

The Book of the Hellenists and the Origin of the Gospel of Mark: The Development of the Gospels of Mark and John Turned on Its Head¹

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“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20)

What the author of 2nd Peter says here concerning the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the coming of Jesus is also true of the scriptures in the New Testament and Gospels. The human motives and circumstances of their composition do not affect or diminish their divine origin and their inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are free to investigate the conditions of their emergence and formation and find the most plausible explanation for their human origins by exploring new solutions to longstanding riddles. This is what I hope to show in the following summary of my many years of research in Europe, now offered to an English-speaking audience.

As such, the present essay challenges three unquestioned assumptions within modern biblical scholarship: first, that the Johannine Prologue was a later addition to the Gospel; second, that John’s account of Jesus was the last to be written; and third, that John is dependent upon Mark and the other synoptists. When each of these assumptions is challenged critically, a new paradigm emerges for understanding why John is distinctive among the Gospels, accounting for John’s unique features.

I. The *Logos* Creed and the Johannine Narrative

First of all, the Gospel of John was not the last to be authored as commonly believed, but – in its original scope – it was the first of our four Gospels to be constructed.¹ And, its so-called Prologue was not a preface, an introduction, or a summary of it. Instead, it was the very cause and reason for the composition of the narrative, conceived not as a story of Jesus – this was only a vehicle of its purpose – but as an ecclesial and corrective to, and commentary upon, John’s *Logos* Creed as the first Confession of Faith. In some respects, this may soon have become problematic for the Church.² It seems to be a Confession of Faith because it says: “And we have seen his glory...” (Jn

¹ *The Priority of John* was already the title of a learned, posthumously edited book of Bishop John A.T. Robinson, London 1985 and 1987. About 10 years later, independently, Klaus Berger also published his book *Im Anfang war Johannes*, Stuttgart 1997. Both scholars argued mainly with related content and theological observations. My approach was a more formal one. I started with the reception-critical treatment of Jn 1:13-14 (1978) and continued with the reconstruction of the original text of the Prologue and its reception in John, other writings of the NT, and the heretical literature (1986). In a last step, I tried to show that not only the Prologue but also the Gospel of John in a first edition must have been used by Mark, Matthew, and Luke (1997 and 2002). See below: annotations 3, 9, and 15.

² Cf. Peter Hofrichter, *Im Anfang war der “Johannesprolog.” Das urchristliche Logosbekenntnis – die Basis neutestamentlicher und gnostischer Theologie*, BU 17 (Regensburg, 1986); 2nd edition available online at academia.edu.

1:14) in a manner of liturgical speaking of the faithful, found nowhere else in the Gospels. The original purpose of the book was to base this Creed upon the real earthly life, passion, and death of Jesus. Probably, the book was already targeted against early heretics who derived from the *Logos* Creed the opinion that Jesus was a heavenly being transformed into the appearance of flesh, as his suffering and death are not mentioned in John 1:1-18.

Therefore, the Gospel implicitly contradicts the *Logos* concept of the Creed by offering a bold, new interpretation: The emphasis now is upon the ministry of Jesus rather than his preexistence and cosmology. Thus, the meaning of “the word” (ὁ λόγος) now refers exclusively to the word of his message (about 20 times); it is the word he hears from his Father and reveals to the world. Thus, Jesus is now shown to represent and be God himself (ὁ θεός, *Yahweh*) in the missionary unity of Father and Son (Jn 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28). “The Beginning” of John 1:1 is now directed toward the beginning of his self-revelation (Jn 2:11). Likewise, the following terms of the Creed – “all,” “nothing,” “life,” and “light” – are connected with Jesus on earth (cf. Jn 3:35; 19:28; 15:5; 5:26; 8:12). At the same time, the Gospel teaches that Jesus was a real “man” (Jn 10:33; 11:50; 18:14; 17:29; 19:5)³ who finally suffered and died on the cross (19:34-35). Therefore, this first Jesus Book was not only an anti-heretical and corrective commentary upon the problematic text initially quoted but also something like the first extensive Christian “*summa theologica*,” which would remain the foundation for all future theological discussions.

