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A SURVEY OF VALENTINIAN THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS OF THE PROLOGUE TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO AN ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

By

TIMOTHY SCOTT CALHOUN MANOR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

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Faculty Advisor David W Chapman

Second Faculty Reader Robert A. Peterson

Director of the Program David W Chapman

Director of the Library James C. Pakala

ABSTRACT OF

A survey of Valentinian theology and exegesis of the prologue to the Fourth Gospel and its relationship to an Orthodox exegesis.

By T. Scott Manor

The Fourth Gospel is one of the most influential and controversial books of the New Testament. Much scrutiny of the Gospel surrounds its potential relationship to and propagation of Gnosticism. Valentinianism, a second century Gnostic sect, claimed that the Gospel of john supported this heterodox theology. Given that a peaceful co-existence of the Orthodox and Valentinian theologies is not possible, the purpose of this paper is to provide an exegetical analysis of the introductory Prologue of John in order to see if either theological system is able to make the legitimate theological claim to the Fourth Gospel.

In order to shed light on the complex subject of Gnosticism, an historical survey of the origins and development of Gnostic thought will be followed with a specific presentation of Valentinian Gnosticism. Theological and historical literature of the early and mid-twentieth century focused largely on the origins of Gnosticism and its relationship to Christianity. This literature will provide a substantial amount of the source material for this survey. In addition, given that the heresiological literature was largely the primary source for understanding Valentinianism, until the recent find of the Nag Hammadi texts, this endeavor will seek to present Valentinian Gnosticism fairly on their own terms using primary textual support whenever possible.

Having established the nature and theology of Valentinianism, an exegetical analysis of the Valentinian interpretation of the Prologue will be presented, again, using

primary source material as much as possible. This will be followed with my own exegetical interpretation of the Prologue, which will represent the traditional Christian perspective.

The conclusion of the paper will find that although there exist certain affinities between the Prologue of John and Valentinianism, historical, exegetical and theological differences cast serious doubt that the intention of the Gospel is primarily Gnostic. In contrast, the historical, exegetical and theological focus of the Prologue will be shown to ultimately cohere with and promote the Gospel of the Christian faith as it is understood throughout the New Testament corpus.

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Abbreviations

AH	*Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, ed. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson LL.D. Anti-Nicene Fathers, Vol.1. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
AV	*Against the Valentinians*, Tertullian, ed. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. Anti-Nicene Fathers, Vol.3. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
BAGD	*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. W. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: University Press, 2000.
CH	*The Church History of Eusebius*, Eusebius, ed. Philip Schaf, D.D., LL.D. and Henry Wace, D.D. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol.1. Second series. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
CJ	*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Origen, ed. Allan Menzies, D.D. Anti-Nicene Fathers, vol.9. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
Exc	*The Excerpta ex Theodoto*, Clement of Alexandria, ed. R. McL. Wilson. In W. Foerster, Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
GP	*The Gospel of Philip*, ed. James M. Robinson, transl. Wesley W. Isenberg. The Nag Hammadi Library. San Francisco: Harper, 1988.
Ref	*Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, Hippolytus, in: *Opera* 3, ed. P. Wendland, GS 26 (1916).
TT	*Tripartite Tractate*, ed. James M. Robinson, transl. Harold W. Attridge and Dieter Mueller. The Nag Hammadi Library. San Francisco: Harper, 1988.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Gospel of John stands as one of the most influential and controversial books of the New Testament. Departing in structure from the synoptic Gospels, John presents a thoroughly theological narrative of the life of Jesus and his role within redemptive history. The language used in the book is often dense in spiritual meaning and significance. As a result, the Gospel has suffered much criticism and laborious exegetical analysis from the time it was written.

Among the litany of questions that arise are those of authorship, historical veracity, and whether or not John was operating within the "orthodox" theological system shared by the other apostolic authors of the New Testament. There are many who claim that the content, language and overall message of John point to a divergent theology which is qualitatively more syncretistic with other religious and philosophical beliefs of the specific historical situation of the time in which this book was written. More specifically, the question of primary concern for this paper is whether or not the Gospel of John is to be legitimately seen in connection with, or support of, Gnostic theology, which had become a theological force and rival to the "orthodox" church beginning in the late second century. Both very different theological systems claim the Gospel of John as their own and see it as supporting their specific theological perspectives.

The aim of this paper is to focus intensively upon the original purpose and intention of the Gospel as it is introduced in the Prologue. The Prologue of John operates not only as an introduction to the Gospel, it is also the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the intentionality of the author in how he intends his book to be understood. An appropriate understanding of the Prologue of John will

provide the reader with the correct hermeneutical paradigm by which to understand the nature of the Gospel as a whole.

At this point two major questions arise: what is an appropriate conception of the author's intentions for understanding his Gospel, and how is one to arrive at such an understanding? As noted above, the primary focus of this paper is an exegetical comparison of two very different hermeneutical interpretations of the Gospel: the orthodox and the Gnostic. The goal will be to gain a clearer picture of the intentionality of the author on his own terms in a discussion which is largely clouded with uncertainty by examining the nature of both interpretations on their own terms in light of the historical *Sitz im Leben* of the author. Such an examination is intended to produce answers to the question of whether either theological system can legitimately claim that this Gospel advocates a specific position given and unique historical and theological situation of the author at the time that the Gospel was written.

It is therefore imperative to this endeavor that language must be understood in its appropriate context. Clearly, language is understood as the method by which ideas and truth are communicated, interpreted and understood. Such communication is couched in a unique and specific historical and cultural context in which certain assumptions are made by the author in his communication. Thus, to understand fully that which is being communicated, it is necessary not only to process the language used; it is also of vital importance to allow such communication to be seen in light of the historical and cultural situation of the author in order to see more clearly what is being communicated in light of that specific situation. In doing this, the reader is able to understand more fully that which is being expressed.

Historically, the specific doctrines of both the orthodox and the Gnostic religions of the late second century are separated from the time that this Gospel was written by over one hundred years. Both theologies had developed and claimed exclusive rights to

the Gospel of John. This purpose of this paper concerns the question of which party most correctly interpreted and understood John on his own terms.

Review of the Literature

Much of the literature concerning the Fourth Gospel in current scholarship directly pertains to the question of the existence of Gnostic thought within the language and message of the Gospel. Many have argued that there are clear Gnostic elements, especially in the Prologue. Others have rejected this position in the attempt to preserve the Gospel from such a syncretistic influence. The debate over this issue continues today and stands as a major catalyst for the task of this paper. The following survey of relevant literature is presented in a cursory fashion here, but it will be expounded upon throughout the rest of this paper.

Early twentieth century scholarship was extremely influential in re-introducing the question of the existence of Gnostic elements in the Fourth Gospel. The works of Richard Reitzenstein[1] and Wilhelm Bousset[2] argued for a reversal of the traditional notion that Gnosticism was simply a heterodox theology that had its roots in Christianity. Their goal was to liberate Gnosticism from the history of the Church and bring it into the *Religionsgeschichte* by attaching Iranian and Babylonian origins to Gnosticism, focusing specifically upon Gnostic forms found in Mandean and Manichean literature. The writings of Bousset and Reitzenstein formed the basis of the so-called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* which sought to bring the New Testament into a Gnostic perspective.

Hans Jonas[3] followed in the same footsteps and wrote what is arguably the most comprehensive account of Gnosticism: the unfinished work *Gnosis and spätantiker Geist.*

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[1] Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, trans. by J. Steely. (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979); also *Poimandres* (Leipzig: Teubner 1904).

[2] Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. by J. Steely. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970); also *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907).

[3] Hans Jonas, *Gnosis un spätantiker Geist.* Teil 1: *Die mythologische Gnosis*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1934); also *The Gnostic Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

Rudolph Bultmann, and his protegé W. Schmithals,[4] also took up the work of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and argued for the necessity of a pre-existent Gnostic Redeemer Myth, which the author of the Fourth Gospel subsequently Christianized and was the basis for the historicizing of Jesus within this Gnostic soteriological scheme.

In the mid-twentieth century, the discovery of the Hebrew Qumran literature as well as the Nag Hammadi library, a series of original Gnostic texts in the Coptic language, changed the face of Gnostic scholarship. The Qumran literature[5] allowed for the research into pre-Christian Jewish themes that appear to have some Gnostic parallels, while the Nag Hammadi library[6] provided the first collection of original, developed Gnostic literature. These discoveries, especially that of the Nag Hammadi texts, provided scholarship with primary, historical literature that would change the trajectory of Gnostic research up to the present time.

Reconstruction of Gnosticism in its literary, historical and theological aspects is largely the focus of current scholarship. Kurt Rudolph[7] and Elaine Pagels[8] have both contributed much to the scholarly study of Gnosticism, as well as publishing literature that has brought the discussion from the ivory tower of academia into the mainstream world of popular culture.

In response to much of the critical scholarship that exists, there remain those who argue for the independence and authenticity of the Fourth Gospel. Such an argument began with the heresiologists of the second century and continues in much the same way today. Among recent studies, the most notable is the commentary of the Fourth Gospel

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[4] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).
[5] Florentino G. Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
[6] James M. Robinson, ed, *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 5 vols. (Boston: Brill, 2000.
[7] Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. by R. Wilson. (San Francisco: Harper, 1987).
[8] Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

written by R. Schnackenburg[9] as a response to the commentary by Bultmann, who had proposed a Gnostic foundation for the Fourth Gospel.

In addition to Schnackenburg, among many others, the works of New Testament Scholars such as F.F. Bruce,[10] H. Ridderbos,[11] R. Brown,[12] G.R. Beasley-Murray,[13] Craig S. Keener[14] and D.A. Carson,[15] as well as the works of scholars such as E. Yamauchi[16] and M. Desjardins,[17] have contributed significant analysis and discourse towards maintaining the theological independence and authority of the Gospel in the debate over which religious authority has legitimate claim to the canonical writings of the New Testament.

The debate was of critical importance in the historical context of the growth of the early Christian church and formation of the canon. Gnosticism posed a serious threat to the early church: specifically, the integrity of the Gospel was in danger. In much of the same way, with the discovery of many Coptic Gnostic writings in the mid-twentieth century, the church is once again faced with a similar dilemma in combating adversarial scholarship that is eager to question the authority and validity of the Gospel as well as the legitimacy of the church.

The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel is of particular concern in this debate. For orthodox theology, the Prologue introduces Christ (the Logos) as God; who not only created all things, but became incarnate in order to bring salvation to his people. For Gnosticism, the Prologue presents a metaphorical account of Gnostic soteriology that transcends orthodoxy, providing canonical legitimacy to their heterodox theology. The

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[9] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982).
[10] F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).
[11] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, trans. by J. Vriend. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmams, 1991).
[12] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).
[13] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987).
[14] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003).
[15] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).
[16] Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).
[17] Michel Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 108. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

Prologue stands as the introduction to the most theologically developed Gospel in the New Testament corpus, and therefore it is of particular interest to examine carefully the message and theology promulgated by the author and its relationship to these two theological systems.

Assumptions and Methodology

I. *Authorship*

The Gospel of John makes no explicit claims regarding its own authorship. External evidence from early church fathers suggests strongly that the author was the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus mentions that "John the disciple of the Lord who leaned back on his breast, published the Gospel while he was resident at Ephesus in Asia."[18] Although Irenaeus wrote at the end of second century A.D., he did have a tertiary connection to the apostle in that he associated with Polycarp who knew John. This is the earliest major evidence given for the Apostolic Johannine authorship. There are many who support this view, yet in modern scholarship this opinion is largely opposed or denied.

One opinion contrary to Johannine authorship rests upon a quote of Papias as it is recorded in Eusebius which suggests that there were two Johns. The first John is listed by Papias among the other disciples, while immediately after, in a second category, Eusebius states that Papias handed down "traditions from John the elder."[19] There is speculation, however, as to whether Eusebius correctly interpreted Papias. Upon a close reading of the quote by Papias found in Eusebius, both the first John (understood as the apostle) and the second John are referred to as being an "elder." In fact, "Eusebius plainly records Papias' report that he sought to learn the 'teachings of the elders,' and then lists among elders members of the Twelve."[20]

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[18] AH 3.1.2.
[19] CH 3.xxxix.4-5.
[20] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 96.

> Given the weak exegetical basis in Papias for Eusebius' conclusion...plus Eusebius's desire to distinguish the Apostle John from the writer of the Apocalypse may serve as the entire basis for his insistence that there were two Johns. When all this is taken into account, it is far more likely that John the elder was none other than John the apostle.[21]

Chapter 21 of the Gospel mentions that the "beloved disciple" is identified as the one who wrote "these things". Much of the authorship-controversy revolves around who is identified as the beloved disciple. Traditionally, the view is that the individual is the disciple John, son of Zebedee, who intentionally refrains from using his name. This position is supported partially by the fact that only the twelve dined with Jesus at the last supper (the beloved disciple is clearly present [13:23]). In addition, other literary "clues" throughout the Gospel of John, which, when corroborated with evidence from the synoptics, leads to identifying this beloved disciple as the apostle John. In fact, the only people who denied Johannine authorship by the end of the second century were a group of people called the *Alogoi* ('witless ones'), who rejected the *Logos* doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, and therefore the Fourth Gospel altogether.[22]

The internal evidence of the Gospels, although substantial, is not conclusive. Critical scholarship is all too eager to attach the identity of the author with someone else. Although plausible, such arguments find difficulty stacking up against the internal and external evidence that suggests that the author is the disciple John, son of Zebedee.

Given that there is no *conclusive* evidence as to the author of the Fourth Gospel, what can be assumed in this discussion? Internal and external evidence allows for one to assume that the book was authored by a man named John, who was a Jew from Palestine, who also claimed to be an eyewitness to the life of Christ.[23] It is left to the skeptic to formulate a coherent and convincing contrary position.

II. *Date*

There are those who believe strongly that the lack of mention in the Fourth Gospel of the fall of the Temple (A.D. 70) indicates an early date. Such an argument from

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[21] Ibid., 98.
[22] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 28.
[23] Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 218ff.

silence holds some sway, however the foundation for such an argument is shaky at best. This position of an early date is also supported by the argument that much of the language and the descriptions of Palestine by the author suggest an early dating of John, but as Carson points out well, "the Fourth Gospel sets out to tell us what things were like *in Jesus' day*, and it is far from clear just how much of the Evangelist's description we may legitimately read back into his own situation."[24]

There is another position that seeks to date the Fourth Gospel based on an analysis of the trajectory of spiritual development in the early church. Those who take this position (e.g. Dunn) argue that only at the end of the first century is there found a full-blown conception of a pre-existent Christ as well as the emphasis on the incarnation as is found in the Fourth Gospel. In addition, those who hold to a late-first century Johannine Apostolic authorship find support in early Patristic writings, such as Irenaeus, Jerome, Clement (as recorded in Eusebius) and Eusebius.

Finally, there are those who push for an even later date. Some argue that the affinities shared between the Johannine and Gnostic language suggests a date that must allow for a developed Gnosticism to exist (late second century A.D.). This is also true of the corresponding traits between the Fourth Gospel and much of the Coptic literature dated in the late second century. There is also some patristic evidence which suggests a later date of the Fourth Gospel. Yet the discovery of Papyrus 52, which contains a portion of John and is dated around the first half of the second century A.D. makes it difficult to push the date of the Gospel as late as some would like.[25]

What then is one to conclude regarding the dating of the Fourth Gospel? Although the considerations given to both the absence of any mention of the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70, as well as the developed theology do not prove independently

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[24] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 82.

