

**The Christ-Hymn of John 1—  
From Response to Prologue**  
[draft]<sup>1</sup>

**Paul N. Anderson**

**Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies, George Fox University, Newberg, OR  
Extraordinary Professor of Religion, North-West University, Potchefstroom, SA**

There are few more momentous and history-impacting texts in world literature than John 1:1-18. It served as an engaging introduction to John's story of Jesus, which became the most widely embraced text in the history of early Christianity; it contributed to the most intense of theological controversies—and their resolutions—in the first four Ecumenical Councils (325-451 CE); it became a favorite text throughout church history of heretics and orthodox alike; it became a theologized basis for the excluding the Johannine witness from the first three historical quests for Jesus in the modern era; it has posed a basis for a number of diachronic theories of Johannine composition; and it has offered a literary basis for synchronic interpreters to see the Johannine Gospel as a literary whole—it's literary features announced and prefigured by the Johannine Prologue.

However, does the Johannine Prologue advocate the divinity of Jesus, or the humanity of Christ, or both? Were these verses the first stroke of the evangelist's quill, or do we have here a later confessional hymn added by the compiler? Does the Johannine Prologue reflect John's being "a spiritual gospel" over and against "the facts" (or, more literally, "the bodily things") of the Synoptics, with the third-century view of Clement, eclipsing John's claims to eyewitness memory? Do the odd references to John the Baptist in vv. 6-8 and 15 reflect their being added (à la Bultmann's view) or being built around; why are some of the Prologue's themes not replicated in the rest of the narrative (*Logos* as a reference to Christ, *plērōma* (fullness) as a theme, *monogenēs* (onlybegotten) as a reference; and why is the language and cadence of this text so similar to 1 John 1:1-3? Finally, who are the people referenced as "we" in John 1:14 and 16, and is there some relation to the same in 21:24, as well as the prolific uses of the third-person plural pronoun in the Johannine Epistles?

In addressing issues from literary- and historical-critical perspectives within an overview of John's dialogical autonomy, most of the theological-historical issues of previous paragraph will thereby be clarified. And, such is the goal of the present essay.

### **1. The Relation of the Gospel's Prologue to the Johannine Corpus**

Given the questions raised above, the place of the Prologue to the rest of the Johannine corpus is a longtime question for scholars. It clearly introduces the narrative compellingly and well, and the Gospel's main themes are laid out engagingly within a confessional, strophic prelude to what is to follow. As Alan Culpepper shows with a chiastic reading of John 1:1-18, at the central pivot of the unit is the message that those who believe in Jesus as the Christ become children of God, welcomed into the

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divine family (vv. 10-13), coinciding perfectly with the Gospel's statement of purpose in 20:30-31: "these things are written that you might believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, have life in his name."

Then again, as mentioned above, the strophic cadence of the Christ-hymn reflects a worship context of its development and use, several vocabulary words and themes are closer to the language of 1 John, and the abrupt references to John the Baptist in verses 6-8 and 15 raise questions about their relation to the confessional hymn. In Bultmann's view, the fact that some later Gnostics embraced John the Baptist as a prophetic figure led him to imagine a Gnostic origin of the Prologue and the Johannine I-Am sayings as originating in an imagined Revelation-Sayings Source. However, in my own analyses of Bultmann's diachronic theory of composition, there is no stylistic, contextual, or theological evidence for his inference of alien sources underlying or overlaying the Evangelist's work. I do believe the author of the Epistles (John the Elder) served as the final compiler of the Beloved Disciple's work, but with Raymond Brown, his operation seems conservative rather than intrusive, although the later material added (chs. 6, 15-17, 21, etc.) clearly addresses some of the disruptive issues reflected in the Epistles.

