

A Critical Analysis of the *Orthodox Study Bible*'s Treatment of the Gospel of John

Cyril Kennedy

Introduction

This paper is one of the first to critically engage the *Orthodox Study Bible* (henceforth: OSB), focusing in particular on the introduction and annotations for John 1–2. The purpose here is to attempt to identify any evidence of interaction with modern biblical criticism.¹ It briefly reviews the evangelical Protestant background to the OSB before engaging a more self-consciously Orthodox approach to Scripture as grounded in the life of the Church. The complementarity between patristic and modern exegesis will then be examined, along with some of the pitfalls of modern exegesis from the Orthodox perspective, in order to establish that loyalty to patristic interpretations of Scripture does not preclude the use of modern scholarship in regards to the Bible in Orthodox exegesis.

History of the Orthodox Study Bible

Various evangelical groups that eventually, after the 1960s, became Orthodox, did so in part because of a professed desire to recover the faith, life, and concrete practices of the

¹ By modern biblical criticism I mean the scientific study of the origin, transmission, and interpretation of the Bible and related texts over roughly the last 200 years; often, but not always, this has been influenced by Enlightenment attitudes regarding divine intervention and history.

New Testament Church.² By 1987 the majority of those in the self-styled Evangelical Orthodox Church entered the Antiochian Orthodox Church.³ Renamed the *Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission*, they were encouraged by their new mother Church to maintain an evangelical and missionary attitude, and immediately began work on a study Bible whose annotations would reflect Orthodox theology.⁴ In 1993, *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms* was published by the St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy in cooperation with Thomas Nelson, using the New King James Version (NKJV). This was republished in 1997 by Conciliar Press with thirty-three pages of new material entitled “The Bible and the Orthodox Church” and “A Guide to the Spiritual life.”⁵

In 2008, a new version of *The Orthodox Study Bible*⁶ was published with an English translation of the LXX prepared by the St. Athanasius Academy; the New Testament continued to use the NKJV, although the annotations were revised. Some supplementary material had been revised, and (unfortunately) most of the cross-references in the New Testament had been omitted. The project director (Peter Gillquist), the managing editor (Alan Wallerstedt), and the general editors (Joseph Allen, Jack Norman Sparks, Michel Najim, and Theodore Stylianopoulos) remained the same for both editions, as did the majority of the members of the overview committee.

The OSB is intended to be understood by a high-school graduate, and the annotations focus on four major themes: the

² Timothy P. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 104–105.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴ Matthew Francis, “*The Orthodox Study Bible* and Orthodox Identity in North America,” in *Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* II, no. 2 (2007): 38.

⁵ *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993 [Special Helps, 1997]).

⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008). All subsequent references to *The Orthodox Study Bible* will refer to the 2008 edition, unless otherwise noted.

Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, and the Christian virtues. “To attain these goals, specific attention was given to the biblical interpretations of the Fathers of the ancient and undivided Church, and to the consensus of the Seven Ecumenical or Church-wide Councils of Christendom.”⁷ This is part of the OSB’s missionary purpose: the introduction to the OSB states clearly that its goal is not only to encourage Bible study among Orthodox Christians, but to help “non-Orthodox readers interested in learning more about the faith of the historic Orthodox Church;”⁸ in other words, to demonstrate to non-Orthodox that Orthodoxy is rooted in biblical teaching.⁹

Such opinions have been echoed in reviews by non-Orthodox authors, one of whom wrote that the OSB “does a marvelous job of presenting Orthodox perspectives on Scripture.”¹⁰ The OSB also engages a Western audience by criticizing various Western Christian (particularly evangelical) teachings, such as the evangelical approach to salvation as a strictly unmerited gift (leaving no room for asceticism), or the terminology of being “born again.” In fact, the OSB often uses Western Christian doctrinal disputes as a foil for Orthodox teaching.¹¹

Yet the OSB has also attracted serious criticism from both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike. Its missionary approach sometimes borders on the polemical, and one reviewer noted that the article “Introducing the Orthodox Church” used the

⁷ Ibid., XII.

⁸ Ibid., XII. Note the absence of a reference to Roman Catholics, though a certain number of the latter have also become Orthodox in the last several decades.

⁹ Weber, “Looking for Home,” 113; Francis, “Orthodox Identity,” 53.

¹⁰ James R. Payton Jr., review of *The Orthodox Study Bible : New Testament and Psalms*, ed. Peter Gilguist, et al., *Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (1996), 218; see also Peter Toon, “A Treasure from Scribes Old, not New,” review of *The Orthodox Study Bible : New Testament and Psalms*, ed. Peter Gilguist, et al., *Touchstone Magazine*, Summer 1994, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=07-03-031-b>.

¹¹ Weber, “Looking for Home,” 116. See also the study article on “Justification by Faith” in *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1529.

words “of course” at points where the argument has the weakest historical and theological support and lacked substantive evidence (e.g. the claim that the apostles were bishops and the claim that the filioque has led to a diminished role for the Holy Spirit in Western theology): “Pound the pulpit here, because the point is weak!”¹² The same article has been described “as a polemical screed laced with historical inaccuracies, not to say caricatures.”¹³

Some of the anti-Protestant apologetics are simply unsupported, such as claiming chrismation was “there from the start.” Thus Ephrem Lash, an archimandrite of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, concludes that “[t]his whole chapter has absolutely no place in a biblical study guide for the Orthodox; it is simply a piece of not very effective propaganda aimed at those outside the Church.”¹⁴ In his review of the first edition of the OSB, he comments that it feels “far too much like a piece of evangelical propaganda decked out in the trappings of Orthodoxy, like an eighteenth-century New England chapel or meeting house with a golden onion dome stuck over the pediment of the porch.”¹⁵

Lash continues in this critical vein, noting that most of the notes are dull “and many of them jejune in the extreme ... Critical questions are avoided by simply not being discussed at all. This is unsatisfactory, since many readers will be seeking help on just these questions.”¹⁶ These criticisms are for the most part repeated in his review of the 2008 edition.¹⁷

¹² Payton, review of *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 219.

¹³ Brian Butcher, “A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the *Orthodox Study Bible*: A Case Study in Prospective Reception,” in *Translation is Required*, ed. Robert J.W. Hiebert (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 218.

¹⁴ Archimandrite Ephrem, review of *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms*, in *Sourozh*, 54 (1993): 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁷ Archimandrite Ephrem, “Orthodox Reflections on The ‘Orthodox’ Study Bible,” in *Sobornost* 31 (2009): 87–96. In this review of the 2008 edition of the OSB, Archimandrite Ephrem focused on the translation and commentary on the LXX.

In some Orthodox eyes, then, the OSB is not the way to handle biblical, hermeneutical, and historical issues. Can we state positively what Orthodoxy *does* think of biblical methods and studies today? Indeed we can, and we begin with a widely respected Orthodox biblical scholar, Theodore Stylianopoulos, who expresses the conviction of many Orthodox theologians that the relationship between the Church and Scripture does not lead to contradictory interpretations, since the Church, as the source from which the Scripture (and Tradition) emerged, is able to form them into a coherent source of revelation.¹⁸ The mutual interdependence of Scripture, Tradition, and Church means the Bible does not exist apart from and above the Church, nor can the Church use and misuse the Bible as it sees fit even in the service of apologetics.

To isolate the Bible from its vital ecclesial setting, and to analyse it purely as a thing-in-itself as if its meaning were contained sealed within its covers as a self-enclosed and self-exhaustive phenomenon capable of being fully understood and appreciated directly by anyone in a strictly “worldly” context, would be to violate the book and to make its full significance incapable of being properly and correctly discovered.¹⁹

The Ecclesial and Patristic Interpretations in Orthodox Exegesis

Patristic interpretation is regarded by almost all Orthodox theologians as foundational to the ecclesial nature of Orthodox exegesis.²⁰ In his interview with *Again* magazine, Fr. Chad Hatfield’s only criticism of the OSB was that it did not rely

¹⁸ Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition in the Church,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary Cunningham, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 21.

¹⁹ Hopko, “The Bible in the Orthodox Church,” 67.

