

A Reconsideration of Jesus' Anger and Weeping in the Story of Lazarus (John 11:33–38)¹

J. Glen Taylor, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

Careful readers of John's Gospel have long been intrigued by certain puzzling elements in the climactic story of the death and raising of Lazarus in chapter 11. These include the surprising fact that so powerful a miracle story is not mentioned outside this Gospel. Certain details of the story are also puzzling, such as the incongruous logic of John's claim in vv. 5-6 that it was because Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters that he decided to linger where he was rather than immediately attend to Lazarus's dire illness as urgently requested by Mary and Martha.² There is also the surprisingly strong emotional reaction by Jesus in vv. 33 and 38.³ Related to this is the mystery surrounding the reason for Jesus's anger and deep consternation.

In this essay I shall focus mostly on the last of these puzzling elements—the reason(s) for Jesus' anger and agitation.

To begin, here is a brief catalogue of explanations for the cause or object of Jesus' anger:

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, Vancouver, British Columbia, June 1st, 2019. I am indebted to Maud Sandbo for editorial comments and to Stephen Chester, John Kloppenborg, and Andrew Lincoln for feedback on an earlier version. This study shall assume the validity of the Nestle–Aland (28) critical edition. This includes agreement with Metzger on the early variant to v. 38, attested in P⁴⁵, P⁴⁶, D, θ, etc., which reads, ἐταράχθη τῷ πνεύματι ὡς ἐμβριμούμενος, “he was troubled in spirit as one who is angry.” He states: “Since the latter is the easier reading (for it softens the statement by inserting ὡς), a majority of the Committee regarded it as a secondary improvement, introduced from a sense of reverence for the person of Jesus” (Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1995], 200). For the sake of ease, I shall refer to the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel as John.

² Many recent commentators attribute the lack of logic to John's portrayal of Jesus as a supernatural figure who marches to the beat only of God's drum. Jesus thus refused to respond to Mary's prodding at the wedding in Cana, or to accede to the schedule of his brothers in chapter 7, or here in v. 2 to the sisters' request. John Kloppenborg notes: “it is critical to see Jesus in John as a divine subject [who] works by different rules and acts in different ways” (personal communication).

³ Often translated “deeply moved within,” this rendition masks a harsher response on the part of Jesus such as strong anger, a rebuke, or a scornful snort. For a lexical analysis, see later in this study.

1. Death, whether in itself,⁴ the death of Lazarus, the impending death of Jesus,⁵ its ultimate (satanic) cause,⁶ its woeful effects such as grief, or some combination of these.⁷
2. Unbelief on the part of others (including Mary).⁸
3. The Jewish mourners, whether for their unbelief (see 2 above), hypocrisy or their intrusion into a private affair.⁹
4. Mary's challenge in v. 32, which seemed to question Jesus' loyalty as a friend.¹⁰
5. Jesus himself, whether for his failure to teach his followers a proper understanding of death¹¹ or out of momentary regret for not coming sooner to spare pain and death.¹²

Recent scholarship has tended to favor an explanation under the first category—namely that Jesus' anger and consternation were primarily over his own imminent death.¹³ But, as the following possible objections imply, debate rightly

⁴ E.g., J. Ramsay Michaels, *John*, NIBC 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 203.

⁵ E.g., Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 176. For a cogent argument in support of the common view that John's focus is primarily on Jesus' death, see Wendy E. Spronston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition*, JSNTSup 212 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 151–53.

⁶ Timothy George, "A Roar Heard Round the World," *First Things* (April 2017), accessed online, without pagination.

⁷ E.g., Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to John*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2005), 327; cf. Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 248; idem, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading," in Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, eds. *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 243; and Jacob Kremer, *Lazarus: Die Geschichte einer Auferstehung; Text, Wirkungsgeschichte und Botschaft* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985), 73.

⁸ E.g., Joan Salazare Infante, "Jesus Shed Tears in Frustration: The Contribution of *dakryō* and *klaīō* to the Interpretation of John 11:35," *Pacifica* 27 (2014): 239–52; Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 406.

⁹ Esler and Piper opine that Jesus' anger is directed against the Judaeans, despite the seeming sincerity of some; Philip F. Esler and Ronald A. Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: A Social-Scientific and Theological Reading of John* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 115–17. On the last-mentioned option, see G. R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," in *New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 9:690.

¹⁰ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 200.

¹¹ Francis Moloney, "Can Everyone be Wrong? A Reading of John 11.1-12.8," *NTS* 49 (2003): 519.

¹² Cullen I. Story, "The Mental Attitude of Jesus at Bethany: John 11.33, 38," *NTS* 37 (1991): 51–66.

¹³ See footnote 5 above.

continues. First, the narrative contains not a single generic or philosophical comment on the banality of death. More significantly, the emotion one typically finds expressed over death is sorrow, but instead we find anger and agitation. Third, this option disregards the explanation offered by the Jews at the end of the narrative; they do not say “see how he despises death” or the like, but “see how he [i.e., Jesus] loved him” and “could not he who healed the blind man have prevented this man from dying?”¹⁴ Their reaction seems in fact to clarify a misconception, anticipated already by John in v. 5, that Jesus did not love Lazarus, because otherwise he would have come sooner or even prevented his death altogether.

In what follows, I shall present arguments under four different headings in support mostly of option five above, while at the same time offering a different explanation for Jesus’ anger than those proffered by its recent advocates Maloney or Story.¹⁵

At the outset a few clarifications are in order. First, in claiming that Jesus’ anger was self-directed, *I do not mean to imply that Jesus “sinned” or that he, even for a moment (as claimed by Story), doubted his plan to bring glory to God and the Son through the death of Lazarus.* The theological issue aside, that would be contrary to John’s portrayal of Jesus elsewhere in the Gospel.¹⁶

Second, although attested in ancient sources, as demonstrated by C. I. Story,¹⁷ and unobjectionable on comparative philological grounds, as demonstrated by the same, I acknowledge that the view that Jesus’ consternation was self-directed has not generally been met with favor. This relates not simply to the logical and theological problem of Jesus being angry with himself (on which see later), but to the highly unlikely explanation that the same scholar, Story, offered

¹⁴ Besides, there is no good reason to mistrust the report of the Jews here—they mourn in good company alongside Mary, Martha and even Jesus. (On the alleged distinction in words for weeping being indicative of a difference in sincerity, see note 54 in this study.)

¹⁵ I do not deny that the favored option also plays a minor role.

¹⁶ See in the immediate context 11:40 where Jesus reaffirms his commitment, stated already in 11:4, to bring glory to God through the death of Lazarus. God’s glory and belief (also mentioned in 11:40) are such central themes in the Gospel of John that it is inconceivable that John would have Jesus even momentarily deviate from them; cf. e.g., 1:14, 11:22, 26–27. (Regarding theological grounds, it should be obvious that they extend beyond the Pauline notion that one can be angry and not sin [Eph 4:26].)

¹⁷ These include Origen, Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria (Story, “Mental Attitude,” 55-57). For a slightly different understanding of Origen, as well as a more detailed discussion of both him and Chrysostom, see Barnabas Lindars, “Rebuking the Spirit: A New Analysis of the Lazarus Story in John 11,” *NTS* 38 (1992), 95–96. For historical figures whose explanations for Jesus’ anger reflect or anticipate those listed earlier in this essay, see Story, “Mental Attitude,” 58-63.

for it. Thus, late in his essay and almost as an afterthought, Story opined that Jesus had a “momentary change of heart” in that “[a]t the moment” he regrets “his delay in arriving at Bethany,” a view described aptly (but harshly) by one Johannine scholar as “breathtakingly naïve and about as remote as it is possible to get from Johannine thinking.”¹⁸ In short, the problem of Jesus being self-critical lies mostly with a seeming incompatibility with Johannine Christology. This is because, apart from a few possible cases, John’s portrait of Jesus elsewhere, including later in chapter 11, is of him being “in control” and supernaturally attuned.¹⁹

Third, by any reckoning, the sheer density of strong emotions in this chapter is atypical in Johannine literature. My point is in hope that a measure of latitude might be afforded any explicator of *this chapter* of John.²⁵

Finally, this passage, so well-known for tightly held positions on the matter of reasons for Jesus’ anger, poses a disadvantage for any view that is different.