[25] Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 96.

conclusive as factors for placing the authorship of the Gospel at a specific historical date, they do serve to frame the discussion within significant parameters. An early date (pre-A.D. 70) is difficult to establish given a lack of supporting evidence. Given this, the lack of mention of this event suggests strongly that the date be pushed forward to a time when the effects of the fall of the Temple would have been minimized such that it would allow for the author *not* to make mention of it. This notion is corroborated by the Gospel's "developed" theology and language. In addition to Patristic evidence, it seems warranted to assume that the date of the Fourth Gospel be placed around the end of the first century, around A.D. 90. The date of the Fourth Gospel will have added significance when the Gospel is compared with the dating of other literature which many see as having direct influence upon the Fourth Gospel.

III. *Coherence*

The focus of this paper is clearly limited to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, nevertheless it is critical to understand its connection to the rest of the Gospel. The Prologue stands as the introduction to, and hermeneutical key of, the Gospel as a whole. It serves to draw the reader into the Gospel message as well as to introduce the major themes of the book. It would be difficult not to notice the organic relationship that exists between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel. The Prologue introduces the message, themes and overall theology of the Gospel, while the rest of the Gospel both assumes the Prologue, and elaborates its message.

However, the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel is written in a different genre and contains different language than that of the rest of the book, which causes some to suggest that the Prologue was composed by someone other than the Evangelist. There is difficulty in matching the poetic form of the Prologue with that of the structure and rhythm of Greek poetry, which opens the question as to the origins of this poetic introduction. Those who assume that the Prologue is not original to the Gospel point to Hebrew or Aramaic origins, but what is often overlooked is the fact that the unique

features of the Prologue- various parallelisms, short clauses, frequent chiasms, etc.- are also found throughout the entire Gospel. In addition, the major themes introduced in the Prologue are expounded upon throughout the Gospel. The following chart demonstrates the thematic relationship between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel.[26]

Theme	*Prologue*	*Gospel*
Logos/Son identified as *Theos*	1:1	20:28
the pre-existence of the Logos or Son	1:1-2	17:5
in him was life 1:4		5:26, 11:25
life is light	1:4	8:12
light rejected by darkness	1:5	3:19
yet not quenched by it	1:5	12:35
light coming into the world	1:9	3:19; 12:46
Christ not received by his own	1:11	4:44
being born to God and not of flesh	1:13	3:6; 8:41-42
seeing his glory	1:14	12:41
the 'one and only' Son	1:14, 18	3:16
truth in Jesus Christ	1:17	14:6
no one has seen God except the one who comes from God's side	1:18	6:46

Despite this, there are those who point to the difference in genre and language of the Prologue as evidence against its relationship to or coherence with the rest of the Gospel. One must admit that such differences allow for the question of a potential outside source from which the Evangelist borrowed his Prologue. Nevertheless, the source-theory questions that surround this Gospel often fail to take into account the thematic and stylistic unity which exists throughout the Gospel. Thus, whether the Evangelist borrowed from other sources to create the Prologue is not really a question of critical importance as it pertains to coherent unity of the book as a whole. Despite the different genre, and the stylistic and linguistic variations, one cannot deny that the thematic content and message of the Prologue not only invites the reader into the message of the Gospel, but also points to the rest of the Gospel as a unified presentation and

[26] This chart draws largely from that found in Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 111.

fleshing-out of the themes presented in the Prologue. It is therefore a fair assumption that the Prologue not only complements and coheres with the rest of the Gospel, but that it also exists as an integral part of the Fourth Gospel.

Methodology

The primary concern of this paper is the relationship between Valentinian Gnosticism and early church orthodoxy, especially in their individual exegeses of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel. The orthodox interpretation to the Prologue has survived in tradition as the normative interpretation. On the other hand, both Valentinianism as well as Valentinian exegesis to the Prologue, until recently, have largely been in a place of obscurity, given the lack of primary literature. Given this, it is necessary to begin with an introduction to Gnosticism in general: its origins, message and significant literature. Building upon this, the focus will then narrow to a presentation of Valentinianism and how, as a Gnostic sect, its relationship to the early church forced a theological crisis concerning the New Testament, especially in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.

After both Gnosticism, and more specifically Valentinianism, have been adequately introduced, a close reading and exegesis of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel as understood in Valentinian theology will be compared to a close reading and exegesis from my own perspective, which falls in step with that of the orthodox perspective. Both of these will follow an exegetical method based upon representative sources in order to give each a fair reading. A conclusion based on this comparison between these two exegetical interpretations will focus upon which interpretation, in light of the historical, cultural and theological *Sitz im Leben* of the author, appropriately understands and represents the message of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel.

Chapter 2

Gnosticism

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear and fair representation of Gnosticism, specifically focusing upon its origins and theological characteristics. Part one of this chapter will provide a survey of the history of Gnosticism. This will lead into part two, which will focus primarily upon Valentinianism and the specific theological characteristics attached to it.

Part I: The History of Gnosticism

It would be both impossible and naïve to assume that one may speak of Gnosticism as a clear, distinguishable and uniform theology. The history through which Gnostic thought spans, as well as the complexity and diversity of Gnostic theologies, makes the task of arriving at a clear definition very difficult. There are, however, certain common traits that are largely shared within the various Gnostic systems such as a strict dualism which negatively subjects all that is visible, tangible or "worldly" and the belief that "the only secure foundation is a world beyond which can be described only in negative terms, and to which man belongs in a hidden part of himself, and from this alone is deliverance to be expected."[27] Yet to define Gnosticism loosely as "the Hellenisation of Christianity" (Adolf van Harnack) fails both to do justice to, and to understand, the complexity of the history of Gnosticism.

Therefore, in order to narrow the scope, the focus of this paper is upon the second century Valentinian Gnostic sect. Historically, during the latter part of the second century, Valentinianism stood as the last great Gnostic school and was of great concern to the developing early Church. The written works of many church fathers focused primarily upon this Gnostic sect because of its influence upon and threat to early Christianity. Theologically, the Valentinians aligned themselves closely with orthodoxy,

[27] Rudolph. *Gnosis*, 33.

claiming to share in the church's history and accepting the literature of the New Testament; however, the Valentinian exegesis and interpretation of the New Testament pushed their theology in a very different trajectory than that of orthodoxy.

The developed Valentinianism of the second century was a product of a much larger history of Gnostic thought that had preceded it in a number of different, less developed forms. Valentinianism claims that the Fourth Gospel was written within a pre-existent Gnostic framework and that the author intentionally employs Gnostic language and themes. As Irenaeus noted, the Valentinians were in the practice of "making copious use of that (Gospel) according to John to illustrate their conjunctions."[28] In order for this to be true, so the argument goes, there must have existed, in some sense, a pre-Christian form, or forms, of Gnostic thought upon which the author would have relied.

Evidence indicates that there certainly did exist loose, pre-Christian forms of Gnostic thought, which would, over time, become more developed and defined. These forms of Gnostic thought certainly comprised the foundation for the future Valentinian Gnosticism; but the question that concerns the Fourth Gospel is whether there existed a coherent system of Gnostic thought that might have had direct influence upon its author. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to trace the origins of Gnostic thought from the Pre-Christian era up to the time of Christ.

Pre-Christian Gnosticism

The title of this subheading is potentially misleading given that Gnosticism, strictly defined as a coherent theological system, did not exist before the time of Christ. Nevertheless, there were traces of what were to become understood as "Gnostic" thought found throughout various pieces of literature that pre-date Christ. It must be noted, however, that Gnosticism proper is conspicuously non-existent before Christ. Gnosticism's pre-Christian component parts, like scattered puzzle pieces, independently contributed to what would become understood as the developed "Gnosticism" of the

[28] AH 3.11.7

second century A.D. The difficulty lies in attributing the title "Gnostic" or "Gnosticism," understood as a developed theology, to pre-existent elements, which ostensibly would be mis-characterized as such.

The congress on 'The Origins of Gnosticism,' in their struggle to categorize accurately such various and confusing conceptions of Gnosticism, met at Messina in 1966 and attempted to use the terms "pre-Gnostic" and "proto-Gnostic" to delineate these two divergent conceptions of the term. Their conclusion was to distinguish "pre-Gnostic" and "proto-Gnostic" thought. "Pre-Gnosticism" is simply the litany of various "Gnostic" ideas that existed seminally prior to the Christian era and would become the basis for the religion that would become "Gnosticism" proper. The title given to this definition, however, has met with some disagreement within scholarship for the reasons stated above. "Proto-Gnosticism" is the intermediate period in the historical Gnostic progression after the time of Christ where the shift occurred between the infancy of pre-Gnostic syncretistic Gnostic thought and the organized, developed theology of the second century A.D.

One conclusion can be deduced: that although Gnosticism became a strong theological force primarily after the inception and rise of early Christianity, it would be an historical mis-characterization to view Gnosticism simply as a heterodox theological system that stemmed from Christian origins. This conclusion, that Gnosticism has its roots before and outside of Christianity, is largely due to the work of modern scholarship, specifically the German *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of Bousset and Reitzenstein. In his work *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (1907), Wilhelm Bousset argued that the roots of Gnosticism were most likely found in pre-Christian Iranian and Babylonian religions. This was complemented by the work of Richard Reitzenstein, whose work in philology argued for the origins of Gnosticism to be found in Manicheism and Mandeism.[29]

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[29] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 32f.

Gnostic Themes in Pre-Christian Jewish Literature

Scholars in search of a pre-Christian Gnostic conception often point to apocalyptic Jewish literature as one source likely to have had significant influence on the origins of Gnosticism. As Robert McLachlan Wilson noted concerning Jewish influence on Gnosticism, "certain elements of Gnosticism were purely Jewish, and other, pagan elements were also derived from Diaspora Judaism, even although that was not the ultimate source."[30] Many of the apocalyptic Jewish writings present cosmogonies that, as the later Gnostic theologians would do, freely adopted and independently interpreted the history of the Old Testament as their own. In addition, the formal characteristics of apocalyptic Jewish literature, which include numerology, artificial claims to inspiration, the conflict between light and darkness and good and evil, and the notion of primordality with its revelations concerning creation and the fall, point to a potential source for what would develop into the Gnosticism of the second century.[31] Apocalyptic Jewish literature also promotes a dualist perspective of the world in which the present world is rejected in favor of a future eschatological age of redemption.

The apocalyptic writings, such as I Enoch, 4 Ezra ch.14, Jubilees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, reference "heavenly tablets" on which the secrets of the ages are recorded and intended to be read only by a few highly privileged people.[32] This notion finds great affinity with Gnosticism in that the idea of *gnosis* is received only by the "initiated". Due to the fact that this world is governed by evil, only the initiated few attain the revealed wisdom and resulting knowledge necessary for redemption. "The knowledge of God's mysteries guarantees salvation; knowledge, or cognition, and redemption are closely connected" in apocalyptic Jewish thought.[33]

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[30] Professor Gilles Quispel, *The New Testament and Gnosis*, eds. Utrecht in A.H.B Logan and A.J.M Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1983), 38.
[31] D.S Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 105.
[32] Ibid., 107ff. cf. I Enoch 81.2, 93.2
[33] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 32f.

Another proposed source for the development of Gnosticism in the late, inter-testamental Jewish literature is those writings which focused upon the hypostatization of Wisdom, which may have served as the prototype for the later Gnostic Redeemer, or Sophia.[34] Wisdom in the Jewish apocalyptic literature is personified as eternal, unsearchable, universal and the formative creative power in the world.[35] In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Wisdom is identified in "a manner analogous to that of the Stoic teaching concerning the all-pervading Logos."[36] Where the connection between a hypostatized Wisdom in Jewish literature and the Sophia figure of Gnosticism breaks down, however, is the fact that "in Judaism proper Wisdom was conceived of as a positive power and not as an evil or at best a misguided Demiurge."[37]

The liberty with which these esoteric expressions in Judaism interpret the history of the Old Testament, in addition to a cosmologically dualist perspective and the personification of Wisdom "are some of the features that cause many to look to heterodox...expressions in Judaism or to Jews, who if not already in revolt against their religion and its God soon moved in that direction, for the origins of Gnosticism."[38] This notion was promoted largely by twentieth-century scholars such as J.T. Sanders, R. Bultmann and W. Schmithals who note that "The influence of pre-Christian Gnosticism can also be discerned...particularly in speculations of late Judaism, e.g. the wisdom myth, as well as in the Qumran writings."[39]

The Qumran texts, which form part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, have been the proof texts of many who wish to point to the evidence of pre-Christian Gnostic thought. These

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[34] Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 146; cf. Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymn* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1971), 96; Walter Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 126; and Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 8.
[35] *Ecclesiasticus* 1:1, 6; 24:6, 3.
[36] Bruce Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957) 67; cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:17; 14:6, 3; 1:3.
[37] O. Betz, *Was am Anfang geschah*, in O. Betz *et al.* (eds), *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel* (1963), 40 quoted in Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 147.
[38] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 307.
[39] Schmithals in the preface to Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 8f.

scrolls were discovered on the West bank of the Dead Sea in 1947 and were written by a community that stood on the fringe of Judaism that "observed a strict piety of the law but at the same time held a range of ideas which exhibit links with Apocalyptic as well as with the emergent Gnosis."[40] One example of these "ideas" found in the Qumran texts, which were possibly foundational for Gnosticism, is that of dualism.

> And to love all the sons of light,
> each according to his lot in the plan of God;
> And to hate all the sons of darkness,
> each according to his guilt in the veangence of God. (1*QS* 1:9-11)[41]

It should be noted, however, that although the general dualist conception found in Qumran is comparable to that of Gnosticism, "it was not an absolute dualism...because it was subsequent to, inferior to and dependent upon an overriding and fervent monotheism."[42]

Some claim that the soteriology of Qumran points less to Israel's historical redemptive relationship with the Lord, and more toward a concept of salvific knowledge, found largely in the Hymns. The cosmological dualism, soteriological significance of knowledge and conception of God in the Dead Sea Scrolls is seen as an intermediate link between earlier apocalyptic Jewish literature and the more developed Gnostic thought. W. Schmithals, in the preface to R. Bultmann's *The Gospel of John*, argues that the influence of "pre-Christian Gnosticism" can be found in the Qumran writings.[43] The dating of the Qumran texts is difficult. "Because no document yet published bears an explicit date, Qumran scholars must rely on historical, archaeological, and paleographic data. Thus, the earliest documents from Qumran have been dated to the late third or early second century B.C.E."[44]

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[40] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 280.
[41] cf. 1*QS* 3:18-19 and 1*QH* 6:29-30; 14:11-12 as well as 1*QM* 1:1; 13:9-11
[42] James H. Charlesworth, *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 110.
[43] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 8; Rudolph also notes, "Qumran offers a certain link on the fringe of Judaism for the illumination of the origin of Gnostic ideas," Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 280.
[44] Ayala Sussman and Ruth Peled, eds, *Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (New York: George Braziller, 1993), 131.

Pre-Christian Jewish thought was also influenced by Greek Hellenistic philosophy, especially in the writings of Philo. The Platonic dualist philosophy of spirit and matter, body and soul, as well as the divine and the temporal, not only influenced inter-testamental Jewish thought, literature and exegesis of Scripture; it also served as a foundation for the later Gnostic systems that were so prevalent in the second century A.D.

Admittedly, this is a brief survey of pre-Christian "Gnostic" thought. Much more attention to the detail of the literature would allow for a more precise conclusion regarding the existence of "Gnostic" thought in pre-Christian literature. Nevertheless, given this brief overview of pre-Christian Gnostic ideas, certain conclusions may be drawn.

Narrowly defined as a specific theological system, there is no evidence of pre-Christian Gnosticism as it came to be understood in the second century, yet there is evidence for a broadly defined form or forms of pre-Christian "Gnostic" precursors. Four basic characteristics of pre-Christian Gnostic thought may be derived from an historical survey of pre-Christian literature.