While others might see the references to John the Baptist as added to the Christ-hymn, a more plausible inference is to envision verses 6-8 as the original beginning of the second biography of Jesus—with Helen Bond, who, along with Richard Burridge, sees Mark as the first biography of Jesus—perhaps having heard Mark performed among the churches. Thus, while John's story of Jesus reflects echoes of Mark, it is not dependent upon Mark for its content. That is distinctively Johannine in its character and origin. Further, as an augmentation of Mark's story of Jesus, the Johannine witness also poses a number of distinctive features, functioning as something of a dialogical corrective along the way. Thus, in beginning with the witness of the Baptist, John 1:6-8, 15, 19-42 provides a complement to Mark 1:1-15, and a bit of a corrective to 9:13. John indeed came announcing and preparing the way for Jesus; however, he was neither the light, nor the prophet, nor Elijah; such roles, in Johannine perspective, are reserved for Jesus. Thus, the original beginning of the Johannine narrative was likely as follows (vv.6-8, 15, 19-23):

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him (he himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light).

John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'"

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

as the prophet Isaiah said.

Given that Mark 1:1-5 heralds the witness of the baptizer, John 1:6-7 augments that theme, while also clarifying that John came to bear witness to the light, but he was not the light (v. 8). And, as Mark 1:7 notes John's witness that Jesus came after him, John 1:15 clarifies that while Jesus came after John chronologically, he was before him in terms of prominence. One can even imagine vv. 1-3 expanding the precedence of Christ cosmologically as an ontological embellishment of that theme. John's baptizing with water, versus Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit in Mark 1:8 is also echoed in John 1:33. And, while Mark's report begins *after* John has been thrown into prison (Mark 1:14), the Johannine account claims to report events that happened *before* John was thrown into prison (John 3:24). Thus, along with chapters 6, 15-17, and 21 (as well as a few clarifying insertions), the Johannine Christ-hymn appears to have been packaged around the narrative's original beginning, designed as a dialogical complement to Mark, both chronologically and geographically.

## 2. The Johannine Prologues as Responses to the Evangelist's Narration

In terms of its content and vocabulary, the Johannine Christ-hymn is most similar to the Prologue of 1 John 1:1-3. That being the case, the origin and character of the Epistle's opening may well suggest something similar to that of the Gospel, as both appear to have originated first as responses to the evangelist's narrative ministry. To begin with, 1 John 1:1-3 reflects the Elder's appreciation for the witness of the Johannine evangelist over the years (John 19:34-35; 21:20-24), although he may also have his own content to convey, as one claiming likewise to be among the eyewitness generation. Among the dozens of contacts between the Johannine Epistles and Gospel, some of them clearly reflect familiarity with and the echoing of the evangelist's teaching ministry over the years. These include the reference to the "new commandment"—to love one another—mentioned by Jesus in John 13:34, which by the time 1 John 2:7 is written has become the "old commandment," which they have heard from the beginning; the injunction to abide in Christ in John 15:4-7 is claimed by community members in 1 John 2:6; and assertions that those who walk in the light do not walk in darkness (John 8:12; 12:35) are referenced in 1 John 1:6-7; 2:9. Thus, 1 John clearly reflects familiarity with the evangelist's witness, even if it was finalized later.

Note, however the especially clear contacts between the Johannine narrative and the Elder's introduction to the first Johannine Epistle. Not only do these contacts reflect familiarity with the evangelist's narration; they also connect with audiences' familiarity with the Johannine witness over the years.

- Jesus declares what he has heard from the Father, and the Spirit declares what is from Jesus → the Elder declares what was from the beginning (John 8:26, 38; 13:21; 16:13-15 → 1 John 1:1-3)
- Jesus knew things and people from the beginning → the Elder testifies to what was and what people have known from the beginning (John 6:64; 8:44; 15:27; 16:4 → 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 13-14, 24; 3:11)
- The Son testifies to what he has seen and heard → the Elder testifies to what he and others have seen and heard (John 3:32 → 1 John 1:1, 3; cf. also Acts 4:19-20, where John the Apostle testifies to what he and others have seen and heard)