Under the following four headings, I shall argue not only that Jesus’ irksome consternation was self-directed, but also that there are reasons for it that can be reconciled with Johannine theology and context.²⁶

1. Philological

¹⁸ Story, “Mental Attitude,” 64. The comment is that of Wendy Spronston North, *Lazarus Story*, 148. In the same context, Story (*ibid.*) states that “momentarily he [Jesus] regrets the course of action which he had pursued in allowing the illness of Lazarus to culminate in death.” Further against Story on this point, Jesus’ “change of heart” must have been *very* “momentary” because he quickly reaffirms that his plan was, and continues to be, to raise Lazarus for God’s glory (v. 40).

¹⁹ Although the problem of incompatibility with Johannine theology is real, there are two other places in John’s Gospel where Jesus startles for having a change of mind, one at the wedding in Cana in chapter 2 where, after balking at his mother’s plea, Jesus solves the problem of a shortage of wine; and the other in chapter 7, where Jesus attends the festival in Jerusalem after telling his brothers that he would not (vv. 8–10). My point is that, despite explanations amenable to Johannine theology having been offered for them, real problems do exist. (On the possibly related problem of illogic in 11:5–6, see footnote 2.)

²⁵ I am reminded of a comment about John 11 by John Kloppenborg: “something odd is going on here.” (Personal communication.)

²⁶ In short, I shall argue that Jesus’ inner turmoil flowed in large measure from the contrast he faced between the good purposes of God and the harmful effects they had on his dearest friends. From a literary perspective, this is revealed in the contrast between his earlier up-beat perspective on Lazarus’ death and the frustration (and possible anger and resentment) Martha, and especially Mary, felt and directed *toward him* for not coming sooner. (I am indebted to Stephen Chester for prompting me to take further notice of not just the literary element but also the human.)

First, John seems at pains to imply through repeated word-choice that Jesus' irksome consternation was self-directed. John mentions Jesus' harsh angst no less than three times in vv. 33–38, in each case associating the emotions of Jesus specifically with reference to himself: 1) ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι, —“he rebuked (his) spirit” or, as more commonly understood here (alone), “being sorely agitated in spirit”; 2) καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν, “and he troubled himself”; and 3) πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ, “again being angry in/at himself.”²⁷ In these cases, after one that uses τῷ πνεύματι, “in spirit,” which must refer here to Jesus, two follow that employ the reflexive pronoun “himself” (again referring to Jesus); moreover, in each instance John uses the grammatical case of the direct object of the verb (dative, accusative, dative).

Each expression merits brief consideration.

A. Vs. 33ba: ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι.

Translators and scholars offer a range of possible English renderings: “groaned” (ASV), “groaned in the spirit” (KJV), “greatly disturbed in spirit” (NRSV), “deeply moved in spirit” (NASB, etc.; ESV “. . . in his spirit”), “rebuked the spirit,”²⁸ “rebuked (his) spirit.”²⁹ (Several renditions in other languages are also noteworthy.)³⁰

That ἐμβριμάομαι clearly connotes anger is so well known as to merit no elaboration; suffice it to state that ἐμβριμάομαι conveys not sorrow but anger, rebuke or, more literally, a snort of disgruntlement.³¹

²⁷ As with others offered before, these translations are intended as exemplary, not definitive.

²⁸ Lindars, “Rebuking the Spirit,” 99. (Lindars understands the expression originally to have pertained to the exorcism of an unclean spirit.)

²⁹ Story, “Mental Attitude,” 63. Story defends the use of “(his)” here on grounds it was conveyed by the reflexive pronoun in the parallel phrase ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν.

³⁰ Voorwinde (*Emotions in the Fourth Gospel*, 169 n95) elaborates on some non-English renditions as follows: “German translations in both the Luther and Zwinglian traditions do not hesitate to render ἐμβριμάομαι by the verb ergrimmen (‘get angry, furious’) in both verses.” He adds (*ibid.*), “The Dutch authorized version of 1951 reads verbolgen (‘incensed’, ‘angry’, ‘wrathful’). The Vulgate has *infremo* (‘roar,’ ‘rage’) for v. 33 and *fremo* (‘murmur,’ ‘growl,’ ‘rage’) for v. 38.” Kremer (*Lazarus*, 73) further advances “schnauben,” [“snort,”] “anschnauben,” [“censure angrily”]. For more on German renditions, including commentaries and the vorlage of the English translation of Bauer’s *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., 192–93.

³¹ In addition to the preceding note, consider both C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 398–400)—“It is beyond question that ἐμβριμάομαι . . . implies anger” (*ibid.*, 399)—and D. A. Carson: “It is lexically inexcusable to reduce this emotional upset to the effects of empathy, grief, pain or the like” (*The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 415. The only dissenting voice is that of Lindars, who regards the verb to denote “an aggressive style of behaviour rather than to the emotion of anger as such. The emphasis is on outward expression rather than on inward feeling”:

The best way to adjudicate how best to translate ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι is to compare John 11:33 with other passages in the New Testament where the same verb is followed by a referent in the dative (the objective case of this verb).³²

1. ἐνεβριμήθη αὐτοῖς “he harshly admonished them” (said of Jesus to a group of blind men about not broadcasting having been healed—Matt 9:30);
2. ἐμβριμησάμενος αὐτῷ, “he rebuked him” (said of Jesus to a leper—Mark 1:43);
3. ἐνεβριμῶντο αὐτῇ, “they rebuked her” (said of a group of men to the woman who anointed Jesus’ head with expensive ointment—Mark 14:5);
4. ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι, typically translated³³—“he was angry in spirit” (said of Jesus with reference to himself upon seeing Mary and others mourning—John 11:33).

The comparison above makes Story’s case for preferring the fourth case also to consist of a rebuke— “he rebuked (his) spirit”—clear. His point is all the stronger with καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν, “and troubled himself,” following directly on its heels.

Many scholars have readily drawn support from John 13:21 for the view that Jesus’ inward anger was precipitated by an *outside* factor, namely his impending passion. What is often overlooked, however, is that *the expression in 11:33 must be distinguished from that in 13:21*, this latter of which may indeed be rendered “troubled in spirit.”

The argument is typically made that since Jesus was troubled in spirit, *not* on account of himself in 13:21 but rather on account of Judas, that Jesus’ inward irritation should similarly be understood in 11:33 as not directed at himself. But the logic doesn’t follow. The wording in 13:21 is different: the Greek verb in 13:21 is ταρασσω, whereas here in 11:33a it is ἐμβριμάομαι. Moreover, the verbs occur in different voices: ταρασσω in 13:21 is aorist passive whereas ἐμβριμάομαι in 11:33

Lindars, “Rebuking the Spirit,” 96 (lexical discussion 93–96). See further Voorwinde, *Emotions in the Fourth Gospel*, 172–175, which includes a cogent rebuttal to Lindars.

³² Not including John 11:38, from the same disputed context.

