly (παρρησία) to the world. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the *Ioudaioi* come together. I said nothing in secret (ἐν κρυπτῷ)" (18:20). Jesus confronts the sins of his opponents publicly and boldly, and they in turn accuse him of blasphemy. Attending to the connections between Jesus in John and Parrēsiathēs in the work of Lucian, Parsenios shows how it is dangerous to speak boldly. The response to a person who engages in *parrēsia* is often violence and persecution. Like Socrates, Jesus was killed for bold truth-telling. Unlike Socrates, however, Jesus makes no defense and remains silent before his accusers. Still, in both cases they use *parrēsia* to distinguish the true from the false; it reveals what is true beneath a false veneer.

Marianne Meye Thompson reports on the philosophical content of the term, "light" (φῶς), and its use in the Gospel of John. She finds two patterns in ancient philosophical sources in which light plays a role, the first cosmological and the second epistemological. In the first, light is a phenomenon intrinsic to the physical world; its counterpart is darkness. Ancient Greek philosophy viewed the world in terms of "dualities" or "pairs of opposites." The Pythagoreans developed a list of ten such oppositional pairs, including male/female, right/left, odd/even, and light/darkness. Light is linked with life and darkness with death. In the second pattern, which holds greater potential for our reading of the Gospel of John, the connection of light and vision is developed. In Plato's analogy of the cave, light represents both the Good itself and the means by which one knows the good. Accordingly, light and sight become metaphors for grasping that which is ultimate or true. Because light makes perception possible, Philo speaks paradoxically of the "most brilliant and radiant light of the invisible and Almighty God" (*Somn.* 1.72). Thompson comments: "To see the light of God is to see the God who cannot be seen." When she turns to the Gospel of John, Thompson observes that the light comes into the world for the benefit of humankind: the "light of humankind" (τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων) is the light *for* them (1:4). Furthermore, "one comes to the light, then, by

faith, because the light has come into the world to make it possible to see the light: by light one 'sees' or believes in the light." In John as in Greek philosophy, however, light is set over against darkness. Darkness is a sphere or power that seeks to overcome the light. As with Plato's cave dwellers, some refuse to leave their shadows and darkness. The problem lies not with the light, but with those who refuse to see it. There are two levels of seeing in John: there is physical sight and there is insight. Sight does not guarantee understanding or insight – the eyes are not always sure witnesses – but the blind man in John 9 is given both sight and insight. Not surprisingly, John's use of light imagery has much in common with the Greek philosophers, and Philo especially. But there are differences. For John the light is not intrinsic to or inherent in the world but comes from outside of it. By locating light in the person of Jesus, John's vocabulary of comprehension takes on a richer and more complex meaning.

Jean Zumstein assesses the philosophical content of the term, "sign" (σημεῖον), and its use in the Gospel of John. He acknowledges at the outset that there is no evidence of John's direct dependence on Greek philosophical tradition or Philo. Instead, he asks how "signs" would have been understood in John's historical context. As a conceptual approach to this investigation, Zumstein employs C. S. Peirce's theoretical model of the interaction of the sign, the object, and the interpreter. Signs, as a formal concept, played an important role in Epicurean recognition theory, as signs make possible movement from the visible world to the invisible, opening the way to a deeper perception of the cosmos. Ancient sceptics (e.g., Sextus Empiricus) introduced the issue of the credibility of the sign, but signs had no specific religious significance. When one turns to ancient literature and historiography, one finds, for example in Homer's *Odyssey*, that thunder functions as a sign, not in the biblical sense, since no natural laws are broken, but in the sense of a divine omen. In Diodorus Siculus one finds that the signs of God are present in the immanent world, but especially at holy sites. Plutarch developed a theological theory of signs as a means of divine communication. The same elements are found in ancient Jewish literature, where signs function both to convey understanding of a future reality or a yet unrecognized reality, and as a means of divine communication with human beings. Turning to the Gospel of John, one finds that "signs" can be narrated *Wundergeschichten*, as in the Old Testament and the Synoptic Gospels. "Signs," however, designate only Jesus' deeds, never his words, and they can be perceived visually. It is possible, but debated, that Jesus' post-Easter appearances, or the whole of his ministry, are to be understood as signs. At the same time, for all John shares with other ancient literature, it develops the hermeneutical potential of signs in a unique manner. The term is found almost exclusively in the words of the narrator, and the simple seeing of signs is problematized in