> *First*, the postulation of an Absolute outside of the immanent world which is the source of Gnosis.
> *Second*, man as an intellectual immanent being partaking of the Gnosis.
> *Third*, the partaking as the way to overcome the material world, and as such, Gnosis as salvation.
> *Fourth*, Gnosis as understanding of the spiritually structured cosmos.[45]

As noted above, this broad conception of *gnosis* as it existed in the pre-Christian era *must* be distinguished from the later, more developed Gnostic belief systems that arose after the time of Christ.

The Gospel of John was written during this "proto-Gnostic" era, a time when Gnosticism was beginning to come into its own as a coherent theological system. There

[45] H. Goedicke, "The Gnostic Concept - Considerations about Its Origin", in U. Bianchi (ed.), *Studi di Storia Religiosa della tarda antichità*, pp.67-68 quoted in Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 15.

are many questions raised concerning what influence, if any, Gnostic theology may have played in the theology of John. Of primary importance is whether the author of John promotes what is known as a Gnostic "redeemer-myth," which will be discussed below.

Developed Gnosticism

Due to the lack of primary Gnostic literature, Gnosticism proper was understood for centuries through the polemic writings of the early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Origen and Clement of Alexandria. Much of that changed in the mid-twentieth century with the discovery of a series of Gnostic texts written in the Coptic language which were found in Egypt, known as the Nag Hammadi texts. Both the Qumran texts and the Nag Hammadi texts share certain common traits: each stands in critical opposition to their "official" religious counterpart from a fringe position and they also share a dualist perspective in rejecting all things worldly and held hope that there would be an eschatological deliverance which would provide deliverance of the soul.

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts provided a unique gift to scholarship dedicated to understanding the nature of Gnosticism. After the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, Gnostic theology was more clearly understood. The polemic writings of the early church fathers were no longer the primary means by which Gnosticism was known, and scholars became increasingly critical of what was seen as a mis-representation of the Gnostics by the heresiologists, written as fallacious straw-man polemic arguments. As the texts were restored and translated, the understanding of Gnosticism grew to include various sects that held different, but not necessarily contradictory beliefs.[46] No individual Gnostic sect laid claim to exclusivity of doctrine, thus leading to a Gnostic religion comprised of independent yet interwoven doctrines. The Nag Hammadi texts also contain Gnostic writings that demonstrate its relationship with Christianity: both strongly Christian and non-Christian texts are included in the Nag

[46] This, however, is also evident in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (AH).

Hammadi writings. Given this, it became increasingly difficult to arrive at a narrow definition of "Gnosticism".

One of the most significant developments that arose from research of the Nag Hammadi texts is the evidence that some Christian Gnostic texts have been secondarily Christianized, supporting the theory of a non-Christian origin of the Gnostic belief system. This theory had been postulated in the early twentieth century by the "*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*" of Gnostic scholars Bousset and Reitzenstein. This has direct impact for this endeavor in that it does not allow for a mis-characterization of Gnosticism as a renegade belief system that is simply divergent from Christianity. It does allow for the possibility that proto-Gnostic theology existed at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John. It also permits some scholars to claim that the author could possibly employ such a theology.

Gnostic Redeemer Myth

Central to the debate of the Gospel of John is the question over whether the author's Prologue introduces strictly Christian redemptive elements, or those of what is known as the Gnostic "redeemer myth". Many scholars of Gnosticism believe that the teaching of the Son of Man in the Gospels is not to be understood as a new redemptive-historical development in the history of Yahweh's relationship with and pursuit of man, but rather a Christianization of a pre-existent soteriological doctrine that carries far less Christian and far more Gnostic elements. Proponents of this view argue that this pre-existent doctrine would become historicized in the person of Jesus by the apostles and the early church. Two of the primary proponents of this view are R. Reitzenstein and R. Bultmann.

In his work *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur* (1904), Reitzenstein set out to prove the existence of a pre-Christian Gnostic "redeemer myth". In support of his position, Reitzenstein focused largely on the Greek

Hermetic tract *Poimandres* from Egypt, in addition to the Naassene Sermon and Mandean texts.

Poimandres is one text in a collection of Hermetic writings that finds some affinity with the Gospel of John. The Hermetic writings (Hermetica) are remnants of an extensive collection of literary pieces, the majority of which are recognized as originating in Egypt in the second and third centuries A.D. The Hermetica demonstrate a hybrid philosophy, employing elements of both Greek and Oriental thought, and promoting personal piety and purification as well as a rejection of material things.[47] Salvation in the Hermetica is found only in the knowledge of God.

In the Hermetic text *Poimandres*, "Anthropos," or Primal Man,

> falls into darkness and is there held captive, and can return again only after leaving behind some part of his being; this part forms the soul of light scattered in the world of the body (through the creation of the world and man), and for its redemption the part which returned to the beyond descends once again as a redeemer in order to redeem ('to gather together') the rest of his nature and so restore his original totality.[48]

Although Reitzenstein read this specific form of the myth into Gnostic theology, the broader idea of a redeemer who liberates the souls of men as particles of light that had been oppressed by the powers of darkness by means of knowledge (*gnosis*) of their identity with the redeemer does play a part in Gnostic theology.

Secondly, the *Naassene Sermon* in Hippolytus *Refutatio* V, was believed by Reitzenstein to be composed about 100 A.D. by a hellenized Oriental for a Phrygian Jewish community. A universalistic conglomeration of all mysteries is presupposed. These various mysteries tell the same story of one primal man who is called Adam, who exists in dual form: both as a non-individualized entity that holds sway over the universe and also as an individual soul that resides in every man. The souls of men are

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[47] Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1953), 14.

[48] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 121.

unconscious, or "slumbering", only to be awakened by this heavenly Adam and taken to the kingdom of God to which he belongs.[49] Reitzenstein held this as the foundation for Christian soteriology, noting that "We recognize that this purely pagan doctrine could and must be christianized."[50]

Thirdly, Reitzenstein (and later Bultmann, Schmithals and others[51]) employed support for his Redeemer Myth from Mandean literature. The Mandeans were a Semitic tribe which originally lived in the vicinity of the Jordan, and were closely connected with and influenced by Judaism. Reitzenstein noted the reliance of Mandean literature on Iranian religions, which have parallels in structure to the simpler, more fragmentary pattern of John, leading him to see the pattern of the Fourth Gospel as derivative of such literature.[52] As in the Naassene Sermon, the focus is dominated by the concept of rising from the dead. Here the Primal Man exists as the knowledge of the deity (*Manda d'Haije*), who slumbers in every person, yet wanders about as an unknown and invisible emissary to the earth testing the hearts and minds of men to see where he finds himself dwelling. The call to wake up is given, and upon the death of the body, he leads the divine part of the soul heavenward to exist with him as "Adam", the "world soul."[53]

The fundamental conception of the Redeemer Myth in developed Gnostic soteriology lies in what is understood as the 'redeemed redeemer'. Along the lines of the redeemer myth of Reitzenstein and Bultmann, Gnostic soteriology emphasizes

> the idea that the redeemer (*salvator*) and the one to be redeemed (*salvandus*) belong closely together and are sometimes difficult to keep apart, since the point of view may swiftly change from 'saviour' to 'saved' (*salvatus*) or 'to be saved' (*salvandus*) and vice versa. Behind this stands the conception, fundamental to gnostic soteriology, that both partners, Salvator and Salvandus, are of one nature, i.e. form parts of the world of light...The idea of the 'redeemed redeemer' is therefore indeed a logical and characteristic formulation of the gnostic redeemer conception, which unites redeemer and redeemed

[49] Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, sec.13, p.14.
[50] Ibid., sec.13, p.15.
[51] cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 8.
[52] Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, sec.13, p.15.
[53] Ibid., sec.14, p.16.

> very closely together, but it is only one variation of this. There is no uniform gnostic 'redeemer myth' such as theologians in particular have imagined.[54]

Given this analysis of K. Rudolph, the idea that Gnostic soteriology developed as a departure from Christianity, again, is a mis-understanding. Rather, it is a syncretistic conglomeration of various traditions from which the Gnostic "redeemer" became historicized in its personification of Christ as the redeemer figure.[55] Or, as Bultmann notes, "In Christian Gnosticism, the redeemer who becomes man was held to be Jesus. That is to say that the idea of the incarnation of the redeemer has in some way penetrated Gnosticism from Christianity; it is itself original Gnostic, and was taken over at a very early stage by Christianity, and made fruitful for Christology."[56]

The question here is whether this "redeemer myth" concept that stands outside the realm of Christianity existed in a pre-Christian form and whether or not the Gospel of John employs or presupposes such a redeemer myth. R. Bultmann believed that a proper exegesis of the Prologue of John "presupposed this Redeemer myth and could only be understood in light of the myth."[57] The primary problem for the Reitzenstein-Bultmann hypothesis is that most of the primary texts from which their theory is derived are all of a post-Christian date.[58] This suggests an illegitimate exercise in eisogetic import of later literature as a presupposition for the pre-dated Gospel of John.

Further, consideration of a pre-Christian Gnostic form of a redeemer myth must also consider apocalyptic Jewish literature, which, as has already been discussed, carried certain loosely-Gnostic themes within its theology. Bultmann assumed that the redeemer myth influenced the concepts of Sophia, Anthropos and Logos in the pre-Christian Jewish

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[54] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 122, 131.
[55] Ibid., 132.
[56] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 25f.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Yamauchi, *Pre Christian Gnosticism*, 22. The Naassene Sermon in Hippolytus *Refutatio* V (third century AD), book omega of the alchemist Zosimos (fourth century AD), book 8 of the Neoplatonist Jamblichus (fourth century AD).

literature.[59] In addition, Sanders does not allow for Christianity to have invented the cosmic dimensions of its christology without a dependence upon a prior myth in Judaism.[60] Yet Käsemann disagrees, suggesting that the concepts of Sophia, Anthropos and Logos in pre-Christian Jewish literature all stand historically prior to a developed redeemer myth, and are largely foundational to such an understanding. This is supported by the fact that no piece of pre-Christian Jewish literature contains a specific Gnostic redeemer myth, thus making "the chief arguments for this [Reitzenstein-Bultmann] hypothesis...logical ones which take what is common to the figures of Logos, Anthropos, Sophia, and the Christology of the New Testament and presuppose a common ancestor."[61] Such a presupposition is unwarranted, and given the later dates of the primary textual support for this hypothesis, it is a fair assumption that the author of John is not simply historicizing the myth through the personification of the redeemer-Logos of the Christ figure in his Prologue.

Such a conclusion is accepted by both scholars of Christian history as well as students of ancient Gnosticism. Stephen Neill asserts

> One question calls urgently for an answer. Where do we find the evidence for pre-Christian belief in a Redeemer, who descended into the world of darkness in order to redeem the sons of light? Where is the early evidence for the redeemed Redeemer, who himself has to be delivered from death? The surprising answer is that there is precisely no evidence at all. The idea that such a belief existed in pre-Christian times is simply a hypothesis and rests on nothing more than highly precarious inferences backwards from a number of documents which themselves are known to be of considerably later origin.[62]

Further, W. Schmithals, a student of Bultmann, expresses the need for modification of the pre-Christian Gnostic Redeemer myth in the Bultmannian understanding of the Gospel of John:

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[59] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 22ff.
[60] Sanders *The New Testament Christological Hymn*, 80.
[61] Ibid., 96ff.
[62] Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 179-180.

> The judgment of Bultmann (*Das Euangelium Johannes*, p.10): "However, the idea of the incarnation of the redeemer did not somehow penetrate Gnosticism from Christianity, but is originally Gnostic", appears to me accordingly to need correcting. The redeemer myth is undoubtedly Gnostic, but the special form of the myth which speaks of the incarnation of the redeemer in a concrete historical person is not proved in the pre-Christian era, not even in the documentation cited by Bultmann...[63]

It is clear that such sentiment, although opposed by some who continue to believe that the early apostolic writings of the New Testament are simply a Christian adoption of earlier mythologies, is largely shared by both Christian and Gnostic scholars. Given this, there are those who believe that the Gnostic Redeemer myth is a product of a Docetic Christology. This would mean that the author of the Gospel of John is not simply historicizing a redeemer myth, but rather introducing his own theology that is not based in Gnostic or Hellenistic origins. The former issue pertaining to a Docetic Christology is not of concern here, but the latter (the liberation of the Gospel from the binds of an assumed pre-Christian Gnostic Redeemer myth) allows for the argument that the author was rather employing Jewish historical language and theology. It will be shown in the exegetical analysis of the Prologue of John that this redeemer myth is excluded in the orthodox interpretation, but is assumed as the proper hermeneutical framework within Valentinian Gnostic exegesis.

Having presented a brief overview of the history and origins of Gnosticism, the focus will now shift to the "developed" Gnosticism of the second century A.D., specifically the Gnostic sect Valentinianism.

Part II: Valentinian Gnosticism

The Gnostic theologian Valentinus lived during the second century when both Christianity and Gnosticism were on the rise. As an early Christian, Valentinus studied and worked within the church, even being put forward as a potential bishop before he was forced out of orthodox circles for being considered a heretic.[64] Upon his departure,

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[63] Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, 133, n.125.
[64] AV 4.

Valentinus continued his teaching, and his theology would become the basis for the last great Gnostic school, founded in the second century A.D.

The nature of Valentinian Gnosticism focuses largely on a specific Gnostic cosmogony, which serves as the foundation for Valentinian Gnostic soteriology. Valentinian cosmogony, specifically, speaks of the inevitable entrapment of the souls of all men, remedied only by the liberation which is found only in the knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Divine. The entire system of Valentinian cosmogony, very akin to that of Basilides, is very tedious and complicated, but it does provide the foundation for their exegesis of the Prologue of John.

Valentinianism was not a stylistically uniform theology, but rather an amorphous group of diversified sects which held much in common theologically; yet no individual component sect of Valentinianism claimed exclusivity, which allowed for this heterogeneous mixture of semi-variant theologies to all be held under the banner of Valentinianism. The glue which held this theology together was the core teaching of Valentinus, which, despite divergence, is visibly interwoven throughout all Gnostic theologies which claim to be Valentinian.

Unfortunately, much of what is known of Valentinianism is found in the heresiological literature of the Church fathers who sought to discredit this heterodox theology. Nevertheless, there is a strong coherence among the Church fathers in their account of Valentinianism, which stresses the dependability of the description given by Irenaeus.[65] Although one cannot claim exact representation of the Valentinian system from a polemic text such as one authored by Irenaeus, it is unlikely that his presentation of Valentinianism is a theological straw man which presents a perforated representation of the Gnostic theology. Irenaeus' account is corroborated, although admittedly in large part by other heresiological literature. Many of the accounts of Valentinianism are found

[65] Cf. François-M.-M. Sagnard, *la gnose valentinienne et la témoignage de Sain Irénée* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin., 1947).

in the heresiological literature of the aforementioned Irenaeus[66] as well as Hippolytus,[67] Origen,[68] Clement of Alexandria[69] and Epiphanius.[70] With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, more features of Valentinianism were discovered and core features provided by Irenaeus were corroborated. This allows the account given by Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* to at least provide a good starting point for presenting Valentinian theology. It will be this account by Irenaeus that will inform the following representation of the Valentinian cosmogony.

Valentinian Cosmogony

The Valentinians believe in a perfect, pre-existent Aeon called by the names Proarche, Propator and Bythus, who is both invisible and incomprehensible. Along side this Proarche existed the (synchronous) Ennoea (Thought) who is also called Charis (Grace) and Sige (Silence). From these two aeons emerge the beginning of all things, from which came Nous, also called Monogenes and Father, as well as Aletheia. These four (Proarche, Ennoea, Nous and Aletheia) constitute the first Tetrad of the Valentinian system.