³³ I.e., not including the more common, but not at all credible, “deeply moved within.”

is aorist middle (deponent).³⁴ Confusion further arises in that the same expression, τῷ πνεύματι, follows both the verb ταρασσῶ in 13:21 and ἐμβριμάομαι in 11:33. But the consequent inference of synonymity is unjustified because ἐμβριμάομαι is not in the passive voice, and τῷ πνεύματι in 11:33 could, unlike 13:21, be objective, the dative case being used for the object of ἐμβριμάομαι. Moreover, however appropriate “was angered in spirit” might seem in 11:33, it is strongly counter-intuitive on the basis of comparative attestation noted above where, in every other case in the NT, ἐμβριμάομαι followed by x as a nominal in the dative means “he rebuked x.” The most straightforward way to render this phrase, apart from any puzzlement over why Jesus would direct this emotion toward himself, is thus “he rebuked (his) self” or “he rebuked the spirit” (i.e., his own).

In sum, attestation elsewhere favors the meaning that Jesus “rebuked (his) spirit”; but, for other reasons—theological, proprietary, inability to find a reason for self-rebuke, etc.—most scholars and translators prefer “was angry in spirit” or the like, which doesn’t indicate Jesus as the object in the same way that the rebuke option does.³⁶ Thus, despite being dubious and less idiomatic, “he was angry in spirit” has gained favour, in part because of the similarities (yet often without sufficient regard to real differences) between 11:33 and 13:21. On this more common but unattested reckoning the object of Jesus’ harsh criticism could also have been Jesus himself. But whether it is or not is a matter of inference.

Notably, apart from a few ancient sources (including, notably, Origen, Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria), C. I. Story and Barnabas Lindars are exceptional in advocating for the stronger philological case.³⁷

Despite the strong evidence to the contrary, the common alternative “was angry in spirit” cannot be ruled out.³⁸ This prompts consideration of the second expression ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν, “he troubled himself,” or the like.

³⁴ In English we do not say, “he angered his spirit” but “he was angry in spirit.” In other words, confusion arises because the English translation “was angry” in 11:33 implies that ἐμβριμάομαι here too is passive, which it is not.

³⁶ As well, most scholars probably take, or assume, “in” in “was angry in spirit” to mean merely within and not toward himself. Either is an inference. For Jesus to have been angry “internally” no more implies that he was angry only within himself than that he was angry *at* himself. Both are possible. Yet, since it goes without saying that anger comes from within, the reader ought to wonder why John chose to highlight this aspect in all three cases.

³⁷ The number of advocates, whether ancient or modern, ought not count for much, especially since most recent translations implicitly favor the impossible: “deeply moved within.”

³⁸ The common alternative also leaves room for my view, though “chastened himself” secures it (or nearly so); my point has mostly been to explore the exact meaning of the clause.

B. Vs. 33bb: ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν “troubled Himself” (NASB footnote; so too Story³⁹), “greatly troubled” (ESV).

The introduction to Voorwinde’s lengthy discussion on the meaning of ταρασσω aptly summarizes its sense:

While it has the literal sense of ‘shake together’ or ‘stir up’ (e.g. of water in John 5.7), its figurative meaning is far more prominent in the New Testament, and it is in this sense that it can refer to the emotions. In the active voice [which the verb has in 13:33] ταρασσω can be defined as ‘to cause inner turmoil,’ and be translated *stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion* (BDAG)⁴⁰

More pertinent to the discussion at hand, because ἑαυτὸν can here be nothing other than the direct object of ἐτάραξεν, added credibility is thereby added to the predominant implication that τῷ πνεύματι in the prior expression involving ἐμβριμάομαι is also *the direct object* of the verb, understood as “rebuke/chasten,” and not a locative dative for the verb understood as “he was angry.”⁴¹

As with the more popular rendition of the first expression “he was angry in spirit” (though not with “he rebuked (his) spirit,” in which case the emotion can only be *toward* Jesus), so too in the case of ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν, Jesus’ emotions could have arisen on account of someone or something other than himself. But the point is the same; unless one goes with “rebuke” in the first case, whether the self is the object or not is a matter of mere inference. Nevertheless, there remains the problem that no “outside” object or person as an outlet for Jesus’ anger is in any way obvious.

Noted in part already with reference to 13:21, it is often argued that the verb ταρασσω is used later in John in connection with Jesus’ anguish over his own death and that of the disciples over the same. These cases merit re-examination.

There are four cases in which ταρασσω is used in relation to Jesus’ death—12:27, 13:21, 14:1, and 14:27. Though true, the first and thus the closest in context to our case of 11:33, 12:27, involves Jesus doing the same thing I am suggesting he does in 11:33, namely trouble himself over an internal conflict *concerning himself*. John 12:27 says, “Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.’” In Gethsemane here, the verb (a perfect middle/passive indicative) describes Jesus’ angst as he

³⁹ Story, “Mental Attitude,” 51ff.

⁴⁰ Voorwinde, *Gospels*, 176–80 (here citing 176). The bracketed clarification is mine.

⁴¹ See later in this study for a possible purpose behind ambiguity on the part of John as to whether Jesus is clearly the object of his own rebuke/anger, or consternation.

negotiates the uncomfortable ground between doing the Father's will and doing what he desires as a human. In short, that the conflict in 12:27 is between God's option and the one Jesus would favor as a human supports my contention for the same in 11:33; in both cases the conflict within the self, concerned the self.⁴²

In the other three cases, Jesus' inner consternation does relate more objectively to his death. But, as with life, so arguably in John: there is no reason to expect a person to find only one thing troubling. Besides, in the other three cases, the death of *Jesus* is front and centre in the contest, whereas in 11:33 it is not; here the focus is rather the death of *Lazarus*—from which by extension scholars (rightly I believe) infer allusion also to Jesus' own death. To be more precise by extension, although there is a focus is on the death of Lazarus, there is a far greater one on *the role that Jesus is alleged to have played* in Lazarus' death by not coming sooner.⁴³ That is clearly what sparked angst if not anger *toward Jesus* on the part of the women and mourners; and, so I suggest, the human Jesus⁴⁴ could also have been the target of that same anger—toward himself.

The notion that Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus is worth considering for another reason. My point is not just that the narrative flirts with others attributing the death of Lazarus to Jesus. It is also that there is an *overlooked correlation* between one of the most widely accepted reasons for Jesus' anger—i.e., that it was directed toward the *ultimate root cause* of Lazarus's death—Satan; and the present unpopular reason for Jesus' anger—i.e., that it was directed toward the *implied root cause* of Lazarus's death—Jesus.

An additional point is overlooked concerning the darling explanation that Jesus' anger was directed toward the harm and evil of death. Not only is the banality of death nowhere mentioned in the story, its opposite is. Somewhat ironically then, where many scholars invoke a negative theological construal on (primarily Lazarus's) death as the ground for Jesus' anger, the narrative attributes a contrastively positive theological construal on Lazarus's death by Jesus. It is more in keeping with the narrative, then, to attribute the anger of Jesus not to something that he here affirms—the *good* purposes of God in allowing Lazarus to die—but to his later understanding that there was a grim flip-side to allowing Lazarus to die. This included the grief of dear friends and their anger and disappointment over him

⁴² The two cases are not identical, since *ταράσσω* occurs in the active voice uniquely in 13:33. But that only strengthens my case for Jesus being the object of (his own) disruption here.

⁴³ The problem with Jesus' anger being occasioned (only or mostly) by the death of Lazarus is that Jesus will immediately reverse the situation.

⁴⁴ If the sensitivity of Jesus implied here is hard to reconcile with John's theology of Jesus, two responses come to mind: a) here it is (!); and b) the vulnerable sensitivity showed by the human Jesus here could theoretically have been willed upon John by the early church, given that certain challenging historical elements are being narrated. (See further the third section of this study.)

not coming when summoned and “allowing” Lazarus to die. Contrary to Story, then, Jesus’ self-rebuke is not a matter of him changing his mind but of experiencing post-Bethany the contrast between the good and glad purposes of God and the carnage of its immediate effects, for which others are implicitly holding him responsible.