While John the son of Zebedee has traditionally been associated with “the Gospel of John,” the particulars of authorship are less certain than the traditional memory of its completion in Asia Minor. Many scholars agree that the Galilean fisherman and Son of Thunder John may be associated with the Apocalypse but scarcely with the Gospel under his name. I decided to give this highly intellectual writing the title *Book of the Hellenists* since Andrew and Philip, with their Greek names, are shown as disciples whom Jesus had especially called (Jn 1:40,43). They helped him at the multiplication of bread (Jn 6:7-8) and were instrumental in bringing the Greeks to Jesus (Jn 12:20-22). The language and style of the Johannine Gospel show the most elegant *Koiné* Greek in the whole New Testament. We must not forget that the background of the introductory Creed clearly echoes the Greek writings of Philo of Alexandria and Greek philosophy, as well. It seems that the disciple Philip later became one of the Seven, and after the stoning of Steven, the leader of the Hellenists (Acts 6:5; 8:5).⁴ We may also remember the classical Greek Orthodox icons, where Prochoros, the third man after Steven and Philip in the Hellenist hierarchy of the Seven (Acts 6:5), is depicted as John’s secretary occupied with writing the Gospel, thus linking the Gospel again to the Seven Hellenist leaders. Obviously, the Gospel may have been embraced by this group. The reason for its composition may have been a severe controversy or even a definite split within the Hellenist community.

The theologians behind the *Book of the Hellenists* had no intention of presenting a biography of Jesus or an exact report of his words and deeds. Instead, they primarily wanted to introduce him as a real person in space and time and show him teaching their interpretation of the quoted Creed according to the last stanza of this text: “Nobody has ever seen God, the only-begotten Son, this

³ While the narrative of the Gospel refers to the “man sent from God to give witness of the light” in Jn 1:6 as John the Baptist, the mission of Jesus and his testimony of himself being the light of the world (Jn 8:12-14) must have had their origin and basis there. On the other hand, incarnation is definitely not an issue of the Gospel because the “word” is not identified with Jesus but with his message. The term “flesh” is referred to only in the context of the Eucharist (Jn 6).

⁴ As a deacon in Caesarea, he had four prophetic daughters (Acts 21:9) and later as one of the twelve Apostles in Hierapolis (Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* III.31).

one has explained.” The death of Jesus is introduced and supplemented in the narrative as his final glorification (Jn 12:23), embedding the Calvary events in the words of the Creed: “And we have seen his glory, glory of the Only-Begotten from the Father” (Jn 1:15). Thus, the *Book of the Hellenists* presents the crucifixion of Jesus graphically and boldly, correcting a feature the Creed lacks.

Despite these primarily doctrinal intentions, however, the Gospel of John as the *Book of the Hellenists* has also proven to be most trustworthy in the facts included. Modern archeology has verified the existence of the Pools of Bethesda (Jn 5:2) and Siloam (Jn 9:7), and material facts corroborate numerous other topographical features in John’s narrative. Even John’s chronology of the Passover events, contradicted by Mark and his followers, has been confirmed by more recent research. Therefore, at least one important authority behind the project of the *Book of the Hellenists* must have been an eyewitness who had an excellent knowledge of the places and ways of Jesus, the calendar of the Jewish feasts, and the chronology of the Passover events.⁵ The value of the Gospel of John as a reliable historical source for Jesus has been highlighted recently again by the scholars of the “John, Jesus and History Project,” directed by Paul N. Anderson and others.⁶

II. Mark Provides an Alternative to Early John

While the *Book of the Hellenists* can be read as something like a history of Jesus since it contained a detailed account of the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus and a few important events of his work and revelation. It did not include most of the authentic words and deeds of Jesus, which were certainly still told and known among the Christian believers. Instead, it contained lengthy and mostly fictive doctrinal speeches and meditations placed in the mouth of Jesus. We can imagine that many Christian believers, especially those of the communities attached to the missions of Peter and Paul, were unhappy with this book and wanted to have a somehow similar book about Jesus recording his true words and deeds. The most trustworthy authority for this task would have been Peter, but he might have already been dead. His companion, though, was Mark.

John Mark was not an immediate disciple of Jesus. His mother had hosted the friends of Jesus after the Easter events in her house in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Her son Mark went first with Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus, but then he left them (Acts 12:25; 13; 5:13). According to tradition, later on he went with Peter to Rome, maybe as his Latin translator. Mark is a Latin name, so his father was probably a Roman. Mark must have known many single stories about Jesus from the preaching of Peter, but he certainly had little knowledge about exactly when and on which occasions these the events he reported might have happened. Therefore, when he decided to write a more authentic

⁵ This witness may have been Mary Magdalene. She stood under the cross and was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. She may be also hidden in the figure of the enigmatic beloved disciple of Jesus. Until the 9th century, her grave was in Ephesus, and she is appreciated not only in the Gospel of John, but even more so in apocryphal literature. She is downgraded in the tradition attached to Peter and Paul as testimony of the resurrection and also as having been possessed by demons in Lk 8:2. A problem may occur in Jn 20:2, where Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple appear as two different persons, but this story belongs to the latest additions to the Gospel, probably together with Jn 21:20-23.

