LOVE IN THE GOSPEL of JOHN
LOVE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study

FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, SDB
For the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC;
St. Mary’s University and Seminary, Baltimore;
Catholic Theological College;
and Australian Catholic University
in gratitude for honors bestowed.

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover”
(see John 15:13; 19:28–37)
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An awareness of the theme of love in the Gospel of John has a long history in Christianity. In a story attributed to Augustine, the disciples of the Beloved Disciple, somewhat wearied by his relentless insistence that they love one another, once asked him if there was anything else of importance that Jesus passed on. The Beloved Disciple simply replied: “Love one another.” Ever since that time, Christians have focused on the central role of love at every level of life and practice, and not only for “one another.” As history tells us, there have been times in the Christian story when care and love for others have not been especially obvious, especially during the Crusades, in the dramatic breakdown of Christian unity during the period of the Reformation, in the horrific persecution of the Jewish people across the centuries, and in the abuse of young people by Christian authorities in more recent times. Despite these tragic departures from the dream of the founder of Christianity, his followers—in their many guises—still strive to obey his command to love.

Scholarship has attended to the theme of love in the life of Jesus, in the Gospels, and in the earliest teachings of Christianity, as they are found in its foundational documents in the New Testament. However, Jesus and the authors of the documents of the New Testament did not invent the command to love God and neighbor. The commands to love God (Deut. 6:4–5) and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18) predated the Christian era by many centuries, as, most likely, did the command to love one’s enemies (see Luke 6:27//Matt. 5:44; see the hints in Exod. 23:4–5; Prov. 24:17–18; 25:21–22). Most likely, love for God and neighbor were locked together for the first time in Jesus’ synthesis of the Law and the Prophets: “You shall
love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30–31 NRSV; see Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 10:26–27). Jesus may not have been the first to ask for love of one’s enemies, although a majority would suggest that it was part of his uniqueness.

Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Gospel of John knows it contains love commands (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). But there is something different in the Fourth Gospel that has attracted the interest of scholars in recent times. Despite the widespread insistence upon love in the Gospel of John, the command to love one’s neighbor has disappeared. A command to “love one another” has replaced it. It is equally interesting that Jesus does not command love of God. He instructs his disciples—and through this Gospel, all subsequent readers and hearers—to love him. To love Jesus, and to believe that he has come from the Father, is one of the guarantees that God will love them (see 16:27). Scholars have assessed the uniqueness of the Johannine use of the theme of love variously; there is little unanimity among them. They seldom focus upon the cross of Jesus as the revelation of love (see 15:13).

This book starts from an interpretative principle rooted in the human experience of love. Most studies of the love theme in the Gospel of John focus upon the appearance of the two Greek verbs for love and friendship that appear there, ἀγαπάω and φιλέω, and upon the nouns associated with those verbs (ἀγάπη, φίλος). This approach to the text is important, the result of the close linguistic and historical-critical reading of texts, characteristic of much modern biblical scholarship. However, what came first: words for love, or actions that made love visible and thus known? Most human beings find it difficult to talk about love, but the search for love and its many expressions surrounds us, from the intimacy of human relationships to the energy that drives the outstanding care for the less fortunate by such groups as Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). Each day, within the increasingly selfish and violent world of these first decades of the third Christian millennium, we can see love in action, despite our inability to speak about it. Generally, we are simply amazed; it is “the stuff of life,” and most of it happens without too many words. It may, therefore, be useful to attend more to what happens in the story of the Gospel of John, as well as to observe what is said.

Starting with the fundamental Johannine axiom, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn
the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (3:16–17), we find it is the action of God’s loving that initiated the presence of Jesus in the world. As Jesus states later in the story, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13 NRSV). Laying down one’s life is not about words but about action. The following study will focus on the actions of a God who sends, on the task of the Johannine Jesus to make God known, on the manner in which this God is made known, on the request that disciples and followers of Jesus love in a certain way, and on the inevitable fruits of that love. Love words are part of the Gospel’s description of these actions, but I will mainly focus on the actions of God in and through his Son, and the actions of all who wish to see and hear Jesus (see 9:35–37; 12:21), even where so-called love words do not appear. This approach inevitably leads me to appreciate more deeply the end of John’s Gospel, the “hour” of Jesus. The Gospel of John is above all about Jesus’ telling the story of God (1:18). An appreciation of the fabric of the story as a whole and the function of actions, especially the actions of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and return to the Father, which manifest love, may best uncover what this Gospel attempts to communicate to readers and listeners of all ages. The words for love may not abound in John’s descriptions of these actions, but perhaps one must look in those descriptions to see what the Johannine words about love mean. What follows tests that hermeneutical intuition, based on millennia of human expression and experience of love.

I extend my gratitude to my fellow Salesian from the English Province, Michael Winstanley, SDB, who read an earlier form of this text. A perceptive reader of all the possibilities of the Johannine text, himself the author of a fine book on its symbolism and spirituality (Symbols and Spirituality: Reflecting on John’s Gospel [Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2008]), he has greatly enriched what appears here with his careful reading of my earlier draft. We first met as theological students in Rome in 1966. For more than forty years Michael has supported me in our mutual journey in the Salesian world with its care for the young, especially those most in need, a world not without its own difficulties in our challenging times. Perhaps in this period of Christian and Catholic history the message of love revealed on a cross will take on a special meaning. So be it! I am also most grateful for assistance from the staff and the resources of the Mannix Library at Catholic Theological College and the Dalton-McCaughey Library of the United Faculty of Theology, both in Melbourne, Australia, and from the facilities of the University Library of Australian Catholic University, scattered across campuses in Brisbane, Sydney,
Canberra, Melbourne, and Ballarat. Finally, I thank my colleagues in the faculty of theology and philosophy at Australian Catholic University, especially the dean, Professor Anne Hunt, and my long-standing friend and colleague, Professor Anthony J. Kelly, CSsR, with whom I have discussed in a number of contexts much of what follows. Special thanks are due to my former student, now a well-published authority in matters Johannine, Associate Professor Mary Coloe, PBVM. Mary read the entire text with expertise and care in its penultimate stage; the final product is better because of it. This is the only scholarly work I have written since 1976 without the accompaniment of overseas travel and research. Perhaps that is obvious, but may it be a sign of a new maturation of theological endeavor in Australia.

I am dedicating this study to four important Catholic centers of higher learning that have honored me in recent years. In 2005, as I ended my time as the Katharine Drexel Professor of Religious Studies and Dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, that prestigious university appointed me an emeritus professor, and the neighboring St. Mary’s University and Seminary, Baltimore, awarded me an honorary doctorate, in recognition of my service to New Testament scholarship. Catholic Theological College, where I began my teaching career in 1976, elected me as a Fellow of the College in 2009, and in 2011 Australian Catholic University admitted me as a Doctor of the University, the university’s highest award. Among the reasons for this award was my service as the Foundation Professor of Theology at the then-infant university, from 1994 to 1998. I have been simultaneously proud of and yet humbled by these awards. Critical biblical scholarship within the Catholic tradition can be difficult, but these major Catholic institutions have supported and encouraged me by recognizing what I have attempted to contribute to my tradition. I dedicate this book to the Catholic University of America, St. Mary’s University and Seminary, Catholic Theological College, and Australian Catholic University, in gratitude for all that I have learned from so many colleagues and students in the United States and across Australia.

I wish to thank Baker Academic for this fine production. Gratitude is due in a special way to James Ernest, whose long-term friendship and support of my work made this book possible, and Tim West, whose editorial support has been unparalleled in my now-lengthy writing career.

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## Abbreviations

All references to Jewish, intertestamental, Greco-Roman, and patristic literature not mentioned below are given in full.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABRL</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Reference Library</td>
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<td>AnBib</td>
<td>Analecta biblica</td>
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<td>ATANT</td>
<td>Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>AThR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
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<td>AusBR</td>
<td>Australian Biblical Review</td>
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<td>AYBRL</td>
<td>Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBET</td>
<td>Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium</td>
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<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<td>BibInt</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation</td>
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<td>BibIntS</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation Series</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>BibScRel</td>
<td>Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJRL</td>
<td>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNTC</td>
<td>Black’s New Testament Commentaries</td>
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<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>BZNW</td>
<td>Beihete zur Zeitschrift für die neuestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>CahRB</td>
<td>Cahiers de la Revue biblique</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBET</td>
<td>Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>CBQMS</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series</td>
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<td>CCSL</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum: Series latina. Turnhout, 1953–.</td>
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<td>CNT</td>
<td>Commentaire du Nouveau Testament</td>
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<td>DRev</td>
<td>Downside Review</td>
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<td>EBib</td>
<td>Études bibliques</td>
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<td>EH</td>
<td>Europäische Hochschulschriften</td>
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<td>ETL</td>
<td>Ephemeraes theologicae Lovanienses</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETR</td>
<td>Études théologiques et religieuses</td>
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<tr>
<td>EvT</td>
<td>Evangelische Theologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Forschung zur Bibel</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>HeyJ</td>
<td>Heythrop Journal</td>
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<td>HKNT</td>
<td>Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>HNT</td>
<td>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>HTCNT</td>
<td>Herder’s Theological Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>HUT</td>
<td>Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie</td>
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<td>IBS</td>
<td>Irish Biblical Studies</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>JB</td>
<td>Jerusalem Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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### Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</em></td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td><em>Journal for Theological Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κτλ.</td>
<td>καὶ τὰ λοιπά = et cetera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td><em>Lectio divina</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNTS</td>
<td>Library of New Testament Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTZ</td>
<td><em>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>New Century Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NovTSup</td>
<td>Supplements to <em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRTh</td>
<td><em>La nouvelle revue théologique</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NTAbh</td>
<td>Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td><em>New Testament Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖTK</td>
<td>Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNTC</td>
<td>Pelican New Testament Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTMS</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td><em>Revue biblique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RivB</td>
<td><em>Rivista biblica italiana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSR</td>
<td><em>Recherches de science religieuse</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>RTL</td>
<td><em>Revue théologique de Louvain</em></td>
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<td>Sal</td>
<td><em>Salesianum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SANT</td>
<td>Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<td>SB</td>
<td>Studi Biblici</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBFA</td>
<td>Studium biblicum Franciscanum analecta</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
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<td>SBLSS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>Stuttgarter Bibelstudien</td>
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<td>Sem</td>
<td>Semeia</td>
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<td>SHR</td>
<td>Studies in the History of Religions</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td><em>Scottish Journal of Theology</em></td>
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<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Sacra pagina</td>
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<tr>
<td>s.v.</td>
<td>sub voce: “under the word”</td>
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<tr>
<td>THKNT</td>
<td>Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>TynBul</td>
<td>Tyndale Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ</td>
<td>Theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZKT</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neustamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZTK</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</td>
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The Gospel of John, which appeared toward the end of the first Christian century, continues the tradition of Jesus’ speaking about love. The source of his teaching about love of God and neighbor, as found in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, is the Old Testament. When asked to identify the most important commandment (Mark and Matthew) on what to do to inherit eternal life (Luke), he responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31; cf. Matt. 22:35–40). The expressions come from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (love of God) and Leviticus 19:18 (love of neighbor). In Luke the same words appear, but Jesus elicits them from a lawyer (Luke 10:25–27). The settings are different. For Matthew and Mark the episode belongs to a series of conflicts with Israel’s leadership (see Mark 11:27–12:44; Matt. 21:23–22:46). For Luke, it introduces the parable of the good Samaritan, which Jesus tells

1. Throughout I will refer to “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” using these traditional expressions to indicate that one is older than the other, not to express a value judgment. Other suggestions (e.g., Hebrew Scriptures/Christian Scriptures; First Testament/Second Testament) either are not accurate or do make value judgments. All translations from European languages are those of the author.
in answer to the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29; see vv. 30–37). The evangelists may use the words of Jesus in their own way, but the combination of Deuteronomy and Leviticus to command love of God and neighbor most likely goes back to Jesus himself.  

The use of this command to love develops and changes direction from the Old Testament through Jesus into the Synoptic Gospels and finally in John. Jesus’ command to love as it appears in Mark, Matthew, and Luke never appears in the Gospel of John. Indeed, nowhere in John does Jesus request that the disciples love God. John has replaced this with a request by Jesus that the disciples love him and his commandments (14:15, 21, 23, 28; 16:27). He promises the disciples that if they love him and his commandments, his Father will love them (14:21, 23). Jesus and the Father share a union of love that Jesus does not share with the disciples for most of the Gospel (3:35; 10:17; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26). Only at the end, in his final prayer for disciples of all ages (17:20–26), does Jesus ask the Father that they be swept into the love that has always united the Father and the Son: “that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (17:26 NRSV).

The Fourth Gospel also uses two different words to speak about the act of loving. All the passages cited in the previous paragraph use the Greek verb ἀγαπάω. In describing another series of relationships, Jesus, or John, uses the verb φιλέω. General Greek usage of these two expressions subtly distinguishes between them. The verb ἀγαπάω has come to be used for self-giving Christian love, while φιλέω maintains its classical meaning of “friendship love.”


4. See BDAG, 5–6, s.v. ἀγαπάω; 1056–57, s.v. φιλέω.
the two expressions, we need not resolve the matter here. However, with a summary glance at the passages using φιλέω we can see that some of the themes mentioned in the previous paragraph return. The Father loves the Son (5:20), Jesus loves Lazarus (11:3, 36), the one who loves his life loses it (12:25), the world loves its own (15:19), the Father loves the disciples (16:27), and Jesus loves “the other disciple” (20:2). The main difference is the use of φιλέω to refer to the negative loves of those who reject Jesus (the love of some for their own lives and the love of the world for its own). John uses φιλέω to describe Jesus’ love for “the other disciple” in 20:2 but not elsewhere in the Gospel. He regularly singles out the Beloved Disciple with the verb ἀγαπάω (13:23; 19:25–27; 21:7, 20).

The focus upon the love of Jesus and love of one another reflects a very Johannine point of view. Central to the thought of the Gospel is that no one has ever seen God. However, his only begotten Son, who is forever in union with his Father, makes him known (see 1:18). This paraphrase of the final verse of the prologue to the Gospel (1:1–18) sets the scene for the story that follows. If you wish to experience the revelation of God—and that also means if you wish to experience the love of God—you will need to find it in the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ (see 1:14–18), and be united to him in faith and love (14:15–24). John grounds his theme of love in the fact that the gift of Jesus to humankind flows from God’s love for the world: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (3:16). All discussion of love in the Fourth Gospel begins from this Johannine truth. Jesus is able to tell his disciples that God, his Father, loves them. But so close is the relationship between the Father and the Son that not to honor the Son means not to honor the one who is forever in union with his Father. Indeed, whoever it was went to considerable trouble to keep a proper name out of the story (see 21:20–24). On this, see Francis J. Moloney, The Gospel of John, SP 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 6–9.

5. For simplicity and out of respect for the tradition, I will use the name “John” to refer to an author of the Gospel as we have it. We do not know the name or identity of the author(s). Indeed, whoever it was went to considerable trouble to keep a proper name out of the story (see 21:20–24). On this, see Francis J. Moloney, The Gospel of John, SP 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 6–9.

who sent him (see 5:23). What the earlier tradition (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) said about loving the Father, John has transferred to loving Jesus, the Son. Typically, the love that the Father has for the disciple depends upon the love the disciple has for Jesus (see 16:27).

Significantly, however, in the Fourth Gospel, the generic command to love one’s “neighbor” (πλησίον) seems to have become more inward looking. The object of Johannine loving is now “one another” (ἀλλήλων) rather than “neighbor.” This central element of the love theme is especially important in John’s account of the final encounter between Jesus and his disciples (13:1–17:26). In opening the so-called last discourse, the narrator indicates that Jesus loved his own “unto the end” (εἰς τέλος), loving them to the temporal end of his life on the cross, and consummately (13:1). Jesus concludes by praying that the disciples will be swept into the love he and the Father have shared from all time (17:24–26). In 14:21–24 he instructs them on the need to love him, his word, and his commandments as the key to being loved by him and his Father. In 13:34–35 and 15:12, 17 he commands them to love one another as he has loved them. But to lead into his commands at the heart of John 15, he uses vine imagery to address the crucial importance of the disciples’ “abiding” (μένω) in him as he does in them so that Jesus and the disciples may love each other as the Father and the Son love each other (vv. 1–11). They are to keep Jesus’ commandment to abide in his love, just as Jesus has obeyed the Father’s commandment and thus abides in God’s love (vv. 9–11). Having requested that the disciples abide in him and thus keep his commandments, Jesus immediately states the commandment twice, in 15:12 and 17. Between these two commands to love, Jesus tells his disciples that no one has greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (15:13). Jesus closes his prayer for unity with a memorable petition that his disciples of all time be one in love (17:21–23),

7. On the double meaning of εἰς τέλος in John 13:1, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 373–74. John 13–17 is a “so-called” last discourse because 13:1–38 is a narrative and 17:1–26 is a prayer. Only 14:1–16:33 is discourse, as we shall discuss later in this study.

8. Almost all commentators divide 15:1–17 as follows: vv. 1–8, vv. 9–17. I find this surprising. The disappearance of the vine imagery after v. 8 and the opening of the love theme in vv. 9–11 lead them to this division. Thus they link vv. 9–11 with vv. 12–17. This division misses the fact that although vv. 9–11 lack vine imagery, vv. 1–11 are unified by the continuous use of the verb “to remain” or “to abide” (μένω) in vv. 4 (three times), 5, 6, 7 (twice), 9, 10 (twice). It also misses the obvious literary inclusio, or frame, created by the love command in v. 12 and v. 17, which makes vv. 12–17 a self-standing literary unit. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 416–18.

and one with both Jesus and the Father, as the Father and Jesus are one in an intense unity of love (17:24–26).

This overview of the impressive use of the love theme in the Gospel of John indicates its importance for this early Christian story of Jesus. But there is more to the theme of love in the Fourth Gospel than those places in the narrative where nouns and verbs that ask for love or express love are found. Jesus not only speaks about love in words; he also shows it in actions. He spells it out in a special way in washing his disciples’ feet and giving Judas the piece of bread in 13:1–38; in his final prayer in 17:1–26; and in submitting to crucifixion, that “greater love” he referred to in 15:13 when urging the disciples to love as he has loved, εἰς τέλος (13:1, 34–35; 15:12, 17).

**Contemporary Approaches**

Over the centuries interpreters have assessed the meaning and importance of the love theme in the Gospel of John variously. Currently, three major approaches predominate. Since the groundbreaking work of Ernst Käsemann on the Johannine community as viewed in the light of John 17, and Wayne Meeks’s essay on the Johannine man from heaven, a number of scholars have seen the love command as a major element in identifying the Johannine community as an early Christian sect. For Käsemann, the love theme is essentially inward looking—it urges love for fellow members of the community: “There is no indication in John that love for one’s brother would also include love toward one’s neighbour.” He regards 3:16, on God’s love for the world,
as a reflection of an earlier tradition that does not reflect true Johannine thought. He claims that this famous passage does not “give us the right to interpret the whole Johannine proclamation from this perspective.” Rejecting other forms of Christianity, as well as their non-Christian neighbors, the Johannine Christians developed their own “inner” Christian culture with its unique language and practices. In their Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John, Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh categorize all the passages that deal with love as exhibiting socially conditioned “antilanguage” in an honor-shame society. All exhortations to mutual love demand loyalty and unconditional commitment to the “core group,” “members of John’s antisociety.” The command to love and the experience of love are limited to the members of the community.

Joan Campbell has further refined this approach. In a very perceptive study—depending upon Michael Halliday’s work on antilanguage and Bruce Malina’s application of these theories to the Fourth Gospel, where he traces


an antisociety—an antisociety17—Campbell argues, on the basis of a series of studies of
John 2:1–11, 7:1–10, and 19:25–27, that the Gospel reflects an antisocial and
antilingual reversal of established Mediterranean cultural norms.18 One
finds the rejection of a fictive group regarded as Jesus’ “brothers” who claim
special access to Jesus because of family relationship (see 7:1–10), also seen
in Jesus’ reluctant support for his mother (2:1–11), whom he hands over to
an inner group of disciples, represented by the Beloved Disciple (19:25–27).
The inner group, representing the Johannine community, is an antisociety that
has developed and used its unique antilanguage in the Gospel of John. The
fictive “brothers” lay claim to a special relationship with the Jesus tradition,
but the Johannine antisociety, specially privileged to care for the mother of
Jesus, is excluding them by its use of an antilanguage.