²⁰ Butcher, “A New English Translation,” 214; Archimandrite Ephrem, review of *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 44; Stylianopoulos, “Biblical Studies in Orthodox Theology: A Response,” 75; Karavidopoulos, “Interpretation,” 254; McGuckin, “Recent Biblical Hermeneutics,” 310–11.

enough on patristic exegesis. “Orthodox people need to understand that all Bible study begins with the teachings of the Holy Fathers.”²¹

Patristic interpretation of Scripture is not monolithic. The ante-Nicene Fathers tended towards a literal and mechanistic idea of revelation, while the post-Nicene Fathers detected a more dynamic relation between the human and divine elements in Scripture.²² The Antiochian school emphasized the spiritual meaning in the historical events, while the Alexandrian school favoured discerning the spiritual meaning through allegory.²³ Eventually Orthodox hermeneutics combined these different approaches, attempting to avoid the extremes of any of them.

In several ways, patristic interpretation set a precedent for modern biblical studies. The dynamic view of inspiration adopted by fourth-century fathers such as Athanasius, Chrysostom, and the Cappadocians means that every word need not be understood as a verbatim quote from God.²⁴ This allows the incarnation to serve as a metaphor for the relation of divine inspiration and human effort in the formation of the Bible. As Stylianopoulos explains, “[b]y analogy, though not to be pressed too far, the Bible is an incarnation of God’s saving will embodied in human categories of language and expressions which are not necessarily inerrant in every detail but only in the underlying saving message.”²⁵ Thus, the message of the Bible regarding God, salvation history, and the Christian life is affirmed without requiring absolute faith in details of historical and geographic data.

Orthodox theologians have also recognized that the Fathers also engaged in biblical criticism. The Fathers, such as Irenaeus, were deeply involved in the formation of the canon, criticizing gnostics and other heretics for ignoring the internal

²¹ “Three Perspectives on the New Orthodox Study Bible,” *Again* 30, no. 2, republished with permission at http://orthodoxstudybible.com/articles/three_perspectives/.

²² Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition,” 22.

²³ Guy Freeland, “Hermeneutics and the Orthodox Renaissance of Biblical Studies,” in *Phronema* 2 (1987): 80.

²⁴ Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition,” 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

structure and harmony of the books that became the New Testament.²⁶ The willingness of later Fathers to use the scientific and geographic knowledge of their day gleaned from secular sources showed that Christians can find a use for secular knowledge.²⁷

Yet some Orthodox scholars are suspicious of modern Biblical studies. In his emphasis on *theoria* (spiritual vision) John Breck dismisses modern historical methodology, but finds allegory, typology and chiasmus valuable. Rather than looking to modern biblical scholarship, according to Breck, the true meaning and saving significance of the Bible can be apprehended “only within the ‘closed hermeneutical circle’ of Scripture and tradition in the life of the Church.”²⁸

However, it seems that the majority of Orthodox theologians regret that loyalty to the patristic heritage sometimes stifles contemporary understanding of the Bible. It must be understood that “the exegete fathers did not exhaust the content of the Scriptures, which they saw and interpreted in a superb way from certain viewpoints only, which the needs of their time necessitated.”²⁹ While the Fathers set a standard for subsequent generations of Christian exegetes, particularly in their defense of Scripture and Tradition against heretical attacks, they did not have the same knowledge of philology, history, and critical analysis that is available today. Likewise, their preaching and writing was directed to the problems of their age.³⁰ This position is expressed well by Veselin Kesich, who remarks that “the Fathers did not exhaust the meaning of Scripture and yet they are our guides.”³¹

In what sense, therefore, should contemporary Orthodox interpretation show its faithfulness to the patristic legacy? Orthodox exegetes can continue to derive from the Fathers se-

²⁶ Kesich, “The Orthodox Church and Biblical Interpretation,” 344.

²⁷ Karavidopoulos, “Interpretation,” 255.

²⁸ Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition,” 31.

²⁹ Agourides “Biblical Studies,” 56.

³⁰ Kesich, “The Orthodox Church and Biblical Interpretation,” 345.

³¹ Veselin Kesich, “Biblical Studies in Orthodox Theology: A Response,” in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 17, no. 1 (1972): 63.

veral basic principles: that God speaks through Scripture to the Church in every time and place, that Scripture gives guidance on how to live the Christian life, that personal reading of Scripture is to be encouraged (the private reading of Scripture was a tradition inherited from Judaism, an experience of “concentrated prayerfulness”³²), and that the diversity of patristic opinions on any particular aspect of the Bible was broad enough that even if a consensus can be discerned, it cannot be seen as exhaustive of the meaning of any particular passage. Thus, it is possible to conclude that “[t]he work of the Orthodox biblical scholar is to combine the analytical method of contemporary science with the synthetic and organic ‘method’ of the Fathers.”³³

Biblical Criticism in Contemporary Orthodoxy

In modern times, there has been a small but significant renaissance of Orthodox interest in Scripture. While the faithful remain largely ignorant of biblical criticism, many Orthodox theologians have reacted to it negatively, accusing it of “dismantling the Scriptures, undermining the authority of their witness, and providing few commensurate benefits to either Church or society.”³⁴

At the same time, most Orthodox theologians admit the value of contemporary biblical studies, which have produced innumerable tools and methodologies, thereby adding tremendously to the knowledge of Scripture. Stylianopoulos defends modern scholarship, saying that

despite the radicals and revisionists in modern biblical studies, there are many more biblical scholars, committed believers, and people of the Church who take very seriously the authority of scripture and the classic Christian tradition, and strive mightily to speak a word

³² Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition,” 27.

³³ Agourides, “Biblical Studies,” 57.

³⁴ Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, “Perspectives in Orthodox Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47, no.1–4 (2002): 334.

from God to the Church and the world today. In the face of secularism and pluralism, scholars from diverse backgrounds who share such commitments have every reason and responsibility to work together and learn from each other in obedience and witness to Christ.³⁵

With this in mind, some theologians have called for a distinctly Orthodox biblical criticism, without the spirit of scepticism so typical of current biblical criticism, in order to show “that the proper function of criticism is not to destroy but to purify and illumine.”³⁶ Such an Orthodox biblical criticism would be faithful to “earnest, discerning, critical study through the use of reason as a gift of God, yet operative within the horizon of active faith adequate to the apprehension of the transcendent realities testified by the biblical texts.”³⁷ Other scholars, noting the neglect of the critical study of Byzantine lectionaries and manuscripts of the Scriptures, have called on Orthodox scholars to produce a new critical edition of the Byzantine text for the New Testament.³⁸ What these theologians suggest is that “[t]he Church should encourage biblical criticism and also fight any tendency to transform the image of Christ as it is given in the New Testament into something else.”³⁹ These theologians see biblical literalism, anti-intellectualism, and patristic fundamentalism as threats to authentic Orthodox interpretation of the Bible.⁴⁰ While liberal interpretations focus solely on the human aspect in Scripture, fundamentalist interpretations are equally flawed, giving attention only to the divine element in Scripture and turning revelation into a mechanistic process.⁴¹ Such an approach undermines the

³⁵ Stylianopoulos, “Scripture and Tradition,” 32–33.

³⁶ Kesich, “Response,” 66.

³⁷ Stylianopoulos, “Perspective,” 327.

³⁸ Karavidopoulos, “Textual Criticism,” 393.

³⁹ Kesich, “Response,” 68.

⁴⁰ Kesich, “Response,” 66; Freeland, 79.

⁴¹ Kesich, “The Orthodox Church and Biblical Interpretation,” 344.

