

# "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it": The spirit beyond the Christological debate: Toward a pneumatological interpretation of John 1:5

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*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”*  
**THE SPIRIT BEYOND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DEBATE:  
TOWARD A PNEUMATOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 1:5**

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree  
from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Weston Jesuit)

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## *Introduction*

According to Bruce Vawter, the Incarnation is not only an affirmation of Christian dogma but also the very essence of salvation.<sup>1</sup> In another article in the same volume, he defines the Incarnation as “the tremendous mystery by which the eternal Word took on our human nature, becoming one of us in everything except sin (Heb 4:15); in everything, that is, except what was impossible with divinity.”<sup>2</sup> The pivotal question in this thesis is whether or not John 1:5, καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν (*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*) refers to the Incarnation.

Johannine scholars have debated the point about where the Incarnation is first referred to in the Prologue of John. According to one hypothesis (which I will call the First Hypothesis [H1]), advocated by scholars such as Ernst Käsemann, John 1:5 refers to the Incarnation. In Chapter One below, I will first set forth the exegetical and theological reasons why these Johannine scholars propose 1:5 as a reference to the Incarnation. Second, presupposing momentarily that scholars supporting this hypothesis are right in their approach, I will take up the issue of how its insights could help with various contemporary Christological debates, specifically religious pluralism and process theology. In doing so, I will offer a sympathetic case for the First Hypothesis.

Other scholars refute the position that John 1:5 refers to the Incarnation (I will call this the Second Hypothesis [H2]). I will take up this position in Chapter Two. However, we will see that not all Johannine scholars who disagree with H1 actually

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Vawter, “Johannine Theology,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 828-839, at 832.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Vawter, “The Gospel According to John,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 414-466, at 423.

agree on a specific point in which the Incarnation is first alluded to in the Prologue. Francis Moloney, for example, divides the first five verses into two categories: vv. 1-2 (pre-existence) and vv. 3-5 (creation through the Word). And the Word is with human beings until the Incarnation (vv. 6-14). At the same time, Moloney suggests that the coming of the Word into the world has been established since vv. 3c-4 and 9.<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown offers the best critique of H1, but Brown's own position is confusing. On the one hand, he already sees Jesus' ministry beginning in verses 10-12b while, on the other hand, he believes that the Incarnation takes place at John 1:14.

Rudolf Bultmann confers a liturgical meaning to the whole Prologue, but also offers two contradictory affirmations. First, he believes that "the turning point of the Prologue is verse 14, which speaks of the Incarnation of the Logos: the Word became flesh. Up to this point, we may have been dealing with the pre-existent Logos."<sup>4</sup> Specifically, John 1:5-13's subject is the Logos, as Revealer in history, and a preliminary description of his Incarnation which really takes place with the change of the verb tense in verse 14:

Just as the *et incarnatus est* marks a turning point in the Mass, Bultmann says, so too here the character of the Prologue changes. This is most noticeable in the source, which till now had spoken of the revelation in creation; but there is also a change in the style of the Evangelist, who from v.5 onwards has spoken indirectly, only hinting at what is to come. Now the riddle is solved, the miracle is proclaimed: the Logos became flesh!<sup>5</sup>

Second, in his *Theology of the New Testament*, Bultmann affirms:

Within the world of death life appeared (1 Jn. 1:2), into the world of darkness came the light (1:5; 3:19) –it came by the *coming of the Son of God* into the world. Jesus is he. Thus he came after the Baptist in time, he nevertheless was prior to him (1:15, 30). He even claims that he was before Abraham (8:58); yes, even more: that he was before the foundation of the world (17:5, 24). It is

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville, MIN.: The Liturgical, 1998), 38.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Charles K. Barrett, *New Testament Essays* (London: S.P.C.K., 1972), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 60-61. I will refer to it as First Bultmann in the text.

he in whom the Christian Congregation believes as the one “who was from the beginning” (1 Jn. 2:13f.). In him the “Word” which in the beginning was with God became flesh (1:1f., 14) and came into its own property –i.e. into the world, which belongs to it, and hence to him, as the one through whom it came into being (1:9-11).<sup>6</sup>

My assessment is that these disagreements among scholars are due to the complexity of the nature of the Prologue of John’s Gospel. Moreover, these scholars fail to offer a clear definition of the Incarnation before debating whether or not the Incarnation begins in one verse of the Prologue or in another. From my systematic point of view, the lack of clarity in the definition of the Incarnation is troubling. Thus, in the second chapter I will also argue in favor of H2 that John 1:5 does not allude to the Incarnation. But I will also go beyond the exegetical argumentation of this hypothesis to point out the dogmatic risks of any misunderstanding of the Incarnation.

At this point, two questions catch my attention: 1) Why isn’t John 1:5 a reference to the Incarnation? To this question, I offer both exegetical and theological arguments. 2) Why should not 1:5 and anything else before 1:14 be a reference to the Incarnation? My response to this question is based on the history of the dogma, specifically, how flesh is central in the Church’s fight against heresies. In fact, it seems to me that all the heresies in the history of dogma are caused by, or are a direct or indirect effect of, a confused understanding of the Incarnation, an understanding based on the suspicion of the fact that the *Word of God became flesh* (John 1:14). This second chapter, therefore, is basically a systematic critique of H1. In that sense, it remains an apophatic theological approach. The question, therefore, is whether a cataphatic interpretation of John 1:5 that goes beyond the Christological controversies is possible.

My response to this last question is the object of Chapter Three. This chapter intends to interpret John 1:5 Pneumatologically. This idea is motivated by the fact that,

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; 2 vols.; Waco: Baylor, 2007), 2:33. I will refer to it as Second Bultmann in the text.

admitting that the Prologue of John is a précis or an introduction to the whole Gospel, how is it that we do not have a clear reference to the Holy Spirit, a major theme in the Gospel, in the Prologue? More specifically, can the light that shines in the darkness in John 1:5 be a reference to the Holy Spirit? These fundamental questions bring other secondary, but important, questions that Chapter Three will answer. The first of these questions is, after denying that John 1:5 is a reference to the Incarnation, can it refer to another form of divine manifestation? Second, how can this manifestation refer to the Holy Spirit? But, third, is not this Pneumatological interpretation in opposition with the paradigmatic understanding of the Johannine Pneumatology, that the Holy Spirit is a gift of the risen Christ to the community and, therefore, has no place at the beginning of the Gospel? Fourth, can we still assume the paradigm about the later coming of the Holy Spirit and not contradict the identification of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, or the Messiah, or the Son of God, already present in the first chapters of the Gospel? Finally, can the Prologue of John still confess a Trinitarian faith from the beginning if it ignores the Holy Spirit from this very beginning?

I articulate my hypothesis through a reinterpretation of Johannine Pneumatology and theology of creation, and through abundant use of wisdom literature. In doing so, I propose a Trinitarian interpretation of the Prologue. However, I have to acknowledge that the use of Scripture at this point can raise fundamental theological questions about whether or not I am distorting the text in forcing a Pneumatological meaning which is not explicit in the text. Some critics might, then, refute the whole logic of my thesis. Since the reason why I reject H1 is that John 1:5 does not have an explicit reference to the flesh, without which there is not a true Incarnation, an objection can be raised against me: how can I argue in favor of the Holy Spirit who is not explicit in the text either?

In the conclusion, I intend to recapitulate the main points of the three chapters in a balanced way, and to address these concerns about the use of Scripture in this thesis. Maybe more important is: how can my Pneumatological Proposal be received by other theologians, and what is the ultimate purpose of this thesis for an African theologian?

## *Chapter 1: The Christological Debate: Strengths and Limits of Hypothesis One*

We can read the Prologue of John's Gospel from two perspectives. 1) Retroactively as a post-resurrection text. In that sense, reading the whole Gospel is necessary to understand its Prologue.<sup>7</sup> This approach tends to adopt a chiasmic structure and implies different possible reconstructions and a cyclical understanding of history.<sup>8</sup> 2) Chronologically,<sup>9</sup> as different and successive steps of salvation history. From this chronological approach, the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist has to be clarified in the progression of the text;<sup>10</sup> and since Jesus is the Light of the world (John 14:6), it remains unclear whether or not we should already apply this title to John 1:5. H1 mainly follows the chiasmic and retrospective approach, and emphasizes Jesus as the Light of the World; it holds to a cyclic understanding of history. H2, in contrast, tends to follow the chronological structure. Each approach affects the way we interpret the syntax of the Prologue of John's Gospel and has significant consequences for whether or not we should understand John 1:5 as an allusion to the Incarnation.

In this first chapter of my thesis, I carefully examine the Christological debate around John 1:5. Specifically, I explore and evaluate the exegetical and theological arguments which might justify any attempt by exegetes and theologians to understand John 1:5 as an allusion to the Incarnation (H1). Only after this exploration will I opt

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 110.

<sup>8</sup> Following the chiasmic structure of R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abington, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> For example, First Bultmann, Moloney and Raymond Brown, with some nuances, tend to support this chronological approach.

<sup>10</sup> I do not focus very much on the specific issue about whether or not verses 6-8, 9, and 15 are interpolations. However, I accept the broad consensus among scholars that both Jesus and John the Baptist have an eschatological significance. But John appears in the Prologue and in the Gospel in three aspects: 1) as a concluding witness of Israel (v. 6) who bears witness to Jesus so that people may believe in him (v. 7); 2) to resolve a community dispute (vv. 8-9); 3) and as the first witness to the Incarnation (v. 15). Cf. Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (ed. R. Bauckham and C. Mosser; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 265-294, at 282.

apophatically for H2 (in chapter 2), detailing the negative theological consequences of H1 and responding to the question why John 1:5 is not and, more concretely, should not be an allusion to the Incarnation, unless we *re-define* what Incarnation is.

### 1. *The Issue of the Structure of the Prologue*

The issue of the structure of the Prologue of John's Gospel is important in this thesis because, depending on how one structures it, one emphasizes some aspects more than others, and that can have an impact on where someone sees the first reference to the Incarnation in the text. The perception that the Incarnation is alluded to in John 1: 5 (H1) is a result of a structure that interprets verse 5 in light of the understanding that verses 6-8 are part of the original hymn of the Prologue.<sup>11</sup> This chiasmic structure is defined by three main characteristics. First, it has John the Baptist as a starting point. Second, it emphasizes the inclusion and correspondence of verses 1 and 18. Finally, it can either have its climactic point in verse 12<sup>12</sup> or not have a climactic point at all. Therefore, the chiasmic structures tend to be centered on secondary themes of the Prologue, and elude the reality of flesh and the general agreement around verse 14 as the central point of the Prologue.

According to Marie-Emile Boismard, for example, the pivotal point of the Prologue is not the Incarnation as such, but the conferring of the status "children of God" on those who believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the "Light" is a metaphor for the name "Jesus," which appears in the Gospel for the first time in verse 17, and from this point, the reader can draw the connection (retrospectively) between Jesus and what

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<sup>11</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, chapters 1-6* (trans. Robert W. Funk; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1:114.

<sup>12</sup> Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Marie-E. Boismard, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean* (Paris: Cerf, 1953), 54ff.

has been said about the Logos, the Light and the Only Son.<sup>14</sup> The problem with Boismard's approach is that it would be the last time the title "Logos" would be applied to Jesus in the whole Gospel.

The main defender of H1 is Ernst Käsemann. He also considers verses 6-8 an insertion, and sees in the relationship between verses 4-5 and 9 a reference to the Incarnation.<sup>15</sup> He clearly opposes the idea of other scholars like Charles H. Dodd or First Bultmann who suggest that a Hellenistic reader can think of the *Logos asarkos* up to verse 13. For Käsemann, on the contrary, the parallelism between verse 5 and verses 9ff implies that the portrayal of Jesus Christ as he appears in history begins at verse 5. Consequently, only by integrating verse 5 into the first part (verses 1-5) can one give a cosmological interpretation to it, as the structure of Charles Fox Burney and Johannes Weiss suggests.<sup>16</sup> Käsemann rejects such a structure for its lack of systematic unity.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he wonders about the effect of the relationship between verses 5, 9, and 14 if we consider verses 6-8 an insertion, an idea supported by Adolf von Harnack, for whom verse 14 needs not be seen as a transition from the *logos asarkos* to the *logos ensarkos*, but instead states that "this historical event was taken into account as early as verse 5."<sup>18</sup>

Finally, Ernst Haenchen suggests that, traditionally, the ancient church generally invoked verse 5 as referring to the Incarnation of Jesus, taking over the Gnostic

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<sup>14</sup> M.-E. Boismard by Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 117. The contradictory quotations of Bultmann in the introduction reflect this twofold perspective of the reading of the Prologue.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 138-168, at 144.

<sup>16</sup> Weiss suggests a division of the Prologue in four parts: 1) The cosmological significance of the Logos (vv. 1-5); witness of John the Baptist (vv. 6-8); manifestation of the Light (vv. 9-13); and the plan of salvation (vv.14-18) (Cf. Ernst Käsemann, "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel", 144-145). These cosmological interpretations are necessary to understand why pluralist and process theologians would be pleased in having the Incarnation at this point rather than at John 1:14 which is more ontologically and historically deployed, though more dogmatic and less universal.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

punctuation of verse 4 and linking verse 5 with verse 6.<sup>19</sup> Haenchen pursues his argument by quoting Käsemann's affirmation that the "portrayal of Jesus Christ as appearing in history begins at v. 5."<sup>20</sup> Then he forcefully emphasizes that "there is absolutely no convincing argument for the view that vv. 5-13 ever referred to anything save the historical manifestation of the Word to the believer."<sup>21</sup> Haenchen concludes that, since the text of the hymn appears to have been widely disseminated only with verses 6 to 8 already inserted, verse 5 in this context could be understood solely as a reference to the Incarnation.<sup>22</sup> His interpretation is also in accordance with Second Bultmann, for whom verses 5-13 give a suggestive description of the appearance of Jesus Christ in history which is then followed, in verses 14-16, by concrete details.<sup>23</sup>

Briefly, in adopting a chiasmic structure which lacks a strong climax, these authors are not able to agree on a specific verse signaling the first reference to the Incarnation in the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel. And John 1:5 appears as one of the possible allusions to the Incarnation, as suggested by H1. Let me examine more deeply the whole argumentation.

## 2. *My Evaluation of the Exegetical Argument*

First, Ernst Haenchen's interpretation raises some exegetical concerns. In fact, the suggestion of a Gnostic punctuation of John 1:4 is anachronistic because there is no evidence of Gnostic influence in the composition of the Gospel. The truth is, rather, that this Gospel inspired later Gnostic thought. Second, the suggestion that the incarnational interpretation was common among the Fathers is simply exaggerated. Saint Augustine offers a more moralistic and wisdom interpretation of verse five, one prior to the

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<sup>19</sup> Haenchen, *John*, 1:114-115. This is questionable since there is no evidence of Gnostic influence in the Prologue.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions*, 144, quoted by Haenchen, *John*, 1:115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Incarnation of the Word.<sup>24</sup> Third, following the logic of Käsemann in support of the H1 is not an easy task. It begs several questions. First, where does the historical event of the Logos really begin (in verse 4 or in verse 5)? Second, even if it begins in verse 4 or verse 5, does any historical manifestation of the Logos mean that we should necessarily consider it a reference to the Incarnation? In fact, in observing the structure proposed by Käsemann (1-4 [without 4?]; 5.9-12), he appears to separate verse 5 from the first part of the Prologue, while at the same time he seems to suggest that the reference to the Incarnation begins in verses 4-5.<sup>25</sup> This sort of confusion points to the difficulty in having a concrete beginning of the historical process for the Logos, an argument that reinforces my resistance toward H1. In fact, some scholars, such as Friedrich Spitta, Theodor Zahn, Johannes Weiss, and Bruce Vawter, effectively think that the Prologue, at verse 4, has passed from creation to the Incarnation.<sup>26</sup> For these authors, the gift of life which is mentioned in verse 4 is associated in the Gospel with the coming of Jesus. But, according to Brown, a jump from creation in verse 3 to the coming of Jesus in verse 4 seems exceedingly abrupt. Considering the phrase “that which has come to be” in verse 4 as a link to his coming in 9 and 10 seems tautological.<sup>27</sup> Brown’s objection clearly militates against the theory of Käsemann, who sees a reference to the coming of Jesus not in verse 4 but in verse 5, which he joins to 10 [or 9?],<sup>28</sup> and against the theory of Second Bultmann, who begins the work of the revealer in history with verse 5, which he joins to verse 9.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to Saint John* (trans. J. Gibb and J. Innes; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 1873-1874), 1:11-14.

<sup>25</sup> Käsemann, “The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John’s Gospel,” 144.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday & Compagny, 1966), 1:26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

With this in mind, I am not exegetically convinced of H1 for two reasons. First, it seems very confused for a text that has been proposed to a community as a whole; and second, as Käsemann himself acknowledges, the gradation from the most universal to the concrete seems too sudden to speak here about the Incarnation which, I believe, cannot take place at the same time in verses 4 or 5 or 9 or 12<sup>30</sup> and in verse 14, unless it is not a single event. If that were in fact the case, it is the meaning of the Incarnation that we would have to reconsider: Is it a process with multiple manifestations, or is it a concrete and specific single event? Are there many incarnations?

Finally, and in a more theological mode of argumentation, Urban C. von Wahlde, like all those who support H1, shares the belief of the community that, since the beginning, “Jesus was already in existence at the beginning of the time.”<sup>31</sup> This author, after showing that there is a wide connection between the light-darkness symbol in verse 5 in other literature of the time –an observation that could help to avoid seeing it as the Incarnation unless we believe there are multiple incarnations– concludes in favor of the incarnational interpretation of the same verse.<sup>32</sup> In my opinion, Wahlde’s conclusion seems confused. How can he affirm the Incarnation and, at the same time, describe the result of the appearance of Jesus in the world as “being in the world but not known by the world, coming into his own but not being accepted, the Word becoming flesh”?<sup>33</sup> These are three phases of the history of the Word available in the Prologue, and I doubt that any of these phases alludes to the Incarnation.

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of St John and the Johannine Epistles* (Minnesota: Liturgical, 1982), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K: Eerdmans, 2010), 2:2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3. *Theological Advantages of H1*

First of all, as we have seen, the exegetical arguments for H1 point to the Incarnation of the Logos as *beginning* in verse 5. And if the Incarnation *begins* at one point, that means it is a process. Second, H1 suggests that we can refer to the Incarnation without an explicit reference to the flesh. Theologically, there is no other better way to de-historicize the Incarnation. Advocates for religious pluralism, such as John Hick, Jacques Dupuis, and Roger Haight, have advanced –with legitimate reasons– such ideas, which I will examine shortly. Finally, H1 raises the question about whether the sentence *and the light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it* can refer to the Incarnation in every context. If not, that would mean that it refers to the Incarnation only in a specific context (Johannine?), and its terms have to be understood symbolically or metaphorically. Is it possible to find a connection with some theologians who come to understand Jesus as “Symbol of God”? Today’s new theological context of religious pluralism and evolutionary world view can be pleased in interpreting verse 5 of the Prologue of John as referring to the Incarnation for two reasons. First, by admitting that the Incarnation is a process, H1 denies Jesus an absolute character and helps in interreligious dialogue. Second, in an evolutionary world with ecological concerns, H1 could be a valuable support for process theology.