John's interpretation of the meaning (and difficulty) of believing. When the second element of Peirce's model is considered, one sees that the object of the sign is clarified by the narrator or Jesus. For example, the narrator explains that the Cana wedding miracle confirms the lordship of the Johannine Jesus. The same conclusion is evident when John's other signs are examined: the Johannine signs must be interpreted Christologically. Consequently, for John the object of the signs belongs not to the realm of the demonstrable (*Gebiet des Feststellbaren*) to that of the indeterminate (*Unverfügbarkeit*). The third element of Peirce's model, the interpreter, reveals the surprising pattern that in John the signs do not carry unequivocal meanings but are interpreted variously by different characters, a pattern that is especially striking since the signs are "wonders." The signs have a revelatory function that can only be grasped by Christological interpretation which in turn calls the interpreter to believe.

The prologue is an inexhaustible, literally unfathomable, text. These essays summarize the state of research and open new insights into the prologue's themes and characters, ways it is related to the body of the Gospel, and the ways it engages ancient Greek philosophy. They also suggest many avenues for further study, thereby fulfilling one of the chief aims of the Colloquium Ioanneum.

R. Alan Culpepper
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Part 1

Confronting the Challenges of the Prologue

The Prologue as Theological Prolegomenon to the Gospel of John

R. Alan Culpepper

The Gospel of John is distinctive among the gospels in that it opens with an elaborate, initially poetic, prologue (John 1:1–18) that introduces the narrative that follows. The prologue supplies what Meir Sternberg called chronological, preliminary, concentrated exposition.[1] Study of the prologue has generally concentrated on (1) its origin (whether it is based on a hymnic source or was composed for its present purposes), (2) its structure (chronological, topical, poetic, and/or chiastic), (3) the logos concept (its background and role in the Gospel), and (4) the relationship between the prologue and the Gospel. I propose to share some reflections on this latter topic, with an interest in both literary themes and theological perspectives in the hope that my comments will serve as an introduction for more detailed discussion in the rest of the papers prepared for this volume.

The issue of the relationship between the prologue and the rest of the Gospel is well known.[2] While noting that "in its present form, it is indissolubly linked with the Gospel itself," Rudolf Schnackenburg raised the following alternatives: (1) it should be read apart from the body of the Gospel as "a section with its own significance"; (2) it is an overture which prepares for the thought of the Gospel that follows; (3) it is an integral part

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[1] M. Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 1, 98–99. Cf. R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (FF; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 18–19.

[2] A. Harnack, "Über das Verhältniß des Prologs des vierten Evangeliums zum ganzen Werk," *ZTK* 2 (1892): 189–231; J. A. T. Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John," *NTS* 9 (1962–63): 120–29; M. Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos: Studien zum Verhältnis des Johannesprologs zum Corpus des Evangeliums und zu 1 Joh* (NTA NF 20; Münster: Aschendorff, 1988), esp. 296–399; E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); J. Zumstein, "Der Prolog, Schwelle zum vierten Evangelium," in *Der Johannesprolog* (ed. G. Kruck; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 49–75; and J. Beutler, "Der Johannes-Prolog – Ouvertüre des Johannesevangeliums," in *Der Johannesprolog* (ed. G. Kruck; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 77–106.

of the Gospel, the "beginning" of its message, taking the existence of the Redeemer back to before creation.[3] His conclusion is that the prologue is "a considered theological composition, placed at the beginning for Christological reasons."[4] Raymond Brown pointed out, however, that in addition to the difference in the poetic qualities of the prologue, it contains "theological concepts and terms … that have no echo in the Gospel."[5] Among these he listed: (1) λόγος does not occur outside the prologue as a Christological title, (2) χάρις and πλήρωμα do not occur in the Gospel, (3) ἀλήθεια has a different meaning in the Gospel ("truth" rather than "endurance, fidelity," and (4) "tabernacle" in v. 14 is replaced by Jesus as the temple in the Gospel.[6] Since Bultmann, the most common solution has been that the evangelist edited a Logos hymn, whether drawn from outside the Johannine community or from its own traditions and worship, and used it as the prologue to the Gospel.[7] Jean Zumstein, more recently, has argued that it is impossible to ignore the theological discontinuity between the prologue and the Gospel because the prologue says nothing about Jesus as the one sent (*Sendungschristologie*) or the death of Jesus and does not programmatically introduce the Gospel.[8] The theological function of the prologue consists instead in defining the hermeneutics (*den hermeneutischen Rahmen*) that must guide the reading of the Gospel.[9]

Since the Gospel gives particular attention to Jesus' relationship to the Father, God's role as sender, and Jesus' dependence upon the Father, we may begin with the question of how the prologue portrays God's work in the world.[10] A cursory reading of the prologue reveals that it speaks of five divine initiatives:

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[3] R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. 1 (trans. K. Smyth; HTCNT; New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 221.