These more sectarian readings of the Johannine Gospel and its background
accept that love for one another has a “missionary aspect” (see 13:34–35;
17:23). However, the Gospel calls those outside to believe in order to be
saved. It does not offer them love but exhorts them to believe. As Herbert
Preisker puts it: “Love has already experienced a narrowing... The depth
of warmth and love remain, but it has lost in breadth and unlimitedness.”19
After a careful study that endorses and develops Käsemann’s argument with
material from the Johannine Epistles, Jack T. Sanders pursues this under-
standing of this movement in early Christianity, claiming that Johannine
Christianity is morally bankrupt. He strikingly concludes:

Johannine Christianity is interested only in whether he [the “outsider”] believes.
“Are you saved, brother?” the Johannine Christian asks the man bleeding to
death on the side of the road. “Are you concerned about your soul?” “Do you
believe that Jesus is the one who came down from God?” “If you believe you
will have eternal life,” promises the Johannine Christian, while the dying man’s
blood stains the ground.20

Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold,
(Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1985).

18. On antisociety and antilanguage, see the clear and well-documented presentation in
114–51, 180–93.

Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 205.

SCM, 1985), 91–100. The citation is taken from p. 100. In a similar vein, Wayne Meeks remarks,
Supporters of the second major approach locate the Gospel’s teaching on the love of God, the love of Jesus, and the love that disciples are to have for one another within a literary stratum in the history of the redaction of the Gospel that reflects the changing social and religious settings of the Johannine community. Most recently, Urban C. von Wahlde has joined a long line of scholars who claim that we can uncover these “stages” in the development of the Gospel as we now have it. He has argued that all the material describing God’s love or Jesus’ love or exhorting love for Jesus and for one another comes from the final stage in the redaction of the Fourth Gospel. Attempts to trace the strata in the Gospel, identified as a reflection of various stages in the text’s history, and the allocation of those strata to different people, settings, conflicts, and even ideologies, have long been a significant part of Johannine scholarship. Urban von Wahlde’s recent addition to this work, however one assesses it, has the advantage of tracing a unified and positive development of the Johannine tradition. For example, he makes no use of an “ecclesiastical redactor,” who attempts to draw the tradition in a more conservative direction, losing touch with the fundamental message of the evangelist. For von Wahlde no one has “betrayed” an earlier version. Each edition builds upon what has gone before.

The love material, found exclusively in what von Wahlde identifies as a third edition, has been strongly influenced by the teaching of the Johannine Letters. The first edition was a Synoptic-like Gospel. The second reflects the community’s separation from the synagogue (which took place, for von Wahlde, in the early 60s), evident in changed terminology for Jewish leadership and in the tension between Jesus and “the Jews.” After this breakdown of relationships with the synagogue, the community began to disagree on the humanity of Jesus, eschatology, and ethics. Into this situation stepped “the Elder,” the author of 1 John, who appeared at this time (late 70s). The other somewhat cynically, “that this Gospel has won its secure place in the affections of generations of readers and its profound influence on theological, literary and moral sensibilities of Western culture only through an endless series of more or less strong misreadings” (“Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist,” 317).

23. This is one of the defects of Bultmann’s source theory, also present in Becker and Haenchen.
Letters of John appeared in the early 80s, and a third edition of the Gospel appeared in the mid-nineties. “The Elder,” already deceased, was given the title of “the Beloved Disciple” as a third author wrote the final edition of the Gospel of John. All the material that deals with love comes from this final stage in the community’s history. It aims at overcoming tensions in the community, already spelled out by the interventions of the now-deceased Elder in 1–3 John. By the time the third edition was penned, the Elder had been elevated to the dignity of “the Beloved Disciple.” As is obvious with the question of who should be received or not received into a community in 2–3 John (see 2 John 10–11; 3 John 9–10), 1 John did not resolve the tensions. According to von Wahlde, we should understand the Johannine love theme as an attempt by the third and final editor of the Gospel to insist upon, and thus restore, unity to divided communities.

While respecting and learning from other scholars and approaches, the approach adopted in what follows recognizes that there are gaps and tensions in the story line of the Fourth Gospel but seeks to recapture the text as a whole and unified utterance. In doing so, it also seeks to engage the form and rhetoric in which the Gospel was originally recited or written and has thus come down to us in the Christian tradition. Wolfgang Iser set the agenda some time ago, at the beginnings of what has come to be called narrative criticism, only one form of what is best described as synchronic interpretation. Iser correctly affirmed that in any narrative, no matter how complex, “the reader strives even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern.” We must take into account the whole fabric of the Johannine narrative, in an attempt to test whether the love material can “fit together in a consistent pattern.” This study is concerned with the theme of love within the literary and theological fabric of the text as we have it.


26. As Josef Blank, Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie (Freiburg: Lambertus Verlag, 1964), 26, puts it: “The text itself has something more to say that
will reach beyond an analysis of the words and passages that deal explicitly with the theme of love in an attempt to delve more deeply into the role of that theme in the sequence of events that determine the narrative dynamic of the whole story.27

After presenting the overall structure and argument of the Gospel, we must carefully assess the text as we have it. We must ask several questions in order to trace the role and purpose of the love theme in the Fourth Gospel. Does the narrative in any way consistently indicate Jesus’ purpose? In other words, how does Jesus describe his mission? What does he claim he is doing or, in Johannine terms, what was he sent to do? The prologue states that he tells God’s story, he makes God known (see 1:18), but we must test this across the rest of the Gospel. If, however, a major player in the Johannine story is the God whom Jesus makes known, a further question emerges: what God? Here the theme of love emerges, as God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, sent that the world might be saved (3:16–17). Must we eliminate this famous Johannine passage from a study of the love theme, as it is the only place where the Fourth Gospel makes this claim? Is Käsemann correct, that the idea of a God who sent his Son out of love is “foreign” to the Gospel as a whole?28 However, if 3:16–17 forms part of a study of this theme, the mission of Jesus is to make known a God who loves. If the task of Jesus is to make known a God of love, how does he do so: only in word, or also in action?

We must examine moments across John’s story of Jesus that point to Jesus’ future accomplishment of the task given to him by the Father. They prepare the reader/listener for the culmination of Jesus’ mission, and they are many: references to “the hour” of Jesus, the “lifting up” of the Son of Man, the glory of God and the glorification of the Son, and the theme of “gathering.” Other passages, recording actions (13:1–38), discourse (15:12–17), and prayer (17:1–26), demonstrate and describe the love associated with that future event and its consequences for Jesus’ disciples. These themes and events serve as a prelude to analyzing the culmination of Jesus’ mission to

cannot be found in the ‘traditions.’ . . . The true interpretation of text begins only when the history of the tradition building blocks have been put into their place.”


make known a God who loves in the Johannine account of his passion and death (18:1–19:42). Despite suggestions to the contrary, what is said and what happens in the narrative suggest that the Johannine cross should be understood as the consummate (ἐις τέλος: 13:1; 17:1; 19:28–30) revelation of God’s love (ἀγάπη: 13:1, 34–35; 15:12, 13, 27; 19:28–30). However, the cross is only the beginning of the end for Jesus. It is the first moment of the “hour” of Jesus, which will not be complete until he returns to the Father. But it marks a new “beginning” as those who do not see and yet believe are blessed (20:29). They will be the future bearers of God’s love, as it was manifested in Jesus. Thus, commissioning and foundational moments, deeply rooted in the love theme, mark the presence of the risen Jesus in the two resurrection accounts (20:1–31; 21:1–25). Not only the words but also, and perhaps especially, the actions of Jesus instruct all future disciples.

Before we can begin analyzing the Johannine text, however, we must understand the overall narrative fabric of John’s Gospel. A summary presentation of the internal theological logic and narrative unity of the Gospel follows. In analyzing texts in subsequent chapters, we will refer to the role any particular text plays within a unified Johannine story. What follows indicates my conviction that an appreciation of the whole story enables a better interpretation of its single parts.

The Literary and Theological Fabric of John 1:1–21:25

The Gospel of John, at first sight, is easily divided into a prologue, two major sections, and a conclusion. The prologue (John 1:1–18) is one of the most remarkable passages in the New Testament; it stands alone, introducing the story of the life and teaching of Jesus. Immediately following the prologue, a

29. John 13:1, 34–35; 15:12–13, 17 contain the word “love” (ἀγάπη), while 13:1 and 20:28–30 use either the Greek noun for “end/perfection/consummation” (τέλος) or the Greek verb for the action “to fulfill,” “to perfect” (τελείω [v. 28] and τελέω [vv. 28, 30]).

30. The pages that follow are the result of a long association with this Gospel and reflection upon it. More detail can be found in Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4). The presentation would be regarded by some as somewhat idiosyncratic in places and by others as reasonably traditional. This study will not attend to the love theme in the Johannine Letters. From the same literary and theological background, they reflect a slightly later period (see Francis J. Moloney, James to Jude, Daily Bible Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007], 108–15) and thus have their own historical and literary setting (see John Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, SP 18 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002], 58–74). Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes, 51–60, argues that the love theme should be assessed across all the Johannine writings, without distinction. Theologically he has a point, but in literary terms, the presentation of the love theme in the Gospel stands alone. For more detail, see below, pp. 192–203.
narrative about Jesus’ public ministry begins. As with the other Gospels, we first read of John the Baptist’s activity, but once Jesus enters the scene, he is the main focus of attention. From 1:19 to 12:36 we see him in Jerusalem and Galilee, in discussions with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the disciples, “the Jews,” and many others. There, after threatening darkness for those who reject him, Jesus leaves the scene and hides himself (12:36b). In 13:1, John introduces the final evening Jesus spends with his disciples, and the account of those last days runs until 20:29. Finally, the author intervenes to conclude his story. He tells readers and listeners why he wrote the Gospel (20:30–31). A further chapter (John 21), added after the author had penned 20:30–31, but always part of the Gospel as it has been transmitted, shows that there was more to be said to the disciples, and to all subsequent disciples who might read this Gospel.

Reading John 1–12

The Prologue (1:1–18)

The Gospel of John opens by claiming that in “the beginning” the Word was already turned in loving union toward God, a union so intense that what God was, the Word also was (1:1–2). But this Word is, like all words, directed to others. Salvation is impossible without the Word, the light and life of humankind (vv. 3–4). This is a biblical way of saying that only in the Word can humankind find the answer to its hopes and deepest desires. However, powers of darkness oppose the revelation of the Word of God. They attempt to overcome the light he comes to bring, but they fail (v. 5). Although only a hint at this stage, a Johannine theology of the cross already begins to appear.

6–8). The light the Word brings is neither recognized nor accepted, but to those who do receive it, a unique salvation is possible: they will become the children of God (vv. 9–13). The Word to be heard and accepted as the light and the truth is not an abstract notion. The Word that is one with God has entered our history; he has dwelt among us, the fullness of the gifts of God. The revelation of God himself, “the glory of God,” in the Word who has become flesh, has been gazed upon (v. 14).

But who is he? The Baptist reenters, calling out in his own words that the one who may come after him chronologically is greater than he is because this coming one has existed before all time (v. 15, recalling vv. 1–2). Israel regarded the gift of the law as the greatest of all God’s gifts. From the fullness of God we have all received a new gift that takes the place of a former gift (v. 16). The gift of the law to the Jewish people came through Moses, and it was a great gift. But now the perfect gift has been given: the gift of the revelation of the truth given to us through a man whose name was Jesus Christ (v. 17). No one has ever seen God, but Jesus’ story that now follows is about God. Jesus makes God known (v. 18). “The prologue prepares readers to see the whole story of Jesus as God’s act of communication through his embodied word.”

Well informed by the prologue, readers and listeners cannot be indifferent as they read the life story of Jesus Christ in the light of the prologue. As C. Kingsley Barrett once wrote, “The deeds and words of Jesus are the words and deeds of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.” Herein lies the key to the *krisis* of the Gospel: where does the reader/listener stand as the story unfolds?

**The First Days of Jesus (1:19–51)**

There are four “days” behind the narrative from verse 19 through verse 51 (see vv. 29, 35, 43), followed by the indication of “on the third day” for the

32. See the important recent study of Sherri Brown, *Gift upon Gift: Covenant through Word in the Gospel of John*, PTMS (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 88–95.
34. C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 156. The comment was for v. 2, but it applies to the whole prologue.
35. I transliterate the Greek word κρίσις in the text above because it hints at the English word “crisis,” but its Greek meaning is “judgment.” The Gospel challenges the reader to judge whether the Jesus in the body of the story matches the prologue, or whether the objections to Jesus’ claims make more sense. Both “crisis” and “judgment” are involved in this reading/listening process.
first miracle at Cana (2:1). The background for these “days” comes from the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, which commemorates the gift of the law on Sinai. In this celebration, there are four “days” of more remote preparation (vv. 19–51), the fourth day of which begins an intensive preparation for the gift of the glory of the law (vv. 43–51), which takes place “on the third day” (2:1, 11; see Exod. 19:10–11, 16).36

The days, therefore, prepare the people for the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus, which will take place at Cana (2:11). On the first day people from Jerusalem guess who John the Baptist might be. The guesses express hopes linked to first-century Jewish messianic expectations: Messiah? Elijah? Prophet? (1:19, 21, 22, 25). The second day (see v. 29) finds the Baptist giving witness to Jesus. His words transcend Jewish hopes: Lamb of God (v. 29), “he was before me” (v. 30; see v. 1), one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v. 33), the Son of God (v. 34). On the third day (see v. 35) the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God, and the disciples of the Baptist set out to “follow” Jesus. However, the disciples, despite having been instructed by the Baptist and spending a brief time with Jesus, express their own messianic hopes: Rabbi (v. 38), Messiah (v. 41). On the fourth day (see v. 43), a day that begins the more intense preparation for the gift of the glory, Jesus makes a promise (v. 51). He calls Philip, who calls Nathanael, but once again the disciples cannot transcend their own expectations: they have found “him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote” (v. 45 NRSV), “Rabbi,” “son of God,” “King of Israel” (v. 49).

Jesus asks, “Do you believe because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree?” (v. 50) and promises, “You shall see greater things than these. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (vv. 50–51). With these words Jesus tells the first disciples that their hopes fall short. However positive they may be, they do not match the prologue (1:1–18) or the witness of John the Baptist (1:19–34). Even Nathanael’s confession must be surpassed. Greater faith is required. Jesus promises that, as a consequence of true faith, he will reveal the heavenly to them in himself, the Son of Man. The incipient faith of the disciples does not go far enough; they are too locked within their own world. A faith based in what can be controlled and understood

36. For texts and reflection on this Jewish background, provided by Exod. 19 and a possibly late first-century Jewish midrash on Exodus, the Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 50–51. See also Mary L. Coloe, “The Johannine Pentecost: John 1:19–2:12,” AusBR 55 (2007): 41–56.
by the *disciples’ expectation* (“we have found” [vv. 41, 45]) is not enough. What more is required?

**From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)**

The question raised by 1:19–51 is answered in 2:1–4:54. Jesus performs two miracles at Cana (2:1–12; 4:46–54). The second Cana story opens with the comment: “Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine” (4:46 NRSV). It ends: “Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee” (4:54 NRSV). The two Cana stories frame a series of episodes that tell of reactions to Jesus. The responses of the mother of Jesus in 2:1–11 and the royal official in 4:46–54 set the theme: true faith. Both trust in the efficacy of the word of Jesus. Even though Jesus rebukes his mother (see 2:4), she simply says to the attendants: “Do whatever he tells you” (2:5). Similarly, Jesus rebuked the royal official (see 4:48), but as Jesus promises health to his son, “the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way” (4:50 NRSV). The two examples of faith framing the narrative evidence an unconditional acceptance of the “word of Jesus.”

Between these two examples of perfect Johannine faith lie two sets of possible responses to the word of Jesus. The first is as follows:

a. “The Jews” totally reject the word of Jesus (2:13–21; see vv. 18–21). They demonstrate no faith.

b. Nicodemus is prepared to admit that Jesus is a great teacher from God because he does great signs, but he is not prepared to let go of his categories when Jesus speaks of the need to be reborn from above (3:1–10; see vv. 2–9). He shows partial faith.

c. John the Baptist is prepared to disappear totally from the scene, as he is only the friend of the bridegroom, who listens for his voice (3:22–30; see vv. 27–30). He completely commits himself to the word of Jesus.

All the characters in this series of responses to the word of Jesus come from the world of “the Jews,” and a journey from no faith to true faith is possible within that world.

Once this cycle ends, the reader finds that another begins in the experience of the Samaritan woman and the Samaritan villagers.

a’ In a first moment, the Samaritan woman is unable to go beyond her ideas of wells and water, and is incapable of grasping the words of
Jesus as he promises a water that will give eternal life (4:1–15; see vv. 13–15). At this stage she has no faith.

b' Jesus shifts the discussion to something she can understand (her marital situation), and she comes to see that he is a “prophet.” She even suspects he may be the Messiah (4:16–30). She is responding with categories that come to her from her own religious and cultural circumstances, and shows partial faith (see vv. 19, 25–26).

c' Finally, the Samaritan villagers come to hear the word of Jesus (4:39–42), and because of his word (not the woman’s), they proclaim: “This is indeed the Savior of the world” (4:42). We again encounter true faith.

John has told stories of a journey of faith from no faith to true faith in the non-Jewish world. The mother of Jesus (2:1–12) is a Jew, and the royal official (4:46–54) is a gentile. The mother’s example is followed by stories that tell of a possible journey of faith within Judaism, and the example of the royal official is preceded by stories that tell of that journey outside Judaism. Both Jew and gentile have come to express their unconditional trust in the word of Jesus. Jesus has told the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is from the Jews” (4:22), and by the end of the series of encounters with non-Jews, the villagers can join “the Jews” in their proclamation: “This is indeed the Savior of the world” (4:42). The Gospel raises the question of the nature of true faith in 1:19–51. It answers that question in the catechesis of 2:1–4:54.37

Signs and Shadows (5:1–10:42)

The Johannine Christians, the first people to be addressed by this Gospel, found themselves cut off from their traditional roots, cast out of the synagogue (see 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Johannine faith demands that they place all their trust in the word of Jesus (2:1–4:54). Israel’s celebration of its great feasts recalled the great moments of God’s saving intervention in the history of God’s people. The feasts were a “memory” in which God was present in the celebrating community. How were these saving moments still present to a community of Christians, excluded from Jewish celebrations because they believed that Jesus was the Christ (see 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)? John 5:1 announces a new theme: “After this there was a festival of the Jews and Jesus

went up to Jerusalem” (NRSV). From 5:1 on, the evangelist continues to refer to Jewish feasts: Sabbath (5:9b), Passover (6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22).

**Sabbath (5:1–47)**

Jesus, put on trial for curing a crippled man on a Sabbath (5:1–14), shows that he is able to work as his Father works (vv. 15–18), because the Father has passed Sabbath authority to him. He gives life and judges, as God does on a Sabbath (vv. 19–30). He then calls his witnesses: John the Baptist, the Father, the Scriptures, and even Moses (vv. 31–47). “The Jews” move against him because of their understanding of the law of Moses (v. 18), but this Sabbath event closes with Jesus’ teaching that Moses, who witnesses to Jesus, accuses them (vv. 46–47). Jesus’ presence incarnates the Sabbath God, who judges and gives life.

**Passover (6:1–71)**

As the Passover approaches (6:4), Jesus provides bread for a multitude, and they wish to take him by force to make him king (vv. 1–15). He leaves them, as his disciples set out on a boat trip and encounter a stormy sea. Coming to them in the storm, he reveals himself as the presence of the divine: “I am he. Do not fear” (vv. 16–20). Only the disciples receive this revelation, and the people who have been fed must take boats so that once again Jesus, the crowd, and the disciples are together at Capernaum (vv. 22–26). He warns the crowd to seek the true bread from heaven, catching up the Jewish tradition that once the manna disappeared, the bread from heaven was the law. However, Jesus, the true life-giver and bread, has perfected the manna and the law given by Moses. They must believe in him (vv. 27–50). Where is he to be found? So far, this discourse has developed within traditional Jewish themes of wisdom and law providing the nourishment once provided by the manna to the wilderness generation. The disciples in the story can access the true life-giver and bread in the person and teaching of Jesus. But what of future disciples? Where is Jesus to be found? From verse 51 the discourse

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38. For more background to the Johannine use of the expression “I am he,” see below, pp. 34–35, note 38.

39. Joshua 6:10–12 reports the final meal on the manna “from heaven.” Jewish tradition replaces the gift of the manna with the gifts of Wisdom and Torah, also “from heaven.” For a comprehensive study of this, see Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSupp 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 147–92.
shifts its focus to the eucharistic celebrations of later communities, where disciples of all time can eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man (vv. 51–58). But the disciples, who have been present throughout and received the full revelation of Jesus on their boat trip, find all this too hard. Many of them leave Jesus, while some remain with him, because he alone has the words of eternal life (vv. 60–71). The celebration of the Passover, with its message of bread from heaven and life-giving freedom, is found in Jesus.

