THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AND THEOLOGIAN OF THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ST. JOHN AND HIS GOSPEL IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH TRADITION

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Introduction
The advent of modernism, i.e. the so-called ‘Enlightenment’, inheriting characteristic tendencies from the Renaissance, brought in its wake an uncompromising scepticism and revisionist attitude to all that had previously been conceived as being part of a great Sacred Tradition. This Tradition, manifesting in the Western and Eastern parts of Europe as well as elsewhere in the world, is Christianity.\(^1\) Though this Sacred Inheritance survives in a traditional manner to our own day, some of what is called ‘Christian’ suffers, in different and subtle ways, from a post-‘Enlightenment’ deleterious influence. Such is the bias against Holy Tradition in all its manifestations—Holy Writ being among the manifestations of the Tradition.\(^2\)

\(^1\) For an insightful presentation and defence of the Sacred Tradition of the Church, the reader is referred to: Philip Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998).

\(^2\) That Sacred Scripture is a dimension of Holy Tradition is not a denial of its intrinsic value and immense importance, though its place as the ‘first principle’, or the condition *sine qua non*, of Christianity is here denied. See: Timothy Ware, “Holy Tradition: The Source of the Orthodox Faith,” in *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 195-207. In tandem with this note, and from the outset, I wish to make evident to the reader that my perspective, in this essay, will be, to the best of my knowledge, thoroughly informed by the Orthodox Tradition.

To the end of showing the bias for what it is, i.e. insupportable in itself, I will suggest in this essay that the traditional attribution of the ‘Fourth Gospel’ to St. John, the Beloved Disciple of the Lord, is not without reason. A related argument will ensue, that the distinguished and venerable moniker ‘the Theologian’ is due to the Evangelist because the doctrine of which he is the exemplar unhesitatingly propounds the fullness of the reality of Jesus Christ, which is the eternal and uncreated *Evangelium*. This study will comprise the following development: using the New Testament and early patristic sources, I will investigate the characteristics of the person of St. John and of the Gospel attributed to him. Then, I will perform a poignant analysis of the patristic reception of this Apostle and his Gospel, with the ecclesial (exoteric) and mystical (esoteric) ramifications thereof. I will complete the development of the composition of this essay with an introductory exposition of St. John’s profound, though provocative, theology and metaphysic. Thus, I hope to have demonstrated, by the end of this essay, the appreciable significance of the Fourth Gospel and its author within the Christian Sacred Tradition.

St. John and His Gospel: Scripture
What is apparent from the New Testament regarding the first appearance of our John—his first encounter with Jesus—is that he, together with his
brother James and their father Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade. It is at their initial meeting along the coast of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus called the two brothers who, thenceforward, “followed him”.\(^3\) Immediately, then, Jesus taught his disciples. His doctrine caused amazement in them, “for he was teaching them as one with power, and not as the scribes”.\(^4\) At one point, John, together with his brother James, are given a surname by their Teacher, the “sons of thunder”,\(^5\) an appellation that has implications for their character traits. This event seems to be motivated by a similar intention in Jesus as in his naming Simon ‘Peter’, i.e. for Jesus merely ‘looked upon him’ and, as it were, drew the name ‘Peter’ out from him to foreshadow Simon’s future ‘petrine’ manifestation.\(^6\) Likewise, the following episodes seem to befit the character of a ‘son of thunder’: John scolded an exorcist who, using Jesus’ name, cast out devils, though he was not following Jesus’ disciples; learning of the shame brought upon his Teacher, John, with his brother, exclaimed to Him: “Lord! Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven to consume them?”; the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus, asking Him to grant them each a place, one on His right and one on His left, in His glory.\(^9\) From these accounts, we can discern the contours of a ‘fiery’ character: zealous, enthusiastic and daring, though intolerant, exclusivist, and self-righteous. With the aid of his Master’s compassionate rebukes, however, John quickly learned—because his ‘fire’ was for the sake of God—to curb his passions, becoming the man known to tradition as the Apostle of Love.\(^10\)

The Gospel of Mark, along with the greater Synoptic tradition, lays especial stress on the mysteriousness of Jesus’ identity, and seeks to veil it in the proclamation of the Kingdom, whereas the Fourth Gospel seeks to lead people to a knowledge of Jesus Himself.\(^11\) Thus, we find Jesus desirous of concealing His identity, as when He silenced an unclean spirit who said to him, “I know who thou art, the Holy One of God”, as well as when the Teacher “commanded his disciples, that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ”.\(^12\) Nevertheless, He possessed disciples to whom He gave His Teaching. He also had a group of elect disciples to whom He revealed directly His deeper mysteries: Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John.\(^13\) Other texts in the New Testament point John out for distinction, especially his close companionship with Peter,\(^14\) and Paul’s remark that he, along with James and Peter, “seemed to be pillars” of the Church.\(^15\) In the Fourth Gospel, John is never explicitly men-

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\(^3\) Matthew 4:21-22; and Mark 1:19-20.
\(^4\) Mark 1:21-22.
\(^5\) “He named them Boanerges, which is, the sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).
\(^6\) John 1:42; Matthew 16:13-20; and Mark 3:16.
\(^10\) This name is given to him especially on account of the First Epistle attributed to him.
\(^11\) Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 4:17; and John’s Prologue, 8:12, and 17:3.
\(^12\) Mark 1:23-25; 3:11-12; and Matthew 16:20.
\(^13\) Such events were the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37 and Luke 8:51), Jesus’ Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2; Mark 9:1; and Luke 9:28-29), and Jesus’ Passion in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-38), events where only these three disciples were admitted.
\(^15\) Galatians 2:9.
tioned. Because of this seeming oddity, the identification of the Beloved Disciple, “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, with John apparently solves the ‘mystery’, especially if one disregarded certain issues that arise from historical-critical enquiries. Let it merely be said, then, that Jesus loved many individuals. The name ‘Beloved Disciple’, therefore, is thus seemingly reserved for a distinguished relationship with Jesus.