⁶ See, for instance, the first three volumes in the central series (five additional books have also been published as of now): *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, Symposium Series 44; *Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, Symposium Series 49. *Early Christianity and Its Literature 1*; *Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens*, *Early Christianity and Its Literature 18*. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S.J., and Tom Thatcher, editors. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007, 2009, 2016).

Jesus Book he took over the frame of the book already existing, together with its record of the passion and resurrection of Jesus and some significant events. He simplified the confusing pilgrimages of Jesus to the celebration of the different Jewish feasts, collapsing them into a single journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, and filling in the remaining outline with his own material from the preaching of Peter.⁷

There has never been a serious doubt of at least some sort of literary relationship between the Gospels of John and Mark, although their traditions are also mostly autonomous. Since Christian antiquity, theologians were convinced that John, as the last evangelist, had known and used the Gospel of Mark and the other two Synoptic Gospels, filling in what was missing between them. Although most of the content of Mark and John is different, there are still as many as fifty direct parallels between Mark and John. However, if we investigate them in detail, another issue arises. Surprisingly, if the details are considered more closely, it appears more likely that in almost all of the cases, John might not have copied from Mark, but rather, Mark copied John. Thus, the facts of the minor similarities and differences suggest not that John depended on Mark, but that Mark depended on John.⁸

However, Mark not only replaced most of the content of the book of his predecessor but also tried to make some significant corrections. One of them was the date when Jesus was crucified. In John, we read that Jesus was crucified at the same time as the lambs were slaughtered in the temple, i.e., the day before Passover. This Friday was the 14th of the month Nisan and the preparation day not only for the Sabbath but also for Passover. After sunset, at the beginning of the feast day, these lambs were eaten at the Passover meals. But Mark wanted to present the Last Supper Jesus had celebrated with his disciples as an ordinary Passover meal (Mk 14:12). In this case, the Friday when Jesus was crucified would have been the first day of feast, the 15th Nisan. Mark avoids all references to John's chronology (Jn 18:28; 19; 14:31). Because of religious and political reasons, trials, crucifixions, and funerals during the feast would have been absolutely impossible. Meanwhile, we know that people from Galilee were allowed to celebrate the Passover meal already one day earlier. Mark did not know that.

As for the resurrection of Jesus, Mark diminished the appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14-18)⁹ and reduced this very first testimony of his resurrection to the appearance of an angel to Mary Magdalene and two other women, who simply inform the disciples and Peter that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (Mk 16:6-8). This angel at the tomb was later added to the Book of John as two angels (Jn 20:11-13). We remember that Peter must have told Paul that he himself was the first one to have seen the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:5; Gal 1:18f).

As to the shameful denial of Peter in the courtyard of the high priest, Mark makes him at least weep about his failing (Mk 14:72; cf. Jn 18:27). Mark changes the two first-called disciples Andrew and Peter so that Peter now is the first one called, and then he replaces Philip and Nathanael with James and John. This is not mentioned at all in the original *Book of the Hellenists* (Mk 1:16-20; cf. Jn 1:35-

⁷ Cf. "Zur Komposition des Markusevangeliums auf der Grundlage des Hellenistenbuches." Pages 161-84 in *Für und wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums*. Edited by Peter Leander Hofrichter. TTS 9 (Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg-Olms-Verlag, 2002). Available at academia.edu.

⁸ I have tried to show and argue that in detail by all parallels in Greek in my book: *Modell und Vorlage der Synoptiker – das vorredaktionelle Johannesevangelium*. 2nd edition. TTS 6 (Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg-Olms-Verlag, 2002).

⁹ This is a case where a redaction of John depends on Mark.

51). He repeatedly depicts Peter, James, and John as the three most prominent disciples (Mk 9:2; 14:33; cf. Gal 2:9) and Peter as their speaker (Mk 8:27-33, etc.).