**Tabernacles (7:1–10:21)**

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the most spectacular feasts of the Jewish calendar, lasting eight days. It was highlighted by rituals. Priests lit four candelabra set in the center of the temple area. Priests and people walked in solemn procession to the Pool of Siloam, gathered water, and took it back to the temple area. Finally, each morning the priests recalled the apostasy of former generations by moving toward the rising sun in the east (see Ezek. 8:16) but turning back to look at the Holy of Holies and professing faith in the one true God.40 The festival also intensified the messianic expectation of those attending. After a mysterious hesitation (7:1–9), Jesus goes to Jerusalem, only to meet with puzzlement and disbelief (vv. 10–13). Some affirm his messiahship and accept his origins; others deny and reject him (vv. 14–36). In rejecting Jesus, the priests do not accept the one true God as they claim each morning. On the major day of the feast, Jesus stands up and proclaims: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (vv. 37–38).41 The narrator explains that the living water was the Spirit, not yet available, as Jesus was not yet glorified (v. 39). The water quenching all needs is not the ritual water of the feast but the water Jesus will give in his death and the gift of his Spirit (see 19:30, 34).

In 8:12 Jesus takes up another tabernacle theme. The temple was the “light of Jerusalem,” but Jesus announces: “I am the light of the world.” “The Jews” respond variously to Jesus as the unique light and revelation of


41. For this christological rendering of 7:37–38, see Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 251–53, 256–57.
God for the whole of humankind (see also 8:24, 28). Some believe in him (see v. 30), but others hint that Jesus’ origins are in doubt, whereas theirs are so perfect that they have all the “truth” that they need. This question of origins leads to Jesus’ claim: “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58), and they take up stones in order to kill him for such blasphemy. Profession of faith in the one true God is at stake as they fail to recognize the Son of God (see 7:28: “He who sent me is true, and him you do not know”).

Jesus dramatically acts out the themes of himself as the light of the world and the living water by healing the man born blind. In 9:5 Jesus again proclaims, “I am the light of the world,” and performs a miracle by sending the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. A note inserted by the evangelist explains that it is not the waters of Siloam that effect the cure; it is Jesus “the Sent One” (see 9:7). But, as the man born blind progresses to a confession of Jesus as the Son of Man (see vv. 11, 17, 33, 35–38), the leaders of Israel move further into the darkness, away from the revelation of their God in the Son (see vv. 16, 24, 28–29, 34). Jesus accuses them of being blind with a blindness that refuses to accept him. “The Jews” think they have all the answers in what they know already (9:39–41). This leads Jesus directly into the parable of the good shepherd. Against the falseness of the now “blind” shepherds of Israel (see Ezek. 34:11–16), Jesus is the good shepherd, whose sheep know his voice, and who is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep (see 10:1–18). At last Jesus has indicated the nature of his messianic mission: he is the Messiah Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, and gathers other folds into the one flock (vv. 15–16).

DEDICATION (10:22–42)

The final feast, Dedication, had come into existence in remembrance of Judas Maccabeus’ restoration of the temple to Israel in 164 BCE; it was a winter celebration that also ran for eight days. Dedication was more than a celebration of the restoration of a building. For Israel, the temple was a consecrated place, the house where the “glory of God” dwelt among the chosen people.42 The loss of the temple meant the loss of the place where the presence of their saving God could be seen and visited in the heart of the nation. During the Feast of the Dedication, “the Jews” reject Jesus’

claims to be the Son of God, and again attempt to kill him (vv. 31 and 39). They do not belong to the good shepherd, as they do not respond to his voice (vv. 22–29). They do not recognize the sonship of Jesus, and thus do not realize their own chance to become children of God (vv. 31–39). They claim that he “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (v. 36) is a blasphemer. During Dedication, Jesus, the consecrated and sent one, can point to himself—eliminating all further need to look to a temple—and claim: “I and the Father are one” (10:30). All that has been claimed for Jesus across 5:1–10:42 as the perfection of the celebrations of Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication is true because of Jesus’ claim in 10:30 (see also v. 38).

Across 5:1–10:42 John argues that the feasts celebrated in Judaism have not been replaced but brought to their perfection. They were “signs and shadows” of the fullness of God’s gift that took place in Jesus Christ (see 1:17).

Jesus Turns toward the Cross (11:1–12:36)

After the setting (vv. 1–3), John 11 begins, “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it” (11:4). The glory of God shines forth in the raising of Lazarus (see 11:40), but the Son of God will be glorified because of this event, in his “hour,” set in motion by the raising of Lazarus. This sign leads the Jewish council to decide that Jesus must die for the nation. The evangelist clarifies further: not for the nation only but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (see 11:49–52). To this point in the Gospel, the death of Jesus has never been mentioned. The term “to lift up” has hinted toward it (see 3:14; 8:28), and so have the ominous references to “the hour,” which has not yet come (see 2:4; 4:21, 23; 7:30; 8:20). But the verb “to die” appears for the first time in 11:16. From this point on in the story, as Jesus turns toward the cross, such references multiply (11:16, 50, 51; 12:24, 33). But his death will also be a gathering. Jesus dies for the nation, and also to gather the children of God who are scattered abroad (11:49–52).

Lazarus is still present as his sister anoints Jesus (12:1–11), and Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem (12:12–16) leads the chief priests to decide that both Jesus and Lazarus must die (12:9–11, 17–19). But the Pharisees declare:

43. The expression “signs and shadows” to describe the relationship between the celebration of the Jewish feasts and the feasts in John 5:1–10:42 comes from Leo the Great, Sermon 8 on the Passion of the Lord (PL 54:341B).
“Look, the world has gone after him” (v. 19). Some Greeks, representing those children of God who are scattered abroad (see 11:52), seek him (vv. 20–22). The hour for the glorification of the Son of Man has come (v. 23), and Jesus explains his own destiny and that of his followers through the symbol of the grain that must fall and die to give new life (vv. 24–26). In 12:31–33 Jesus further expresses the link between his glorification, the gathering of all peoples, his hour, and his death (vv. 27–30): “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die” (NRSV). The hour of Jesus is at one and the same time his being lifted up to glory and his crucifixion; it is the end of the ruler of this world. On the cross of Jesus the glory of God will shine forth perfectly, as Jesus gathers everyone to himself. He urges his grumbling audience to walk in the light while they have the light (vv. 34–36a). The public appearance of Jesus ends dramatically as the narrator comments: “After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them” (v. 36b).

**Conclusion to the Public Ministry (12:37–50)**

In 12:37–43 the narrator raises a question that plagued the early church: why did Israel refuse the revelation of God in Jesus (see Rom. 9–11)? The narrator first gives a traditional answer: the heart of Israel was “hardened,” and this hardening was a part of God’s plan so that the message might be preached to the gentiles (12:37–41; see Isa. 53:1; 6:10). John gives his own response in 12:42–43: “the Jews” preferred the praise (δόξα) of men. Thus they failed to acknowledge the living presence of their God in Jesus of Nazareth. They did not see the glory (δόξα) of God.44 The public ministry closes with words of Jesus (vv. 44–50).45 He has come into the world as the unique revelation of light and truth. His coming leads to a judgment, but it is a judgment we bring upon ourselves. Those who

44. The Greek word δόξα almost always means “esteem, praise.” Only in the Bible does it refer to the visible manifestation of God’s saving presence: in the Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint) “the glory of God,” and in John’s Gospel the revelation of God in Jesus. See LSJ, 444, s.v. δόξα. In 12:42–43 (and elsewhere) John makes a play on both meanings. “The Jews” seek the former, and are blind to the latter. See below, pp. 92–93.

45. Although Jesus has departed from “the Jews” in 12:36b, his voice returns, “crying out” to the reader in v. 44, restating the heart of the message of his public ministry by repeating or rephrasing many of his revelatory statements from 1:19–12:36. See Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 363–66.
believe in Jesus and all he has come to reveal will not remain in darkness; but those who refuse the light and the truth of Jesus will live in darkness.

Reading John 13–20 (21)

The Theme of Glory

The hour of Jesus, which is the cross, and his glorification are intimately linked. On three occasions he has foretold his oncoming death, speaking of it as his being “lifted up” (3:14; 8:28; 12:32). The “hour” of Jesus, his being “lifted up” on the cross, is also his exaltation, and the means by which he is glorified. The “Book of Glory” tells of Jesus’ glorification and his final revelation of the glory of a God who so loved the world that he “handed over” his Son (see 3:16).

Jesus’ Final Encounter with His Disciples (13:1–17:26)

Footwashing (13:1–38)

Jesus knows that the hour has come for his return to the Father. Having loved his own on earth, he now returns to the Father (13:1). The disciples are swept up into Jesus’ love, despite their failure, ignorance, denial, and betrayal (vv. 21–30, 36–38). They have a part with Jesus (see v. 8), symbolized in his washing their feet and his gift of the piece of bread to Judas (vv. 2–17; 21–38), accompanied by his words that link these gifts to the challenge of discipleship. Jesus gives an example, that they are to do to one another as he has done to them (v. 15); and a new commandment, that they are to be known as his disciples because they love one another as he has loved them (vv. 34–35). In this is Jesus glorified, and in him God is glorified (vv. 31–32). The love Jesus will reveal in his self-gift will continue in the lives of “his own,” whom he leaves in the world (vv. 12–17; 33–35). Jesus tells these things to failing disciples, whom he has chosen and whom he will send out, so that in the moment when he is glorified, they might believe that he is the revelation of God: “so that you might believe that I am he” (vv. 18–20).

46. Scholarship has made much of the temporal and literary tensions in John 13–17. See, most famously, 14:31. Jesus tells his disciples that he will no longer talk much with them (v. 30), and invites them to rise and go forth (v. 31). Two further chapters of discourse (chaps. 15–17) and the prayer of Jesus (17:1–26) follow. On these tensions, and the need to resolve them, see Francis J. Moloney, “The Function of John 13–17 within the Johannine Narrative,” in “What Is John?,” vol. 2, Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 43–65.
The Discourse (14:1–16:33)\footnote{The literary form of 13:1–38 is recognized as “narrative,” including Jesus’ dramatic discussion with Peter in vv. 36–38, and the literary form of 17:1–26 is “prayer.” This means that only 14:1–16:33 is regarded as “discourse.” Most commentators begin the discourse with 13:31. For the case against this decision, see below, pp. 102–3.}

A—Departure (14:1–31)

In John 14:1–31 Jesus explains that his departure is imminent. But the departure of Jesus, through his death (vv. 1–6, 27b–31), is unlike any other departure. It is not a moment for consternation or fear (vv. 1, 27b), as Jesus departs to return to the Father (vv. 2–3, 6, 28), to initiate an in-between time, filled by the presence of another Paraclete, who will be with the disciples forever (vv. 16–17, 26). Another character enters the story, continuing the revealing task of the earthly Jesus. Jesus is about to depart from the disciples (14:2–3a). His promise to come to them (see vv. 18, 28) will be fulfilled in the ongoing revealing mission of the Paraclete. But the earthly Jesus has opened the way to the Father (vv. 6, 20–21).

The gift of the Paraclete will ensure that the oneness between the Father and the Son will be revealed in the disciple who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments, who is now swept into that same oneness (vv. 18–21). This promise of an in-between time undermines all consternation and fear (see vv. 1, 27b). The Spirit-filled disciples will experience love (see vv. 15, 21, 23–24, 28), further belief (see vv. 15, 21, 23–24, 29), and joy (see v. 28). Jesus announces that he will no longer talk much (v. 30a) but that the prince of this world is coming (v. 30b). A tension lies behind Jesus’ summons to rise and face the prince of this world (14:31c), and also behind the need for further words from Jesus that will guide all disciples of Jesus through the conflicts and hatred of the in-between time.\footnote{The summons to depart in v. 31c, which only leads into further discourse and the prayer, is most likely evidence of the ending of an early discourse (14:1–31), the original form of what eventually became 14:1–16:33. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 582–86, 636; Jean Zumstein, L’Évangile selon Saint Jean (13–21), CNT Deuxième Série 4b (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007), 88–89. For von Wahlde, Gospel and Letters of John, 1:591–92, v. 31c resulted from the combination of the second and third editions of the Gospel (see also pp. 229–393). But in a narrative reading of the story as a whole, the interpreter must try to see why the final story retained this difficult passage and not explain it away as reflection of an earlier stage.}

B—Abiding in the True Vine (15:1–11)

The focus of Jesus’ argument changes in 15:1–11. By using the symbol of the vine and claiming to be the true vine, Jesus links himself to Israel’s traditional claim to be a vine or a vineyard (see Hos. 10:1–2; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer.
2:21; Ezek. 15:1–5; 17:1–21; 19:10–15; Ps. 80:8–18). But more important
than the image of the vine is Jesus’ command to his disciples “to abide,”
and his explaining what this abiding will mean for them. Some form of the
verb “to abide” appears ten times in verses 1–11. Jesus’ command asks that
disciples take on a new and deeper reciprocity with the one who is about to
come to his glory through a cross.

C—Loving (15:12–17)

In verse 12 the command to love returns: “This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you” (v. 12 RSV; see 13:34). The
cross stands behind Jesus’ statement of the principle that the greatest act
of love is the gift of one’s life for one’s friends (v. 13). The disciples will
not obey the new commandment of their own ability. They are now in a
new situation, where slavery has disappeared because Jesus has made the
Father known to them (vv. 14–15). Jesus has done this at his own initia-
tive, summed up with words that look back to the image of the good
shepherd—“Greater love has no one than to lay down one’s life for one’s
friends” (v. 13)—and others that remind us of the use of the metaphor of
the vine: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that
you should go and bear fruit” (v. 16). Jesus’ love for his own surpasses all
paradigms of love for one’s friends (see 13:1–38). John 15:12–17 forms the
centerpiece of 15:1–16:3, and is highlighted by Jesus’ command that the
disciples love as he has loved, as a consequence of all that he has done for
them (v. 17).

B’—Hatred from the False Vine (15:18–16:3)

The tone changes again in verse 18, as the world’s hatred, rejection, and
expulsion become the subject of Jesus’ discourse. As the world has hated
Jesus, so also will it hate, reject, and even murder the disciples because
they are the chosen ones of Jesus, no longer part of this world’s system
(vv. 18–19). The rejection of the word of Jesus continues in the rejection of
the word of his disciples (v. 20). Those who have hated Jesus will also hate,
reject, and kill the disciples (vv. 21, 24; 16:3) because they do not recognize
Jesus as the Sent One of the Father. They stand condemned, rejecting the
revelation of God brought by Jesus, and fulfilling the Scriptures by hating
without reason (15:22–25). But the truth of the Father and Jesus will be made
clear by the witness of the Spirit. Even in the midst of conflict the disciples
will have the responsibility to continue this witness to later generations
(vv. 26–27).
Balancing his insistence that he is the true vine (15:1), Jesus tells the disciples that they will be cast out of the synagogue and even killed (16:2). “The Jews” from the story of 1:19–12:50 are the false vine (see Jer. 2:21). Jesus reverses the teaching on the love and joy flowing from abiding in Jesus, the true vine (15:1–11), telling the disciples of their future treatment by the false vine in 15:18–16:3.49

A’—Departure (16:4–33)

The disciples have remained silent throughout 15:1–16:3. They return as interlocutors in 16:4–33 as the theme of departure, interspersed with comments and questions from the disciples, reappears. Jesus returns to the theme of his departure to the Father (16:4b–6, 25–28) and of his coming back to the disciples (vv. 16, 21). Jesus promises the presence of the Paraclete to expose the failures of the world and to guide and instruct the disciples in the time of his physical absence (vv. 7–15). In 16:12–15 he develops this theme of the aggressive presence of the Paraclete over against “the world” (vv. 8–11; see 14:26–27). The allegory of the woman in labor is based on a pattern of “before and after” (see 14:12–14). Before the hour of birth, she has tribulation; but by passing through the hour, after the birth she has great joy, as a child has been given to the world (16:21). The disciples are now sorrowful over the departure of Jesus, but they will finally come to a time when they will be seen by Jesus in joy that no one can take from them, and they will no longer have need to ask for anything (vv. 22–23a). They must live through an in-between time in the fullness of joy, given in the name of Jesus when they turn to the Father in prayer (v. 23b–24). Jesus assures the disciples that the Father will answer them, giving them anything asked in Jesus’ name (v. 23b) as they live through the in-between time, after which they will no longer need to ask anything of Jesus (v. 23a).

Because the disciples have believed that Jesus comes from the Father, the Father loves them (vv. 25–27). Jesus’ return to the place of oneness with the Father (v. 28) leads the disciples to a final glimmer of understanding. They see that Jesus’ origins ensure the uniqueness and authority of his revelation (v. 29). Between the “now” of the upper room and the “then” of perfect faith, the disciples will sometimes suffer and be lonely. Jesus is about to suffer, but his oneness with the Father overcomes all loneliness. Jesus has overcome the

49. For a comprehensive study of the social and historical setting that produced this experience of hatred and rejection, especially as it is worked out in the context of a “trial” of Jesus and his followers, see Andrew T. Lincoln, Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 263–332.
world, and the disciples’ awareness of this victory should bring them joy in the midst of tribulation (v. 33).50

PRAYER (17:1–26)

The narrator’s comment that Jesus adopts a traditional position of prayer (17:1a) and prays to the Father (vv. 1b–2) initiates a change in literary form. Themes central to 13:1–38 return: “the hour” (17:1; see 13:1), the glorification of the Son and the Father (17:1, 4–5; see 13:31–32), Jesus’ self-gift having brought to perfection the task given him by the Father (17:3–4; see 13:1), his ongoing love for his fragile disciples (17:9–19; see 13:4–17, 21–31a), and the disciples as the fragile sent ones of Jesus who will reveal the one who sent Jesus by the unity that their love for one another creates (17:11b, 21–23; see 13:18–20, 34–35). He has revealed God in his life (and death) in a unique and authoritative way (17:4) and now seeks a return to glory with the Father (v. 5). The disciples have believed in Jesus’ revelation of the Father, and in the basis for the truthfulness of that revelation: Jesus comes from the Father. Jesus presents them to the Father as the worthy successors of the Son (vv. 5–8).

As Jesus turns to pray explicitly for them (v. 9), their fragility is recalled. He asks his Father to care for them and to sanctify them. He first asks his Father, who is holy (v. 11b), to be Father to them, that he care for and keep them (vv. 11b, 15) in the hostile world. They are not of the world, as Jesus is not of the world (vv. 12–16). They have succumbed to the attractions of the world on more than one occasion, and Judas has already gone out into the darkness (v. 12; see 13:30). Jesus next asks the Father to make them holy (v. 16) so that they may perform the same sanctifying mission as Jesus (vv. 16–19). The disciples need greater holiness, as a gift from God, if they are to parallel the saving action of Jesus’ self-gift (see v. 19). This is what he wants from them: that they be one as Jesus and the Father are one, and be filled with the perfection of the joy of Jesus (v. 13).

The oneness of love that marks the unity between the Father and the Son is to be repeated within all future communities of believers, generated by the word of Jesus’ immediate disciples (v. 20), so that the world may believe that

50. If, as suggested in note 48 above, 14:1–31 was the earliest form of the discourse, 16:4–33 appeared later and is a “rewriting” and enriching of 14:1–31. There are many parallels between 14:1–31 and 16:4–33, generated by the overall theme of “departure” in both passages. For a helpful chart showing the parallels, see Brown, Gospel according to John, 589–91. For the process of “rewriting,” see Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the Gospel of John, ed. Francis J. Moloney, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 290–92.
Jesus is the Sent One of God (vv. 21, 23a) and that God loves the disciples just as he has loved the Son (v. 23b). The prayer closes with a request that disciples of all generations be swept up into the oneness of love that exists between the Father and the Son (v. 26). As the theme of love opened 13:1–38 (see 13:1), it closes 17:1–26 (see 17:24–26). In and through this love God has been glorified, and the Son is glorified (vv. 1b, 5, 24). The unity of love granted to the disciples, who are aware of the truth about God in a way unknown to the world, will enable them to contemplate that glory (vv. 24–25).

The Literary and Theological Design of 13:1–17:26

13:1–38: Jesus makes God known in the perfect love that he shows for his fragile disciples. In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified, and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognized as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by their love for one another.

14:1–31: Jesus instructs his failing disciples on his departure and on the conditions and challenges they will face. Guided by the Paraclete in his physical absence, they should have love, faith, joy, and peace, being swept up into the love that unites the Father and Jesus, the Sent One.

15:1–11: The oneness and joy created by abiding in Jesus, the true vine, and being swept up into his abiding oneness with the Father is affirmed.

15:12–17: The disciples of Jesus are to love as he has loved, as a consequence of all that he has done for them.

15:18–16:3: “The Jews,” the false vine that has rejected Jesus and the Father, will hate, reject, expel, and slay the disciples.

16:4–33: Jesus instructs his failing disciples on his departure and on the conditions and challenges they will face. Guided by the Paraclete in his physical absence, they should have joy and confidence, loved by the Father who sent Jesus.