Admittedly, it is odd for the sympathetic reader to in any way attribute Lazarus’s death to, of all people, Jesus. But given the way in which the narrative is construed, it is hard to deny that such was alleged; the delay of Jesus in responding to news of Lazarus’s imminent death and the obvious fallout that ensued from his delay—including questions it brought about his love for the family—is a conflict integral to the story and around which the plot centers and develops.

Besides, if the painful irony of Jesus’ possible involvement stirs up angst in the reader, is it any less likely to have done so in Jesus?⁴⁵ After all, Martha and Mary are not disappointed in the reader but in Jesus.

Jesus was angry and troubled not only within, but at himself, over the painful cognitive dissonance between, on the one hand, being the divinely ordained means by which glory would be brought to God and faith instilled in others, and, on the other hand, being at the same time the human means by which grief, disappointment, and seeming lack of love was conveyed to close friends and others. The human Jesus experienced anger (even “self-rebuke” on one viable reading of John’s expression), confusion and tears, at the fact that, whether implicitly (according to the sister[s]) or explicitly (according to the Jews), people were pointing the finger at him over Lazarus’s death.

Returning to the lexical discussion at hand, the objective reflexive pronoun as the object of the verb “trouble,” “stir up,” presents no obstacle to the chasteful interpretation offered for the first expression as suggested by Story, Lindars and the present study. John could well have intended to imply that Jesus was upset with himself.⁴⁷ However hard it may be to admit to “he (was) agitated (at/in) *himself*,”

⁴⁵ And what of the early church? I consider this matter in section three. On the matter of angst within Jesus, a friend reminded me of cases in superhero stories where, despite the hero’s best intentions, he often ends up causing harm and grief to an innocent party, much to his pain and chagrin.

⁴⁷ It is still possible that Jesus’ emotions could be directed elsewhere, other than towards or against himself. To agitate oneself could mean to get *oneself* worked up about some *external* irritant. The problem is that this exact expression is, to my knowledge, not attested elsewhere. Further, the point is probably moot because one can consternate oneself about an external phenomenon for which the self is a precipitating cause, as I believe is the case here.

I am content to leave open what aspect of Jesus’ prior actions and attitudes was lacking. This is partly to circumvent the debate whether Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. Clearly, he could have. However, the chronology provided indicates Lazarus would have been dead had Jesus come right away. On this understanding the critique of the women would be,

John seems intent on directing attention away from any external “it” αὐτο(v) as his point of reference for Jesus’ emotions, preferring instead to direct it in relation to ἑαυτὸν, “himself.”⁴⁸

C. Vs. 38: πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ “again, being angry within himself.” In providing a third reference to the trouble and consternation felt by Jesus, John once again directs attention inwardly in his use of ἐν ἑαυτῷ in respect to Jesus’ self.

Notably, this third expression seems to lend preference to that option in the first expression according to which Jesus “was angry within himself” rather than “rebuked himself.” This is because the particle ἐν prior to ἑαυτῷ likely precludes the dative being used objectively.⁵⁰ It is also because the word “again” constitutes a link with the first expression in which the same verb ἐμβριμάομαι is used.

Given that my subject matter in this essay is the hotly debated object of Jesus’ anger and consternation, it would be easy to infer from my philological discussion that my “point” is to prove that Jesus’ inner anger was directed “toward himself” rather than it arose “from within himself but toward something else,” but that is not so. In both cases the “toward” must be inferred, unless of course the first expression means “he rebuked (his) spirit,” which clearly identifies Jesus as the object at least there.

“Lord, if you had *not gone away* my brother would not have died.” But this still leave Jesus open to possible criticism, for the narrative implies other things could have been done—what spiritual care-givers today call “the ministry of presence”—such as offering comfort, mourning with the family, bestowing honor on the women by gracing their bereaved home with a prominent person, and perhaps most poignantly, shortening the time of sadness and grief by resurrecting Lazarus sooner. In fact, this temporal aspect seems important; immediately after weeping Jesus says, “where have you laid him?” (v. 34). Although in obedience to God, Jesus allowed Lazarus to die, the Son of God could not bear to let the grief and pain of others last a moment longer.

⁴⁸ My emphasis. I add parentheses to reflect the fact that English requires the use of the passive to convey the sentiment conveyed by the active in Greek.

This is not to deny that Jesus could have been affected by an emotional response from outside himself. The point is that my alternative suggestion is viable; besides, there is no more obvious external stimulus than that which occupied the sisters and mourners: disappointment in (or anger toward) *Jesus* over his delay, and his implied culpability for the death of Lazarus.

⁵⁰ Other verbs of emotion, perception or confusion that occur with ἐν ἑαυτῷ include διαπορέω “be at a loss” in Acts 10:17, where Peter is “inwardly perplexed” (ESV) “greatly puzzled: (NRSV) “perplexed in mind” (fn. Literally [perplexed] ‘himself’); οἶδα “know” in John 6:61, where Jesus, “knowing in himself” that . . . ; ἐπιγινώσκω, “know” in Mark 5:30, where Jesus, “perceiving in himself that”. . . ; cf. γίνομαι “become” in Acts 12:11, where Peter “came to himself” (ESV, NRSV, NASB).

To summarize consideration of all three expressions, the least ambiguous expression is the second where *ταράσσω*, in the active voice, is followed by the reflexive pronoun (accusative) as its direct object, “Jesus stirred/troubled himself.” The second case thus adds credence to taking *τῷ πνεύματι* in the immediately preceding expression also as objective, and thus “he rebuked the self.” The first and third expressions each seem clear enough, the former strongly implying “he rebuked the self,” and the latter “again, being angry within himself.” However, unlike the second, the third, which takes the dative non-objectively, has the effect of tempering what would otherwise be the clearly self-rebuking connotation of the first.

To summarize another way (where italics reflect emphasis for the past and future direction of my argument). 1. *For some reason* John was at pains to refer Jesus’ anger and consternation to himself. 2. Taken on its own, by far the most natural and likely rendition for the first expression is “he rebuked/chastened the spirit [i.e., of himself].” 3. Whether intentional (as I shall later entertain) or not, *John leaves room for ambiguity about the object of Jesus’ anger.*

I find these elements striking and, if my latter argument about the reason for John referring to Jesus’ self-referential anger is correct, exegetically significant.

2. Literary and Narratival Context

Here I should like to consider the references to Jesus’ anger and weeping within the context of the whole story.

A. The Near Context in Which Jesus’ Emotions Are Expressed

Given the relative sparsity of emotional expressions in John, it is reasonable to ask: Do these unusual expressions of anger/rebuke and consternation on the part of Jesus occur in the same context as other similar emotional expressions, especially any that are atypical or otherwise capture attention? The answer of course is yes, in the sisters’ words, twice given for emphasis: “Lord, if you had been here our brother would not have died.”⁵¹ Admittedly, anger is not overtly expressed (neither does my argument require it) but, I urge, nor is it in any way unreasonable or

⁵¹ This is especially true of Mary, who avoids coming to Jesus and who, unlike Martha, offers no added conciliatory remark such as “but even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him” (NRSV). Apart from being unusual, I see no reason why many interpreters avoid the clear implication of frustration with, disappointment in, or even anger toward, Jesus here. And, given the context—in which the women are obviously disappointed in Jesus not coming sooner, *as requested*—I strongly disagree with those who see this expression (especially on the lips of terse Mary) as “an expression of faith.”

difficult to infer. Also, there is no question as to whom this emotionally charged comment is directed: *toward* none other than *Jesus*.⁵²

The rarity of at least two possibly implied rebukes of Jesus, one by a sister (perhaps both) and another by Jesus, should not go unnoticed, and no less in a gospel known for conveying Jesus as supernatural and beyond reproach.⁵³ In such a case, one is tempted to invoke Ockham's razor, according to which the simplest explanation (here for such a cluster of atypical negatively charged emotional responses occurring in the same context) is to be preferred, namely that they are directed at the same individual. And given that the object of all the other hard feelings or touchy questions elsewhere (by the sisters in vv. 21, 32 and 37) the story is Jesus, Ockham's razor bears his name.⁵⁴

B. The Preceding Context of Chapter 11

⁵² Further, the two questions posed by the Jewish mourners reference emotion and doubt respectively ("see how he loved him," and "could not he . . . have kept this man from dying") (vv. 36–37). Again, both concern *Jesus*.