St. John and His Gospel: Tradition

The overwhelming, i.e. total, unanimity of the testimonies from the first three centuries concerning the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is truly astonishing. What is more astounding is the use, by many scholars, of the modern critical methods in the toilsome study of this Gospel, which completely undermines this proclamation of old. Nevertheless, the earliest and greatest authorities from among the Holy Fathers who made direct references to the author of the Fourth Gospel are Sts. Irenaeus of Lyons (c.115-c.202) and Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215). The former wrote, plainly, that “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel”. The latter, giving a more detailed account, tells how, “last of all, John, aware that all the external details had been recorded in the Gospels, was urged by his disciples and divinely moved by the Spirit to compose a spiritual Gospel”.

Besides these, we find accounts from the Holy Fathers that lead to the same conclusion. Among them are Papias,

20 St. Clement puts St. John within the elite group of Christ’s disciples. He writes: “Peter, James, and John... [had been] favoured by the Saviour” (Eusebius, The Church History, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 53.). He also distinguishes these three as having received gnosis directly from the risen Lord: “After the resurrection, the Lord imparted the higher knowledge [gnosis] to James the Just, John, and Peter. They gave it to the other apostles” (Ibid.).


22 Eusebius, Church History, 199. Eusebius elsewhere provides parallel information concerning the circumstances of the composition of St. John’s Gospel: his disciples’ beseeching him to write, his knowledge of the three other Gospels and his approval of them, though he was aware that certain things about the Lord remained to be said (Eusebius, Church History, 99-100.). St. Irenaeus also says that John wrote his Gospel to refute Cerinthus, a heretic contemporaneous with him (Against Heresies 3.11.1, in: Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 426.).

23 It has been well argued that there is a high probability that Papias, who according to St. Irenaeus, was a “hearer of John” (Against Heresies 5.33.4, in: Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 563.), attributed the Fourth Gospel to the

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16 John 21:20. The other texts regarding this mysterious figure are John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2-7, and 21:7. The “other disciple” (1:35-40 and 18:15-16) may also be a reference to this same personage, based on the similarity of the wording in 20:2. Note also that there is a similarity of relationship posited between John and Peter in the New Testament, and between the Beloved Disciple and Peter in the Fourth Gospel.

17 I will tackle the issue of John’s absence from the Fourth Gospel, as ‘anonymity’, before long.

18 John 11:3; 5 and 36; 13:34; 14:21; and Mark 10:21. These texts, among others, show that, without a sufficient reason, the emphasis put upon ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ is frivolous, to say the least.

St. Justin Martyr (c.103-165), Polycrates of Ephesus (c.130-c.196), Hippolytus of Rome (c.170-c.236), and Victorinus of Pettau (d.c.304). From the Alexandrian tradition, there is also St. Dionysius the Great (d.265) who wrote concerning John that he was “the son of Zebedee... who wrote the Gospel according to John”. This last Father also mentioned that, in his Gospel, John referred to himself as the ‘Beloved Disciple’. What is more, we have the report that a given heretic, Heracleon, interpreted the ‘speaker’ in a given passage of the Gospel as “the disciple”, presumably the author himself. Finally, Origen (c.185-254), that ‘indestructible’ Alexandrian theologian, proclaimed: “What are we to say of him who leaned on Jesus’ breast, namely, John, who left one Gospel, though confessing that he could make so many that the world would not contain them?”

John’s Gospel was among the Evangelist’s “undisputed writings” that were “read by all the churches under heaven”. Yet, the apparent anonymity, and the strange ending, of the text can be a source of confusion. A masterful analysis of 21:24 has determined that the statement of this verse, that this is that disciple who giveth testimony of these things and hath written these things, is a reference to the author and writer of the entire text of the Gospel—including the final chapter. Insight is drawn from Tertullian (c.160-c.220), the lawyer-theologian from Carthage, who labelled 20:31 as the clausula evangelii. What this signifies, however, is not the end of the totality of the work, but rather, “the archival and epistolary function of chapter 21—i.e., that the Evangelist’s eyewitness testimony, the message he wishes to inculcate, ends at chapter 20. He does not mean, in other words, that the work as a whole ends at...”

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33 Eusebius, Church History, 99. Eusebius adds: “Of John’s writings, in addition to the Gospel, the first of his epistles has been accepted as authentic both in past and present, but the other two are disputed. As to the Revelation, opinions are evenly divided” (Ibid., 100.). Even a generation before Eusebius, Origen had claimed that the only Johannine texts that were not universally deemed genuine were the second and third letters (Origen, Commentary on John 5.3, in: Origen, “Commentary,” 346-7.).
chapter 20”. The pseudepigraphical view of the Fourth Gospel in general thus has its difficulties; and so does the bland notion of the utter ‘mysteriousness’ of the personage called the Beloved Disciple. Here is a useful glimpse at the intention underlying much of the tradition of anonymity:

The being that has attained a supra-individual state is, by that fact alone, released from all the limiting conditions of individuality, that is to say it is beyond the determinations of ‘name and form’ that constitute the essence and the substance of its individuality as such; thus it is truly ‘anonymous’, because in it the ‘ego’ has effaced itself and disappeared completely before the ‘Self’.36

From this description, telling deductions can be wrought: St. John, a prominent disciple of the Lord, remains ‘invisible’ in the Gospel which he authored37 in order that the anonymity of his individuality may appear ‘replaced’ by the self-subsisting and eternal reality.38 Thus, the ‘Beloved Disciple’, whose ‘identity’ is projected into the whole of John’s prior life, indicates an essential relationship with the Lord; and the post-paschal realization causes to emerge the remembrance of all things past in the light of it: all things are thenceforward seen in the light of Christ, to the end “that God may be all in all”.39

The Church and Ecclesial Continuity
Holy Tradition possesses two distinct, though interrelated, dimensions: the ecclesial or exoteric, and the mystical or esoteric, aspects. This distinction is somewhat mitigated because Christianity is an ‘exo-esoterism’.40 Nonetheless, the two realms remain distinct with regard to their possibilities. The exoteric aspect is generally found through ‘space’ and ‘time’. Thus, though the Creed41 seeks to point to the Christic reality, which is a mystery,42 the Fathers who composed it “[aspired] to reach the very early days of Christianity via the apostles and to furnish the creed with the authority of the first witnesses.”43 Even before the