#### *a. The Incarnation as a Process for a Religious Pluralism*

The point I am making here is that, in de-historicizing the Incarnation, the defenders of H1 are close to certain aspects of religious pluralism. Because of that, the approach to the Incarnation in this hypothesis can be helpful to foster dialogue with other religions, without necessarily denying the Incarnation as the pluralists tend to do. Let me set forth first the arguments of the pluralists.

In his philosophy of religion, John Hick's argument is that Christianity is always adapting itself into something which can be believed. Therefore, as human knowledge continues to grow at an increasing rate, Christianity should find even more ways to adapt itself so that it can be believed. This adaptation "involves a recognition that Jesus was (as he is presented in Acts 2:22) 'a man approved by God' for a special role within [the] divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythologic or poetic way of expressing his significance for us."<sup>34</sup> Hick, therefore, questions Jesus' humanity as a universal model and rejects its uniqueness and absolute significance, urging us to abandon a metaphysical claim about Jesus' divine identity as Son of God.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, all-inclusive Christologies become "useless and antiquated epicycles," as Hick prefers a more "Reality-Centeredness" model.

This model affirms that "religions are oriented in different ways, toward that which they view as the Central Reality or Divine Absolute. Sharing in this universal search, all religious traditions have, in their differences, equal value: none has precedence over the others or has the privilege of a special divine revelation."<sup>36</sup> The doctrine of the Incarnation is a myth because the assertion "that Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning, but it is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king."<sup>37</sup> In addition to Hick's argument, Maurice Wiles argues that the Incarnation is *an* interpretation of the significance of Jesus that became an essential part of Christianity, in a process similar to the teachings

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<sup>34</sup> John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1993), preface, vii, xiv.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9, 173ff.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 79.

<sup>37</sup> Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 178.

about Eucharist, inerrancy, and the Virgin Birth. At the beginning, all were marginal devotions before they became essential.<sup>38</sup> They are not really essential to Christianity.

The arguments of the pluralists are both exegetical and theological. Exegetically, they argue that, since Jesus was *completely* centered on God, and proclaimed God and God's Reign, the christocentric proclamation of the apostolic church<sup>39</sup> falsified Jesus' own message,<sup>40</sup> and part of the task today is to overturn this "myth" by restoring the theocentric nature of Jesus' *own* (or original) message. But, paradoxically, their fundamental biblical verse is Acts 2:22, which states that Jesus was "a man attested by God." Theologically, they deny any claim of absoluteness to Jesus because absoluteness is an attribute of the Ultimate Reality or Infinite Being alone. Everything "*created*, by contrast, is finite and contingent, including the humanity of the incarnate Word."<sup>41</sup> Following Edward Schillebeeckx,<sup>42</sup> Claude Geffré,<sup>43</sup> and Christian Duquoc,<sup>44</sup> they affirm that the historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ-event irremediable limitations.

Alternatively, pluralist theologians, led by Jacques Dupuis in this case, propose a "relative uniqueness" and a "relative universality," "constitutive" of Jesus' saving *significance* for all humankind as far as Jesus is "truly" the "cause" of salvation for all human beings.<sup>45</sup> They affirm, to my confusion, that "God –and only God– saves";

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>39</sup> Including, in their view, biblical texts such as: Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Eph 1:1-13; or Col 1:15-20. Their use of Scripture seems therefore very selective, at the service of their own noble purpose.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 169. In admitting that Jesus was *completely* centered on God, one can wonder how can this be possible for any mere human being.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 165. I call it the Arianism of the pluralists.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1990), 165-166.

<sup>43</sup> Claude Geffré, "La singularité du Christianisme à l'âge du pluralisme religieux," quoted by Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> Christian Duquoc, *Dieu différent* (Paris: Cerf, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 166. I emphasize words in italics to point out the confusing nature of these propositions which limit the uniqueness of Jesus and his universality only to its

consequently, Jesus, through whom God saves, is not the primary Savior since he is not really God. Their syllogism ends in a less satisfactory note when they call this God “Father” and admit that Jesus is his Son,<sup>46</sup> upholding the basic theological affirmation they try to underscore in denying any ontological relation between Jesus and God. In fact, as Justin Martyr put it, “to know God is to know the Father, and to know that the Father of all has a Son, who, as the First-born Word of God, is also God” (*1 Apol* 63). Assuming this implicit Subordinationism (first-born), Arius, and more recently many other theologians such as Hick and Haight, denied any ontological relationship between Jesus and the Father in order to preserve a strong transcendence of the Father.<sup>47</sup>

For Haight, Jesus is the symbol of God, the mediation of God to Christianity whose ultimate object is the Ultimate, the Transcendent Reality of God. He is the central, but not exclusive, determinant of the character of Christian faith and it is not accidental that Christology is just a part of theology.<sup>48</sup> In that sense, he is sympathetic to Ernst Troeltsch’s and Hick’s questioning of the absoluteness of Christianity, as well as to process theology in its dynamic understanding of the Incarnation as a framework of God’s ongoing communicating presence in the world.<sup>49</sup> This desire to maintain the absolute transcendence of the Father is due, Haight says, to the strong monotheism of Judaism. In response, one can wonder whether the truth is in these skeptical, but nevertheless divine, definitions of Jesus, or in more forceful affirmations of his divinity as Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity. The scandal might also be that some Jews even suggested that this human being could have been God in the first place, given

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*significance* and fall short in telling us *how* Jesus can be relatively unique and relatively universal, but, nevertheless, be *truly* the cause of salvation for *all human beings*. Does *significance* equals *truth* in the order of salvation?

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (New York: Orbis, 1999), 259-260.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 22.

their monotheistic context. One would therefore see that kind of conclusion being taken by later Christians as less scrupulous in this respect.

*b. The Catholic Response to These New Challenges*

In the condemnation of Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God*,<sup>50</sup> the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Catholic Bishops Conference,<sup>51</sup> pointing out her criticisms of *Dominus Iesus*,<sup>52</sup> regretted that she (like other pluralistic theologians) wants to argue that there is more to God than that which is revealed through Jesus. In consequence, she is not in keeping with the Christian understanding of *Jesus as the fullness of truth*, as defended by the Church. For the fullness of "truth," according to Johnson's argument, one needs, on addition to Jesus, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.<sup>53</sup> In her opinion, Christ cannot be, as Sesboué could say, "The Unique Mediator of Salvation."<sup>54</sup> The point here is that in many of its theses, religious pluralism can hurt the centrality of the Christian faith, that is, the divinity of Jesus and, consequently, can relativize the Incarnation.

My personal assessment of the Declaration of the CDF is that I agree with the document in its main affirmations concerning Jesus' universal mediation of salvation, as well as on its emphasis on the unicity and uniqueness of the mystery of the Incarnation (DI 9-10) by which God became true man,<sup>55</sup> and in the belief that this event, although truly

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Bishop as Teachers: A Resource for Bishops* (Washington DC: April 18, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), *Declaration Dominus Iesus on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (Rome: August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000). Abbreviated as DI in this thesis.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 174-179.

<sup>54</sup> Bernard Sesboué, *Cristo, el Único Mediador* (2 vols.; Madrid: Secretariado Trinitario, 1990), 1:99-113.

<sup>55</sup> As attested by the councils of Nicea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Toledo XI (675), Letran IV (1215) or Reihms (1148). Cf. Henrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (trans. Roy J. Deferrari; St Louis : Herder, 1957). Quoted in this essay as "DH." For all these councils, Christ has a true body (DH 13), united to the Logos (DH 205), with a rational and spiritual

historical, is also absolute. Two questions, however, remain unresolved. The document acknowledges that the unicity of the economy of salvation makes it Christocentric and always Trinitarian, a case I defend later in Chapter Three. But I do not find a clear response to the question about how this document explicitly makes a pneumatological economy an anathema (DI 12), while still affirming that the Holy Spirit's role in the economy of salvation is both prior to the Incarnation and posterior to it. The response provided by the document seems to be the *filioque*. That is true, conforming to the Catholic tradition; but true only partially. *Ruah* was also with God *in the beginning* (Gen 1:1; John 1:1), and everything was made by and through her (John 1:2; Prov 8:22). Affirming this is a condition to make the unicity and universality, as well as the Trinitarian dimension of salvation history, more accurate both biblically and theologically.

Additionally, there is a clear message in John's Gospel that cannot be denied without shifting from the meaning of the text. The particularity of Christianity, says Craig Koester, is Jesus' affirmation in John 14:6: "I Am *the* way, the truth and the life."<sup>56</sup> There is consensus among scholars today that the word "the" in this text is not "a." This confirms the singularity and centrality of Jesus in the history of salvation in John's Gospel; it also rejects any attempt to dilute the Incarnation in order to accommodate interreligious dialogue. And any consideration of John 1:5 as a reference to the Incarnation can hurt the identity of Jesus, particularly his true humanity, which is a central issue of Christian doctrine.

*c. The Incarnation as a Process for a Process Theology*

What would an understanding of the Incarnation as a process, as suggested by H1, mean for process theology? Process theology intends to remove from Christianity

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soul (DH 216.480), consubstantial with us (DH 149), son of Adam and of Mary sharing our same blood (DH 40), etc.

<sup>56</sup> Craig Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 210.

the “dominating influence of Greek and Hellenistic notions that have distorted the sense of Christianity.”<sup>57</sup> Its opponents, on the contrary, see it as the “most dangerous heresy presently threatening the Christian faith” or as a “total capitulation to paganism,”<sup>58</sup> since process theology, even among its Christian defenders, is not interested in “distinctions within God for the sake of conforming with traditional Trinitarian notions.”<sup>59</sup> Process theology’s suspicion of dogmas is founded in the biographical background of its godfather. After his experience during the First World War, Alfred North Whitehead wondered how some people “can be so sure” and, as a scientist, he considered dogmas as an obstacle to intellectual growth.<sup>60</sup> We ought to understand the idea of “process” in this context of growth and change of/in nature and God.<sup>61</sup> For Whitehead the efficient causation is a mutual influence of the cause and effect on each other. And since God grows *in* the world, and since Jesus of Nazareth *represents* or *expresses* God’s being in this world, the dynamics and changes in the world and in human beings would affect God’s inner being, as God’s being would transform the world and fulfill God’s ideal aim of salvation and redemption for the world.<sup>62</sup> This is the philosophical principle that establishes the idea of process. Process thought affirms that everything, maybe except process itself, is in process and subject to change and actualization.<sup>63</sup>

Two things need to be emphasized at this point because of their impact on process theologians’ understanding of the Incarnation and its impact on this thesis. First, the idea of removing Greek and Hellenistic influence from Christianity is, in fact, a

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. introduction of Ronald Nash (ed.), *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1987).

<sup>58</sup> Nash, introduction to *Process Theology*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and his Work* (2 vols.; Baltimore, MD: The Hopkins University, 1985-1990), 1:188.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 10.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 12.

<sup>63</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr. and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 14.

rejection “as crassly mythological of the idea of the literal enfleshment of the Second Person of the Triune God.”<sup>64</sup> The Logos or the Word is immanent in the world, present in all human beings and in all creation. This Logos is actualized in Jesus of Nazareth in an optimal but not exclusive level. Therefore, the Church Fathers “erred in personifying the Logos as the eternal subsistent Second Person of Godhead.”<sup>65</sup> Second, as far as we understand their two notions of *actualization* and *act of God*, we discover the foundation of their rejection of the uniqueness of the Christ event:

A decisive act of God would be an event (a) for which God’s aim was such that, if the aim were actualized, the event would optimally express God’s being, and (b) which did in fact actualize God’s aim or will for it to an optimal degree. With this understanding God has, formally speaking, acted in the same way he always acts, i.e. by supplying the ideal aim for the event.<sup>66</sup>

For Schubert Ogden, Jesus is the *decisive* “Act of God” in the sense that “his words and deeds *represent* God’s inner being and action in a *decisive* or *normative* fashion.”<sup>67</sup> However, this specialness is not absolute or exclusive. In fact, since all the acts of God are expressed equally, the specialness of a special act is only *partially* a function of the person whose special act it is. In that sense, and because the acts of God are expressed equally, their specialness depends on human response/acceptance (normativity) or interpretation (decisiveness), and on its mutual influence with the whole context where it is manifested.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, those who made Jesus special and his event a *decisive* act of God were his disciples. This is why it is pure mythology. Process theologians disavow the uniqueness of Jesus and the Virgin Birth as mythological and nonhistorical. For them, “to affirm that the Word was ‘enfleshed’

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<sup>64</sup> Nash, *Process Theology*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> David Griffin, “Schubert Ogden’s Christology and the Possibilities of Process Theology,” in *Process Theology and Christian Thought* (eds. D. Brown, R. E. James, Jr. and G. Reeves; Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971): 347-361, at 358.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Griffin, “Schubert Ogden’s Christology,” 351.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 354.

means that Jesus is ‘the point where the Word is most significantly, most intensively, most vitally and dynamically operative.’”<sup>69</sup> Beyond that, Jesus is not really different from other human beings, but is special because of his obedience to the Father.

*d. Evaluation of the Process Theology’s Argument*

Process Theology is not exactly heretical, as many believe. It is a valuable theological contribution whose concern was mainly to build bridges between faith and science, and to develop a more personal spiritual experience of God that does not ignore the issue of suffering in the world. Important theologians like Elizabeth A. Johnson embraced its theses as an opportunity for a liberation theology that would challenge a metaphysical understanding of God for a more living, less male-dominant, and dynamic God.<sup>70</sup> This is also not only a theology of liberation, but a modern theological contribution able to engage ecology and science. For Johnson,

Without ignoring the human dilemma, recent theology is broadening its attention to include the natural world from which human beings emerged, in which they live embedded and for which they are responsible... allowing [theology] to play melodies that have not been heard for centuries (...) Traditional Western emphasis on Christ’s coming to save us from sin puts the focus almost exclusively on human beings. The approach of contemporary Christology, such as Karl Rahner’s work shaped by transcendental analysis of the human subject, and of liberation theologies based on Jesus’ option for the poor, also tend to relegate the natural world to a zone of disinterest. Asking the ecological question reveals that Christology is not exhausted but holds yet further potential to galvanize faith that includes the earth.<sup>71</sup>

Process theologians are, in fact, comfortable with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Henri de Lubac’s cosmic Christ, because they accurately understand the evolving nature of the universe<sup>72</sup> and because of their insightful recuperation of the Pauline (and

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<sup>69</sup> Nash, *Process Theology*, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, *The Quest of the Living God*.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, “An Earthly Christology: ‘For God so Loved the Cosmos’,” *America* (April 2009), 27-30, at 27.

<sup>72</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, “Teilhard de Chardin and the Orientation of the Evolution: A Critical Essay” in *Process Theology* (ed. E. H. Cousins; New York: Newman, 1971): 229-248, at 229.

Ignatian) belief that the incarnate Logos is present in everything.<sup>73</sup> Where to find this cosmic Christ better than in the first five verses of the Prologue of John?

My concern about process theologians, however, touches one of the aspects they hate the most, that is, the dogmatic. In an evolutionary world, advocates of process theology argue that the Incarnation is not, or should not be, a single event; rather, it is part of a long process beginning with the creation of the world in which Jesus Christ is the climax, as the optimal level of actualization of God's will. However, Christopher Mooney affirms that the Incarnation must mean for the Christian that, in Jesus of Nazareth, we totally accept God's revelation as irrevocable because in Jesus God became enfleshed in living matter as an act of self-expression: "The Word was made flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).<sup>74</sup> We can see a similarity in this explanation with H2. In fact, we admit the possibility that John 1:5 refers to the Incarnation only if the Incarnation is a process, so that since the remote beginning of God's self-communication, the final goal was the Incarnation of his Son for our salvation. In Rahner's words:

The Incarnation... appears ontologically (not merely morally or as an afterthought) as the unambiguous goal of the movement of creation as a whole, in relation to which everything prior is merely a preparation of the scene... Thus it would not be extravagant, as long as it is done with prudence, to conceive the evolution of the world as an orientation towards Christ, and to represent the various stages of this ascending movement as culminating in him as their apex... If what St Paul says in Colossians 1:15 is true and not softened by some moralistic interpretation; if furthermore the world as a whole, including therefore its physical reality, is actually in process of reaching in and through Christ that final state in which God is all in all, then the line of thought we are developing here cannot be entirely false.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Henri de Lubac, "The Cosmic Christ" in E. H. Cousins, *Process Theology*, 257-267.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher Mooney, "Theology and Evolution," in *Theology and Scientific Knowledge: Changing Models of God's Presence in the World* (foreword by John E. Thiel and afterword by Margaret A. Farley; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 120-192, at 165.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," in *Theological Investigations* (trans. C. Ernst; 23 vols. ; Baltimore: Hélicon, 1961), 1:149-200, at 165.

However, even if we admit that the Incarnation is a process, it should be the climax of this process, not the beginning. Bonaventure acknowledged, that although God was able to incarnate from the beginning, nevertheless God wanted the Incarnation to take place at the end of the times, after the Patriarch and the Prophets to whom this Incarnation was promised.<sup>76</sup> In other words, verse 5 cannot explicitly refer to the Incarnation before the Prophets intervene (verses 6-8 and 15) since the climax of the Prologue and of the whole message of the Gospel is John 1:14. In this verse, not only does the Word become flesh, but the Incarnate Word is also presented as the Only Son of God, the fullness of truth, the “exegesis” of God the Father. That is why he can be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin and the darkness of the world, the only One who can be “the way, the truth and the life” (14:6).