Orthodox principle of the double-nature of Scripture as both divinely inspired and humanly transcribed.⁴²

On the other hand, Orthodox Tradition can be used to justify the use of biblical criticism:

What we call Tradition ... is nothing else but the life experience of the Holy Scriptures by the Church within its age-long history. Since Tradition is life, namely the act of receiving and handing down the treasure of faith, it is not in any way a static and emaciated affair but has the essential features of a living organism: movement, progress, assimilation of the environment, its transformation and, finally, elimination or rejection of particular elements which have lost their organic relation to the living body of Christ.⁴³

Orthodox biblical interpretation is traditional precisely because it “takes into serious consideration the historical, social, cultural and related circumstances of the times of the interpreter.”⁴⁴

Tradition thus becomes a source of stability for the interpreter, rather than a hindrance. One manifestation of such an approach is John McGuckin’s “hermeneutic of familial trust,” in which Orthodox scholars take seriously insights derived from a hermeneutic of suspicion, such as feminist or liberation theology, while resisting the ideology behind that hermeneutic in favour of communion with the Church.⁴⁵ This allows Orthodox interpreters “to make use of a large range of biblical readings, methods, and styles that have not been produced by those within the same communion, and perhaps not written with much regard for what one might call the ‘inspired’ character of the sacred text.”⁴⁶

Theodore Stylianopoulos goes even further, arguing that biblical studies should constitute a matter of such high priority

⁴² Stylianopoulos “Perspectives,” 329; Karavidopoulos, “Interpretation,” 250.

⁴³ Karavidopoulos, “Interpretation,” 250.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁵ McGuckin, “Recent Biblical Hermeneutics,” 310.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 313.

for Orthodox theology that it should not be bound to patristic interpretation. “[T]he study of the Bible within Orthodox theology [should] be more clearly seen as a field in its own right, with its own methodological, historical and theological issues and problems, apart from and relatively independent of the study of the Church Fathers.”⁴⁷ He makes strong arguments for the priority of the Scriptures themselves over the Fathers as an introduction to the Bible: if the patristic approach is one of prayer and humility in the presence of the word of God, are the Scriptures any less clear as a guide to prayerful and humble reading of the word of God? “Why should the works of the Fathers be considered the primary school of initiation for the Orthodox biblical scholar and not Holy Scripture itself, the main source of Revelation according to the Fathers?”⁴⁸ Indeed, if the example that the Fathers set is to be concerned primarily with Scripture, then what justifies the widespread Orthodox view of the Fathers as essential arbiters of the meaning of the Bible? Even if the Fathers “are guides to exegesis distant from heresy and teachers of the unity of Scripture and Tradition, i.e., of the integral relationship of Scripture to the faith and life of the Church,” is not Scripture the same?⁴⁹

Stylianopoulos concludes that patristic interpretation is binding on Orthodox biblical studies only “to the extent that binding dogmatic pronouncements on specific scriptural texts exist.”⁵⁰

This means not only that the Orthodox biblical scholar may engage himself fully with the whole range of textual, literary and historical criticism of both the Old and New Testaments against their historical backgrounds, but also that the field itself of biblical studies must finally be seen as a field in its own right, a field in which scholars of other Faiths have also long worked and worked well.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Stylianopoulos, “Response,” 70–71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

Doctrinal differences between Christians should not affect the examination of historical issues (although many live by the unfortunate maxim of not letting the facts get in the way of the truth).

In the final analysis, we should be able to study the Bible by being less “Protestant,” less “Roman Catholic,” and less “Orthodox,” and being simply *biblical*. If that is the case, and I think it mostly is or should be, then these qualifying adjectives, Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, can in the final analysis designate only the Church of the biblical student, not his task as a student of the Bible.⁵²

The OSB and Contemporary Orthodox Exegesis

The question must now be raised: how does the OSB compare to these endorsements of biblical criticism from contemporary Orthodox theologians? Surveying the whole of the OSB would be far beyond the scope of this paper. In order to limit this study to a reasonable length, I have chosen the first two chapters of the gospel of John for the purpose of analyzing the annotations in this section of the OSB.

Why John 1–2? The fourth gospel has a special status. John is the only evangelist given the title “theologian,” which in the Orthodox Tradition is shared with only two Church Fathers, St Gregory of Nazianzus and St Symeon the New Theologian.⁵³ Since many of the earliest manuscripts of the Byzantine lectionary have readings from John for the weekdays between Easter and Pentecost, but not weekday readings for the rest of the year, it is likely that John forms one of the oldest parts of the lectionary.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵³ Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion: the Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, Vol. 4, trans. Mother Maria Rule and Mother Joanna Burton (Ormylia, Greece: Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, 2003), 115–116.

⁵⁴ Harry Merwyn Buck, Jr., “The Johannine Lessons in the Greek Gospel Lectionary,” in *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament, Volume II, Number 4* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 1; Allen Wikgren, “Chicago Studies in the

The Orthodox Church continues to read John primarily during the Paschal season and at certain other feasts; the use of pericopes from John 1–2 at well-attended liturgies such as Pascha, Bright Monday, the first Sunday of Lent, the Order of Crowning, and the feasts of the Apostles Philip and Andrew all recommend these chapters for closer study, since Orthodox faithful are all the more likely to search the OSB for insights into passages they hear proclaimed during the liturgy.

The Introduction to the Gospel of John

The brief introduction to the gospel of John in the OSB, covering two pages, gives some sense of the interpretation that will follow in the annotations.⁵⁵ It deals with authorship, date, and major themes, together with an outline of the gospel. Authorship is attributed, “according to tradition,” to the Apostle John, the beloved disciple. This is consistent with the majority of patristic witnesses, though some modern scholars are sceptical.⁵⁶ The gospel is dated to about AD 96, consistent with the witness of Irenaeus and Jerome and later patristic consensus.⁵⁷ In these brief comments, the OSB follows a middle path, affirming Orthodox Tradition without dogmatizing it.

The themes identified in the introduction to John are more difficult to understand. The editors of the OSB have established the major theme to be faith that “the eternal Son of God has come in the flesh” and that belief in Him will lead to eternal life (20:31).⁵⁸ However, no preliminary explanation of how the gospel expresses this is offered.⁵⁹ The OSB introduc-

Greek Lectionary of the New Testament,” in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey*, ed. J. Neville Birdsall and Robert W. Thomas (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 108.

⁵⁵ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1418–19.

⁵⁶ *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Volume IVA, John 1–10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), xxvi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise stated, a chapter and verse reference will be to the gospel of John.

⁵⁹ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1418.

tion also treats other themes, such as the Trinity, “the spiritual dimension” (an ambiguous term, seemingly a reference to the mystical theology of John described in terms of the “world” and the kingdom of God), the sacraments, and the Church. There is no doubt that these themes are found in John’s gospel, but more detailed explanation is necessary if the reader is to understand their importance in the gospel. Unfortunately, no mention is made of the volatile relations of Jesus with the Jews, of the Jewish feasts and other rituals that Jesus constantly reinterprets in light of himself, of the status of the disciples (especially the Beloved Disciple), the unique aspects of Johannine pneumatology, or of the miraculous signs and lengthy (and difficult to understand) discourses.

The lack of explanation about the themes in the introduction does not do justice to their mystical presentation within the gospel. They seem to be chosen for the sake of later “proof-texting” of Orthodox doctrine and ecclesiology. For example, under the heading for the theme “The Church,” the reader finds that

The gospel of John testifies to a strong sense of community among the disciples, expressed through the plural “we” (1:14, 16). True disciples are those who believe in Jesus as the incarnate Son of the Father, who are united with Him, and who here and now express the life of divine love given by Christ.⁶⁰

This note seems to contradict itself: while the use of the plural “we” in 1:14 and 1:16 is read as a sign of respect for communal apostolic witness, the note goes on to speak about discipleship in purely individual terms; it is unreasonable to expect any reader to be satisfied that these two verses constitute an overarching theme of ecclesiology throughout the gospel.

How do these observations of the OSB compare with contemporary academic introductions to John? While the OSB approaches John with a single author in mind, most contem-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1418.

porary scholars draw attention to the community out of which the fourth gospel emerged. The apparent divisions between the Johannine community with both the synagogue and, more controversially, other first-century Christians, receive little attention in the OSB. Even Raymond Brown, who undermines the notion that the Johannine community was especially isolated from and hostile to other Christians – by pointing out that *every* early Christian Church would have appeared sectarian to outsiders, rejecting ‘the world’ and calling on its members to voluntary and total commitment⁶¹ – does not ignore that John’s community held to “a challengingly different and volatile Christianity.”⁶² The Johannine Church’s experience of Christianity was different enough that real tensions with other Christians are evident in the gospel, as for example in the unique role of the Beloved Disciple, who is regularly contrasted with Peter, the leader and spokesman of the twelve (13:23–26; 18:15–16; implicitly in 19:26–27; 20:2–10; 21:7; 21:20–23).