51. The following summary briefly repeats the argument outlined above but also respects the literary form of its constituent parts. John 13:1–38 and 17:1–26 state and restate the same themes in a narrative and a prayer. The earliest form of the discourse and its rewriting appear in the statement and restatement of the same themes in 14:1–31 and 16:4–33. At the center lies a different discourse, which begins with the theme of abiding (15:1–11) and closes with the theme of hatred (15:18–16:3). At its center—and thus at the center of 13:1–17:26—lies the message on love in 15:12–17, framed by the love commands in v. 12 and v. 17. Whatever the history of these originally independent constituent parts, and the internal and external forces that brought them together, the interpreter must work with the final shape of the narrative, “to fit everything together in a consistent pattern” (Iser, *Implied Reader*, 283). The above reading of 13:1–17:26 is guided by Yves Simoens, *La gloire d’aimer: Structures stylistiques et interprétative dans la Discours de la Cène (Jn 13–17)*, AnBib 90 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981).
17:1–26: Jesus makes God known in the perfect love that he shows for his fragile disciples. In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified, and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognized as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by their love for one another.

The stage is set for the story of Jesus’ glorification, “the hour” when he is “lifted up” to draw everyone to himself, making known the love of God.

The Passion of Jesus (18:1–19:42)

Up to this point, the word “kingdom” has only been used twice in the Gospel, and both times in a traditional passage, referring to “the kingdom of God” (see 3:3, 5). In the passion account it appears three times in one important verse (18:36). Thus far in the Gospel, the title “king” has appeared four times (1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15). On each occasion people who would like to make Jesus a king have addressed him in a way that reflects false messianic hopes. Throughout the Passion Narrative the term “king” appears ten times. Jesus is crowned and dressed as king, and he acts out his role as king, “lifted up” from the earth. Thus, although the Gospel tells the story of an arrest, a Jewish and a Roman trial, a crucifixion, a death, and a burial, it tells it in a way that proclaims Jesus as king.

A—Jesus in a Garden with His Enemies (18:1–11)

Jesus is not arrested in this scene (see v. 12). He is the master of the situation from the beginning of the passion story. He asks the Romans and the Jews whom Judas has gathered whom they seek, and he reveals himself to them with the words “I am he.” They fall to the ground impotent. But Jesus calls them to their feet, insists that his disciples go free, and prevents violence from Peter. On the one hand, the church must flow from the events that are about to take place, and on the other, Jesus has come to drink the cup that his Father has asked him to drink (v. 11; see also 4:34 and 12:27).

B—The Jewish Hearing: Jesus and Peter (18:12–27)

Peter denies Jesus and draws near to the fire, set by those who had come with lanterns and torches to take Jesus (vv. 15–18). Meanwhile, Jesus is inside, interrogated about his disciples and his teaching (v. 19). He refuses to answer, as his time of public manifestation and teaching is over (see 12:36b). He has made the message known, and it is now the era of the church, the
time for the disciples to preach what they have heard (vv. 20–21). A soldier’s slap rejects this message, but its “rightness” cannot be questioned (vv. 22–23). However, one of the disciples is outside, denying Jesus a second and a third time (vv. 25–27). Jesus is the great witness to the truth, and the church has the task of continuing that witness (see vv. 20–21). That the disciples, the bearers of that message, often deny such knowledge does not alter the situation.

C—The Roman Trial: Jesus as King (18:28–19:16a)

The account of the Roman trial is marked by a series of changes of place. A schematic outline of the flow of this passage shows the dramatic alternation between Jesus and Pilate, moving in and out of the Praetorium. Ironically, the King of Truth overcomes the political powers of this world. Pilate presents Jesus to the people as their king, and they reject him. At the center of 18:28–19:16, Jesus is, ironically, clothed and crowned as a king.

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<td>6th Scene: 19:8–12</td>
<td>“Crucify him!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Scene: 18:33–38a</td>
<td>3rd Scene: 18:38b–40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Pilate entered . . .”</td>
<td>“Pilate entered . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus proclaims that he is the king of truth.</td>
<td>He declares Jesus innocent and “king of the Jews.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilate waves Jesus away with the retort: “What is truth?”</td>
<td>They ask for crucifixion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Scene: 19:4–7</td>
<td>4th Scene: 19:4–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Pilate went out . . .”</td>
<td>“Pilate went out . . .”</td>
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<tr>
<td>He declares Jesus innocent and says, “Behold the man!”</td>
<td>He declares Jesus innocent and says, “Behold the man!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>They ask for crucifixion.</td>
<td>They ask for crucifixion.</td>
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52. As, among others, Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 21–29, points out, this passage is a “hearing” and not a Jewish “trial.” Unlike the Synoptic tradition (see Mark 14:53–72), this passage presents no witnesses against Jesus and records no condemnation of Jesus. The experience of a trial between Jesus and “the Jews” takes place across Jesus’ ministry, and he is already condemned there (11:47–53). Jesus has submitted to this verdict (12:27–33). John uses this moment in the tradition of a passion narrative to announce the presence of Jesus’ word “in the world” and the role of his disciples as hearers of that word.
4th (Central) Scene: 19:1–3
No change of place mentioned. Jesus is
crowned and dressed as a king. He is ac-
claimed: “Hail, king of the Jews!” But this
truth is rejected with slaps.

The cross scene can now follow, where
Jesus will act as a king, but in a way
most unlike the kings of this world (see
18:36–37).

B’—The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Beloved Disciple
and the Mother (19:16b–37)

The narrator reports Jesus’ crucifixion rapidly (v. 18), continuing to focus
upon Jesus’ kingship. Pilate universally proclaims him as king by means of
a sign, written in the languages of the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans,
nailed to the cross. But “the Jews” refuse to accept the proclamation (vv.
17–22). Jesus’ kingdom will never be torn apart, even in the hands of the
enemy. The symbol of Jesus’ seamless robe that will not be torn apart (vv.
23–26) makes this clear. The central scene (vv. 25–27) indicates the nature
of the new kingdom of the crucified king. Jesus gives the first of all believ-
ers—his mother (see 2:1–11)—and the Beloved Disciple (see 13:23; 20:2–10)
to one another as mother and son (19:25–27). “And from that hour” (the
Greek can also be translated “because of that hour”) they become one (see
v. 27). The central scene in the Johannine account of the crucifixion of Jesus
reports the foundation of the new community of Jesus, the formation of a
new family, based on faith and love, that transcends all bonds of flesh and
blood.

As Jesus dies, he claims to have brought to perfection the task he was
given (see 4:34 and 17:4). He thus “pours down” his Spirit on the newly
formed community (19:28–30). The narrator tells of the blood and the
water flowing from the side of the elevated Christ (vv. 31–37). Through this
message he addresses his own community at the end of the century, so that
they also may believe (see v. 35).53 God’s love on the cross must continue
to be revealed in the life of the community of Jesus. It is revealed among
Christians in the sacraments of the blood and the water, flowing from the
side of the crucified Jesus: in Eucharist and baptism. The cross of Jesus
challenges the Christian community to look upon the crucified one as the

53. On the crucial importance of reading the Gospel as the reflection on the life of Jesus
generated in a postresurrection Christian community, see Udo Schnelle, “Cross and Resurrection
in the Gospel of John,” in The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John, ed. Craig R.
Koester and Reimund Bieringer, WUNT 222 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 133–45; Jean
Zumstein, “Erinnerung und Oster-Relecture im Johannesevangelium,” in Kreative Erinnerung:
Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium, 2nd ed., ATANT 84 (Zurich: Theologischer
Verlag Zürich, 2004), 47–63.
ultimate revelation of a God who is love: “They shall gaze upon him whom they have pierced” (v. 37).

C—JESUS IN A GARDEN WITH HIS FRIENDS (19:38–42)

As the passion began with a garden scene where Jesus met his enemies (18:1–11), it concludes with a further garden scene as Jesus is laid to rest by his newly established friends, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:38–42). We recall that Nicodemus came to Jesus in secrecy (see 3:1–2), and that he tried, at one stage, to defend Jesus’ rights, only to wilt under abuse (see 7:50–52). John tells his readers that Joseph of Arimathea was secretly a disciple of Jesus (v. 38). The community of Jesus is active as once-hidden disciples publicly ask for the body of Jesus. They bury his body with a large quantity of myrrh and aloes, a burial fit only for a king.

The Resurrection of Jesus (20:1–29)

The Johannine resurrection account contains three unique features: the experience of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in their journey to the empty tomb (20:2–10), Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene (vv. 11–18), and the episode of doubting Thomas (vv. 24–29). Early on, the Gospel of John indicated the possibility of a journey of faith from no faith to complete faith in the experiences recounted in the journey from Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54). It ends with similar journeys.

Original members of the Christian community, Peter and the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene and Thomas all begin in unbelief (see 20:2–3 [the disciples], 13–15 [Mary], 24 [Thomas]). However, the risen Lord leads them, through their various experiences of little and partial faith (vv. 9–10 [the disciples], 16–17 [Mary], 25 [Thomas]), into a final total commitment in faith (vv. 19–22 [disciples], 18 [Mary], 28 [Thomas]). It must further be noticed that the Beloved Disciple “saw and believed” (v. 8) without seeing Jesus. Mary Magdalene and Thomas initially respond very physically. Mary wishes to cling to Jesus (v. 17), and Thomas will believe only if he can physically penetrate Jesus’ wounds (v. 25). In the end, they overcome these limitations and come to faith. But the risen Jesus reminds Thomas that he believed because he saw Jesus (v. 29a). Jesus’ final words are: “Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe” (v. 29b). As the Beloved Disciple believed without seeing, all who follow the way of the Beloved Disciple are specially blessed. They are all called to be beloved disciples.
**Original Conclusion to the Story (20:30–31)**

John closes his Gospel by telling his readers and listeners that they now have a new “Scripture.” He has chosen from Jesus’ many signs and written his story so that the readers may go on believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in his name (vv. 30–31). John passionately believes in the saving power of a decision for Christ. They no longer have Jesus among them, as in the days of his presence among the original disciples, but they have this story. It is written to arouse and maintain the decision of faith from its readers and listeners.54

**An Important Addition (21:1–25)**

The members of the Johannine community found that they needed to face further questions. The episodes of John 21:1–25, which has always been part of the Gospel as it was handed down, address these questions. The first question that had to be resolved was membership in this new community. The question of the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Simon Peter also arises. It is the Beloved Disciple who recognizes Jesus and confesses that he is “the Lord” (v. 6), but Peter leaps into the sea (v. 7). Simon Peter hauls a heavy net ashore. The 153 fish do not tear the net, as the soldiers could not tear Jesus’ garment at the cross (see 19:23–25a). Peter leads, enthusiastically taking action at the word of the Beloved Disciple and at the word of Jesus, but the church is a boat under the direction of its Lord, Jesus. It draws into its net people of all tribes and places, but the net never damages (see v. 11). The Lord and his disciples share a meal. The person who shared many meals with them during his ministry is still with them at the table (vv. 12–13).

The second question concerns leadership in the community. Peter must three times confess his love for Jesus to overcome his threefold denial (21:15–17; see 18:15–18, 25–27). Jesus entrusts him with the task of shepherding the sheep, of being to the community what Jesus was: a good shepherd (see 10:1–18). Indeed, he tells Peter that he will, like Jesus, lay down his life for his sheep (21:18–19; see 10:18). But what of the Beloved Disciple? He is no longer alive, and John informs the community that they should not be surprised at this (vv. 22–23). Nevertheless, his witness links the community to Jesus. He may have died, but his Gospel is a life-giving Scripture.

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Beloved Disciple remains the authority behind the community’s story of Jesus: “This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things” (21:24). Authority rests with Simon Peter, but the test of true discipleship does not lie in one’s dignity or authority. The true disciple is the one who loves, who is loved, and who tells the story of Jesus. In this the Beloved Disciple remains the model. The distinction between authority and discipleship was established in the earliest years of the Christian church. Attention to the story of Jesus and love are the measure of discipleship, not where one stands in the line of authority. But someone must have the role of the shepherd, and for John it is Peter.

Conclusion

This sketch of the literary and theological artistry of John’s story of Jesus already anticipates the importance of the theme of love. Omnipresent though it is in the Johannine narrative, we have seen that its role in the Gospel has been variously interpreted. Text without context is pretext, and the above presentation of a coherent narrative and literary unity for John 1:1–20:31 (and John 21) will guide us as we interpret the passages relevant to a study of the love theme. This approach to the question attempts to avoid a myopic focus upon words. Actions express love more profoundly. Words for love appear to be indiscriminately scattered across the story (3:16–17; 13:1, 34–35; 14:15–28; 15:9–17; 16:27; 17:23, 24–26). But once loving actions are introduced to the analysis, we find more literary and theological unity to the development of the love theme than may at first be apparent.

John tells his readers and listeners about God’s love, Jesus’ love, the disciples’ love, and the interaction of love between all the players by means of actions. The study that follows will focus attention on both the words and actions of the Johannine Jesus that can be associated with the love theme. However, it is beyond our scope to attend to the subtle argument of Johns Varghese, The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John, AnBib 77 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), that the Gospel works with three semantic fields that deal with love: the bridegroom and the bride, friendship, and covenant. For Varghese, the Fourth Gospel integrates personal and intimate love (bridegroom and bride), social love (friendship), and love reflected in obedience to the commandments (covenant). For a critical survey of studies of the theme of love in the Fourth Gospel, from Claude G. Montefiore (1894) to Sjef van Tilborg (1993), see pp. 15–28. Also beyond the scope of this work is Sjef van Tilborg’s Imaginative Love in John, BibIntS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), a study of the various “love relationships” established during the narrative that argues that Jesus demonstrated a variety of genuine relationships of love with various “others” in the story. Van Tilborg assesses Jesus’ relationship with the central figure of the Beloved Disciple as a homosexual one. The Beloved Disciple is “the centre of his affective life” (see pp. 77–110, 239–52; the citation is from p. 252).
a story that begins with an action of God who so loves the world that he
gives his only Son, sending him so that the world might be saved (3:16–17).
From that point on in the story God no longer acts, except manifested in
the gift of his only Son. God is revealed in and through the Son, and only
in and through the Son.56 In being the revelation of God, the Son brings
to perfection the task given him by his Father (4:34; 17:4). The command
that his disciples, by loving as he has loved (13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 17:21, 23),
make known that God has sent his Son in an act of love for the world looks
beyond the story of the Gospel into the lives and relationships of all who
read and hear the Gospel of John, that they may be swept into the oneness
of love that unites the Father and the Son (17:24–26).

The nature of the love that must mark his followers is indicated by Jesus’
words during his final evening with his disciples: “No one has greater love
than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13 NRSV). Not only
did Jesus say these things, he did these things.57 As he says to his disciples
earlier in that final evening: “I am telling you this now, before it takes place,
so that when it takes place you may believe that I am he” (13:19). The story
takes the reader through a full circle: the love of God initiates the presence
of Jesus in the world (3:16–17), and the life and death of Jesus manifest the
ongoing presence (glory) of the divine in the world (13:19; see 13:34–35;
15:12, 17; 17:23, 24–26).58 By means of the cross, resurrection, and ascension,

56. The only actions of God (ὁ θεός) recorded after 3:16–17 are God’s sealing of the authority
of the Son of Man (6:27), God’s giving everything into Jesus’ hands (13:3), God’s glorifying
the Son of Man (13:31–32), and God’s love for those who love his Son (16:27). These actions
give God’s guarantee and support to the mediating role of the Son. “The Jews” make mistaken
claims about God’s actions (see, for example, 9:29, 31). However, John and Jesus systematically
use the expression “the Father” (ὁ πατήρ) as the subject of a verb to reinforce the fundamental
truth that the Father “sends” the Son. All other occurrences when the Father is the acting subject
address the ongoing relationship between the Father and the Son as the story unfolds (5:17–30;
6:27; 8:28, 54; 10:15, 17, 29; 12:28; 14:11, 13, 23; 15:9; 16:15, 32; 18:11). The only exceptions are
Jesus’ statements that the Father honors (12:26) and loves (14:23) those who honor and love the
Son, and Jesus’ indication that the hour is coming and now is that the Father seeks worshipers
in spirit and truth (4:23). As this long list indicates, God (or the Father) never interacts directly
with “the world” after 3:16–17. That is the mission (the task) of the Son, whom the Father has
handed over and sent into the world. See Paul W. Meyer, “‘The Father’: The Presentation

57. As Gail O’Day, “Jesus as Friend,” 85, remarks, “The convergence of Jesus’ words with his
actions shows that his words and promises can be trusted. There is complete unanimity between
what Jesus says and what Jesus does.”

58. Jesus’ words in 13:19, that what is about to happen is to lead the disciples to believe his
claim “I am he,” use a formula (ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι) taken from the Old Testament (ἐγώ εἰμι: “I am
he”). The expression indicates the uniqueness of the divine presence (see esp. Exod. 14:4, 18;
20:2, 5; 29:46; Lev. 19; 20:7; Isa. 43:10; 45:18). The naming of God in Exod. 3:14 lies behind
however, Jesus brings his “hour” to completion and returns to the Father (20:17). But before leaving, in the two accounts of the presence of the risen one in this Gospel, Jesus challenges all disciples to continue his mission of making love known by becoming beloved disciples, believing without seeing (20:2–10, 29), and he founds a community on a pastor who must profess his love in words and action (21:15–19), nourished by a Scripture that comes from the witness of the Beloved Disciple (21:20–24).

these affirmations of YHWH as the one and only God, even though the Greek formula (ἐγώ εἰμι) does not appear there. As Koester (Word of Life, 103) puts it: “In John’s Gospel Jesus uses the ‘I Am’ or ego eimi for himself. . . . This does not make Jesus a second God. Rather, the idea is that the one true God meets people in Jesus.”
The Mission of Jesus: To Make God Known

Interpreters of the Fourth Gospel have understood the purpose of Jesus’ presence “among us” (John 1:14) in various ways. In a recent study of the missions of Jesus and of the disciples in the Fourth Gospel, Andreas Köstenberger has approached the question from three directions: the person of Jesus, the task of Jesus, and the charge of Jesus. In analyzing Jesus’ person, he examines the evidence for the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, and then studies Jesus’ signs and works as the best way to understand how Jesus performed the task given to him by the Father. Finally, he analyzes the various “modes of movement” used in the Gospel to speak of Jesus as the expected Messiah and the sent Son.1 This careful work focuses upon the person of Jesus, human and divine, who exercises his

1. Andreas J. Köstenberger, The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 45–140. My dialogue with Köstenberger indicates my respect for this careful study, even in disagreement. See the earlier studies of Juan Peter Miranda, Der Vater, der mich gesandt hat: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den johanneischen Sendungsformeln; Zugleich ein Beitrag zur johanneischen Christologie und Ekklesiologie, EH 23/7 (Bern: Herbert Lang; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1972), and his shorter synthesis in Die Sendung Jesu im vierten Evangelium: Religions- und theologiesgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Sendungsformeln, SBS 87 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977).
mission by means of his activities and movement. For Köstenberger, the Johannine description of Jesus’ mission during his ministry in John 1–12, which focuses upon the earthly Jesus, is subtly different from that of the so-called Book of Glory (13–21), which portrays a mission of the exalted Jesus. He concludes:

The Fourth Gospel’s portrayal of Jesus in chapters 1–12 focuses on Jesus the Messiah as the Son sent by the Father, with a stress on the “horizontal” dimension of Jesus’ mission, while chapters 13–21 view Jesus primarily as the one who came into the world and returns to the Father, with an emphasis on the “vertical” dimension of the mission of Jesus. Notably, however, 20:30–31 subsumes both 1–12 and 13–20 under the Fourth Gospel’s purpose for writing. The presentation of Jesus as the eschatological shepherd-teacher spans chapters 1–21 and thus provides a unifying element within the framework of the Gospel narrative, encompassing the gathering of Jesus’ disciples as well as the disciples’ gathering of fruit for Jesus.

This is a rich result, but the intense focus upon the human-divine person of Jesus undervalues an important element at the heart of the Johannine story: the Gospel is ultimately about God, and not Jesus.

Do the words of Jesus anywhere indicate what he thought he was doing? Apart from the christological theme that emerges from 9:39–10:21, as Jesus’

2. Miranda, Der Vater, also adopts this approach, but he also looks behind the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the Sent One to the history of religions background of these various “movements.” To a lesser extent he adopts this approach in his Die Sendung Jesu as well, where he focuses more on the Johannine message.


presence in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles closes, Jesus does not explicitly claim to be an “eschatological shepherd teacher.”

There are several contrasting scholarly understandings of the mission of Jesus in John, but this chapter will investigate what the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel says explicitly about his mission. Thus, what follows presupposes that the most important voice to express the reason for Jesus’ presence and mission in the Gospel of John is that of Jesus himself.