#### *Conclusion of Chapter One*

To conclude this chapter, a retrospective interpretation of John 1:5 in light of the post-resurrection and Christocentric context can argue in favor of H1: 1) the whole Gospel is about Jesus Christ as the One sent by God in the world; 2) Jesus was rejected by his own people before he was risen; 3) he is the One through him everything was made and in whom everything has/is life; 4) he presents himself in the Gospel as the Light of the world (John 14:6), and can therefore rightly be the light that shines into darkness and that is not overcome by darkness. Moreover, H1 offers legitimate arguments, both exegetical and theological, to support an incarnational interpretation of John 1:5. This interpretation is valuable because Jesus as the Logos is the key to

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<sup>76</sup> “De tempore vero incarnationis hoc tenendum est, quod, licet Deus a principio potuerit incarnari, noluit tamen nisi in fine saeculorum, praecedente lege naturae et lege figurae, post Patriarchas et Prophetas, quibus et per quos fuit incarnatio repromissa.” (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* [trans. Quaracchi; Paris: Editions Franciscaines, 1967], 4:1).

understanding John's Gospel,<sup>77</sup> and since Scripture can be used to teach, refute, correct, and educate (2 Tim 3:16) in order to respond to a present theological debate. Religious pluralism and process theology are signs of the time that challenge both exegesis and theology to find new responses for the faith of the Christian community. But because of their rejection of the Incarnation, which they understand as mythical and non-historical, these theological approaches offer good examples of how a less carnal and historical understanding of the Incarnation like the one proposed by H1 could advance to actual Christological controversies in Christianity. I have reviewed this debate not just to point out what is legitimate and valuable, but also what is essential to Christian faith, and the mis-understanding of which could have dramatic consequences for the people of God: the Incarnation. Because, as Karl Rahner says:

Every conception of the Incarnation in which the humanity of Jesus would only be the livery of God which he uses to signal that he is present and speaking is a heretical conception. And it is basically this heresy, which was rejected by the church itself in its struggle against Docetism, Apollinarism, Monophysism and Monothelism, which is perceived today as mythological and is rejected as mythology, and not a really orthodox Christology. We also have to admit that such a mythological understanding of the Christological dogma of our faith can also be present implicitly in very many Christians however orthodox their formulas are, and hence it inevitably provokes a protest against mythology.<sup>78</sup>

The dogmatic implications of H1 are the object of the Chapter Two of this thesis. The point I make here is that John 1:5 is not and should not be considered a reference to the Incarnation. This thesis is supported by exegetical arguments, but also by theological arguments related to the history of the dogma.

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<sup>77</sup> Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 109.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 226.

## *Chapter Two: Arguments in Favor of the Second Hypothesis (H2)*

H2 is an exegetical and theological critique of H1. In this chapter, I reject H1 in order to show that not only is John 1:5 not alluding to the Incarnation, but more, John 1:5, for theological reasons related to the history of the dogma, should not refer to it. My exegetical argument focuses on the issues of verb tense and the structure of the passage. My theological argument intends to find different meanings of the symbol of light and darkness and to highlight the dogmatic risks of any understanding of the Incarnation that ignores the reality of the flesh.

### *1. The Verb Tense and the Structural Issue*

H2, as I said before, mainly follows a progressive or chronological structure, with a linear understanding of salvific history. This structure implies a progressive succession of the narrative of the text whose main subject is the Word. This structure considers two large steps that are divided into small phases: 1) The pre-temporal Logos, which includes verses 1-4 (or 5) and 6-13. In this first step, revelation history progresses in three phases: verses 1-2: The Word and God; verses 3-4 (or 5): The Word and the world; and verses 5-13: the history of the Logos with human beings until just before the Incarnation. 2) Verses 14-18 represent the *moment* of the Incarnation, the enfleshment of the Word. Brown *sort of* follows this same structure. According to him, the pre-incarnate Logos goes until verse 12b (the Word in the world) and the Incarnation belongs to verses 12c-18.

Following this logic, Martin Hengel describes the Prologue as an outline of different stages of the revelation of the Word whose climax is the Incarnation in verse 14. Prior to this point is the pre-history of the *Logos asarkos*.<sup>79</sup> For Hengel, the subject of the first 13 verses is the Logos, and what happens in verse 5 is the beginning of human history

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<sup>79</sup> Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," 268 and 271.

whose connection with the Logos depends both on the Logos' role in creation and on the human capacity to interact with the Logos. But verse 5 also offers a "rift" between the Logos and the reality of human life and, for Hengel, this rift "is the condition for the necessity of the Incarnation."<sup>80</sup> The Incarnation is *necessary* because of the Fall that disrupted creation and history, and the Incarnation's goal is justification and reconciliation with God.

I agree with Hengel in every aspect of his approach, except the meaning he gives to the necessity for the Incarnation. In fact, I find more consistent the Franciscan idea of absolute predestination of the Son<sup>81</sup> so that, even if human beings had not sinned, the Son would still have been incarnate. In that sense, Bonaventure understood the Prologue of John as "a summary of various aspects of the Word's exemplarism and role as mediator between God and creation."<sup>82</sup> Regarding the absolute condition of this Incarnation of the Logos, Karl Rahner found it in the distinctiveness of the persons in Godhead, the specific characteristic of the Son being that He is the Only One able to become incarnate.<sup>83</sup>

Although Brown, in his division of the Prologue, puts verse 5 with the first part (1:1-5) –"The Word and its activity in creation"<sup>84</sup>–, he sometimes treats it separately because "some exegetes think that this expression was added by the evangelist in anticipation of the darkness of unbelief (8:2; 3:19; 12:35, 46)."<sup>85</sup> The book of Wisdom (7:29-30) speaks also of a beauty that surpasses sun and stars, and that sin cannot

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Daniel P. Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation? Reconsidering the History of the Absolute Predestination of Christ in the Light of Robert Grosseteste," *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 374-391.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Herbst, "Johannine Dimensions of Bonaventure's Soteriology," *Franciscan Studies* 67 (2009): 243-266, at 248.

<sup>83</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 214, 221, 223.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 951.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

prevail over Wisdom.<sup>86</sup> In his *Introduction to the New Testament*,<sup>87</sup> Brown considers the Prologue of John as “an introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnation,”<sup>88</sup> and “a preface to the Gospel” that encapsulates John’s view that Christ is “a divine being (God’s Word [1:1,14], who is also the light [1:5,9]) and God’s only Son [1:14,18] who comes into the world and becomes flesh.”<sup>89</sup>

The argument made by Brown is therefore as follows: “once one views verses 6-8 as a later addition, as a modern scholarship does, there is no reason to read verse 5 as a reference to the incarnation.”<sup>90</sup> Haenchen also gives several reasons to support the fact that verse 5 is not yet a reference to the Incarnation. Haenchen’s first argument points out that, in the normal course of events, we would expect the mention of John the Baptist prior to that of Jesus in any tradition based on Mark. Second, the effort is occasionally made to interpret verse 9 as a description of the Incarnation; but this effort is shattered by the fact that neither the imperfect “was” (ἦν) nor the periphrastic imperfect “was coming” (ἔρχόμενον) are suited to describe the beginning of such an event.<sup>91</sup> Briefly, the two main arguments to be marshaled against H1 here are that there is no indication in John 1:5 why the Logos really became flesh; and it is striking that this event is reported in the present tense, while the reaction of the darkness is depicted immediately following by the aorist κατέλαβεν.<sup>92</sup> In fact, the aorist usually refers to a single past action. We should wonder therefore what this single action is. Brown, from his perspective, does not exclude the possibility that it could refer to the “fall of man,” a

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<sup>86</sup> Brown and Fitzmyer, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 951.

<sup>87</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: ABRL, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 338; and *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 1:25-26.

<sup>91</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John*, 1:115.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Jewish understanding of Gen 3:15,<sup>93</sup> but its use in the same verse with the present tense φαίνει could also imply a continuous action or, as Sadananda Rathnakara calls it, “an anamnesis of various stages of the history of salvation.”<sup>94</sup>

## 2. *The Argument Against Käsemann: Understanding φαίνει*

In making the case against Käsemann, Haenchen argues that if the original hymn made reference to the Incarnation (which would be a decisive event), then one ought at least to expect a clearer allusion to it, beyond a simple reference to the present tense of “shines” (φαίνει), which proves nothing. One really ought to expect an aorist here, as a designation of the event of the Incarnation, just as it appears, in fact, in verse 14.<sup>95</sup> By asserting a parallel between the present tense of verse 5 and 1 John 2:8,<sup>96</sup> Käsemann overlooks the fact that, although 1 John 2:8 indeed makes use of the vocabulary of the Gospel, it nevertheless reflects an apocalyptic expectation of an imminent end to a high degree: “because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” According to Haenchen, the text certainly speaks of the present, but does so in such a way that what is said is that the imminent end is in the process of coming to realization. And such an ardent expectation of the end has nothing to do with the Gospel of John. Furthermore, Haenchen believes that Käsemann has inherited his view from Bultmann, “that the Evangelist provided the hymn which he had before him with an epilogue –i.e., vv.14-18.” If so, he continues, then, “the ring of the present,” which Käsemann detects, does not offer the desired solution:

We are of the opinion, Haenchen says, that it [φαίνει] expresses an indefinite but very long duration of time, during which the state of affairs represented by

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<sup>93</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 1:27.

<sup>94</sup> Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God: An Exploration into the Johannine Understanding of God* (Berlin: W de Gruyter, 2004), 185.

<sup>95</sup> Haenchen, *John*, 1:115.

<sup>96</sup> “Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”

“is shining” (φαίνει) persisted, while the aorist “did not comprehend” (οὐ κατέλαβεν) expresses the failure of this activity.<sup>97</sup>

If we make use of these latter concepts, verse 5 therefore has to do with the fruitless activity of the Logos in the generations prior to the Incarnation of the Logos. The hymn does not tell us why the failure occurred; neither does it describe a fall into sin, like the story of Adam and Eve with its consequences, such as are depicted in 4 Ezra 7:11f.; but rather “depicts the situation prevailing between creation and incarnation only in the briefest terms –a description that is continued in verses 9 to 11.”<sup>98</sup>

### 3. *The Symbol of Light and Darkness in John 1:5*

In John’s Gospel, darkness is the antithesis of light and is opposed to God. Darkness, Vawter says, is the rejection of God by human beings because of sin.<sup>99</sup> Light, meanwhile, refers to God’s presence and enlightenment of humankind, and the idea of overcoming can be understood in the sense of fulfillment despite the obstacles.<sup>100</sup>

We can consider the symbol of light in verse 5 of the Prologue, first, in continuation with verse 4, that is, in its relationship with the creation: “in Him was life, and the life was the light of humankind.” In that case, life in the Logos is affirmed as the Light, so that the Light often comes to mean “a divine power, the essential nature of divinity [that] is seen as φῶς.”<sup>101</sup> According to Rathnakara Sadananda, this light can also describe the “salvation itself, as the symbol of God’s final eschatological gift.”<sup>102</sup> By understanding light in this way, we can see that, until verse 13, the salvation of God was already in process, but only as a pre-incarnational communication of God. The light

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<sup>97</sup> Haenchen, *John*, 1:116.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce Vawter, “The Gospel According to John,” 422.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 433ff. Vawter sees this idea of fulfillment in the section 5: 1-10, 42 of the Gospel, as Jesus overcomes the Sabbath (5: 1-47) or the Tabernacles (7: 1-8, 59) and appears as the Light of the world (9: 1-10, 42).

<sup>101</sup> Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

in verse 5 is, therefore, the light of God that, before the Incarnation, participates in any seeking of freedom and struggling for truth and understanding of oneself and the world surrounding one. In fact, Rathnakara Sadananda says that “life in the Logos is in the first place the life-creating force that calls the creation into existence, but also that which carries itself the necessity and the possibility of illumined existence.”<sup>103</sup>

Second, we can understand the symbol of light in a cosmological dualism with darkness: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5). Stephen C. Barton defined cosmic dualism as “the division of the world and humanity into opposing forces of good and evil, light and darkness.”<sup>104</sup> According to John F. McHugh, darkness refers “not to the absence of physical light, but rather to that ‘encircling gloom’ of doubt or depression, of uncertainty or despair, where it could be a grace to see but one step ahead.”<sup>105</sup> Light can, therefore, be understood in the dualist context of Qumran as the struggle between the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness (1QS III, 20-26), or that between children of light and children of darkness (1QS I, 9-10; II, 16-17; III, 24-25).<sup>106</sup>

Third, a moral interpretation points to the rejection of God’s light by men and women through sin (cf. Genesis 3), and the introduction of the darkness of evil into God’s creation. But it is not all about the original and more universal/cosmological sin; verse 5 in relationship with verses 9-11 affirms that “the genuine light of the world came into the world he had created; and the world, directed to evil by man’s sin, rejected him. He came to his own land, and the people that had been prepared for his

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Stephen C. Barton, “Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (ed. R. Bauckham and C. Mosser; Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2008): 19-52, at 9.

<sup>105</sup> John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 18.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

coming by Moses and the Prophets rejected him.”<sup>107</sup> The religious leaders are the symbol of that progressive darkening of the elected people (in contrast with the Samaritans, or others born in darkness/blindness). They have transformed the light/knowledge they received into idolatry; and they are certain to possess the truth while they remain in darkness and falsehood. Nicodemus represents that world, and the Jewish authorities and the masses for whom he speaks are called “the world” elsewhere (8:23; 12:18-19).<sup>108</sup> Therefore, as occurs in 1:5, the world, humankind, and Nicodemus will not remain in the darkness; in fact, the truth is exposed to Nicodemus by the Light (3:20-21).<sup>109</sup> Here is what Saint Augustine says regarding John 1:5 in his *Tractates*:

But perhaps the slow hearts of some of you cannot yet receive that light, because they are burdened by their sins, so that they cannot see. Let them not on that account think that the light is in any way absent, because they are not able to see it; for they themselves are darkness on account of their sins. “And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” Accordingly, brethren, as in the case of a blind man placed in the sun, the sun is present to him, but he is absent from the sun. So every foolish man, every unjust man, every irreligious man, is blind in heart. Wisdom is present; but it is present to a blind man, and is absent from his eyes; not because it is absent from him, but because he is absent from it.<sup>110</sup>

We can, therefore, see verses 3 to 13 in two ways. First, they admit a diachronic reading of the Prologue as the history of salvation, in conformity with the biblical model of creation-infidelity-election-incredulity-election. The verb κατέλαβεν refers, in this perspective, to the “various stages of the history of salvation describing how God over and over again offers the possibility of a new beginning, [and] it does not denote a particular event as some scholars indicate to fall after creation or the moment of incarnation.”<sup>111</sup> Second, in a synchronic perspective, verses 3 to 13 mean the rejection

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<sup>107</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles*, 16-17.

<sup>108</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 46-47.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates*, 11, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God*, 185.

of the Logos in the person of Christ that lies beyond the words of the evangelist. The author of the Gospel has in mind the single and dramatic issue of the passion and death of Jesus as the crystallization of the incredulity of the world.<sup>112</sup>

In my opinion, both the diachronic and synchronic interpretations are legitimized. In fact, a Christian reader who knows who the Logos is since verses 1-2, and who identifies Him from the beginning with Jesus Christ, could easily understand the rejection of the Light in verse 5 as the rejection of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, by his own people.<sup>113</sup> But if we consider the text by itself, as I do, on the one hand, we could recognize a special manifestation-rejection of the Light, which may even be indicative of a revelation or a theophany in verse 5, but that this refers to the Incarnation as we ought to understand it, is doubtful. On the other hand, darkness, independent of its dualistic or moralistic meaning, has in the Gospel of John the sense of the condition for the manifestation of God as Light. A good example of this fact is the man born blind in John 9. While the disciples ask a moral question: “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:2), Jesus gives a theological and revelatory answer: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him” (9:3). Darkness precedes the birth of the man and appears as a main factor for God’s manifestation. But the Incarnation involves flesh: it is God’s manifestation in flesh.

Finally, there is another possible interpretation of the symbol of light and darkness, one that is creational. Here, light evokes the separation of light and darkness in Genesis 1.<sup>114</sup> According to McHugh, in the Old Testament, darkness is one of the constituent elements of the initial chaos (Gen 1:2) that is not annihilated, but brought

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<sup>112</sup> Annie Jaubert, *Approches de l’Evangile de Jean* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 94.

<sup>113</sup> Verse 5, in that case, would refer to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, and not explicitly to the dogma of the Incarnation.

<sup>114</sup> Barton, “Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism,” 12.

under control by God and turned into a useful and subordinate part of his creation (Gen 1); indeed, the darkness serves to reveal God's glory (Gen 15; Ps 8:9).<sup>115</sup> McHugh thinks, therefore, that light refers in John 1:5 to the eternal life in the Logos that begins to shine into and through the darkness, just as with the creation of physical light in the beginning. It is the creative light that initiated the ordering of the universe and the beginning of life on earth (Gen 1:3).<sup>116</sup> He also attributes the ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν of verse 9 to the quality of that unique light –true, real, authentic, and genuine– that has from the very beginning been shining in the darkness and yet been unrecognized (verses 1-5).<sup>117</sup> We can therefore understand the symbol of light here as the life of the Logos in creation, especially in humankind (verse 4), and also as the force that sustains life in creation and in humankind, despite the darkness of sin and spiritual blindness (verse 5). It is not yet the Incarnation.

#### *4. Reasons Why John 1:5 Is Not and Should Not Refer to the Incarnation*

In my opinion, John 1:5 is not a reference to the Incarnation because there is a better reference in the same Prologue which is unanimously accepted as the best way to define the Incarnation. True Incarnation is the basic acknowledgment that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) and that “Jesus was born a son of David of a Jewish mother, living among men as one of them, eating, drinking, and sleeping among them (1 John 1:1).”<sup>118</sup> Moreover, let me repeat, an understanding of the Incarnation that ignores the flesh is dogmatically problematic as attested by the history of the dogma. Although the flesh historicizes the Word in the Incarnation, it does not make the Incarnation less universal as pluralist theologians have objected. As we will

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<sup>115</sup> McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, 18-19.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Vawter, “Johannine Theology,” 832.

see later in this chapter, Irenaeus's historical theology is as open to universality as the universalist tendency of Justin is rooted in history.

*a. And the Word Became Flesh, and Dwelt Among Us (John 1:14)*

The first step I want to take in understanding the event of the Incarnation in the Prologue is to put verse 14 (ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) in parallel with verse 6: Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος. In the Prologue, John the Baptist and Jesus are the only two characters to whom the descriptor 'coming from God' is applied.<sup>119</sup> But they differ in their ways of "coming from God." On the one hand, John is a human being who "appeared." On the other hand, Jesus did not "appear." He is the Logos made flesh: this is the true meaning of the Incarnation. John came as the witness to testify to what was to come (vv.6-7). That event occurs in verse 14, in strongly realistic language in its assertion that the Word became *flesh*.<sup>120</sup> According to Brown, the word *flesh* seems to have been associated with the Incarnation from the earliest days of Christian theological expression. For example, Rom 1:3 describes God's Son who was descended from David according to flesh; Rom 8:3 catches even better the element of scandal in this when it speaks of God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." And the hymn in 1 Tim 3:16 contrasts manifestation in the flesh with vindication in the Spirit.<sup>121</sup> Flesh refers to the creaturely and bodiliness of Jesus Christ.<sup>122</sup>

However, there is another textual element. The καί of the beginning of verse 14 marks a change in the rhythm of the Prologue. Scholars such as Schnackenburg link verse 14a to verses 10-13 as referring to the activity of the Word after the Incarnation,

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<sup>119</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 43.