While no study Bible can give more than a cursory introduction to any book of Scripture, the OSB introduction suffers most by failing to take seriously the gospel as written to a *particular community*. It fails to mention any *background* to the gospel of John, whether of sources or of the community that produced the gospel.⁶³ While modern scholars can become preoccupied with such questions, ignoring the fact that the gospel speaks not only to its original community but to the Church throughout history, Orthodox need not accept theories of conflict between churches claiming different apostolic founders to appreciate that the various books of the New Testament were written for quite different contexts. In fact, knowledge of their specific contexts often makes their message clearer for the Church today. An introduction to the concerns of John’s initial audience, to the extent that they can be faithfully

⁶¹ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 14–15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³ Although the editors of *The Orthodox Study Bible* do point out that many scholars believe Luke used Mark as a source: *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1359.

discerned from John's gospel, would be invaluable in helping readers appreciate the main themes of his gospel. Failure to do so leaves the reader with the erroneous impression that the gospel was written as a kind of tract for distribution on the street corners of the Roman Empire, without regard (conscious or otherwise) for the reception and living out of the good news of Jesus Christ in a particular Church. In this context, the statement in the introduction that John was written to supplement the other three gospels is unclear. Do the editors mean it was originally intended as a supplement, or simply that Christians should read it as such?

The academic focus on the uniqueness of the fourth gospel, both regarding terms and events left unmentioned in John (such as "apostle" or the last supper) and Johannine differences with the synoptic gospels, seems to give more credit to the uniqueness of the fourth gospel and its theology.⁶⁴ Orthodox Christians need not accept the theory of a conflict between the Johannine Church and Christians who were loyal to "the twelve" in order to gain an appreciation from modern studies for the special place that themes such as discipleship, the world and the kingdom, the role of women and Samaritans, and John's "exalted" Christology have in the fourth gospel.⁶⁵ They can agree with Brown, who concludes that the Johannine Church never broke communion with other churches, and that the prayer "that they all may be one" (17:21) was read with these other Christians in mind.⁶⁶

The Prologue: John 1:1–18

Other than the mention that 1:1–18 forms a "prologue" that "reveals the new creation in Christ," the OSB offers no explanation of overarching themes, important words, or an identifiable structure for this passage. Without this, the annotations appear disconnected, like comments on a series of isolated propositions rather than on a coherent work of poetry or

⁶⁴ Brown, *Community*, 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

prose. Many modern scholars believe that the prologue is based on an early Christian hymn.⁶⁷ John Breck compares it to other New Testament hymns (Col 1:15–20, Heb 1:2–4; 1 Cor 13),⁶⁸ several of which speak of Christ’s relationship with the Father, his incarnation, his exaltation and glory, and his role in creation.⁶⁹ Contemporary commentators also connect the prologue to the rest of the gospel: Kysar draws out common themes, such as the rejection of Jesus and the superiority of Christian revelation over Judaism,⁷⁰ while Brown sees in 1:11–12 a condensed version of the Book of Signs (John 1–12) and the Book of Glory (John 13–21): in place of the Jewish people who had been his own (1:11), Jesus has now formed around himself a new people as “his own” (1:12).⁷¹ The OSB’s commentary would have benefited from a brief outline of the structure of the prologue and its relation to the gospel as a whole.

There is also a tendency in the notes to simply rephrase the scriptural texts: for example, the notes for 1:9–11 restate the verses, only expanding to suggest that the light of Christ is received through the gospel and Holy Communion. The note for 1:12 is even less helpful: “To believe in His name means *to believe and trust* in Him who in His humanity took the name Jesus.”⁷² Rather than restating the word under question, or offering a synonym, would it not have been more constructive to offer some explanation of the importance of names in the biblical world?

⁶⁷ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 43; Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel, Revised Edition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 29; Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (i–xii)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1966), 20–21.

⁶⁸ John Breck, *Spirit of Truth: The Origins of Johannine Pneumatology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), 79.

⁶⁹ Brown, *John*, 20–21.

⁷⁰ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 29.

⁷¹ Brown, *John*, 29.

⁷² *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1421, (my own emphasis).

Several passages are also passed over. For example, there is little mention of John the Baptist in the notes, which is unfortunate considering the clear contrast made between him and Jesus. It would have been helpful, for example, to note that while the Logos is described in divine terms (1:1), John is called a man (1:6); the Logos is with God (1:1), while John is *sent* by God (1:6); the Logos was “in the beginning” (1:1) but John “came” (1:7); John *bears witness* that all may believe *in the Light* (1:8).⁷³ Later, in 1:27 and 3:22ff., when Jesus may seem to be John’s disciple, the prologue makes it clear that he, the Word, is prior and of a different order entirely.⁷⁴

To be sure, the OSB notes have their strengths. Various meanings of the word λόγος (word, wisdom, reason, action) are related to the Son of God. The OSB’s distinction between the three “modes of existence,” expressed by the three uses of the word “was” in 1:1, is consistent with modern scholarship. The first refers to the Word’s existence: “There can be no speculation about how the Word came to be, for the Word simply was.”⁷⁵ The second states the relationship between the Word and God the Father, implicitly distinguishing them.⁷⁶ And the third statement, “the Word was God,” indicates that the Word has the same divinity as the Father. Connections are also drawn between the prologue and Genesis 1, between Christ’s glory and his crucifixion, between the phrase “dwelt among us” (1:14) and the tabernacle and temple; and different possible meanings of the aorist κατέλαβεν (1:5: comprehend, overcome) are applied: “darkness can never overpower the light of Christ, nor can it understand the way of love.”⁷⁷

Unfortunately, very little of this is expanded upon. For example, the rich connotations of the verb σκηνόω (to dwell, live) are only briefly dealt with. This word is reminiscent of Ex 25:8–9, where God dwells in a tabernacle made by the people. In essence, as Brown has written, “we are being told that the

⁷³ Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968), 87–88.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁵ Brown, *John*, 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁷ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1421.

flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth, and that Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle."⁷⁸ Seen in this light, the OSB might have benefited from relating this to Jesus' words in the Temple in 2:19–22 as a sign that he is the true place of meeting with God. Similarly, Moses and Isaiah's visions of God are mentioned in the note for 1:18; but are these visions of God's energies? Or are they examples of the inadequate vision of God under the law, compared to the Son who not only has seen the Father, but is ever with Him (1:18; cf. 5:37, 6:46)?⁷⁹ The reader is left to discern this for himself.

Another difficulty is the tendency of the notes to leap from the first century text to articulations of Trinitarian theology from subsequent periods. For example, where the prologue mentions the Word, the Light, or the Son, the commentary includes mention of the Spirit. The note for 1:3 ("All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.") reads: "Will, operation, and power are one in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." It is a stretch to say that this follows directly from the affirmation (scripturally sound) that the Son and the Spirit are co-creators. Similarly, the note for 1:4 concludes that God the Word is the source of life, together with the Father *and the Holy Spirit*. While this is clearly consistent with Orthodox theology, it may not be what the author of the prologue originally had in mind.

This enthusiasm for a Nicene understanding of the Trinity is also reflected in the negative reaction to other translations of 1:1: "Some twist and mistranslate this phrase 'the Word was a god' in order to propagate their heresy that the Son of God is a created being, a creature not fully divine. Such a translation is unsupportable, false, dishonest, and deceptive."⁸⁰ Yet several scholars note the absence of the definite article *ὁ* before *θεός*, which makes a distinction between the Logos and God the

⁷⁸ Brown, *John*, 33.

⁷⁹ According to Brown, "it is the failure of Moses to have seen God that the author wishes to contrast with the intimate contact between Son and Father." *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁰ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1419.

