SYNTACTICAL AND TEXT-CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON JOHN 20:30–31: ONE MORE ROUND ON THE PURPOSE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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Debates over the purpose and audience of the Fourth Gospel turn on a plethora of interlocking texts and interpretive stances. One small but vital part is the interpretation of John 20:30–31. More than fifteen years ago, I published an essay under the title "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:30–31 Reconsidered."[1] Some time later that piece was criticized by Gordon Fee, and his response has been adopted in some circles as the last word on the syntactical and text-critical issues that are involved. Other interests have intruded on my attention, but it is high time I responded. I am grateful for Dr. Fee's arguments, some of which convince me, and some of which I find rather unsatisfactory.

Inevitably many will not recall the nature of the disagreement, so for the sake of clarity it seems best to summarize both my argument and Fee's response, along with a few asides from others, before I advance a few fresh considerations.

I. The Original Essay

Although the original essay lightly surveyed some of the broader arguments for the view that the Fourth Gospel was originally written for the purpose of evangelizing Jews and other biblically literate people such as proselytes and God-fearers, the heart of the argument lay in two points, one quite minor, the other major. The minor argument was that regardless of one's text-critical

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[1] D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:30–31 Reconsidered," *JBL* 106 (1987): 639–51.

decision regarding πιστεύ[σ]ητε (aorist subjunctive or present subjunctive) in John 20:31, very little could legitimately be made of the decision so far as determining the purpose of the book is concerned, since elsewhere in the book both the aorist and the present are used to refer to both the initial coming-to-faith and the exercise of believing on the long haul. In other words, this minor argument was merely an exercise in setting aside as largely irrelevant a frequently argued tense distinction (here complicated by textual variations) that could not be supported by John's usage elsewhere.

But the major purpose of the essay was to call attention to some linguistic work by Lane C. McGaughy and then work out some of its implications for John 20:30–31. In his monograph, McGaughy sets out to determine what is the subject and what is the complement in every instance where the verb εἰμί occurs in the NT.[2] His summary is as follows, articulated in three points and four subpoints (and largely using his own words):

1. The subject is that word or cluster that agrees in person and number with the personal ending of the verb. That, of course, is true for all verbs (except where there is a breach of concord), not just for εἰμί.
2. The word or word cluster with head terms in the nominative case is the subject. Once again, of course, this is true for all verbs, except where the verb takes on the form of an infinitive, in which instance the "quasi subject" is in the accusative. Moreover, this rule, though true, is not particularly helpful in distinguishing subject and completion when the verb is a copulative.
3. The subject is determined by its antecedent—which may be linguistic, situational, or merely the topic on which comment is being made. In particular:
    a. Demonstrative and relative pronouns are subjects (this follows, of course, from what has just been said).
    b. The subject is indicated by zero anaphora—that is, the subject need not be separately expressed, but the context nevertheless tells us that ψεύστης ἐστίν means "he is a liar" and not "a liar exists."
    c. The word or word cluster determined by an article is the subject.
    d. If both words or word clusters are determined by the article, the first one is the subject.

The important rule for my original paper, as for this one, is (3c). After examining every instance of ἐστίν in the NT, McGaughy says that all of them fit under these rules, except for five exceptions to (3c): John 20:31; 1 John 2:22b;

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[2] Lane C. McGaughy, *Toward a Descriptive Analysis of EINAI as a Linking Verb in New Testament Greek* (SBLDS 6; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972).

4:15; 5:1; 5:5c. Each of these five passages makes a christological assertion, and in each instance McGaughy thinks that the anarthrous "Jesus" is the subject. In the passage that is the focus of this paper, then, McGaughy renders the relevant clause, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

In an important review of McGaughy's book, however, Eugene Van Ness Goetchius doubts that there are adequate syntactical or contextual reasons for thinking that there are any exceptions. Compare, for instance, the christological assertions in Acts 5:42; 18:5, 28. Begin with Acts 18:5: . . . διαμαρτυρόμενος τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν. This falls within the parameters of McGaughy's study, and consistently McGaughy holds that Paul bore witness that "the Christ is Jesus" not that "Jesus is the Christ." Acts 5:28 is similar, though admittedly with text-critical variations. Strictly speaking, Acts 5:42 falls outside the parameters of McGaughy's work, since the copulative verb is omitted: . . . διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν. Once again, however, we are faced with the need to determine which noun is the subject, and, in line with a rising number of commentators, Goetchius opts for "that the Christ is Jesus." In each of these contexts, the "given" for the hearers is "the Christ." The Christian witness is that "the Christ is Jesus." Moreover, this rendering is supported not only by fair consideration of the context of Acts but by recent work on Greek syntax.[3]

That brings us to the five finite verbs, all in the Johannine corpus. Four of these are found in 1 John. Some kind of christological aberration stands behind the text,[4] an aberration that divided "Christ" or "Son of God" from "Jesus." Hence the four confessional statements in these verses. There is no particular contextual reason for thinking that "Jesus" must be the subject. In each pair of instances, it makes at least as much sense to understand the "true" confession to be "that the Christ is Jesus" (2:22b; 5:1) or "that the Son of God is Jesus" (4:15; 5:5c). Indeed, if "Christ" and "Son of God" constituted the locus of debate, it might make even more sense to understand them to be the head terms in the confessional utterances.

That leaves only John 20:31. Here, too, I argued that Goetchius is right: McGaughy's rule is stronger than McGaughy himself thinks it is, and so the relevant clause should be rendered, "that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus."

In the rest of my article, I tried to work out some of the implications of this understanding of the syntax. I offered twelve points that began with the argu-

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[3] See Henry R. Moeller and Arnold Kramer, "An Overlooked Structural Pattern in New Testament Greek," *NovT* 5 (1961–62): 25–35; and especially the more linguistically compelling work of Jeffrey T. Reed, "The Infinitive with Two Substantival Accusatives," *NovT* 33 (1991): 1–27.

[4] Despite arguments to the contrary, I am still inclined to think that some kind of proto-Gnostic movement is in play. I will defend that view in my forthcoming NIGTC commentary. But none of my argument in this paper turns on this conclusion.

ment that this reading presupposes that the answer is being cast to answer the question, Who is the Messiah? Who is the Son of God? rather than Who is Jesus? It seems to me that my twelve points are still cogent—but they turn entirely on the assumption that McGaughy, improved by Goetchius, is correct and therefore that the translation "that the Messiah, the Son of God, is Jesus" is the only acceptable rendering. If that rendering is incorrect, then my twelve observations are simply irrelevant, mere answers blowing in the wind because unattached to any textual data.