35 Ibid., 5.
37 Note that only St. John and the Lord’s mother are ‘anonymous’ in this Gospel. Mary is referred to as “the mother of Jesus” (for example: John 2:1 and 19:25). There are, obviously, serious implications, though I will limit myself to develop, later in the essay, only those concerning the Beloved Disciple. I will merely indicate here that the anonymity of these two persons is interrelated and that it possibly finds its fulfillment at the ‘adoption scene’ in 19:26-27. The full significance of the double anonymity surpasses the scope of this essay.
38 This is what St. Paul indicates in these texts: “I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20), and “For you are dead: and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).
39 This is St. Paul’s discourse on the Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:12-58. More light will be shed on this in the third part of the essay.
40 Marco Pallis, “The Veil of the Temple: A Study of Christian Initiation,” Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies 5 (1999): 113-45. For instance: “Christianity’s ‘structure’ as such involves a ‘sliding scale of esoterism’ in the sense that those called to follow this path can live on whatever level or depth that grace and ability allows for” (Ibid., 114.); and: “The particularity of the Christian tradition, namely its eso-exoteric structure, is closely bound up with this all-absorbing role of Christ as the Incarnate Word, in whom all essential functions are synthesized without distinction of levels” (Ibid., 119.).
41 The Nicene Creed is what I am referring to, though the remark is applicable to all the traditional creeds.
42 See, for example, Ephesians 3:4.
momentous fourth century, the ‘apostolic Fathers’—Sts. Clement of Rome (c.96), Ignatius of Antioch (c.35/50-c.98/117), Polycarp of Smyrna (69-155)—had the same concern. For them, authentic apostolicity was a principle of the soundness of tradition. This concern they inherited from the apostles themselves. Such are the cases of St. Paul exhorting the ‘brethren’ at Thessalonica to ‘stand fast and hold the traditions, which [they] have learned, whether by word or by [his] epistle’, and of Christ’s saying that “he that receiveth you [i.e. his apostles] receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me’. In a like manner, St. Ignatius, a disciple of St. John, testifies to a large ‘network’ of apostolic communities, reminiscent of St. Paul’s ‘adventures’ and the history portrayed in the ‘Acts of the Apostles’. St. Polycarp presents an analogous case. Together, they herald and defend the unity of “apostolic orthodoxy” against heresies that are schisms and deviations from it, though they are by no means alone in such an endeavour; others have also boasted such orthodoxy, such as Polycrates, who, after lauding many “great luminaries [that] sleep in Asia”, says, “I, too, Polycrates, the least of all of you, live according to the tradition of my relatives... [M]y brothers, [I have] lived sixty-five years in the Lord and conferred with brethren from all parts of the world and have studied all of Holy Scripture...”

The fact that these men were bishops is highly relevant, for the apostolic tradi-

45 “Their first norm is the authority of the apostolic testimony enshrined in the epistles and the gospels to which they so constantly refer” (Ibid., 73). I found this exemplary text which goes a long way to secure the view I am exploring, and offer it at length: “The written form of the apostolic message was always understood by the Byzantines in the framework of ‘apostolic tradition’—the wider, living, and uninterrupted continuity of the apostolic Church. The famous sentence of Basil of Caesarea [330-379] on Scripture and Tradition can be considered to reflect the consensus of later Byzantine theologians: ‘We do not content ourselves with what was reported in Acts and in the Epistles... and in the Gospels; but, both before and after reading them, we add other doctrines, received from oral teaching, and carrying much weight in the mystery [of the faith]’. The ‘other doctrines’ which Basil mentions are, essentially, the liturgical and sacramental traditions which, together with the more conceptual consensus found in the continuity of Greek patristic theology, always served in Byzantium as a living framework for the understanding of Scripture” (John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 8.)
46 2 Thessalonians 2:14.
47 Matthew 10:40.
50 Eusebius, Church History, 128-35, 177.
51 Ibid., 111. See also: Hoffman, “The Authority of Scripture,” 72.
52 Eusebius, Church History, 179. These last words are reminiscent of those of St. Polycarp before his accuser, who “[urged] him, saying, ‘Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ’. Polycarp declared, ‘Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?’” (The Martyrdom of Polycarp 9, in: Anonymous, “Martyrdom of Polycarp,” in vol. 1 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 41.).
tion “is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches”. St. Irenaeus, who traveled to Smyrna and to Rome, had succeeded Pothinus in Lyons in 177, thus establishing himself as a link in this important apostolic succession. Thus, he is an important witness and preserver of the testimony of the two generations preceding him because of his staunch defence and explication of the apostolic tradition.

He states that Papias was “the hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp”. Likewise, St. Polycarp knew “John and others who had seen the Lord”, i.e. “[he] had heard [many things] directly from eyewitnesses of the Word of life”. That other authority, St. Clement of Alexandria, traveled widely—“from Italy to Egypt”—forming links with many teachers, who, “[preserving] the tradition of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul, the sons receiving it from the fathers (but few were like the fathers), came by God’s will to us also to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds”. Thus, we find in these two representatives of the early Church—Sts. Irenaeus and St. John himself (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.3.4, in: Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 416).

53 Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.2.2, in: Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 415. Texts such as the following confirm the early origin of this notion: Acts 1:20, 25, 14:22, 15:22-23; Titus 1:5, 2:15; and 1 Peter 5:1.

54 Eric Osborn, Irenaeus of Lyons (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2. The Church in Lyons had strong ties with the Churches of Rome and of Asia Minor (Ibid., 172.). On his succession to Pothinus, see: Eusebius, Church History, 162. On his own acclaim prior to becoming the ‘Shepherd’ of Lyons, see: Ibid., 160, where we find the Christians who were going to be martyred in Gaul writing to the Bishop of Rome as follows: “Once more and always, Father Eleutherus, greetings in God. We have entrusted this letter to our brother and companion Irenaeus to bring to you. We beg you to hold him in high regard as one zealous for the covenant of Christ. For if we had thought that rank could confer righteousness on anyone, we would first have recommended him as a presbyter of the church, which he is in fact”.

55 See this work of his: Irenaeus, On the Apostolic Preaching, trans. John Behr (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997). He writes, for example: “So, faith procures this for us, as the elders, the disciples of the apostles, have handed down to us” (Ibid., 42.).