[4] Ibid.

[5] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Vol. 1 (AB 29; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 19.

[6] Ibid.

[7] For the latter position see P. N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2011), 68, who holds that the Elder, the final editor of the Gospel, added the prologue.

[8] Zumstein, "Der Prolog, Schwelle zum vierten Evangelium," 51–52 (n. 2). See further his conclusion that "Es ist daher illusorisch, im Logoshymnus eine Kurzfassung der Theologie des Evangeliums finden zu wollen" (74). As we will note later, however, the prologue in its current form does introduce the sending motif with the introduction of John the Baptist as one sent by God (John 1:6).

[9] Ibid., 75.

[10] This topic has been explored notably by P. W. Meyer, "'The Father': The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 255–73; and M. M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids:

1. The work of creation through the Logos (v. 3)
2. The giving of the law through Moses (v. 17)
3. The sending of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8, 15)
4. The coming of the light (v. 9)/the incarnation of the Logos (v. 14)
5. The birth of the children of God (vv. 12–13)

These five initiatives will provide the structure for our investigation of the theological and literary relationship between the prologue and the body of the Gospel. In particular, we will be interested in how the Gospel's presentation of Jesus is influenced by setting the incarnation in relationship to the other four divine initiatives, and how those initiatives are reframed or reinterpreted when they are set in relationship to the incarnation.

I. The Work of Creation through the Logos (v. 3)

John is unique among the Gospels in connecting Jesus with God's work in creation. Raymond Brown observed that "the fact that the *Word* creates means that creation is an act of revelation."[11] By beginning with the words, "In the beginning," John creates a clear echo of the opening words of the Book of Genesis, and perhaps suggests that this Gospel should be regarded as scripture – a continuation of the record of the mighty acts of God in creation, in history, and in the people of Israel.[12] Like Lady Wisdom, the Logos was with God in the beginning and was the agent of creation. John's use of the wisdom tradition for the presentation of Jesus as a wisdom teacher is also evident in its emphasis on illumination or revelation, abiding, and the sifting of human responses that accompanies it.[13] As the Son of God in whom the pre-existent Logos became incarnate, all that Jesus says and does in the rest of the Gospel carries divine authority.[14] The characterization of Jesus in the rest of the Gospel flows out of these opening verses, especially Jesus' power over and within nature. When Jesus changes water to wine, heals the sick and restores life, walks on water, multiplies

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Eerdmans, 2001); and in various sections by J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (BIS 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[11] Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:25 (n. 5).

[12] M. J. J. Menken and S. Moyise, *Genesis in the New Testament* (LNTS 466; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 88–90.

[13] M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 152–58. P. Borgen, *Logos Was the True Light and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Relieff 9; Trondheim: Tapir, 1983), 99, has explored the targumic character of the prologue at length and concluded that "It can be considered very probable that the evangelist has not only reproduced words from Gen. i … but that he has also drawn on learned Jewish exegesis."

[14] So also R. A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 327.

loaves and fish, gives sight to a man born blind, and raises the dead, the reader is expected to understand that Jesus is continuing to exercise the authority of the divine Logos through whom all things were created. The prologue *tells* us about the work of the Logos; Jesus' signs *show* us that the Logos was incarnate in Jesus. Marianne Meye Thompson makes the astute observation that "although there are no further references in John to God's creation of the world through the Logos, the emphasis on God's gift of life through the agency of Jesus – the Word incarnate, Wisdom incarnate – shows the unity of the life-giving work of God and Jesus."[15] Both confer life. Further, "This is not so much a creation ethic or theology as it is a theology of God's far-reaching dominion and authority, exercised through the work of Jesus."[16] Therefore there is no sharp distinction between "natural" and supernatural, and no natural theology of the created order bearing witness to the Creator.