Interestingly enough, my ninth point introduced, and dismissed, one of the points that Fee would eventually raise. I wrote:

> In private conversation, some have questioned whether it is right to rest so much weight on the article with a name, especially the name Ἰησοῦς when names in general and this name in particular exhibit notorious complexities in the patterns of their articular and anarthrous occurrence. But the crucial syntactical unit is not the name, with or without the article, but all nominative nouns syntactically linked to ἐστίν. The frequency of the construction and the consistent validity of McGaughy's "rule"—especially so once his own "exceptions" have been judged unnecessary and unlikely—suggest that the syntactical argument cannot be so easily sidestepped.[5]

But sidestepping it, of course, is precisely what Fee has managed to do. So we must turn to a summary of his argument.

II. The Response of Gordon D. Fee

Fee's essay was first published in the Festschrift for Frans Neirynck.[6] Fee tells us that his purpose is twofold: "(1) to suggest that the textual question of 20,31 can be resolved with a much greater degree of certainty than is often allowed; and (2) to propose grounds for believing that the original text (πιστεύητε present subjunctive) is meaningful grammatically for John" (p. 2193). A final lengthy footnote provides his reason for dismissing the evidence from McGaughy.

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[5] Carson, "Purpose," 648–49.

[6] Gordon D. Fee, "On the Text and Meaning of John 20,30–31," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: University Press, 1992), 2193–2205. It reappears in the third collection of Fee's essays, *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). In this section, page references to Fee's article are given in parentheses in the text, according to the page numbers of the original publication.

The Text-Critical Issue

On the textual question, Fee summarizes the evidence for 20:31 as follows:

πιστεύητε   𝔓⁶⁶ᵛⁱᵈ ℵ B Θ 0250 892

πιστεύσητε   A C D K L rell

Related to this is the reading in 19:35:

πιστεύητε   𝔓⁶⁶ᵛⁱᵈℵ B Ψ Origen

πιστεύσητε   rell

Fee points out that Bruce Metzger's *Textual Commentary* asserts that both readings in 20:31 "have notable early support,"[7] but the extended comment that follows has little to do with textual criticism per se. It discusses neither intrinsic nor transcriptional probabilities, but shows instead the meaning each reading would have for the Fourth Gospel. By contrast, Fee points out that the *videtur* 𝔓⁶⁶ is required because the word is partly lacunose, but there is no doubt that the manuscript supports the present subjunctive. That puts the reading clearly in the second century—as does the support of Origen with respect to the similar reading at 19:35. Thus only the present subjunctive actually enjoys "notable early support"; the earliest support for the aorist subjunctive is found in witnesses from the fifth century, admittedly from several textual traditions.

Further, in his careful discussion of the likely options that explain the two readings, present and subjunctive, Fee makes a good case that the present subjunctive is the *lectio difficilior*. I need not review his findings. I think he is right, and the present subjunctive in 20:31 should be taken, by a wide margin, as the most likely reading.

The Significance of the Present Subjunctive

The second part of Fee's paper seeks to answer the question, "Is the Present Subjunctive 'meaningful'?" (pp. 2199–2205). Fee casts his discussion in terms of whether John uses *Aktionsart* "in a meaningful way" (p. 2199). Before considering the passages with πιστεύω, he prepares the ground by arguing more generally, along the following lines: (a) The occurrence of the aorist subjunctive is not normally very significant. After all, the aorist is the default tense ("what an author would be expected to use if he had no specific 'kind of action' in mind" [ibid.]). Moreover, many of the occurrences are in fixed phrases (e.g.,

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[7] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 256.

twenty-three are passives, eight of them ἵνα πληρωθῇ). Others, Fee asserts, are "undoubtedly constative" (ibid.), as 1:8, where John the Baptist is said to bear witness to Jesus—certainly without any particular moment in mind. The evangelist could have used the present to indicate that the witness was borne over time, but there was no pressing need to do so. And some verbs appear in the aorist "simply because the sense of the verb is aoristic" (ibid.): Fee lists λαμβάνω in 6:7, βάλλω in 5:7, δίδωμι in 1:22; 13:29; 17:2, and the verbs "to eat," "to die," "and to raise up." So even if the aorist were used in 20:31, we should be hesitant about insisting that this would be "meaningful" in some way. "If the aorist were original, it could be ingressive, of course, but it could also refer to the simple act of believing, without making a point of when" (ibid.). (b) But this is not the case with the present subjunctive. True, some verbs carry a "durative sense" (ibid.) and so can be expected to occur in the present tense (e.g., ἔχειν, or verbs for "to love" and "to bear fruit"). But the present tense is not the default tense, and one should expect John's choice of it to be meaningful. (c) Strong evidence supporting the thesis that John knew the significance of tense is found in constructions where he uses both the aorist and the present, carefully distinguishing between them (e.g., ἵνα γνῶτε καὶ γινώσκητε [10:38]; ἄρατε . . . μὴ ποιεῖτε [5:8]). To show that "John knew the signficance of tense" does not, admittedly, demonstrate "that he therefore always used the present tense with this kind of significance" (p. 2200). So (d) Fee goes on to assert that "John shows a general sensitivity to *Aktionsart* (ibid.) when he chooses the present subjunctive in ἵνα clauses. Fee lists a number of examples, both in the Gospel at large and in the Last Supper discourse in particular. (e) That brings Fee to consider two sets of interchanges, which I here set forth as Fee does:

First set:

4:34	ἐμὸν βρῶμά ἐστιν ἵνα ποιήσω τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με καὶ τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον

        ποιησω   𝔓[66] 𝔓[75] B C D K L N W Θ Ψ 083 l 33 al

        ποιῶ   ℵ A f[13] Byz

6:38	ὅτι καταβέβηκα ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐχ ἵνα ποιῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με

        ποιῶ   𝔓[66] 𝔓[75] B rell

        ποιήσω ℵ D L 1010 pc (p. 2201)

Fee says that in 6:38 the present ποιῶ makes perfectly good sense, for "while it is true that a (constative) aorist could have given the same meaning" (ibid.), the present tense "suggests that the sentence has to do with Jesus' earthly ministry

as a whole" (ibid.): Jesus' words and works "constitute a continual 'doing' of the Father's will" (ibid.). This way of looking at things, Fee thinks, helps to explain the Byzantine reading (the present) at 4:34. Yet in its own context, the aorist in 4:34 (which Fee thinks is most likely original) makes good sense and is "meaningful" in its own context: the presence of the parallel τελειώσω suggests that the focus "looks forward to one specific moment, hinted at often in the Gospel, when Jesus 'finishes' the will of the One who sent him—namely, on the cross" (ibid). Fee admits that this reading of the pair of texts cannot be judged to be certain (after all, the aorist in 4:34 could be constative), but he thinks that it makes the most sense and respects both the tenses and their respective contexts.