57 Eusebius, Church History, 177. St. Polycarp was made bishop of Smyrna by none other than
and Clement—a very close affinity: Irenaeus’ theology “blends Paul and John in a way which is beyond proof-texts and based on a profound understanding,” and Clement, like his teachers, instructed his students to become “wise in the mysteries of Christ.” Both Irenaeus and Clement assumed and benefited from an apostolic heritage—they think the same gospel, though in different intellectual environments—a fact that presupposes certain ecclesial relationships.

St. John in Tradition: Ecclesial and Mystical Dimensions

The aforesaid is ground for proceeding to St. John’s ecclesial and mystical aspects. In the first place, from the New Testament to the later Holy Fathers, we can clearly trace a particular evangelical and ecclesial dispensation. This aspect of the Johannine heritage flatly contradicts the speculations of many modern scholars regarding a ‘Johannine school’ distinct from the catholic or ‘Petrine’ Church. That St. John is, as a ‘pillar’ of the Church, a source for the apostolic distinction and succession of such men as Ignatius and Polycarp, and that these men clearly exhibit the catholic teaching, indicates, to say the least, a truly sound and authentic, and generally exoteric, ‘deposit of the faith’ concerning Jesus Christ and salvation. It is no wonder, then, that Sts. John Chrysostom and Augustine present the ecclesial

theory that they do. As we have seen, the Petrine tradition is, properly speaking, the catholic Church. On the other hand, and as we shall see further, the distinctly Johannine heritage is the truly ‘inward’ realization of the catholic doctrine. As to the ‘Petrine’ aspect of the Church, it originates in Christ’s very words to St. Peter—as if in fulfillment of Christ’s previously naming Simon ‘Peter’—that “thou art Peter; and upon

Labor of the beloved disciple

68 For the purposes of this essay, though this is a generally accepted view among Orthodox Christians, St. John Chrysostom and Byzantine theology are used interchangeably. Concerning St Augustine, though he is often portrayed as the Father of Catholic theology (I do not, in general, disagree), it will be seen that his view on certain issues may be different from the tradition that has followed in his stead.

69 We are here referring to apostolic catholicity, and, thus, not exactly to the establishment of the Catholic Church. Our reference is St. Vincent of Lérins (d.c.445): “Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense ‘Catholic’, which, as the name itself and the reason of the things declare, comprehends all universality” (A Commonitory 2.6, in: Vincent of Lérins, “A Commonitory,” in vol. 11 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: A Select Library of the Christian Church, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994]), 132.

70 Let it be said that the ‘Petrine’ (or ‘New Testament’) heritage as opposed to that which is ‘Johannine’ is not an absolute rule, but, as the nuanced characterisation of Christianity as ‘exo-esoteric’ shows, each is merely (though really) a typology of levels of the ‘life of Christ’ and a Christian’s reception and integration of it. Thus, St. Paul (without neglecting other examples including the Synoptics and the Gospel of St. John themselves) reveals both aspects of the Church, at times emphasizing one over the other.

71 John 1:42. The event of Christ’s naming Simon ‘Peter’ can adequately be seen as occurring before the latter’s confession: “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).
this rock I will build my church". Byzantine theology presents the view that St. Peter is the representative of the apostolic assembly and *coryphaeus*, “the chief of the apostolic choir, and has been established as the rock of the Church and is proclaimed by the Truth to be the key bearer of the Kingdom of Heaven.” Yet, the ‘keys’ given to him is symbolic for the veracity of his confession! From this nuanced view, it follows that every believer who confesses like Peter is, thus, also the rock of the Church and is also given the ‘keys of Heaven’, each for him or herself; Christ’s words are, therefore, soteriological, as well as ecclesial.

Regarding the Church

72 The full context of Christ’s consecration of Peter is as follows: “Jesus said to them: But whom do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter: and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-19).


74 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 97-8. A Twelfth century homily has it that “the Lord gives the keys to Peter and to all those who resemble him, so that the gates of the Kingdom of heaven remain closed for the heretic, yet are easily accessible to the faithful” (Ibid., 98). Moreover, according the Byzantines, “the confession is entrusted to each Christian at his baptism, but a particular responsibility belongs... to those who occupy in each local church the very throne of Christ in apostolic succession, i.e. to the bishops.... There is no plurality of episcopal sees, there is but one, the ‘institution’, the ‘apostolic succession’ which was discussed, the third century Latin Father, St. Cyprian of Carthage, taught that the ‘see of Peter’ belongs to each bishop in every local church.”

In St. Augustine, that pillar of Latin theology, we find a seamless agreement with the Greek (Byzantine) tradition concerning ecclesiology. Thus, he says that the external functions of all the Church, i.e. “the power of binding and loosing sins”, are given by Christ through Peter, for he represents “the universal Church” because of his primacy among the apostles. Though Augustine agrees that St. Peter was called *petra* on account of his confession, he goes apparently deeper, at least explicitly, than his Eastern confrères: drawing upon Matthew 7:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 10:4, he says that Peter’s confession (the ‘rock’) is Christ himself, and that it is upon this foundation that Peter himself built. St. Augustine

75 Ibid.

76 This is true at least for what I am considering here, which, however, is not without value. I only do not contend to know everything either Augustine or the Byzantines thought and said on the subject. St. Augustine does, in fact, seem to say, contrary to the general opinion of the Orthodox, that St. John was not beloved by Christ on account of his chastity (i.e. his virginity), but on some other quality, as will be seen (Augustine, “Homilies on the Gospel of John,” in vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 452.).

77 Ibid., 450.

78 Ibid. Matthew 7:24-27: “Everyone therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat
further elaborated this typological ecclesiology—and here we begin to perceive that aspect of the Church that is distinctly ‘Johannine’—saying that, on the one hand, the Church lives surrounded with evil but is delivered insofar as it holds to Christ, and, on the other hand, that she also possesses another, immortal life, “that is not passed in the midst of evil”. These two ‘lives’ are likened to:

two states of life... that are known to the Church, whereof the one is in faith, the other in sight; one in the temporal sojourn in a foreign land, the other in the eternity of the [heavenly] abode; one in labour, the other in repose; one in the way, the other in the fatherland; one in active work, the other in the wages of contemplation.