Even in the interest of practical church discipline, Mark deviated from his predecessor and probably from historical truth. Taking into consideration the split between Jewish Christians and Heathen Christians concerning the discipline of dishes and the position of James and Peter in this controversy (Gal 2:11-21), he redoubled the miraculous multiplication of bread (Jn 6:3-13), reporting the first one on the Jewish western bank of the Sea of Galilee with the unchanged numbers five and twelve (Mk 6:35-44); the other one on the pagan eastern bank used the secular numbers four and seven (Mk 8:1-9). He even used a different eucharistic terminology in the prayer of Jesus, likewise blessing (Mk 8:41) and thanking (Mk 8:6), probably according to the Jewish-Christian and the Pagan-Christian practice.¹⁰ But in order to connect the missions to the Jews and the Gentiles (Gal 2:7) within the mission of Jesus himself, Mark redoubled not only the multiplication of bread but the entire sequence of chapters 4 and 6 of John, replacing the stories told there by similar material of his own. He begins both sequences substituting the story of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-42) with a respective story on women. The Jewish mission (Mk 5:21b-7:23) starts with the awakening of the little daughter of Jairus and the healing of the blood-liquid woman (Mk 5:21b-43). Likewise, the pagan mission (7:24-8:11) starts with the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:24-30).

In the story of Jesus walking on the water (Jn 6:15-20; Mk 6:45-53), Mark's paraphrase is copied almost verbatim from John, and he even literally kept the word of Jesus: "Εγώ εἰμι, μὴ φοβεῖσθε – It is I; don't be afraid." But "ἐγώ εἰμι" is the typical formula of divine self-revelation in the Gospel of John. Moreover, there is a geographical problem. In John, it is clear. The multiplication of bread took place on the eastern bank of the lake, and after that the disciples were on their way across the lake to Capernaum. Since Mark tells the walking on the water after the first multiplication of the bread within the mission among the Jews on the western side of the lake, crossing the lake thereafter was not necessary. So, he makes the disciples sail to the other bank to Bethsaida (Mk 6:45) at the northern end of the lake and from there to Gennesaret (Mk 6:53). But Bethsaida is not really across the lake; it is nearby. And on the way there, you need not cross the lake; consequently, you will never come to the middle (Mk 6:47) of the lake. The whole story is less than satisfactory topographically.

Other changes were necessary because of the simplified frame. Since Jesus in the Gospel of Mark had come only once at the end of his mission to Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple had to be shifted from the beginning (Jn 2:13-17) to the end of the story (Mk 11:15-17). The prophecy of Jesus that they may destroy the temple (of his body) and he would rebuild it within three days (Jn 2:19) is now put in the mouth of the false prosecutors at the synedrium and expressively related to the real and handmade temple: "He himself would destroy it and build another one not handmade within three days" (14:58). This accusation presupposes already the knowledge of the prophecy of Jesus in Jn 2:19.

¹⁰ Luke, connected with Paul, who opposed the separation of tables, will cancel this redoubling of the multiplication of bread by Mark and replace it by a redoubling of the mission of disciples, introducing the Seventy in order to trace Jesus back to Paul's theory of the two different missions for the Jews and the Gentiles. Cf. Peter L. Hofrichter, "Von der zweifachen Speisung des Markus zur zweifachen Aussendung des Lukas: Die Auseinandersetzung um die Heidenmission in der Redaktionsgeschichte der Evangelien." Pages 143-155 in *Theologie im Werden: Studien zu den theologischen Konzeptionen im Neuen Testament*, ed. Josef Hainz. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992). Reprinted in: *Logoslied, Gnosis und Neues Testament*, 213-224. Available at academia.edu.

Of course, Mark could not take over the “signs” of Jerusalem told in John earlier. The healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda is replaced by the healing of another lame man in Capernaum. In both cases, Jesus says: “Stand up, take your bed and walk!” And the report continues with almost the same words: “Immediately he stood up, took his bed and went around” – or, respectively, went out (Jn 5:8f; Mk 2:11f). From the healing of the blind-born man at the Pool of Siloam, Mark preserved only the words of Jesus in Jn 9:39 referring to Isaiah 6:9, fulfilling the Scripture according to the LXX, and used it in another context, namely, justifying the teaching of Jesus in parables (Mk 4:12), although “to see and not to see” is also somewhat forced in that setting.

The method of changing the story or the context, but maintaining the decisive words, can be observed in the healing of the mother-in-law of Peter. Mark took the words “the fever left him” from the healing of the official’s son in John 4:52 and changed them to “left her” (Mk 1:31). Matthew, however, repeats both stories one after the other, but to avoid the repetition, he omits “the fever left him” in the first story (Mt 8:5-13 and 8:14f.).