Second set:

13:19   ἀπ᾽ ἄρτι λέγω ὑμῖν πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι, ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅταν γένηται ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι

        πιστεύσητε   𝔓⁶⁶ rell

        πιστεύητε   B C [𝔓⁷⁵ lac]

14:29   καὶ νῦν εἴρηκα ὑμῖν πρὶν γενέσθαι, ἵνα ὅταν γένηται πιστεύσητε

        (no variation)

As UBS has it, the aorist πιστεύσητε is deployed in both verses, and in that case, Fee asserts, "there is little to be said" (p. 2202), since the aorist is what one might expect after ὅταν γένηται. But Fee argues that the UBS reading is "almost certainly wrong" (ibid.). And if the present subjunctive is in fact the correct reading in 13:19, it is entirely appropriate, Fee asserts, because of the object clause, ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι. "It is not the moment of believing 'when it happens' (which alone accounts for the textual variation) that here concerns John, but that the disciples will thereafter continue to believe that 'I am,' after what Jesus has said beforehand is fulfilled" (ibid.). By contrast, in 14:29, where the focus is on believing without specifying that crucial object clause, the aorist subjunctive seems most appropriate. Fee concludes: "It is not that [John] is trying to 'make a statement' by the use of the present in these texts, but that he shows considerable sensitivity to the subtleties of *Aktionsart* inherent in the language itself" (ibid.).

The texts he has considered so far convince Fee that John displays "nuanced usage" whenever he deploys the present tense with ἵνα, so at this juncture Fee tests his results by surveying all of the ἵνα-clauses with πιστεύω. There are eleven of them (1:7; 6:29, 30; 9:36; 11:15, 42; 13:19; 14:29; 17:21;

19:35; 20:31). Of these, six are aorist subjunctive, and "all refer to general or specific instances of 'belief' within the 'historical' situation of the narrative" (p. 2203). The remaining five display textual variation, but the present tense "is almost certainly original in each case" (ibid.). In each instance, Fee argues that the choice of the present tense is significant. (a) In 6:29–30, Jesus' opponents ask him, "What should we be doing (ποιῶμεν) so that we might be performing (ἐργαζώμεθα) the works of God?" The implication is "not that they are asking about what single thing they might do to please God, but what kind of 'works' over the long run should they be doing so as to be living in keeping with God's will" (ibid.). Jesus' answer, "This is the work of God that you believe (πιστεύ-ητε) . . . " is therefore not a demand for initial faith in Christ, but a lifelong belief in Jesus. (b) John 13:19 has already been considered. (c) In John 17:21, Jesus prays for those who believe in him because of the word of his disciples. He prays that they may be one, a unity patterned on the unity of the Father and the Son, "so that the world may believe (πιστεύῃ) that you sent me." "On the surface," Fee observes, "this passage seems a bit more difficult for the position being argued here" (p. 2204). Nevertheless, he insists, once one takes into account "all of John's linguistic subtleties and grammatical senstivities [*sic*]" (ibid.), the choice of the present tense fits into the same pattern. In the prayer of John 17, Fee asserts, there are three distinct groups: the disciples, their disciples, and the world. "The world is no longer the arena of salvation (as in 3,16–17), but refers to those who do not—and never will—believe in him (in the sense of having faith in Christ" (ibid.). Here Fee provides a footnote: "Although not so earlier, κόσμος is used exclusively in a hostile sense in the *Abschiedsreden* (chaps. 14–17). This has been set up by the clear line of demarcation in the double conclusion to the Book of Signs in 12,37–50" (p. 2204 n. 28). So Fee argues that neither here in 17:21 nor in 17:23 (ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι . . .) is the conversion of the world in view. "The world will continue to be the world, but on the strength of Christian unity, it will have to take seriously that the Father sent Jesus into the world" (p. 2204). This is what the world will come to believe, over time—and hence the tense is entirely appropriate. If we may then take (d) and (e) together: in 19:35 and 20:31, assuming that a present tense is original, and assuming that Johannine usage is consistent with what has already been established, it is best to think of ongoing, continuing faith in both of these passages.

Fee is cautious about inferring too much from his argument. It is possible to suppose that John "has written his gospel for the believing community in order that, in light of defections or external pressures, they 'may continue to believe'—as though the Gospel were intended to keep people from drifting away from faith in Christ" (ibid.). Fee thinks that that case could be made on other grounds, but this much weight cannot be placed on the tense alone. Rather, he is arguing that the present subjunctive in 20:31 "presupposes a doc-

ument intended for those who are already members of the believing community" (p. 2205). Moreover, this is confirmed by the fact that "those who 'confess' Jesus in this Gospel in the language of this sentence (that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God) are not coming to faith, but represent those from within a context of faith, who must be encouraged to a deeper measure of that faith, in the sense of deepened understanding (e.g. Nathanael, Peter, Martha, Thomas)" (ibid.).