The use St. Augustine makes of the analogies of the ‘active’ and the ‘contemplative’ lives applies, thus, to every Christian, in whose pilgrimage along the Way he/she is led, first, through the love of God, to “obtain deliverance from [his/her] present mortality”, and then, being loved by Him, to “be preserved in the immortality to come.” As these are stages (beyond ‘states’) of the spiritual life conceived by Christians, neither the aspect represented by St. Peter, nor that by St. John, excludes the other, but, if faithfully pursued, the Way will lead, *Deo volente*, to the consummation of the Feast of the Kingdom. On a related note, Origen of Alexandria taught that the Gospel of St. John is the “first-fruit” of the Gospels and all Sacred Scripture, thus that it speaks of the eschatological import—though this import is likewise primordial—of the Christic Way. What is more, Origen conceived and distinguished between a ‘somatic’, external, Christianity—concerning the evangelical mission—and a ‘spiritual’, inward, Christianity, “which is in secret”.

82 Among the earliest references to ‘Christianity’ seem to be ‘the Way’, as in Acts 19:23 (“Now at that time there arose no small disturbance about the way of the Lord”) and 24:22 (“Felix... had a+ most certain knowledge of this way”); also, Christ said: “I am the Way...” (John 14:6).
85 Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.6, in: Origen, “Commentary,” 299. “[It] speaks of him whose genealogy had already been set forth, but which begins to speak of him at a point before he had any genealogy” (Ibid.).
86 Ibid., 302. Origen adds: “We must... be Christians both somatically and spiritually, and
Though the rule of faith—which is "handed down" and instructs in the right doctrinal and sacramental means of the Church, and which "the faithful keep, having the Holy Spirit constantly dwelling in them, who was given from Him [God] at baptism and kept by the recipient living in truth and holiness and righteousness and patience"—is the apostolic tradition and inheritance, the Church’s mystical dimension, of which St. John is the type, is the truly life-giving ‘sap’ of the ‘vineyard’. This, Origen’s ‘secret Christianity’, is intimately tied in with the lex arcana from the historic origins of the Church. As St. Clement has put it: “The gnosis itself is that which has descended by transmission to a few, having been imparted unwritten by the apostles”. But this esoteric tradition is not at odds with faith in Christ; rather, it reveals its deeper import. The Holy Fathers in St. John’s direct apostolic lineage, the aforementioned Ignatius and Polycarp, thus constitute only one aspect—the external and ecclesial—of what we may call a ‘Johannine school’ proper. This, together with the two further Johannine manifestations—theologians that manifest a ‘logos’ theology, and those of the purely spiritual lineage, sporadic like fire—is a blatant refutation of the misappropriation by pseudo-gnostics of John’s organic theological symbiosis of the Church’s ecclesial and mystical dimensions. Another manifestation of the tendency to inappropriately sever the integral nature of John’s wisdom is messalianism, a largely monastic, and

93 It is a curious fact that these saints, as well as, by extension and considering the prior discussion, Sts. Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Clement and Origen of Alexandria do not figure in modern scholars’ reconstructions of a Johannine community. It would seem that avowedly ‘objective’ scholars consider Holy Tradition to be extraneous to their subjects when this is precisely what an unbiased historical investigation will perceive!
94 “The Spirit breatheth where he will and thou hearest his voice: but thou knowest not whence he cometh and whither he goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).
95 In the Orthodox context, this would be, presumably, the appropriate manner of referring to so-called ‘gnostics’. 

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87 Irenaeus, Apostolic Preaching, 42-4.
88 Ibid., 67.
89 I am employing, in this essay, the term ‘mystical’ in the Orthodox and etymological sense, from the Greek mysterion, “that which is hidden... from merely mundane researches” (Lossky, Orthodox Theology: An Introduction, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 9.). “Mysticism is accordingly treated... as the perfecting and crown of all theology: as theology par excellence” (Lossky, Mystical Theology, 9.).
90 John 15:1-8. The Spirit is essential for the authenticity of the Church’s apostolic ministry and for it to remain in tradition with Jesus and his Gospel. The Church’s various ministries, especially the episcopate, “are meant to maintain and structure this continuity, thus assuring the purity and effectiveness of the Church’s ministry in the world” (Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 175-6.).
93 It is a curious fact that these saints, as well as, by extension and considering the prior discussion, Sts. Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Clement and Origen of Alexandria do not figure in modern scholars’ reconstructions of a Johannine community. It would seem that avowedly ‘objective’ scholars consider Holy Tradition to be extraneous to their subjects when this is precisely what an unbiased historical investigation will perceive!
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essentially anti-sacramental\textsuperscript{96} and anti-institutional, movement.\textsuperscript{97} They were condemned at various councils, such as those at Side (390), Constantinople (426), and Ephesus (431).\textsuperscript{98} The main problem with this group is its perceived neglect, or outright denial, of the incarnate Logos who (as it is for St. John) informs all of the Church’s concerns, the ecclesial as well as the mystical.

A Holy Father that is sometimes characterized as a messianic, though falsely-so, is St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022). The reality to which this saint testified was—and is—recognized by Holy Tradition as a most valuable reminder about its own truth and worth, for the saint or mystic is “the guardian of the faith” and ought to be trusted “more than any permanent institution”.\textsuperscript{99} Thus, St. Symeon, “[standing] as an important witness of the inevitable tension in Christianity between all forms of ‘establishment’ and the freedom of the Spirit”, does not deny the sacramental reality of the Church, but rather reveals that the Kingdom is an “attainable reality”.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{96} Meyendorff, \textit{Byzantine Theology}, 69.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 178.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 177. “The New Theologian was given an opportunity to raise the question of authority in the Church, by opposing the charismatic personality of the saint to that of the institution... His purpose is to formulate the tension between the Kingdom and ‘this world’, to affirm that the tension between the ‘institution’ and the ‘event’ is built into the very existence of the Church in history” (Ibid., 75.).
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 74. “Conscious of the fact that in the Kingdom of God there are no laws other than those of the Spirit, [the Church] has also remembered that the Kingdom, already accessible as a true and direct experience, has not yet come in strength, and remains hidden under the sacramental veils. In the present \textit{aion}, structures, laws, canons, and institutions are unavoidable, as \textit{means} toward a fuller realization of the Kingdom” (Ibid., 178.).