- Thomas demands to see and touch the flesh-wounds of the risen Lord → the Elder attests to what believers have looked at and touched with their hands (John 20:24-29 → 1 John 1:1)
- The words of Jesus are life-producing → the Elder witnesses to the word of life (John 5:24; 6:63, 68 → 1 John 1:1)
- Jesus testifies to what he has seen → the Elder testifies to what has been seen—the life revealed (John 3:11 → 1 John 1:2)
- Jesus has come that people might receive eternal life → the Elder declares eternal life to his audiences (John 3:15-16, 36; 5:25; 6:40, 47; 10:28; 17:1-3 → 1 John 1:2)
- The life the Father gives is manifested to the world → the Father’s eternal life is revealed to us (John 5:21, 26; 1 John 1:2)
- Those who keep the Son’s word will be loved by the Father, and the Father and the Son will make their home with them → to have fellowship with believers is to enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son (John 14:23 → 1 John 1:3)

If the Prologue to 1 John reflects familiarity with the evangelist’s witness, though, might the Christ-hymn also reflect the same? Indeed, the Johannine Christ-hymn introduces the completed Gospel well, but such likely does not reflect a later composition only—theologically and cosmologically oriented—over and against the more mundane features of the narrative, eclipsing Johannine historicity. Indeed, John’s story of Jesus deserves to be seen as “the mundane gospel,” not simply “the spiritual gospel.” That being the case, note how the elements of the Christ-hymn echo—as well as introduce—key elements of the narrative.

- The Son is one with the Father → The Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 10:30 → 1:1-2)
- As the light of the world, all who follow him will receive the light of life → in him was life, and the life was the light of all humanity (John 8:12 → 1:4)
- Believers are liberated from darkness by the light → the light overcomes darkness (John 11:9; 12:46 → 1:5)
- Jesus is come as the light of the world → the light that enlightens all was coming into the world (John 9:5 → 1:9)
- The world does not know the Father or the Son → though he made the world, the world did not know him (John 16:3; 17:25 → 1:10)
- Jewish leaders do not receive Jesus’ testimony → he came unto his own, but they did not receive him (John 3:11 → 1:11)
- Those who believe become children of light → those who believe become children of God (John 12:36 → 1:12)
- People must be born from above and of the Spirit → being born of the divine—not human—initiative is key (John 3:3, 6 → 1:13)
- In the tangible ministry of Jesus his glory is revealed → in the incarnation of the Word is God’s glory revealed (John 2:11; 11:4 → 1:14)
- While Moses gave the Law, he also wrote of Jesus, way, the truth, and the life → while the Law came from Moses, grace and truth came from Jesus (John 1:45; 5:46 7:19; 14:6 → 1:16)
- No one has ever seen God, but the Son has revealed the Father → no one has seen God at any time, but the onlybegotten God at the Father’s side has revealed him (John 6:46 → 1:18)

Again, these features introduce the narrative fully, but, if inquiring about their origin—assuming that the Johannine narrative developed over at least five decades before being rendered in a preliminary edition or stage of development—it requires little imagination to see the Johannine Christ-hymn as developing first as a confessional affirmation of John’s story of Jesus, which it then introduces in service to its finalization and circulation. Thus, as the Prologue of the first Johannine Epistle developed as the Elder’s affirmation of the evangelist’s witness, so does the Johannine Christ-hymn. And, it need not have been written by the Fourth Evangelist to serve as an engaging introduction to his work, finalized after his death by the Elder (John 21:20-24).

As confessional compositions, the two Johannine Prologues serve experientially preparative functions. Especially if audiences are somewhat familiar with any of their features, one can imagine their joining in with reciting a familiar chorus inwardly or otherwise, taking in a participatory appetizer, enhancing receptivity to the content that follows. As a stand-alone confession, of course, the Johannine Christ-hymn would have been complete, in and of itself, but from a literary standpoint, its inclusion as a launch-pad for the Johannine witness insured its preservation over the centuries as one of the most significant and influential compositions in world history. Note also the poetic and strophic features of the Johannine Prologues.