The Response to McGaughy

In his final footnote, Fee says that his conclusion stands over against my article on the purpose of the Fourth Gospel.[8] The major flaw in my argument, he asserts, is my dependence on McGaughy (described above). The problem is that McGaughy drew his observations "on the basis of the verb εἶναι [*sic*], without adequate attention to John's own usage of the article with proper names."[9] Fee is referring to one of his earlier essays,[10] where, he asserts, it was "demonstrated that Johannine usage in particular and NT usage in general favors [*sic*] an anarthrous personal name in ὅτι-clauses when the name precedes the verb."[11] This feature has "more significance" than "syntactical links to ἐστίν."[12]

Subsequent discussion has only occasionally taken up these issues. Robert Gordon Maccini and Derek Tovey follow my arguments; so does Robert T. Fortna, but because he connects 20:30–31 to his reconstruction of the Signs Source, he substantially agrees with my exegesis of 20:30–31 but argues that it is only the Signs Source, and not the Fourth Gospel, that was written with evangelistic intent.[13] Some today are at best only mildly interested in such matters, because the focus of their inquiry into John's Gospel is the nature of its rhetoric, rather than with matters slanted toward historical questions.[14] But it is more common, I think, to follow Fee's arguments.[15] Still more commonly the

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[8] Fee "On the Text and Meaning," 2205 n. 29.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Gordon D. Fee, "The Use of the Definite Article with Personal Names in the Gospel of John," *NTS* 17 (1970–71): 168–83.

[11] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205 n. 29, referring to Fee, "Use of the Definite Article," 179.

[12] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205 n. 29.

[13] Robert Gordon Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (JSNTSup 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 32; Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 88; Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 201 n. 474, 323.

[14] Perhaps the best example of a commentary with such commitments is Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998).

[15] So, e.g., Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*

detailed syntactical and semantic issues are simply not addressed, but opinion largely comes down on the side of the view that the Fourth Gospel is addressed to the Johannine community and thus is not evangelistic in scope or intent.[16] Doubtless this is a particularly attractive approach among scholars for whom the focus of attention is on the Johannine community. If the document is primarily addressed *to* the Johannine community, then transparently its primary purpose cannot be evangelistic.

III. Revisiting the Issues

It would not be appropriate here to canvas the evidence that has been put forward over the years for the view that John's Gospel is primarily evangelistic.[17] My purpose is narrower: to evaluate the detailed responses set out by Fee

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(Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 177; James V. Brownson, "John 20.31 and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *RefR* 48 (1995): 212–16.

[16] For instance, the subtantial and admirable commentary on John by Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1215–16, asserts that the issue cannot be decided on the basis of one's text-critical judgments (though Keener thinks the present tense is more likely), but on the basis of how one reads the entire Gospel. "Undoubtedly John would like to invite faith from his opponents; certainly he wants the closet believers among them to go public with their faith (12:42–43; 19:38–40). But by what means would John get the Gospel into the hands of unbelievers except through the preaching of believers? From the perspective of marketing strategies, the intrinsic probabilities favor a primary audience of believers. But the Gospel itself suggests the same. Throughout the Gospel, many people become initial believers, but their initial faith proves insufficient without perseverance (2:23–25; 8:30,59). John's goal is not simply initial faith but persevering faith, discipleship (8:30–32; 15:4–7). John's purpose is to address believers at a lesser stage of discipleship and to invite them to persevere as true disciples" (p. 1216).

[17] In addition to the literature I listed in my original article, not only have there been numerous additions, but some debates have been cast in substantially new categories. For instance, if Richard Bauckham and his colleagues are even substantially right, then the canonical Gospels were initially written for a much wider intended circulation than a hermetically sealed community associated with a "Matthew," a "Mark," a "Luke," or a "John" (see Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Re-thinking the Gospel Audiences* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]). I am inclined to think that the principal *negative* thesis of this book is largely correct (i.e., that the canonical Gospels were *not* intended to be read by discrete and rather separate individual communities), but that some of the *positive* theses are more doubtful. The view that the canonical Gospels were all written primarily for the widest possible *Christian* audience needs more testing. In particular, Bauckham's second contribution in the book, "John for Readers of Mark" (pp. 147–71), isolates evidence that Bauckham thinks supports the view that John's intended readers had read Mark, and that John was therefore writing not for an ostensible "Johannine community," but for those already familiar with Mark's Gospel, and thus for wide circulation among the churches. The response of Wendy E. Sproston North ("John for Readers of Mark? A Response to Richard Bauckham's Proposal," *JSNT* 25 [2003]: 449-68) is largely convincing—but it does not address the possibility that John's Gospel was written primarily with evangelistic purposes in mind. To make matters yet more complicated, some have suggested that although John is writing to Christians, he is doing so to help

(though I shall also introduce one or two collateral arguments advanced by others).

The Text-Critical Issue

By and large, I find Fee's discussion of the text-critical debate on John 20:31 convincing. I suspect that in time many others will as well. With a reasonably high probability, the present subjunctive should be taken as original. I shall assume this conclusion in the ensuing discussion. I am less convinced that Fee is right when he finds the present tense in several other Johannine passages—or, to put it more carefully, Fee sometimes seems to me to overreach the evidence in these other passages in a way he is careful to avoid in 20:31. But to borrow the language of the courtroom: I will happily stipulate to the present tense in all of the relevant passages for the sake of the argument, even though the evidence is most convincing for 20:31.

The Significance of the Present Subjunctive

Granted the reading ἵνα πιστεύητε in John 20:31, what significance, if any, can be attached to the choice?

(a) Fee's discussion has, today, a very old-fashioned feel, but this is not his fault. When he wrote, detailed consideration of the relations between tense form and aspect theory was being conducted in journal articles in fairly esoteric places, or in Spanish.[18] Certainly such consideration did not hit the mainstream of English-language NT scholarship until the publication of three important books, by Stanley E. Porter, Buist M. Fanning, and Kenneth L. McKay, respectively.[19] For instance, Fee's comment (above) that in 6:38 the present ποιῶ

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them, among other things, in their evangelism of their relatives and friends, not least Jews and proselytes (Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995], 2, 11).

[18] I am not including the sophisticated discussions of aspect theory in linguistic circles largely unconnected with *koinē* Greek (e.g., Bernard Comrie, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977]), many of which worked out of Slav languages. Moreover, some essays a century ago focused exclusively on classical Greek texts. The Spanish volume that helped to move the discussion into the field of the NT was the rather cautious work by Juan Mateos, *El Aspecto Verbal en el Nuevo Testamento* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1977).

[19] Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (Studies in Biblical Greek 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Kenneth L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach* (Studies in Biblical Greek 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994). Discussion has moved a considerable distance beyond these seminal works, with numerous voices contributing refinements, corrections, and debate. Of the many

makes perfectly good sense, even though an aorist could be "constative" and thus have the "same meaning," is not the sort of opinion that anyone informed by aspect theory would make today. Again, when Fee suggests that because the aorist is the default tense, one should not expect it to be "meaningful," whereas the present, because it is not the default tense, must be presumed to be "meaningful," is well-nigh incoherent under aspect theory. Because the aorist under most conditions occurs more frequently than the present, it is less weighted than the present,[20] but that is rather different from saying that it is intrinsically meaningless.