The key value established in the first five verses is "life."[17] Life has its origin in the Word, an affirmation that implies something about God's purpose for creation as well as the ultimate aim or fulfillment of God's purposes. One of the debated issues, however, is whether the first occurrence of the word "life" in v. 4 refers to natural life or spiritual or eternal life. Let's recall vv. 3 and 4: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of men" (NRSV). These verses are replete with problems. Where does v. 3 end and v. 4 begin? How does one read and punctuate the statement, "What has come into being in him was life?" Is it "in him" or "in it"? And what is the meaning of the reference to life? Does it mean the life of the created order, or the life conveyed to those who received the Logos incarnate in Jesus? I contend, contrary to many Johannine scholars, that the first reference to life in v. 4 refers to all created life, not to spiritual or eternal life. Raymond Brown, on the other hand, claims, "Of course, in its first chapter Genesis is speaking of natural life while the prologue is speaking of eternal life,"[18] and "in v. 4 the Prologue is still speaking in the context of the creation narrative of Genesis. That which had especially come to be in God's creative Word was the gift of eternal life."[19]

[15] Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 136 (n. 10).

[16] Ibid., 140.

[17] S. Harstine, "The Fourth Gospel's Characterization of God," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (ed. C. W. Skinner; LNTS 461; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 137, observes that "The character of God serves a mimetic function in the text as the source of life, a function established for the audience in 1.1–4."

[18] Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:26 (n. 5).

[19] Ibid.

Ed Miller identified five interpretations of ζωή (life) in v. 4a but, like Brown, Miller favored the incarnational.[20]

John often uses words with deliberate ambiguity and plays on their multiple meanings. So here John asserts that the Logos, like Wisdom, was the agent of creation. Wisdom brought into being living things, and then gave to those who would receive it the revelation that leads to a higher way of life. John moves step by step in these verses: (1) a positive statement: "all things came into being through him" (which parenthetically would include the affirmation that the Logos gave life to all living things); (2) a negative restatement: "and without him not one thing came into being"; and then (3) a restatement with further specification: "what-came-into-being-in-him was life." John often moves from the literal to the spiritual and from the literal to the ironic, challenging readers to grasp the relationship between the two. In these opening verses John declares the role of the Logos in creation and begins to lead the reader to the characteristic sense of life in this Gospel – that of the life bestowed by the Word incarnate in Jesus. In the first occurrence of the term in v. 4, however, the sense is ambiguous, allowing the reader to start from the context of the creation of life while moving the reader to the full sense of life in this Gospel.[21] John is primarily interested in the nature of eternal life, and will even affirm (in 17:3) that it is already present and available here and now, but this first reference does not contain all the meaning John will eventually load into this term.

The opening verses of John refer to the role of the Logos in creation and interpret the Logos in light of the Wisdom tradition, both of which suggest the broad sense of "life." John often entertains more than one level of meaning and introduces one sense only to lead the reader to see a higher meaning. The next line moves from an anarthrous reference to life to a specific reference ("The life"), which hints that it is already looking toward the life of the Word that became incarnate in Jesus. Caution should be taken not to place too much emphasis on this point, however, because the article is required to identify "life" as the subject since the verb is the verb "to be" and the complement is definite. "The light" denotes the revelation that enlightens the created order and gives humanity the knowledge of God that in turn grants to life its higher quality.

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[20] E. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3/4* (NovTSup 60; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 51.

[21] See G. H. C. Macgregor, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 6; M.-É. Boismard, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1953), 31–32; I. de La Potterie, "De Interpunctione et Interpretatione Versum Joh. 1:3–4," *VD* 33 (1955): 206–07; P. M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (JSNTSup 294; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 166; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 77.

This light shines in "the darkness" that characterizes all who live in ignorance and therefore in opposition to "the light." The opposition between light and darkness sets up the oppositional dualities of the Fourth Gospel,[22] but it is not an ontological, metaphysical, or eternal dualism. The opposition is between persons who are empowered or transformed by "the light" and those that are not. Those who are not of "the light" oppose it, but shall not overcome it.[23] These observations are important because they establish the divine identity of Jesus, the place of the cosmos as the creation of the Logos, the ultimate value of life, and the potential of human life lived in relation to its Creator through the revelation disclosed by Jesus.

The theme of life is one of the most pervasive themes in the Fourth Gospel. In the first major section, John 2–4, Jesus celebrates life at a wedding, providing a bountiful supply of wine, alludes to his resurrection in the confrontation in the temple, instructs Nicodemus on what it means to be born from above, recalls the life-giving power of the serpent Moses raised up on a pole, promises that everyone who believes in him will have everlasting life (3:16), and teaches the Samaritan woman about living water. The last paragraph of John 4 weaves together the themes of believing and living as it narrates the story of the healing of the royal official's son. We could go on to detail the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, the feeding of the multitude in John 6 and the discourse on the bread of life, the raising of Lazarus in John 11, the parable of the seed falling into the ground (which Jan van der Watt has already treated at length),[24] the lesson of the footwashing as Jesus prepares to lay down his life for the disciples, and the imagery of Jesus' death, the handing over of the Spirit, Jesus' resurrection, and the feeding of the disciples in John 21. Wherever you are in the Gospel, you are never far from the theme of life.