As to the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist says that he had a vision (τεθέαμαι), that the Spirit came down in the shape of a dove and remained on Jesus, and that he had an audition from God (ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν) interpreting this vision (Jn 1:31f.). The Baptist testifies to what he has seen, that Jesus is the Son of God – καὶ γὰρ ἑώρακα καὶ μεμαρτύρακα ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Jn 1:34). Mark makes this testimony of the Baptist the vocation experience of Jesus Himself: Jesus Himself sees the Spirit coming down on him and hears a voice coming from heaven: “You are my beloved Son ...” This development is carried further when Luke finally changes these personal experiences of the Baptist or Jesus Himself simply into a real fact: “Ἐγένετο ...” (Lk 3:21f.). A reverse development is scarcely imaginable; Mark clearly fills out the Johannine picture here.

These are some isolated examples of how Mark used the *Book of the Hellenists*. But let us take a short review of his method in big steps. First of all, Mark starts his own book by immediately recalling the outset of his predecessor with the words: “Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” We remember: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God” in its ecclesial reinterpretation that the “word” is the message of Jesus, and Jesus is God Himself in the unity of Father and Son! Mark seems to have agreed to this theological position and confirms it in his Gospel. Mark also explains later expressively in his interpretation of the parable of the sower how he understands the *Logos*: “The word is the seed the sower is sowing” (Mk 4:14). The word (λόγος) as the seed is obviously symbolizing the message, which Jesus, the sower, is preaching.

The baptism of Jesus and the calling of the first disciples is followed in John by the wedding in Cana, where the mother and the brothers of Jesus are mentioned (Jn 2:1-11). Mark replaces this story with another one expressively dealing with the mother and the brothers of Jesus (Mk 3:31-35). The cleansing of the temple, as we mentioned already, is transferred to Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. The conversation with Nicodemus about the birth from above (Jn 3:1-23) is replaced by some parables on seeds (Mk 4:1-35). The issue of the bridegroom in Jn 3:29f. linked with John the Baptist was already drawn forward in Mk 2:19f. Instead of the section about Jesus and John baptizing in Judea (Jn 3:22-36), Mark inserts two water stories of Galilee: the stilling of the storm on the lake (Mk 4:35-40) and the healing of the possessed man of Gerasa (Mk 5:1-20). All these stories equally assert the divine authority of Jesus.

The passage about the Samaritan women begins the double paraphrase about the mission of Jesus – first among the Jews and then among the gentiles and ends with the sermon on the bread (Jn 4:1-54; 6:1-59; Mk 5:21-8:21). Within this double paraphrase, the word about the prophet not esteemed in his fatherland is shifted from the beginning and the relationship to Jerusalem (ἐν τῇ ἰδιᾷ πατρίδι) to the context of the family of Jesus in Nazareth (Jn 4:44; Mk 6:4). Typical for John is the term “σημεῖον – sign” in the sense of a miracle performed by Jesus. In Jn 6:30, it is used precisely in this meaning: What sign do you perform that we believe in you? Mark, not familiar with this terminology, makes it a “sign from heaven” that the Pharisees are demanding from Jesus (Mk 8:11).

The story continues with the confession of Peter (Jn 6:66-71; Mk 8:27-33). Mark ascribes Peter’s confession according to the *Book of the Hellenists*: “You are the saint of God” only to the demons (Mk 1:24) and shows Peter confessing Jesus as the Messiah. Chapters 5, 7, 8, and 9 of John dealing in Jerusalem have almost no correspondence in Mark except the healing story at the Pool of Bethesda, already mentioned above. Maybe, with the transfiguration, Mark reacts to the sermon of Jesus that he is the light of the world and that he gives witness for himself (Jn 8:1-20; Mk 9:2-12). Both stories have to do with the rejection of the Prophet-Christology and with John the Baptist representing Elijah and also being testimony.

The relations between both Gospels continue with the saying of Jesus that those who keep his word (τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον) will not die (Jn 8:51), as Mark applies John’s content to the apocalyptic meaning that some of the people here present will not die until they have seen the kingdom of God (Mk 9:39). Out of chapters 9 and 10 of John, only the motives of seeing and not seeing and of the sheep (Jn 10:12; Mk 14:27) may have been used in other contexts. The direct relation is set forth with the decision about the death of Jesus (Jn 11:47; Mk 11:18), although without a literal parallel.