If this were a different sort of response, it would be worth going through Fee's essay line by line and observing the kinds of categories that have bred confusion whenever simple resort to *Aktionsarten* has held sway. What is the difference between a "historic present" and an aorist? If an aorist conveniently labeled "ingressive" or "constative" has the "same meaning" as a present-referring present tense form, must one not begin to suspect, at the very least, that the labels are not very helpful?

(b) Nevertheless, the tenor of Fee's argument can be cast in categories that aspect theory would approve. Granted that one concludes, on text-critical grounds, that the present subjunctive is found in 20:31, what semantic contribution does the tense make? Aspect theory would respond by saying that, barring certain caveats,[21] the present tense πιστεύητε in John 20:31 reflects the evangelist's choice of presenting this believing as process. He might have chosen to present this belief as something else, but he chose to present it in this way. In this sense, then, the choice of tense in 20:31 is "meaningful." Had the author chosen the aorist tense, that too would have been "meaningful," but the meaning would have been different.

(c) But then the question (for Fee's purpose and ours) becomes this: Does John's choice of the present tense in 20:31, that is, his decision[22] to present the

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works, see especially Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* (Studies in Biblical Greek 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), and Stanley E. Porter and M. B. O'Donnell, "The Greek Verbal Network Viewed from a Probabilistic Standpoint: An Exercise in Hallidayan Linguistics," *Filología Neotestamentaria* 14 (2001): 3-41.

[20] Though weight is determined not only by relative frequency but also by morphological bulk and specificity of meaning.

[21] For example, defective verbs that have no aorist, or verbs whose lexis virtually demands that they be deployed in the present or perfect or related tenses, or verbs deployed in peculiar ways owing to an author's idiolect. There are at least eight or ten such potential caveats, but none of them seems to be relevant in John 20:31.

[22] Although aspect theory frequently speaks of the author's "choice" or "decision," this is never meant in some psychological sense, as if each author makes a self-conscious decision or choice at the occurrence of each tense. The language of choice is retained to make it clear that the tense is tied, not objectively to the kind of action (*Aktionsart*) such that the kind of action *deter-*

believing as process, signal that he is thinking of ongoing belief among people who are already Christians (to use the generic term), as opposed to the choice of an aorist tense, which would have signaled that the author was thinking of initial conversion? This, it seems to me, is where Fee's argument is entirely unconvincing. He mounts a plausible defense of the "meaningfulness" of the present subjunctive in 20:31 (though that defense could have been made more coherent and credible by the deployment of aspect theory), but then assumes that this meaning "presupposes a document intended for those who are already members of the believing community."[23] This is precisely where the evidence deserts him.

Consider afresh Fee's treatment of all eleven instances where the verb πιστεύω occurs after ἵνα. Five are present subjective, including the one in 20:31.

1. In John 6:29, Fee is quite right to think of the present subjunctive πιστεύητε as process (I shall use the categories of aspect theory from now on, unless they threaten to confuse the discussion). But the context shows that Jesus is making his demands of unbelievers, of opponents, of those who cannot in any sense be thought of as believers.

2. In John 13:19, the present subjunctive (assuming that is the correct reading) is applied to believers.

3. In the case of John 17:21, Fee's exegesis is far from convincing. He argues that there are three groups: the disciples, their disciples, and the κόσμος—but this "world" can never be anything other than the world, and that from the *Abschiedsreden* on, "world" is used in an exclusively hostile sense. Therefore the demand that the world "believe" (17:21) or "know" (17:23) that the Father has sent Jesus cannot be meant salvifically. We respond: First, almost all studies that seek to demonstrate that John makes both positive and negative use of κόσμος, or even positive, negative, and neutral use of the word, hark back to the much-quoted essay of N. H. Cassem.[24] But that essay is deeply flawed. Passages such as John 3:16–17 are *not* positive instances of "world." The world in such passages is still the lost world, the guilty world. That is precisely why God's love in John 3:16 looks so good. John thinks God's love in sending Jesus is wonderful, not because the world is so good, or even so big, but because the world is so bad. It is doubtful that there is a single passage in the Fourth Gospel where the "world" is ever thought of as intinsically and unques-

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mines the choice of tense, but subjectively to how an author "chooses" to portray an event or state (even if such authorial choices are very commonly non–self-conscious).

[23] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205.

[24] N. H. Cassem, "A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of κόσμος in the Johannine Corpus with some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology," *NTS* 19 (1972–73): 81–91.

tionably good. The closest one gets to the possibility is where there is a kind of dramatic "setup" in order to magnify the world's badness—as in 1:10, where we are told that the world was made by the λόγος, but the movement of thought rushes on to the wretched conclusion: the world did not recognize him, even though it had been made by him. In other words, it is very difficult to prove that there is a darkening of the meaning of "world" from the *Abschiedsreden* on, if there has never been much light that is intrinsic to the world.

Second, even within the *Abschiedsreden*, the disciples were chosen "out of" the world (15:19). As is well known, the predestinarian strain in John's Gospel is not of the ontological sort found, for instance, in much later Valentinian Gnostic circles. Neither the disciples nor the disciples of the disciples spring from a category other than the world. The predestinarian strand reflects Christ's choice of them, a choice that drew them "out of" the world. He did not choose them because they were already essentially non-world. Thus, ongoing Christian witness assumes that fresh converts will come from the world: there is no other quarry.

Third, it appears, then, that the Lamb's taking away the sin of the world (1:29, 34), the Father's love for the world (3:16), and the Spirit's convicting of the world (16:7–11) are all of a piece: what is in view is not the salvation of the world *qua* world, but the salvation of those who are ultimately drawn from this quarry, for in John's Gospel there is no other (just as in Ephesians, another document with predestinarian strains, all believers were originally children of wrath [3:3]).

Fourth, all this suggests that the obvious way to take 17:21 and 23 is to see an *ongoing* work of witness. The disciples have their disciples, but it is important to see beyond them, and pray beyond them, for the world, so that new disciples will be drawn from this world, in ongoing outreach (as in John 10 other sheep must be drawn in, from other sheepfolds—and this is long before the *Abschiedsreden*). What this means, then, is that the use of the present subjunctive of πιστεύω in 17:21, though "meaningful," insists that what is demanded of unbelievers is that they practice faith, that they show faith as process. In other words, the present tense is applied to those who are not yet believers (as in 6:29).