Father without implying that the Logos is not God.⁸¹ Archimandrite Ephrem writes that “[t]he note on John 1:1 fails to notice, though Origen discusses the point at some length, that there is a difference in Greek between *ho theos*, ‘[the] God’, that is the Father, and *theos*, ‘God’, without the article, that is ‘God’, but not the Father.”⁸² Thus, “by omitting the article [John 1:1] avoids any suggestion of personal identification of the Word with the Father. And for Gentile readers the line also avoids any suggestion that the Word was a second God in any Hellenistic sense.”⁸³ It is true that the absence of the article does not justify a translation such as “the Word was divine,” especially since, “for a modern Christian reader whose Trinitarian background has accustomed him to thinking of ‘God’ as a larger concept than ‘God the Father,’ the translation ‘The Word was God’ is quite correct, especially since 1.1 is probably an inclusion with 20:28.”⁸⁴ But the OSB’s strong stance on this point (most likely a response to the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ translation of the Bible)⁸⁵ does not seem to have the appropriate nuance.

The Testimony of John: 1:19–28

The next pericope in John, 1:18–28, describes the witness of John the Baptist. This passage has relatively brief annotations when compared to the prologue. Its events are identified as taking place on the first day in the seven day period ending with Jesus’ rest in Capernaum (2:12); these seven days correspond to the seven days of creation in Gen 1, and John’s witness to Christ the Light is seen as a parallel with the creation of light in Gen 1:3–5.⁸⁶ There are only two other notes; the first explains that John is not *the* prophet of Dt

⁸¹ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 32; Brown, *John*, 24.

⁸² Archimandrite Ephrem, review of *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 47.

⁸³ Brown, *John*, 24.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁵ *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1970), 1151.

⁸⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1422.

18:15–19, a prophecy interpreted as referring to Christ (this expectation is echoed in 1 Macc 4:41–50, 14:41, and in Qumran literature⁸⁷); and the second directs the reader to notes on Luke’s gospel explaining John’s baptism as a call to repentance which, like the law, could neither remit sins nor give the gift of the Holy Spirit, but which pointed to Christ who could.⁸⁸

However, it might have been helpful if the OSB had paid more attention to the unique role and witness of John the Baptist. His claim *not* to be Elijah is left unexplained, which could confuse a reader familiar with the seemingly contradictory passages in Mk 9:18 or Mt 11:14. The fact that John the Baptist may have been the Christ *or* Elijah *or* the Prophet also goes without explanation. Does this line of questioning reflect the variety of different eschatological expectations in Israel at the time, of which the Jewish authorities were well aware?⁸⁹ Or is it intended to point to Christ, who is the fulfillment of all these expectations? John’s quote from the LXX of Isaiah 40:3, which draws on the image of preparing a royal or religious procession, is also left unexplained.⁹⁰ No explanation of 1:26 (“one you do not recognize”) is given; it might have been helpful to make some connection of this passage with later questions of Jesus’ origins and identity (6:42; 7:27, 42; 9:29) and perhaps with the notion of the “hidden Messiah,” the “apocalyptic strain of messianic expectation where the Messiah’s presence on earth would be hidden until suddenly he would be shown to his people.”⁹¹ The location of the scene is also passed over. Again, the OSB might have profited from pointing out that Bethabara may mean “place of crossing over,” an allusion to Joshua leading Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land. “Just as Joshua led the people *across* the Jordan into the promised land, so Jesus will cross over into the promised land at the head of a new people. Pilgrim tradition identifies the

⁸⁷ Brown, *John*, 49.

⁸⁸ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1369.

⁸⁹ Brown, *John*, 46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

same site on the Jordan for both Joshua's crossing and Jesus' baptism."⁹²

On the other hand, a wealth of materials can be found in the modern commentaries. Much is made of the contrast between John the Baptist and Jesus, and John's main role in the fourth gospel as witness rather than Baptist highlights his subordinate relation to Jesus ("He must increase, but I must decrease." 3:30).⁹³ He functions as "the perfect prototype of the true evangelist, whose one goal is self-effacement before Christ."⁹⁴ Since only Jesus can say ἐγὼ εἰμὶ, (cf. 8:58), John emphatically denies that he is the Messiah, Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ Χριστός, (1:20).⁹⁵ Thus, John also immediately recognizes Jesus as "preferred before me;" in fact, John the Baptist is the *only* character in John 1 who understands who Jesus is by Johannine standards, since he does not use the traditional titles for the Messiah taken up by the disciples, but proclaims Jesus' pre-existence, recognizing him as the Lamb of God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶

The theme of purification is also significant in this passage, as it is through much of John's gospel. The OSB's notes at Luke 3:3 and 3:16, 17 (which the annotations in John mention) hint at this, but it would have been helpful for the editors to make the connection more explicit, especially since John is questioned about his baptism (a purification rite) by priests, Levites, and Pharisees, specialists in ritual purity. Brown makes the interesting connection, perhaps following Origen, that in Luke's gospel, John the Baptist is the son of a priest, involved in purification.⁹⁷ In this light, John's testimony is not a denial of water baptism, as it may at first appear, but an affirmation that genuine purity can come only through Jesus, through water and the Spirit (cf. 3:5).⁹⁸

⁹² Ibid., 44.

⁹³ Wink, *John the Baptist*, 89; Brown, *John*, 45.

⁹⁴ Wink, *John the Baptist*, 105.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁹⁶ Brown, *Community*, 29.

⁹⁷ Brown, *John*, 43; *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 58.

⁹⁸ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 38; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 90.

Excursus: The Jews and the Trial Motif

Another important aspect of 1:19–28 noted in modern commentaries is that it is the first instance of the trial motif that characterizes much of the gospel of John; the reader sees the first examples of the legal vocabulary (confession, judge, testimony, witness, condemn) that characterizes the fourth gospel, showing how the trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin at the end of the gospel expressed a reality that coloured Jesus' whole ministry.⁹⁹ Seen in this light, John the Baptist's witness is a prelude to the long "trial" of Jesus that begins in Chapter 2 and continues throughout.

1:19–28 also opens up the tension between "the Jews" and Jesus (initially represented by his "witness" John the Baptist).¹⁰⁰ The term "Jews" occurs seventy times in John (compared to five or six times each in the synoptics) and has various shades of meaning, sometimes being merely an ethnic or geographic distinction. However, much of the time the fourth gospel uses "the Jews" to refer to the religious authorities who are hostile to Jesus.¹⁰¹ It does not refer to the Jewish people at large but to those who have made their minds up that Jesus is not the Messiah and who are willing to cast out of the synagogues any who do believe in him (9:22, 34; 12:42; 16:2).¹⁰² They are "types of unbelief,"¹⁰³ criticized not for their hypocrisy or unethical behaviour (as in the synoptic gospels) but for their failure to recognize and believe in Jesus.¹⁰⁴ While John 1–2 does not reveal "the Jews" as the opponents they will become in subsequent chapters, there are hints of the open conflict that is to come,¹⁰⁵ when the Jews will persecute (5:16), misunderstand (8:22), attempt to stone, arrest and crucify (8:59), and refuse to believe in Jesus (10:31–39).

⁹⁹ Brown, *John*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 52.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *John*, LXXI; italics in the original.

¹⁰² Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 10.

¹⁰³ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 68.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *John*, LXXII.

¹⁰⁵ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 9.

Many scholars believe that the fourth gospel's harsh portrayal of "the Jews" arises in part from the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues.¹⁰⁶ In the wake of the destruction of the Temple, Jewish Christians became increasingly suspect, and by the 80's there were concerted efforts to drive Christian-Jews out of the synagogue, and the Eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh*), publicly recited in the synagogue, were revised to include a curse on heretics, primarily Jewish-Christians, thus forcing Christians (possibly with violence) out of the synagogue or into hiding.¹⁰⁷ Whether this conflict was locally isolated or more widespread is difficult to tell, but the anger and pain felt towards those who had driven Christians out of the synagogue is palpable in the fourth gospel.¹⁰⁸

While it would be very difficult for the OSB to express so many details about "the Jews" in a brief commentary, it is unfortunate that the only brief comment on "the Jews" is in the note for 2:18–21, since their introduction in 1:19 is the very beginning of their conflict with Jesus.¹⁰⁹ Considering that both 2:6 and 2:13–22 are loaded with pregnant symbolism regarding the fulfillment of Jewish worship in Jesus, a theme continued through the rest of the gospel, it may have been beneficial to introduce the conflict with the Jews at its initial appearance. Similarly, some commentary on the trial motif would have been helpful.