He addresses the question explicitly on two occasions (4:34 and 17:4) and on a third occasion uses the language of 4:34 and 17:4 to describe his ministry (5:36). These three statements set the agenda for Jesus’ mission:

4:34: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me [τοῦ πέμψαντός με], and to accomplish his work [τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον].”

5:36: “The works [τὰ ἔργα] which the Father has granted me to accomplish [τελειώσω], these very works [αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα] which I am doing [αὐτὸν], bear me witness that the Father has sent me [με ἀπέσταλκεν].”

17:4: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work [τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας] that you gave me to do [μοι ἰνα ποιήσω].”

Two of these passages appear early in the narrative (4:34; 5:36), and the third is found in Jesus’ final prayer to the Father (17:4). We must give the literary and theological context of each of these sayings its full importance if we are to understand them within the overall fabric of the story. The two passages from Jesus’ public ministry, although they occur in close proximity in the narrative, belong to different literary and theological settings. His words to the disciples about his mission (4:34) come at the end of the section described in our first chapter as the Cana to Cana section of the ministry (2:1–4:54), while his statement concerning the witness of his mission (17:4) occurs in Jesus’ final prayer to the Father.

5. On this passage, see Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 299–312. I wonder about the teaching element in Jesus’ use of the messianic shepherd (see 10:11, 14). I also fail to see this theme in 20:30–31, which Kostenberger claims “subsumes both 1–12 and 13–20.” As will appear later (pp. 88–89), rather than “teaching” Jesus’ focus in the good shepherd discourse seems to be more christological, introducing the theme of “gathering” by means of Jesus’ self-gift in death (see 10:15–17).

6. For a good survey, see Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus*, 5–16.

7. As what follows will indicate, only two explicit statements from Jesus (4:34; 17:4) address his mission, reinforced by one further statement that describes his activity in terms of that mission (5:36). These lapidary yet profound statements by the Johannine Jesus about his mission render the analysis of this material somewhat dense.

8. See above, pp. 15–16.
ministry comes at the beginning of Jesus’ presence at celebrations of the major Jewish feasts (5:1–10:42).

The importance of Jesus’ words in his final prayer (17:4) cannot be overestimated. The prayer serves the story both as a climax to the final encounter between Jesus and “his own” (see 13:1; 17:9–10) and as a moment of intimacy between Jesus and the Father. He prays, looking back across his ministry, telling the Father all he has done. He asks that he now be glorified with the glory that was his before all time (17:1–8; see 1:1–2). After this prayer for himself, Jesus prays for his immediate disciples (vv. 9–19) and all who will come to believe in him through their word (vv. 20–26). Nowhere else in the Gospel does the reader encounter Jesus’ intense intimacy with the Father, expressed in a personal prayer. In what follows we will repeatedly observe that a statement early in the narrative (4:34) and a restatement of the same themes in Jesus’ final prayer (17:4) form a “literary frame” that should influence the interpretation of the theme of Jesus’ mission through the rest of the narrative. The statement and restatement, in Jesus’ own words, of why he is “among us” appears in the Cana to Cana section of the story (2:1–4:54: statement) and in the final prayer (17:1–26: restatement).

Jesus’ Task: To Glorify God on Earth (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4)

To Accomplish the Work of the One Who Sent Him (4:34)

Across the early stages of Jesus’ public ministry, the narrative itself raises a question in readers’ minds with its account of the first disciples’ early interactions with Jesus. These disciples’ understanding of the person of Jesus, despite their enthusiastic attraction to him (see 1:35–51), does not match the understanding of the reader, provided by the prologue (1:1–18) and the witness of John the Baptist (1:19–36). Jesus is from God (1:1–2, 14), is “turned toward God” (1:1, 18), is telling the story of God (1:18), is “the Lamb of God” (1:29, 36), is “the Son of God” (1:34). But the disciples express their understanding of him in terms that express their Jewish hopes: “Rabbi” (1:38), “the Messiah” (v. 41), “him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote” (v. 45), “Rabbi . . . Son of God . . . King of Israel”

Jesus responds to them with a promise that they will see “greater things” in the ascent and descent of angels upon the Son of Man (1:50–51). He requires something more of them.

The Cana to Cana section, then, opens with a question hanging over the narrative: if the faith of the first disciples was a good beginning but ultimately insufficient, what more does Jesus require of them so that they may see the “greater things” he has promised them? The catechesis on authentic Johannine faith, provided by 2:1–4:54, answers that question. Eight encounters between Jesus and other characters teach the reader that authentic faith requires an unconditional acceptance of the word of Jesus, who is himself the Word (1:1, 14). Anything short of that is insufficient. Jesus makes this clear in his dialogues with his mother (authentic faith), “the Jews” (no faith), Nicodemus (partial faith), John the Baptist (authentic faith), the Samaritan woman (no faith), the Samaritan woman again (partial faith), the Samaritan villagers (authentic faith), and the royal official (authentic faith).

But significantly, on two occasions in the narrative that runs from 2:1 to 4:54, these encounters stop, and either the storyteller (2:23–25) or Jesus (4:31–38) comments upon the action and the personalities. Between Jesus’ first encounter with “the Jews” at the purification of the temple (2:13–22) and his subsequent encounter with Nicodemus (3:1–21), John comments that many believed in Jesus’ name because of the signs that he did, but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew the depths of their hearts and the shallowness of this belief. To tell of the belief based on signs, John uses the Greek verb “to believe”: πιστεύω (2:23). To indicate that Jesus does not “entrust himself to them,” the evangelist uses another tense of the same verb πιστεύω (v. 24). For John, external “signs” are not enough, as Jesus knows what is in the heart of the human being (v. 25). The episode of Nicodemus that follows exemplifies this limited faith, as Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night because of the signs that Jesus did (3:2).

11. Nathanael’s use of “son of God” must be understood in conjunction with the titles surrounding it: “Rabbi” and “King of Israel.” This is part of the common use of “son of God” language to speak of an obedient king and people, and even a Davidic messiah (see Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14; Hosea 11:1; 4Q174 [Florilegium] 11, 18–19; 4Q246 [Aramaic Apocalypse] II,1–9). See further Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 56, 61–62, and the comprehensive treatment of this question by Brendan Byrne, “Sons of God—Seed of Abraham”: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background, AnBib 83 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 9–78.
believer? Are Jesus’ signs, his works among men and women, of no value in the challenge to faith? The Gospel of John treads a fine line between a negative attitude to “signs” that might distract from the divine origins of Jesus and his message, and the need to see the revelation of God in the person and deeds of Jesus. The author must hold in balance the inbreaking of the revelation of God in the incarnate Logos, on the one hand, and, on the other, the human events, especially the “signs,” that form part of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of a human being, Jesus. Jesus Christ has told God’s story (1:18). For that reason, John balances the negative comment on “signs faith” in 2:23–25 with a discussion between Jesus and his disciples after the departure of the Samaritan woman to her village. On this occasion, he points toward the event in the life of Jesus that is the goal and purpose of his mission (4:34).12

Jesus’ foray into Samaria, a world outside Judaism (4:1–42), is briefly interrupted as his disciples bring provisions and the Samaritan woman returns to her village, leaving her water container behind (4:27–30). She will be back, along with her fellow villagers (vv. 39–42), but the disciples are shocked that Jesus should converse with a Samaritan woman. The situation worsens when he refuses to take any of their food (vv. 31–32). They suspect that he may have even eaten with her (see v. 33), an entirely unacceptable possibility. The narrator’s earlier comment on the relationship between Jews and Samaritans is still operative in the narrative: “The Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans” (4:9c).14 Playing upon the disciples’ perplexity, Jesus transcends their concerns, explaining why he was with the Samaritan woman and why he has no need of food: “My food is to do the

12. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the role of “signs” (σημεῖα) in the Gospel of John. Scholars have studied the origin and role of the miracle story traditions intensely, especially since Rudolf Bultmann’s groundbreaking work that suggested that the Fourth Gospel began as a Synoptic-like collection of miracle stories. The most comprehensive studies come from Michael Labahn, Jesus als Lebenspender: Untersuchungen zur einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten, BZNW 98 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), and idem, Offenbarung in Zeichen und Wort, WUNT 2.117 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). In English, see the right-headed approach of Udo Schnelle, Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 74–175.


will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (v. 34). For the first time in the Gospel Jesus states that only one thing matters for him; it is his very sustenance (“my food”). He has been sent, and his task is to accomplish the will of the one who sent him. This is the mission of anyone who is “sent” in the world of that time. The sent one must represent the sender, without any shadow of his or her own person and will entering into the accomplishment of the mission or “task” as the one sent.15 Jesus does not tell the disciples who sent him, although the reader, well informed by the prologue (1:1–18), knows that God, the Father of Jesus, stands behind Jesus’ entering the human story (see 1:14–18). Jesus’ origins are “with God” (1:1). As the story unfolds further, the disciples, who have not read the prologue but are actors in the subsequent story, will eventually discover that God is the one who sent Jesus.

Jesus uses two expressions that will play an important role in his explanation of what he is doing with his life. He has been sent “to accomplish/to bring to perfection” (τελείω) the “task/work” (τὸ ἔργον) of the one who has sent him. It is not just any work but the work of the one who sent him (αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον: “his work”). Significantly, these expressions appear side by side for the first time in this statement from Jesus. Before him lies a task, a “work,” a mission not his own. The one who sent him entrusted it to him. His life was unconditionally determined by his commitment not only to “get the job done” but to bring it to consummation. The Greek verb τελείω is associated with the noun τέλος, which literally means “the end.” However, in the Greek of the New Testament the word has at least two meanings: a chronological end (for Jesus this also means his death on the cross) and an indication of the quality of an action, its consummation/perfection. John will eventually play upon these two meanings to show that it is by means of the cross that Jesus will bring to its perfect end the task that he has been given. For the moment, that event still lies in the future.16 Jesus has earlier hinted, in words to his mother at Cana, that his “hour” is yet to come (2:4). He now points forward to a time when he will perfect the task given to him. Those two “times,” the hour of Jesus and the perfection of the task

15. For more on this, see below, pp. 64–68, on Jesus as the Sent One of the Father.
given to him by the one who sent him, may coalesce. Only further exposure to the story will uncover whether that is true. This first statement from Jesus concerning his mission does not indicate who sent him, nor does it indicate what the work (τὸ ἔργον) of the one who sent him will entail. He simply tells the disciples that he must accomplish it in a consummate fashion (τελειόω). “Narrative texts implicitly keep promising the reader the great prize of understanding—later.”

Looking back across the literary unit of 2:1–4:54 (Cana to Cana), we see clearly that the first pause in the steady interaction between Jesus and others (2:23–25) insists that “signs” alone do not lead people to authentic faith in Jesus. However, there is one “sign” that is essential to a correct understanding of the Johannine Jesus: that moment when he does the will of the one who sent him, when he brings to perfection the task he has been given (4:34). This balance, in an event in the story of Jesus (4:34), between a criticism of signs faith (2:23–25) and an affirmation of the importance of the perfect accomplishment of “the work” plays a key role in John’s message. As the history of the early reception of the Fourth Gospel shows, Christian belief is always in danger of being reduced to an intellectual experience, belief in a God who is made known by Jesus (see 1:18; 17:3), detached from any particular human events. Indeed, the second-century gnostics read John this way. This Gospel was so popular within gnosticism, a powerful religious current that believed that salvation came from “knowledge” (γνῶσις), that it ran the danger of not being accepted into the Christian New Testament. It was saved by Saint Irenaeus, who, late in the second century, linked the author (the Beloved Disciple [see 21:24]) with the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, and by the good sense and concern for orthodoxy of the Letters of John, especially 1 John. The Letters were more acceptable than the more speculative and theologically driven story of the Gospel of John and in
some ways “eased” the Gospel associated with the Letters into the accepted Christian Scriptures.

To read or hear the Fourth Gospel in this intellectual/gnostic fashion is to misunderstand John’s story of Jesus. Jesus will not complete his mission until he has brought to perfection the task given him (4:34). The passage in the Gospel of John that spells out this balance most clearly is 17:3. In his prayer to the Father, Jesus prays: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God” (v. 3ab NRSV). We will devote more attention to this passage below, but it could be read as gnostic (eternal life is the result of knowing [“that they may know”: γινώσκωσιν] the one true God). But the prayer continues: “and Jesus Christ whom he has sent” (v. 3c). Knowledge of God is essential for eternal life, but is possible for historical men and women only through the human experience offered by the life and story of Jesus Christ, the Sent One of God. The Christian reader of 4:34 who is aware how Jesus’ life ended might wonder if a cross could be Jesus’ doing the will of the one who sent him and the perfection of his task.

“The Works Which the Father Has Granted Me to Accomplish” (5:36)

As the Johannine account of the ministry progresses, the reader/listener encounters a change of the overarching theme of the story in 5:1–10:42. The new theme is stated in 5:1: “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” Many have attempted to identify which feast is in question, but what is at stake here is the presence of Jesus at Jewish feasts. As we have seen, the celebrations of Sabbath (5:1–47), Passover (6:1–71), Tabernacles (7:1–10:21), and Dedication (10:22–42) lie at the heart of this stage of Jesus’ story. John explicitly mentions the celebration of each of those Jewish feasts (see 5:9; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22).

Within that overall context, “the Jews” call on Jesus to defend himself for healing the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethsaida because he did it on a Sabbath (5:1–15; see v. 9 for the indication that it was a Sabbath). Once the healed man has identified him as the one who performed the miracle

19. For further background to these issues, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 3–9. For a very good introduction to the gnostics and gnosticism, see David Brakke, The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
(vv. 14–15), “the Jews” decide that they must persecute Jesus and put him on trial, as he has acted in this way on a Sabbath (v. 16). Jesus’ response to their decision only exacerbates the situation (v. 17). Only God can work, judge, and give life on a Sabbath, as the world must go on, children are born, and people die. But Jesus claims, “My Father is working [ἐργάζεται] still, and I am working [ἐργάζομαι].” The trial of Jesus that now follows depends upon this claim of Jesus. “The Jews” seek all the more to kill him, because he has made three claims, all of which they would regard as blasphemy. Two of their accusations are ironically correct, but the last is not. They say that he broke the Sabbath (correct) and that he calls God his Father (correct). But as the discourse that follows in 5:19–47 shows, they are wrong to claim that he makes himself “equal to God” (v. 18).

From this point on, John 5 presents a court scene. In the first part of the trial against Jesus, framed by verses 19 and 30, which state Jesus’ unconditional dependence upon (and not equality to) the Father, Jesus argues that he too is able to give life and judge, because the Father has given him this authority (see vv. 19–22, 26–27, 30). Because of this, “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (v. 23). But it is not enough for Jesus to argue his own case. He must bring witnesses (v. 31). He does that in verses 31–47, where he calls upon the witness of John the Baptist (vv. 33–35), the works of Jesus himself (v. 36), the Father (vv. 37–38), the Scriptures (vv. 39–44), and Moses, whose law “the Jews” are using in their search to kill him (vv. 45–52). Those sitting in judgment have been judged: “It is Moses who accuses you. . . . If you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (vv. 45, 47).

As he presents those who witness to his mission, which is severely questioned by the trial scene that lies behind 5:19–47, Jesus tells “the Jews”: “The works [τὰ ἔργα] which the Father has granted me to accomplish [τελειώσω],

22. Most translations state that they “persecuted Jesus” (e.g., RSV, NRSV, JB), but the Greek verb διώκω can also mean “to put on trial.” Its primary meaning is “to persecute,” but in the forensic setting of 5:1–47, it also has the meaning of “put on trial.” See Anthony E. Harvey, Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel (London: SPCK, 1976), 50–51; Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 197.

23. On this Sabbath role, reserved only to God, see Charles H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 320–23; Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 174. Jewish sources are listed there.

24. Bultmann, Gospel of John, 245, comments: “They can only understand equality with God as independence from God, whereas for Jesus it means the very opposite, as is brought out immediately in v. 19.”

25. See Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 73–81.
these very works \[αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα\] which I am doing \[ spyOn\], bear me witness that the Father has sent me” (5:36). Echoes of Jesus’ words to his disciples in 4:34 return. Jesus is not stating his understanding of his mission in full (the revelation of the glory of God on the cross). Rather, it is the only occasion in the Gospel when he explains his ministry in terms that repeat what he has said (4:34) and will say (17:4) concerning the purpose of his presence “on earth.” As in 4:34 (and elsewhere), the reader/listener hears that Jesus is the Sent One, but now Jesus tells more. In 4:34 he has been sent by the Father and has come to bring something to perfection, to accomplish the task given by the Father, a task that is called “the work” and named by a singular noun \(τὸ ἔργον\). In 5:36, in contrast, Jesus tells those directing the trial, and the readers, that the Father has granted him the authority to accomplish “the works” \(τὰ ἔργα\). Although related, the singular and the plural use of the noun are not to be identified.

“The works” clearly refers to the actions of Jesus during the course of his lifetime, during his ministry, and Jesus has already made this clear by his response to the accusation of “the Jews” in 5:17. There he claimed to be “working still” \(ἐργάζομαι\). The miracle of healing the paralyzed man played a role in the Father’s design. Jesus’ defense is that he, like the Father, has the authority to give life and judge on a Sabbath. That is but one of many “works” of Jesus, and his life is marked by them, as he does the works of God (see 5:17; 7:3; 9:3; 10:32–38). What links the singular and the plural noun is the fact that both result from Jesus’ response to the Father. They are given to him. The Father’s will is that he bring to perfection “the work” (4:34), and the Gospel regularly uses the expression “the works” to indicate that during his ministry he responds to that will in everything that he says and does. The association of the verb “to accomplish/perfect” with “the works” in 5:36 is especially significant in linking “the work” that Jesus must accomplish to his “works” by means of which he must accomplish “the work.” In the face of aggressive rejection, Jesus gives evidence in a forensic setting that explains his ministry (5:36) in terms of his mission (4:34; 17:4).

The “works” do not originate in Jesus’ personal agenda or self-determined mission. “The work” that Jesus must bring to perfection is to fulfill the will of the one who sent him (4:34). In the course of his ministry, which he will spend responding to the will of the one who sent him, he will continually do “works” that the Father has given him (see 6:30; 7:3; 9:3; 10:11, 25, 32–38; 15:24). He will do them as the Father designs and will thus accomplish/perfect them. “The works” witness that the Father has sent him (see also 10:25) and
that the case against him—that he is breaking the Sabbath, calling God his Father, and making himself equal to God (v. 17)—does not call for his death (v. 18). On the contrary! Ironically, the case against Jesus manifests God’s design, as Jesus perfects “the works” that the Father has given to him and moves steadily toward the accomplishment of “the work” of the one who sent him, in a perfect response to his will. In the story, however, the rejection of Jesus’ works is under way. His “hour” has not yet come (2:5; 7:30; 8:20) but certainly will arrive (12:23, 31 [“now”]; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). At that stage of the story the “works” of Jesus will have ended, as he perfects the “work” entrusted to him by the Father (4:34). His subsequent disciples, however, will continue his “works” in their own ministry (see 14:12).

Interpreters sometimes undervalue the relationship between “the work” and “the works” because of the close relationship between Jesus’ works and the “signs” in the Gospel. The works and the signs overlap somewhat, since the human Jesus manifests the glory of God by both during his ministry (see 2:11; 11:4, 40; see also 10:37–38). But “works” and “signs” also differ in some ways. In the first place, there is never any negative note associated with the “works” of Jesus, because “Jesus’ works are God’s works performed by and through Jesus.”26 This cannot be said of the Johannine presentation of “signs,” which is problematically ambiguous on several occasions.

The many who believed in Jesus because of his signs do not receive Jesus’ trust (2:23–25); Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus because of the signs that he did, still requires further instruction and conversion (3:1–21); the Samaritan woman remains puzzled by Jesus’ identity, despite his knowledge of her history and her relationships (4:25);27 “the Jews,” who wish to seize him and make him king after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, do not have their way (6:14–15); Jesus is deeply moved and saddened when no one in the story of Lazarus manages to arrive at complete and unconditional faith in him (11:1–44);28 and some of those who witnessed the revelation of God’s glory in this miracle only go and tell the Pharisees what Jesus has done (11:45–46), a step that leads to the decision that Jesus must be slain (11:47–50, 57). Despite this ambiguity over the saving value of signs, they are a crucial element in the journey to faith. For this reason, as he closes his

27. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 126–35.
Gospel, the author states that many other “signs” could have been recorded in his story of Jesus, but he has selected some from the many possible and has written them into the story so that the readers might go on believing in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God, and have life in his name (20:30–31).  