Jesus' claim in John 5:17, "My Father is still working, and I also am working," is particularly relevant here. C. H. Dodd wrote a classic exposition of the debate in John 5 regarding what is permissible on the Sabbath.[25] When four rabbis were challenged as to whether God kept His own law, their response assumed that God continued to work but that God's work on the Sabbath did not violate the prescriptions for the Sabbath (*Exod. Rab.*

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[22] M. Volf, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 189–217, esp. 190.

[23] See further my essay, "The Problem of Evil in the Gospel of John," in *Interpretation and the Claims of the Text: Resourcing New Testament Theology* (FS C. H. Talbert; ed. J. A. Whitlark; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 59–72.

[24] J. G. van der Watt, "Ethics Alive in Imagery," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (ed. J. Frey, J. G. van der Watt, and R. Zimmermann; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 436–45.

[25] C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 320–23. See also Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 162 (n. 2).

30:9). Philo agreed: Divine rest does not mean abstention from good deeds: "The cause of all things is by its nature active; it never ceases to work all that is best and most beautiful" (*Cher.* 87). In fact, Philo claims that it is impossible that God should rest because "God never ceases creating, but as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to be cold, so it is the property of God to create … for He causes to rest that which, though actually not in operation, is apparently making, but He Himself never ceases making" (*Leg. All.* 1.5–6). In other words, God caused inferior creative agencies to cease, while God continued to create. Elsewhere Philo modifies this claim, saying that God rests from creating mortal things (*Leg. All.* 1.16). Later rabbis followed the same line in claiming that God ceased from some things but not others. God rested from the work of creation but not from "the moral government of the universe" – *providentia ordinaria* (see above).[26] The two activities that Jesus claims the Father has given to the Son are giving life and judging (5:21–22), and both of these activities belong to the continuous work of God. Hear Dodd's comment:

> John similarly speaks of two divine activities, ζῳοποιεῖν and κρίνειν. The former is clearly a function of the creative power of God, and the latter of the kingly power …: even on the Sabbath, as always, God gives life and judges. The words which follow, καγὼ ἐργάζομαι, imply that the life-giving work which Jesus has performed on the Sabbath is an instance of the divine activity of ζῳοποίησις, and as such is exempt from the Sabbath restrictions.[27]

For our purposes, we may simply note that John signals that God's creative work is ongoing and not limited to the originating act of creation.[28]

Jesus extends the promise of a distinctive quality of life, here and now. He is therefore continuing the work of the Logos in the creation: the giving of life. Jesus says, "I came in order that they may have life and have it abundantly" (10:10), and this life comes through knowing him in all that that connotes (17:3): knowledge, love, obedience, and blessing. The incarnation, consequently, reframes God's act of creation, as Jesus goes on giving life.

II. The Giving of the Law through Moses (v. 17)

Taking the references to God's initiatives in chronological order, we will treat the giving of the law through Moses next, although it is the last of the initiatives introduced in the prologue, and we do not discount the signifi-

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[26] Ibid., 322.

[27] Ibid., 323.

[28] See further my essay, "'Children of God': Evolution, Cosmology, and Johannine Thought," in *Creation Stories in Dialogue: The Bible, Science, and Folk Traditions* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and J. G. van der Watt; BIS 139; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 27–28, where this paragraph also appears.

cance of this sequence. The prologue securely establishes the work of God through the Logos in creation and the incarnation before recognizing the role of Moses and the giving of the law. In this instance the divine action is implicit, conveyed by the use of the passive voice to avoid direct reference to God when the source of the action is clear. Moses is important in John both in connection with the expectation of a prophet like Moses and as a cipher for the law.