Nous then brought forth Zoe and Logos, thus constituting the foundation for the entire Gnostic pleroma. From these two were brought forth Anthropos and Ecclesia. These eight aeons constitute the first Ogdoad, the root and substance of all things.[71]

A total of thirty aeons, the last of which being Sophia, were subsequently brought forth: twelve additional aeons from the conjunction of Anthropos and Ecclesia, and ten from the conjunction of Logos and Zoe. These thirty aeons are known to none except those that possess knowledge (*gnosis*).[72]

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[66] *Against Heresies* 1.1-8, 11-12, 13-21.
[67] *Refutatio VI* 29-36.
[68] *Commentary on the Gospel of John.*
[69] *Excerpta ex Theodoto.*
[70] *Panarion* 31:5-8; 35:4; 35-36.
[71] AH 1.1.1.
[72] Ibid., 1.1.2.

The events of the world take their disastrous course as a result of the "passion" of Sophia to comprehend the greatness of the Father apart from her consort, a relationship held only by the aeon Nous. Her failed attempt "plays an essential role for, in the last resort, the world events take their course by reason of (Sophia's) fall which was caused by its unbridled striving, motivated by inquisitiveness, after the unknown father of the Pleroma, as by the 'ignorance' or the 'error' thus called forth, the 'material substance' arises."[73]

Peace thus being disturbed among the aeons of the pleroma, the creation of "Christ" and the "Holy Spirit" are necessitated to restore peace. Yet that which came into existence as a result of Sophia's failed endeavor, her passion (*enthymesis*, the disastrous result of her failed attempt), was separated from her after Sophia was restored to the pleroma. This passion (*enthymesis*) was subsequently forced outside the pleroma, and became the "lower Sophia" or Achamoth. To relieve the sufferings of this expelled *enthymesis*, Jesus (*soter*) is brought forth from the full participation of all thirty aeons as "the perfect fruit".[74]

Achamoth (also called Sophia after her father, and Holy Spirit after the spirit which is with Christ) sought to return to the pleroma, but was obstructed by Horos, the boundary of the pleroma. As a result of her grief and fear, Achamoth experienced "passions" of her own, the collection of which is understood as the substance from which this corporeal world was made. Her desire to return to the pleroma brought forth every soul of this world.[75]

In her anguish, Achamoth set out to form a world similar to that of the pleroma from which she was banned. She therefore creates the creator of the world out of the physical substance, the Demiurge, who is an image of the first Father. The Demiurge is ignorant of the pleroma, and through his ignorance all things of the cosmos are created.

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[73] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 320; cf. AH 1.2.2-1.2.3.
[74] AH 1.2.6.
[75] Ibid., 1.4.2.

He created and oversaw both the seven heavens (the Hebdomad) which carry an intelligent nature and earth. Achamoth, the creator of the Demiurge creator, recessed into the eighth heaven, which is called the Intermediary. Given this, he who is incapable of recognizing any other spiritual entities, thought himself alone as God, who declared to his people, "I am God and besides me there is no one else."[76]

"What is essential, in addition to the teaching about the aeons, is the role of 'Ignorance' as the cause of the material-psychic world or matter, and the threefold division into body, soul and spirit in which a limited capability for salvation is attributed to the soul, which is shaped with the help of the spirit towards the attainment of knowledge."[77] This threefold division is characteristic of the three kinds of man that exist in the material world as a result of events within and outside the pleroma: hylics (or cholics), psychics and pneumatics. The first of these is inextricably bound to the material world and cannot experience salvation. The second, psychics, are capable of salvation, and it is for this group of mankind that Christ finally came from heaven. The third group, the pneumatics, have "an aboriginal affinity" with the pleroma through the pneumatic seed received from the second Wisdom (the Holy Spirit) and are not in need of salvation because they possess a triple nature and are destined to ascend on high.[78] "Humankind, though, remained ignorant of this fact, as did the Demiurge, and accepted the reality presented to it by the Demiurge; that is, of a universe guided by him, the alleged God and creator of all. Human ignorance of reality above the Hebdomad, and of the pneumatic element which has entered the world, allows the world to continue existing as it does, and facilitates the worship of its creator as the supreme God."[79]

This is an admittedly brief and conceptually loaded account of the Valentinian cosmogony. Given the brevity of this paper, however, it is necessary to depend upon a

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[76] Ibid., 1.5.3-4; Is. 45:5f, 46:9.
[77] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 322.
[78] Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 106.
[79] Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, 3.4.1.

simple, cursory understanding of the Valentinian cosmogony. This broad presentation will be fleshed out more in examining Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue of John.

Valentinian Soteriology

Given the Valentinian cosmogony, man, as a creation of the Demiurge, is separated from the pleroma; but has the innate desire to ascend to the knowledge of and association with this higher realm. This separation in Christian soteriology exists as a result of the sin and fall of Adam first, and, as a result, all of mankind as well.[80] In Christianity sin is understood as any action which man commits that stands contrary to the nature and law of God, and is an affront to the holy and pure nature of the Divine. Within Valentinianism, sin is understood in a very different context.

"Sin in Valentinianism refers to a human act or thought not in harmony with the supreme God or Father," who is known by the names Proarche, Propator and Bythus in the Valentinian cosmogony.[81] Therefore sin as it is understood within orthodoxy is not regarded as such within Valentinianism, because they believe they hold the knowledge of the "supreme God" to whom they are morally responsible. In addition, the moral judge within Christian soteriology is the Demiurge, who exists as a lesser god, ignorant of the pleroma which places him on the bottom of the divine hierarchy of Gnosticism.

The cause of sin in those capable of *gnosis* (psychics and pneumatics) is ignorance of the Father and/or the tension of their hylic nature which "poses a constant internal threat" to act in evil.[82] Sin, therefore, is individualized and can only be overcome within one's own grasp of and adherence to *gnosis* ("knowledge"). This *gnosis* descended in and through the Son and is available to those capable of receiving it. This attainment in addition to the spiritual rite of baptism is what justifies the Gnostic in Valentinianism.[83]

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[80] cf. Rom. 5:12-19.
[81] Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism,* 118.
[82] Ibid., 119.
[83] Exc 78.2.

Valentinian soteriology therefore plays out in three different ways corresponding to the three different groups of men which exist in the cosmos. (1) The hylics are inevitably headed for destruction and have no hope for the attainment of *gnosis*, and therefore no hope of salvation. (2) The pneumatics are essentially handed a free pass in that their reception of *gnosis* usurps any power that the antithetical hylic nature may have had on them. Essentially they are sinless. (3) The psychics then hang in the balance: certainly capable of attaining salvation through *gnosis*, while at the same time susceptible to falling into the same fate shared by the hylics.

The Valentinian perspective on those who call themselves "Christians" is that they are capable of salvation as well, but only if they are led into a knowledge of the true *gnosis*, to which they lay claim. Without this, the naïve that comprise orthodoxy are doomed to share the same fate as they hylics, with no hope of acceptance into the Pleroma.

One can see here the two qualitatively different perspectives of Valentinianism and orthodoxy. This distinction is representative of the divergent exegeses of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, especially since both groups claim that the Gospel is representative of their theology. The Valentinians consider a *prima facie* reading of the language and message of the author as a naïve, illegitimate reference to the world in which the Demiurge acts in ignorance as the true deity. Redemption to this god is not true redemption, for it excludes any redemption to the Pleroma. For the Valentinians, the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, and the language used in it, are saturated with Pleromic as well as Gnostic soteriological overtones. The redemptive picture painted by the author in the Prologue can only be properly understood by those who have received *gnosis*- who understand the Pleromic import attached to the language such that it presents a redemption that supersedes that of orthodoxy, which, without *gnosis*, are incapable of seeing the greater redemption to which the author is referring.

Valentinianism and Christianity

The divergence in soteriological perspectives hits at the much larger divide between Gnosticism and orthodoxy. It must be made very clear that these two groups did not worship the same God in different ways. On the contrary, perhaps the primary underlying reason for the heresiologists to have written so extensively against the Gnostics in the second century is that their religion was a direct affront to Christianity, and for them to have "borrowed" the Gospel message (and for that matter much of the Judaeo-Christian history of redemption) as a proof text for a completely foreign theological system threatens the integrity, authority, authenticity and stability of the early church.

The difficulty here lies in the confusion of seeing why the parallelism of themes, language, etc. that exist between the two theologies was as strong an affront as the heresiologists saw it. In particular, the Valentinians who were aligned so closely with early Christianity were very difficult to distinguish from those believers who belonged in the orthodox camp. For example the Valentinians would recite the orthodox creed, and the language which they used to describe God largely coincided with that of orthodoxy.[84] In addition, the Valentinians described God as "a sole Lord and God...For he is unbegotten... in the proper sense, then, the only Father and God is the one whom no one else begot. As for the universe, he is the one who begot and created it."[85]

This only fueled the fire of the heresiologists who sought to expose these imposters as wolves in sheep's clothing. As Irenaeus noted regarding the Valentinians, "such persons are, to outward appearance, sheep, for they seem to be like us, from what they say in public, repeating the same words that we do; but inwardly they are wolves."[86] Irenaeus' frustration that the Valentinians were ostensibly indistinguishable from Christians was likely the catalyst for his massive work *Refutation and Overthrow of*

[84] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 32.
[85] TT 51.24-52.6.
[86] AH 3.16.6.

Falsely So-Called Gnosis, also known as *Against Heresies*, written to instruct those considered to be naïve to the threat posed by the Valentinians.

Additionally, public confession and private belief were two different things within Valentinianism. In private they insisted on discriminating between the orthodox image of God (as master, king, lord, creator and judge) and the true God which these terms represent.[87] The false association of the orthodox between such terms with the Valentinian Demiurge is replaced by the Valentinians with what they deemed the true referent: the Primal Principle, or Proarche, understood only by those who had received *gnosis*. As the author of the *Gospel of Philip* notes, these names can be

> very deceptive, for they divert our thoughts from what is accurate to what is inaccurate. Thus, one who hears the word "God" does not perceive what is accurate, but perceives what is inaccurate. So also with "the Father," and "the Son," and "the Holy Spirit," and "life," and "light," and "resurrection," and "the Church," and all the rest–people do not perceive what is accurate, but they perceive what is inaccurate.[88]

The God of Christianity, the Demiurge, inaccurately makes the false claim to be the sole ruler of all. The ignorance which underlies this claim also underlies those Christians who "inaccurately" perceive "God" as the Demiurge. What allows the Valentinians to take such a condescending position is their attainment of *gnosis*. This *gnosis* opens the minds of those who have received it so that they come to know the true source of divine power and their true spiritual origin. When pitted against early Christianity and the infancy of the developing Church, "Gnosis offers nothing less than a theological justification for refusing to obey the bishops and priests!"[89]

The authority of the Church does not fall upon those who are initiated into *gnosis*, rather the Church's authority is viewed by the Valentinians as akin to that of the Demiurge whom they represent: illegitimate and ignorant. Despite the fact that the

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[87] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 32.
[88] GP 53.24-34.
[89] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 38.

Valentinians rejected the authority of the early Church, it was the history of the Church which provided the open source of Valentinian tradition, while the other source, *gnosis*, was secret.

These two sources lay at the foundation of their exegesis of the New Testament. Specifically, as it pertains to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, two very different exegetical trajectories exist. The first belongs to orthodoxy who sees the message of the Prologue as pointing to creation and the nature of the relationship that exists between God and his creation. Although the Valentinians accept the Fourth Gospel as part of the "open source" of their tradition, the other "secret source," that of *gnosis*, takes the trajectory of the message of the Prologue in a very different direction. The trajectory of the Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue does not point back to the creative acts of the Demiurge, but rather to the original pleroma and the soteriological significance of the Logos as the means by which one is able to be redeemed back into the higher world of the Aeons.

Valentinianism and the Early Church

The relationship between the early Church and Valentinianism has been the source of much speculation. The two axes upon which such speculation exists lie largely on political and theological lines. The question over why the orthodox literature survived in relation to the demise of Gnostic literature can be painted with any number of different brushes, but it primarily comes back to theological and political speculation.

Many who are skeptical of the early church operate under a hermeneutic of suspicion, believing that those in a position of authority saw the political potential in creating an organized church that would stand as the intermediary between God and men. If the Church were to exist in this position, it would provide those in authority with an extraordinarily large amount of power and influence. By establishing the Church on the model of divine authority, one would see God's authority as being mediated through the Church hierarchy. This would provide the exclusivity needed by the church to position

itself as *the* dominant theological force. Many who support this position point to the political status of the Church in later history as proof of the desire for political power among the early Church. But such an *ex post facto* argument carries little weight. In relationship to the Gnostic tradition of the same time, the authority of the early Church was in jeopardy and the existence of the church stood in a shaky position against the political pressures of the Roman empire.

This Gnostic heterodox theology was positioned essentially as an alternative to the organized, "official" religion of orthodoxy. The Gnostics offered a direct, unmediated relationship with the divine which they held as being superior to that of the orthodox Church. Rather than worshiping the god of the cosmos, Valentinianism offered the means to worship and be in relationship with the Father, Proarche, who stands above all and is supreme over everything that exists, including the orthodox god, negatively called the Demiurge by the Valentinians. In addition, rather than offering a hierarchical structure of clergy and laity as the early Church had implemented, the Valentinian Gnostics refused to acknowledge such distinctions. "Instead of ranking their members into superior and inferior 'orders' within a hierarchy, they followed the principle of strict equality."[90] This position, however, possibly proved the most detrimental to the survival of Valentinianism, for the organization and structure of the early Church, with an ever-growing amount of power, were able to essentially wipe out the unorganized Valentinian, and overall Gnostic theology.

The orthodox Church would "win" this theological struggle and as a result, it sought to do away with that which could continue to pose a threat. Thus, much of the literature of the Gnostics was destroyed and the orthodox Church would maintain its claim to the truth over against Gnosticism for centuries.

This, however, changed in the mid-twentieth century with the discovery of the Coptic Gnostic writings of the Nag Hammadi library. For the first time in ages,

[90] Ibid., 41.

Gnosticism was able to be taken on its own terms. The survival of this literature and the message of its theology once again fueled the fire in the debate over why orthodoxy survived at the demise of Gnosticism.

There are *some* inaccuracies in the heresiological representation of the Gnostics, essentially the only available Gnostic sources before the Nag Hammadi discovery, which leant some weight to the skeptical notion that the early Church fathers intentionally mis-characterized the Gnostic position in order to support their polemic. The question regarding the illegitimacy of these Gnostic texts in the sight of orthodox tradition once again pointed to the political dominance of the early Church over the inferior Gnostics.

It is certainly fair and accurate to ascribe the dominance of the early Church over Valentinianism, *in part*, to the strength and organization of the Church. Many of the facts *seem* to point to a political motivation for orthodoxy to eliminate Valentinianism, and Gnosticism in general. This political perspective does provide a cogent explanation for the success of the Church, but largely at the expense of its integrity. One must be careful in attaching potentially unwarranted political motivations to the early Church, which was still in its infancy during the height of Valentinianism and was more likely fighting for survival than for political power. Thus, in examining the historical relationship between Valentinianism and orthodoxy, it *must* be noted that the battle which existed between them fell primarily upon theological lines.

The other primary perspective from which to view early Christianity's rejection of Valentinianism lies in the protection and preservation of a theology which was threatened by a foreign, Gnostic element. The strong polemic and, at times, scathing language of the heresiologists can also be seen as representative of the desperation that existed in defending the "truth" of orthodoxy. Those concerned with maintaining the integrity of the early Church understood well the threat posed by a tangential heterodox theology based largely upon philosophical assumptions that completely undermined and usurped the authenticity of Christianity. Valentinians sought to "cunningly allure the simple-

minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them" by means of their "specious and plausible words" such that those who would listen to the Valentinian theology would be "unable...to distinguish falsehood from truth."[91] The early Church fathers viewed Valentinianism as a cancer that "abused the Scriptures by endeavoring to support their own system out of them" and would eventually destroy the Church, unless serious action was taken.[92] The early Church recognized that, given such a divergent theology, there could be no peaceful co-existence between Valentinianism and orthodoxy. So it fought back.