“Signs” also differ from “works” in that, after his return to the Father, Jesus’ “works” will continue in the “works” of his disciples (see 14:12). This is never claimed for Jesus’ “signs,” which are intimately associated only with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus’ “works” and his “signs” overlap a great deal, but the former relate directly to his response to God, the one who sent him to perfectly accomplish his “work” (see 4:34), while the latter are those human manifestations of God’s presence in Jesus that are open to misunderstanding.

Marinus de Jonge sums up the relationship well when he writes: “All Jesus did and said on earth is summed up in the word ἔργον, and in the instances ἔργα is used, the word refers, in all likelihood, not only to the σημεῖα, but also to a wide range of activities, just because God is active in the Son, and the Son completely obedient to the Father.” Applying this to 5:36, where Jesus introduces his “works” into a forensic encounter with “the Jews” to show that he has been granted Sabbath authority by his Father, we see that the verb “to accomplish/to perfect” (τελειόω) forges a close link between “the works” and “the work.” Jesus can point to his “works” as evidence of God’s activity in and through him (see also 5:20). His response to God’s commissioning him (“the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish”) to bring this activity to accomplishment has a forward-looking function in the narrative. As Jesus must do the will of the one who sent him, to bring to perfection his work (4:34), he now describes this as in motion during his ministry. Jesus is doing what the Father has commissioned him to do. In his perfect performance of “the works,” he moves toward the final and perfect accomplishment of “the work.”

29. For a helpful study of how this ambiguity over the relationship between signs and faith may have come about across the redactional history from a “signs Gospel” to the finished version, see Robert T. Fortna, The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 235–50.

30. For a summary and positive assessment of the role of “signs” and “works” in the Fourth Gospel, see Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 54–74. See also Schnelle, Antidocetic Christology, 150: “The fourth evangelist thus deliberately distinguishes between σημεῖα and ἔργα. The exclusively christological meaning of σημεῖον as a precise designation of the revelatory work of the Incarnate One is in no way relativized by John’s speaking of the ἔργα Χριστοῦ or θεοῦ; it is, instead, enhanced.” See also Keener, Gospel of John, 272–79.


32. The plural expression “the works” is also used for the activities of others, sometimes negatively (3:19–20; 7:7; 8:39, 41) and sometimes positively (3:21; 9:4). The expression always refers to deeds that can be seen and experienced.
As the narrative unfolds, the reader is being told more clearly what Jesus thought he was doing: bringing to perfection (τελειόω) the work (τὸ ἔργον) that the Father asked him to do (4:34), through the steady accomplishment (τελειόω) during his ministry of the works (τὰ ἔργα) that manifest his authority as the Sent One of God (5:36).

“Having Accomplished the Work You Gave Me to Do” (17:4)

Jesus’ third explicit statement concerning his mission is the only other association of the words for “work” (ἔργον) and “accomplish/perfect” (τελειόω) in the Gospel. On this final occasion Jesus uses them to indicate explicitly that he has accomplished his mission to perfect the work his Father has “given” him. The statement appears in 17:4, as Jesus begins his final prayer to the Father (17:1–26). At the conclusion of Jesus’ final encounter with his disciples, as he goes to the cross, looking back across the ministry, he prays to the Father in words that allow the reader into the intimacy between Jesus and the one who sent him. In verses 1–8 Jesus prays for himself to his Father with a bold sense of security, as he makes his requests. Though appearing at a certain point in the chronology of Jesus’ life, this prayer is in a sense “timeless.” Jesus speaks to the Father as if he has already accomplished his mission (17:4–5) and is no longer in this world (v. 11). Yet he seems to contradict this as he prays, “These things I speak in the world” (v. 13). The prayer wanders in and out of the time sequence of the narrative. By now Jesus has established that his glorification of God and his own coming to glory (see 11:4; 13:31–32; 17:1) lie in the future. John has linked the manifestation of God’s glory and the beginnings of Jesus’ glorification with Jesus’ death and resurrection. That story is yet to be told. However, in 17:4 Jesus prays to his Father as if he has already accomplished everything. This literary feature of Jesus’ prayer to his Father must be accredited to the nature and form of a prayer that cannot be tied down to time and place.33 Jesus’ moment of intimacy with God, his Father, transcends such boundaries, granting the reader and listener privileged access to Jesus’ evaluation of his mission, done in response to the will of the one who sent him (4:34).

Jesus claimed in 4:34, near the beginning of the Gospel, that his sole source of nourishment was to do the will of the one who sent him and to accomplish

his work. In his final prayer, he looks back across his life, regarding his mission as completed, and states: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do” (17:4).\(^{34}\) Expressions used in 4:34 and 5:36 reappear: “having brought to perfection” (τελειώσας/τελειώσω) “the work” (τὸ ἔργον). In 4:34 Jesus spoke of the need to do the will of the one who sent him. In 5:36 he indicated that the accomplishment of “the works” was granted to him (ὅ δέδωκέν μοι) by the Father. In 17:4 he claims that he has now brought to perfection the task that his Father gave him (ὅ δέδωκάς μοι). Not only has he perfectly accomplished that task, but in doing so he has glorified the Father. John 4:34, 5:36, and 17:4 are closely linked by Jesus’ usage of identical words to describe what he was to do (4:34; 5:36) and what he has accomplished (17:4). However, in 17:4 Jesus adds that by perfecting the task given to him, he has glorified God “on earth.” Although it is yet to happen in the story, in a manner typical of the “timelessness” of John 17, Jesus tells his Father that he has brought to accomplishment/perfection the task that the Father gave him, and in doing so has glorified God “on earth.”\(^{35}\)

Jesus regards his life as determined by the will of the one who sent him. His task is to bring to perfection the work of the Father (4:34; 5:36; 17:4). It is already becoming evident that—despite the remarkable things said about Jesus in the Fourth Gospel—his life, death, and resurrection function as once-and-for-all moments in the realization of God’s design for the human story as he glorifies God and is himself glorified. At the beginning and end of the account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples, this moment has been described as the “hour” (13:1; 17:1). The Gospel may be about Jesus, but Jesus is about God’s business.\(^{36}\) John has already made this abundantly clear to the reader/listener in 1:18: no one has ever seen God, but the story of Jesus tells the story of God and is further enriched by the intertwining double story of glory and glorification that occurs across the Gospel, intimately linked with the “hour” of Jesus.

The noun “glory” and the process of “glorification” can be understood in two opposing ways. Some characters in the story fail because they are locked into a search for the wrong form of “glory.” The Greek verb δοξάζω,

\(^{34}\) Although the conjunction of the noun τὸ ἔργον and the verb τελειώσω appears only in 4:34 and 17:4, the use of τὰ ἔργα with τελειόω in 5:36 draws that passage into our theme of Jesus’ understanding and articulation of his mission.


“to glorify,” and its noun δόξα, “glory,” are used universally in the Greek language to speak of human achievement. The basic Greek meaning is “notion” or “opinion,” often applied to human fame, honor, and respect for extraordinary performance, such as victory in games, political success, or the honor due to significant figures or those who have achieved something notable. Only in the Bible does the expression come to mean “glory” initially in the sense of a “shining forth,” and then in the manifestation of the saving and caring presence of God in the human story. The reason for this is the use of δόξα in the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures known to us as the Septuagint (LXX), from some two hundred years before the Christian era. A Hebrew expression, kābōd YHWH, which probably originated in the accounts of God’s saving interventions in the exodus narrative, is used across the books of the Bible, in poetry and prophecy as well as in narrative, to speak of God’s visible, tangible, and experienced presence to Israel (see, for example, Exod. 33:22; 1 Kings 8:11; Ps. 19:1; Hab. 2:14). However, most unexpectedly, when the translators of the Hebrew produced the Greek Septuagint, on every occasion when kābōd YHWH appears in the Hebrew they rendered it as δόξα θεοῦ, normally rendered in English as “the glory of God.” The expression δόξα refers no longer only to human success but also to the visible, caring, and saving presence of God in the human story. The Fourth Evangelist regularly plays on the traditional and the biblical meanings of the same word (see 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54). This is especially the case in 12:43. As the evangelist speculates on why Israel rejected Jesus, he finally decides that “they loved the praise [τὴν δόξαν] of men rather than the glory [τὴν δόξαν] of God.” In their search for esteem and honor (τὴν δόξαν) among men and women, they could not see and experience the glory (τὴν δόξαν) of God among them in and through the person of Jesus, who made God known

37. LSJ, 444, s.v. δόξα. For the New Testament use, see BDAG, 256–58, s.v. δόξα and δοξάζω. See the comment on p. 257: “The Common Gk. usage of δόξα in [the] sense of ‘notion, opinion’ is not found in the NT.” The applied meaning of “human success” does appear. For further background and discussion of this issue, see below, pp. 92–93.

38. The noun kābōd is related to the verb kābed, which literally means “to be heavy, to weigh down.” The strong physical idea of “presence” flows into the noun from that background. See BDB, 457–59, s.v. kābed and kābōd.

(1:18). As Jesper Nielsen correctly argues, John uses “glory” terminology in two ways: one is to refer to “a relational status and recognition,” while according to the other, “δόξα [is] a divine appearance.”

In contrast to the common use of the expression, its rich biblical use plays an important role in the theology of the Fourth Gospel. The presence of Jesus in the world, doing the deeds (τὰ ἔργα) of God, manifests the glory (δόξα) of God. In his account of Jesus’ first sign (the abundant wine at Cana, 2:11) and his last (the raising of Lazarus, 11:4, 40), John explicitly links “glory” with Jesus’ miracle-working ministry; the voice from heaven also links the two, telling Jesus that he has already manifested God’s glory during his ministry (12:28). But on several occasions Jesus uses the verb “to glorify” (δοξάζω) to look forward to his own glorification and the glorification of God. They are not to be identified, even though they are closely linked. For the Johannine Jesus, his being “lifted up” and exalted on the cross is the moment when he “glorifies” the Father (7:18; 11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:1, 4). The glorification of Jesus, however, does not happen on the cross. He is glorified by means of the cross. Jesus will be glorified only when—his words clearly allude to 1:1–2—through the cross and resurrection he returns to the glory he had with the Father before all time (17:5; see also 7:39; 8:54; 11:4; 12:16, 23, 28; 13:31–32; 15:8; 17:1, 4).

The glorification of God as Jesus is exalted on the cross and the eventual glorification of the Son by means of the cross are most clearly juxtaposed as Jesus explains to his disciples the purpose of Lazarus’ illness in 11:4: “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.” The raising of Lazarus is the trigger for the events that bring about Jesus’ death (see 11:49–53, 57). In that death God is glorified, and by means of that death the Son of God is glorified, as he returns to the glory that he had with the Father before the world was made (17:4; see 1:1–2). The glory of God manifested on the cross and the glorification of Jesus by means of the cross are, however, unified by the Johannine conviction that they form the heart of the one “hour” of Jesus.

41. For an exhaustive study of “glory” in the Fourth Gospel and the word’s intimate association with the cross and the “hour,” see Chibici-Revneanu, Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten. She rightly suggests that the event of the cross sets in motion a process by means of which Jesus is glorified, including his presence in a future community (see pp. 131, 187, 282, 296–99, 301). For a survey of the scholarly discussion of the Johannine use of δόξα, and support for Chibici-Revneanu’s close link between “glory” and the “hour,” see Jörg Frey, “... dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen (Joh 17,24): Zur Hintergrund, Sinn und Funktion der johanneischen Rede von der δόξα Jesus,” NTS 54 (2008): 375–97. Frey’s essay endorses and summarizes the lengthy
Johannine Christology is not an end in itself. It is in service to the author’s major concern: theology. Jesus claims that he has brought to perfection the task that he was given, and in so doing, he has glorified his Father “on earth” (17:4). He has shown forth the glory of God in his miraculous activity (2:11; 11:40; 12:28; 13:31–32), but the high point of Jesus’ glorifying God “on earth” is his being lifted up from the earth (see 3:14; 8:28; and esp. 12:32–33). This is the only interpretation possible for Jesus’ insistence that he must bring to perfection the task given to him (4:34) and his claim that in doing so he has glorified the Father “on earth” (17:4). As this study will later demonstrate in more detail, on the cross and at the moment of his death Jesus is aware that “all is now finished” (τετέλεσται; 19:28). To fulfill (τελειωθῇ) Scripture, he cries out that he thirsts (fulfilling Ps. 69:21). On receiving the vinegar, he says, “It is finished” (τετέλεσται; 19:30). The perfect accomplishment (τέλος) of Jesus’ task (ἔργον) takes place in Jesus’ death. This accomplishment is clearly indicated by the threefold use of verbs that catch up the theme of the perfect performance of his task (τετέλεσται, τελειωθῇ, τετέλεσται) in 19:28–30.42

Immediately before his prayerful claim in 17:4, Jesus provides more detail about that task. Jesus reminds his Father that the Father gave him authority over all living things: “You have given him power . . . to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (v. 2). The task of Jesus is to give eternal life. Jesus explains immediately, “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v. 3 NRSV). The task that Jesus claims to have brought to perfection, to have accomplished and thereby glorified God, is to make God known by telling the saving story of God (see 1:18; 20:30–31). Such claims lead to a further question. What sort of God must Jesus make known?43


42. See below, pp. 153–55. Two verbs are involved, τελέω and τελειώω. See BDAG, 996, s.v. τελειώω; 997, s.v. τελέω. Both relate to the theme of perfect accomplishment (τέλος), and they differ only a little in meaning. The latter is more closely related to the fulfillment of an obligation. However, apart from John 19:28, the verb τελειώω is never used in the New Testament to speak of the fulfillment of the Scriptures (πληρέω is always used). John deliberately changes the traditional verb used to speak of the fulfillment of Scripture to create the cumulative impact of like-sounding verbs that all relate to the promised τέλος (perfect accomplishment) of 4:34 and 17:4. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 908–9.

43. The important study of Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 159–82, correctly identifies the mission of Jesus as the task of making God known. He deals with the question raised here, “What sort of God?,” in his study of the theology that is at the center of the lawsuit, undoubtedly
What Sort of God?

In 4:34, 5:36, and 17:4 Jesus’ own words establish that he has been sent to bring to perfection the task given to him by his Father: to make God known. Those three texts bear singular significance. They are the only places in the Gospel where Jesus explicitly states the purpose of his mission. Not surprisingly, the same message appears in each of these statements, although there is a narrative progression between them. This is necessarily so, as a good storyteller does not give away all his or her secrets at the beginning of the story. Initially, Jesus does not refer to the one who sent him as “God” or “the Father,” simply associating the work with “the one who sent” him (4:34). However, a reader/listener familiar with the prologue (1:1–18) and the discussion with Nicodemus (3:1–21) would have no doubts about whom Jesus means by “the one who sent me” (see 3:13–17). Somewhat later in the story, in the midst of his public ministry, Jesus resumes the theme of his mission. At this stage of the story Jesus speaks not of the perfection of “the work” of God, as in 4:34, but of the accomplishment/perfection of his own “works.” Like “the work” of God that Jesus must accomplish (4:34), his many works are also determined by the will of the Father, who granted him the task of bringing them to perfection (5:36). Jesus’ claim that he accepts this responsibility introduces a further, forward-looking tension into the story in his words “the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish” (5:36).

When will that happen? Jesus will perform a number of “works” after 5:36 (6:1–15; 9:1–7; 11:1–44), just as he has performed “works” before his statement in 5:36 (2:1–11; 5:1–14). But when will he finally accomplish “the works”? In the light of 4:34, the reader/listener looks forward to the present at the heart of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. He never suggests that making God known might mean making love known, despite some pages that point in that direction (e.g., pp. 230–31, 300–301). For Lincoln, as with Küstenberger, the theology of the Gospel is almost totally submerged by its Christology. He claims that “the logos about the theos is the witness embodied in the incarnate Logos, Jesus” (p. 193). For Lincoln, the issue at the heart of the trial is the defense of the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, a cosmic struggle acted out in the Gospel and continued in the postresurrection Johannine community under the direction of its Advocate (see pp. 183–262). This is correct, but there is more to it. If Jesus is the “witness” in the trial, does he witness only to the truth of himself as the Son of God? Or does this Christology also involve a theology, as Jesus, through his own perfect loving (13:1; 15:13), as part of his witnessing, makes known the God who loves the world (3:16)? This study, which owes much to Lincoln’s work, will argue that case. I do not regard Lincoln’s significant work on the trial motif as incorrect but as partially correct. We must take account not only of what the witness says in this story but also of what he does.
accomplishment of “the work” of God. During Jesus’ ministry his works bear witness to the Father who has sent him (5:36), but as his life closes, Jesus claims to have accomplished the mission given to him by that Father (17:4). Obviously, the story of Jesus points toward God, whose will directs his mission (4:34; 5:36), whose task he must accomplish (4:34; 17:4), and whom he must glorify “on earth” (17:4). The Christology of the Fourth Gospel points away from Jesus toward God. The narrative thus forces a further question of a Christology determined by theology. If Jesus makes God known, what does the Johannine Jesus say about God? What sort of God does Jesus make known (see 17:3)?

A God Who Loves the World (3:16–17)

The relationships between God and the Word and between the Father and the Son, and the eventual relationship between Jesus and his own, are dynamic. In other words, the nature of the relationship between God and the Word in the prologue (1:1–3), as already indicated in 1:14–18, spills out into the dynamic nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the story.44 The oneness of God and the Logos in the prologue is further spelled out in the relationship between the Father and the Son in the story. The prologue closes by indicating the role of the Logos who has become flesh. He has unconditionally embraced the human condition and come into the world to take up his dwelling place as flesh “among us” (v. 14), and he has a name: Jesus Christ (v. 17). No one has ever seen God, but Jesus Christ makes God known (v. 18).

Toward the end of the Gospel Jesus spells out the reason he has made God known. He asks the Father that believers be swept into the relationship with God that he has had from all time: “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. . . . I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (17:24, 26). The love that has existed from all time between God and the Word, between the Father and the Son, has burst into the human story. Jesus has made it

44. On the dynamism of the relationship between God and the Word in 1:1–2, indicated by the use of the Greek preposition πρός, a dynamism repeated in the statement of the relationship between the Son and the Father in v. 18, indicated by the use of the Greek preposition εἰς, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 35, 41–42, 46–47. In the same work I render that relationship as “turned toward God” (v. 1) and “turned toward the Father” (v. 18); see p. 33.
known so that others might be swept into that same relationship. The Johannine shorthand for this appears in the final words of the original shape of the Gospel. This Gospel has been written by means of a deliberate selection from the many signs and episodes that could have been reported, so that the readers/listeners might go on believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in his name (20:30–31).45

The Gospel always speaks of an acting God, and the expression used most consistently to speak God’s action is “sending.” Jesus uses two expressions for this action, but for the moment note that the Father’s action of “sending” his Son, Jesus Christ, appears thirteen times in Jesus’ self-revelation (3:16–17; 5:23, 30, 36; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21) and seven times as he defends himself against attacks from “the Jews” (7:28–29 [twice]; 8:16, 18, 26, 28–29). I have listed these spatially, as they appear across the sequence of the narrative. We must devote more attention to a God who sends, but for now we will notice the appearance of 3:16–17 on the very first occasion when the Johannine Jesus announces the Father’s sending of his Son. Leaving to one side, at present, the overall theme of “sending,” the location of 3:16–17, the first sending saying, at the beginning of the spatial and temporal development of the narrative gives it a singular importance.46

These striking words of Jesus necessarily set the theme for all subsequent statements about the Father’s sending of the Son. Soon after the prologue (1:1–18), after appearing on the scene in 1:35–51, after the miracle of Cana (2:1–12) and the conflict with “the Jews” in the temple (2:13–22), Jesus announces to a puzzled Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (3:16–17).47 Jesus announces that

45. The paraphrase of 20:30–31 offered above indicates a text-critical decision. The verb “to believe” is found in some manuscripts in a present subjunctive form (πιστεύητε) and in others as an aorist subjunctive (πιστεύσητε). As can be seen from the Greek, the difference (σ) is slight, and the textual variation is understandable. I am reading the present subjunctive, thus translating “that you may go on believing.” In other words, the Gospel is written for people who already believe, but John wants to lead them deeper into their commitment of faith. For textual and theological reasons supporting this choice, see Gordon D. Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20:30–31,” in The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck, ed. Frans van Segbroeck, Christopher M. Tuckett, Gilbert van Belle, and Joseph Verheyden, 3 vols., BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 3:2193–206.


47. This crucial first combination of the expressions “Father,” “Son,” “to love,” “to give,” and “eternal life,” all so central to Johanneine theology, has been relegated by some to a tradition
his “sending” is motivated by God’s love for the world, a love that generates the “handing over” of the Son to the world.