John 1:29–51: the Titles of Jesus

The first note in the OSB for 1:29–51 regards John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus is "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 36), and it relates this title to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:4–12 and to Christ as the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb, an image echoed in 1Pt 1:18–19. It is appropriate that the OSB recognizes that this title, like many in the New Testament, has several meanings; likely no single Old Testament parallel can

¹⁰⁶ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 68; Brown, *Community*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *John*, LXXIV–LXXV; Brown, *Community*, 42–43.

¹⁰⁸ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

fully explain it.¹¹⁰ However, it might have been advantageous for the OSB note to connect the lamb of Exodus 12 with the Passover references in John's account of the passion: Jesus' death on Passover at the moment when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the temple, and the connection between John 19:36 and Ex 12:46 (cf. Num 9:12).¹¹¹ It is possible to read the fourth gospel as a re-enactment of God's redemption of Israel out of captivity in Egypt, (John 1:23/Isaiah 40:3 is an announcement of a new exodus and redemption for Israel)¹¹² where Israel is replaced by humanity, Egypt is replaced by human sinfulness and darkness, and the Redeemer and the instrument of redemption are mutually "identified with the person of Jesus Christ slain and risen."¹¹³ Connecting the lamb of 1:29 with broader Exodus themes in John's gospel might have helped the editors of the OSB to draw their readers' attention to one of the wider themes of the gospel.

The connection the OSB makes between 1:29 and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is also widely accepted.¹¹⁴ This passage bears some similarity to the stories of Isaac and the sparing of Israel's firstborn in the Exodus, but emphasizes the lamb/servant himself as the voluntary agent of salvation.¹¹⁵ Again, clearer connections with the rest of the gospel, such as Jesus' eventual silence at his trial (John 19:9), might have enriched the commentary at this point.

While the OSB does not offer more Old Testament parallels of 1:29, other biblical scholars have noticed that the quali-

¹¹⁰ C.K. Barrett, "The Lamb of God," in *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954–1955): 210; Kysar, *John: The Maverick gospel*, 37.

¹¹¹ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 36; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Vol 1* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 452; Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (xiii–xxi)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 883.

¹¹² Keener, *gospel of John: A Commentary*, 454.

¹¹³ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Lamb."

¹¹⁴ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Lamb.,"; Barrett, "The Lamb of God," 217–218.; Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 36; Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 452.

¹¹⁵ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Lamb."

fication of Lamb of God as “he who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29) also suggests the sacrificial lamb of temple worship (Exodus 29, Numbers 28–29) or the Passover lamb sacrificially understood, as in 1 Cor 5:17.¹¹⁶ In some cases, early Judaism attached the nuances of a sacrifice to the Passover (for example, Josephus refers to the Passover as a sacrifice in the *Antiquities*).¹¹⁷ Another possible reference is to the lamb of Jewish apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch, Testament of Joseph, Testament of Benjamin) and of Revelation 5, who figures in the drama of the end times.¹¹⁸ The vision of a lamb, truly triumphant but truly slain, helps solve the question, so pressing in apocalyptic literature, of how Israel can trust God who has promised help through his prophets, but seems to have abandoned them.¹¹⁹ Had the OSB’s commentary briefly noted these two possible meanings for “the lamb of God,” a considerably richer image of Jesus as lamb would have been developed.

Perhaps the OSB’s main shortcoming in its notes for 1:19–51 is that it largely ignores the gradual progression of messianic titles that climax in “Son of Man,” the title Jesus uses for himself.¹²⁰ The theme of the disciples’ gradual growth in perception of Jesus’ true identity is expressed by the disciples’ attributing exalted titles to Jesus which he does not affirm, probably because they are filled with Jewish expectation of an ideal king who will bring economic justice, correct religious falsehood and bring to judgement the evil forces that rule the world.¹²¹ Yet these titles *do* make clear that Jesus is the Messiah; it is noteworthy that the three titles made by the new disciples in 1:35–51 (that Jesus is the Messiah, the one foretold by Moses and the law, and the Son of God and King of Israel) are roles explicitly denied by John the Baptist and attributed to

¹¹⁶ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 454 (footnote 244).

¹¹⁸ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 36; Barrett, “The Lamb of God,” 215 (footnote 2); CH Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1955), 236.

¹¹⁹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Lamb.”

¹²⁰ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 39.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Jesus by John's former disciples, suggesting a transition in messianic expectation.¹²² Philip's description of Jesus (1:45) indicates that the whole Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus;¹²³ here, the OSB might have made a connection with Luke 24:44, which also parallels the theme of gradual growth in faith.¹²⁴

Yet the disciples are still to see greater things; eventually, they will see that in Jesus, heaven and earth meet (1:50–51).¹²⁵ The OSB's final annotation for John 1, on the *Son of Man* in 1:51, evokes both Daniel's vision (Dan 7:13–14) and Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:12–15), on which the angels ascend and descend. The OSB concludes that "Jesus is this 'ladder' who unites earth to heaven, and therefore is this Son of Man."¹²⁶ Here again the OSB might have used the opportunity to identify the climax of another motif, one of *seeing* (variations on the word [βλέπω, θεάομαι, ὁράω, etc.] appear 12 times in 1:29–51), since the disciples' faith will be incomplete until they see the signs that show his glory.¹²⁷ The editors might have also mentioned that "Son of Man" is the only term that Jesus uses of himself,¹²⁸ and that many of the Johannine "Son of Man" references concern Jesus' future glory through his crucifixion (3:14, 6:62, 8:28, 12:23–24, 12:34, 13:31).¹²⁹ While he does not reject the other titles, Jesus describes himself to his disciples by the term "Son of Man," both a prototype of humanity and the restorer of mankind, destined to enter history.¹³⁰

John 2:1–11: The Wedding at Cana

In comparison to previous passages, the Wedding at Cana is the most thoroughly annotated passage in the OSB examined

¹²² Wink, *John the Baptist*, 92.

¹²³ Brown, *John*, 86.

¹²⁴ Brown, *John*, 82.

¹²⁵ Brown, *Community*, 26.

¹²⁶ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1424.

¹²⁷ Brown, *John*, 88.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 39.

so far; 2:1–11 has a very full and insightful commentary. The OSB notes that this miracle is the first of seven signs, “miraculous actions [which] point beyond themselves to the truth that the Kingdom of God has come among us in the Person of Jesus Christ.”¹³¹ Galilee, with its large Gentile population, is interpreted as a sign of the spread of the gospel throughout the world.¹³²

The annotations for 2:1–11 also spend considerable time on the theme of marriage, identifying it as an Old Testament image of the union of God with Israel (although no citations are given). Similarly, the third day is read as a sign of the resurrection, “showing that the marriage of God and His church will be fulfilled in Christ’s Resurrection.”¹³³ The annotations also draw a parallel with 20:1–18, where a woman named Mary makes an appeal, and the disciples bear witness to the event; 20:11–18 also has “a striking similarity to Song of Songs 3:1–5, again showing the unity between marriage and our Lord’s Resurrection.”¹³⁴ Thus John 2:1–11, read at Orthodox weddings, is seen as an endorsement of the holiness and honour of marriage, echoed in Hebrews 13:4. Indeed, one of the possible meanings of the observation, “they have no wine,” is that a marriage is incomplete without the presence of Christ.¹³⁵

The annotations for 2:3–5 interpret this passage as an example of the intercession of Mary.¹³⁶ The address of Jesus’ mother as *woman* (γύναι) is not seen as negative, but as indicating deep respect and distinction, considering its frequent use in John (4:21, 8:10; 19:26; 20:13; cf. Gen 2:23) (that the title *woman* indicates such respect and distinction for the Samaritan woman of 4:21 and the adulteress of 8:10 seems a stretch,

¹³¹ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1424.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1424.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1424.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1424.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1424.