### **3. Confessional Features of the Johannine Prologues**

In reviewing the Prologue to the first Johannine Epistle, several further things come clear. First, the first-person and second-person plural references are multiple, suggesting corporate settings. What “we” have experienced, we declare to “you,” so that you might have fellowship with us, whose fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Its pronouns are not singular—individualistic—they are plural and corporate. John 1:1-3 is a confession emerging from one community, appealing to other audiences, inviting them to join them in fellowship, participating also in their embrace of the Father and the Son, so that their joy might be fulfilled (v. 4).

Second, appeals are here made to first-hand encounter: what we have seen and heard—what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands—concerning the Word of life. Thus, the memory of what was revealed from the beginning is passed along from first generation Jesus-followers to later audiences in distant places, connecting apostolic witness with later generations as part of the Johannine legacy.

Third, note the strophic character of 1 John’s prologue. Within these three verses, a lead statement is followed by four qualifying phrases, a quatrain, in which the fourth phrase introduces a new element that leads into the next verse. This reflects a strophic pattern: A, B, B, B, C (v. 1), followed by C’, D, D, D, E (v. 2), followed by E’, F, F, F, G (v. 3). Thus, each verse leads into the next, and the overall confession introduces the circular, leading into the Elder’s characteristic hope that his audience’s joy will be complete (v. 4; 2 John 12). It is also likely that this hymnic confession would have been familiar to audiences as the Elder’s first Epistle was circulated among the churches, whereas 2 John was written to a single community, and 3 John was written to an individual.

We declare to you what was from the beginning:  
what we have heard,  
what we have seen with our eyes,

what we have looked at and touched with our hands,  
concerning the word of life.

This life was revealed,  
and we have seen it  
and testify to it  
and declare to you the eternal life:  
that was with the Father and was revealed to us.

What we have seen and heard  
we also declare to you  
so that you also may have fellowship with us,  
and truly our fellowship is with the Father  
and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And, the symmetry is even more pronounced in the Greek.

Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς,  
ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν,  
ὁ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν,  
ὁ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν,  
περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς—

καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη,  
καὶ ἐώρακάμεν  
καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν  
καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον  
ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν—

ὁ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν  
ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν,  
ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν·  
καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς  
καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ·

Therefore, it is clear that 1 John 1:1-3 introduces the Epistle from at least one community to others, serving as a circular that was read among the churches of the region. Like the letters of Christ to the churches in Revelation 2-3, the first Johannine Epistle was likely circulated and read among the house-churches of Asia Minor in the later decades of the first century CE, calling for right beliefs and right actions, as well.

The Johannine Gospel also shows evidence of being prepared for such circulation among the churches, and with Richard Bauckham on this score, the Elder has prepared John's story of Jesus to be received among the churches, not just for a single community. Thus, modifying Brown's good work, the Johannine Evangel was likely written *from* at least one community, but not narrowly *for* only one

community. If anything, its first stages of development reflect an augmentation and modest corrective of Mark—which likely preceded the writing of the Epistles chronologically—and the Elder’s finalization of the Beloved Disciple’s witness after his death (around 100 CE) reflects harmonization with the Matthew and Luke, as well as Mark. John’s first ending (20:30-31) defends its autonomy over and against Mark, and its second ending defends its selectivity over and against the other Gospels, as well (21:20-25).

In comparison with the prologue to 1 John, the Christ-hymn of John 1 shows a number similarities and differences. First, the first-person plural language as to what “we” have beheld and experienced carries over in its testimonial way, but missing is second-person plural language, addressed to specific audiences: “you” or other direct references to others. In that sense, the Johannine Gospel’s crafting is designed for more general circulation among the churches—including familiar communities, but not limited to them. It thus is crafted to be a universal and public witness rather than a local, sectarian document.

Second, like the opening of the Epistle, the Johannine Christ-hymn also appeals to first-hand encounter with the Jesus of history, not simply the Christ of faith. Even more specifically, the author claims to have encountered divine glory in the beholding the flesh-becoming-Word, full of grace and truth (1:14). And, such glory is that of the only begotten Son of the Father, which attests to the fleshly humanity of Jesus, not simply the divinity of Christ. The light of life is thus not a disembodied means of ideational illumination; it is embodied in the physical presence and ministry of Jesus, to which the Johannine leaders attest, countering those who might be claiming that Jesus was so divine that he did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3).