Major Johannine themes gather around this statement. John 3:16–17 is an example of what has been called “synthetic parallelism.” This means that the same point is made, in different ways, in one statement and then in another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John 3:16</th>
<th>John 3:17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent:</strong> God</td>
<td><strong>Agent:</strong> God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action:</strong> (1) so loved; (2) gave</td>
<td><strong>Action:</strong> sent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Object of the action:</strong> (1) the world; (2) his only Son</td>
<td><strong>Object of the action:</strong> (1) the Son; (2) the world</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 1:</strong> that whoever believes in him</td>
<td><strong>Motive 1:</strong> not to condemn the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 2:</strong> should not perish but have eternal life</td>
<td><strong>Motive 2:</strong> that the world might be saved through him</td>
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The agent (God) is the same in both elements of the parallel. His actions of “giving” and “sending” can also be seen as parallels, even though the former (with its link to the cross) is perhaps more descriptive than the latter. Both statements indicate that God loved, gave, and sent in order to prevent believers from perishing and the world from being condemned. This is made possible by the final element in the two parallels: the gift of the Son provides eternal life, and the world is saved through him.

The two statements by Jesus, however, do not simply repeat the same truths; rather, his discourse progresses from one affirmation to another. God articulates his love by sending/giving his Son; God loves the world in order to avoid the danger of the believers’ perishing and to indicate that he did not send the Son for judgment. The gift of the Sent One of God brings eternal life and salvation. Nevertheless, we can and must draw a close parallel between God’s positive action in loving the world by giving/sending his only Son so that the world may have life/be saved and the judgment that flows from an acceptance or refusal of God’s action (see 3:18–21, 36). The Fourth Gospel uses the verb “to save” (σῴζω) in only three other contexts, that John picked up from elsewhere, not reflecting his own thought. See Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 59–60. Käsemann claims that we cannot build an understanding of the love theme in John on the basis of this text. See also Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 91: “The statement is probably by the fourth evangelist, and not from Jesus’ lips.” Neither of these positions is acceptable in a narrative reading of John’s story of Jesus. Whatever the origin of the words, the storyteller places them on the lips of Jesus. See, most recently, the detailed study of Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes, 222–25. Popkes shows that 3:16–18 is an example of the creative genius of the author of the Gospel.
The Mission of Jesus: To Make God Known

with the same meaning as in 3:17. In 5:34 Jesus tells “the Jews” that he is offering testimony so that they may be saved, and in 10:9 he speaks of himself as the gate through which the sheep must pass to be saved. In 12:47, in the conclusion to his public ministry, Jesus cries out words that parallel 3:17: “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (12:47).

Jesus’ mission is the result of the action of God, who gives and sends his Son. The reason God sent the Son is that God loves the world so much. Already in 3:16–17, by using the words “God gave [ἔδωκεν] his only Son” in verse 16, in close association with “sent his Son” in verse 17, Jesus indicates that the reason for and culmination of his mission is his death. God’s action is a “handing over” of his Son. Throughout the New Testament the use of the verb “to give/to hand over” (δίδωμι and its compounds) points unequivocally to the death of Jesus (see Mark 9:31; 10:33, 45; 14:41–42; Matt. 26:2; Luke 24:7; Acts 3:13; Rom. 4:25; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:23–24; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14). As Andrew Lincoln rightly comments on 3:16:

The greatness of the divine love is not simply an inspiring theological concept but is demonstrated in its gift, that of the only Son. The gift has in view the whole of the Son’s mission and therefore also the giving up of his life through crucifixion, the cruelest form of public execution.

By believing in this Son, present in the world and handed over to death as a manifestation of God’s love, the believer will gain eternal life (v. 15). The mission of the Son brings salvation to the world (v. 17). Behind God’s love for the world that generates the mission of his Son to make available eternal life lies the Father’s love for the Son (see 3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26), but

48. This is typical of 12:44–50, which summarizes the ministry of Jesus by recalling many of his words from earlier in the story. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 365–66, 368–69; Keener, Gospel of John, 886–89. For completeness, note that Jesus speaks of “salvation” (σωτηρία) from the Jews in 4:22, and the Samaritans confess the he is “the Savior [σωτήρ] of the world” in 4:42. These two passages are closely related, and their meaning is determined by their context. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 147–48.

49. See Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 154: “The force is not, then, that the world is so vast that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it, but rather that the world has become so alienated from God that it takes an exceedingly great kind of love to love it at all.” The loving action of God appears in a number of places through the Gospel. Above all, the Father loves the Son (3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 24), but God will also love those who love Jesus (14:21, 23), and Jesus prays that the love that unites the Father and the Son will also spill over to his disciples in all ages.


51. Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 154. See also Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 75–76.
crucial to the mission of Jesus (his “sending”) is God’s love for the world and his gift of salvation to the world, through the Son (3:16–17).

Again the context throws further light upon Jesus’ statement and leads the reader/listener to the cross. After the troubled discussion with Nicodemus, which only leads to puzzlement (3:1–11), Jesus informs Nicodemus and a wider world that he is about to make known heavenly things (v. 12). He is about to make known the things that pertain to God and God’s way with the world. Jesus insists upon the uniqueness of the revelation of the heavenly that can be found in him, the Son of Man. No one has gone up to heaven to receive the divine secrets, but someone has come down, the Son of Man (v. 13). The question that emerges is, where does one find this revelation of the heavenly in the Son of Man? It is one thing to affirm that Jesus is the unique revealer, but where and when does he reveal?

Jesus answers that question immediately by announcing: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (vv. 14–15). Jesus parallels his reference to being “lifted up” with the “lifting up” of the serpent by Moses in the wilderness, recorded in Numbers 21:8–9. It must point the reader/listener to an eventual physical “lifting up” on a stake. But the verb used for “lifting up” has two meanings, and the interpretation of Jesus’ words must include both. “To lift up” (ὑψωθῆναι) means not only to physically lift up from the ground but also to exalt. Not only will Jesus be “lifted up,” he must be lifted up (δεῖ). The “lifting up” is part of God’s design for his Son. We encounter the singular meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel for the first time. It is always the physical “lifting up” of Jesus in his crucifixion, but it is also his moment of exaltation. The one who believes that will have eternal life (v. 15). This is the context for verses 16–17.

52. For an extensive study of 3:1–21 and the love themes embedded in that context, see Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes, 192–248. See also Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 65–73. Lincoln shows that the reader is drawn into a lawsuit over the truth about the life to come that can be experienced in the present. On the debate over who is speaking in vv. 11–21, Jesus or the narrator, see pp. 66–67. I regard vv. 11–21 as words of the Johannine Jesus (although vv. 31–36 come from the narrator). But this discussion is unhelpful. Whether the words are accredited to Jesus or the narrator, they articulate Johannine Christology.

53. In v. 11 Jesus begins to speak directly to Nicodemus, addressing him as “you” (singular), but by the end of the verse, he accuses a larger number of people of not receiving his testimony (“you [plural] do not receive”). From v. 12 on he always addresses a plural audience. The discourse reaches beyond Nicodemus to a wider world.

54. See Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 42–67.

55. This is already obvious from a dictionary. See BDAG, 1045, s.v. ὑψώω. A most important study of this theme in John remains Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, now further
Jesus’ claim that the love of God for the world caused the “sending” of Jesus to a cross so that believers might have eternal life and the world might be saved through him fills out verses 13–15. Jesus is the one and only revealer of the heavenly (v. 13); the revelation takes place when Jesus is lifted up on a cross (v. 14); whoever believes this will have eternal life (v. 15). The love of God drives the mission of Jesus in the world, handing him over to a “lifting up” in death and exaltation. The mission of Jesus is to make known the heavenly, to make God known to believers and to the world, thus bringing eternal life and salvation (vv. 16–17). As Rudolf Bultmann comments:

The event which is brought to fulfillment in the exaltation of the Son of Man is grounded in the love of God which sent him, so that faith might receive eternal life. . . . Belief in his mission is belief in his exaltation. For only the man who overcomes the offence of Jesus’ humility and who perceives his exaltation in his death, can see in Jesus the Son sent by the Father.

The tight logic of 3:13–17 states that only Jesus makes the heavenly known. He does that through his exaltation on the cross (vv. 13–14), and whoever believes in him will have eternal life (v. 15). God’s love for the world has made this possible by generating the sending of the Son, his mission (v. 16). Twice in this context Jesus promises “eternal life” to those who, as Bultmann put it, “see in Jesus the Son sent by the Father” (vv. 15–16). God’s act of loving the world initiates the cycle of the sending of the Son that culminates in his crucifixion and exaltation. There the heavenly is revealed so that the believer might have eternal life. God’s love makes the gift of eternal life possible, and the mission of Jesus is to make that love known.


56. The first clause of 3:16 has a strong causal meaning: “For God so loved . . . that . . . he gave his only Son [οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς . . . ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν].”


58. On “life” and “eternal life,” see Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 141–44. I am aware of the anthropomorphic language used in this statement, but it comes from the Johannine worldview. Theologically, God does not “act” in any fashion that “initiates” anything, but how else can John tell a story of the presence of God in “the world” in the person of Jesus Christ?
A God Who Is Made Known (17:3)

In 4:34, in the Cana to Cana section, Jesus states his mission to perfect the task given him by the Father, challenging the reader to faith, and then in 17:4, during his final prayer, he restates this theme in his claim that he has accomplished that task. Parallel to this, he promises “eternal life” and “salvation” early in the story (3:13–17), within the Cana to Cana section, and explains what constitutes “eternal life” in his final prayer to his Father (17:2–3). These crucial statements from Jesus frame the narrative as a whole and constitute an important literary feature of the narrative that must not be overlooked in the interpretative process. We must observe not only what is said but where it is said in the story.59

As Jesus’ final prayer opens, he tells the Father that he has accomplished the task he was given (v. 4). Before that statement he prays, asking the Father to glorify him, that he might glorify the Father (v. 1). In verse 5 he returns to the theme of glory, asking that he now return to the glory that was his before the world was made (cf. 1:1–2). The Father has given him authority over all creation, so that he may endow those with him, those the Father gave him, with eternal life (v. 2).60 Jesus uses the expression “eternal life” throughout the Gospel. It is a gift that comes from faith in God and in Jesus, whom he has sent (3:15–17, 36; 4:36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 12:25, 50; 17:2–3), and then a gift that Jesus gives in his revealing mission (4:14; 6:27, 54, 68; 10:28). Although John uses only the word “life” in his statement of the purpose of the Gospel in 20:30–31, he summarizes there the message of the gift of “eternal life” that comes through faith in God and in the one whom he has sent: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his

59. Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 114, misses the significance of these sayings’ location within the narrative. He comments on the use of τελειώω in conjunction with ἐργον: “The term τελειώω is occasionally found with mission terminology, especially the term ἐργον (cf. 4:34; 17:4; cf. also 19:30).” The location of this conjunction is not “occasional” but decisive. A further analysis of 19:30 will enhance this claim. Köstenberger’s neglect of the literary location of 4:34 and 17:4 and then 3:16 and 17:2–3 is one of the results of his conclusion that John 1–12 deals with Jesus’ horizontal mission, while John 13–21 deals with his vertical mission (see Missions of Jesus, 140). On the importance of carefully located repetitions of statements and episodes in narrative, see Genette, Narrative Discourse, 113–27.

60. The syntax is subtle here. Jesus’ authority over the whole of creation, given by the Father at a definite time in the past (17:2: ἔδωκας; aorist tense), looks back to 1:1–18 and the incarnation. However, in his prayer that he might give eternal life, he refers to a specific group, the disciples who are with him. He indicates this using a neuter singular noun and a perfect verbal tense (“all whom you gave him”: πᾶν ὁ δέδωκας αὐτῷ), referring to the oneness of the group of disciples who have long been with Jesus. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 463–64.
name” (v. 31). Only once, however, does John tell the reader what is meant by eternal life, as he pauses, after 17:2, to explain, “And this is eternal life” (v. 3).

Jesus’ explanation of the words “eternal life” generates a pause in the prayer to the Father. After asking that eternal life be given to the disciples (v. 2), he explains: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v. 3 NRSV). Many scholars have claimed that these words are a non-Johannine “summary” that interrupts the flow of the prayer, the result of later editing, and should be ignored in the interpretation of John 17. The phrase “the one true God” appears only here in the Gospel, and it is strange that Jesus would use his own name “Jesus Christ” in a prayer to his Father. Even if it were added to an original prayer (which I doubt but am prepared to countenance), however, such an explanatory intervention into the final redaction of the Gospel enhances the message of the narrative as a whole. The message of verse 3 is crucial to the Johannine understanding of “eternal life,” as this verse is the only place in the Gospel where that message is explicitly clarified. The reader is aware, at this stage of the story, that knowledge of God comes through the revealing words and actions of the Sent One (see 1:14, 16–18; 3:14–15, 16–17, 31–36a; 4:13–14; 5:24–25; 6:35, 51; 7:37–38; 8:12; 9:5; 10:27–29; 11:42; 13:18–20; 14:6–7). This is not a gnostic promise of a saving “knowledge” but the promise of a life available to those who believe that the life and teaching of Jesus have told the story of God (see 1:18). The believer has eternal life by knowing the God revealed by Jesus. Jesus’ words and works have revealed God and thus made eternal life possible for “all flesh” (vv. 2–3). As the final word of Jesus on “eternal life,” 17:3 leaves the reader in no doubt that belief that Jesus has made God known leads to the gift of eternal life (3:15–17;

61. See, for example, Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:172–73; Becker, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 2:513–14. For a good summary of the discussion, and in support of the position taken here, see Wilhelm Thüsing, Herrlichkeit und Einheit: Eine Auslegung des Hohenpriesterlichen Gebetes Jesu (Joh. 17), 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1975), 40–41. Schnackenburg, even though he regards v. 3 as redactional, rightly remarks: “As evidence of Johannine theology, the text is very important” (Gospel according to St. John, 3:173).

62. This is an important methodological issue that separates a literary from a more historical-critical approach to a text. Historically, it may be possible to show various redactional stages in the development of a narrative text. However, a literary reading interprets the text as it has come to us, reading the additions that come from various redactions as clarifications that enrich the story. When the text under review has a doubtful textual history, it may have been added by a later scribe. There is no such hesitation over 17:3. It belongs to the original manuscript tradition. See Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 212–13.
17:2–3), a truth that the narrator will affirm in 20:30–31. Eternal life comes from the knowledge of the God revealed by Jesus: the God who so loved the world that he sent him into the world and handed him over (3:16–17). The cross continues to loom large.

**A God Who Sends (3:16–17; 17:3)**

Identifying Jesus’ mission as bringing to perfection the task given to him to glorify God on earth (4:34; 5:36; 17:4) has led us to an examination of God’s love for the world and his gift, his sending his Son so that Jesus might make God known and thus make eternal life and salvation available in and through himself (3:16–17; 17:2–3). As Jesus opens and closes his ministry, first in public and then alone with his disciples, he speaks of his being “the Sent One” of the Father (3:16–17; 17:3). Only through Jesus’ words and actions does one have access to a God whom no one has ever seen (see 1:18; 3:13–14). Finally, in this sketch of what Jesus himself says about his mission, about what he is doing “in the world” (see 17:4), we must briefly analyze the other action regularly attributed to God in his relationship with his Son in the Fourth Gospel: sending. We have already mentioned this crucial relationship in the analysis of 3:16–17 and 17:2–3, but we must consider it further.

Throughout the Gospel God “relates” by loving the world (3:16–17), Jesus (3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23–24, 26), and, under certain conditions, Jesus’ disciples (14:21, 23; 17:23, 26). The reader learns in 3:16–17 that God “loves” the world so much that he gave and sent his only Son to bring eternal life and salvation.

63. One cannot be certain, but it is possible that the use of the expression “life” in the climactic statement of the Gospel in 20:31 may have been determined by the fact that the final and definitive explanation of “eternal life” is found in 17:2–3, never to be repeated in the story.

64. The overall thrust of the narrative toward the cross should lessen the concern of some commentators to speculate about the nature of the relationship between Jesus and the Father in 17:3. See, for example, Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1054; Bruner, *Gospel of John*, 970–72; Lincoln, *Gospel according to Saint John*, 435. After his discussion, Lincoln rightly resolves the issue: “The exaltation and glorification of Jesus displays the glory of the one God.” See also Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 255–56; Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 167–68.

65. Of course, to speak of the “mission” of Jesus is to recognize that someone “sends” him. The English word “mission” comes from the Latin verb *mittere*, “to send,” and its noun *missio*. Koester, *Word of Life*, 33–40, helpfully points out that God’s “sending” indicates that God is separated from the world. The “sending” of Jesus offers life but also confronts the world with truth.

66. Only once in the Gospel does Jesus say that he loves God (see 14:31). It is presupposed in the mutuality described in 17:20–26 but never stated. Even here, the love of God for Jesus and eventually his disciples dominates. This is a further hint of the central theme of love that begins and ends in God but is made known by Jesus.
salvation. A link with God’s love for the world and the availability of eternal life enriches this crucial first use of the expression “to send”; this is but one of many occasions in the Fourth Gospel where the “sending” action of God is found. The Gospel uses two verbs to speak of God’s “sending” (πέμπω and ἀποστέλλω), and some have argued for a subtle distinction between them. We will note only that, although God “sent” John the Baptist (1:6: “sent [ἀπεσταλμένος] from God”) to bear witness to the light, his mission fades into insignificance once Jesus appears on the scene (but see 3:25–30; 5:33–36). Outside the prologue, Jesus is the only “sent one” of God, his Father. He is the “Sent One” par excellence.

Jesus, as the Sent One, brings glory and honor to the one who sent him (5:23; 7:18). He does the sender’s will (4:34; 5:30; 6:38–39) and performs his works (5:36; 9:4). He speaks the words of the one who sent him (3:34; 7:16; 12:49; 14:10, 24). He bears witness to the sender (5:36; 8:26), whom he knows intimately (7:29); lives in a close relationship with the sender (8:16, 18, 29; 16:32); and is subordinate to him (13:16). Scholars have often shown that these characteristics belong to a Jewish and a biblical tradition of the relationship that must exist between any authentic sender and sent one. This is true, but the many parallels between the Johannine use of the “sending scheme” and other Jewish literature do not exhaust the meaning of the Johannine use of the theme. The Johannine context within which this traditional motif appears so regularly determines its meaning. That context in each case addresses the relationship between the Father (the sender), Jesus (the sent one), and, ultimately, those whom Jesus will send, as the Father sent him (see 17:18; 20:21).

67. See, significantly, Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “ἀποστέλλω (πέμπω), κτλ,” TDNT 1:404–6; Miranda, Die Sendung Jesu, 29–38; and the survey in Francis T. Gignac, “Use of Verbal Variety,” 192n4. For a good discussion of this debate, see Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 99–106. Köstenberger concludes, and I agree, that the use of the different words is determined by a preference for certain words in different grammatical forms. It is also possible that it is part of this author’s use of stylistic variation, as argued by Gignac, “Use of Verbal Variety,” 192–93.

68. John 1:6 is the only place in the Gospel where God is described as sending a human being other than Jesus, the Son. The Baptist’s being sent by God ensures the authenticity of his witness (see 1:6–8, 15, 19–34; 3:25–30). See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 43. Some regard 3:31–36 as words of the Baptist, but it is better to see them as comment from the evangelist. See Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 50–51. In 14:26 Jesus tells his disciples that the Father will send the Paraclete (in 14:16 he says that the Father will give the Paraclete), while in 15:26 and 16:7 Jesus affirms that he will send the Spirit (from the Father [15:26]).

69. I have been guided in this summary by Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 106–11. Among those who have studied this motif, see Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, SHR 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 137–48; Wayne A. Meeks, “The Divine Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in Aspects
Unique to the Fourth Gospel is the literary frame that opens and closes the use of this motif, just as another frame did with the motif of Jesus’ perfect accomplishment of the task given to him (4:34; 17:4), and another with the description of that task as making God known to the world (3:16; 17:2–3). It is in 3:16–17 as well, as we have seen, that John first indicates that Jesus is the Sent One of God. The evangelist closely associates the sending motif with God’s love for the world and Jesus’ mission to bring God’s gifts of eternal life and salvation. Here is a third major theme that Jesus states in the Cana to Cana section of the Gospel (3:16–17) and restates in his prayer to the Father, as the final appearances of the sending-motif dominate 17:1–26 (see vv. 3, 8, 18, 21, 23). As the prayer opens (17:1–5), the themes of Jesus as the Sent One, of his making God known so that believers may have eternal life (vv. 2–3), and of his perfectly accomplishing the task given by the one who sent him (v. 4) and thus asking that he return to the glory that he had before the world was made (v. 5) provide the overall setting for Jesus’ prayer to the Father. Jesus, unconditionally accepting his role as the Sent One (vv. 3, 18, 23, 21), now acknowledged as such by his immediate disciples (v. 8), prays to the Father that the love the Father has had for his Son, now manifest in the world by his immediate followers, who will be cared for and sanctified by the Father in his absence (vv. 9–19), will be in all who will believe through their word (v. 20; see v. 23), and will eventually sweep them into the oneness of love that unites the Father and the Son (v. 26).