¹³⁶ John 2:1–11 is also read on the second Monday after Easter; at one time, a feast of the Theotokos was celebrated on that day in the Church of Chalkoprateia in Constantinople. Petras, “The Gospel Lectionary,” 131.

unless the term indicates their original dignity, to which Christ is calling them back). Likewise, Jesus' answer to Mary's request is not a refusal but a statement that his time for revelation has not yet come. The whole passage is seen as an example of Mary's continued intercession with Christ, expressed in the words of the *theotokion* of the Sixth Hour: "The intercessions of a mother have great effect to win the favor of the Master."¹³⁷ Jesus' eventual acquiescence to her request confirms her intercessory power, teaching that perseverance in petitions is necessary (Mt 15:21–28), and that the intercession of the righteous has great power (Jas 5:16), a sentiment echoed by several modern commentators.¹³⁸

Jesus fulfills his mother's request, and the OSB's annotations suggest other lessons from this: Jesus is Lord of time rather than subject to it, and those gathered at the wedding needed to first be aware of the lack of wine in order for it to become clear that Christ fulfills all needs.¹³⁹ This lack of wine (wine is symbolic of life) indicates that the old covenant was incomplete, "unable to bestow life even on the most faithful people."¹⁴⁰ Thus, the six water pots used for purification purposes are inadequate, despite being made of stone (which cannot contract ritual impurity). The number six, one less than the perfect seven, is a sign of imperfection, illustrating that the law is imperfect, incomplete, and unable to give life. And the change of water into wine signifies the old covenant being fulfilled in the new, through overabundant grace signified by the large quantity of wine.¹⁴¹

The OSB's note for 2:9 connects this miracle of transformation to the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁴² However, the note might have been supported by mentioning that this interpretation is not far-fetched when one considers the theory that John takes for granted the institution of the sacraments, focusing

¹³⁷ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1424.

¹³⁸ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 67; Brown, *John*, 100, 103.

¹³⁹ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1424.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1424.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1425.

instead on their inner meaning.¹⁴³ “[T]here is a fundamental sacramentality about Johannine theology ... a sensory theology. The suggestion that faith grows out of immediate, everyday physical experiences is precisely what the sacraments in Christian thought are all about.”¹⁴⁴ The combined portrayal of the Cana miracle and the multiplication of loaves (John 6:1–15) in ancient art adds weight to this argument.¹⁴⁵ The fact that the “hour” is mentioned, and that this miracle, the multiplication of loaves, and the Last Supper all happen before Passover time suggests that the first two events may be an anticipation of the third.

The final note explains the reference in 2:11 to glory by directing the reader to the note for 1:14, which says that Christ’s glory refers to both his power and his service, ultimately revealed in his cross, showing that he is sent by the Father.¹⁴⁶ Of course, it will only truly be revealed at “the hour” (12:23, 17:24, 7:39), so this must be a partial manifestation, “or as being part of the capsulizing of the training of the disciples where the whole career, including their sight of the glory of the resurrected Jesus, is foreshadowed.”¹⁴⁷ Jesus’ mention of the hour indicates that he is faithful to the divine timing of his Father, but also responds to his mother’s faith.¹⁴⁸ In fact, Mary’s presence at the first mention of Jesus’ hour is not coincidental. Symbolic of the new Eve and the Church, reminiscent of “the woman” of Gen 3:15,

her role is in the struggle against the satanic serpent, and that struggle comes to its climax in Jesus’ hour. Then she will appear at the foot of the cross to be entrusted with offspring whom she must protect in the continuing struggle between Satan and the followers of the Messiah. Mary is the New Eve, the symbol of the Church; the Church has no role during the ministry of

¹⁴³ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 123; Brown, *John*, CXIV.

¹⁴⁴ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 126.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *John*, 110.

¹⁴⁶ *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, 1421.

¹⁴⁷ Brown, *John*, 101.

¹⁴⁸ Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 505.

Jesus but only after the hour of his resurrection and ascension.¹⁴⁹

One area where the notes for 2:1–11 in the OSB might be improved would be to pay greater attention to the *meaning* behind the signs. While these produce widespread belief in Jesus in 2:23, and are recorded so that one may believe in him (20:30–31), Jesus does not trust himself to those who believe because of signs (2:24), lamenting that the people will not believe unless they see signs (4:48), and criticizing those who seek him not because of signs but because of material satisfaction (6:26).¹⁵⁰ The signs are meant to point away from themselves, and unless one moves from the sign to the reality it represents, true faith in Jesus is still lacking.¹⁵¹

Jesus in the Temple: John 2:12–25

After the thorough annotations for John 2:1–11, in 2:12–25 the quality of the commentary in the OSB once again becomes somewhat sparse. Jesus' sojourn in Capernaum (2:12) is left without comment, and there are only three notes for the rest of John 2. At 2:13–27 the reader is directed to the note on Mt 21:12, 13, informed that the synoptic gospels place the episode of the cleansing of the Temple at the end of Jesus' life, and told that "[c]ertain Fathers teach Christ performed this act twice," albeit without any rationale being offered for why he would do so.¹⁵² The note from Matthew explains why the merchants and money changers were in the temple, but offers no explanation for why Jesus drove them out other than to suggest the cleansing of the temple as a reminder of the need to keep the Church, and each Christian, cleansed of "earthly matters."¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Brown, *John*, 109.

¹⁵⁰ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 81.

¹⁵¹ A.B. Caneday, "Sign," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1220.

¹⁵² *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 1425.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1309.

The note on 2:18–21 is significant, identifying “the Jews” as a special term in John, often referring “specifically to the leaders, in this case to the chief priests and elders.”¹⁵⁴ A reference to Mt 21:23 suggests that confrontations with “the Jews” were a theme in Jesus’ life; the annotations for both passages explain that Jesus answers their question about his authority to cleanse the temple (since he is not a Levitical priest) in an ambiguous way so as not to reveal himself to scoffers; in John, he answers their request for a sign by promising the destruction and rebuilding of “this temple,” showing that the ultimate sign of his authority will be his death and Resurrection.¹⁵⁵ The final note on 2:23 connects the three Passovers of John’s gospel to the tradition that Jesus’ public ministry was three years long.¹⁵⁶

While these notes provide some insights into Jesus’ actions in the temple, the OSB does not connect the episode in the temple with the wedding at Cana, missing an opportunity to direct the reader to the overarching themes of John. The two pericopes have in common that they begin to show Jesus’ disciples that the true meaning of Jewish religion is found in him. At Cana, Jesus disrupts a purity ritual “of the Jews,” replacing the water of purification with “the good wine,” and in Jerusalem, he disrupts a public festival “of the Jews,” revealing himself as the true temple, the place of meeting with God. The passages are also connected by the theme of Jesus’ “hour,” first mentioned at Cana; in the temple, Jesus first encounters those who will eventually bring him to his hour. Other connections between the two pericopes are the “third day” and Jesus “showing” a sign (2:18–19) that “manifests” his glory (2:11).¹⁵⁷ Thus, in a certain sense, John has begun the Passion narrative in the second chapter of his gospel: this would provide an explanation of John’s motivations, if indeed he placed the cleansing of the temple and Jesus’ prophesy of its destruction (a singular event) earlier in his gospel, as some scholars suggest.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1425.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 1310, 1425.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 1425.

¹⁵⁷ Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 519.

¹⁵⁸ Brown, *John*, 118.