This polarity of exegetical perspectives will be made clearer in the following chapter where Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue is examined.

[91] AH 1.1.1.
[92] Ibid., 1.9.1.

Chapter 3

Valentinian Exegesis of the Prologue of John

As noted in the previous chapter, the hermeneutic under which Valentinian exegesis operates stresses the non-literal interpretation of scripture. The basic error in the trajectory of orthodox exegesis, according to Valentinianism, is the "preoccupation with the historical reality of Jesus" in which the orthodox mistake literal "historical *data* for spiritual truth."[93] The Gospels as biographies focus too much on external, factual portrayals at the expense of the internal spiritual truth which these portrayals signify.

Valentinianism holds that the Gospels were written as allegories, intended to be spiritually understood by those who had received *gnosis*. This presupposes a different hermeneutic, which is established in the relationship between the `Valentinian myth of redemption based upon its cosmogony and its derivative theology. As seen in Valentinian cosmogony, the historical perspective of the relationship of the Divine is qualitatively different in Valentinianism than in orthodoxy. Thus, the theology which is derived from the Valentinian redemptive history is also very different, causing the Gnostic exegete to interpret the Gospel in light of the "true knowledge" (*gnosis*) possessed by the elite, to whom is given an understanding of "the great and ineffable mystery" which is hidden behind the text.[94] Valentinian exegesis, therefore, focuses on a spiritual interpretation of the canonical literature which seeks to uncover the deeper spiritual force of the language.

In examining a Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, three Gnostic texts will be primarily drawn upon as representative of Valentinian Gnosticism. Heracleon, a disciple of Valentinus, wrote a commentary on the Fourth Gospel, recorded in the writings of Origen, which is considered to be a vital source for understanding Gnostic exegesis.[95] In addition, the writings of Ptolemy, also a Valentinian Gnostic

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[93] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), 11, 14.
[94] Ref 5.8.27.
[95] (CJ) *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Origen, ed. Allan Menzies, D.D. *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol.9. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

theologian whose work is recorded in Irenaeus, will provide much of the source literature.[96] Both Heracleon and Ptolemy were considered by Irenaeus and other heresiologists as representative of Valentinian theology, and thus provide much of the foundation and direction for the following exegetical analysis.[97] Finally, the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*,[98] a collection of sayings from various Valentinian theologians assumed under a title bearing Theodotus' name and recorded in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, provides necessary material in presenting the Valentinian exegetes of the Prologue on their own terms.

The methodology for examining the following Valentinian exegesis is directly influenced by the various exegetical possibilities within Valentinian interpretation. To elaborate, the Valentinian interpretation of the Prologue rests upon which aspect of the Valentinian cosmogony stands as the interpretive grid for exegesis. As noted earlier, given that Valentinian exegesis relates directly to the three stages of their cosmogony (the *pleroma* of the aeons, the *kenoma* ['emptiness'] into which Sophia fell, and the *cosmos* of the Demiurge), there are therefore three potential interpretive frameworks upon which Valentinian exegesis can fall. Thus, the key hermeneutical principle within Valentinian exegesis as compared to that of orthodoxy is that "Whoever says that all things are derived from one (principle) is deceived; whoever says (that they are derived) from three, speaks truth, and gives the exposition concerning the whole."[99] This is not to say that each verse commands a three-fold interpretation, rather "Some passages...seem to be regarded as specifically appropriate to certain contexts."[100] Given this, the methodological structure in presenting the Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue to the

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[96] (AH) *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, ed. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson LL.D. *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.1. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
[97] AH 4.19.2; 1.8.5.
[98] (Exc)*The Excerpta ex Theodoto*, Clement of Alexandria, ed. R. McL. Wilson. In W.Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
[99] Ref 5.8.1.
[100] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 32.

Fourth Gospel will focus on these three interpretive grids, when it is "appropriate" to the verse.

In order to clarify how a three-directional exegesis within Valentinianism operates, consider an example from the Prologue. The most clear example is found in v.3 with the term "all things" as it is used to describe what was created by the Logos.[101] In his commentary on the Prologue, Ptolemy interprets "all things" within a pleromic framework and thus interprets the term as representative of the entirety of the pleromic aeons.[102] Theodotus interprets the verse within a framework based upon the kenoma and thus interprets "all things" as the "external elements" which exist outside the Pleroma and above the cosmos.[103] Finally, both Ptolemy, in his second exegetical interpretation of the Prologue found in his letter to Flora, and Heracleon also interpret "all things" within a framework of the cosmos and thus regard this phrase as those elements which exist in the cosmos.[104] Thus, there are three potential, although not necessary, trajectories for Valentinian exegesis. Each individual interpretation rests upon what aspect of the Valentinian cosmogony is assumed by the exegete.

[101] A more in depth exegetical analysis of this phrase will be given below.
[102] AH 1.8.5.
[103] Exc 45.3.
[104] CJ 2.8.

Chart of Valentinian Exegetical Referents

Given the complexity of the Valentinian three-fold exegesis, the following chart has been comprised in order to give the reader a hermeneutical breakdown of the various exegetical trajectories within Valentinianism.[105]

Term	*Definition of the term within all three exegeses*
vv.1-2	
arche	Pleromic Aeon, also called *monogenes*, generated from *theos*
theos	The pleromic Father who emits all things
Logos	Pleromic Aeon from whom is formed all of the other Aeons

	Pleroma	*Kenoma*	*Cosmos*
v.3			
panta	The Pleroma	The elements, Sophia	The cosmos (and its contents)
di' autou	Logos of the Tetrad	Saviour sent as "fruit of the pleroma" into the kenoma	The Logos that is revealed in cosmic creation, and Saviour in the cosmos
egeneto	came into being and form	came into being and form	came into being and form
v.4			
en auto	in the Logos of the Tetrad	in the Christ, Logos, "fruit of the Pleroma"	in the Saviour in the cosmos and in "pneumatic *anthropoi*"
egeneto	came into being and form	came into being and form	came into being and form
zoe	Zoe, syzygos of the Logos in the Tetrad	the restored Sophia, syzygos of the Saviour, archetype of the ecclesia	the Saviour who is the pneumatic "life" of the "pneumatics" (ecclesia)
v.14			
Logos	pleromic Aeon	Saviour; gave form to all things; "fruit of Pleroma"	Saviour
doxan	possessed by pleromic Aeon Monogenes	possessed by the Saviour in diminished form	possessed by the Saviour in diminished form
monogenes	pleromic member of the 1st Tetrad, reveals *gnosis* to the other Aeons	a *type* of the Aeon, Monogenes, "Saviour"	a type of the Aeon Monogenes, "Saviour"

[105] The chart of the referents for verses three and four above borrows from a chart taken from Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 35.

v.1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Ptolemy, in his commentary to the Prologue, presents an exegesis that is based upon a hermeneutic of the Pleroma. The divergence in exegesis from that of orthodoxy abruptly begins with the interpretation of the second word, *arche*. Arche, traditionally translated "beginning", is not interpreted as a reference to time, but as one of the pleromic aeons, which existed with Theos and Logos. Ptolemy argues that in his Prologue, John is "wishing to set forth the origin of all things," and here in v.1 the author introduces the three main sources from which everything originates and their relationship to each other.

> Having first of all distinguished these three- God, the Beginning, and the Word- he again unites them, that he may exhibit the production of each of them, that is, of the Son and of the Word, and may at the same time show their union with one another and with the Father. For "the beginning" is in the Father, and of the Father, while "the Word" is in the beginning and of the beginning. Very properly, then, did he say, "In the beginning was the Word," for He was in the Son; "and the Word was with God," for He was the beginning; "and the Word was God," of course, for that which is begotten of God is God.[106]

v.2 He was in the beginning with God.

Verse 2, Ptolemy says, "discloses the order of production." In other words, the hierarchy of God (the Father), Arche and Logos is defined. The pleromic hierarchy exists as such:

> (1) The Father, who "Emits all things";
> (2) The Arche, also called *monogenes* and *theos*, being "generated from *theos*";
> (3) The Logos, also called *theos*, for the same reason.[107]

v.3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Verse 3 provides Valentinian exegesis with the hermeneutical key phrase, "all things", which, in the three-fold exegetical system of Valentinianism, is interpreted as either "all things" of the pleroma, kenoma or cosmos, depending on which hermeneutical

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[106] AH 1.8.5.; also, compare the last line with a mis-interpretation of John 3:6.
[107] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 27; cf. AH 1.8.5.

framework is assumed. As noted above, Ptolemy's commentary on the Prologue assumes a hermeneutic of the Pleroma, where "all things" refers to the Aeons of the Pleroma. Thus he says, "the Logos was the author of form and beginning to all the Aeons that came into existence after Him."[108] Ptolemy's premise is "the metaphysical theory that *being* and *knowing* are exact correlates. What exists 'seminally' in the mind (the *arche*, or *monogenes*, who is also called *nous*) must be given 'form' in order to be considered rationally comprehensible, or, synonymously, actually existent."[109] In other words, the Father provides the external being (*ousia*) for all of the Aeons, and the Logos, from the *ousia* received from the Father, provides the Aeons their formation; thus making the Logos "the Father of all those (Aeons) who were to come after him, and the beginning and fashioning of the entire Pleroma."[110]

Although this exegesis is symmetrical to that found in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* (Exc) 6-7a, it does change beginning in Exc 45ff to present an exegesis based upon the kenoma and the creation of its "external elements". Here, the referent of "him" in v.3 through whom all things are made is not the Logos, but the Saviour, who was sent forth from the Pleroma by the Father to the kenoma where Sophia existed. "When Sophia saw him, she recognized him as similar to the light which had left her, and she ran to him, rejoiced, and worshipped."[111] The Saviour then "bestows on her the form according to knowledge and healing from her passions" which he removed from her and made them into substances. "So, by the appearance of the Saviour, Sophia becomes passionless and what is outside (of the Pleroma) is created. For all things were made by him and without him was not anything made."[112] The passions which the Saviour removed from Sophia and made into substances began first as incorporeal matter and then "into compounds and bodies."

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[108] AH 1.8.5.
[109] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 27.
[110] AH 1.1.1.
[111] Exc 43.2-44.1.
[112] Ibid., 45.2.

Thus, given a hermeneutic based upon the Valentinian kenoma, "all things" in John 1:3 refers to "external elements." "Through him" is in reference to the Saviour who descended from the Pleroma to Sophia, and "came into being" refers to taking the passions of Sophia and molding them into incorporeal matter and bodies.

The third exegetical trajectory within Valentinianism for this verse is based upon a hermeneutic of the cosmos. In the Pleroma translation above, Ptolemy, in his commentary, understood "all things" as the Aeons of the Pleroma; yet in his Letter to Flora he presents a separate interpretation in which "all things" refers to the creation of the world. The fact that Ptolemy speaks clearly of two different interpretations of v.3 in his commentary and his Letter to Flora ought not to be seen as arbitrary or conflicting, but rather it demonstrates the flexibility within Valentinian exegesis.

Initially, a cosmic interpretation would seem incongruous with Valentinianism and more aligned with the orthodox interpretation which insists that "all things" refers to the creation.[113] A close examination of Heracleon's commentary assists in making sense of this cosmic hermeneutic.[114] "All things", according to Heracleon, refers to "the cosmos and its contents" and the Logos referred to in v.3 is not a reference to the Logos Aeon of the Pleroma, but rather the Saviour who was sent out from the Pleroma to become the agent of creation.[115] A *prima facie* read of Heracleon's exegesis would seem fully compatible with that of orthodoxy, just as Irenaeus designates that "from all things nothing is excluded."[116] However, Heracleon's conception does diverge from the orthodox understanding. According to Heracleon, "all things" excludes "what he considers divine," but "what he regards as purely evil is, that and nothing else, the all

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[113] AH 5.18.2.
[114] Extent fragments of Heracleon give his exegesis beginning at v.3 and are absent of any direct reference to the Pleroma or Sophia (kenoma).
[115] CJ 2.8.
[116] AH 1.22.1.

things."[117] Heracleon's position illustrates well the Gnostic dualist perspective which regards the things of the cosmos as inherently evil, while that which is spiritual is good.

The Logos through whom "all things" were created also diverges from the orthodox perspective in Heracleon's cosmos interpretation of v.3. Heracleon does not regard the Logos as the pleromic Aeon who facilitated the emergence of the divine world of the Pleroma (a pleromic interpretation), but rather regards the Logos of v.3 as the "operating agent" who caused the Demiurge to "create" the contents of the cosmos.[118] According to Heracleon's emphasis on the cosmic aspect of Valentinian cosmogony, the Logos as "operating agent" is understood as the Saviour, or Christ, who is manifested as creator and saviour of the cosmos.

This coincides closely with the interpretation given in Ptolemy's commentary in that he identifies the Logos, by whom all things exist as the Saviour; yet perhaps further clarification is needed in understanding why this third exegetical interpretation falls out of step with orthodoxy. Resolution to this dilemma once again revolves around understanding more clearly the nature and structure of Valentinian cosmogony. It is understood that the Saviour molded the passions of Sophia into incorporeal matter and bodies, and as a result, Sophia acted through the Demiurge in his creation of the cosmos. Yet, "He did not know her who was acting through him and believed that, being industrious by nature, he was creating by his own power."[119] In understanding this conception of the three creators of the cosmos – Sophia who produces the basic materials, the Saviour who "moulds" the materials of her passion, and the Demiurge who "orders" the materials and governs the world in ignorance of the other two – it becomes evident that the creation ultimately owes its existence to the Saviour who acted as the original creative force. Nevertheless, the creation is credited to the Demiurge who "creates in an

[117] CJ 2.8.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Exc 49.1; 46.1-49.2.

immediate sense."[120] This exegesis of v.3 is incompatible with orthodoxy in that, again, the authority and supremacy of the Lord, called the Demiurge by the Valentinians, is superseded by their independent cosmogony originating in the Pleroma.

The three trajectories of Valentinian exegesis are clearly seen in their three-fold interpretation of John 1:3. Each interpretation is driven by which stage of the Valentinian "mythic history" is assumed, "each dynamically devolving from the prior stage, and issuing finally in the creation of the cosmos."[121]

***v.4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

Verse 4, building upon the three-fold exegesis of v.3, is also exegeted in light of the Valentinian tri-jectory. Returning to Ptolemy's pleromic interpretation, the Aeon "Logos" is assumed to be the "him" of v.4 in whom is "life" which was the light of "men". Both "life" and "men" must be understood in their pleromic context, where "life" is Zoe, who came into being within her *syzygos* Logos, and "men" is one part of the dual union of Anthropos (man) and Ecclesia; which exist as the product of the union of Zoe with Logos.[122] The creation of the Pleroma was instigated by Nous who sent forth the pair Logos and Zoe "as fashioners of this Pleroma" from whom the "life", Zoe, was the "light of men (Anthropos and his partner Ecclesia)."[123] In this creation, Logos acts to give form to the Aeons of the Pleroma; and Zoe is the Aeon who gives life to all of the Aeons of the Pleroma, beginning with Anthropos and Ecclesia.

The kenomic interpretation of v.4 explains the redemption of Sophia, who, as a result of her passion to know the Father, "was excluded from light and the Pleroma, and was without form or figure."[124] The referent for "him" in v.4 in the kenomic interpretation is Logos, who is understood as "the Christ, that is, as the Logos and the

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[120] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 30.
[121] Ibid., 31.
[122] AH 1.1.2.
[123] Ibid., 2.13.8.
[124] Ibid., 1.4.1.