Thus, “the Kingdom to come is already realized in the sacraments,” though each Christian must realize, for him and herself, the synergy between God and man/woman—a mystery defined and exemplified by Christ—in order to live in its reality.\textsuperscript{101} In other words, the Christian disciple and pilgrim must move \textit{into} the ecclesial aspect of the Church, following the mystic, or ‘Johannine’, Way, until he/she knows the “heavenly things”\textsuperscript{102} and receives “meat” to eat.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{The Theologian’s Esoteric Gospel}

The Synoptics and much of the New Testament, the apostolic tradition, and the catholic Church, manifest and perpetuate the generally exoteric (i.e. ecclesial) dimension of the Holy Tradition, though this is, as we have briefly seen, intended to have a pedagogical value. St. Luke tells us in Acts 1:1-2 that the Gospel which he composed consisted “of all the things which Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day on which, giving commandments by the Holy Ghost to the apostles whom he had chosen, he was taken up”. This coincides with the preaching of the Kingdom, noted at the start of this essay as a characteristic of the ‘Synoptic Jesus’. On the other hand, Evagrius of Pontus (345-399) wrote, in his famous \textit{Treatise on the Practical Life}, that “Christianity is the doctrine of Christ our Saviour. It is comprised of the practical, the natural, and the theological”.\textsuperscript{104} This definition is akin to the esoteric perspective exempli-
fied by St. John, for, as his Gospel is the ‘first-fruit’ of the Gospels and all Sacred Scripture, so is Jesus Christ the Gospel itself; and Jesus Himself is Wisdom, “the gnosis, which is the knowledge and apprehension of things present, future, and past”. But more on this in a moment; for now, the following clarification is due:

The difference between the exoteric and esoteric points of view appears clearly when one compares the respective moral attitudes: on the side of exoterism, the virtues readily give way to prejudices which, through excess of zeal, are opposed to reality and consequently to intelligence; on the side of pure esoterism—or esoterism which is fully faithful to its nature—‘there is no right superior to that of truth’, as a Hindu maxim asserts, and every good must result from the nature of things and not from our sentiments in so far as they lose track of this.

It will also be appropriate to recall the earlier description of St. John’s appellation, the ‘son of thunder’. What comes to mind, here, is the transformation and transfiguration of the fiery zealot into the light of judgment, discernment, and contemplation; and such is the nature of theology, according to which the theologian ought to pray truly in order to attain “the true knowledge of God in contemplation”. This contemplation is thus the being of the Beloved Disciple, St. John, the very ‘type’ of the theologian: “Breast of the Lord, knowledge of God; one who reclines on it will be endowed with theology”.

This theology, then, is the proper heritage of him who “represents Christianity in its most inward aspect”. As St. John is the fountainhead of mysticism in Christianity, we can plainly detect the inspiration of his ‘type’ in St. Clement of Alexandria’s Gnostic, who “alone, having grown old in the Scriptures, and maintaining apostolic and ecclesiastic orthodoxy in doctrines, lives most correctly in accordance with the Gos-

105 St. John Chrysostom has commented concerning the disparity between the Synoptics and John as follows ("Homilies on the Gospel of St. John," in vol. 14 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 16): “Because the other Evangelists had dwelt most on the accounts of His coming in the flesh, there was fear lest some, being of grovelling minds, might for this reason rest in these doctrines alone... In order, therefore, to lead away from this fondness for earth those who were likely to fall into it, and to draw them up towards heaven, with good reason [John] commences his narrative from above, and from the eternal subsistence”. For this reason I opt for the view that the entire Gospel is to be read primarily theologically, spiritually, and metaphysically.


107 Clement, The Stromata 6.7, in: Clement, “Stromata,” 494. Jesus did say: “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am” (John 8:58), and “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13).


110 Evagrius, Evagrius of Pontus, 199.

111 Ibid., 280.

112 The origin of the use of ‘The Theologian’ as a designation of St. John the Evangelist has a few early contenders. We find, for example, St. Dionysius the Areopagite’s tenth epistle, “To John the theologian, apostle and evangelist, an exile on the island of Patmos” (Dionysius, Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 288.).

113 Evagrius, Evagrius of Pontus, 130.

114 Schuon, Transcendent Unity of Religions, 130.
pel... For the life of the Gnostic... is nothing but the deeds and words corresponding to the tradition of the Lord".\textsuperscript{115} There is another form of inheritance which assiduous research has uncovered: an inheritance by way of dreams!\textsuperscript{116} This story\textsuperscript{117} is recounted in St. Gregory of Nyssa’s (c.335-c.394) biography of the august and venerable Father, St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (c.213-c.270). ‘The Wonderworker’ is said to have received a dream wherein he received “a declaration of faith... by revelation from the blessed John the Evangelist [and] by the mediation of the Virgin Mary, Parent of God”.\textsuperscript{118} The text runs as follows:

There is one God, the Father of the living Word, who is His subsistent Wisdom and Power and Eternal Image: perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten, Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, Only of the Only, God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity, Efficient Word, Wisdom comprehensive of the constitution of all things, and Power formative of the whole creation, true Son of true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal, and Eternal of Eternal. And there is One Holy Spirit, having His subsistence from God, and being made manifest by the Son, to wit to men: Image of the Son, Perfect Image of the Perfect; Life, the Cause of the living; Holy Fount; Sanctity, the Supplier, or Leader, of Sanctification; in whom is manifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in the Trinity; nor anything super induced, as if at some former period it was nonexistent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abideth ever.

\textbf{The Eagle’s Doctrine: John 3:13}
The foregoing magnificent theological declaration incites us into the Christic

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\footnote{115} Clement, \textit{The Stromata} 7.17, in: Clement, “Stromata,” 554. St. Clement has likewise written that “the only really holy and pious man is he who is truly a Gnostic according to the rule of the Church” (\textit{The Stromata} 7.7, in: Ibid., 534.). St. Irenaeus has also written that “true knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor [suffering] curtailment [in the truths which she believes]” (\textit{Against Heresies} 4.33.8, in: Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 508.).