There are twelve references to Moses in the first nine chapters of John, and a reference in the added scene in 7:53–8:11 (8:5). Although most of these have a polemical tone and the progression climaxes in the debate with the Pharisees in John 9, Moses also serves as a reference to the authority of scripture and typologically for Jesus' functions in the Gospel.[29] Jesus fulfills the role of "the prophet like Moses" (Deut 18:15, 18), but he is also greater than Moses.[30] The prologue declares, "No one has seen God" (1:18; cf. 5:37), but Jesus affirms that the one who was with God has seen God (6:46), and those who have seen Jesus have seen the Father (14:9). These claims evoke God's words to Moses on Mt. Sinai, denying his request to see God, "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live" (Exod 33:20). Moses did signs "so that they may believe that the Lord … has appeared to you" (Exod 4:5; cf. Exod 4:8–9, 30; 7:3). The signs Jesus does are clearly reminiscent of the signs Moses performed – changing water to blood (Exod 4:9; 7:17–19), providing manna and water in the wilderness (Exod 16:12, 15; 17:6), crossing the sea (Exod 14:21–22), speaking to the people what he had heard from God (Exod 4:12; 6:28–7:2), and providing the paschal lamb (Exod 12:46). The Mosaic overtones of the characterization of Jesus in John are therefore far richer than the few explicit references to Moses suggest.

Skipping the reference in the prologue for the moment, the first reference to Moses in the body of the Gospel comes in Philip's announcement to Nathanael that "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (1:45; cf. Deut 18:15, 18). The syntax of this announcement reflects a conflation of the Lukan phrase "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27; cf. Luke 24:44; Acts 26:22; 28:23) and the more common "the law and the prophets" (Matt 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; Acts 13:15; Rom 3:21; cf. Matt 11:13; Luke 24:44; Acts 28:23). The awkward

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[29] S. Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Ancient Reading Techniques* (JSNTSup 229; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), esp. 74–75, 162–63.

[30] See esp. M.-É. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology* (trans. B. T. Viviano; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), esp. 22, 25–30; and the points of contact between the Father-Son relationship in John and the Septuagintal rendering of Deut 18:15–22 in P. N. Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father – Aspects of Irony, Agency, and Encounter in the Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 33–57.

resulting construction, "about whom Moses wrote in the law and the prophets (wrote)" lends emphasis to Moses' role in writing about Jesus – very probably a reference to Deut 18:15, 18 – and Moses as the lawgiver.

A typological interest emerges in the proleptic announcement that the Son of Man "must" be lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (Num 21:8–9). The polemical role of the Moses references re-emerges in John 5:45–46. Moses is the one who "accuses" those who do not receive Jesus, yet ironically Moses is the one "on whom you set your hope" (5:45). The next statement is based on the principle articulated in John 1:45, that Moses wrote about Jesus. If they believed Moses, that one like him would arise in Israel, then they would believe Jesus. Since they do not receive Jesus, they do not believe what Moses wrote about him, and therefore they "do not believe Moses" (5:46). The next chapter, John 6, demonstrates that Jesus was the promised prophet like Moses. After he fed the multitude in the wilderness at Passover, the people perceived that he was "the prophet who is coming into the world" (6:14).

The next three references all specify what Moses gave Israel: bread from heaven (6:32); the law (7:19), and circumcision, the sign of the covenant (7:22). In each case John insists that it was not Moses who gave these tokens of the covenant. The Father gave the bread from heaven, the sustenance of true life, therefore not manna but Jesus, the true bread (6:32), and circumcision actually came from the patriarchs (7:22). The argument proceeds: since circumcision was allowed on the Sabbath, then how much more should they not allow Jesus to heal a man's whole body on the Sabbath since Moses gave them the law (7:19). This same issue re-emerges in the debate over Jesus' Sabbath healing of the man born blind. In the emotional climax of the confrontation between the man and the Pharisees, the religious authorities charge, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (9:28–29). The implication is that one must be either a disciple of Moses or Jesus' disciple, whereas Jesus has claimed that the Father who sent him also acted through Moses. It is not a forced choice between the two but a question of whether one understands Moses, and whether one recognizes Jesus.

With this survey in mind, we may turn to the declaration in the prologue that "the law was given through Moses" (1:17).[31] One first observes that foreshadowing the later references the prologue announces what was "was given" through Moses. The theme of Moses as "giver" is introduced, but also the implication that Moses is the servant of God, who is the ultimate

[31] S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975), wrote 534 pages on the law in John before turning to 1:17!

giver and the giver of grace and truth, the law, and the true bread from heaven.