Life."[125] Having pity upon Sophia, the Christ becomes her "light" and "life", which was in "seed" form, as an image of the pleromic Aeons, which will be restored ultimately to the Pleroma.

> The exegesis of Jn. 1.4 within this second context explains, then, how Christ in the kenoma, bearing Logos and Zoe within himself, unites with Sophia to bring forth the "image" of the pleromic syzygy Anthropos-Ecclesia. This syzygy, being the antitype of the pleromic aion, nevertheless is still, at this level, the archetype of the future Anthropos-Ecclesia that is to come into being at the third stage of creation in the cosmos.[126]

Thus, the kenomic interpretation of v.4 both looks back to the Pleroma from which Sophia fell and the Christ descended to show her "light" and "life", and forward to the "seeds" which were formed as a result of Christ's descension to Sophia and would come into existence in the cosmos with "an affinity with the light which the Christ who entreated the aeons brought forth first, namely, Jesus."[127] Only in light of this can one claim that "consequently, it is rightly said of the Church that it was chosen before the foundation of the world."[128]

The third trajectory of the Valentinian exegesis, again, regards the cosmos. This cosmic interpretation exhibits the Valentinian soteriology in that the divine light dwells in seed form within the souls of men, which the Logos seeks to deliver by awakening them to the knowledge (*gnosis*) of the divine. Also demonstrated in this third exegesis is the Valentinian Christology, which recognizes Jesus as this Logos; yet redemption is not to the Demiurge, but rather to the Pleroma. The referents to the language used in v.4 differs from that of the other two interpretations. According to Heracleon, "in him" refers "to those men who are spiritual."[129] "Life" is that which comes into the world, and is therefore recognized as the Saviour. This is supported by John 11:25 and 14:6 in which the Saviour, Christ, recognizes himself as "the life".[130] Heracleon goes on to say that "He

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[125] Exc 6.3.
[126] Pagels, *Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 33.
[127] Exc 41.2.
[128] Ibid.
[129] CJ 2.15.
[130] cf. Exc 6.4.

(the Logos) provided (those who are spiritual) with their first form at their birth, carrying further and making manifest that which had been sown by another, into form and into illumination and into an outline of its own."[131] To summarize, "in him" is not understood as Christ/Logos, but rather "in the pneumatic men," who, as noted earlier, possess *gnosis* and are seen as redeemed already.

v.5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.*

As noted above, only those verses which are deemed "appropriate" for pleromic, kenomic or cosmic interpretations are exegeted as such. Thus, Ptolemy, in his commentary, provides exegesis for v.5, but abandons any specific exegetical trajectory from here until v.14. Ptolemy interprets v.5 in light of v.4 and the Saviour's descension outside of the Pleroma. The Saviour is "'a light which shines in darkness, and which was not comprehended' by it, inasmuch as, when he imparted form to all those things which had their origin from passion, he was not known by it."[132] Ptolemy presents the soteriological mission of the Saviour, Logos, to awaken those souls who exist in darkness and who do not possess the salvific *gnosis* which is redemption for the Valentinians. Ptolemy's exegesis of this verse is not specifically pleromic here, but brings all three trajectories into one coherent interpretation. The Saviour, assumed to be the "light" of v.5, descended from the Pleroma into the kenoma where, through Sophia, he created what would become the bodies of men which would exist in the cosmos and be the object of his redemptive purpose.

Given that primary Valentinian exegetical texts and fragments concerning the Prologue do not contain specific exegesis from v.5 until vv.14, 18, one may be able to deduce the hermeneutical framework of Valentinian exegesis from the first five verses and apply it to the verses which are absent. However, the purpose of this paper is to

[131] CJ 2.15.
[132] AH 1.8.5.

present Valentinian exegesis *on its own terms*, and as such, only those verses for which there is available primary Valentinian source interpretation will be presented.

***v.14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The dualist perspective within Valentinianism, specifically the negative subjection of all things worldly in the hope of attaining spiritual deliverance, would appear to have difficulty in providing a coherent exegesis of this verse. Here the author of the Prologue is positively conjoining two spheres, the spiritual and physical, which stands contrary to the polarity of the evil physical world and the redemptive spiritual world within Valentinianism. Yet, depending upon which exegetical trajectory is undertaken, the Valentinians are not only able to deal with the content of this verse, but use it in support of their own theology.

Because his commentary only provides a pleromic exegesis of the Prologue, it is plausible that Ptolemy only selected those verses for which a pleromic interpretation was deemed necessary, and therefore left alone vv.6-13, 15-17. This is a supposition, however, and cannot necessarily be ascribed to Ptolemy. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that this is not only plausible, but likely.

In v.14, according to Ptolemy, the author of the Fourth Gospel "distinctly sets forth the first (pleromic) Tetrad, when he speaks of the Father, and Charis, and Monogenes, and Aletheia."[133] As he did in v.5, Ptolemy takes this pleromic trajectory and extends it down to include the kenoma and the cosmos as well. The Logos, according to Ptolemy, refers to the Saviour, sent from the Pleroma to Sophia in the kenoma, from which the elements of the cosmos were created. Ptolemy's comment, that the Saviour gave form to all things beyond the Pleroma, and that he is the fruit of the entire Pleroma not only provides the background to his interpretation of v.5, but the

[133] Ibid.

interpretation of v.14 as well, which follows immediately after. In his commentary, Ptolemy interprets v.14 as the "Word made flesh, whose glory...we beheld; and His glory was as that of the Only-begotten (given to Him by the Father), full of grace and truth."[134] Thus, for the Saviour to become flesh, it must be understood in light of the "glory" which "we have seen" that is "glory as of the only begotten from the Father."

The glory possessed by the Saviour is comparable to that of the pleromic Aeon Monogenes, a member of the first pleromic Tetrad, but the glory of the Saviour is only similar, *not* the same. Likewise, the Saviour is *not* the Monogenes who reveals *gnosis* to the other Aeons, but a diminished image of the Monogenes, sent to bring light to those souls who are in need of salvific awakening through initiation into *gnosis*.

Syntactically this is supported by the fact that, in the Greek, *monogenes* is anarthrous. Thus "He who appeared here is no longer called 'only begotten' by the apostle, but as *an* only-begotten'-'(a) glory as of the only-begotten'."[135] Internally, this exegesis fits within Valentinianism, especially in that the dualist separation of polarities still exists. Here we have a description of the Pleroma seeking to provide redemption to the souls of the cosmos, and yet maintaining its integrity in its separation from the cosmos. The redeemer figure is more of a "picture," where the Logos is a "personification of the power of God."[136] Externally this exegesis is implicitly polemical in that it denounces those who would equivocate the physical appearance of the monogenes (Saviour) with the divine Monogenes of the Pleroma.

v.18 *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Valentinian exegesis of v.18 refers back to what was introduced in v.1. "'Beginning', (the Valentinians) say is the 'Only-begotten', whom they also call God, just

[134] Ibid.
[135] Exc 7.3.
[136] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 19.

as he (John) immediately calls him God in what follows: 'The only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'"[137] The following quote further clarifies the Valentinian scheme,

> Because the Father was unknown, he desired to become known to the aeons. And through his own 'thought' (*enthymesis*), as the one who knew himself, he brought forth the spirit of knowledge, which is in knowledge, the Only-begotten. He who came forth from knowledge, that is, from the Father's thought, became himself knowledge, that is, the Son, because 'through the Son is the Father known.' The Spirit of love has been combined with that of knowledge, as the Father is with the Son, and thought with truth, proceeding from the truth, just as knowledge proceeds from thought. The one who remained 'only-begotten' Son in the bosom of the Father' (v.18) is he who through knowledge explains the thought to the aeons, as though he had indeed gone forth from his bosom.[138]

The Only-begotten who is the "spirit of knowledge" and exists "in the bosom of the Father" who explains *gnosis* to the Aeons is the pleromic Aeon Monogenes. As noted above, this pleromic figure is different from the monogenes found in v.14 and assumed to be the "he" of v.18. "He who appeared here is no longer called 'only-begotten'...but 'as an only begotten'-(a) glory as of the only-begotten."[139] Again, as in v.14, the monogenes referred to in v.18 is understood as the Saviour who seeks to initiate the souls in the cosmos to *gnosis*, much as the pleromic Aeon Monogenes did for the Aeons.

Having presented the Valentinian exegesis of the verses available in extant primary literature, it is necessary to present a primary exegetical topic found in Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue. The most notable aspect of the Prologue absent from Valentinian exegesis is how they understood the person of John the Baptist.

The perspective of John the Baptist by Heracleon, recorded in the writings of Origen, is that he who came to "bear witness to the light" and yet was "not the light" is understood as the Demiurge. "For he (Heracleon) considers that it is the Demiurge who confesses by these words that he is a lesser person than Christ."[140] The Demiurge does not possess the "light", which the saviour sought to bring to the souls of men and is

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[137] Exc 6.2.
[138] Ibid., 7.1-3.
[139] Ibid., 7.3.
[140] CJ 6.24.

already possessed by the group of men called pneumatics. Thus, the Demiurge himself is able to recognize that this Saviour, sent from the Pleroma, ranks before him because he was before him.[141]

Understanding John the Baptist as the Demiurge presents yet another hermeneutic to the Prologue. In v.17 the implicit notion is that the law that was given by Moses is surpassed by grace (Charis) and truth (Aletheia), understood here as referential to the pleromic Aeons, which came through Jesus, the Saviour. One difficulty in Heracleon's hermeneutic is found in the following verse. If the Demiurge is John the Baptist, then he would not be able to recognize on the pneumatic level that the Father is invisible, for he does not possess *gnosis*, but is altogether ignorant of the Pleroma. This is why Heracleon ascribes the statement of v.18 to the apostle John rather than John the Baptist.

Heracleon's hypothesis that John the Baptist is, in fact, the Demiurge breaks down elsewhere, other than just in of v.18. The mention of John the Baptist in vv.6-8, who "came as a witness, to bear witness about the light (Saviour) that all might believe through him" is inconsistent with the Valentinian understanding of the Demiurge, who is unaware of any higher deities and acts in ignorance as the creator of the cosmos. Unless Heracleon is simply choosing only those verses "appropriate" to this hermeneutic, as Ptolemy does in his pleromic exegesis, there is inevitable inconsistencies to this approach.

In order to understand Valentinian exegesis and interpretation of the Prologue on its own terms, it is necessary to examine and present exegetical comments considered to be Valentinian from their own perspective. Having examined the works of Ptolemy, Heracleon and Theodotus, the framework and structure of Valentinian exegesis has been made as clear as possible in this short space. At the core of Valentinian exegesis is the question of if and how any verse relates to its cosmogony. There are three potential hermeneutical trajectories upon which a verse may be interpreted while at the same time

[141] Jn. 1:15.

some texts are not dealt with at all, as far as the evidence leads one to believe. Thus, although complicated in its methodology, Valentinian exegesis cannot be labeled as "arbitrary" or "contrived" as the heresiologists deemed it; rather, it is fairly coherent and certainly discernable. With this exegetical summary of Valentinian interpretation of the Prologue, the focus will now shift to my own exegetical analysis of the Prologue.

Chapter 4

Orthodox Exegesis of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel

Having presented a Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue on its own terms, the following exegesis will, at times, interact with the Valentinian exegesis; however it is *not* intended as a polemical commentary aimed at discrediting the Valentinian interpretation. Rather, the purpose of this exegetical analysis is to present an historical, text-critical analysis of the Prologue as it stands within Christian theology as well as its relationship to, and placement within, Christian redemptive history.

The methodology of this exegesis will primarily follow the thematic scheme presented by the author of the Gospel. The focus will largely fall on the nature and role of the Logos, the light and John the Baptist within the Prologue, as these are of primary focus for the author. The underlying questions of this exegetical analysis regarding these will focus on each one's nature, relationship to other elements of the Prologue and to the Gospel as a whole, and their significance in redemptive history as presented by the author. Finally, given that the Prologue serves as the introduction to the rest of the Gospel, presenting themes which are to be developed throughout the rest of the Gospel, it is necessary to analyze if the author gives any indication as to how this text *ought* to be understood and interpreted.

The introduction to any piece of literature typically drives the audience into a specific framework from which the author *intends* the reader to understand the nature and genre of the text. Just as "once upon a time" indicates that the text is fictional rather than an historical narrative, so also "four score and seven years ago" is historically referential to a specific time and drives the audience into a particular understanding of that historical situation. In the same way, the author of the Gospel of John introduces his Gospel with the words "In the beginning...", which immediately calls to mind the Genesis account of creation. The author indicates clearly that what he will say in the following text is of an historical nature, and ought to be read as such.

This creation theme is picked up again in vv.3-4 when the author notes that all things were made by Him, the Logos, and that life existed in Him. Given that there is such a clear referent to the creation account, it is evident that the author employs such an explicit referent in order to set up an appropriate background from which to interpret this text. That background is the entire Old Testament tradition, which the author frames from "the beginning" of Genesis through the entire history of redemption.[142] Given this, it is both warranted and thoroughly appropriate to "assume that (the) Logos concept is informed principally by the Old Testament teaching concerning 'the Word of the Lord' as God's agent in creation (Ps. 33:6), revelation (Jer. 1:4-5, 9) and salvation (Ezek. 37:4-6), especially since the Prologue proceeds to emphasize these three spheres in which the Logos is mediator."[143]

Why did the author of the Fourth Gospel choose the term "Logos"? This term was employed in a variety of literature before and during the time that the author wrote this Gospel. Stoicism recognized the figure "Logos" as a form of matter which holds all things together and maintains order and stability. In addition, "Logos" can be found throughout the writings of Philo.

Literary criticism of the Prologue points to the use of a pre-existent "Logos-hymn" which the author took up and used as the introduction to his Gospel. The rhythm,

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[142] Bultmann disagrees with this presupposition. He argues that in seeking to discover what "*possible forms of expression were open to the author; the possibilities being those he has inherited with the tradition in which he stands*," that "the Logos of Jn.1.1 cannot...be understood on the basis of the O.T.; for the Logos here is not an event recurring within the temporal world, but is eternal being, existent with God from the very beginning." This is based upon his analysis that the "Word" of God in the Old Testament "is active as event;" it is "address, which takes place; it is a temporal event, and as such the revelation of God as Creator and Lord." Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 20f; cf J.D.G Dunn *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM, 1980), 242. Such analysis by Bultmann, however, is perhaps an exercise in semantic obsolescence, and fails to recognize the hypostatic nature of the Logos as it is depicted by the author in the Prologue. Although it is not until v.14 that the Word of God became incarnate and at that point "*became* hypostatic," v.18 clearly affirms in the Logos (understood as the incarnate Christ) the same three things affirmed in v.1 (viz., timeless existence, intimate relationship with God and participation in deity). In addition, contrary to Bultmann's conception of the Logos as an "active event," it should be noted that the Logos is consistently portrayed in the Prologue as a personal entity; see Murray Harris, *Jesus as God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 59.

[143] Harris, *Jesus as God*, 55.

structure and style of the Prologue suggest that there was such a hymn. Twentieth-ce[144]ntury scholarship, particularly Bultmann, as well as Bousset and Reitzenstein and others, maintain that the Logos-hymn originated in Gnostic Baptist circles or Apocalyptic Judaism.[145] This, of course, is the basis for their understanding the Prologue as historicizing a "Gnostic Redeemer-myth" in the person of Jesus.