How angry Martha was is more open to question, for she comes to Jesus and engages in meaningful conversation with him. The anger of Mary may be clearly inferred for one or more of the following reasons: 1) she remains where she was (although perhaps this was required by custom); 2) she is prodded to encounter Jesus by means of what appears to be a white lie ("The Teacher is here and is calling for you" [ESV]); and 3) she curtly claims that Lazarus died because Jesus was not present and immediately begins to cry. John also leads us to expect better treatment of Mary in light of his pre-emptive mention of her lavish attention to what Jesus would interpret as his own post-mortem needs (v. 2). Finally, given the poignant tone of the remark, it is surprising that John records it twice. He is drawing attention to strong words for a reason that, given the content of the words, includes tension over Jesus' delay and Lazarus's death.

⁵³ The only other case I am aware of in which a follower of Jesus offers him a rebuke is Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi, concerning which see later in this discussion.

⁵⁴ Ockham's razor alone does not suffice; not everyone in the story needs necessarily be angry over the same thing or person. A key question is thus whether the narrator seems to dissociate or link the figures expressing anger. Certainly, by the time Jesus became angry and disappointed in himself, he had come to share *the same* perspective as Martha and Mary: namely, that his seemingly insensitive delay had caused much harm and grief. Indeed, the harmony that is subsequently perceived between the emotions of Jesus, the sisters, and the Jewish mourners lies in that Jesus begins to weep, just as the sisters and the mourners have been doing.

True, the use of a different verb for Jesus' crying could imply *distance* between the two instances of weeping. But Lincoln is correct in stating, "since κλαίω and δακρύω are synonyms, readers would have no reason to take the variation as signalling some major interpretive clue rather than as simply serving stylistic purposes" (Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, 211–232 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 221 n27); cf. BAG, 169, which confirms that κλαίω, "an expression of any feeling of sadness, care, or anxiety" is not a technical term for mourning. Contrast 16:20 where John uses θρηνέω, "mourning," to distinguish it from κλαίω.

Consideration is now given to the preceding context of the narrative. The story begins by introducing Lazarus. Though a stranger to us, he is not to Jesus. Lazarus, we are told, is the brother of his friends Martha and Mary. The narrator next surprises the reader by describing an incident he has yet to narrate in chapter 12, namely Mary's lavish anointing of Jesus. The narrator thus emphasizes not only the close relationship between Jesus and this man's sisters, but Jesus' indebtedness to Mary.⁵⁵ Being "the same Mary who poured perfume on the Lord," the narrator reminds everyone familiar with the Gospel story of its very great cost.⁵⁶ And Mary had not simply spent lavishly on Jesus; as interpreted by Jesus, her extraordinary attentiveness to Jesus' was in preparation for his death and deserving of her gaining fame. Soon however, the question will ironically arise whether Jesus will give the same dutiful attention to Mary's brother, who now too approaches death. A sharp contrast to Mary's sweet anointing of Jesus is offered when Martha will say to Jesus, who tarried in relation to Lazarus' death, "Lord, by now he stinketh" (v. 39).

Returning to the beginning of the story, the contrast between the personal nature of the message from the sisters, "Lord, come quick. He whom you love is dying," and Jesus' response is striking. Because they maintained a well-established close relationship, the sisters' informal and intimate urgent message, like a personal telegram, needs no explication.⁵⁷ But Jesus' response is impersonal, abstract, and theological. It is not even addressed to the sisters, but to his disciples. Verse four reads, "When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'" Whether theological, prospective or both, the statement is unexceptionable. However, the upbeat tone of these words presents a jarring contrast with the women's distress and grief over their stricken brother Lazarus, which Jesus has *yet* to encounter first-hand. Moreover, this is the first of three statements by Jesus that contrast with what he will soon experience upon meeting Martha, Mary and their friends and mourners who had watched Lazarus deteriorate.

It is troubling that Jesus' statement here contains no mention of Martha, Mary—or even Lazarus, whose predicament is dubbed "this sickness" and one that "will not end in death." Although this eventually turns out to be true, the comment serves to imply that Jesus is overlooking (even nullifying) the cold reality of a

⁵⁵ The introductory reference to Bethany as "the village of Mary" is important; it is the home of all three of Jesus' friends and the stage for the sisters' grief. Also "Bethany" contrasts the *nameless* place where, for no stated reason, Jesus had decided to linger for two more days.

⁵⁶ John 12:3–5.

⁵⁷ It is perhaps reflective of a paradoxical Johannine apology of Jesus (on which see later under section three) that the sisters don't say "come quickly," only that Lazarus has fallen ill.

beloved's corpse over which the sisters and others have been mourning for several days.

Verses 5–6 are very odd—perhaps the oddest anywhere in the Bible. They contain a logical fallacy: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Therefore [not δὲ, but οὖν], when he heard that Lazarus had fallen ill, he then [τότε μὲν] stayed where he was for two more days.”⁵⁸ Staying makes no sense as an expression of love for the family; rather, it invites doubt.⁵⁹ How might one reckon with the contrast here? And, even more puzzling, why would John be at pains to draw clear attention to it?

It is worth adding to several explanations⁶⁰ that these verses served to give an early nod to the conflict that will soon unfold regarding Jesus' apparent lack of concern. In other words, John both admits the contradiction while at the same time affirming Jesus' love for his close friends. Timothy George puts it well when he notes that the “unbearable tension” between Jesus' love and his delay “carries the story forward,” anticipating what lies later in the story. Such movement is apparent in that essentially the same question is asked three times, by each sister and finally by the Jews, who say, “could not he . . . have also kept this man from dying?” The point in relation to my argument is that *a contrite Jesus* such as can be strongly inferred in vv. 33 and 38 can readily be seen to mediate the conflict posed by the challenges others level *against him*—and tempers their effects in such a way that the first comment of the Jews after seeing Jesus weep, far from “missing the point” as suggested by a surprisingly large number of commentators, makes the point: “Look, he loved him after all.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ “The harshness of the word **therefore** betokens Christ's determination to make the event redound to his Father's glory even at the cost of delaying his journey.” (Mark Edwards, *John*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries [Oxford: Blackwell, 2004], 115.)

⁵⁹ Here, Mary, especially perturbed by Jesus' delay, is not named. She will soon intimate that sense of anonymity when, after being prodded by her sister, she finally encounters Jesus. A fair inference from the absence of such earlier in the narrative is that Martha's comment, “The teacher is . . . calling for you,” might be, as some have argued, an incentivizing “white lie.”

⁶⁰ Many scholars take John to be saying in effect that Jesus marches only to the beat of God's drum, often comparing this passage to Jesus' jarring response to the request of his mother in 2:4 and to his brothers in 7:6–10 (e.g., O'Day, “Gospel,” 9:686, and Thompson, *John*, 241). O'Day (*ibid.*) thus writes, “The juxtaposition of vv. 5 and 6 underscores that not even his love for this family will alter the unfolding of the events of this hour.” On the view that this is a typical contrastive Johannine motif, see C. H. Giblin, “Suggestion, Negative Response and Positive Action in St. John's Portrayal of Jesus,” *NTS* 26 (1980): 197–211.