The next obvious use Mark made of the *Book of the Hellenists* is the anointing in Bethany. Mark has copied much of the text of John almost word for word (Jn 12:1-8; Mk 13:3-9). He is not interested in the persons important in the *Book of the Hellenists*, Lazarus and Mary, but only in the fact of the anointing. According to him, the owner of the house was a certain Simon the Leper, and the woman anointing Jesus remains nameless. But whereas Mary anoints the feet of Jesus, a standard duty on behalf of an arriving guest, the nameless woman now anoints Jesus’ head, which would have been unusual and more than strange. Mark did need an event by which Jesus was actually anointed as a King to be the hidden Messiah, the Christos, the anointed one, according to his confession to Peter. Mark could almost literally copy the passage of Judas’ anger over the waste and Jesus’ response from John. In addition, however, Mark expressively emphasizes the importance of this event for all future.

Upon the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the people’s shouts are expressed in identical language, word for word, in both Gospels (Jn 12:13; Mk 11:9). Chapter 11 of John with the raising of Lazarus and the meditations on the eternal life of the faithful in Jesus has its counterpart in Mark in the question on the resurrection of the dead (Mk 12:18-27) and in the apocalyptic prophecies of chapter 13.¹¹ The parallels in the passion story are numerous and have been treated by different scholars,

¹¹ The *Book of the Hellenists* taught the judgment already by the decision for or against Jesus and promised to the faithful an afterlife somehow in the line of Greek religion and philosophy, whereas Paul, Mark, and his followers emphasized the apocalyptic end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment. To make the *Book of*

usually in order to explain how John may have depended upon Mark or both depended upon a common source. However, I think Mark has used John directly here, but this cannot be discussed in detail within the scope of this article. The crucial topics of the chronology and of the resurrection have already been mentioned at the beginning of this summary.

Scholars who apply literary criticism to the Gospel of John and follow in the steps of Rudolf Bultmann will agree that the original book underwent a later redaction. These changes probably occurred in different phases and are responsible for the additions to the *Logos* Confession: the change of the chapters 5 and 6, the farewell speeches of John 14-17, the apparitions to Thomas and the disciples in Jerusalem, and the supplementary chapter of John 21. The story of the adulterous women of John 8:1-11 may have been added even later. It is noteworthy that none of these secondary enlargements is reflected in the Gospel of Mark, meaning that they were probably not yet in existence when Mark, in writing his Gospel, used the *Book of Hellenists*. The redaction of John must have happened only after the Gospel of Mark was already in existence, likely following the composition of Matthew and Luke, although this point is not to be argued here.

III. John's Gospel in Canonical Perspective

Having read this short overview of my fuller works published elsewhere, scholars specialized in the exegesis of John might not be totally convinced, but may I point them also to John A. T. Robinson's monograph along these lines.¹² Although claiming John to be the very first Gospel and the basis for the other ones, this approach might downgrade for some "the Fourth Gospel," with its highest developed theology and its famous Prologue as the summit of all christological reflection.¹³ Then again, if the Johannine Prologue had been controversial earlier as well as later in the history of early Christianity, this might have called for a narrative that could more fittingly be ascribed to the historical Jesus. Of course, the real Jesus probably never spoke like the Jesus of John, and the high "Theology of John" was probably early in its development as a result. As for the Prologue of John, it might be fascinating to consider that the very first Jesus Creed may have been composed by the Hellenistic followers of Jesus in the "Synagogue of the Libertines, Cyreneans, Alexandrians, and people of Cilicia and of the province of Asia" (Acts 6:9), likely in Jerusalem.

Stripped of later redactional and anti-heretical enlargements of the Creed, it may have consisted of the following text:

In the beginning was the Word,
And the word was with God,
And god (or divine?) was the Word.

This one was in the beginning with God,
All has been made by him,

the Hellenists acceptable for the Petrine and Pauline mainstream churches, a later redaction may have even added short eschatological supplements to the respective words of Jesus: 5:28f.; 6:54; 12:28.

¹² John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*. Edited by J. F. Coakley (London: SCM, 1985).

¹³ Rudolf Schnackenburg criticized mainly that I would reduce the Gospel of John to a commentary on the Prologue ignoring the independent *Johanneische Theologie*. *Theologische Rundschau* 82 (1986): 456.