There were also Christian "Hellenists", who may be identified with converts of Hellenistic Judaism, who may have produced the hymn as well.[146] This would explain the unqualified use of "Logos" in the hymn. Hymns from such Christian sects demonstrate that there are similar hymns to Christ which existed in the primitive church thus allowing for a non-syncretistic and genuinely Christian Logos-hymn to have pre-dated the Fourth Gospel. If one allows for a change of focus from the historical origins of the hymn to the function it serves in the Prologue, it is not of necessary or primary concern whether or not the author employed an outside text for his Prologue, for the use of such a hymn is transformed by the author into the introduction to his Gospel.

vv.1-5 *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 were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.*

The Prologue begins with a theologically saturated and critical statement. As it pertains to the verbs of v.1, "the imperfect tense *en*, which here denotes continuous existence, is to be carefully distinguished from *estin* ('he is'), which would have stressed his timelessness at the expense of any emphasis on his manifestation historically (cf.

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[144] The notion that the Prologue is *technically* a hymn must be held somewhat loosely. The Prologue does not strictly reflect the structure and rhythm of Greek poetry. Nevertheless, there are parallelisms, chiasms and various clauses which suggest that at least the Prologue is written in rhythmical prose, and possibly was adopted from a previous poem which was subsequently re-worked by the author (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 112). Cf. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. Word Biblical Commentary vol.36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 3.

[145] Ibid., 22ff; cf. chapter 2 "Gnosticism."

[146] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:231.

1:14), and from *egeneto*, which would have implied either that he was a created being ('he came into existence') or that by the time of writing he had ceased to exist."[147]

"...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Greek preposition *pros*, when used between persons, is typically rendered "with".[148] The following phrase "the Word was God" is full of both spiritual and theological significance and therefore has been the result of much scrutiny. Much of the controversy revolves around the fact that the predicate, *theos*, which precedes the verb, is anarthrous. The question, then, is whether "God" is definite or indefinite? E.C. Colwell published an article[149] which is often used (and mis-used) in reference to this question. His analysis led him to conclude that "definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article."[150] This has led many conservative theologians to argue the reverse of this rule that an anarthrous predicate nominative that precedes the verb is usually definite.[151] Such an argument offers the same rationale as saying: "every time it rains the ground is wet; therefore if the ground is wet it must have rained." "This misconception is not the rule, nor can it be implied from (Colwell's) rule."[152] Therefore, syntactically it is inappropriate and fallacious to apply Colwell's rule to John 1:1 in an attempt to secure the definite quality of *theos*. Colwell's rule, however, *does allow* the possibility that *theos* (as an anarthrous noun that precedes the copulative linking verb) may be definite.

This does not *necessarily* force *theos* to be understood indefinitely as "a god" either. Arguments for the pre-verbal predicate nominative to be regarded as indefinite rest largely (if not wholly) on the fact that the anarthrous noun is not *necessarily* to be regarded as definite and therefore is more legitimately to be seen as indefinite. This

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[147] Harris, *Jesus as God*, 54.
[148] BAGD 875.g.
[149] E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 12-21.
[150] Ibid., 20.
[151] cf. Daniel Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 15.
[152] Ibid., 115.

position ignores the developed Christology of the Fourth Gospel which posits the identification of Jesus as God and the fact that the anarthrous *theos* in 1:6, 13 and 18 is definite.[153]

It should be noted that there is no necessary distinction between the anarthrous *theos* and the definite *ho theos* throughout the Fourth Gospel. Grammatically, the phrase could legitimately be rendered "the Word was a god" just as it is grammatically plausible to translate it as "God was the Word." What dictates, or provides parameters to the grammatical possibilities is the context in which this phrase is written.[154]

Why, then, did the author *not* employ the article with *theos*? If the author had employed the article, "whatever John's word order, *ho theos* would have been inappropriate in verse 1c, given the immediate context" and that to have a tautological statement such as *ho theos en ho logos* would "have involved an intolerable equation of persons" and would stand contrary to the context of v.1 as nothing more than an affirmation of "embryonic Sabellianism."[155]

In order to resolve the question over the meaning of the anarthrous qeo.j in v.1c, it is necessary to draw a distinction between a definite noun and a qualitative noun. As noted above, to assume definiteness of *theos* (i.e. *ho theos*) presents problems, such as modalism, which does not fit the overall theology presented in the Fourth Gospel or the New Testament corpus. To identify the anarthrous *theos* as qualitative, however, fits the syntactical structure of v.1 both grammatically and theologically.

> Such an option does not at all impugn the deity of Christ. Rather it stresses that, although the person of Christ is not the person of the Father, their *essence* is identical. The *idea* of a qualitative *theos* here is that the Word had all the attributes and qualities that 'the God' (of 1:1b) had. In other words, he shared the *essence* of the Father, though they differed in person. *The construction the evangelist chose to express this idea was the most* ***concise*** *way he could have stated that the Word was God and yet was distinct from the Father.*[156]

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[153] Ibid., 119; cf. Jn. 5:23; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28, etc.
[154] cf. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 53, 60.
[155] Ibid., 62; cf. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 117 and Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 119.
[156] Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* 120; cf. Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 21f.

Verse 2 offers both a reiteration of the fact that that Logos was with God as well as a segué into v.3. The *hutos* refers back to the substantive previously mentioned, in this case the Logos. This use of *hutos* rather than *autos* as a pronoun is not uncharacteristic of the Prologue.[157] In addition, it will become apparent throughout the rest of the exegesis of the Prologue that the author often uses reiteration, either for emphasis or clarification.

Verse 3 indicates the function of the Logos as creator of "all things." "All things" clearly refers to all things of the creation.[158] This is supported by the fact that the author does not use *ta panta* but *panta*. K. Barth argues that "this means that the author is not looking at the world as a whole but at the world as the sum total of its individual parts. His point is that everything that has come into being, absolutely all things without exception, has come into being through the Logos."[159] Again, given that the Prologue is to be understood in light of the entire history of redemption presented in the Old Testament, it would be unnatural to assume any other meaning for "all things" and the Logos as the creator. The second clause asserts that "apart from him, nothing came into being which has come into being." Again, the author makes clear that all of creation is credited to the Logos. This is supported throughout the rest of the New Testament corpus.

> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:16-17)

But what does it mean that all things were created *through* him? Does the Logos act merely as an intermediary to the actions of God in the world? This is the position held by the Valentinians, in that the god who created "all things" of the cosmos is the

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[157] cf. Jn. 1:7, 15.
[158] cf. AH 5.18.2.
[159] Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 32; cf. Rom. 8:28, I Cor. 3:21. Although Barth's logic may be somewhat dubious, having based perhaps too much on the lack of the article, his conclusion is certainly to be affirmed.

Demiurge, who unknowingly is an intermediate deity between the Pleroma and the cosmos.

This Gnostic supposition gains *some* support from those who wish to attach the *ho gegonen* at the end of v.3 to the beginning of v.4, although the placement of *ho gegonen* with either verse does not necessarily throw the message of the Prologue or the Gospel into either camp. This would change the interpretation of vv.3-4a to "all things came into being through him and apart from him, nothing came into being. (4a) That which came into being in him was life (Zoe)..."[160] A Valentinian pleromic interpretation would clearly welcome this positioning of *ho gegonen* with v.4. Historically, the attachment to v.4 finds support from early documentation (P^{75}, C, D, L, W, G).[161] "It is quite possible that the early Fathers were influenced by the division of the text given by the Gnostics; in this case, the earliest reading need not be the original."[162]

What exegetical difference would there be if *ho gegonen* is attached to v.4? It certainly provides a *lectio difficilior*, which is to be preferred as a text-critical principle. However, text-critical principles and exegetical principles are not necessarily synonymous. Punctuation of verses is an exegetical issue, not a matter of textual criticism.

As noted above, the verse-position of *ho gegonen* does not conclusively push either verse, and perhaps the whole Prologue, into any theological camp. Its significance largely depends upon what presuppositions are assumed in one's hermeneutic. If it is attached to v.4, then the Logos, "him" is the originator of life for that which was made – the "all things" of creation. If *ho gegonen* is attached to v.3, then the complications that come with attaching it to v.4 are eliminated, leaving the traditional reading.

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[160] Calvin notes that "Those who separate the words, *which was made*, from the preceding clause, so as to connect them with the following one, bring out a forced sense: *what was made was in him life*; that is, lived, or was sustained in life (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:30.

[161] Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), apparatus Jn.1, 3.

[162] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:239.

One still must deal with the seemingly unnecessary repetition of *ho gegonen*, but again, given the author's propensity for reiteration (cf. v.2), the repetition in v.3 is not a major cause for critical analysis. Given that v.3 specifically deals with "all things" which "were made" through the Logos, and that v.4 introduces a new strophe focusing primarily upon "light" and "life", it seems certainly plausible and adequate to maintain the position of *ho gegonen* at the end of v.3.

Verse 4 begins a new strophe of the hymn by pushing the description of the Logos from his role before creation (vv.1-2) and in creation (v.3) to the nature of his relationship with humanity. The Logos is said to possess "life", which carries two trajectories in terms of its theological significance. First, having just given account of the role of the Logos in creation, the "life" which he possesses refers to the life of all things which were made through him. Secondly, later in the Gospel the "life" which is possessed by the Logos bears soteriological significance as well.[163]

At first glance, the grammatical shift from the anarthrous *zoe* ("in him was life") to the definite *he zoe* ("the life was the light of men") would provide support for a Gnostic interpretation of *he zoe* as the pleromic aeon. But when Christ describes himself as *he zoe* in 11:25 and 14:6, it becomes apparent that no such association is warranted.[164] Additionally, Greek syntax suggests that the reiteration of the article here is used anaphorically, denoting previous reference.[165]

The life is the personified "light" of men. This association of light and the Logos is significant, for there is no explicit reference to the Logos until v.14, while the "light", as representative of the Logos, is the surrogate reference for the following nine verses. In relating the life and light of the Logos, the author demonstrates the immense significance

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[163] cf. Jn. 14:6, 11:25.

[164] cf. Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 35.

[165] In the anaphoric use of the article, "The first mention of the substantive is usually anarthrous" (Jn. 1:4) "because it is merely being introduced. But subsequent mentions of it use the article, for the article is now pointing back to *the* substantive previously mentioned." Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 98.

of the Logos to humanity – that His life is the light of men. The purpose of this light is explicated in vv.9-13 as the purpose of salvation (cf. Jn. 8:12).

Given that the Logos is understood in this exegesis within an Old Testament framework, what mention is there of the light in that corpus? The Wisdom literature contains reference to the light. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Ps.27:1). "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light" (Ps.36:9). That which is said of the light in the Old Testament is consistent with the light of the Logos in the Prologue.

Reference to the light is also found in the later Jewish writings of the Apocrypha and Qumran, where the personified Wisdom is described as the light.[166] Light and life together is also found in the hermetic text *Poimandres*,[167] the writings of Philo[168] and Mandean literature.[169] The common thread of many of these various literary sources[170] is also common to the Logos in the Prologue, that is, the Logos *possessed* life and light and came to *impart* life and light to mankind. Although these concepts "were already current and possessed great appeal...we cannot determine the exact extent of the dependency" by the author of the Prologue.[171] Nevertheless, the setting apart of the light as the "true light" in v.9 possibly suggests the acknowledgment by the author of other "light and life" concepts, and his desire to attribute exclusivity of the "true light" to the Logos of the Prologue.

Verse 5 pushes the role of the Logos as the light from the historical period of primordial existence and actions within creation to its present significance. The author introduces the immediate relevance of the light and Logos to his audience. This is indicated grammatically by the fact that the verb tense shifts from the aorist and imperfect

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[166] cf. 1*QS*, 4:2, 11:3, 11:5.
[167] Corp. Herm. I, 6.
[168] Philo, *Fuga*, 198.
[169] cf. Edmondo Lupieri, *The Mandeans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 38ff.
[170] It should be noted that although many of these sources do have Gnostic tendencies, not *all* do.
[171] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:244.

tenses of the preceding four verses to the gnomic present, "The light shines in the darkness..."

"The darkness has not understood it" completes v.5 and must be understood in light of vv.7, 9 and 10ff. for a proper rendering of *katalaben*. These verses expound on the relationship of the light with the world, and show that the light came that "all might believe" and yet "the world did not know him" and "his own people did not receive him." Clearly the relationship of the light to the world is based upon the purpose of the light to "enlighten" the world, thus a proper understanding of *katalaben* in v.5 does not suggest a hostile interpretation ("and the darkness has not *overcome* it"), but rather the failure of the world to attain "comprehension of faith" in its creator.[172]

vv.6-8 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness concerning the light.*

The metaphorical introduction in vv.1-5 changes to the phenomenological actualization in v.6. Thematically the verse begins with the witness of the light by John the Baptist, and stylistically with a new prose genre.[173] Semantically, the use of *egeneto* in describing the existence of John the Baptist stands in contrast to the imperfect *en* which is used to describe the primordial existence of the Word. As with the use of *egeneto* in describing the creation of all things in v.3, the use of *egeneto* suggests a historico-temporal trajectory of the verb; placing the man John and his witness of the light at a specific moment in history.[174]

The soteriological means of redemption is first introduced in v.7, "that all might *believe* through him." It is not made clear in v.7 what the nature of this belief is, but it is

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[172] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 48, ftnt.1.

[173] It should be noted that "the Baptist" does not occur here, yet it is clear that the John of the Prologue is identified with the figure John the Baptist. Evidence for this is found in the corroborating accounts of the synoptic Gospels where the figure "John" of the Fourth Gospel is clearly represented as "John the Baptist" in the synoptics.

[174] cf. Mk. 1:4; Lk. 1:5.

developed fully in v.12 where belief in his name initiates one as a child of God as well as in the purpose statement of the Gospel, "these (signs of Jesus) are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). For the sake of precision and clarity, it is necessary to reiterate that the light to which John testifies is the Logos, who acts as both the life and light of men (v.4).[175]

Verse 8 provides further clarification that the light is *not* to be understood as John the Baptist who came to bear witness to the light. The emphasis of this negative assertion suggests to some scholars that the author intentionally discredits a theological sect which regarded John the Baptist as the Messiah.[176] This certainly may be the case given the historical *Sitz im Leben* of the author, however it is equally plausible, and perhaps less speculative, that he may be providing clarification, as he does throughout the Prologue.

vv.9-13 *The true light, which shines on all men, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

The "true light" of which John testifies is coming into the world. The verse links up with v.4, suggesting that originally (if John used a Logos-hymn) v.9 was the continuation.[177] The word "true" simply means "real" or "genuine."[178] As noted earlier, the use of "true" here possibly elicits a contrast to other conceptions of light which are false. The use of the verb *en*, serves to connect the Logos (cf. v.1f) with his identification as the light. There can be no mistake that the light and Logos are not simply fully

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[175] Bultmann disagrees with this conception, arguing that 1:19-34 clearly indicates that the witness of John the Baptist is limited to "Jesus as the Revealer, and not to the divine revelation (the pre-existent Logos) in general." Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 50.
[176] cf. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 42; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 51; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 121; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:253.
[177] cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:253.
[178] BAGD 43.3.

synonymous, but tautologically identical. Just as the light "was coming into the world" (v.9), the Logos "became flesh and dwelt among us" (v.14). In the same way, the light "enlightens everyone" (v.9) is connected to v.4, where the Logos is described as possessing life which was the "light of men."

The phrase "shines on all men" can either mean "to illuminate inwardly" or "to shine; to make visible."[179] Throughout the rest of the Gospel the light is not received by all, but rather is offered to all. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12b). Also, "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (Jn.3:19b). Even within the Prologue, the light shines on all who came into contact with him in his public ministry (1:9) and most have rejected the light (vv.10f), but there are also many who have come to believe the light as well (v.12f). The salvific connotations of "illumine inwardly" or "enlighten" seem to cohere well with the rest of the Gospel more so than simply the act of "shining."