\footnote{116} The notion that saints can receive visions or dreams in which they are given teachings, for their own edification or for propagating among certain people, is not unknown in the religious literature of the world. One preeminent case is that of Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240), an Andalusian Sufi Master who is known as ‘the Greatest Master’ of Islam. See: Michel Chodkiewicz, \textit{Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn `Arabi}, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

\footnote{117} The question of authenticity is not my concern here. Rather, the symbolic and theological meaning is what I would like to convey to the reader at this time.

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mystery, which the *spiritualis aquilae* plumbs. St. John, the ‘eagle’, is capable of looking into the mysteries of the Divine Sun, for, having advanced in the Way past the stage of purification into the depths of the contemplation of God—thus as the Lord’s Beloved Disciple—he is admitted to the intimacy and delectation of the Wedding Feast and is given the power of theology to know “the deep things of God”:

The eagle fearlessly turns to the sun
its gaze
As you do at God’s flash if your
heart is unstained.

The consummation of this love is for the Theologian, because he is unperturbed, thanks to his purified vision, by the Divine Light. He is like the eagle, which “is the only bird [that] can face the sunlight directly and, by doing so, in fact increases [its] vision instead of going blind”. Thus, St. John teaches the doctrine of the “Eternal Church”. This doctrine, I stated, is Christ. One of the most salient verses of the Gospel of St. John (and indeed, from all Scripture) regarding Christ’s Person is John 3:13, where Christ tells Nicodemus, a high ranking Pharisee who sought instruction from Him but failed to understand, that “no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven”. The common Church teaching is that Jesus’ origin is beyond this world, into which He alone came by Incarnation for the sake of the salvation of the world. What is more, Christ, because of the union of His two natures—divine and human—was, and is, never absent from His Father, “co-enthroned”, as He is, with Him in the Kingdom. However, and without denying the literal meaning of this interpretation regarding the economy of salvation of the Christic dispensation, St. John, because of the nature of his Gospel, would take his readers to a deeper, metaphysical perception. Metaphysics, being “the science of the Real”, deals with the knowledge of real principles and, ultimately, with the Absolute Principle which, transcending all relativity, “is beyond the domain of change and becoming”. Our intention for approaching this verse in this manner is

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121 Here, the relevance of Matthew 22:14 is obvious, for “many are called, but few are chosen”.
122 I am inspired for this speculation by the parable of the ‘wise virgins’ (Matthew 25:1-13).
123 “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither [has it] entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).
125 Ibid.
126 Schuon, *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 84.
128 Ibid.
justified if we remember Origen’s distinction between the ‘somatic’ and the ‘spiritual’ teaching on Christ, as well as St. Clement’s notion of gnosιs as the knowledge of principles and ends and existent conditions of things. This gnosιs is none other than Christ, who proclaimed Himself “Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End”.

The Irish sage, Johannes Scottus Eriugena (c.815-c.877), has understood that ‘heaven’, in this verse, refers to the Father. Thus, he paraphrases John 3:13 to read: Nemo ascendit in patrem, nisi qui de patre descendit, filius hominis qui est in patre. Concerning the ‘descent’ and ‘ascent’ of the Son of Man, both, again, are referenced to the Father. “The Son of man who is in heaven” will then signify that Jesus is “in the Bosom of the Father”. Eriugena continues:

Exitus ergo eius a patre humanatio est; et reditus eius ad patrem hominis, quem accepit, deificatio et

The Incarnation is undertaken alone, as it consists in the descent of God’s Oneness; the ascent also is by Him alone, though with Him all the restored members of His Body: In ipso enim omnes credentes unum unum sunt. Vnus itaque christus, corpus cum membris, ascendit in patrem. This is the eschatological reality that is revealed in Jesus Christ, made known to John the Theologian by Christ Himself. St. John’s luminous doctrine is intended to ‘shatter’—like lightning—the idolizing of a dark materialism that stops short at the opacity and density of ‘all this’ (‘this world’) rather than seeing things as they are, truly. Christ is the truth and the light of the world, so in Him things can be seen truly. According to his theology, St. John characterizes those who reject Jesus in this manner: “They said: Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph,

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130 Revelation 22:13. Furthermore, St. John Chrysostom says that spiritual things are the substance and end of things temporal (“Homilies,” in vol. 14 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 156.)
131 “Personne n’est monté au Père, si ce n’est celui qui est descendu du Père, le Fils de l’homme qui est dans le Père” (Scot, Commentaire sur l’Évangile de Jean, 224-5.). Eriugena explains that in Latin ‘ascendit’ is ambiguous as it can refer to both the past and the present, whereas in Greek, the same word plainly refers to the past. Thence he asks what is the ‘descent’ and what is the ‘ascent’, and what is the ‘heaven’ from which he is and to which he goes (Ibid., 223.).
132 Ibid., 225. Eriugena uses John 16:28 to support this interpretation, which reads: “I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again I leave the world and I go to the Father”.
133 John 1:18.
whose father and mother we know? How then saith he: I came down from heaven?\textsuperscript{141} Though we can undeniably perceive the theological and metaphysical nature of the 	extit{gnosis} pertaining to the Theologian’s Gospel, it is nevertheless true, in accordance with what was previously said, that the catholic Church (St. John included) possesses, in a most harmonious manner, this vision of Christ. The following exquisite texts, from the Epistle to the Ephesians and that to the Corinthians, in which the final—though, because metaphysical, also principal and essential—restoration and resurrection of all things in Christ, i.e. their unity \textit{in divinis}, is exclaimed, plainly show this:

What is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us, who believe according to the operation of the might of his power, which he wrought in Christ, raising him up from the dead and setting him on his right hand in the heavenly places. Above all principality and power and virtue and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And he hath subjected all things under his feet and hath made him head over all the church, which is his body and the fullness of him who is filled all in all.\textsuperscript{142}

When he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father: when he shall have brought to nought all principality and power and virtue. For he must reign, until he hath put all his enemies under his feet. And the enemy, death, shall be destroyed last: For he hath put all things under his feet. And whereas he saith: All things are put under him; undoubtedly, he is excepted, who put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself shall be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.\textsuperscript{143}

The last point I will make concerning the Christic mystery and reality concerns the following event found in the Synoptics: St. John, together with Sts. Peter and James, were brought by Jesus to Mount Tabor in secret. There He unveiled to them the uncreated Light of His Godhead.\textsuperscript{144} The Orthodox view of this event is as follows: “The light of our Lord’s Transfiguration had neither beginning nor end; it remained unbounded in time and space and imperceptible to the senses, although seen by bodily eyes... [B]ut by a change in their senses the Lord’s disciples passed from the flesh to the Spirit”.\textsuperscript{145} Thus, we can confirm that the ubiquitous Reality is the object of all the Holy Scriptures, though St. John’s Gospel is particularly suited to lead contemplative Christians to the heart of the mystery which Christ’s \textit{hypostasis} was incarnated to reveal.