Third, the strophic design of the Johannine Christ-hymn as we have it, packaged around the witness of John the Baptist, is less uniform in its structuring than 1 John 1:1-3, although its strophic form is still pronounced, nonetheless. Instead of quatrain phrases following an assertion, however, the Johannine Christ-hymn as it stands reflects lead statements that are followed by couplets and tercets, a few quatrains, and even a sestet at the end (depending on how one breaks the phrases, of course). The pattern is thus ABB and AB BB, involving the development of themes in ways progressive. It could also be that we have here an adaptation of a fuller hymnic unit with a more consistent meter, but the strophic character of the Christ-hymn is perfectly engaging as it is. Whatever the case, most likely is the possibility that regional audiences would have been familiar with the narrative’s opening confession, as it clearly served as an experientially engaging worship piece designed to involve hearers transformingly in the content they were about to receive.

#### **4. The Three Stanzas of the Johannine Christ-Hymn**

As a confessional response to the Johannine witness over the years within the evolving Johannine situation, the three stanzas of the Christ-hymn move from broader, cosmological perspectives to reflections on the movement’s history, to an articulation of the gospel message, itself. And, as a revised introduction to the Johannine Gospel, we here see a move beyond an augmentation of Mark to a larger, cross-cultural and interfaith interest, sounding the good news of God’s saving-revealing action in the works and witness of Jesus as a means of extending the blessings of Abraham and Moses to the diverse families of the Mediterranean world. Thus, the Johannine Christ-hymn poses a universal and inclusive

appeal, inviting audiences to receive in faith the Jewish Messiah—Christ Jesus of Nazareth—as a means of being welcomed into the divine family.

Outreach, however, was not the only function of the Johannine Christ-hymn; its thrust is also highly political. The Christological hymns of the New Testament also served a religio-political function, in pushing back against the Roman imperial cult of the mid-to-late first century CE. As Jewish resistance literature, the hymnic confessions of Philippians 2:6-11, Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-20; and John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18 functioned to push back in faithful solidarity against imperial hegemony. Thus, it is neither the divine Julius nor Augustus, nor is it Caligula, Nero, or Domitian, who deserved veneration; it is Christ alone, who has put worldly powers under his feet. Appropriating Psalm 110:1 (the most oft-quoted Hebrew Scripture verse in the New Testament) in a number of ways, God's triumphal action in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus asserts confidence in the eschatological, world-redeeming initiative of God, bringing hope for humanity and the dawning of the New Age.

That being the case, note the progressive development of themes between the three stanzas of the Johannine Christ-hymn, moving from cosmic claims, to community memories, to continued outreach.

### **Stanza 1: The Cosmic Advent of the Divine Word (vv. 1-5).**

The opening stanza of the Johannine Christ-hymn begins with the relation the pre-existent *Logos* to God. The *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He is the creative source of all things and the originator of life and light, which darkness neither comprehends nor overtakes. In that sense, the contributions of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE philosopher of Ephesus, Heraclitus, would have evoked resonance with the Johannine Prologue among audiences of Asia Minor and beyond. In the view of Heraclitus, the cosmos is in flux; the one thing certain is change. One cannot step into a moving stream twice in the same place; the water has moved on. At the origin of God's creative activity is the divine spark, which is the source of life itself. While creation involves flux, however, that which holds things together is the divine *Logos*, which as a principle of reason is available to all humanity. These teachings bolstered the love of truth in Greek philosophical traditions, and his work was especially picked up by Cicero and the Stoics, developed further by Philo of Alexandria.