Here we may pause to recognize the question of the relationship between law, grace, and truth in the prologue. The King James Version follows the translation of William Tyndale in John 1:17, inserting a gratuitous "but" between the two halves of the verse. I say "gratuitous" because there is no adversative conjunction in the Greek text: ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. The previous verse declares, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."[32] Verse 17 opens with a causal ὅτι "for" or "because" and continues "The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The natural sense of this construction is that the law was a gift of God's grace and "grace and truth" were further grace. Both come from the Logos. On the other hand, the adversative sense, juxtaposing law and grace has both a long tradition of interpretation and some basis in the flow of the prologue toward v. 18.[33] As W. Gutbrod observed, the relationship between the Law and Jesus is not simply antithetical: "Between the law as the word of Scripture and the revelation of God in Jesus there is a positive inner connection."[34] Both are revelatory; John treats the law as "the body of divine revelation given to Moses."[35] Both are also manifestations of grace (χάρις), but the law does not give life; it bears witness to Jesus, who is the giver of life.[36] As Peter Phillips put it, v. 17 makes a distinction "between two graces/gifts of God and not two opposing systems of belief."[37]

James Dunn's challenge to interpreters to "Let John Be John," is nowhere more important than in the interpretation of the role of the law in John. As Gerhard Kittel observed, "the relation between Christ and Law is

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[32] For a review of various interpretations of "grace upon grace," see Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:16 (n. 5); and Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 212–13 (n. 21). Brown notes that the proposition ἀντί occurs only here in John and considers three interpretations: replacement, accumulation, and correspondence.

[33] For a nuancing of the adversative interpretation of v. 17 see Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 64–65, 71, 90 (n. 2); D. M. Smith, Jr., *John* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 60–61; Beutler, "Der Johannes-Prolog," 97 (n. 2).

[34] W. Gutbrod, "νόμος," *TDNT* 4:1083.

[35] Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 517 (n. 31).

[36] Gutbrod, "νόμος," 1083–84 (n. 34); cf. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, 537 (n. 31); M. Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (WUNT 2/132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 225.

[37] Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 214 (n. 21). See also F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 46; and S. Brown, *Gift upon Gift: Covenant through Word in the Gospel of John* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 144; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 94, "One cannot 'replace' the other. One prolongs and perfects the never-ending graciousness of God. The gift of the Law is perfected in the gift of the incarnation."

a basic question throughout the Gospel."[38] John does not set grace over against law as Paul does. Instead, references to the law in John function to vindicate Jesus against charges brought against him by the religious authorities. It has often been noted that the discussion at the festival in Jerusalem in John 7 continues the debate over Jesus' healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath in John 5. The Mosaic law justifies Jesus' works. It is a matter of correct judgment or correct interpretation of the law, not choosing either Moses or Jesus, because Moses bears witness to Jesus. Although the people venerate Moses as the lawgiver, they do not follow the law's prescriptions (7:19). Moses gave them the rite of circumcision, and the law allows circumcision on the Sabbath (7:22). Therefore, on the basis of the principle that what is true for the lesser also valid for the greater (*Qal waḥomer*), it is also permissible to heal the man's whole body (7:23). Ironically, when the religious authorities – the chief priests and Pharisees – demean the crowd as ignorant of the law, Nicodemus confronts them with their own failure to follow legal procedure and due process by judging Jesus without first giving him a hearing (7:51). Their own law requires that charges be upheld by two witnesses (8:17; Deut 19:15). The references to "your law" in John 8:17; 10:34; and 18:31 and "their law" in 15:25 can be interpreted to mean that the law applies to "them" but not "us," which is clearly the sense when Pilate says, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law" (18:31). On the other hand, when Jesus speaks of "your law" in John 8:17 and 10:34 in the context of debate with the Ἰουδαῖοι the term drives home the inconsistency between their charge that Jesus violated the law and their failure to follow its prescriptions (the requirement of two witnesses) or note its implications (those whom God sanctifies and sends can be called "gods" or "the son of God"). Likewise, the crowd is mistaken when they stumble over Jesus' proleptic reference to his exaltation because they maintain that the law says that the Messiah will abide forever (12:34). The law, therefore, defines norms and terms that vindicate Jesus when he is ironically accused of violating the law.

The final references to the law in John draw the conclusion toward which the earlier references have been building. The conclusion is stated explicitly in Jesus' appeal to the Psalms (35:19; 69:5; cf. *Pss. Sol.* 7:1), "They hated me without a cause." Then, by ironic implication the same point is made when the Ἰουδαῖοι claim that according to their law Jesus ought to die because he claimed to be the Son of God (19:7).

Moses, as we have seen, serves two primary functions in John; he defines the role of the expected prophet like Moses and serves as a cipher for

[38] G. Kittel, "λέγω," *TDNT* 4:135.

the law.[39] In both cases, within the juridical process of the Gospel, Moses, like John the Baptist, serves as a witness for Jesus. The roles of both Moses and the law are therefore reframed when they are brought in relationship to the incarnation: they have become witnesses to Jesus.