The annotations of the OSB may have also benefited from some insight into Jesus' motivations for cleansing the temple. While many assume that Jesus was reacting to corruption and extortion in the temple economy, some scholars are sceptical, since there is little evidence in other first century literature, often critical of the temple elites, that the temple economy was particularly unscrupulous.¹⁵⁹ Another possibility is that the court of the Gentiles, intended as a place of prayer (cf. Mark 11:17), had been debased.¹⁶⁰ Whatever its catalyst, the incident in the temple begins Jesus' challenge to the Jerusalem aristocracy, which in turn begins his journey to the cross.¹⁶¹ This is evident in the quote of Ps. 119:9; changed from a past to a future tense, it becomes a prophecy that Jesus' actions will lead to his destruction.¹⁶² Jesus' own words, which show more concern for the temple's destruction than its purification, foreshadow his coming death and resurrection at the hands of those who regulate the purity of Israel.¹⁶³ Jesus, the new temple and the source of true forgiveness, had to be put to death; his actions in the temple, where atonement and true worship exist only as shadow and type, prophetically anticipate this.¹⁶⁴ The disciples' subsequent remembrance of Jesus' words guides the reader to a deeper meaning and faith, more reliable than the superficial faith of 2:23–25.¹⁶⁵ Had the OSB commented on this transitional passage, it would have made clear the connection of inadequate faith based on signs with the request of the Jews for a sign (2:18), and Jesus' knowledge of "what was in man" (2:25) with the upcoming conversation of Jesus with the "man" Nicodemus (3:1).

¹⁵⁹ Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 522–523.

¹⁶⁰ Kevin Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), 24.

¹⁶¹ Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 524.

¹⁶² Francis J Moloney, "The Gospel of John: The 'End' of Scripture," in *Interpretation* 63/4 (2009): 363; Keener, *Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 525; Brown, *John*, 124.

¹⁶³ Brown, *John*, 120.

¹⁶⁴ Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John*, 24.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the introduction and annotations of the *Orthodox Study Bible* for John 1–2 in an attempt to understand how the OSB explains the meaning of Scripture. It began with an overview of the background of the OSB, arising out of evangelical Protestant attitudes towards the Bible and missionary work transplanted into the Orthodox context in which the Church is the privileged interpreter of Scripture. The tension and complementarity between patristic and modern exegesis was then examined. Finally, the OSB's introduction to John and the annotations of the first two chapters of this gospel were studied in detail, in an attempt to understand the overall approach to Scripture in the OSB.

It may be argued that this paper has asked too much of the OSB; that no single study Bible could possibly attain such breadth and cover so much material without becoming cumbersome and unwieldy, a liability rather than an asset in the pious layman's search for understanding. A cursory glance at other study Bibles will reveal that such is the case: no study Bible this author has encountered has dealt with half of the material presented in this paper. Each study Bible has its disadvantages: some seem overly preoccupied with sources behind the text, or too concerned with the gospel as a window into the life of the community that produced it, rather than as the word of God speaking to Christians yesterday and today; others spend too much effort justifying John's authorship and early dating, giving the reader the impression that authorship and date are the fundamental factors in the gospel's value as Scripture. Some Catholic and Protestant Bibles display a clear confessional orientation, while others do not. All overlook certain aspects one might consider essential, and all are forced to include some information and leave other information out.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ See, for example: *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY: 1993); *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995); *Ignatius Catholic*

Certainly, the editors of the OSB deserve to be commended for their efforts. While some may argue that a study Bible is foreign to the scriptural ethos of Orthodoxy, mediated as it is by the liturgy, iconography, hymnography, and (sometimes infrequent) preaching, this would be to idealize a “post-Patristic” scriptural ethos, one which ignores the repeated encouragement that the Church Fathers gave to personal reading of Scripture.¹⁶⁷ By publishing a Bible marketed to an Orthodox audience, St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy and Thomas Nelson have almost certainly increased the frequency of Scripture reading among Orthodox Christians in America.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, the annotations of the OSB are often useful, especially for easily identifiable narratives such as the wedding at Cana (2:1–11). Individual verses are also commented on and the insights offered are often helpful in understanding the context of a particular verse, word, or theme in the broader context of the Old and New Testament Canons. References to patristic interpretations, when they occur, are equally welcome, as these are not easily accessible to the faithful.

While the OSB has increased the reading of Scripture among many Anglophone Orthodox, its outreach to Protestant readers is undoubtedly a legacy of the influx of so many evangelicals into the Orthodox churches in North America, eager to bring more Protestants into the Orthodox Church with them. Thus, Francis’ comment that the OSB may “demonstrate the capability of the [Orthodox] faith to graft into its midst people and concepts from the Evangelical Protestant community”¹⁶⁹ appears to be accurate, most clearly in that the OSB has inherited the Protestant use of Scripture as a polemical tool. Such an attitude is not limited to the publishers of the OSB: in his interview with *Again* magazine, Fr. Hatfield praised the annotations of the OSB: “[i]t was the footnotes of the first OSB that

Study Bible: New Testament, Introduction, Commentary and Notes, Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010).

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, the list of patristic quotations from the 1997 edition of *The Orthodoxy Study Bible*, in “Section I: The Bible and the Orthodox Church,” i–iii.

¹⁶⁸ Francis, “Orthodox Identity,” 39.

¹⁶⁹ Francis, “Orthodox Identity,” 55.

attracted many non-Orthodox readers to explore Orthodoxy further ... the Bible has the potential to be a great tool for evangelism.”¹⁷⁰ Yet many Orthodox would object to this statement, considering it questionable that the Bible should be used as a tool for evangelism, let alone as a “tool” at all. Rather than existing for apologetic reasons, the Bible exists to bear witness to Jesus as the Christ; he who is the eternally begotten Word of the Father. While the OSB is a “valuable way-marker in the maturation of Orthodox identity in North America,” and “demonstrates the capability of the faith to graft into its midst people and concepts from the Evangelical Protestant community,”¹⁷¹ it is unfortunate that it sometimes seems to be preaching Orthodoxy rather than Christ. While the two should be linked, unfortunately it is possible to comment on Scripture in such a way that the commentary displaces one with the other. Such an approach fails to do real credit to the unique way in which any of the books of Scripture bear witness to the crucified and risen Lord, a Lord who not only transcends the confines of a Church but also calls all Christians to unity.

Thus, paradoxically, the confessional approach of the OSB may not increase the level of genuine biblical literacy among its readers, at least not as much as desired. The very reason that many Orthodox are attracted to the OSB, its apparent “orthodoxy,” arises in part from a suspicion of non-Orthodox sources of theology, a suspicion that seems to extend to non-Orthodox commentary on Scripture.¹⁷² Thus the OSB shows reluctance to put Kesich’s observation that the “modern method of interpretation corresponds to our historical interest, to our urge to interpret spiritual matters in historical terms,” into action.¹⁷³ Instead, it frequently approaches Scripture as a

¹⁷⁰ “Three Perspectives on the New Orthodox Study Bible,” *Again* 30, no. 2, republished with permission at http://orthodoxstudybible.com/articles/three_perspectives/.

¹⁷¹ Francis, “Orthodox Identity,” 54–55.

¹⁷² See, for example, the consistent identification of non-Orthodox commentators in *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, ed. Johanna Manley (Crestwood, NY: Monastery Books & St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 219, 614.

¹⁷³ Kesich, “The Orthodox Church and Biblical Interpretation,” 345.

source of proofs for Trinitarian and Christological teaching defined by the Orthodox Church in subsequent centuries. It also displays a deference to the Fathers that is at times unhelpful to the contemporary reader who may be concerned about new questions and issues. Hatfield argued that the interpretation of the OSB is Orthodox *because* it is patristic: it is only a small step from this to arguing that an interpretation is *not* Orthodox because it is *not* patristic.

To what extent does the OSB adopt the affirmations (albeit qualified) of contemporary Orthodox theologians regarding modern biblical scholarship? If God really does speak through Scripture to the Church in *every time and place*, and if the diversity of patristic opinions on the Scriptures allows for continued searching into their meaning, does the OSB reflect this? The OSB makes no claim to read the Scriptures as a discipline largely independent of patristics, as Stylianopoulos suggests, nor does it show evidence of using the “large range of biblical readings, methods, and styles” developed by non-Orthodox exegetes, as McGuckin allows, using these tools and findings in submission to the Church’s authority and with a desire to edify the faithful. In fact, the OSB indicates little if any knowledge of modern exegesis, nor does it recommend any additional resources for Scripture study, whether other (non-Orthodox) study Bibles, reliable bible dictionaries or trustworthy authors. God willing, Orthodox exegetes will begin a process of discovery of the hidden treasures of modern biblical criticism so that they may be like “every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven [who] is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt 13:52).