<sup>120</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:31.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. The abridged volume of Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich (eds), "Flesh," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: MI.: Eerdmans, 1985): 1000-1007, at 1006.

and translate καί with “and indeed,” taking καί as a resumptive and confirmative conjunction. For those who interpret verses 10-11 as referring to the activity of the Word before the Incarnation, the καί might be taken as a strong contrastive, meaning, “and yet,” “and nevertheless,” that is, in spite of the rejection referred to in verses 10c and 11b, the Word became flesh.<sup>123</sup> Yet, a third interpretation (that I support) uses καί as a means of emphasizing a fact as surprising, unexpected or noteworthy, thereby creating a climax: “and then,” or “to crown all,” the Word became flesh. The καί in this sense is a conjunction expressing astonishment.<sup>124</sup>

There is consensus among scholars and the whole Tradition in recognizing verse 14 as the climax of the Prologue and “the climax of New Testament Christology, itself the edge of the New Testament message.”<sup>125</sup> As an example, for Bultmann, the turning-point of the Prologue is verse 14, which speaks of the Incarnation of the Logos: the Word became flesh. Käsemann’s thesis loses its strength since it seems to be no more than a hypothesis. In fact, according Käsemann, verse 9 denies explicitly that the Baptist is the Light, but that it is the Logos who is the true Light.<sup>126</sup> However, the same author argues that “since the hymn –which Kasemann believes to have been already Christian before John edited it –was complete with verse 12, *there must have been* [my emphasis] a reference to the Incarnation before this point.”<sup>127</sup> According to Peter M. Phillips, in verse 5, the *Logos* becomes both the giver of life and also the light of humanity; and so, the author creates a direct bridge between the reader and *Logos*. However, Phillips argues, “up until this point, *Logos* is that which is beyond, in eternity,

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<sup>123</sup> McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, 49.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *New Testament Essays* (London: S.P.C.K., 1972), 27.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

with God... Even if we have not yet reached incarnation, *Logos* is already beginning the journey that will reach its climax in v.14.”<sup>128</sup>

*b. The Incarnation is a Central Issue in the History of the Dogma*<sup>129</sup>

The most important heresies in the history of Christianity are either a cause or a result of a certain understanding of the Incarnation. Gnosticism despises the Incarnation. Facing the burden of Gnosticism, Irenaeus understood that “Christianity is about the divine and spiritual Word becoming flesh and body. The redemption depends on the *real* [I underline] Incarnation, the *real* suffering on the Cross, and the *real* resurrection of the flesh.”<sup>130</sup> When Gnosticism opposed the Incarnation of God as such, Irenaeus affirmed the unity of the real divine and real human in Jesus Christ as the center of our redemption. In Irenaeus’s words:

Not one of the heretics is of the opinion that the Word was made flesh. If you examine their creeds carefully, you will find that, in every one of them, the Word of God is presented as without flesh and incapable of suffering [1], as is “the Christ who is above.” Some say that He revealed Himself as a transfigured man, but was not born or made flesh [2]. Others deny that He took human form at all [3]. They say that he descended, in the form of a dove, on the Jesus born of Mary... and after He had announced the “unknown Father,” He went up again into the “divine pleroma”... The Lord’s disciple shows all these people to be false witnesses when he says: “and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).<sup>131</sup>

Docetism denies the true Incarnation and affirms that it was simply *apparent*. Adoptionism also denies it in an unconscious attempt to eliminate the difficulties of the kenosis of God in Jesus. For Adoptionists, the divinity of Jesus is the conquest of a

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<sup>128</sup> Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 169.

<sup>129</sup> I treated this topic in a previous work. Cf. Jean Luc Enyegue, *El cuerpo como realidad fundamental y sintética de la teología*. Memoria de síntesis para la obtención de la Licenciatura en Estudios Eclesiástico (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2011), 39-52.

<sup>130</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies* (trans. John Saward; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Haer.* III, 11, 3. All the translations and references to Irenaeus texts in this section are taken from von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation*.

human being to become God, a kind of Christological Pelagianism.<sup>132</sup> In trying to argue that the Logos was not born of Mary, Pablo of Samosata concluded with a strong Monarchianism in which the Logos who unites with the human being Jesus is in fact the Father. Consequently, Jesus does not have a personal consistency distinct from the Father given that he is the same hypostasis of the Father.<sup>133</sup> Arius's resistance to accepting the *absolute* divinity of Jesus is also due to the fact of Jesus' enfleshed nature, because flesh for him is sign of finitude and creatureliness as opposed to *absoluteness*.<sup>134</sup> For Arius, Jesus, as attested in the New Testament, has passions and emotions, suffers, and is mutable. He cannot, therefore, be equal to the Father Almighty.<sup>135</sup> For Apollinaris of Laodicea, Jesus is perfect God (Nicea). However, two perfect things cannot constitute a unique reality. Consequently, the humanity of Christ cannot be literally perfect. The Incarnation is a mixture of both the Logos and the body (the Logos being the soul of Christ) that results in a third element different from the first two.<sup>136</sup>

Nestorius took up this thesis after the Council of Ephesus (431), affirming that the divinity and the humanity of Jesus were two distinct things before the union, but that after the union they became a unique nature absorbing the first two.<sup>137</sup> Modal Monarchianism does not give any consistency to the Incarnation. Its main thesis is that God the Father is manifested in history in three fundamental moments: as Father in

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<sup>132</sup> José I. González Faus, *La humanidad nueva: Ensayo de Cristología* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1984), 391.

<sup>133</sup> Manlio Simonetti, "Monarquianos," in Di Berardino, A. (ed.), *Dizionario Patristico e di antichità cristiane* (3 vols.; Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1983), 2:1467. This doctrine was condemned by the Synod of Antioch (268). But in arguing against Paul of Samosata that Jesus Christ is a composition body/soul, the Synod substitutes in fact the Incarnation with *composition*. And during many years, this understanding was understood as orthodox.

<sup>134</sup> González Faus, *La humanidad nueva*, 396.

<sup>135</sup> Olegario González de Cardedal, *Fundamentos de Cristología* (Madrid: BAC, 2005), 229.

<sup>136</sup> *Fragm. 113*. Quoted by González Faus, *La humanidad nueva*, 398.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

creation, as Son in the Incarnation, and as Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a unique *hypostasis* or *prosopon*. God is a simple and indivisible monad and God's manifestation in history has to be understood as different aspects or modalities, three names of the same being, transitory and dynamic. The Incarnation is not real; it is pure modality of the same being.<sup>138</sup> Following the dramatic concept of *prosopon*, Nestorius separates God from the actor representing God, Jesus. And since we cannot attribute the feelings of the personage to the person he/she represents, the flesh and humanity of Jesus are not intrinsically and ontologically of God. The Incarnation is meaningless, and the motherhood of Mary is limited to the human being Jesus Christ.<sup>139</sup> Obviously, one can be afraid that this kind of approach could cloud or endanger the unique and fundamental mediation of Jesus.<sup>140</sup>

The Incarnation is, therefore, intrinsically linked to flesh as the act or event by which the Logos becomes flesh (John 1:14). So, if we admitted the possibility of a reference to the Incarnation in John 1:5, this could solely be understood as an important step toward the Incarnation which will truly take place later in verse 14. However, we could not have considered that the main concern of verse 5 is the Incarnation. First, the coming of the light into the world does not mean that it becomes flesh; second, if this coming of the light has to be understood as Incarnation, then Incarnation no longer refers to the Logos becoming flesh, but instead comes to be understood as a sort of illumination of the world. This is why John 1:5 should not be explicitly linked to the Incarnation, because it could become synonymous with a Gnostic comprehension of the

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<sup>138</sup> Presently, the Christology of O. Cullmann, the Trinitarian Theology of Catherine LaCugna, and the *subsistenzweise* of Karl Rahner tend to be characterized as modalistic. These are not actually heresies, but theological approaches that tend to soften the immanent Trinity (Cullmann and LaCugna) or the plurality in God (Barth and Rahner) in order to avoid ontologization, Hellenization, or abstract forms of Christianity.

<sup>139</sup> González Faus, *La humanidad nueva*, 408.

<sup>140</sup> Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life* (trans. H. D. Egan; New York: Crossroad, 1990), 84-85.

coming of the Logos into the world. It could also lean toward the possibility of many incarnations, thereby supporting the thesis that denies the event of Jesus Christ being absolute. Briefly, as Witherington observes:

At v.14 the logos finally reaches the human stage. The strophes before this were not in any direct way talking about the incarnation, but here the subject is directly treated. Here one find “ho logos sarx egeneto.” This means “the Word became flesh.” It certainly does not mean that the Word turned into flesh with no remainder, because he remains the Word who is beheld by the community at the end of the hymn. Thus it might be better to say that what is meant is either the Word took on flesh, or the Word came on the human scene. The Word became more than he was before, not less. To his divine nature he added a human one.<sup>141</sup>

*c. Flesh is Not Necessarily Contrary to Universality*

Pluralist theologians deny the Incarnation or tend to de-historicize it because it makes Jesus Christ less universal. Irenaeus believes in the revelation of God in history in the person of Jesus Christ, God made flesh. But he also points out that God’s revelation does not begin with the birth of Jesus of Mary: “From the beginning the Son has been present to His handwork, and reveals the Father to all.”<sup>142</sup> A very interesting point here is that Irenaeus is referring to the Son revealing God before Jesus was born of Mary (preexistence). This precision can serve as a support of H1, which understands John 1:5 as a reference to the Incarnation, since Jesus is the subject and the object of John’s Gospel and since –in Irenaeus’s words– He has always been present “from the beginning.” In fact, Irenaeus goes further in this opinion by developing a history of salvation in which Jesus is the center, in progressive analogies: “Through the creation itself the Word reveals God the Creator, and through the world the Lord, the world’s Maker, and through the work or art the Artist who fashioned it, and through the Son the Father who begets the Son.”<sup>143</sup> In a more Johannine theology, Irenaeus proposes an

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<sup>141</sup> Ben Witherington, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 55.

<sup>142</sup> *Haer.* IV, 6, 7.

<sup>143</sup> *Haer.* IV, 6, 6.

analogy that culminates God's revelation in the Incarnation, a moment prepared by the law and the prophets: "Similarly, through the law and the prophets the Word proclaimed both Himself and the Father... Finally, through the Word made visible and palpable, the Father was revealed. Though all alike did not believe, all saw the Father in the Son (John 14:9)."<sup>144</sup>

However, this last aspect of Irenaeus's theology also confirms me in my preference for H2 concerning John 1:5. It stresses that God's revelation is a process and, by identifying the presence of the Word in God's revelation previous to the Incarnation, Irenaeus also recognized that any rejection of God's creation, law, and prophets is a rejection of God's Word and will, and is a prelude to the most radical rejection of the Incarnate Word in the passion and death of Jesus Christ.<sup>145</sup> I prefer, in that case, to make a clear distinction between what is God's manifestation since the beginning that has always been in and through Christ in the Holy Spirit (John 1:1-13),<sup>146</sup> and what is properly God's specific manifestation in the Incarnation (John 1:14). Like those who believed in God's creation, followed God's law, and accepted the words of God's prophets became children of God in the Holy Spirit, so also do those who now receive and embrace the Son of God made flesh become God's children. They become adopted children of God by receiving God's only Begotten Son (*Haer.* III, 16, 3) and are initiated to be accustomed with his dwelling among them and abiding within them (*Haer.* III, 20, 2), so that they can also become like the Son of God (*Haer.* V, preface; V, 16, 2).

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> As attested in *Haer.* IV, 33, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Contrary to what we have seen in Justin, Irenaeus does not identify Sophia and Logos. On the contrary, he clearly associates Sophia with the Spirit and Logos with the Son, both the "two hands" of God.

In the Incarnation, Jesus assumed Adam's nature and substance (*Haer.* V, 1, 3) and became man, with flesh and blood (*Haer.* V, 14, 1), so that he could also recapitulate human nature and history in Himself (*Haer.* III, 13, 1; V, 14, 2). That is why Irenaeus pointed out both that Jesus was born of Mary (*Haer.* III, 21, 10; 22, 4; IV, 33, 11), and also that Jesus was capable of temptation, suffering, and death (*Haer.* III, 22,2; 19, 3; *Dem.* 71). For Irenaeus, the Incarnation means the condition of the Son made man. It involves his whole life, from the virginal conception to the final consummation. It is an open-ended event<sup>147</sup> which inaugurates a new beginning in the relationship of God with the world, making God visible and palpable to the world and bringing the world to fulfillment through the Holy Spirit.<sup>148</sup>

The plenitude of time (Gal 4:4) corresponds to the time of the Incarnation through which Jesus begins his work of the recapitulation of all (*Haer.* III, 16, 7; IV, 22, 1).<sup>149</sup> By this understanding, Irenaeus establishes two aspects of God's work: the creation in which the Father is the main agent, and the Incarnation/Recapitulation in which the Father's two hands, namely the Son and the Holy Spirit, are the main agents. The first is the beginning (Gen 1:1) and the second is the new beginning (John 1:1-3).<sup>150</sup> Both moments are reconciled in John 1:3: "and through/in him/her, everything was made." Therefore, it becomes clear that, for Irenaeus, Logos and Sophia, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are eternally preexistent to creation since they do not belong to creation, because creation was made in/through them.<sup>151</sup> Incarnation was necessary for the redemption of human beings. That also implies that, for Irenaeus, the Logos, in his

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<sup>147</sup> Jacques Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée: Lectures des Écritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique: Une approche trinitaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 205.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 259. According to Jacques Fantino, Irenaeus christianizes here an idea already present in Valentinian Gnosticism.

<sup>150</sup> Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée*, 233.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 303, 347.

divine nature, could not fully save human beings. He had to be both truly divine and truly human (with all human properties) to save human nature from sin.<sup>152</sup> Not taking into account the flesh in the Incarnation, as H1 suggests, would mean for Irenaeus falling into a kind of Docetism, emptying the real historical character of the Son,<sup>153</sup> or into the errors of the Ebionists who denied the carnal nature of the humanity of Christ,<sup>154</sup> or the dualism of Marcion, since if there is not unity between the preexistent Logos (John 1:1-5) and the Incarnate Son (John 1:14), the Son is not historically real – something his flesh makes possible– or is multiplied (pluralism).

If there is not unity within the preexistent Logos, then the Son in John 1:5 is not the same as in John 1:1 (who was turned toward God and was God). And because he is not more God (the argument defended by religious pluralism), he is not more absolute. And if he is not more absolute, the salvation itself is emptied of its contents and becomes a Docetism in reverse: God’s salvation in Jesus is not godly as such, but only in appearance. The Scripture, which sets forth God’s salvation in Jesus Christ, would become as irrelevant as Christian faith itself since Jesus is not God anymore.

Now, some can object to those who advocate for a more Pneumatological approach<sup>155</sup> by denying the particular-absoluteness-universality of Jesus. How can a no-God (Jesus) give a divine Holy Spirit? The goal of this essay in the next chapter is to find a way to preserve Jesus’ divinity and humanity, and to see how a particular Jesus (in his humanity) can be a universal Savior (in the unity of his life and nature) and preserve at the same time the truth present in other religions.

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<sup>152</sup> Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo. Comentario del Libro V del “Adversus haereses”* (Madrid: BAC, 1985), 62.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>154</sup> Concretely, they denied the possibility of the virginal birth. That suggests that either God is not powerful enough to make this possible, or (what is interesting for us here) that a man born from a woman cannot be Christ. They deny the power of God, but implicitly reject the true humanity of Christ (cf. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 88, 96).

<sup>155</sup> Will be detailed in the next chapter.

d. *Justin Martyr's Doctrine of the Universal Logos*

Patristic foundations of H1 seem to lead us to Justin Martyr's understanding of the Logos and its universal nature. But this is only a partial reading of Justin. Logos in Ancient Greece and in Neo-Platonism is the *intelligence qui parle* (literally, "knowledge that speaks") or the knowledge that becomes word. In Heraclitus, for example, Logos is the order and harmony of all, while Philo thinks that it is the preamble condition of this order and harmony. For Philo, Logos is not the order itself but the origin.<sup>156</sup> Justin prefers the use of Logos as *word* over *reason, order, power, or fire*. Antonio Orbe explains that Justin could not accept the metaphor of power<sup>157</sup> and fire because it would deny the distinction between the Light (logos) and its source (God), and support the angelical theses about the logos (*Dial.* 128:3). Justin preferred the word, Orbe adds, but also with some reservation, "because the word can be inconsistent (unsubstantial)."<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Justin opposes any kind of Modalism (cf. *Dial.* 128:3-4) in which the Logos is understood as the manifestation of the Father.<sup>159</sup> The Logos is the Word of God, Creator of everything. Justin also suggests that this same Logos is the one who inspired the prophets (*Ap.* 36-38).<sup>160</sup>

Therefore, although Justin distinguishes clearly between the Father (and eternal God) and the Logos (Begotten Son of God since the beginning; *Dial.* 61:3.4),<sup>161</sup> there is still a certain identification between what further creeds will see as the Son (*App.* 8:3) and the Spirit who spoke through the prophets (cf. *Dial.* 128:2; 19:6; 26:2), and who is

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<sup>156</sup> Sylvain J.G. Sanchez, *Justin Apologiste Chrétien: Travaux sur le Dialogue avec Tryphon de Justin Martyr* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 2000), 186. This book offers a philosophical reading of Justin.

<sup>157</sup> Although Justin also evokes "Power" as agent of the Incarnation (*Dial.* 88:2; *1 Apol.* 46:5), the Spirit is also active in the Passion and the Cross (*Dial.* 30:3; 31:1; 41:8; *1 Apol.* 35:2).

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue avec Tryphon* (trans. P. Bobichon; 2 vols.; Fribourg: Academic, 2003), 2:969.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 970.

<sup>160</sup> Sanchez, *Justin Apologiste Chrétien*, 187.

<sup>161</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (trans. Thomas B. Falls; Washington, DC: The Catholic University, 1965), 94.

truly the Holy Spirit.<sup>162</sup> The result of this identification is that all the Old Testament theophanies become christophanies for Justin. He offers a Christology of the Logos; but less, if not absent, is Pneumatology. It becomes acceptable that the Incarnation itself is understood sometimes as the “descent of the Spirit on the Virgin,” as the Power of God in Mary, and with a marginal consideration of flesh (*Ap.* 33:6).<sup>163</sup> This separation from the flesh<sup>164</sup> in the understanding of the Logos offers the possibility for a natural –and therefore more universalist– perspective to the Logos, present everywhere as *logos spermatikos*.<sup>165</sup>

### *Conclusion of Chapter Two*

Because of the weakness of the arguments presented by H1, and the theological risks presented involved in H2, I argue that John 1:5 is not a reference to the Incarnation and should not be. The Franciscan idea of the absolute predestination (Bonaventure) and

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<sup>162</sup> The use of the Christological title “Lord” as the “one who spoke through the prophets” in chapters 11-31 of *Dial.* confirms this identification or even confusion between Son and the further reference to the Holy Spirit in the creeds (cf. *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, 1011).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189. Sanchez notes that Justine distinguished the Logos from the Holy Spirit in *Ap.* 60:7, but uses it mainly as Son of God, Creator of everything and reason, order of the created world. It is not clear whether this explicit omission of the Holy Spirit is its identification with the Son or not, because sometimes in the *Dialogue*, Justin gives the impression that the Holy Spirit is taken for granted, even by Trypho, so that he has no need to prove the Holy Spirit, but only the divinity of Jesus (chap. 36-42; 55-62).