⁶¹ Timothy George, “Waiting for and with Jesus,” *First Things* (March 4, 2017), accessed online, without pagination. George explains v. 5, where it says “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,” “as though to fend off the thought that *Jesus might be indifferent or callous to the plight of his friends at Bethany . . .*” (my emphasis). The last question disrupts the easing

I mentioned three cases in which Jesus' upbeat attitude towards Lazarus' death stood in sharp contrast to the attitude of Martha and Mary as they helplessly watch their brother die. The initial case—Jesus' "denial" of Lazarus' death in v. 4—is followed in v. 11 by Jesus' comparison of Lazarus' death with sleep.⁶² Verse 11 reads, "our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." Though a common metaphor for death to John's later readers, Jesus' use of "sleep" in this context strike the initiated reader as gross understatement compared to the sisters' experience of a long-dead (even stinking) Lazarus.⁶³ Jesus' continued use of the metaphor as he speaks of his going there to "wake him up" compounds the effect. To Jesus at this point in the story, Lazarus' death is akin to letting him sleep in. To put the matter bluntly—thereby underscoring how appropriate a later expression of *self*-chastisement could be—to Jesus at this early point in the narrative, it is as though Lazarus will be given a mere friendly wake-up call. And although it is true that a profound theological lesson on the glory of God awaits, John here seems content to bide time early in the narrative between seeming insensitivity and strident purpose on the part of Jesus.

A third contrastive element lies in v. 15. Here, perhaps as if to make the point most strongly, the writer attributes to Jesus the emotion of "rejoicing" that Lazarus had died: "I rejoice [χαίρω] for your sakes, that you may believe, that I was not there."⁶⁴ There can be little doubt that this joyful emotion provides a strong (and telling) foil to the mournful and bereft state of friends whom Jesus shall only later encounter. More to the point, Jesus' "rejoicing" finds precedent in other aspects of Jesus' prior attitude which *later*, as the belated beneficiary of Bethany's mournful scene, he will aptly temper in the light of greater knowledge by way of self-rebuke/inward anger—not in the sense of a change of heart, mind, theological conviction, or anything else, but by way of sympathy in response to the contrast between the mournful carnage that he witnesses around him and the glorious future

of tension caused by the former and reinforces my point that the narrative addresses a controversy that remained in John's day. The challenge also helps carry the narrative forward.

⁶² Sleep is a common metaphor for death in the NT, especially in the Pauline letters, and John's audience would have been familiar with this language. The point in the immediate context is that Jesus is talking so casually about Lazarus having fallen asleep that his disciples think he is speaking literally.

⁶³ Although we are correct in thinking, according to v. 13, that the disciples were simply being dense in thinking that Jesus was speaking of physical death, there is room to wonder whether Jesus' casual attitude towards Lazarus's condition might have contributed to their mistaken interpretation that he was merely asleep and would wake up.

⁶⁴ Jesus' choice of so exuberant a word as "rejoice" to describe Lazarus's death may have proven too much even for the narrator, who employs odd syntax to create distance between the rejoicing and Lazarus dying. On the syntax, see helpfully Édouard Delebecque, "'Lazare est mort' (note sur Jean 11,14–15)," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 89–97, followed by Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 163.

purposes of God, purposes that he had previously affirmed with gladness. It is thus with his feelings bestirred, inwardly irked, and likely even self-scolding/rebuke relative to his previous singular optimism and joy, that Jesus occupies the fulcrum between now and the future—now seeing Lazarus long dead, his friend’s dear sisters frantic with disappointment, and everyone else in attendance weeping with them—and simultaneously seeing the future when God will be glorified and his people will believe in his Son. Here in this later post-Bethany context, Jesus, seething with inner angst and turmoil, cries.

My argument overall assumes that there is development between the relatively enthusiastic perspective of Jesus toward Lazarus’s death prior to arriving in Bethany and the later perspective of Jesus, who, after Bethany and being human, saw grounds for showing remorse, yet in no way as to contradict or deny his prior relatively positive outlook. Evidence for both *change and consistency* may be seen in 11:40-42 where, after Bethany, Jesus invokes the same doxological perspective on Lazarus’ death but this time without any sense of gladness over it.⁶⁵

A similar point to the one made here has been noted by others. Take for example, the following remark by Lincoln (who nonetheless attributes Jesus’ anger to the banality of death):

The portrayal of Jesus here [i.e., as angry and troubled] need not be seen as a contradiction of the earlier stress on his knowledge and gladness that what will ensue will be a revelation of God’s glory and an occasion for belief or as in conflict with his own power over death. Rather, in the context of the whole narrative, *it becomes part of the necessarily paradoxical depiction of the Logos who has become flesh. As the divine Logos, he displays sovereignty in the face of death, yet, as the incarnate Logos, he also shows human anger and sorrow* when presented with the consequences of death’s disruptive power in the case of this one whom he loves and, by extension, in his own case.⁶⁶

In sum, I suggest from the preceding context that Jesus’ disgruntled angst is a Johannine signal of his having gained a fresh perspective relative to his prior more upbeat perspective and exhibition of gladness over what God would accomplish through the death of Lazarus.⁶⁷ So too, Jesus’ weeping is consistent

⁶⁵ John 11: 40–42. It is not that the theology here is different or even less positive, it is that the jarringly positive aspects that were present in 11:15 are here muted.

⁶⁶ Lincoln, “Lazarus Story,” 221.

⁶⁷ The logic of the story depends on understanding a contrast at the level of the narrative. The more common explanation that Jesus’ anger is against death also implies a contrast between Jesus’ comments about the good of Lazarus dying earlier in the story and Jesus’ later weeping over Lazarus’ death.

with the explanation offered here that Jesus' deep angst was self-directed. Jesus wept in response to the sight of others mourning. And he immediately asks where the tomb is, as though to fix the problem of Lazarus's death as soon as possible.⁶⁸

What follows Jesus' encounter with the sisters is also consistent with the explanation offered here. After saying "Jesus wept," John adds: "therefore the Jews were saying, 'see how he loved him'" (v. 36). Taken at face value, the Jews' response here (far from being, as many have curiously argued, largely beside the point or missing it)⁶⁹ demonstrate that—contrary to what seemed apparent prior to his weeping—Jesus did love Lazarus after all.⁷⁰ And here again, John records a reaction by the Jews to an emotional response regarding *Jesus* in relation to Lazarus's death, not to any other suggested outside influence, whether his future death, hypocrisy on the part of others, the chaos that death brings, its ultimate Satanic cause, the Jews intruding on a private affair, etc.⁷¹

⁶⁸ There is no denying that Lazarus's death was a precipitating factor in Jesus' mournful reaction; yet because the cure is immediately forthcoming and it was the will of God that Lazarus should die, what accounts for the intense emotions of weeping, and more pointedly, of anger ἐν αὐτῷ?

⁶⁹ It is telling that the reaction of the Jews given by John poses a problem for those who see Jesus' anger and weeping for reasons other than to counter the unloving or neglectful impression left by Jesus' divinely illumined attitude and actions. Note, for example, the counter-intuitive exegesis reflected in the following comment by Beasley-Murray (*John*, 194): "*The Jews from Jerusalem accompanying Mary and Martha failed to understand the tears of Jesus; they did not perceive that the tears were more over them than over Lazarus!*" (emphasis mine). Curiously, what Beasley-Murray goes on to say about the second reaction of the Jews supports my argument that the anger of the Jews was aptly directed *toward Jesus*. He writes, "The query raised in v. 37 . . . appears to be . . . a criticism of *Jesus* for not preventing the death of Lazarus; hence the further mention of the anger of Jesus as he made his way to the tomb (v. 38a)" (ibid., emphasis mine).