Having inextricably joined light and Logos in the same figure, v.10 describes the fact that the world into which the light came did not know him. The term "world" (*kosmos*) is used three times in this verse, and carries two different meanings. The world which the light was in and that "did not know him" is clearly referential of humanity,[180] while the middle usage refers back to the totality of all that was created by him. In addition, the verb *en*, following the stative quality of its use in vv.1, 2, 4 and 9, indicates that his existence in the world is not referential to the incarnation, which first appears in v.14. If this were the case, one would expect the use of *egeneto* rather than *en*. Rather, the existence of the Logos is understood as before the incarnation.

Finally, the use of the active verb "did not know" emphasizes the rejection of the work of the Logos by humanity rather than the failure of the Logos in his soteriological

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[179] Ibid., 1074.1-3.
[180] cf. Jn. 3:16, 1:11.

mission. The world was made by him, and he was in the world and yet the world did not know him. The fact that the creator Logos exists in the world and is not known or received by the world clearly stands contrary to the ontological dualist conception of the Gnostics. The moral culpability of not knowing or receiving the Logos rests squarely on the shoulders of humanity. Humans are not trapped in this world of evil, rather they have simply failed to know him.

Verse 11 reiterates and builds upon the point made in v.10. The substitution of "his own" rather than "the world" provides substantiation to understanding the *kosmos* of v.10 as the world of humanity. The phrase "his own" is used twice in v.11. *ta idia* is neuter and can mean "his own property" or "his home"[181] whereas the specific use of the masculine *hoi idioi*[182] requires the reading to be "his own people."[183] Again, the general reference to the world as the totality of all that was created by him is paired with the specific referent to humanity.[184]

The rejection of the Lord by his own people is not something new. The use of the imperfect *parelabon* suggests that the Logos, who has existed throughout history, has been rejected by his own people. The Lord spoke through the prophets concerning this.

> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.[185]

The rejection of the Logos is not universal in scope, as indicated in v.12. The use of *de* indicates a contrast, that there are those who do not fall into the category of v.10f.

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[181] BAGD 467.4.b; cf. Jn. 19:27.
[182] "In the religious language of mysticism and Gnosis, the *idioi* are the favored and elect who have received divine revelation and attained the goal of union with God. (*Corp. Herm.*, I, 31) Such a notion can hardly be intended here, since all men are envisaged and it is precisely their estrangement from the revealer that is stressed." Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:260.
[183] BAGD 467.4.a.
[184] cf. *kosmos*, v.10.
[185] Is. 1:2-4.

There is no indication in the verse to suggest a change in the reference of time such that it does not include both the Old Testament and present situation of the author. This is supported by the use of the aorist *edoken* as well as the present *pisteuousin.*

The Logos possesses the power to grant the right to become children of God to those who believe on his name. Again, contrary to the Gnostic conception of the *pneumatics*, men do not possess the ability in and of themselves to become children of God. Such a bestowal comes from God alone and is found exclusively in Jesus, who claims to be "the way the truth and the life" (Jn.14:6).

The "new birth" theme introduced in v.13 is more fully developed in the third chapter when Jesus tells Nicodemus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn.3:3). The author uses three negatives to describe that it is not by any other natural means that one is given the right to become a child of God. The author employs another parallel description to provide clarification for what was just said. Just as "all who received him" is clarified with "who believed in his name," so also the "children of God" are those "who were born...of God."

vv.14-15 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness concerning him, and cried out "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me'.")*

In the first thirteen verses of the Prologue, the author has set the stage for the event of v.14. The Logos is described, but has remained transcendent. John the Baptist, who was sent from God, has born witness concerning the coming of the Logos. Finally, in v.14, the apex of the Prologue comes in the incarnation of the Logos.

The Logos once again is the subject, calling to mind his role in the first four verses which focus upon his primordial existence with the Father and role in the creation of the world. The connection of v.14 to the beginning of the Prologue is evident by the fact that v. 14 stands in antithetical parallelism to v.1. "The Logos who 'existed in the

beginning' (v.1a), 'came on the human scene (*egeneto*)' in time (v.14a). The one who was eternally 'in communion with God' (v.1b), temporarily 'sojourned among us' (v.14b). 'The Word had the same nature as God' (v.1c) is paralleled by the contrasting thought that 'the Word assumed the same nature as humans (*sarx egeneto*)' (v.14a)."[186]

The Logos *sarx egeneto*, the verb suggesting a historico-temporal event.[187] The verb does *not* suggest the "appearance" of the Logos in the flesh, but rather "refers to a mode of existence in which the deity of Christ can no more be abstracted from his humanity than the reverse."[188] The use of *sarx* as opposed to *anthropos* or perhaps *soma* must be understood within the greater context of the entire Gospel. "In Johannine terms it expresses what is earth-bound (3:6), transient and perishable (6:63), they typically human mode of being, as it were, in contrast to all that is divine and spiritual."[189] This is *not* to say that *sarx* carries Pauline connotations of sinful man.[190] In the context of the Prologue, sin has not yet been introduced explicitly, but the nature of the Logos as Divine and the nature of man as temporal, bound by this world, *has been* introduced. In addition, the *doxa* which is beheld in the Logos as he existed in the flesh would be incongruous with a conception of *sarx* as pertaining to the sinful nature of man. Rather, it is the act of the divine Logos becoming incarnate *sarx* that the author emphasizes.[191]

The verb "dwelt" carries the nuance of pitching one's tent or tabernacle, "perhaps an expression of continuity with God's 'tenting' in Israel."[192] God's desire has always been to dwell with his people. "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). "Whether the allusion in John 1:14 is to the tabernacle or

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[186] Harris, *Jesus as God*, 71.
[187] cf. Jn.1:3, 6, 10.
[188] Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 50.
[189] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:267.
[190] cf. Rom.8:3. Of course, even in Paul, *sarx* does not necessarily always bear sinful connotations.
[191] cf. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 49; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 63f.
[192] BAGD 929; AH 1.9.2.

to the tent of meeting, the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst his people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh."[193]

The contrast between the Johannine Logos and the Gnostic Redeemer must be recognized. Rudolf Bultmann, a proponent of a Gnostic Redeemer myth as the foundation for the Fourth Gospel, notes that

> In the *gnosis* man achieves knowledge of himself and his origins, the knowledge that in this earthly world he is an exile, and the knowledge of the way back to his heavenly home. Yet apart from the fact that such teaching instructs him about man in general without helping him to understand his own concrete existence, when the Redeemer does bring him such revelation, his incarnation is only a *means* to the revelation which he brings and not the revelation *itself*. The Revealer, once he has become man, assumes the role of the mystagogue; and the Gnostic no longer needs him as the Incarnate, once he has himself acquired the *gnosis*. In John, however, the encounter with the Incarnate is the encounter with the Revealer himself; and the latter does not bring a teaching which renders his own presence superfluous; rather *as* the Incarnate he sets each man before the decisive question whether he will accept or reject *him*.[194]

The glory which we beheld is a glory that is *as* of the only begotten from the Father. One must consider whether the word "as" is used as a comparative article ("glory *like* the only begotten") or is it used as a definition ("glory *that is* of the only begotten"). "As" in v.14 ought to be understood as a marker introducing the perspective from which a thing is viewed or understood as to character, function or role[195]

Verse 15 continues with John the Baptist's testimony of the Logos. The verb "witness" (*marturei*) is in the present tense while "has cried out" (*kekragen*) is in the perfect and is followed by the imperfect "this was he..." (*en*). The use of the present indicates that he continues to bear witness as he has before, which explains the perfect. Thus, the translation might read, "John is witnessing concerning him and has cried out saying..."

As in v.2, the author uses the imperfect (*outos en*). This one of whom John speaks, who is coming after him, ranks before him because he was (*en*) before him in

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[193] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 127.
[194] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 65f.
[195] BAGD 1104.3.a.

time. The referent here is undoubtedly the Logos of vv.1-2 and the use of the verb *en* emphasizes this primordial Divine Logos is now coming into the world, and John is testifying concerning it.

vv. 16-18 *And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Verse 16 begins a new strophe in the Logos hymn. The "fullness" (*pleroma*) spoken of is not a Gnostic reference, but rather is the embodiment of what is said in v.14, that the glory of God is full (*pleres*) of grace and truth, found throughout the Old Testament. From this fullness we, who have seen his glory (v.14), have also all received "grace upon grace."

The preposition *anti* ("grace *anti* grace") is of importance. Originally, the use of the preposition indicated the notion of "facing," "over against" or "instead of," which would render the interpretation "we have received grace in place of (another) grace."[196] "The *anti*, according to most modern commentators, indicates the ceaseless stream of graces which succeed one another."[197] On the contrary, *anti* as "instead of," taken with v.17 would mean that the grace which came through the Logos is what replaces the law of v.17; the law being understood as an earlier form of grace.[198]

This position stands contrary to many scholars who argue that *anti* means "upon," basing their argument largely upon this conception found in Philo.[199] Nevertheless, the use of *anti* as "instead of" or more likely "over against" seems to fit the context well. In

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[196] C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 71. In addition, BAGD does not give "upon" as a possibility of the lexical range of *anti*, but rather gives as the primary definition "instead of," "in place of." BAGD 87.

[197] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:275.

[198] Cf. Carson. The grace of Jesus does not *replace* the law. "The law, *i.e.* the law-covenant, was given by grace, and anticipated the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ; now that he has come, that same prophetic law-covenant is necessarily superseded by that which it 'prophesied' would come," Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 132; cf. Rom.7.

[199] Cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 78, ftnt.2; "The greater fullness of grace under the new covenant, in contrast to the old, is not envisaged," Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:275f; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 56.

addition, this fits well with v.17 which begins with *oti*, denoting an explanation of the preceding verse. Either is theologically sound, but context seems to suggest the first rendering.

Given the understanding of *anti* in v.16 as "over against," the explanation given in v.17 is made clear. Moses, the head of a previous dispensation and recipient of an antiquated law is superseded by the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. The verb "came" is *egeneto*, again denoting the historico-temporal incarnation of the divine Logos into phenomenal existence with his people.

Just as Moses was not allowed to see God (Ex.33:20), only the Only-begotten of God, who is in the Father's bosom, has made him known. The distinction between God and the Only-begotten is clearly made here, yet it is already understood that the incarnate Word is not only with God, but God himself (Jn.1:1). There is thus an iclusio of v.1 and v.18, affirming the deity of the Logos before and after his incarnation. The final statement of the Prologue makes it entirely clear that "it is he who has revealed God" to us.

Certain characteristics of the Prologue can be drawn from the above exegesis. First, the Prologue provides the hermeneutical background upon which the entire Gospel is intended to be understood. The nature, history and relationship of the Logos to creation and humanity thematically are presuppositions for the historical reality of the personified Logos, Jesus, in the rest of the Gospel. This is the message of the Prologue *and* the Gospel, that the divine Logos is not only visible throughout history, but that he has come into the world in order that those who believe in him will receive the right to be called children of God. The author introduces this in the Prologue, and expounds it in the rest of the Gospel.

Also, the hermeneutic set forth by the author in the Prologue clearly drives the audience back to the history of redemption found in the Old Testament. From the outset, the author both implicitly and explicitly guides the audience to understand what is being

said about the Logos in light of the Old Testament history. Regardless of possible source-material for the Prologue, the message of the author clearly has the Judaeo-Christian tradition in focus.

Finally, it is fair to posit the *possibility* that the author intentionally employs the language and structure of other theologies, not just as a polemic, but also to set forth the exclusivity of Christ. Although Gnosticism proper was not existent by the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel, certain characteristic themes of second century Gnosticism did exist and were used within other theologies. Given this, as it pertains to the Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue, the author of the Prologue does make use of many words and themes that provide cursory support for their theology. This final exegetical analysis demonstrates, however, that a closer look into the precise message of the author brings that support into serious question.

Conclusion

The Fourth Gospel stands as one of the most significant and controversial books of the New Testament. The Gospel is independent of the synoptic tradition and presents a theological narrative of the life and ministry of Jesus. For Christian orthodoxy, the Fourth Gospel clearly sets forth the role of Christ as God in his soteriological mission to redeem his people. For others, the Gospel resonates themes of independent theologies which stand contrary to the history and theology assumed by Christianity. It is for this reason that the Fourth Gospel has been the subject of intense historical, theological and literary scrutiny.

One such group that laid hold of the message of the Gospel was the Gnostic sect called Valentinianism. Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel is rooted in a history that transcends that of orthodoxy to the heavenly realm of the Pleroma, from which the world finds its ultimate origins. For the Valentinians, the role of the Logos in the Gospel Prologue is to provide redemption to the souls of the world that exist in darkness, with no knowledge of the ultimate heavenly realm apart from the divine spark which the Logos seeks to enlighten. Knowledge, or *gnosis*, is not only the soteriological means of redemption, but is also the foundation for their exegesis, which provides a "true" interpretation of the message of the Fourth Gospel. Valentinian exegesis and interpretation of the Prologue reveals a theology which claims to supersede that of orthodoxy, which is seen by the Valentinians to have naïvely misconstrued the Demiurge as the source and aim of redemption.

The historical struggle of the early church and this heterodox group demonstrates the inability of orthodoxy and Valentinianism to co-exist peacefully. With both groups claiming the Fourth Gospel as their own, the question burned as to who was right. Was the author of the Fourth Gospel operating within the "orthodox" theological system shared by the other apostolic authors of the New Testament, or does his message point to

a divergent theology which is qualitatively more syncretistic, aligning more closely with Valentinianism?

The historical analysis of the origins of Gnosticism casts a shadow of doubt as to whether the author intentionally put forth a Gnostic theology. Gnosticism did not come into a developed, coherent existence until the second century, yet pre-Gnostic thought did exist in a very loose conglomeration of various mythologies at the time that the Fourth Gospel was written. Particularly in the Prologue, the author makes use of metaphorical language and themes that are shared with Valentinian theology. They are also shared, however, with orthodox Christianity; thus forcing the question over the theological allegiance of the Gospel.

Exegetical analysis of the Valentinian interpretation of the Prologue presents a complicated hermeneutic, which operates within three potential trajectories. The Prologue does seem to align closely, yet tangentially, with certain aspects of Valentinian theology, when interpreted through the hermeneutic lens of their cosmogony. However, serious questions arise as well. For the Fourth Gospel to have promoted a theology based upon such a complex cosmogony, it must have existed at the time of authorship; and there is no evidence that Gnostic thought had developed such a thorough cosmogony by that time. In addition, the available sources of Valentinian exegesis conspicuously avoid dealing with verses of the Prologue that could prove problematic to their theology. Finally, given that the Prologue was written as an introduction to the rest of the Gospel, and should be seen as inextricably connected to it, Valentinian theology and exegesis proves problematic when the metaphorical language of the Prologue is shown to be specifically referential to the person and work of Jesus Christ throughout the rest of the Gospel.

The Christian exegesis of the Prologue proves to be considerably more coherent. The Prologue makes it explicitly clear that the Logos not only shared primordial existence with God of creation, but that he *is* the God of creation (v.2). This Logos then became

flesh and dwelt among his people in order to bring redemption to the world of his creation. The soteriological knowledge given by the Saviour is not *gnosis* of the ultimate heavenly realm of the Pleroma, but rather of himself. The scope of this redemptive purpose is made clear in the Prologue that "the light" offered by the Logos extends to everyone (v.9), as opposed to the Valentinian conception that "the light" is only offered to those constitutionally capable of receiving it. Finally, the Christian exegesis of the Prologue is entirely coherent with the message of the rest of the Fourth Gospel, as well as the New Testament corpus.

Thus, the conclusion of this exegetical analysis is that the message of the Prologue of John, while susceptible to some degree of late Valentinian interpretation, wholly promotes and coheres with the orthodox Christian tradition and the Gospel message of the New Testament.

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