<sup>164</sup> Another example is the following reference where Justin explains the virginal birth: “his blood did not originate *from human seed but from the will of God* (Jn 1:13)” (cf. Saint Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 63:2). The whole issue Trypho questions here is the “incredible and practically impossible [idea] that God deigned to be born and to become man” (*Dial.* 68:1). For Justin, Christ “assumed” the body “for the sake of those who believe in him, for whom he also suffered, and also to the cup which he taught us to offer in the Eucharist, in commemoration of his blood” (*Dial.* 70:4). The question therefore is not whether God appeared to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, but rather whether “he could also be born man of a virgin” (*Dial.* 75:4). For Justin, the title “Son of Man, indicates that he would become man and appear as such, but that he would not be born of a human seed” (*Dial.* 76:1). That means that “*the first born of all creatures* took flesh and truly became man... by the power and purpose of the Creator of the world” (*Dial.* 84:2). Finally, in his humanity, Christ endured suffering in his crucifixion so that he “should shoulder the curses of the whole human race, fully realizing that he would raise him up again after his crucifixion and death... and in order that by his wounds humankind might be healed” (*Dial.* 95:2-3).

<sup>165</sup> Bobichon suggests that Justin’s reinterpretation of the notions of “race”, “people” and “nations” goes as further as to substitute Israel by pagan nations in the order of salvation, before becoming ultimately “one nation” (cf. *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, 974, 976).

the Ignatian idea of finding God in everything (Rahner) do not deny the specific meaning of a central dogma of Christian faith, that God became man (John 1:14). Should I stop my argumentation at this point, I might have offered a very apophatic theology. I do not see any problem with that; but the last chapter of this essay will offer a more cataphatic approach, toward a Pneumatological interpretation of John 1:5.

### *Chapter Three: Toward a Pneumatological Interpretation of John 1:5*

In this chapter I offer a Pneumatological interpretation of John 1:5 and thus argue that the Holy Spirit is already present or presupposed in the Gospel of John in its beginning until the end. For, for the Gospel to be Christocentric from the outset, it should also be Pneumatological. In order to make this case, I will develop a wisdom Pneumatology along with the existing wisdom Christology, so that the new wisdom Pneumatology is coherent with the Johannine Pneumatology and, specifically, with the Prologue of John where there is no an explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. Such a project presupposes a twofold challenge. First, it requires a revision of the current understanding among scholars that the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel functions (solely) as Jesus' gift to the community to "fill" his physical absence within the community and to lead the community to a fuller understanding of Jesus' identity and actions. Second, the difficulty due to the fact that there is no explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in the Prologue must be overcome. This chapter thus explores the nature of the Prologue and its wisdom background. Then it sets forth the ambiguity of the figure of Wisdom and makes the case that the Holy Spirit can assume less controversially this ambiguity as part of his/her nature than the more fleshy and historical Jesus. This new wisdom Pneumatology is supported by scriptural arguments and by the tradition of the Church.

#### *1. The Nature of the "Word": Rediscovering Its Pneumatological Meaning*

##### *a. The Hermeneutics of Personified Wisdom as Background of the "Word"*

The idea of Wisdom as a personified figure existed in many traditions in the Ancient Near East. According to Richard Clifford, this figure is linked in the Bible to symbols such as light-truth (Ps 43:3), peace-love, and righteousness (Ps 85:10). Clifford also points out the presence of the figure of Lady Wisdom in other Ancient Near East cultures, but stresses her distinctiveness following the way she operates in the book of

Proverbs. In Proverbs, Lady Wisdom has her own speech, addresses all human beings (8:4), and invites people to believe in her.<sup>166</sup> This explains why some scholars, such as Gerhard von Rad,<sup>167</sup> stress that Lady Wisdom may also be a goddess once worshiped by the Israelites. This argument is supported by the fact that Lady Wisdom sometimes appears as the extension of God's attributes that have taken on an independent life, and also because Lady Wisdom speaks with divine authority (Prov 1:20-23) and plays a prominent role in creation (Prov 8). Therefore, three main interpretations are given to Lady Wisdom: she is 1) an attribute of God, or 2) a goddess, or 3) simply a literary device.

Close to the first and second interpretations is that offered by Roland E. Murphy. He recommends understanding the figure of Lady Wisdom as the expression of God's self-communication, even if he acknowledges that the biblical context does not admit the figure of Wisdom to be conceived as a hypostasis or person "because of the strict monotheism of the postexilic period."<sup>168</sup> Among the many interpretations offered by the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (NRSV),<sup>169</sup> Lady Wisdom embodies the universal wisdom known by the sages, and she aimed to instruct younger generations. In that sense, she plays the roles of a teacher, counselor, and household planner, which roles were played by Israelite women in their homes. She is also understood here in opposition to Woman Folly (Prov 9:13-18). In addition, there is the possibility that Lady Wisdom was simply a literary device.<sup>170</sup> The origin of the Personified Wisdom motif

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<sup>166</sup> Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 55-56.

<sup>167</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

<sup>168</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1990), 133.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Harold W. Attridge, Wine A. Meeks, and Jouette M. Bassler (eds.), *New Revised Standard Version: Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 850.

covers, however, a broader Ancient Near Eastern context where it is also given a stylistic, theological, and moralistic interpretation.

Murphy offers an interesting review of recent interpretations of the nature of Personified Wisdom in the Ancient Near East.<sup>171</sup> According to him, the first attempt to understand the nature of Personified Wisdom finds its inspiration in a Canaanite/Assyrian goddess. Bernhard Lang has rejected such a hypothesis, arguing that in Ahiqar, where the supporting text for this interpretation is found, there is no speech by a wisdom goddess, nor does Lady Wisdom have the traits of an Assyrian goddess. Rather, Lang finds a relationship between Wisdom and the Egyptian *maât*, specifically in Prov 1-9. On the one hand, he recognizes Lady Wisdom as a pedagogue, a personified school of wisdom, or “a didactic reconstruction designed to make an impression on a student.” On the other hand, in the English translation of his study,<sup>172</sup> Lang argued that Israel had a polytheistic past in which a goddess of wisdom was honored as the “divine patroness of scribal education and training.” He then hypothesized that Lady Wisdom came to be understood as a simple personification of a poetic type, representing “wisdom teaching its moral injunctions.” Murphy’s appreciation of Lang’s theorizing is that it is “ingenious but highly uncertain”.<sup>173</sup>

Von Rad corroborates the Egyptian influence of Prov 8:22-30. For him, the style of this text alludes to a specific Egyptian idea of a deity, *Maât*, caressing personified truth that embodies law, world order, and justice. To confirm the idea of a personified *Maât*, von Rad also views Lady Wisdom as a personification of the “world order” (Prov 8; Job 28; Sir 24).<sup>174</sup> Another meaning of *Maât* in the Egyptian religious view is that she

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<sup>171</sup> Murphy, *The Three of Life*.

<sup>172</sup> Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986).

<sup>173</sup> Murphy, *The Three of Life*, 137-138.

<sup>174</sup> von Rad. *Wisdom in Israel*, 153.

is the principle of world order. What is objectified here, von Rad suggests, is not an attribute of God but an attribute of the world, “something created by Yahweh and assigned to its proper function.”<sup>175</sup> In conclusion, von Rad thinks that personified Wisdom is “the self-revelation of creation,” the title that he gives to his treatment of this topic in chap. 9 of *Wisdom in Israel*.<sup>176</sup>

b. *The Historicized Wisdom of Israel and the Prologue of John’s Gospel*

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Wisdom appears as the “animating principle of the *true* [I underline] and *eternal* world. [And] the true world is represented by loyal servants or ‘sons’ who place their trust in God the creator and ruler of this world (chap.2).”<sup>177</sup> The emphasis in Clifford’s position is the historicization of this principle by connecting it with the specific history of Israel and by using covenant language so that Lady Wisdom is identified with the Word (Sir 24:3), the law (Sir 24:3),<sup>178</sup> and the Temple<sup>179</sup> (Sir 24:4, “pillar of cloud”; “tent”; and the implicit references to the Exodus in vv. 7-12). Accordingly, the identification of wisdom and the Torah<sup>180</sup> in Sir 24:23 is the recognition that biblical revelation is the best expression of divine wisdom.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the relationship of wisdom to worship, cosmos, and history will appear again as a central theme in Sir 42:15-50:24 (the lengthy section known as “the Praise of the Ancestors”). This historicization of wisdom is fulfilled, I contend, in the Gospel of John.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Murphy, *The Three of Life*, 138.

<sup>177</sup> Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*, 147. The brackets are mine.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>179</sup> We should however note here that some scholars, based on the history of redaction, see in Jesus the New Temple, after the destruction of the Ancient one in 70 A.D (cf. Aidian O’Boyle, *Towards a Contemporary Wisdom Christology: Some Catholic Christologies in German, English and French 1965-1995* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2003), 78.).

<sup>180</sup> Wisdom is identified with the Torah in 24:3. It is also compared to “the great cosmic rivers that fertilize the earth, allowing the sage to define himself as one who draws from that world-encompassing stream” (24:30-34). See Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 127.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 124.

Despite Sharon Ringe's acknowledgment that the word *wisdom* is mentioned nowhere in the Gospel or the Johannine letters,<sup>182</sup> there is significant consensus that wisdom emerged as a central theological motif in the Fourth Gospel through Hellenistic Judaism, and that the Prologue contains a theology of wisdom.<sup>183</sup> In the literature of Judaism preceding the Gospel of John, wisdom is encountered in the section of the *Kethuvim* (i.e., the "Writings"), in the deuterocanonical books of the Christian canon, in the apocalyptic books *1 Enoch* and *2 Esdras*, and in the writings of Philo.<sup>184</sup> Additionally, as Ben Witherington affirms, the narrative *pattern* of many Christological hymns concerning the life and activity of the Son should be found in earlier Jewish reflection on the career of personified Wisdom (Prov 8; Sir 24; 1 Enoch 42).<sup>185</sup> Specifically, here are some connections with the Prologue of John which help to construct a wisdom Christology.

To illustrate this Christological link, Clifford and many other scholars (such as Brown) affirm that "Word" and Wisdom are most memorably combined in the New Testament in the first chapter of John's Gospel. That is, "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), evokes both Proverbs 8:22 ("beginning") and Genesis 1:1-3 ("beginning", "God said"). If Lady Wisdom was "created before anything else" and was with Yahweh during creation as a "master worker,"<sup>186</sup> the "Word," however, is not created. Rather, it is turned toward God, and God was the Word (1:1). Still in relationship with John's Gospel, the NRSV tends to suggest a progressive masculinization of Lady Wisdom to conform a strongly male-centered society,<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Sharon H. Ringe, *Wisdom's Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster, 1999), 29.

<sup>183</sup> Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 51.

<sup>184</sup> Ringe, *Wisdom's Friends*, 29.

<sup>185</sup> Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 51.

<sup>186</sup> Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 61.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Attridge, *New Revised Standard Version*, 850.

opening the “Word” to a broader and, maybe, not exclusively Christocentric understanding.

In fact, even before the composition of Christological hymns, the *Wisdom of Solomon* associated Wisdom and the Holy Spirit: “Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given Wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by Wisdom” (9:17-18).<sup>188</sup> Ben Witherington is convinced that it is the use of the Genesis material in the hymnic material about wisdom, both in the Old Testament and in later Jewish wisdom writings, that provides the font of ideas and forms used in creating the Prologue of John. For him, not only Prov 3 but also Prov 8:1-9:6 should be considered: “There one learns that personified Wisdom was present at creation, but also that she called God’s people back to the right paths and offered them life and favor from God (8:35).”<sup>189</sup> And he insists that Wisdom is a feminine figure!<sup>190</sup>

*c. Identification of Lady Wisdom with the Lord and the Creator Spirit*

Something persistent in studying these authors is that the very origin and authority of Wisdom suggest more than a personified order of creation. Wisdom tends to be identified with the Lord. The call of Lady Wisdom is the voice of the Lord; she is the revelation of God, not merely the self-revelation of creation. She is the divine

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<sup>188</sup> Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 52.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> Ringe states that Wisdom proves to be an ambivalent icon of women’s identity in divine form: “That ambivalence has several dimensions. First, this personification is in a form recognized as female according to the canons of the kyriarchically assigned gender roles: She is a man’s woman. Her sphere of activity is principally the household and neighborhood, and her roles encompass primarily tasks of nurturing traditionally linked to women’s activities... Second, Wisdom appears as ambivalent about her involvement with humankind. At one moment she hides herself, and at another she is said to seek out people to follow the ‘way’ that she would teach them... Finally, traditions that equate Wisdom with Torah, and thus sacrifice personality for permanence, or traditions that remove Wisdom from the role of mediator between creator and creation by confining her to the heavenly sphere, reflect a desire on the part of spokespersons for the official theology to limit or control Wisdom –to keep her in her place.” Ringe, *Wisdom’s Friends*, 31.

summons issued in and through creation, sounding through the vast realm of the created world, and heard on the level of human experience. This is the task that seems to be assigned to her in Prov 8:31. Von Rad's earlier description of Lady Wisdom is more accurate:

Wisdom is the form in which Jahweh's will and his accompanying of man<sup>191</sup> (i.e. his salvation) approach man. Wisdom is the essence of what man needs for a proper life, and of what God grants him... So wisdom is truly the form in which Jahweh makes himself present and in which he wishes to be sought by man... One does not have to choose between God and creation in Lady Wisdom. Ultimately the revelation of creation is the revelation of God. God speaks through wisdom/creation, which is turned to human beings and speaks in the accents of God. Such is the thrust of Prov 8.<sup>192</sup>

This creative role of Wisdom also appears in one hymn of the Qumran wisdom texts in these terms: "All things come to pass by his knowledge. He establishes all things by His design, and without Him nothing *is* [my emphasis] made" (1QS 11:11). Does this not sound familiar? In fact, the Prologue of John affirms that same creative role of the Logos/Word, without which anything could have come to existence (John 1:2-3). In the same way, Elizabeth Johnson and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggest that Wisdom Christology is the result of a certain identification of Logos with Sophia, and that by the end of the first century, Jesus is presented not only as a wisdom teacher or as a child and envoy of Sophia, but ultimately as the embodiment of Sophia herself.

For Schüssler Fiorenza:

while the Jesus movement, like John, understood Jesus as the messenger and prophet of divine Sophia, the wisdom Christology of the Christian missionary movement sees him as divine Sophia herself. James Dunn, too, judges that "Jesus is the exhaustive embodiment of divine wisdom"; Jack Suggs argues that for Matthew, "Jesus is Sophia incarnate"; according to Raymond Brown's analysis, "in John, Jesus is personified Wisdom."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Understand here "human beings."

<sup>192</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 138-139. See also von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 144-176; and Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs*.

<sup>193</sup> Quoted by Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 95.

An important observation needs to be made at this point. Applying 1QS 11:11 to John 1:1-2 can be misleading. It would assimilate the Logos to knowledge and design, without any relation to concrete history and flesh, that is necessary for a true Incarnation (H1). Although there is not any certain indication of Gnostic influence in the composition of the Prologue of John, we know from the first chapter of this thesis, however, that this Gospel was used later as a font of Christian Gnosticism. And because it bears a threat of a Gnostic interpretation, we should not neglect any further interpretation that could lead to Gnosticism, as would be the case in H1. In my opinion, a more inclusive interpretation, using Wisdom rather than Logos, can help recuperate the Holy Spirit who, as we know from Gen 1,<sup>194</sup> also had a significant role in the material that inspired John's Gospel's Prologue. For she was present from the beginning as *ruah* and still contributes in the continuing creation of the world.

## 2. *Biblical and Theological Foundations of this Wisdom Pneumatology*

### a. *The Ambiguity of Wisdom in Support of the Pneumatological Shift*

In the light of the risk of a Gnostic interpretation of the Logos in John 1:1-2 along with 1QS 11:11, many arguments can be marshaled in favor of the alternative which I offer as a Pneumatological shift. The first argument is the use of the *present tense* in this Qumran text (1QS 11:11). This verb can evoke the continuing creative role of Wisdom, continually providing life to believers and people of good will before the coming of Jesus in the world and after his return to the Father. In fact, as Ringe sees it in parallel with another text, the *Wisdom of Solomon's* first affirmation is that "Wisdom, equated with God's Spirit, is the cosmic force holding together all creation including human history and social institutions and dwelling in individual persons as God's self-

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<sup>194</sup> I will extend on this point later in this chapter with Matthew Edward.

manifestation to all who seek God (1:1-8).”<sup>195</sup> And since the *Wisdom of Solomon* mainly defends the idea of Wisdom providing life and light (7:27), as the effulgence of eternal light, and as the very life breath of God (7:25), the main quest of its central part (Wis 6:12-9:18) alternates between, on the one hand, descriptions of Wisdom’s characteristics and gifts, both as a personified figure and, on the other hand, the background of such common meaning of wisdom as study, knowledge, experience, and cleverness (6:9, 11, 25). Anyone can easily recognize in these attributes common gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit as set forth in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor 12:1-14; Gal 5:22-23).

Second, it seems that Ringe does not go far enough in her conclusion about Wisdom in the Fourth Gospel. She only notices that while the Prologue mainly celebrates the Logos in terms reminiscent of the wisdom hymns of Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon (feminine), the Logos is grammatically masculine and allows us to establish the link between wisdom motives and the man Jesus in whom the Logos became flesh.<sup>196</sup> In John’s context, however, as observed along this thesis, reading these texts solely in a Christological perspective would have been dangerously Gnostic. However, since it is in the nature of wisdom to be ambiguous, as wisdom can refer to masculine Wisdom (Logos) or to the feminine Wisdom (Sophia), related both to the couples Word-Life/Knowledge-Light,<sup>197</sup> then only a preexisting Logos-Christology or a Pneumatology can theologically avoid this Gnostic understanding. In the former, the

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<sup>195</sup> Ringe, *Wisdom’s Friends*, 40.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 45. It is important to notice at this point the fact that the NRSV points out the gradual masculinization of wisdom to conform with the male dominant society. Should we consider these genres relevant, then we ought to ask whether it is right that the man Jesus Christ can be both Logos and Sophia in the Wisdom Christology. In fact, Johnson holds that Sophia is a female personification of God’s own being in creative and saving involvement with the world. Cf. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 91.