III. The Sending of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8, 15)

John the Baptist's role is distinctly different in the Fourth Gospel. Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels John is described as a prophet in the manner of his dress and diet (Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6), his message (Matt 3:7–10; Luke 3:7–14), and the claims about him (Matt 17:10–13), and even culminates the heritage of the prophets (Matt 11:11–14), the Fourth Gospel never calls John a prophet but holds that term in reserve for Jesus (see John 1:21, 25; 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17). In contrast, the prologue's references to John the Baptist are almost laboriously formulaic. First, John is introduced with striking formality: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (1:6). Jewish readers might recall the opening words of the Book of Job: "There was once a man in the land of Ur whose name was Job" (Job 1:1). The characterizing information about Job is that although he lived in the land of Uz he was "blameless" (Heb. תם, *tam*). The character defining information about John is that he was sent from God as a witness to testify to the light. Every term is significant.

God is described as sending forty-four times in John (19x with ἀποστέλλω: 1:6; 3:17, 28, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29, 42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21; cf. 9:7; and 25x with πέμπω: 1:33; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:38, 39, 44; 7:16, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24, 26; 15:21; 16:5). All of these references are to God or the Father sending Jesus except for 1:6, 33; and 3:28, which refer to God's sending the Baptist and 14:26, which refers to the Father's sending the Paraclete. That ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω are used synonymously in John is confirmed by observing the close parallel between John 17:18 and 20:21, where the former has ἀπέστειλα and the latter has πέμπω in the second part of the statement.

καθὼς ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, κἀγὼ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον· (17:18)
καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. (20:21)

On the other hand, Rengstorf noted that John uses these common terms in a particular way to make a subtle point in its Christology. Jesus regularly

[39] See Theobald, *Fleischwerdung*, 360–62 (n. 2), who defines both negative and positive functions of Moses in John.

speaks of God as the One who πέμψας με, but "God is never called ὁ ἀπ-έστειλας με."[40] Rengstorf explains this peculiarity as follows:

> In John's Gospel ἀποστέλλειν is used by Jesus when His concern is to ground His authority in that of God as the One who is responsible for His words and works and who guarantees their right and truth. On the other hand, He uses the formula ὁ πέμψας με (πατήρ) to affirm the participation of God in His work in the *actio* of His sending.[41]

The nature of the sending is such that the one sent does the work(s) of the sender (5:36; 6:29; 9:4), speaks the words given by the sender (3:34; 7:16; 8:26; 12:49; 14:24), bears witness to the sender (8:18), and brings glory to the sender (7:18). The Hebrew understanding of the שָׁלִיחַ (*shaliaḥ*) is clearly evident here: "the one sent by a man is as the man himself" (*m. Ber.* 5:5); that is, the one sent is as good as the sender "in all that he says and does in execution of his commission."[42] These Johannine formulations are distinctive, however, in that Jesus was not just sent in order that the world might believe in the One who sent him (with a form of πέμπω, 5:24), or believe in the one who was sent (6:29, ἀπέστειλεν), but that they might believe/know that Jesus had been sent (ἀπέστειλας) by the Father. This feature of the sending theme comes to full expression in John 17:

> so that they may believe that you sent me. (11:42)
> and they have believed that you sent me. (17:8)
> so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (17:21)
> so that the world may know that you have sent me. (17:23)
> and these know that you have sent me. (17:25)[43]

These statements lie at the core of the Johannine Christology that portrays Jesus as the one sent by the Father.[44] This excursus into John's theology enables us to make several observations that are not immediately apparent to a reader of the Gospel. (1) Only John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Paraclete are described as having been sent by God. (2) The same is not said to Abraham, Moses, or the prophets. (3) Curiously, while it is imperative that one believes that Jesus was sent by God, the same is not said for John. Instead all the emphasis is placed on his testimony to Jesus' identity. (4) John's role is narrowly defined: he was sent to bear witness to the light

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[40] K. H. Rengstorf, "ἀπόστολος," *TDNT* 1:404.

[41] Ibid., 1:405.

[42] Ibid., 1:415.

[43] The previous paragraph is adapted from my essay, "Designs for the Church in John 20,19–23," in *Studies in the Gospel of John and Its Christology: Festschrift for Gilbert van Belle* (ed. J. Verheyden et al.; BETL 265; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 506–07.

[44] See Meyer, "'The Father'," 263–64 (n. 10); and Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 92–98 (n. 10).

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