4. In 19:35, assuming we agree that the present tense is to be preferred, the eyewitness bears witness to the flow of blood and water. His witness is stipulated to be true, and all of this is now being passed on, the readers are told, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς πιστεύητε. But who are the "you"? Fee seems to assume that because, in his view, the preceding three instances have believers in view, it is most probably so here. But the evidence is against him, both in the premise and in the conclusion. I am not disputing that these are present-tense forms (though I am not as certain of Fee's text-critical judgments on these verses as I am persuaded by his treatment of 20:31), nor am I disputing that the present

tense is semantically "meaningful" (believing as process is in view). What is disputed is Fee's claim that such belief is not demanded of unbelievers, as part of the appeal to become Christians, that is, to become genuine believers. Of the three passages, in 6:29, unbelievers are certainly in view; almost certainly the same is true in 17:21. Only in 13:19 are believers clearly in view. Whether unbelievers or believers are in view here in 19:35 will be determined by who we think the original intended readers were. It is difficult to discern any grounds on which this verse should be piled onto the "believer" side of the debate.

5. That brings us to the verse in dispute, 20:31. At this juncture, Fee's accumulated evidence that because the present tense is "meaningful" in the other four cases, it must be "meaningful" here, and this "presupposes a document intended for those who are already members of the believing community," is in tatters. This is not because no legitimate distinction can be made between the semantics of the aorist and the semantics of the present, but because the present tense forms, in this ἵνα construction, can clearly be applied to believers and unbelievers alike.

With one exception, Fee does not discuss, but merely lists, the six instances of ἵνα + πιστεύω where the verb is in the aorist tense. Yet here too the results are diverse.

6. In 1:7, the witness of John the Baptist is to the end that all will believe (aorist): the focus is on the action itself, on the act of believing, without the author choosing to specify further the kind of action it might be. The evangelist seems to think of John the Baptist's witness as calling people to faith in Christ, which witness presumably is addressed, in the first instance, to unbelievers (and that observation must have at least some bearing on whether or not this Gospel has evangelistic intent).

7. In 6:30, the only one of these six passages that Fee does discuss, he is quite right to note that the aorist tense is used after Jesus' opponents ask for a sign. The only additional thing that needs to be said is that in both 6:29, where the present tense is used (as we have seen), and here, where the aorist tense is used, the people of whom faith is demanded are clearly unbelievers, indeed outright opponents.

8. In 9:36, the blind man is coming to faith; he wants to come to faith.

9. In 11:15, Jesus rejoices that he was not in Bethany when Lazarus died, "so that you [disciples] might believe"—clearly used, then, of those who are already considered to be disciples.

10. In 11:42, Jesus tells his Father that he has prayed as he has in order that the crowd (ὄχλος) that is standing around (presumably made up of at least some unbelievers) πιστεύσωσιν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας. This, surely, intends that some come to faith, and the ensuing verses show that some do, and some do not (11:45–46). (Incidentally, this object clause, ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας, used here in the context of evangelism, is exactly the same as that found in another of

Jesus' prayers, in John 17:21, where Fee argues, as we have seen, that evangelism is not in view.)

11. Finally, in 14:29, the aorist is used of the disciples believing Jesus when the various things that Jesus predicts come to pass. This is probably more than believing certain predictions, but believing *in Jesus* on the basis of the fulfillment of the predictions. Even so, this is cast in the aorist tense, even though those who so believe are already disciples.

In short, without wanting for a moment to deny that there is a semantic distinction between the aorist and the present of πιστεύω, the evidence emphatically shows that it is not exegetically possible to tie one tense to unbelievers who are coming to faith, and the other to believers who are going on in their faith in some durative sense. Both tenses can be applied by John to both unbelievers and believers. Fee's discussion does not in any way threaten the "minor" point made by my original essay.

(d) Fee's concluding observation, almost off-the-cuff, that people such as Martha, Nathaniel, and Thomas do not really come to faith but "represent those from within a context of faith, who must be encouraged to a deeper measure of that faith,"[25] and therefore it should not be surprising if a present tense (with his understanding of "durative" force) is applied to them, is misguided in several ways. First, we have seen aorist tenses applied to the faith of disciples. Second, even though in the historical reality these people were people of faith—that is, they were people "from within a context of faith"—the evangelist, without denying for a moment their religious heritage (see, for example, his comments on Nathaniel), theologically construes all disciples, even the Twelve, as having been chosen *out of the world*. The change that must take place within them springs not from the fact that they did not have a context of faith and now gain one, but from the fact that, with this turn in redemptive history, with this arrival of Jesus as the One of whom Moses wrote, genuine faith is faith in Jesus. That involves "conversion" (for want of a better generic word) in some sense. There is no way of playing down the importance of this "conversion" without doing damage to John's theology.[26]

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[25] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205.

[26] It is difficult not to be reminded of somewhat similar debates over Pauline theology. Convinced of Paul's deeply Jewish religious commitments, some doubt that "conversion" is the best term to apply to whatever changes take place in him in the wake of his Damascus Road experience. But see now Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; WUNT 181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 361–91.

The Response to McGaughy

Fee's dismissal of my major argument is restricted (as we have seen) to one lengthy footnote. Here, too, his argument is less than convincing.

(a) To mention a rather picky point first: Fee says that the "major flaw in [Carson's] argument . . . is his reliance on L. C. McGaughy . . . [whose] observations are made on the basis of the verb εἶναι [*sic*], without adequate attention to John's own usage of the article with proper names."[27] In all fairness to McGaughy, however, in his original study he saw John 20:31, and four passages in 1 John, as exceptions to his own rule. I followed Goetchius in arguing that McGaughy's rule is better than McGaughy himself thought it was. If Fee is right on 20:31, then I am wrong, but not McGaughy. The "major flaw" in my argument, if there is one, is not in my "reliance on L. C. McGaughy," but in my extension beyond him.

(b) The heart of Fee's argument turns on his 1970–71 *NTS* article.[28] I had read it many years ago, but I freely admit I did not recall it when writing my essay on John 20:30–31 and the purpose of the Fourth Gospel, and therefore did not take it into consideration. Had I done so, it would not have changed my conclusion, but it would have changed the shape of my argument here and there.