<sup>197</sup> As “*Wisdom*,” *Sophia* is not used in this Gospel, and someone could question the necessity of using the Wisdom metaphor relating to this Gospel. However, many scholars think that the theology of Wisdom is behind this Prologue. We can also notice that the Synoptic Gospels use *sophia* (Matt 1: 19; Lk 11:49).

Logos is the main hand of the Father in the original work of creation.<sup>198</sup> With the Logos comes the word that breaks into the undifferentiated pre-creative darkness. In the latter, Sophia is present in that remote beginning as *Ruah* (Gen 1), and becomes the main hand of the Father in the *creatio continua*, providing the gifts of life and light (John 1:4), maintaining the contrast between light and darkness (1:4-5), and empowering witnesses throughout history (1:6-8).

Third, Wisdom is as ambiguous as *doxa*. All depends on the perspective from which we approach Wisdom. As Wisdom can refer to the Logos, *doxa* refers to the glory “seen” by believers in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Linked to Wisdom as knowledge, *doxa* refers to grace, to God’s unmerited favor, given to believers as the truth of their life, something the Spirit conveys to people who have been born anew by the Spirit.<sup>199</sup> Nobody can receive that grace or be born anew without the Spirit. And that allows a parallel between John 1:12-13 and John 3:1-8, where glory, grace, and truth are inseparable. All this forms part of the richness of the ambiguity of Wisdom. In fact, the *Wisdom of Solomon* sometime uses Word and Wisdom as synonymous (e.g., *Wis* 9:1-2).

The logical conclusion is that, since the absolute beginning, the Spirit was with God, and along with God and the Word, created matter and human beings within which she abides as continuing *Creator Spirit* who prepared the matter and human beings to be the tabernacle of the coming Jesus, the Incarnate Logos (John 1:14). Those in whom this Spirit is present and who recognize her become children of God (John 1:12b-13).

As Ringe says:

Wisdom is God’s delight, and Wisdom, in turn, delights in humankind. Wisdom thus functions as the ‘primary link’ between God and humankind, or, more properly, as the way God is actively present in the world. Through Wisdom, the movement happens in both directions: The desire of Wisdom for intimacy with humankind becomes the vehicle for divine presence on

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<sup>198</sup> About the hands of God in creation, see: Irenaeus, *Haer.* IV: 20: 1.

<sup>199</sup> Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 55. I will treat this point with more details later in this chapter.

earth, and at the same time humankind's desire for Wisdom draws humankind toward God.<sup>200</sup>

*b. In the Scripture, Wisdom Has A Divine Origin*

Now that I have established the twofold meaning of Wisdom as Logos and as Sophia, and the fact that in having Gen 1 as primary material, John's Prologue's supposed lack of the Spirit would result in ignoring the presence of Ruah from the beginning or in assimilating *Ruah* with the Logos, a second element of this Pneumatological turn is the reaffirmation of the divine origin of Lady Wisdom or Sophia. Job 28:20-23 affirms that God alone knows where wisdom is. She seems not to be understood from the perspective of creation's order (28:14); rather, she is in God's presence, visible to God. Wisdom is pre-existent to creation, maybe a proto-creature (Sir 1:4). Job 28's claim is that "Wisdom belongs to God, who alone knows where she is."<sup>201</sup> She has a divine origin, whether as "created" or "acquired," depending on different translations of *begot* (8:22-31).<sup>202</sup> If created and pre-existent, then Lady Wisdom can hardly bear divine attributes. But, if God acquired her, then her pre-existence can be not only eternal (God's delight day by day, v.30) but also autonomous from God. In both cases, her role in creation is prominent. She is beside God (8:30), playing on the surface of his earth (8:31), and is the font of life and blessings (8:35). The one who finds her finds life and receives favor from God (parallel to 18:22: finding her and receiving happiness as a favor from the Lord). Her speech in 8:12-16 outlines divine attributes proper to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor 12:1-14; Gal 5:22-23). All these qualities are the gifts of the Lord's Spirit to the messianic figure (Isa 11:2). These remarks raise another question: can a legitimate Christological interpretation of Wisdom ignore this spiritual presence and still be truly Christological?

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<sup>200</sup> Ringe, *Wisdom's Friends*, 37.

<sup>201</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 135.

<sup>202</sup> On these semantic nuances, see: von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 152.

This question seems to have been ignored by traditional approaches of wisdom Christology.

c. *Matthew Edward: Wisdom as Ruah, Pneuma, or Spirit*

At this point, the “Word” can be translated by “Logos” and by “Sophia.” Both have divine origin and come from the same sources that influenced the formation of the Prologue. The purpose of this section is to establish the divine nature of Sophia as a condition of further wisdom Pneumatology. If both Attridge and Clifford remain cautious in extending wisdom motifs to the Holy Spirit, Matthew Edward has a strong case for a Wisdom Pneumatology.<sup>203</sup> First, he presents wisdom as a principle of unity in both God’s creative and salvific activity. Wisdom is the spirit or power of God ordering the universe and guiding it to unending unity and friendship with God-self.<sup>204</sup> In addition to this cosmic dimension of Sophia (Wis 10), Edward points out her abiding in human beings as the soul of individual sages, and in Israel, as the presence of God’s ongoing providential care for God’s people (Wis 8:2). Next, he emphasizes the fact that wisdom rewards her followers with eternal life (Wis 6:21), while those who reject her are punished with death. She was with God before the beginning (Prov 8:22-31) and during the creation, but as “the spirit of God who hovered over the waters before creation” (Gen 1:2; Wis 7:22).<sup>205</sup> In Edward, there is a shift from Christology to Pneumatology. The attributes that support a wisdom Christology are now clearly applied to the Holy Spirit, to *pneuma*.<sup>206</sup>

Starting with Scripture, Edward notes that the Spirit of God which is present all over wisdom literature can be described in the Hebrew Bible “as the divine agent, that

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<sup>203</sup> Matthew Edward, *Pneuma and Realized Eschatology in the Book of Wisdom* (Bristol, CT.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

is, as God at work in the world and among humans.” Specifically, this Spirit acts “to empower humans in a variety of ways for his service,”<sup>207</sup> such as prophecy (Zech. 7:12; Neh 9:20, 30) and leadership (Num 11:16-30; 1Sam 10:10; 16:13, etc.). These very qualities of wisdom, those which consist in understanding, counseling, might, knowledge, righteousness, are proper to the Holy Spirit.<sup>208</sup> He goes further to point out that the primary word that is used to translate *ruah* in the Septuagint is *pneuma*. He then relates this *ruah/pneuma* to the spiritual reality that unites the whole universe. Therefore, wisdom is that “wind” which “contains vital heat and which is present throughout the universe in different concentrations in everything from stars to semen.”<sup>209</sup> It is also connected to the idea of a human being brought to life by the “breath” of the Lord (Gn 2:7; 7:22; Job 22:4).

Wisdom as *spirit* or *ruah* or *pneuma* is, therefore, the unifying principle, not only of God’s act of creation and *creatio continua*, but also of the Spirit unifying the specific history of Israel as a people. For Spirit-Sophia was responsible of the salvation of Israel. She endowed a kingly sage (Is 11:2; 61-62:9) and is at the heart of Wisdom’s hope (Wis 1:5-7; 8:16-18). She inspired and spoke through the prophets. And, for Edward, the greatest development of this Spirit took place in the personification of wisdom, presenting a unification of the prophetic and kingly endowment of the Spirit of God with the later wisdom tradition (Dan 2:3; 5:12; 6:3 and Wis 1:5; 7:22; 9-17). Moreover, in Sir 39:28 the life given by her will be brought to an end, where the judgment and glory of God will fully be manifested, along with the fulfillment of the Law (Sir 38:34; 39:6).<sup>210</sup> In her the life of the righteous will be extended beyond

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 120.

physical death.<sup>211</sup> All these attributes found in Israel's Scriptures, along with parallels from Ancient Near East traditions, contribute to highlight her divine nature.

### 3. *Wisdom Pneumatology as a Theological Necessity*

#### a. *There Is no Wisdom Christology Without a Wisdom Pneumatology*

Theologically, we should presuppose a Wisdom Pneumatology wherever we can suggest a Wisdom Christology. The systematic argument in favor of this is obvious: there is no Christology without the Trinity; moreover, no one can really know Jesus as Christ unless in the Spirit. The question now is whether we can use these conclusions and simply transfer them in favor of a Johannine Pneumatology in John 1:5 which would have been influenced by the Wisdom Pneumatology which we just developed. To address this issue, the first step I need to consider is whether there is a Pneumatology of John and what would that mean. I also need to see whether there are sufficient elements in the Johannine literature, and specifically in the Prologue, that will strongly support a Wisdom Pneumatology.

It is true that the main theme of the Gospel of John is Jesus' identity. However, the evangelist makes clear that Jesus' ministry and person can only be understood if one recognizes where Jesus comes from and where he is going. The Son of God is only explicable if one understands that here is a divine being who comes from and returns to heaven.<sup>212</sup> But how can one recognize Jesus among human beings as the one coming from above? The historical reading of the Prologue gives us a clear answer, with the witness of John the Baptist. Even before meeting Jesus, he has given witness to him as the one who comes after him (1:15). Now, as he walks with his disciples, he clearly identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29), just before acknowledging that he himself did not know Jesus (1:30, 33). He now knows

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 49.

Jesus because he saw the Spirit descending from heaven (1:32) and remaining on Jesus (1:33). Ironically, the evangelist introduces a theme which will be present in the Gospel: the growing blindness of the religious leaders who asked John the questions in 1:19-24. Like the man born blind, these leaders perceive something in John, but they cannot recognize him as he is: not Elijah or the Messiah, but as a witness, one sent from God (1:6), not like Jesus, but empowered by the Spirit who makes him a child of God. And just before the introduction of the reference on John the Baptist (1:6), there is John 1:5.

So, as we consider whether there is any place in the Prologue where we could find that presence of the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets, making people witnesses to God's presence in the world after the creation of the world and of humankind (1:3-4), it becomes clear that the Spirit is the light that was always shining in spite of the darkness of the history of the elected people (John 1:5). In fact, Ben Witherington thinks that many of the first Christological hymns (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; 1Cor 8:6), prayers, creedal statements, and doxologies<sup>213</sup> came initially from a spontaneous response in worship to what was felt to be the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>214</sup> There is also a consensus among scholars today that the apparent binitarian theology of the early Church was in fact Trinitarian because, for its members, what was obvious to them was their life in the Holy Spirit; any doubt was about Jesus' divinity.<sup>215</sup> In the early Church, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, tends to identify wisdom, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. For the author, wisdom "is the Holy Spirit that preexists, that created all creation" (*Herm. Sim. V:6:1-6*). And according to Justin Martyr, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the prophets, the Spirit of power and of wisdom; moreover, he

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<sup>213</sup> Cf. Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 114ff.

<sup>214</sup> Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 49-50.

<sup>215</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 114. This "leading of the Spirit" (Witherington), and the apparent binitarism of the early Church (LaCugna) are supportive arguments of the next section (d) in which I argue that the Holy Spirit was *presupposed* by the evangelist from the beginning of the Gospel.

tended to make the Holy Spirit another title for the Logos, although, at other times, he treated it as the spouse of the Logos.<sup>216</sup> In John's Prologue, at least until verse 14, the subject seems to be this Logos and, I contend, might well have been the Holy Spirit.

*b. We Become Children of God by Receiving the Power of God (John 1:12)*

As we come closer to the central verse of the Prologue (1:14), we have to think about other elements of John 1:6-13 that can be useful for admitting a possible presence of the Holy Spirit in the Prologue. These elements are the ideas of belief, becoming children of God, and an understanding of the concept of "power" (verse 12).

The idea of belief is one of the primary goals of the Johannine Gospel (20:31). Belief is closely connected to signs and occurs after great signs in John's Gospel: Cana (2:1), Passover (2:23), after the dialogue with the Samaritan woman (4:29), the multiplication of the loaves (6:14), and the raising of Lazarus (11:45). The content of this belief is recognizing, through the signs, that Jesus is the One Sent by God, "the Christ and the Son of God" (20:30-31). To believe, in John, means believing in Jesus' witnesses: John the Baptist, Jesus' words and works, and the witness of the Scriptures. John the Baptist, as we just said, is the first human (*anthrōpos*) witness proposed by the Gospel (vv. 6-7). Like Jesus, he is sent by God (1:6) and, more interestingly, also "bears" testimony to God (1:7; 8, 15, 32, 34; 3:1, 26; 5:31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39; 8:13, 14, 18). This idea of "bearing testimony" indicates that "the believer is taught by God, by Jesus and/or by the Spirit, but is not taught by humans."<sup>217</sup> John the Baptist can recognize the Lamb of God because he already bears the Spirit of God even before Jesus was born. This Spirit is what helps John the Baptist understanding the preexistence of Jesus: "He existed before me because he ranks above me" (1:15). Thus,

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. Robert L. Calhoun, *Scripture, Creed, Theology: Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine in the First Centuries* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2011).

<sup>217</sup> von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 2:5.

if John was not the true light (1:6) but “was intended to bear witness and so to bring everyone to the Light,”<sup>218</sup> I can affirm that beyond the controversy between Jesus’ disciples and those of the Baptist lies the Spirit of God who makes the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist so special and so intimate, in continuity with the whole history of salvation, and who gives to believers, the “power” of God, thereby empowering them to become children of God.

In relationship with the Holy Spirit, Urban C. von Wahlde affirms:

The belief was intended to lead one to accept what Jesus said about himself as one qualified to announce the advent of the eschaton and the gift of the Spirit. This belief prepared the believer for the gift of the Spirit, for the Spirit was to be given only to those who believed in Jesus. But the gift of the Spirit also raised the believer to another form of life and a new level of existence.<sup>219</sup>

These believers became children of God. However, scholars like Moloney, situate the coming of the Holy Spirit only at the end, when Jesus is no more physically present. Moloney’s main assertion concerning the Holy Spirit is that “in the fourth Gospel the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, becomes a character whom the Father will send after the departure of Jesus. The Spirit Paraclete will be the presence of Jesus in his absence, leading, instructing, comforting Christians, and judging the world (cf. 14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15).”<sup>220</sup> This insight might sometimes look binitarian, as the fourth Gospel for Moloney “presents the God of Israel as Father, and Jesus as Son, in an all-determining *relationship*.”<sup>221</sup>

In my opinion and at the strictly theological level, inserting the Holy Spirit only at the end of Christ’s presence in the world presents a fundamental challenge for the Christian Trinitarian doctrine: can we have one Person without the Three? Is it possible to know Jesus as the Son of the Father unless we have received the Spirit of God? For,

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 1:31.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 1:434.

<sup>220</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 21.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 21. The italics are mine.

as we all know, “no one can enter the reign of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5-6; Gen 1:1, with its close link between spirit-water).<sup>222</sup> Finally, it seems to challenge the following affirmation of the Creed, that the Son “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, [and] born of the Virgin Mary” or that “by the Holy Spirit [he] was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

The Spirit was already there from the beginning. However, since the Gospel was written for the later community so that its members can believe,<sup>223</sup> the Christological focus of this Gospel is the result of this primordial presence. It is due to the fact that the community was convinced that “the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and give them direct knowledge of God.”<sup>224</sup> Based on this assumption, there is no idea of belief in John’s Gospel unless *in* and *through* the Holy Spirit who, along with the disciples, will constitute the witnesses of Jesus’ identity and mission.

In verse 12 of the Prologue, “power” admits both a judicial translation – “authority” or “right”– and a theological interpretation as God’s power given to the believers so that they can become children of God. For Brown, John tries to affirm that “sonship is based on divine begetting, not on any claim on man’s part.”<sup>225</sup> The point I want to make here is that being children of God is *mediated* by the “power” of God (1:12). That can also help us to understand the verb “receive” and the expression “believe in his name” in a more nuanced way. In fact, argues Moloney, “in terms of the Prologue itself the Word as yet has no name, no role in the human story. Nevertheless, the results of belief in the name of the Word are described in the past tense: he gave

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<sup>222</sup> Object of the next sections (c-d).

<sup>223</sup> von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 1:434.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:435.

<sup>225</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:11.

them (aorist: *edōken autois*) power to become children of God.” And he continues, “the power given is not a promise but an achieved fact for those who receive and believe.”<sup>226</sup>

The problem with Moloney’s interpretation is that he understands this power in an exclusively Christological way, as a “realized eschatology.” However, the fact is that the text, beyond any theological interpolation, relates the story of receiving and rejecting the life-light-power of the Word (*Logos/Sophia*) which is still not identified with the historical person of Jesus. Until 1:18, the “Son” is not named as such. Therefore, if Christians are not begotten by blood or carnal desire (1:13), they can be God’s children only if there are empowered by God, and this empowerment is acknowledged to be effective since Abraham, the Father of faith and of the “children of God” (John 8:39-47; 11:52). There is also a possibility that these verses of the Prologue (vv. 12-13) are a preparation for the next affirmation, the nucleus of the whole text: “The World became flesh” (1:14). If this is the case, I can argue with scholars like Ignace de la Potterie and Joseph William Pryor that it can be an allusion to spiritual birth, more specifically, to Virgin Birth,<sup>227</sup> which gives a more complete account of the mystery of the Incarnation.

c. *“How Can This Be?” (John 3:9): Presupposing the Holy Spirit*

This question seems to me to be a turning point in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It is the reaction of Nicodemus after Jesus told him that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (3:5). Before that, Nicodemus had called Jesus “the teacher from God” (3:2) because he realized that Jesus could not perform certain signs unless God is within him (3:2). The object here is to confirm with another section of the Gospel (3:1-8) what I already said about the Prologue, that the evangelist presupposed the Holy Spirit before the ascent of Jesus.

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<sup>226</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 38.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:12; and Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 44.