And without him was made nothing.

What was made, in it was Life,
 And the life was the light of humanity,
 And the light was shining in the darkness,
 And the darkness has not comprehended it.

*

There appeared (He became) a man
 sent from God,
 to give testimony of the light.

He was the true light
 That enlightens every man,
 Coming into the world.

He was in the world,
 And the world did not know him;
 He came into his property,
 And his own ones did not receive him.

*

Not from blood,
 And not from the will of flesh,
 But from God was he born.¹⁴

And the Word has become flesh,¹⁵
 And we have seen his glory,
 Glory of him, who was born only from the Father.

Nobody has ever seen God,
 The only begotten Son,
 Who is at the bosom of the Father,
 That one has explained him to us.

¹⁴ Blood in plural and in sexual context signifies the menstrua as the female matter of procreation. Therefore, to avoid and contradict Christology, in which the true humanity of Jesus was denied, the original christological meaning had to be canceled. For this purpose, the sentence “But those who believed in his name, he gave them might to become children of God” was inserted. Children as a neuter could be understood as the grammatical subject to the following sentence (Jn 1:14), but this was still ambiguous. Therefore, in a next step, the relative pronoun in plural and the plural ending of the verb were added: οἱ and ἐγεννήθησαν. The line “And not from the will of man” may be the redoubling addition of a variant in the sense of a simply natural generation to the previous line. Cf. Peter Hofrichter, *Nicht aus Blut, sondern monogen aus Gott geboren*, FzB 31. (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1978); and succinctly: “Die Bedeutung des Blutes in John 1:13.” Pages 45-66 in *Logoslied, Gnosis und Neues Testament*, TTS 10 (Hildesheim: Georg-Olm-Verlan, 2003). Both available online at academia.edu.

¹⁵ The following line of the canonical text: “and he dwelt (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us” belongs to the insertion attached to the Exodus issue and continues: “full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have received grace upon grace. For the law has been given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.” In the original Logos Creed, the title Christ was still absent. Probably in the beginning when most Hellenists preached Jesus as the Logos or the Son of God, but not yet as the Messiah: cf. Acts 8:4f.; 9:20,22; 11:26.

The author of the Gospel of Matthew enlarged the Gospel of Mark with material from the hypothetical “Source of Sayings,” probably from the tradition of Matthew, and he underlined again and more intensively the importance and leadership of Peter. Still aware of the overall thrust of the *Book of the Hellenists*, he replaced the *Logos* Creed with the story of the earthly origin of Jesus, beginning with his human genealogy down from Abraham (Mt 1:1-17) and ending with the birth of Jesus (1:18-24) and his settlement in Nazareth (Mt 2: 23).

Luke kept this idea of “Matthew” but improved the performance. He worked out a perfect exegetical paraphrase to the *Logos* Creed, turning its meaning from heaven and high theology to a wonderfully simple story and meditation about Christ’s birth here on earth. He must have used the text of the Creed contained in the *Book of the Hellenists*, still without any redactional insertions. The “man sent from God to give testimony to the light” was still open for different interpretations, besides the original one on Jesus also the other one on John the Baptist, already taken in a secondary consideration in the *Book of the Hellenists* itself (Jn 1:32-34; 5:31-35), but also even in the sense of an angel like Gabriel (Lk 1:26f). His birth “not from blood and not from the will of flesh” (Jn 1:13) was not yet grammatically fixed to “those who believe in his name,” which were not yet existing in the text (Jn 1:12), but still related to the “man sent from God,” may he be Jesus or the Baptist. It could be explained as concerning in one case an old woman after her fertility (Lk 1:18) and in the other case concerning a virgin before her maturity (Lk 1:27). Luke took account of both possibilities, one after the other. Obviously, he explained the statement that Jesus “came into his property and his own ones did not receive him” (Jn 1:11) with the story that his parents came to Bethlehem and there was no room for them in the inn (Lk 2:1-8), or that we have seen his glory (Jn 1:14) in the choir of the angels singing: “Glory be God in the highest” (Lk 2:9-14); and finally that the Son “has explained” the Father to the world (Jn 1:18) is then narrated by showing the young Jesus sitting in the temple in midst of the scribes, explaining the Scriptures to them (Lk 2:46). Luke has already alluded to the first terms of the Creed – beginning, word, God, etc. – in the previous preface to his Gospel, so that they are also clearly pointing to the earthly life and work of Jesus, and the terms “life” and “light” are present in the temple service of Zacharias through mediation of Psalm 27.¹⁶