Lincoln similarly stumbles over the implication of these verses, though with greater balance and finesse than Beasley-Murray at this point:

Jesus' weeping produces both a more positive and a more negative reaction among 'the Jews.' But even the more positive interpretation of Jesus' grief as showing how much he loved Lazarus *is not totally reliable* but remains on the surface. As has been suggested, *Jesus' emotional response entails much more than this and is directed at the death to which Lazarus has succumbed.* (Lincoln, "Lazarus Story," 327, emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ I shall address the matter of the second remark of the Jews, in abiding criticism of Jesus (v. 37), under heading three.

⁷¹ My point more specifically is that Jesus' weeping reflected despair over, as others were also implying, the part he—inevitably, ironically, and painfully *to himself*—had to play in, Lazarus's death.

C. The Broader Context of the Gospel(s)

My literary argument includes two observations that involve similarities between the Lazarus story and the Synoptic Gospels. First, many scholars have noted links between the Lazarus Story in John and the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane in the Synoptics.⁷² One key link invites a favorable comparison between the inner angst of Jesus in 11:33 and 38 and the conflict between the human and divine wills of Jesus that led to much agony, grief and weeping in the Garden. The point is this: the conflict of Jesus in the garden in the Synoptics was not merely a case of emotions *within* himself but, as I suggest in John 11:33, 38, related *to* himself. In other words, Jesus' emotions can be attributed to the conflict precipitated by the gut-wrenching contrast between the divine will of Jesus (which in John 11 was to bring glory to God through the death of Lazarus) and the human will of Jesus (which was to have been able to spare his friends the grief and anguish associated with having their brother die, and to have others not disappointed in him over this).

A second observation from a comparison between John 11 and the Synoptic gospels sheds possible light on the specific nature of Jesus' emotional reaction in John 11. Although I have chosen to leave open the exact nature of the angry emotions expressed in John 11:33–38 (anger or rebuke in the case of ἐμβριμάομαι and inner turmoil or confusion in the case of ταρασσώ), the context of the four Gospels as a whole lends credence to *rebuke* as a component of the emotional interchange in John 11.⁷³

As in John's Gospel, there arises a key initial point in all three of the Synoptic Gospels— Mark 8:27–33, Matt 16:13–23, and Luke 9:51–55 (cf. 18–26)—in which Jesus' death is intimated as inevitable. The relevant point is this: *at some point in the near context of each of these Christological disclosures, reference is made to a rebuke.*⁷⁴ Moreover, at the point where Jesus' death is intimated in both Mark and Matthew there are two rebukes, the first by a disciple

⁷² As Voorwinde (*Gospels*, 173 n49) notes, “Only Matthew and Mark's accounts of Gethsemane could be said to equal the emotional intensity found here [i.e., John 11:33–38].”

⁷³ Whether from the words of Mary, Martha, or both, but especially by Jesus, as claimed by Story (and in a different sense, by Lindars). Recall that the first emotional response of Jesus in John 11:33 is entirely consistent lexically with a self-*rebuke*.

⁷⁴ In Mark 8:30 Jesus “sternly warns” his disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Christ (ἐπιτιμάω plus the third person plural pronoun in the dative case). (Matthew's version has Jesus “command” (διαστέλλω) his disciples the same—16:20.) Then in Mark 8:32, after Jesus intimates his suffering and death, Peter begins “to rebuke” Jesus (again, ἐπιτιμάω present active epexegetical infinitive plus the third person singular personal pronoun in the dative), who in turn (v. 33) “rebukes” Peter (the same verb with Peter's name in the dative case). In Luke the definitive turning point is later in this same pericope in 9:51 when Jesus rebukes James and John (v. 55).

(Peter) against Jesus, and the second by Jesus himself (Mark 8:31–32; Matt 16:22–23).⁷⁵ The initial rebuke by Peter in Mark (and also in Matthew) invites comparison with the provocative words the sister(s) in John 11 direct toward Jesus.⁷⁶ Moreover, in both Mark and Matthew the second “rebuke” comes from, as seemingly in John 11:33a, *Jesus*.⁷⁷ In short, in keeping with the view of several scholars, *a rebuke* (here implied by Mary and perhaps Martha) and a counter rebuke by Jesus (here not to the women but to himself) perhaps functioned in the Gospels as a literary clue to the fact that the story would now continue along a path towards the scandalous and unthinkable: the death of Jesus himself.

3. Historical

Assuming the arguments presented here are cogent, a problem remains: why would John record Jesus attributing anger and frustration toward himself? It is one thing that John elsewhere attributes inner turmoil to Jesus (ala ταρασσῶ) concerning his death, and quite another that John attributes anger and consternation to Jesus concerning himself.

In possible answer I should like to offer a hypothesis that takes its cue from two things in the narrative in addition to John’s three self-referential emotional statements of Jesus (four including his weeping): 1) the frustration and critique offered *by others against Jesus* in the same narrative; and 2) potentially controversial elements in the narrative that are hard to account for on grounds other than they are genuinely historical.

⁷⁵ Unlike Mark (8:32), Matthew falls short of explicitly calling Jesus’ response a rebuke (ἐπιτιμᾶω) but that it is such cannot be doubted (9:23).

⁷⁶ I acknowledge that not everyone will agree with my implication that the words of the sister(s) (at least Mary) constituted a rebuke of Jesus. First, apart from it being unusual, I do not think this a stretch in light of the context of the sisters’ summons of Jesus in the hope of preventing Lazarus’s death (cf. v.2); and second, my implication of such here is primarily for the sake of the argument that it parallels that of Peter in Mark and Matthew.

⁷⁷ This note refers to three different points. 1. The circumstances in Luke are different, as reference to a rebuke comes later, but that is arguably beside the point if the rebuke serves as a literary signal calling attention to that part of the story where Jesus intimates his own death. 2. Regarding the implied closest connection here with Mark (i.e., that Mark explicitly attributes “rebuke” to Jesus), of all the synoptics, Mark bears the closest similarity to John in terms of structure (see, for example, Lincoln, *John*, 27). There is no consensus regarding the relation of John to the Synoptics, but some scholars regard Mark to have been an especially important source. For example, Lincoln states: “this writer . . . has become persuaded that the Fourth Gospel provides evidence that its writer and editor not only knew Mark, *to which it is most substantially indebted*, but also knew and used both Matthew and Luke.” Lincoln, *John*, 32 (emphasis mine). 3. Here again I give credence to the view that the Lazarus story serves *indirectly* to intimate Jesus’ death.

The first factor relates to the fact that throughout the second part of the story, it is, surprisingly, *Jesus* who is consistently the object of others' frustration (including even Mary and Martha) or anger and doubt.

Second, several troubling things seem to reflect early historical memory.⁷⁸ For one, it is hard otherwise to account for the rare, sharp words directed towards Jesus by Martha and Mary: "Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died." Similarly, it is hard otherwise to account for John recording that Jesus delayed in responding to news of Lazarus' illness by remaining where he was at the time—seemingly at no special place and for no pragmatic reason, and long enough to generate questions as to whether Jesus' delay caused Lazarus' death. And third, there is a historical ring to the words of Jesus' detractors, "Could not he who gave sight to the blind have kept this man from dying?" Further, although the statement, "See how he loved him," could easily be an editorial gloss, a historical element arguably lies behind John stumbling over his own logic in saying that "because" Jesus *loved* the family he "therefore" decided to remain where he was for two extra days. There can be little doubt that Jesus' delay was taken by some to imply a lack of love for Lazarus. And finally, the jarring comment that Jesus "rejoiced" over Lazarus' death is also hard to account for on grounds other than preserving a historic memory (presumably on the part of the disciples who accompanied him.)