Nicodemus's question is a clear example that he is still in the darkness of misunderstanding and ignorance: "How can it be?" But, more important, Jesus' response seems to suggest that Nicodemus, as "a teacher of Israel" (3:10), should know better. It is a recognition that there is a long Jewish tradition of being begotten of the Spirit that a Jewish teacher should know (e.g., Exod 4:22; Deut 32:6; Hos 11:1; 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7).<sup>228</sup> At the very beginning, God "begot" human beings when God breathed into them the breath of life (Gen 2:7). Now this Old Testament tradition has an eschatological meaning which explains the present moment in which Nicodemus is living. In fact, according to Brown, "the pouring of God's spirit was an important feature in the OT picture of the last days," and "while Nicodemus could not have been expected to understand the particular aspect of the Spirit that is proper to Jesus' teaching, at least Jesus' words should have meant for him that the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit was at hand, preparing man for entrance into God's kingdom."<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, to reinforce an argument already made by Ringe in this chapter, "begotten" (3:3) can mean either "to be born," that is, with emphasis on the feminine contribution of bringing new life, or "to be begotten," which emphasizes the masculine contribution. Brown identifies the agent of this birth in 3:5 with the Spirit, although he also observes that, despite the fact that this Spirit "is feminine in Hebrew (neuter in Greek), the primary meaning seems to be *begotten*."<sup>230</sup> On the one hand, this preference of "begotten" to "being born" seems to corroborate the process of masculinization of the "Word" (cf. 1:1-5) alluded by Ringe in a previous section of this chapter.<sup>231</sup> On the other hand, and more importantly, it emphasizes the prominent role the evangelist gives

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<sup>228</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:139.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Ringe, *Wisdom's Friends*, 31.

the Holy Spirit in this process of rebirth and regeneration. In fact, the *NRSV* sees a parallel between this birth of the Spirit in 3:3, 8, and 1:12-13. These verses have in common a contrast between an improper birth (of water and flesh) and a proper birth (from above and of the Spirit). In John 3:3 this proper birth means “regeneration” or “receiving spiritual life and entering the kingdom of God.”<sup>232</sup> Moreover, in connecting 3:3 with the Prologue, there is a confirmation of the fact that the Holy Spirit was already presupposed in the Prologue too.

Now, what attracts Nicodemus, a man in the darkness, to Jesus, despite the opposition among Jewish leaders? One possible answer comes from Nicodemus’s own words: “the signs.” The signs of Jesus reveal His divine authority, and Jesus confirms it by an authoritative statement: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again, from above” (3:3). There is also Nicodemus’s ability to recognize those signs as powerful enough as to reveal the presence of God, and to identify Jesus as a distinguished teacher in whom God abides. His question, however, contrasts this firm knowledge and betrays Nicodemus’s ignorance and unawareness of the actual presence of the Spirit. I suggest that the evangelist uses this paradox between what Nicodemus affirms and what he seems to ignore to emphasize the difference between the Old Testament’s Spirit and the Spirit brought by Jesus. The fact is, the Spirit is already present and at work in the community of the believers, but is still unknown by many because they are still walking in the “night” (3:2) and darkness of misunderstanding. This Spirit is made categorical by the presence of Jesus and is given to those who believe in him. Because Nicodemus does not understand this old but new reality, Jesus adds the reference “being born of water and the Spirit” (3:5).

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<sup>232</sup> Walter A. Elweel, “Birth, New,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2 vols. Walter A. Elwell. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1988), 1:360.

Scholars do not agree on the correct interpretation of this reference, more specifically, of the allusion to “water.” This reference is, however, already present as a contrast at the beginning of the Gospel, to emphasize the qualitative difference between the baptism of John –“of water”– and the baptism of Jesus –of the Holy Spirit” (1:31-33). In this section, scholars see a parallel between “being born of water and Spirit” and the incarnational reference of Matt 1:20: “what is begotten in her (Mary) is of a holy Spirit.” This reference is understood in opposition to John 3:6: “flesh begets flesh.” I also have to noticed that scholars differ in their interpretation of this new birth: whether as exclusively Christological or as a sacramental reference. Moloney, for example, sees it as a reference to baptism, but solely the baptism “in the Spirit brought by Jesus Christ.”<sup>233</sup> Brown, in contrast, affirms that “begetting of Spirit, while it includes accepting Jesus by faith, is primarily the communication of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>234</sup>

So, in putting these references of “water and Spirit” in Jesus’ mouth, and in suggesting that Nicodemus should have known about the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, this section admits that the Holy Spirit was presupposed in Jesus’ inner circle and among that of John the Baptist. The connection made with baptism also signals a sacramental and an ecclesiological allusion which was already contrasting the earthly baptism of John “with water” (1:31) and the heavenly baptism of Jesus “with the Holy Spirit” (1:33).<sup>235</sup> Therefore, I suggest that Jesus here invites Nicodemus to believe in

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<sup>233</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 92. As a reference to baptism, also see: Louis F. Hartman and J. Heuschen, “Rebirth,” in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (by Louis F. Hartman; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 1988-1991.

<sup>234</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:144.

<sup>235</sup> The theme of ecclesiology and sacramentalism in John is very important here. According to the traditional Johannine Pneumatology, the theology of the Church (and of the sacraments) is usually connected with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit after the ascent of Jesus. Therefore, in referring to the Community and to the sacrament of baptism in the third chapter of the Gospel, the evangelist is deconstructing this traditional Pneumatology and showing that the Holy Spirit was presupposed as he was composing the Gospel. My interpretation is also confirmed by Culpepper who affirms that “the Gospel was written in order to recall the ministry and teaching of Jesus for the early believers during

him, to receive his own baptism “of the Spirit.” Moreover, as a piece of the Johannine sacramentalism, I also understand this section (3:1-8) as an overcoming of previous dualisms.

In fact, as *mysterium*, “sacrament” refers, on the one hand, to earthly signs like “water” and “flesh” which, on the other hand, go beyond mere worldly signs to point to the divine. And this gap between the dualisms can be overcome in this Gospel solely through the Spirit. Flesh is lifted up by the Spirit, the darkness by the light, and death by life. The first “place” in the Gospel where this dualism between Spirit and matter, heaven and earth, the human and the divine is overcome is in the nature of Jesus himself, the Son of God made flesh (1:14), begotten in Mary of a Holy Spirit according to the creed, and not of flesh alone (1:13-14). In him, everything that is flesh and that is “outward manifestation of life”<sup>236</sup> is given true life in the Spirit. This Spirit “blows where it wills” (3:8). The problem is that Nicodemus hears her voice but is not really open to her. Nicodemus knows the Jewish law and the Scriptures, but his knowledge is still embedded by the darkness of ignorance of religious leaders who are still walking in the “night” (3:2). But for those who already believe in Jesus, the Spirit dwells in them (3:8), and because of that, I contend, this Spirit is presupposed within the Gospel from the beginning.

Jesus invites Nicodemus to move from what he knows to what he ignores, that is, to what Jesus has seen from above and which Nicodemus does not know because he did not receive “our” testimony (3:11). Now, it is not clear what “our” means at this point. Brown offers three interpretations. It might be a majestic “we” (Trinity), a reference to Jesus’ disciples (i.e., the Johannine community or “church”), or an ironic

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the period when the early Christian community was emerging as a separate social entity and defining itself theologically” (Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of John as the Church’s Book,” *Interpretation* 63 (Oct. 2009), 341-354, at 347).

<sup>236</sup> Vawter, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2:430.

use of Nicodemus's own word ("we" in 3:2) against him.<sup>237</sup> However, what I see here is that the Spirit is also presupposed in any of these interpretations. In the first one, Jesus uses "we" as a member of the Trinity. In the second interpretation, he includes his disciples in a categorical experience of the Spirit as fullness of truth. For to "see," in John's Gospel, means to "experience, encounter, participate in."<sup>238</sup> The interpretation involving irony implies that, if Nicodemus were open to the Spirit of the law he already knows, he would be able to "see" beyond the signs which led him to Jesus, and he would really mean what he said at the beginning of the conversation when he called Jesus "the teacher that comes from God."

So to Nicodemus' question, "how can this be?" the response is: "open your eyes, your heart, and your mind, and see what is obvious. Then believe!"

*d. It is Proven by the Tradition of the Church*

As I said before, Justin seems to understand the presence of the Holy Spirit within the community of the believers as granted.<sup>239</sup> Athanasius, for his part, emphasizes the interrelationship of Son and Spirit, and the dependence of the latter on the former. His position both reacts to the Arians and positively affirms the Trinity. In one of his letters, he affirms that denying one Person of Trinity is denying all three Persons (*Serap.1.1.3*). He links the three persons together by pointing out their mutual dependence in their work in creation and redemption. For the Spirit draws us necessarily into union with Son and Spirit, and this interrelationship between Son and Spirit is extended also to the Incarnate Christ. For Athanasius "the same relationship between Father, Son and Spirit governs the Trinity's work of creation." The Spirit is intimately involved with God in creative activity and continues to work in the world

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<sup>237</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:132; also see Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 94.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:130.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. note 163, last section of the second chapter.

today. However, he also points out that “if the Spirit is one with the Father and Son, then the Spirit is unchangeable, present everywhere, and in whom things participate but who participates in nothing.”<sup>240</sup>

This position is confirmed by Didymus, for whom “the Spirit is the boundless source of all sanctification in which Christians (and all angels) participate, and thus *a priori* cannot be a created reality participating in goodness.”<sup>241</sup> The immutability of the Holy Spirit is due to the irreducible unity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and is supported by the fact that the “Trinity is of one substance” (*Spirit*. 76).<sup>242</sup> For Didymus, the Holy Spirit is already present in the Old Testament, whether invoked by David (Psalm 50:13) or dwelling in Daniel (Dan 13:45). And the last bearer of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is John the Baptist, who was sanctified while still in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:44).<sup>243</sup> This Spirit is incorporeal and the producer of wisdom and sanctification (*Spirit*. 10-15.61); is placed before the Father and the Son, and not created (16-20); is uncircumscribed (21-23), and present even in the angels (24-29); fills all creatures (30-34), and is the substance of the gifts of God (35-53).

In relation to John’s Prologue, Didymus refutes the claims of “some people” who “classify the Holy Spirit with *all things* (John 1:3), claiming that the passage which states that *all things* have been made by God through the Word indicates that the Holy Spirit has been made.”<sup>244</sup> For him, the Holy Spirit not only is different in nature from all creatures,<sup>245</sup> but also shares the nature and activity of the Father and the Son,<sup>246</sup> and the

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<sup>240</sup> Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (eds.), *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius's letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit, and, Didymus's On the Holy Spirit* (New York: St Vladimir, 2011), 23-25.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

nature of this activity is that the Spirit gives the same wisdom and truth as the Father and the Son do:

God is called *Only-Wise* not because he is made wise by participation in another's wisdom or from some other source, but because he generates wisdom and makes others wise. This wisdom is our Lord Jesus Christ. For Christ is the *Power of God and the Wisdom of God* [1Cor 1:24]. The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Wisdom, since in the old books it is recorded that *Joshua the son of Nun was filled by the Lord with the Spirit of Wisdom* [Deut 34:9].<sup>247</sup> Inseparable from God, the Holy Spirit is also "Wisdom and Truth."<sup>248</sup>

With Athanasius and Didymus we end where we started this chapter, affirming the mutual dependence of the Persons of Trinity and their identity in substance. So wherever one is explicitly attested, the others are implicitly assumed. There is no Christology without Trinity, no Trinity without Pneumatology, and no Christian faith unless in and through the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. *Some Conclusions From Chapter Three*

Although there is no explicit reference to wisdom in John's Gospel and Letters, there is, however, a consensus among exegetes and theologians that wisdom literature influenced both his style and theology. The assumption that this Gospel is Christocentric has often led to an exclusive Christological interpretation of wisdom motifs. This kind of interpretation contributed to what is traditionally known as Wisdom Christology. It is not clear, however, whether this Christocentrism, which is exegetically and theologically founded, has correctly done justice to the Trinitarian theology of John because of the emphasis put on the distinction between John's Christology and his Pneumatology. In fact, the issue here is not that John's Gospel does not have a strong Pneumatology. Rather, it is a sustained tendency to present John's Christology and Pneumatology as two different and successive phases of the history of salvation. According to the defenders of such an interpretation, Francis Moloney among them, the

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 94.

Holy Spirit appears at the end of the Gospel, as Jesus' gift to the community to "fill" Jesus' physical absence within the community and to lead the community to a full understanding of Jesus' message and actions. The purpose of this chapter is to affirm just the opposite, not necessarily with the intention of disqualifying the traditional interpretation, but in order to make the understanding of Johannine Pneumatology theologically more complete. Not only is this thesis coherent with Johannine theology, it also serves as an opportunity to have a second look at the wisdom motifs in John's Gospel in order to offer scriptural support for a systematic Wisdom Pneumatology.

In this thesis, I emphasized three aspects: first, the nature of the "Word" (John 1:1-2), its disturbing consequences should we maintain a Christological interpretation of John 1:5, and an attempt to interpret John 1:5 Pneumatologically. Second, the Pneumatological shift as a Trinitarian theology of creation of John 1:1-5<sup>249</sup> with its theological foundation in Genesis 1, the wisdom literature, and the tradition of the Church. And third, the syntax of some wisdom expressions of the Prologue and their Pneumatological potential.

In conclusion, what this thesis shows is that the idea of the Spirit of God is common in the Old Testament. This Spirit had a prominent role in creation as *ruah* or *pneuma*. She has divine attributes, but is not limited in being an attribute or a sum of attributes of God since she manifests some autonomy. Sometimes it is suggested that she was created (Prov 8:22), but many times Scripture makes clear that she was there before anything else was made, in the presence of God. Therefore, there is not any aspect of the history of salvation which is not embodied by her providential and caring presence, and the final judgment will be in part about whether we have believed in her or not. Above all, she is the *ruah*, the *pneuma*, the New Testament's Holy Spirit.

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<sup>249</sup> See the creational interpretation of this verse in Chapter 2.

Therefore, the Spirit can dwell among the people in different ways and she has, de facto, dwelt among the Israelites since the beginning of their history of salvation. The movement of acceptance-rejection of God's covenant made those who accepted this covenant children of God, while those who rejected it were led into the darkness. I think that we can associate John 1:5 with this creative, cosmic, and universal Spirit present in Israel's history of salvation. Sophia, in this verse, is the light that shines in the darkness as "a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, a radiance of eternal light, a flawless mirror of the working of God; an image of divine goodness (*Wis* 7:25-26)."<sup>250</sup> She makes human beings become "friends of God and prophets" (*Wis* 7: 7). Moreover, *Wisdom of Solomon* presents Sophia as "more beautiful than the sun" because she "excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail" (7:29-30; Bar 3:37).<sup>251</sup>

More decisively, there is, theologically speaking, no Christology without a Pneumatology, and vice-versa. For even admitting Yves Congar's assertion that Christ is the "precursor of the Holy Spirit," he also points out that the Holy Spirit "is the One who has made Christ's work present here and now since the latter's physical 'departure' from us."<sup>252</sup> I have flagged the risks involved in the exclusive Christological interpretation of John 1:5. Given that where there is a Wisdom Christology we can equally and more acceptably have a Wisdom Pneumatology, I propose that John 1:5 can rightly and, I hope, acceptably, refer to the Wisdom of God, whether as preexistent Logos (not incarnate) or as omnipresent and everlasting Holy Spirit. Other sections of

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<sup>250</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 89.

<sup>251</sup> Cited by Johnson, *She Who Is*, 90. We can easily make a parallel with the John 1: 3-5.

<sup>252</sup> Yves M. J. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (trans. D. Smith; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 130. I emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in "Christ's works" to prevent any suggestion that Congar's quote here can contradict my argument against traditional Johannine Pneumatology.

the Gospel were used to confirm this Pneumatological shift, not only from the preexistence of wisdom, but from the fact that the evangelist, in composing the Gospel, presupposed the Holy Spirit from the beginning.

Fundamental questions remain as possible critiques to this chapter: have I distorted the Scripture to make a theological argument? And how do I relate this Pneumatological shift with the suspicion around recent Spirit Christologies? It is the task of the general conclusion to answer these legitimate and methodological questions.

## *Conclusion*

The case I have made in chapter one is that H1 is a strong and appealing hypothesis. It is strong and attractive for biblical and theological reasons. The Logos is at the beginning with God, is God, and has a prominent role in creation (1:1-4). As the subject of the Prologue through verse 14, the Logos illuminates the rest of the text, and the reader who is a believer also knows that this Logos is identified with Jesus. This approach is understandable when we consider the Prologue as a post-resurrection text whose central concern is the identity of Jesus. He is “the Light of the world” (8:12), and it is a Christian belief from the Constantinople Council that Jesus is “Light from Light; True Light from True Light; begotten, not made.” Moreover, interpreting John 1:5 as an allusion to the Incarnation is also theologically very appealing in a context of new theological proposals, such as religious pluralism and process theology. Pluralist and process theologians reject this dogma because they think it is merely mythological and not to be taken seriously. They also see Jesus as too historically rooted to be able either to foster interfaith dialogue and or to give account of Christ’s universal mediation. The absence of an explicit reference to the flesh in John 1:5 would de-historicize the Incarnation, open it to more universality, and, in that sense, make it more acceptable to these theologians. The question remains whether this new interpretation of John 1:5 should still be called “Incarnation.”

Chapter two, which sets forth H2, while acknowledging the insightful contributions of H1, is chiefly a systematic critique and refutation of H1. The main affirmation of H2 is that there is no Incarnation without flesh, and any understanding of the Incarnation that ignores flesh is heretical. It would either deny the historicity of the Incarnate God or the divinity of the historical Jesus. The former presses any Christology from above to explain how the eternal Son of God became a true human being, and not

an angel or any other supernatural being who came in the world *in the form of a man*. The latter presses the Christology from below to explain how the early Church came to see in the carpenter of Nazareth the Messiah and Incarnate Son of God.

John's Gospel is usually seen as offering a Christology from above, while, paradoxically, its Pneumatology is traditionally understood as posterior to the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For the Holy Spirit, this traditional Johannine Pneumatology affirms, is the gift of Christ to the community to fill the absence of Jesus. However, an implicit consequence of the Pneumatological shift of this thesis is to affirm that what John the Baptist, his disciples, and Nicodemus saw was foremost a human being. This is the reason why they needed to be reborn; that is, they needed the Spirit in order to be able to recognize beyond Jesus, the man, the teacher who comes from above and who has God within him (3:3-5), as the Only Begotten Son of God (1:14-18).

The thesis of chapter three is that the Holy Spirit is the one who reconciles the above and the below. The Son of God is incarnate in Mary by the Holy Spirit; and only those who are born of the Spirit are able to recognize Jesus as the eternal but now Incarnate Son of God. Having this Holy Spirit from the beginning of John's Gospel is also an absolute theological necessity to maintain the unity of the Godhead and of God's self-communication. The Prologue is this beginning. The problem is that a major theme of the whole Gospel, the Holy Spirit, is not explicitly alluded to in a passage many scholars consider an overture or introduction to the gospel as a whole.

To correct this absence, I proposed that the Holy Spirit is presumed in the Prologue while making sure that I offer a responsible reading of the text. I was initially encouraged in this new Pneumatological approach by the fact that some scholars suggest that John 1:5 alludes to the Incarnation, although with no direct connection with flesh. I admit here that I can disagree with an incarnational interpretation of this verse,

but still be open to a Christological interpretation –let me call it “Logophany”– or a Pneumatological interpretation. For the purpose of this Pneumatological interpretation of John 1:5, I suggest another referent for the subject of the first part of the Prologue, the “Word,” rediscovering the ambivalence of its original meaning in wisdom literature, where wisdom refers both to Logos and Sophia. The use of the masculine “Logos” as subject of the Prologue leaves us with no ambiguity about the manhood of Jesus. The price to pay for this exclusive use, however, is the eclipse of the feminine “Sophia.” If the historical nature of the Incarnate Logos (John 1:14) reveals his true humanity, that necessarily involves physical presence, flesh, and masculinity, it is, however, the nature of Sophia as “Spirit” to be “present but absent” in the world. Sophia can, therefore, better assume wisdom’s ambiguity.