All three synoptic authors have thus sought to improve the efforts of the *Book of the Hellenists* in order to avoid and contradict speculations on the preexistence of Jesus based on the *Logos* Creed and to restrict themselves and concentrate on his real human existence and his earthly life. All three refuse to identify Jesus with the Word of God, the *Logos*, and they call unanimously for belief in Jesus as the Son of God and respectively, belief in God his Father, according to the theology and the way of speaking coined by the *Book of the Hellenists*. In this important matter, Mark and his followers fully agreed to the theology of the *Book of the Hellenists*, but not necessarily its general spirituality.

We have to realize that there were at least three different branches among the followers of the first-century Jesus: the Jewish Christians around the fishermen Peter, James, and John from Galilee, the more educated Hellenists who spread from their Synagogue in Jerusalem quickly to other Greek-

¹⁶ More in detail: Peter L. Hofrichter, “Johannesprolog und lukanische Vorgeschichte.” See *John and the Synoptics*. Edited by A. Denaux. (BETL 101) 1992; reprinted in: Peter L. Hofrichter, *Logoslied, Gnosis und Neues Testament* TTS 10 (Hildesheim: Georg-Olm-Verlag, 2003), 225-34. Available online at academia.edu.

speaking Jewish communities (Acts 11:19), and thirdly, the Pagan Christians from the mission of Paul. The Hellenists were the weakest group. They were partly absorbed by the Pauline Mission in Antioch (Acts 11:25f.), and they are perhaps referenced in other controversies (1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 3:9). It is those who renounced the preexistence speculations and believed in the salvific significance of Jesus' death and resurrection that embraced the narrative of the Gospel of John. In other aspects, they kept their own tradition and approach: Personal salvation depends only on belief or unbelief in Jesus. Morals and behavior seem to have no special significance. Their belief in the afterlife and their distant attitude toward apocalyptic eschatology were already mentioned. In order to integrate these Hellenists in Western Asia Minor into the Petrine mainstream Church toward the end of the first century, their Gospel was revised and furthered under the name of John.¹⁷ The next and decisive step for uniting the three branches of the Church was the formation of an "ecumenical" hierarchy in every church by Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century: the Pagan-Christian bishop, the Jewish-Christian presbyters, and the deacon of the Hellenists. These three designated offices in the early Church were modeled after the Jewish temple-hierarchy involving high-priest, priests, and Levites.¹⁸

As we have seen, the final redaction and enlargement of the *Book of the Hellenists* was made, or at least was completed, only after the existence of the Gospel of Luke. Therefore, in this respect, the canonical "Gospel of John" may be considered also as the last one. The Gospel of Mark was also enlarged with the addition of a summary on the apparitions of the risen Lord according to all other Gospels (Mk 16: 9-20), although not yet taking account of those told in chapter 21 of John. Therefore, it is hard to say which of them was the last one to be finished. But the origin of the writing of the Gospels is clear: the narration of Jesus and his ministry started with John's account.

Last but not least, we cannot pass over the question of truth; Pilate even relates the question: "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38). There is not only a solid foundation of trustworthy historical information about the message, wonders, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels but also a broad spectrum of theological reflection, meditation, poetry, and even interest-led fiction in the Gospels. The answer to our question on the truth in the Holy Scriptures is laid in the mouth of Jesus himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life!" (Jn 14:6). The truth is Jesus himself. Truth lies not in the historicity of these facts or words, but with Thomas, in the personal experience of Jesus as Lord and God (Jn 20:28). And, the one who teaches through the Gospels, regardless of how they came into existence, is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), the Holy Spirit, promised to be sent by the Father in Jesus' name (Jn 14:26).

¹⁷ Among those responsible for the final redaction of the Gospel seems to be the author of the first letter of John. Like the redactional farewell sermons of the Gospel, he highlights the necessity of love. In concordance with the Gospel, he refers to the Logos Creed, relating it exclusively to the earthly Jesus, turning the term Logos to the significance of his message (word of life), and teaching the divine unity of Father and Son.

¹⁸ Cf. Peter L. Hofrichter, "Amt und Amtsverständnis in der Urkirche," *Heiliger Dienst* 45 (1991) 1-19, and "Diakonat und Frauen im kirchlichen Amt," *Heiliger Dienst* 30 (1996) 140-158. Both available at academia.edu.