\textbf{Conclusion}

At the conclusion of this extensive essay, which, however, has not been exhaustive, it behoves me to remark that, far from being a superfluous topic of research, the implications of our endeavour, as we have gleamed, are far reaching, extending into realms the very connection to which it might be difficult for some to perceive. Having investigated the New Testament and some early

\textsuperscript{141} John 6:42. St. John shows, in this verse, that people were ‘blind’ to the true nature of Jesus, as they stopped short at the manhood which was before them.

\textsuperscript{142} Ephesians 1:19-23.

\textsuperscript{143} 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

\textsuperscript{144} Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-8; and Luke 9:28-36.

\textsuperscript{145} Lossky, \textit{Mystical Theology}, 223-4.
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patristic literature, I have presented a proper context for discussing St. John and his Gospel. I have also developed key traditional themes related to the heritage of St. John, and have thus seen that his ‘type’ begins in ecclesial orthodoxy but extends into the ‘living’ and ‘tasting’ of the mystical reality of Christ. I also suggested a certain trajectory that St. John would have hoped his readers would take, i.e. to understand his Gospel as relating the reality of Christ understood to be the principle according to which and the way in which all things are to be discerned and the truth followed. Hence, this Gospel and the author to whom it is attributed are not paltry elements of by-gone days. Instead, St. John—and all that he represents—has a direct relationship with every man qua man, ipso facto. In this sense, St. John’s theology is profoundly ‘existential’, so long as this qualification is understood metaphysically, i.e. to do with reality and the nature of things. It is appropriate, here, to introduce some closing remarks.

While the attribution of the most profound of the Gospels to the humble person of St. John the son of Zebedee, who was, let us remember, unlettered, might be the cause for scandal for some, others might see in this a cause for rejoicing. St. John Chrysostom is one who rejoiced that “it is no longer the fisherman the son of Zebedee, but He who knoweth ‘the deep things of God’, the Holy Spirit... For he will say nothing to us as a man, but what he saith, he will say from the depths of the Spirit, from those secret things which before they came to pass the very angels knew not”. In light of this comment, we can know that the fulfillment of the mystery of St. John’s anonymity in his own Gospel is his resignation—his extinguished hypostasis—before the awesome and ineffable mystery that is God. He is the Beloved Disciple of the Lord because he attained to such a height of theosis that his anonymity evidently partook of the mystery of the Holy Trinity—for “each ‘I’ in God is also ‘not I’ but rather Thou”.

At the end of this essay, we may wish to ask ourselves the following question: What is the fundamental purpose underlying St. John’s Gospel? Anyone with a negligible amount of knowledge of this Gospel will doubtless offer in answer—and rightly so!—John’s own words, that: “Many other signs did Jesus in the sight of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing, you may have life in his name”.

But there seems to be more to the Theologian’s Gospel than a mere confession, however laudable, exalted, and serene. This ‘something more’ may be indicated by the constant reference to the ‘remembrance’ of Jesus’ words. This is

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148 I am alluding to a subtle reading of the related theological notions of anhypostasis and enhypostasis, found in St. Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662) and other Orthodox theologians after him.
150 John 20:30-31. Note the similarity of this text with St. Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:16 and John 6:68-70).
particularly significant because it is Jesus Himself who tells His disciples that the *Paraclete* will bring all of His words to their remembrance. John 14:26. Moreover, and in the context of St. John’s theology, it may be more accurate to understand that the importance of remembrance lies in Jesus Himself. This is what seems to occur in the Tradition, in response (i.e. in ‘obedience’) to Jesus’ ‘institution’ of the Eucharistic meal. In any case, both ‘remembrances’—Jesus’ words and Jesus Himself—refer to the same goal, namely “life eternal”. After the explorations of this essay, I not in conclusion that the full extent of salvation lies in ‘neo-genesis’, or the ‘re-establishment of all things in Christ’, and this because *in principium* (i.e. principally) “the life was the light of men”**: the light by which, and in which, we ‘lived’ and ‘moved’ and ‘had our being’. Thus, the eagle’s doctrine is an invitation to the *anamnesis* of one’s heavenly homeland (in the Father’s bosom), to return to which one must undergo an ontic rebirth or regeneration... a theogenesis. That being said, had the apostles left no writings, there would nonetheless remain the Holy Tradition and the doctrine and the mystery of Jesus Christ—the perennial dilemma of every generation, of every soul.

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153 I am suggesting to combine the relevant texts, such as Luke 22:19 and John 6:27-60, in order to appreciate the metaphysical depths offered by St. John.
154 On Jesus’ words as life, see: John 6:64 and 69. On Jesus Himself as life, see: John 6:50-52 and 14:6. John 3:16 is also relevant.
155 Ephesians 1:10.
156 John 1:4.
157 Acts 17:28. (Every Biblical reference has been to the Douay-Rheims Version. This is the sole exception, because of my preference of the wording, which is from the King James Version.)
158 John 3:3, 5-6.
159 “And divinization is to have a divine birth” (Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2.1, in: Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 201.).
160 Notice that, according to Holy Fathers such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, Christ Himself is the ‘original Scripture’: “To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that came by him” (Letter to the Philadelphians 8.2, in: Richardson, trans., *Early Christian Fathers*, 110.).
161 John 21:15-23. This account, though it surely has historical value, is essentially symbolic, considering what we have previously said regarding the ‘Petrine’ and ‘Johannine’ types and their relationship, in that, on the one hand, the Petrine Church will face hardships which it will be unable to surmount (21:18) while, on the other hand, the Johannine inheritance will flourish until Christ Himself comes to take it (21:23).
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