Then I established a connection between wisdom and the Prologue of John’s Gospel. Johannine scholars recognize wisdom influence in the composition of the Prologue. Some see it as the beginning of new creation, a reinterpretation of Genesis 1 and of the whole history of salvation. Not only was the *Ruah* present from the beginning (Gen 1), she is also the Spirit who guided the people in the crossing of the Red Sea, inspired the law, spoke through the prophets, and brought the fulfillment of the promise in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in Mary. Some characters in the Gospel —such as John the Baptist and Nicodemus— and some concepts —such as belief and unbelief, becoming children of God, and the sacramental character of the gospel— suggest that the evangelist presupposed the Holy Spirit while writing the Prologue and the Gospel, and he believed in her presence within the community even before Jesus ascended to the Father.

In conclusion, John 1:5 does not allude to the Incarnation. It alludes either to the preexistent Logos or to the Holy Spirit, the two hands of the Father in creation (a la

Irenaeus). Now, to anticipate some criticisms this thesis can face, it is necessary to raise a series of questions: What is the nature of this thesis or how far is it a systematic theology and not biblical theology? Do I have the right to use Scripture as I did to make a theological argument? How would pluralistic and process theologians receive my critique against them, as well as my new approach? How do I resist the accusation of Logocentrism and Pneumatocentrism, and the suspicions the Spirit-Christologies generate in the Church? Finally, what could be the way forward in light of this thesis?

I have sought to establish boundaries between systematic theology and biblical theology. On the one hand, I have done so on the basis of fidelity to Johannine Christology and Pneumatology, and also “on the basis of adequate exegesis and proper collation of all pertinent texts of the theological teachings” which are “faithful to the teachings of the Bible.”<sup>253</sup> This is its biblical theology aspect. On the other hand, as a systematic theology thesis, the theology of the Incarnation and of the Holy Spirit are exposed “according to an integrated and interrelated method, using the Bible, the Christian tradition, Christian experience, and possibly other sources”<sup>254</sup> to support my argumentation.

Concerning the question about the use of the Scripture, I make two observations. On the one hand, the dogma of the Incarnation is not explicitly formulated in Scripture as a definitive truth; on the other hand, the Holy Spirit is literally absent from the Prologue. The first observation addresses issues related to H1 and H2, that is, whether biblical scholars can propose a dogmatic affirmation from one verse of the Scripture, and whether pluralist and process theologians can separate the genuine words of the historical Jesus from the faith of the early community. The second observation

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<sup>253</sup> James L. Garret, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990): 1:16.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

addresses the third chapter, precisely whether I am correct when I offer a Pneumatological interpretation of a text in which exegetes do not see any reference to the Holy Spirit.

There are explicit texts in the Scriptures that affirm the theological authority of the Bible. Matt 5:18 affirms the non-transferability of this authority, and John 10:35 notes that nobody can abolish Scripture. This authority has been reinforced since the Second Vatican Council to address the tense, but necessary, relationship between Scripture and dogma.

In fact, in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*),<sup>255</sup> this Council strongly affirms that there is a fundamental authority of Scripture in theological matters. According to *Dei Verbum*, as the primary source and soul of theology (DV 24), Scripture not only nourishes the faith of the community, but also inspires its beliefs which are formulated later by the teaching office of the Church in dogmatic truths. This authority, the teaching authority of the Church, is important to understand any dogma, for the “Scriptures have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church” (DV 11). Moreover, in discerning the canon of Scripture, the Church was also discerning and defining her own identity (DV 7). In that sense, and following the teachings of the Council, the International Theological Commission affirms:

Exegesis should strive to read and interpret the biblical texts in the broad setting of the faith and life of the people of God, sustained through the ages by the working of the Holy Spirit. It is in this context that exegesis searches for the literal sense and opens itself to the spiritual or fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) of scripture. “Only where both methodological levels, the historico-critical and the theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis.”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Austin P. Flannery (ed.), *Documents of Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984). I will quote *Dei Verbum* as DV.

<sup>256</sup> International Theological Commission, *Theology today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (Rome: March 9, 2012): 22.

Since our faith is Trinitarian and since there is a specific understanding of the Incarnation in the faith community and the teaching of the Church, an understanding that intrinsically refers to flesh, I affirm that the theologian has the right to correct any exegesis which presents risks for the teaching of the Church and the faith of the believers. The inspired character of Scripture requires its interpreters not to reduce it to something private (2 Pet 1:19-21), detached from the faith of the Church. Moreover, the Scripture should be used to teach, refute, correct, and educate (2 Tim 3:16). Many Church Fathers supported such a spiritual interpretation. For them, more essential is what the author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, intends to be understood.<sup>257</sup> Concretely, for the likes of Augustine and Bonaventure, Scripture has a soteriological purpose, having charity as its object, and is “the extension of the Incarnation and part of the Church, which is his body.”<sup>258</sup> Against Arius, Athanasius stated that the goal of Scriptures is twofold: to affirm that Christ is Son and God eternally, and that he became flesh in Mary.<sup>259</sup>

This is important in order to understand what is at stake in whether or not we understand John 1:5 as an allusion to the Incarnation. On the one hand, this understanding positively makes possible the approach of H1 as it gives pluralist and process theologians leverage to interpret Scripture in the light of the signs of the times. On the other hand, it restricts this leverage of H1 because these adjustments are allowed only as far as they keep the kerygma safe. We ought to make sure, then, that the full humanity of Jesus is secured and that Jesus is not reduced to a spirit, a light, an angel, or even a divinely empowered man in our interpretation of John 1:5. In that sense, the

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<sup>257</sup> Andrew K. M. Adam (ed.), *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2006), 44-45.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas Herbst, “Johannine Dimension of Bonaventure’s Soteriology,” *Franciscan Studies* 72 (2007): 243-266, at 252.

<sup>259</sup> Monique Alexandre, “Scruter les Ecritures,” in *Le Catholicisme des Pères* (ed. Frederic Louzeau; Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), 19-56, at 21.

main questions debated in this thesis are: Is the unity of Jesus' nature safeguarded if John 1:5 is a reference to the Incarnation? Is our salvation entirely secured if John 1:5 alludes to the Incarnation? Is our faith still Trinitarian if the Spirit is absent from the beginning of the Gospel? I follow this guideline in acknowledging some advantages in H1, in finally rejecting it (H2), and in arguing in favor of a more inclusive and Pneumatological approach.

Now, how might pluralist and process theologians receive both my criticism and my positive proposal? This is hard to know. But I suspect that they would insist on their belief that the Incarnation is a myth and that Jesus never thought of himself as Son of God. I wonder why they appeal to a text like Acts 2:22<sup>260</sup> to deny Jesus's sonship, unless they are engaging in a very selective and eclectic reading of Scripture. More fundamentally, Hengel notices that there are about forty different reconstructions of the Prologue.<sup>261</sup> I do not think the evangelist had these reconstructions in his mind when he was writing. The purpose of his argument was more catechetical. Therefore, the most important questions today among pluralist and process theologians should be: Is this interpretation catechetically acceptable? How does this interpretation improve the dialogue with other religions, without jeopardizing a core article of Christian faith like the Incarnation?

On those two questions, I think my thesis successfully passes the test. In linking necessarily the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit, I refute their argument that Jesus, because he is historical, is less universal and absolute. The idea of spiritual birth existed in Jewish tradition; but in Jesus's mouth, this idea is different. It consists in believing in his person, in receiving his baptism of the Spirit. That the eternal Son of God becomes

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<sup>260</sup> "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you..." (Acts 2:22).

<sup>261</sup> Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel," 282 ff.

man is an absolute event in the history of the world, and those who rightly knew the carpenter of Nazareth strangely, but truly, understood this truth. I draw two conclusions from the newness of this event. First, as Christians encounter other religions, they are moved by the same Spirit, the Spirit of understanding, of love and patience, who will guide all of humanity toward the fullness of truth. Second, in admitting the strength and radicalism of this early faith as a historical event (and not simply as a myth), I am displacing my conversation with pluralist and process theologians toward a different epistemological debate: What is the nature of a historical event? Are not witness and testimony, and trust in this testimony, the primary act of any historical narrative? Is there any historical event which is not covered by the veil of the myth, exactly because all historical events have their origins in defective and hopeful witnesses?

Some people might also accuse my whole Pneumatological argumentation as being inspired by suspicious theologians, all of them feminists. Others might simply ask: How do I pass the test within the Church, mainly, its resistance to Logocentrism and Pneumatocentrism? My concern in the limited space of this thesis is not the issue of God and gender; rather, it is to offer an understanding of the Incarnation which is theologically coherent with our Trinitarian faith, using the Scriptures as my main source. Now, some of the particulars that Fiorenza Schüssler, Johnson, or Ringe defend might be objected to. However, other wisdom scholars in this thesis shed light on the prominent role of wisdom in creation (e.g., Clifford and von Rad), and on the identification of Lady Wisdom with pneuma or the Holy Spirit (Edward). The same scholars also affirm that wisdom literature played some influence in the composition of John's Prologue. Therefore, admitting the process of masculinization of wisdom—a process acknowledged by Justin—I am inclined to give some credit to some important insights by these feminists as a means to rediscover the Holy Spirit in the interpretation

of the Gospel of John. In that attempt, not only do I find help in using wisdom literature, but I am also confirmed by textual elements of the Prologue, other sections of the Gospel, and theologians—including both the Fathers and contemporary ones—to argue that, at the time the evangelist was writing, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was presupposed in the Jewish Scriptures, and among the disciples of Jesus and of John the Baptist. A last argument to support that the Holy Spirit was presupposed is the allusion to the sacraments in early chapters of the Gospel of John before Jesus became absent in the community (cf. 2:1-11; 6:53-59).

My thesis is neither a Logocentrism nor a Pneumatocentrism. According to Jacques Dupuis, Logocentrism and Pneumatocentrism stress the universal active presence in the world and history of the Word of God, on the one hand, and of the Spirit of God, on the other hand, following St. Irenaeus “two hands of God” (*Adv. Haer.* IV, 7, 4), jointly carrying out God’s work. Defenders of these theological approaches claim to transcend the historical Jesus, offering two distinct, separate, and alternative economies of divine salvation. From the approach of Logocentrism, it is the Word of God (*Logos*), universally present before the Incarnation (John 1:1-4) as true Light, that enlightens every human being (1:9), who saves, rather than the Word-of-God-made-flesh (1:14). The Word and the man Jesus thus become separated, “Christ” being a title attributed to Jesus who is “constituted Messiah through his fidelity to the Father.”<sup>262</sup> Concerning the universal economy of the Spirit of God, “unlike the economy of the Christ event, which is unavoidably limited by the particularity of history, [the Spirit] knows no bounds of space and time,”<sup>263</sup> and blows where she wills (John 3:8).

Those two approaches are ultimately unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of this thesis because of their emphasis on distinction and separation in the economy of

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<sup>262</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 81ff.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

salvation. This is the main critique I offer against traditional Johannine Pneumatology, and even Dupuis would agree with that.<sup>264</sup> Dupuis affirms that Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism are *combined* in a single economy of salvation.<sup>265</sup> The theses of pluralism cannot be defended unless Christology is revised and re-defined. And this is truer about the mystery of the Incarnation, the most disputed point among pluralist theologians. This need of revision is, in fact, a proof, if needed, of the weakness of a low Christology having to become universal.<sup>266</sup> Where I disagree with Dupuis is his unwillingness to recognize, exactly because of the unity of the history of salvation he is defending, that the Christ-event is absolute.

This thesis, finally, resists the temptation of Spirit Christology. Among theologians defending Spirit Christology are Roger Haight<sup>267</sup> and David Coffey. The fundamental difference between Coffey and Haight is their use of the results of historical methods in Scripture. Coffey is willing to reconcile the Johannine Logos Christology –which Haight rejects because, he thinks, it is not historical, and because of Haight’s belief that Jewish monotheism could not accept a hypostatization of wisdom or the later dogmatic distinction of Persons in Godhead– and Spirit Christology, whose biblical foundations are the Synoptic Gospels. With the notion of “Spirit Christology,” Coffey stresses “the pneumatological dimensions of the Christ event.”<sup>268</sup> Since there is no explicit biblical reference to the Trinity, and a fortiori, to the immanent Trinity, Coffey believes in using Spirit Christology as an “*economic* starting point for

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>265</sup> “Combined” sounds as if Dupuis finally assumed a strong distinction. It is not clear how and when this *combination* takes place. I believe in a stronger unity because the Revelation of God as Triune is made possible by the Christ-event itself, making it less coherent to have Christ without either the Father or the Holy Spirit.

<sup>266</sup> Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 89.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Roger Haight, “The Case for Spirit Christology,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 257-287; and *Jesus Symbol of God*.

<sup>268</sup> Declan O’Byrne, *Spirit Christology and Trinity in the Theology of David Coffey* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 15.

Trinity.”<sup>269</sup> For only in the Spirit can we profess God as Trinity and make Trinity pastorally relevant.<sup>270</sup> He vows to overcome Logos Christology by emphasizing the Synoptic idea that Christ is “the anointed One.”<sup>271</sup> Additionally, he sees the Holy Spirit as “entelechy” directed to the Christ-event, following Rahner, de Chardin, and other absolute predestination theologians.<sup>272</sup> This same Spirit, as entelechy, is the One who leads the Church toward others religions, whose members are anonymous Christians living under this same Spirit.

I agree with Coffey that the Trinity is relevant for the rest of theology and for the Incarnation.<sup>273</sup> I also admire his deep concern about the fragmentation of theology, and his belief that a greater understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christ-event helps us to avoid this fragmentation. I also agree with his desire to build a more inclusive and integrated theology in which Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology are well connected. His critique of Haight confirms the critique I formulate in this thesis against Haight. Coffey, in sum, admits with me that “certain interpretations of the biblical data are allowed authoritative function in theology.”<sup>274</sup> But there does our agreement end.

For Coffey to have an *economic* foundation for his Spirit Christology, he needs the Synoptic Gospels. What he is doing so far is offering a synthesis (his difference with Haight) of Logos and Spirit Christologies by using two different biblical sources. His

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>270</sup> Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 20.

<sup>271</sup> O’Byrne, *Spirit Christology*, 35.

<sup>272</sup> See: David Coffey, “The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy,” *Philosophy and Theology* 13 (2001): 363-398. I use “predestination” here not as it refers to the fate of the individuals, but in Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus understanding of the Incarnation as not necessarily linked to the sin of human beings, but to the absolute goodness of God, and God’s disposition to freely self-communicate (cf. Daniel P. Horan, “How Original Was Scotus on the Incarnation? Reconsidering the History of the Absolute Predestination of Christ in Light of Robert Grosseteste,” *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011), 374-391).

<sup>273</sup> David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 3.

<sup>274</sup> O’Byrne, *Spirit Christology*, 50.

bridge for reconciling those sources is to affirm that we cannot read them separately, but as belonging to the entire Bible as the Word of God. As a result, he is subject to the critique of mingling two different Christologies, of neglecting the fundamental differences between the Johannine (from above) and Synoptic (from below) Christologies. Moreover, Coffey's tendency to see the Holy Spirit mainly as "the Spirit of Christ" can lead to positive and negative results. On the one hand, this understanding is very Catholic in the sense that it defends the *filioque* so dear to *Dominus Iesus*. On the other hand, it is not ambitious enough to affirm the distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person (Constantinople) without originating the Spirit in the Son. Moreover, in having the anointing of Jesus as a starting point, someone might suspect a veiled Adoptionism in relation to Jesus, and a veiled Modalism in relation to the Holy Spirit (i.e., as a form of manifestation of the Son).

To avoid such criticism, the originality of my thesis is to affirm that the Johannine Christology is not exclusively a Christology from above. It is inspired by the *economic* and primary data of people encountering the man Jesus Christ, and recognizing him in the Spirit given to them before the Incarnation (John the Baptist), and made categorical in Jesus, the Eternal Son of God, who can now give it to his disciples. I admit that there is a Spirit of Christ, but also a Spirit *prior* to Christ and active in the creation of the world, salvation history, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Coffey wants to propose the unity of salvation history in a renewed Pneumatological effort. He succeeds in bringing into light the Holy Spirit, but he fails in maintaining both the unity and distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Son. He does not give a clear answer to this question: How can the Spirit as entelechy –preexistent– also be the Spirit of Christ (given by Christ)? Trying to respond to this question using different

sources is not easy to do. To be sure, I face the same question, but offer a solution in the revision of the Johannine Pneumatology.

There is one final issue to discuss. How does the emphasis on flesh for understanding the Incarnation affect practical theology (e.g., spirituality, ethics, and liturgy)? How does it affect the specific context of the African Church and its faith in Jesus Christ? Studying the theology of creation of the traditional religion of the Beti of Southern Cameroon, Alexandre Nana affirms that the most important difference between the Beti and Christian faith in creation is the notion that we are created in the image and likeness of God. This idea is absolutely absent from the Beti –and I can add, from almost all African Traditional Religions.<sup>275</sup> For religions which are strongly “pragmatic” and “anthropocentric,”<sup>276</sup> a theology of the Incarnation that takes into full account the reality of flesh would connect much better with African spirituality, liturgy, and ethics. It would bring into light the face of God and connect it with concrete human faces, thereby fostering a theology and a faith that understand and respect the absolute dignity of human life.

In my opinion, this is the most transformative aspect that Christian faith can offer to Africa today. As people who tend to be “naturally religious”<sup>277</sup> come to understand the depth of the fact that human faces share in the divine image, they will better appreciate the notion that the God in whom they believe became human, and will also be more aware of the divine life in the flesh and blood of the neighbor. Moreover, this awareness brings forth a greater respect for nature –for flesh in John’s Gospel also

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<sup>275</sup> Alexandre Nana, *Anthologie Beti et sens chrétien de l’homme* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), 286.

<sup>276</sup> See: Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l’indifférence religieuse et l’incroyance en Afrique noire* (Yaoundé: UCAC, 1997).

<sup>277</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969); “The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion,” in *Third World Liberation Theologies* (ed. Deane W. Ferm; New York: Orbis, 1986), 199-204.

alludes to all creation. It would reinforce the bodiliness of communities and increase their hope in the transformative power of God, as well as their commitment to one another and to the common good, until God becomes all in all (1 Cor 15:28). Living in this transformative power, history becomes more respectful of the differences. Such differences, including ethnic and religious differences, are transcended because, between God, the Creator, and us, the only thing that mediates is an incarnate love: the love of God for all.

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