This needs unpacking. Fee's 1970–71 essay is primarily a text-critical study of the definite article with personal names in the Fourth Gospel. The essay is comprehensive and very helpful. His purpose is, first, to isolate various stylistic features where the manuscript evidence is conclusive, and, second, to discern "what appear to be Johannine tendencies where the manuscript evidence is less certain."[29] To this end he examines anaphoric usage, tendencies with certain names, compound names, personal names in oblique cases (whether "Jesus" or other names), before turning to personal names in the nominative case. This section (pp. 173–82) he breaks down into four subsections: (1) personal names in the nominative in a variety of formulae introducing direct discourse, (2) Ἰησοῦς verb, (3) verb . . . ὁ Ἰησοῦς, and (4) verb [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς. Only the second of these four interests us, viz., the anarthrous Ἰησοῦς before the verb. So we are down to considering about a page and a quarter of Fee's article. Fee then breaks up this construction (Ἰησοῦς verb) into three groups. First, he finds fourteen instances where Ἰησοῦς "precedes the verb and is accompanied by a syndetic conjunction."[30] In half of these, Ἰησοῦς follows the conjunction

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[27] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205 n. 29.
[28] Fee, "Use of the Definite Article."
[29] Ibid., 170.
[30] Ibid., 178.

(4:6; 5:13; 11:41, 54; 12:1, 23; 19:9 [perhaps also 5:17]), and in the other half Ἰησοῦς precedes (6:15; 8:59; 9:33, 38; 12:44; 18:4; 19:26). Where it follows the conjunction, it is articular, following the common idiom ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς. This is also the normal idiom in the Synoptic Gospels. But where Ἰησοῦς precedes the conjunction, it is always anarthrous (seven instances), and this pattern is found in the Synoptics only in Luke 4:1; 22:48. In other words, in John, apart from the occurrence of the idiom ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς, the name of Jesus is always anarthrous when it precedes the verb. Second, in three instances, Ἰησοῦς is accompanied by the intensive αὐτός, with two being clearly anarthrous (4:2, 44), and the other one, with divided textual evidence, probably so (2:24). And third, there are nine instances of Ἰησοῦς before the verb within a ὅτι-clause—the construction in which we are primarily interested, as that is what we find in John 20:31. The manuscript evidence "strongly favours the anarthrous text as the Johannine idiom," Fee observes, but then adds: "It should be noted, however, that this is not the idiom of John alone, but is consistent through the New Testament."[31] The Johannine passages are 4:1, 47; 5:15; 6:24; 7:39; 9:20; 20:14, 31; 21:4. Fee notes that in each instance Ἰησοῦς is the first word after ὅτι.[32] This, then, is the essay to which he makes reference in his later piece in the Neirynck Festschrift, and which he thinks overturns the McGaughy rule (or, as I would put it, my extension of it to rule out McGaughy's claimed exception in John 20:31).

What shall we make of this?

1. Whatever the tendencies of John's Gospel regarding the article with proper names, the phenomenon that we are dealing with in John 20:31 is, by Fee's own admission, "not the idiom of John alone, but is consistent throughout the New Testament."[33] So it is very difficult to see why the McGaughy rule (or my extension of it) should be dismissed on the basis of "John's own usage of the article with proper nouns."[34] If it is to be dismissed, it will have to be dismissed, according to Fee's own evidence, on the ground of universal NT evidence.

2. The construction that interests McGaughy is a subset of the structure that Fee is examining, and vice versa. To put the matter another way, the two scholars, McGaughy and Fee, are examining two quite different constructions with a range of substructures, and in some of these substructures there is some overlap—but the amount of overlap is very small. At this point in his argument, Fee is interested in all instances where Ἰησοῦς precedes the verb within a ὅτι-

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[31] Ibid., 179. The extra-Johannine passages he adduces by way of illustration are Matt 2:22; 4:12; 17:12; 19:8; 20:30; Mark 6:15; Luke 9:7, 8; Acts 9:38.

[32] Ibid., 179 n. 6.

[33] Ibid., 179.

[34] Fee, "On the Text and Meaning," 2205 n. 29.

clause; McGaughy is interested in all instances of ἐστίν as a linking verb that joins a subject and a complement, and, so far as John 20:31 is concerned, the subject and the complement are both substantives, and the construction occurs within a ὅτι-clause. This means that of the extra-Johannine examples to which Fee refers, not one of them matches the structure of John 20:31 (though some others in the NT do, not mentioned by Fee): the only two that deploy ἐστίν (of those mentioned in n. 31) are Mark 6:15 and Acts 9:38, and neither uses the ἐστίν to link two substantives.

3. Similarly, of the nine examples in John's Gospel, all listed by Fee, four are irrelevant to McGaughy's construction because the verb is not ἐστίν (4:1, 47; 7:39; 11:20). The remaining five, all with ἐστίν, are as follows:

5:15	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὸν ὑγιῆ
6·24	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκεῖ
20:14	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν
20:31	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ
21:4	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν

One of these five, 6:24, has a nonsubstantive as the complement (ἐκεί), so it is not particularly illuminating with regard to John 20:31. In two instances, 20:14; 21:4, Mary or the disciples did not know ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ("that it was Jesus"), and so Ἰησοῦς is the predicate. Similarly, in 5:15 (ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὸν ὑγιῆ) the context shows that Ἰησοῦς should be read in the predicate position—that is, the healed paralytic announces to the Jews "that the one who made him well was Jesus" (or, in more contemporary idiom, "that it was Jesus who had made him well"), not "that Jesus was the one who had made him well." Indeed, Fee himself recognizes the predicate function of Ἰησοῦς. In a parenthetical aside in a footnote, he writes, "Ἰησοῦς is a predicate noun at v. 15; xx. 14; xxi 4."[35] So Fee acknowledges that three of these five find Ἰησοῦς serving as a predicate noun. Moreover one of these three, 5:15, has a substantive for both the subject and the complement. That leaves only 20:31. Here too one finds a substantive for both the subject and the complement. What conceivable reason is there for suggesting that Ἰησοῦς must in this instance be the subject term? Fee himself finds no difficulty with asserting that Ἰησοῦς in 5:15 is the predicate term. Why does he have difficulty here? The fact that throughout the NT, Ἰησοῦς before the verb within a ὅτι-clause is anarthrous does not rule out the fact that its anarthrous status in this context also fits the constraints of the McGaughy construction, which understands it to be the predicate noun. One

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[35] Fee, "Use of the Definite Article," 179 n. 6.

could, I suppose, wonder if the construction that Fee identifies is so supervening that it is unnecessary to suppose that the McGaughy construction has had any influence in determining whether Ἰησοῦς would be articular or anarthrous. Still, that argument seems a bit feeble when Fee himself happily finds Ἰησοῦς to be the predicate noun in three out of the four other possible occurrences (those with ἐστίν) in John's Gospel, and when McGaughy's construction occurs far more frequently in the NT than Fee's does.