Here then is the hypothesis: the story contains enough troubling material to postulate the existence of conflict within the early church that emanated from the innermost circle of Jesus' followers (including most notably Mary). It concerned Jesus' practically inexplicable delay in coming to the sisters when urgently summoned over Lazarus's imminent demise, and the grief, pain, suffering it caused, as well the doubt it cast on Jesus' love for close friends. Add to this, historical elements like testimony to Jesus being glad about Lazarus' demise, and a controversy is reasonable to suggest.

Relevant to the notion of a possible conflict, take for example, the following judgment of Andrew Lincoln about Jesus rejoicing. Lincoln, says of Jesus in v. 15: "While he does not say precisely that he is glad that Lazarus is dead, this does seem to be implied." Lincoln then draws attention to "what in normal human

⁷⁸ It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on a historical reconstruction. My understanding compares favorably with the following aspect of at least Meier's reconstruction: "The signs of a lengthy tradition history and the anchoring of the event in a set place (plus in the Johannine tradition the presence of the proper names of the principal actors . . .) incline me to think that the Lazarus story ultimately reflects some incident in the life of the historical Jesus. . . . I think it is highly likely that John 11:1-45 goes back ultimately to some event involving Lazarus, a disciple of Jesus, and that this event was believed by Jesus' disciples even during his lifetime to be a miracle of raising the dead." (831).

relationships would be the quite inappropriate and offensive expression of gladness in the face of a friend's death."⁷⁹ Then, as if to anticipate the present hypothesis according to which John must successfully negotiate the conflict, Lincoln concludes: "only readers' understanding of the whole Lazarus episode and of its function as a sign . . . will allow any sense to be made" of Jesus' apparent insensitivity.⁸⁰

For John to record this very significant miracle story at a time when others still knew details about the controversy here inferred, he would likely have had to acknowledge key debatable aspects of it, and yet continue to affirm Jesus as divinely stalwart in pursuit of the purposes of God. But the real challenge would have been to strike the right balance between portraying Jesus a) as genuinely conciliatory to the grief and disappointment that others attributed to him, and b) as without implication of sin or wrongdoing.

This challenge is where our earlier lexical survey possibly becomes relevant. That survey showed John consistently describing Jesus' emotions with reference to himself. It showed that, on its own, the first expression most readily denotes self-chastisement. And yet, where this was supported by the context of the second expression that immediately followed, it was noticeably tempered by the third expression, which took a non-objective dative and referenced the first via "again."⁸¹ Could John have been successful in cutting things both ways? If the history of exegesis of these expressions is any indication, the answer is yes.

Jesus' delay, though fully in keeping with the will of God, proved nonetheless deeply hurtful. For anyone other than Jesus, something like an apology would be in order. While such was completely anathema to John, he did, I suggest, the next best thing: by recording a "self-rebuke" (or at least one that can clearly be interpreted as such).⁸² Following from this (in addition to recording the softer notes of self-consternation and continued inward anger) what could be more apt than to record his weeping? That weeping reflects Jesus' conciliatory remorse over the death of Lazarus (including, as we have seen, the part that he had

⁷⁹ Lincoln, "Lazarus Story," 219.

⁸⁰ Lincoln, "Lazarus Story," 219. My point is not to associate Lincoln with my hypothesizing, but to show that there are potentially controversial elements in the story which John, by the time he has finished the story, has successfully negotiated to the point of alleviating the perception of insensitivity.

⁸¹ John 13:21 could similarly be taken to contribute to this tempering.

⁸² It is possible that John's aptly high Christology would have assured him that even self-chastisement by the Son of God could not be other than appropriate, righteous, and apt.

inevitably to play in it) is borne out by the comment that comes in its wake: “See how he loved him.”⁸³

On the one hand, John upheld a high Christology by offering a strong theological reason for Jesus’ delay that is in keeping with the themes of God’s glory and bringing others to faith—both characteristic of his gospel. On the other hand, John portrayed a truly human Jesus who expressed anger and frustration over the fact that grief, anguish, and disappointment were to ensue from his obedience to God’s purpose, something he came to recognize only after arriving at Bethany.

While stretching John close to his limit, these cloudy concessions had a silver lining in that they helped address anti-Docetism. Whether John intended this or not is debated.⁸⁵

Finally, the present hypothesis should be added to others as to why there is no mention of this uniquely powerful story elsewhere.⁸⁶

4. Theological

The interpretation offered here might raise theological questions for orthodox Christians like me. Suffice it note that orthodox Christianity has always insisted that Jesus be not only divine but fully human. And for him to be so, as both Scriptures and historical theology affirm, Jesus must at times have had limited knowledge from which there later came growth in understanding.⁸⁷ And logically, for Jesus to have *learned things* means that it was possible, even likely at least on occasion, that he would have expressed the same emotions that we do over not fully understanding some things sooner—*regret, frustration, self-scorn, anger, etc.* Concrete realities like this are often overlooked in considering the true, full, *real* humanity of Jesus.

To return to the general point about the humanity of Jesus, Millard Erickson, an evangelical theologian trusted for his orthodoxy, upon noting that “Jesus’

⁸³ This has the advantage of taking the Jews’ reaction not as “missing the point,” as Beasley-Murray and Lincoln (in part) suggest. Regarding the comment of the Jews that follows (“could he . . . not have kept this man from dying?”), I regard it possibly to reflect the side of the controversy that was critical of Jesus for not coming sooner and allowing Lazarus to die (and the sisters to suffer anguish and pain).

⁸⁵ For a provocative case in support of anti-Docetism in John, see, for example, Udo Schnelle, *Anti-Docetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, Trans. Linda Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

⁸⁶ Other explanations include the following: that Lazarus had died by the time John’s gospel was written, and was thus no longer in need of anonymity/protection; that the Lazarus story was superfluous in the light of other resurrection stories in the Synoptics (i.e., the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain); that John had unique access to this as well as other traditions emanating from Judea; and that it was hard to reconcile with the chronology of the Synoptics.

⁸⁷ Luke 2:40, 52; cf. Heb 5:8: “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”

knowledge was extraordinary in some matters, but definitely limited in others,” offered his own best judgment on the matter as follows: “Perhaps we could say that he had such knowledge as was necessary for him to accomplish his mission; in other matters he was as ignorant as we are.”⁸⁸

The fuller understanding that came to Jesus post-Bethany can thus be understood as a case of him having limited knowledge prior to Bethany and then, to use Luke’s phraseology in 2:52, “increasing in wisdom.”

I leave it to readers of this Festschrift for my good friend Steve Notley, to decide whether Jesus’ anger was self-directed or not, and whether some of the story’s most puzzling features reflect a conflict relating to the historical Jesus that John had to negotiate for this most striking miracle to be preserved.

And if per chance I have here rightly redressed an understated aspect of Jesus’ true humanity, such would be a fitting tribute to a scholar whose painstaking research has uncovered a lot of other realia about Jesus as a first-century Jew. In any event, it is an honor to offer this essay as a tribute to Notley’s scholarship; it comes with fondness and respect, and with gratitude for years of warm friendship.

⁸⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 648. Gerald Hawthorne, an evangelical NT scholar, concludes somewhat similarly:

in the mystery of the incarnation, [Jesus] nevertheless so chose to ‘encapsulate’ his divinity within the confines of humanity, so chose to make his attributes latent, potential within him (however one is to say it) that he faced life *precisely* like any other human being faces life—not as some colossus striding unfeelingly over earth, but as a person limited physically and mentally, exposed to all kinds of diseases, subject to all sorts of temptations, susceptible to misunderstandings or hated, unshielded from weakness and weariness, unprotected from frustrations and vexations, vulnerable to death and on and on. He learned as other people learn . . .” Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 230. My italics indicate where Hawthorne likely alludes to a scholarly caricature of John’s portrait of Jesus that has justifiably been called into question in much recent literature.