In Philo's work, the character of God's creative *Logos* is not merely a philosophical construct; rather, it roots in God's creative work in Genesis 1. It is neither by violence nor force that the ordered cosmos came into being; it is by the creative Word of God that the cosmos derives both its origin and its ordering. Likewise, in Hebrew thought, the delivered word of the patriarch or the prophet—as well as the word of the Lord—changes reality as it goes forth from the speaker. In the delivery of Isaac's blessing, Jacob is irreversibly blessed rather than Esau (Gen 27), and the prophetic word of Micaiah ben Imlah comes true, even against the designs of King Ahab and his court prophets, who assured the king of success against the enemy (1 Ki 22). Thus, the Jewish background behind the advent of the Son as the divine *Logos* would have resonated with Jewish audiences as well as non-Jewish ones, and one can even imagine the ministry of Apollos of Alexandria in Ephesus advancing such Christological connections with Heraclitus, Genesis, and Philo (cf. Acts 18:24-28). The Christ-hymn of Hebrews 1:1-4 likewise furthers such connections, linking the God who has spoken in many times and many ways with God's Son, appointed now as heir of all things.



A further point and set of connections deserve mention here, as well. In addition to being the ordering source of creation, the divine *Logos* is also the source of life and light for all humanity. And indeed, the power of light speaks for itself, as darkness is extinguished by its mere glimmer. Note also the universalistic reach of the Light. It is availed to all people, and the darkness can neither grasp nor touch it. These insights (vv. 4-5) set the stage well for the narrative that follows. First, all people have access to God's saving-revealing activity in the advent of the *Logos* as the life and light of God. Second, despite the throes and wiles of darkness, God's saving-revealing action will finally triumph; in the following narrative, the resurrection of Jesus has the last word. Third, those who are in the dark are exposed by their miscomprehension in the narrative. And, with Bakhtin, stupidity in narrative is always rhetorical. So, reader beware: you don't want to miscomprehend the witness of the Revealer, as don't the unbelieving in the narrative, so be ready to get it right, both in perception and in the existential response of faith to the divine initiative in the story that follows.

Note here the strophic character of the first stanza of the Johannine Christ-hymn

### **“The Cosmic Advent of the Divine Word”**

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
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 all people.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overtake it.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,  
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,  
καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.  
οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.  
πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,  
καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν.  
ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν,  
καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·  
καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει,  
καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

### **Stanza 2: The Uneven Reception of the Divine Initiative (vv. 9-13).**

In addition to declaring what has been from the beginning, the Johannine Christ-hymn recounts the history of the Word's and the Light's reception, which was uneven during the ministry of Jesus and has continued to be so in the interim. Certainly, the Johannine memory rings true, that the Galilean Prophet—like John the Baptist, his forerunner—was embraced by the Jewish populace while also being

rejected by threatened magistrates and leaders. An overlooked fact is that despite the Judean leaders' plotting the death of Jesus and handing him over to the Romans to be crucified, many of the Judeans also believed in Jesus, as declared explicitly in John 8:31 (cf. also 2:23; 7:31; 8:31; 9:38; 10:42; 11:45; 12:42). In addition, as a corrective to Mark 6:1-6, not everyone in Galilee refused to honor the hometown prophet; indeed, even Samaritans and Galileans believed in Jesus (John 4:1-45). John is *not* anti-Jewish.

The same can also be inferred in later stages of John's tradition-development. Followers of John the Baptist would have been pointed to Jesus by the memory of their leader, whose joy is fulfilled by the increase of Jesus and his own diminishment (3:27-30). Then again, Jesus-adherents may well have experienced uneven receptions during the Palestine phase of the tradition's development (30-70 CE) as well as in the later phases of the Johannine situation in Asia Minor (70-100 CE). Telling are the three references to followers of Jesus being expelled from synagogues for confessing Jesus openly (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and by the time that 1 John 2:18-25 is written, it appears that some members of Johannine Christianity have departed and rejoined local synagogues. Nonetheless, the evangelist's witness points to the signifying works of Jesus, compelling testimonies, and fulfilled words showing that Jesus really is the Jewish Messiah/Christ, availing life to those who believe in his name (20:31).