In short, Fee's earlier essay does not prove that Ἰησοῦς in 20:31 must be taken as the subject noun. In fact, his own work shows rather conclusively that there is no good reason for denying it is a predicate noun. Then, when one recalls the strength of McGaughy's work, with its systematic examination of every instance of ἐστίν in the NT, one must advance very strong evidence indeed to set aside the universality of the pattern. That, of course, is why Goetchius, and later I, questioned whether the ostensible exceptions in John and 1 John were real exceptions. We concluded they were not. What is in any case quite clear is that none of Fee's actual evidence (as opposed to his later claims) weakens McGaughy's rule in the slightest, nor does it weaken the claim that John 20:31 should not be viewed as an exception to that rule.

(c) If McGaughy's rule embraces John 20:31, it is best to translate the relevant expression as "that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus." That brings back the twelve observations on what this might mean that I set forth in my earlier essay on this subject. This is not the place to review them again. But perhaps I should mention three further objections (that is, beyond what Fee has said) that have been raised against them, and briefly respond.

1. Taking Ἰησοῦς as the predicate nominative in 20:31, in line with McGaughy, presupposes that the controlling question is not Who is Jesus? but Who is the Messiah? Andrew T. Lincoln objects to this thesis on the ground that

> the Gospel as a whole does not read as if it addresses those who already know what the titles "Christ" and "Son of God" entail and who simply need to be persuaded that Jesus is a worthy candidate for such titles. Rather, again and again, what appears to be at issue is the identity of Jesus, and the implied author is at pains to make clear what it means to claim that Jesus is the sort of Messiah who is Son of God, with all the connotations of a unique relationship to God that the latter designation bears in the discourse.[36]

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[36] Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 177–78, with particular reference to Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God: Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective* (SBLSBS 11; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 84.

Fair point—provided one does not make it quite so antithetical. In other words, no one is suggesting that John's implied audience already has a fully Christian understanding of what "Messiah" ("Christ") and "Son of God" mean. Both categories were meaningful in Jewish circles (and therefore, presumably, also among proselytes and God-fearers), but there can be no doubt that they underwent a semantic enrichment/transformation/clarification under Christian influence. That is why Christian apologists had to demonstrate, among other things, that the Messiah had to suffer and die and rise again. But they did not say, "You folk are waiting for a Messiah. But you are waiting for the wrong category. We'd like to propose something else, an entirely new category of 'savior.'" Rather, they were saying, "You folk are waiting for the Messiah, and rightly so. But do you not see? If you understand the Scriptures aright, you will grasp that the Messiah for whom you wait had to suffer and die and rise again." The same sort of argument had to be made by Christians in their evangelism of Jews and proselytes not only with regard to Jesus' death and resurrection, but also with regard to other christological claims. The same sort of thing is evident in Acts. There, we saw, the best rendering of Acts 5:42; 18:5, 28 is that "the Christ is Jesus." But who would deny that Luke-Acts is trying to deepen and christianize the assumptions of unconverted Jews and proselytes familiar with the category of "Messiah" ("Christ")?

Thus the fact that John's Gospel does indeed enrich the categories does not mean that the question Who is the Messiah? is ruled out of court. One cannot escape the syntactical claims of John 20:31 quite so easily.

2. The suggestion of Ben Witherington III (n. 17 above) that even if the Fourth Gospel is written for believers, one of its purposes is to help believers bear witness to Jews and proselytes, is intrinsically attractive, but it does not itself address the question of who the "you" are in 19:35 and 20:31.

3. Finally, one must recall, with Craig S. Keener (n. 16 above), how often John insists on persevering faith. Keener is quite right that this is a major Johannine theme. But in Johannine theology, short-lived faith, that is, nonpersevering faith, is not genuine faith that is sadly truncated; rather, it is not genuine faith at all (cf. 2:23–25; 8:30–31; cf. 1 John 2:19). By not persevering, this faith proves itself to be false. That is one of the reasons why, as we have seen, John's Gospel can demand faith conceived by the author as process (i.e., cast in the present tense), even when he is demonstrably dealing with unbelievers. So it is difficult to see why the demand for persevering faith must be a sign that this book is written first and foremost for believers. As one who has addressed both believers and unbelievers throughout several decades of ministry, I find myself underscoring the importance of persevering faith to both groups.

IV. Conclusion

As far as I can see, although the text-critical studies of Gordon Fee make a strong case for the present subjunctive in John 20:31, and although he is right to argue that the present tense πιστεύητε is "meaningful," none of his arguments weakens in the slightest the syntactical claims of McGaughy, nor the extension of those claims to cover the ostensible exceptions. Indeed, his earlier essay on the use of the definite article with proper names in John might even be taken to strengthen those claims.

The questions surrounding the purpose of the Fourth Gospel are extraordinarily complex, and I do not want to leave the impression that I think that a couple of essays on one clause in John 20:30–31 settle the matter. Even with respect to these verses, a great deal more work needs to be done on their connection with 20:29, with the entire Thomas pericope (20:24–29), and with earlier signs[37]—quite apart from what needs to be done on thinking through the purpose of the Fourth Gospel while reading through the document as a whole. On the other hand, I fear that the objections of Fee and a few others may discourage some from reexamining the issue with fresh eyes, feeling that the possibility that John's Gospel was written primarily with evangelistic intent has been ruled out of court by their work. This essay is first and foremost an attempt to keep the issue open.

[37] On the latter, see Hanna Roose, "Joh 20,30f.: Ein (un)passender Schluss? Joh 9 und 11 als primäre Verweisstellen der Schlussnotiz des Johannesevangeliums," *Bib* 84 (2003): 326–43.