Note, however, the universalism of the second stanza. The saving-revealing light of God, which is accessible to all humanity, has now come into the world. Yet revelation demands a response: will humans respond receptively to the divine initiative, or not? Such is the existential question that revelation precipitates. Here the universalist teaching of Heraclitus is referenced with irony. Despite his having created the world, the world fails to recognize its own Ground of Being and Source of Life. Nonetheless, as many as received the Revealer receive also adoption into the divine family, born not of human initiative or schemes, but born of God. This theme in the narrative will account for receptions and rejections of Jesus alike. People who know the Father recognize also the Son; those rejecting the Son either are not abiding in knowing relationship with the Father, or they love the praise of humans over the glory of God.

### **“The Uneven Reception of the Divine Initiative”**

The true light,  
    which enlightens everyone,  
    was coming into the world.  
He was in the world,  
    and the world came into being through him,  
    yet the world did not know him.  
He came to what was his own,  
    and his own people did not accept him.  
But to all who received him,  
    who believed in his name,  
    he gave power to become children of God,  
    who were born, not of blood  
    or of the will of the flesh  
    or of the will of man,  
    but of God.

ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν  
ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον  
ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.  
Ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν,  
καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,  
καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.  
εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν,  
καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.  
ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,  
ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι,  
τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,  
οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων  
οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς  
οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς  
ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

### **Stanza 3: The Father's Glory, Grace, and Truth Revealed (vv. 14, 16-18).**

The third stanza of the Johannine Christ-hymn attests to having encountered the Father's glory, grace, and truth in the fleshly ministry of Jesus. Here, the first-hand witness of the Beloved Disciple is also attested by communities of believers who embrace not only his witness, but who now profess first-hand encounter, as well. Certainly, this can happen as a factor of spiritual visitation in a meeting for worship or otherwise; but, as the Elder professes, there may be more than one eyewitness in the Johannine trajectory, and the tabernacled dwelling of the divine *Logos* amongst humans is professed to be the place—the eschatological *topos*—in which the *shekinah* Glory of God is encountered. Further, in combatting traveling ministers who deny the fleshly suffering and existence of Jesus (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7), it is in the flesh-becoming-Word that God's glory is most powerfully encountered. Thus, the eyewitness of John 19:34-35 attests not to the divinity of Christ Jesus, but to the water-and-blood humanity of Jesus as the Christ.

And, grace upon grace is received through Christ, who, as the Eschatological Prophet predicted by Moses (Deut 18:15-22), provides grace and truth as a means of fulfilling the Law. Within the Johannine narrative, Jesus is accused of breaking Sabbath laws by healing on the Sabbath; and yet, religious leaders fail to appreciate the healing of the lame man because they do not have God's love in their hearts (John 5:42). Likewise, religious leaders fail to celebrate the healing of the blind man because in their legal ways of thinking, they claim to see, when it is actually they who are blind (9:41). When challenged as to his authorization, Jesus claims the Mosaic agency schema as the basis for his loving and grace-filled ministries, and in the evangelist's perspective, these grace-filled healings actually fulfill the gracious Law of Moses rather than breaking it. Thus, grace follows grace, as the Johannine Jesus truly puts into play a profound understanding of how God can be loved supremely and how neighbor is loved redemptively.

As the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), the Father's loving character is truly revealed by the ways Jesus loved his own unto the end (13:1); and indeed no one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (15:12-15). However, Jesus as the only way to the Father is not a feature of

exclusivism, countering diametrically the universality of the saving light of Christ, declared in John 1:9. If asked *why* the Son is the only way to the Father, John 1:18 and 6:44-46 provide the answer. No one has seen God at any time; it is only the Son who reveals the truth of God's character, being, and love. Thus, no one *can* come—not *may* come—to the Father except by being drawn by God's saving-revealing initiative, which Jesus as the Christ eschatologically is and does. Jesus therefore reveals the true character of the Father, and through that revelation is liberating truth availed to the world (8:31-32).

### “The Father’s Glory, Grace, and Truth”

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,  
and we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of a father’s only son,  
full of grace and truth.

From his fullness we have all received,  
grace upon grace.  
The law indeed was given through Moses;  
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God.  
It is the only Son, himself God,  
who is close to the Father’s heart,  
who has made him known.

Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν,  
καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ,  
δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός,  
πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας·  
ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν,  
καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος·  
ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη,  
ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.  
θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε·  
μονογενὴς θεὸς  
ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς  
ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

### 5. From Transforming Encounter to Christological Confession...and Back Again.

While critical scholars of the modern era have discounted the historicity of Johannine witness because it is theologically imbued and distinctively presented, these represent flawed ways of conducting historical inquiry. Every memory worth retaining is pondered and reflected upon precisely because of meaning, and such is always a subjective enterprise. Further, the Johannine memory of Jesus reflects the Beloved Disciple’s putting the teachings and ministry of Jesus into his own words over the years, and rather than involving a corruption of historicity, such reflects an integration of the historic past with emerging historical situations. Nor is the Johannine account founded upon alien sources (a la Bultmann and Fortna) or spiritualized expansions upon Mark or the Synoptics (a la Barrett and the Leuven School).

Every contact shared between John and Mark is different, and 85% of the Johannine narrative has no Synoptic parallel. Thus, John's story of Jesus is rooted in an autonomous reflection upon the ministry of Jesus, developed first as a somewhat corrective augmentation of Mark, and finalized later by the Elder as a harmonized complement to the Synoptics.

The Johannine witness, though, appeals to transformative encounter with Christ on a number of levels. From the latest stages to earlier ones, the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—guides people into truth, bringing to mind in ways relevant the memory of Jesus and his teachings. Before that, the risen Christ appears to the disciples on the shore, to Thomas, to the faithful in the upper room, and to Mary Magdalene in the garden. During the reported ministry of Jesus, transformative encounter is reported by the woman at the well, by Nathanael, and by others. These are the sorts of encounters referenced in John 1:14, whereby God's glory is encountered in the physical deeds and presence of Jesus of Nazareth, continuing further in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And, the narration of such by the evangelist has provided the basis for the composition of the Johannine Christ-hymn, as the witness to how Jesus has been encountered in the past becomes the basis for Christological confessions in the future.

In that sense, transformative spiritual encounter in the Johannine teaching has led to the articulation of faith-based confessions, leading up to the development of a three-stanza Christ-hymn. And, like the first Johannine Epistle, the Johannine Prologue prepares hearers and readers experientially to be receptive to the content of the narrative that follows. That being the case, transformative encounter has led to the opening Christological confession of the finalized Johannine Gospel, which is designed to lead audiences back into the essence of first-hand religious encounter whence the Johannine narrative originated. Thus, from transformative encounter, to hymnic Christological confession, and back again reflects the origin, character, and design of the Johannine Christ-hymn. And, if read accordingly, transformative encounter continues—the essence of salvific and redemptive faith.

## **6. Conclusion.**

Like the Prologue of 1 John, the Christ-hymn of 1 John developed as a confessional response by Johannine believers to the evangelist's teachings and witness over the years. The Johannine Christ-hymn, though, was not the first stroke of the evangelist's quill—eclipsing all grounded and historical elements in the Johannine narrative because of an all-consuming cosmic and theological perspective. No. Such reflects the later reflections of Johannine believers upon the Beloved Disciple's witness over the years, as well as other reports, whereby a confessional affirmation of the Johannine account has developed as a three-stanza hymnic confession packaged around the Gospel's original beginning, citing the witness of John the Baptist as an augmentation and alternative presentation in relation to Mark, the first biography of Jesus. That being the case, the earlier Johannine narrative emerged as the second biography of Jesus, presenting two signs before those narrated in Mark 1 and three signs in Judea, augmenting Mark chronologically and geographically. Added as an engaging and familiar confession, the Johannine Christ-hymn prepares hearers and readers to be receptive and responsive to the narrative that follows. Thus, the Johannine Prologue serves as an engaging and transformative opening to the faith-evoking narrative that follows. It therefore moves from encounter, to confession, and back again, inviting likewise a transformative reading of the Johannine witness. And, with the Elder and his associates, later audiences are drawn into the final acclamation: "His testimony is true!"