Again within this literary frame of the beginning and the end of John’s story of Jesus one finds the message of Jesus’ being sent by the Father to make him known to the world (see 3:13–17), here through his disciples, who now accept him as the Sent One and who will lead others to belief and a unity of love so that they might be loved by the Father, as Jesus is loved by the Father (17:3, 8, 21, 23, 26). Everything else in the “sending” passages is determined by this message and supports it. As the Sent One (3:16–17) who makes God known (17:3), Jesus does the Father’s will by performing

his works (4:34; 5:30, 36; 6:38–39; 9:4) and speaking his word (3:34; 7:16; 12:49; 14:10, 24). Always subordinate to the one who sent him (5:21–22, 27; 13:3, 16), but in unfailingly close relationship with him (8:16, 18, 29; 16:32), he bears authentic witness to the God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son so that those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life, and might not be judged but saved (3:16–17; 5:36; 12:44–45; 13:20; 15:18–25). It is impossible to claim to honor the Father if one does not honor the “sent one” (5:23). This is the context within which Jesus speaks of himself as the Sent One of God in his bitter encounters with his opponents (7:28–29; 8:16, 18, 26, 28–29). During the celebration of Tabernacles (7:1–10:21), as the priests confess their faith in the one true God each morning, they make a lie of this profession by rejecting the one whom God has sent (esp. 8:12–59).71

Within the context of Jesus’ angry debates with “the Jews” at the Feast of Tabernacles, on one occasion Jesus plays upon the different types of “glory” in 7:15–18. Questioned over his authority to teach, because he cannot trace a direct line back to any teacher (v. 15), Jesus responds that his teaching comes from the one who sent him (v. 16). One can see that a teaching is authentic when the teacher teaches the will of the one who sent him and not his own will—the will of a human agent (v. 17). On the basis of this criterion, Jesus can claim the authority of the one who sent him. But there is more. Turning on his interlocutors, Jesus tells them that they speak on their own human authority and thus seek human “glory,” esteem, respect, and honor (δόξα). Jesus seeks to manifest only the “glory” (δόξα) of the one who sent him. Only in this passage in the Gospel does Jesus or John link “sending” and “glory,” but the very first sending passage linked God’s gift and his sending of his only Son that life and salvation might be possible (3:16–17). The true test of the authority and the truthfulness of Jesus’ teaching is whether he seeks glory from human beings or seeks to manifest the glory of the one who sent him (7:18); he passes this test. How he will ultimately do so is yet to be told in the story, but the anger, animosity, and potential for violence that surround these encounters between Jesus and his opponents in 7:1–8:59.

70. The remarkable Johannine statements about the oneness between Jesus and God in 10:30, 38, determined by the context of the Jewish celebration of Dedication, could also be introduced here, especially as they depend upon the crucial reference to “sending” in v. 36: “him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (see Moloney, Gospel of John [SP 4], 312–21).

71. On this ritual at Tabernacles, see Francis J. Moloney, Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 69–70. On the tension between this daily ritual and the rejection of Jesus at the feast, see Moloney, “Narrative and Discourse,” 164–67.
hint for the first time that Jesus will finally authenticate his authority and truthfulness on the cross, when he reveals God’s glory.

Conclusion

Jesus’ being the Sent One of God is not so much about “who he is” but “what he does.” We may not have investigated every element in the Fourth Gospel that points to the mission of Jesus. However, in showing the literary pattern of statement and restatement of the theme in the Cana to Cana section of the Gospel (2:1–4:54) and in Jesus’ final prayer (17:1–26), a pattern always expressed in the words of Jesus, we have traced the essential message. We have heard what Jesus says about his mission: who sent him and why he was sent. Jesus brings to perfect accomplishment his mission or task to manifest God’s glory on earth (4:34; 17:4). God’s love for the world initiates the sending of the Son and the gift of eternal life and salvation that can be found in Jesus’ making God known (3:13–17; 17:2–3). The sending (mission) that flows from God’s love eventually leads all who believe in Jesus into the unity enjoyed by the Father and the Son (3:16; 17:24–26).

The Fourth Gospel makes clear that God has a relationship with the Son, and that he has sent the Son so that others may enter that same relationship and continue the mission of Jesus (17:18, 20; 20:21). Only in 3:16–17 does the Gospel speak of God’s direct association with the world. God so loved the world that he gave and sent his only Son to bring eternal life and salvation (3:16–17). From then on, motivated by God’s love for the world, the Son must bring to perfection the task (τὸ ἔργον) he has been given by God. Jesus states that it is God’s work that he must bring to consummation (4:34). But God does not play a first-person role in the action of the story. The signs (σημεῖα) and works (ἔργα) of Jesus’ ministry look forward to that final accomplishment (5:36; see 2:11; 11:40; 12:28; 13:31–32). But only at

72. In this I differ from Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 106–21, whose analysis of the “sending” passages and the scholarship that surrounds them argues that the theme points to Jesus’ being the eschatological shepherd teacher.

73. For a more complete assessment, especially through the other words that deal with Jesus’ movement (coming and returning, descending and ascending, calling to follow, gathering), see Köstenberger, Missions of Jesus, 94, 121–40. For other terminology that may be associated with Jesus’ mission (“must,” “will,” “in order that,” “perfect/accomplish”), see pp. 111–14. Some of these themes and expressions have been dealt with above, and others will appear in subsequent chapters.

74. As Schnelle, Antidocetic Christology, 175, puts it: “Since the miracles are visible, this-worldly demonstrations of Jesus’ majesty, and at the same time are part of the Johannine theologia
“the end” (τέλος) of his life will he claim to have achieved all that he had been asked to do, in his single word from the cross: “It is finished” (19:30: τετέλεσται; see 13:1; 17:4 [τελειοώ]). Only then is God’s love for the world manifested. Little wonder that an elder from the Johannine community of early Christians, most likely in a period that slightly postdates the Gospel, could twice affirm: “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). But to describe God as “love” is to reveal very little about who God is, as it goes no further than Jesus’ affirmation in the Gospel: “God so loved the world” (3:16).

The God of the Johannine Jesus cannot be known in his essence. That program will bother the Christian church at a later time. For the Gospel of John, God can be known only through his relationships: loving the world so much that he sends his only Son in an act of “handing over” (3:16). If the accomplishment of Jesus’ mission is to make God known, and God’s love for the world generates the sending and handing over of the Son, the task of Jesus is to make love known. A further question emerges from this analysis of the Johannine text: how does Jesus make love known? Jesus certainly speaks about love, but as is normal among human beings, he also (and perhaps especially) manifests love in what he does, as well as in what he says.
Jesus responds to the will of the one who sent him. His mission is to accomplish and to bring to perfection the task that he had been given (John 4:34; 17:4). He makes God known so that the world may be saved and have eternal life (3:16–17; 17:2–3). This accomplishment of Jesus’ task points to a Johannine theology of the cross. But the theme of God’s making known his love in and through Jesus by means of the cross emerges well before the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection appears in the narrative. The Johannine Gospel as a whole is shot through with a tension that looks forward to some future time and event, promising the accomplishment of Jesus’ task in the revelation of a God of love and the consequences of this love in the lives of all believers; this future event is regularly referred to as an hour that “has not yet come” (2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20).¹

¹. This feature of a narrative is called a “prolepsis.” A form of what is called “anachrony” (Genette), it occurs when the regular time-sequence of the story is disturbed by reference to an event that looks to the future for its resolution. Prolepses are an important element maintaining the interest of the reader, looking forward to the eventual denouement of suggestions and hints given during the course of the story. See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 33–84; Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 46–51.
Our study of Jesus’ mission indicated that the cross is the Johannine Jesus’ supreme action in making known a God who loves the world. However, we must devote further attention to earlier indications in the narrative that point forward to that event and give it content and anticipated meaning. Ernst Käsemann, in portraying the Johannine presentation of Jesus as evidence of an early Christianity on the way toward a gnostic docetism, claims that little or nothing in the ministry of Jesus points forward to the story of the crucifixion or needs the cross to be understood: “Apart from a few remarks that point ahead to it, the passion comes into view in John only at the very end. One is tempted to regard it as being a mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work.”

Käsemann’s claim underestimates a rich vein in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Far from being “a mere postscript,” the crucifixion is anticipated by several major themes that emerge across the account of Jesus’ public ministry, pointing forward to a significant moment that will be accomplished at a time and place appearing later in the story. In this “looking forward” these themes anticipate, develop, and enhance the Johannine understanding of Jesus’ perfection of his task on the cross. We can fully appreciate the Johannine narrative presentation of Jesus’ crucifixion only through attention to this feature of the story, which informs the reader/listener about a number of themes that are not encountered for the first time in the Passion Narrative but reach their climax there.

Across his ministry, Jesus speaks of the “lifting up” of the Son of Man (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33) and of his “hour” (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:27–28; see also 12:31 [“now”]). He points to a future “gathering” of those who are not of this fold who are scattered abroad (10:16; 11:52; see also 12:11, 19, 24, 32) and of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son of Man (7:39; 11:4, 40; 12:16 [see 2:22]; 12:23, 28). In a diversity of ways, the lifting up of the Son of Man, “the hour” of Jesus, “the gathering,” and the glory of God and the glorification of the Son all point toward the event of the cross, generating a tension in the narrative as the reader/listener seeks a fuller understanding and the eventual narrative resolution of these provocative themes.

2. Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 7. Driven by his thesis that the Fourth Gospel indicates an early Christian community on its way toward full-blown gnosticism, Käsemann is forced by his presuppositions to relegate the Passion Narrative to “a mere postscript.”

3. As Schnelle, Human Condition, 115–16, puts it: “From the beginning in John, Jesus’ activity is also seen from the perspective of the Cross.” See pp. 115–18.

of these four themes are finally resolved in the story of Jesus told in the prologue and the Book of Signs (1:1–18; 1:19–12:50). They drive the reader/listener further into the narrative seeking their resolution. It will be found in John’s story of Jesus’ crucifixion. In this chapter we will trace the development of these themes across Jesus’ ministry. In the following chapter we will indicate how John further spells them out in the story of the crucial events and words of Jesus’ last evening with his disciples at the meal (13:1–38), in his command to love (15:12–17), and in his final prayer (17:1–26). In those passages, themes of the hour, the gathering, and the glory of God and the glorification of the Son return within dense literary and theological contexts where the language of love is also exquisitely expressed (see 13:1, 34–35; 15:12–17; 17:23, 24–26).

The Lifting Up of the Son of Man

Already in the prologue John hints toward Jesus’ crucifixion. It is possible to read 1:3c–4 as an announcement of Jesus’ life-giving presence: “What took place in him was life, and the life was the light of the world.” This interpretation depends upon a decision on the location of a modern punctuation mark in an early manuscript tradition that had no such indications. It also depends upon the interpretation of a perfect tense of a notoriously versatile Greek verb (γίνομαι) as “what happened/what took place.” Accepting a reading of made here. The glorification of Jesus in the human stage of his revelation of God on the cross (Thüsing’s first stage) is associated with the “lifting up” of the Son of Man. The glorification of Jesus in his return to the Father through ascension (Thüsing’s second stage) is never associated with the term “the Son of Man.” See Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 208–20, and Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 319–20: “The Son of Man is the incarnate one.”


6. The love theme also emerges in 14:15, 21, 23–24, 28 and is repeated in a similar vein in 16:26–27. We will also consider these passages, but both structurally and theologically 13:1–38, 15:1–12, and 17:1–26 contain the most significant treatment of the love theme: 13:1–38 containing Jesus’ actions and their interpretation, 15:12–17 Jesus’ command and its basis, and 17:1–26 Jesus’ prayer. See Francis J. Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 1–28, 64–66, 102–26. The structure and theology developed there depends heavily upon Simoens, La gloire d’aimer.

7. The punctuation of vv. 3–4 is hotly debated. There are three uses of the verb γίνομαι in these verses. The verb has many possible meanings. Like verbs that are often and widely used in any language (so-called common verbs), it is extremely versatile. See BDAG, 196–99, s.v. γίνομαι, which provides nine possible different fields of meaning. In John 1:3–4 most interpreters place a full stop after the final use of the verb (γέγονεν: perfect tense), rendering the Greek as: “All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of the world.” However, the full stop can be placed after the
1:3c–4 as stating that what took place in the event of Jesus’ presence was the advent of a saving “light” that enlightens everyone, anticipating Jesus’ own words at the Feast of Tabernacles, where light plays such an important part of the celebration (see 8:12; 9:5), we can see the cross already present in the struggle indicated by 1:5. The conflict between light and darkness in verse 5 refers to that historical event at which the darkness apparently overcame the light, but the Johannine (and Christian) argument is that the opposite is the case. Note the present tense of the verb: “The light shines [φαίνει] in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The author wishes to indicate that the light of Jesus’ revelation of God still “shines” in the world, despite the past event of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Thus the prologue affirms the ultimate victory of God in and through the cross of Jesus (1:5), and the reader/listener takes this information into the reading experience of the narrative. However, John further develops his interpretation of that victory. One of the most striking examples, appearing very early in the Gospel, is the use of the double-meaning Greek verb ὑψωθῆναι. This verb means a physical “lifting up” from the ground, as is second use of the verb, in the aorist tense (ἐγένετο), making the final use of the perfect tense of the verb an indication of the Jesus event: “All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made. What took place in him was life, and the life was the light of the world” (vv. 3c–4). For valuable studies, see Edward L. Miller, *Salvation History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3–4*, NovTSup 60 (Leiden: Brill, 1989); Ignace de la Potterie, “Structure du Prologue du Saint Jean,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 254–81. See also Keener, *Gospel of John*, 381–82; Bruner, *Gospel of John*, 16–18.

8. For more detail, see Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 35–37, 42–43.


Most recently, Luc Devillers, “Le prologue du quatrième evangile, clé de voûte de la littérature johannique,” *NTS* 58 (2012): 317–30, has claimed, on the basis of a hypothesis that 1 John was written before the third edition of the Gospel, that the prologue (written after 1 John as part of the final edition of the Gospel) not only is the key to the Gospel but also resolves the tensions between the more christological Gospel and the more soteriological 1 John by its double insistence on Christology and soteriology, holding together all the Johannine literature (and is thus the capstone: “clé de voûte”). The article gives an excellent overview of current discussion of this question, especially among French-speaking scholars.

clear in 3:14: “As Moses lifted up [ὑψωσεν] the serpent in the wilderness.” The reference to Moses’ raising a golden serpent on a spear, so that all the Israelites suffering from a death-dealing snakebite might gaze upon it and be restored to health (Num. 21:8–9), links the verb “to lift up” with a physical raising of the serpent and its suspension above the ground. However, the same verb also means “to exalt,” a sense that flows naturally from the fact that a physical lifting up is sometimes a “raising on high” as a recognition of achievement. The second part of 3:14, leading into verse 15, applies the “lifting up” to Jesus. The verb “to lift up” bears both meanings: “So must the Son of Man be lifted up [ὑψωθῆναι δὲ], that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (vv. 14–15). The lifting up of Jesus is both his suffering from being lifted up from the earth in crucifixion, and in his God-willed exaltation (the Son of Man must [δὲ] be lifted up), so that all who believe in the crucified one might be saved. Just as the Israelites who looked upon the lifted-up serpent in the wilderness lived, so anyone who believes in the unique revelation of God made available by the Son of Man who came from heaven (v. 13) and is lifted up from the earth in crucifixion (v. 14) will also have life, but in this case, eternal life (v. 15).

After the Cana to Cana section (2:1–4:54), within which appears the first saying from Jesus indicating that he will be exalted on the cross (3:14), the Gospel turns to record the presence of Jesus at the celebration of the Jewish feasts (5:1–10:42). Dominating this part of John’s story is Jesus’ presence at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1–10:22). During a bitter struggle between Jesus and “the Jews,” who move steadily toward disbelieving and rejecting Jesus (especially in the conflicts and misunderstandings of 7:1–8:59), Jesus looks forward to a moment when an enigmatic event will take place. Put simply, Jesus tells his hostile audience who are questioning his motives, his origins, and his destiny (see 8:21–27) that a time will come when they will kill him: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he” (8:28). Incredibly, Jesus claims at that moment he will reveal the divine presence among them because his death by crucifixion will also be his exaltation.11 Readers and listeners would know that the story of Jesus ended in a crucifixion. That moment in history was well past, and one of the reasons for telling the story was to make sense out of this horrific death of 

the person they claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God (see 20:31).

John makes sense of Jesus’ death by describing it as a “lifting up” that is simultaneously an “exaltation,” as we have already seen in 3:14–15. However, in 8:28 Jesus goes one step further. He tells “the Jews” that they will eventually “lift him up” in crucifixion. At that moment Jesus’ oneness with the will of the Father, enabling the revelation of the divine presence, will be made known to them.12 “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me” (8:28). It is “the Jews” who will lift up and exalt Jesus on the cross.

Unlike anything else in the New Testament, 8:28 states unequivocally that this moment of exaltation is also the moment when his oneness with the Father, and thus his authority to make God known, will shine forth for them. The cross is not only the saving revelation of 3:13–15. It is also the moment when the divine presence in the human story will be made known to those responsible for the physical “lifting up” of Jesus (8:28).13 Close to the surface, but not stated, in this affirmation by Jesus lies a hint of self-judgment. “What will happen as a consequence of the knowledge which comes from the elevated Son of Man is their own responsibility (see 3:16–21, 31–36; 5:19–29; 12:46–48).”14 Later in this same encounter Jesus will state

12. The Fourth Gospel regularly uses the expression “I am he” (ἐγώ εἰμι) in two forms. See above, pp. 34–35, note 58. Often Jesus uses it to describe not so much his being but his saving actions: “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 48), “I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “I am the door” (10:7, 9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6), “I am the true vine” (15:1, 5). On other occasions, as in 8:28, he uses it “absolutely,” without any complement (see also 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 58; 13:19; 18:5–8). The absolute use of ἐγώ εἰμι reaches back to the tradition of the revelation of the name of God to Moses with the verb “to be” in Exod. 3:14. However, the expression ἐγώ εἰμι is not found in LXX Exod. 3:14. Looking back to Exod. 3:14, the prophets use it widely, especially Deutero-Isaiah, where the prophet affirms the presence of the one true God over against all false gods (see esp. Isa. 43:10; 45:18). In the Fourth Gospel it is the highest claim that Jesus makes for himself. By using this expression, continuing the tradition of Exod. 3:14 and the Prophets, Jesus claims to reveal the divine in the human story. See further Heinrich Zimmermann, “Das absolute ἐγώ εἰμι als neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel,” BZ 4 (1960): 54–69, 266–76; André Feuillet, “Les Ego Eimi christologiques du quatrième evangile,” RSR 54 (1966): 5–22, 213–40; Brown, Gospel according to John, 533–38; David M. Ball, “I Am” in John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications, JSNTSup 124 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

13. As Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 143, rightly concludes in his analysis of 8:28: “The cross then discloses the identity of Jesus the Son of Man in the fullest sense of his oneness with the Father.”

14. Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 140. For a detailed study of John 8:28 within its literary and theological context, see pp. 124–41. On the possibility that the promise of 8:28 still contains
his identity unequivocally when he uses the same formula to tell “the Jews”: “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). Their response is not promising: “So they took up stones to throw at him” (v. 59).

The third and final use of the double-meaning verb “to be lifted up/exalted” (ὑψωθῆναι) appears at the close of Jesus’ ministry in 12:32. As the reader/listener has come to expect from the experience of this elegantly composed narrative to this point, the meaning of Jesus’ execution has gathered even greater richness in the story that has followed 8:28, especially from the passage on the good shepherd (10:1–18) and the aftermath of the raising of Lazarus (11:45–57). This final use of “to be lifted up/exalted” appears in a dense passage where the coming of the Greeks has led Jesus to announce that his hour of glorification has come (12:20–23) and to spell out the consequences of the glorification for himself and all who wish to follow him (vv. 24–26). Faced with his “hour,” he turns to his Father in prayer, accepts the travail that lies ahead, is comforted by a voice from heaven that assures him that he has glorified God on earth and that God will glorify him again in the very near future (vv. 27–28). To a puzzled crowd, Jesus explains further what this means. The whole text, and especially the final explanatory note from the storyteller, brings Jesus’ prophecies about his future “lifting up” to a close: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” He said this to show by what manner of death he was to die” (12:31–33).

The “hour” of Jesus, indicated by the twofold use of “now” (νῦν); the judgment that Jesus brings; his glorifying the Father and, in doing so, being glorified himself; and the gathering of everyone will take place when he is lifted up from the earth on a cross. To eliminate any shadow of doubt about the meaning of “lifting up,” the storyteller explains that Jesus was speaking about the way he would die: through his being lifted up in crucifixion (v. 33). Some of these themes I will return to later in this chapter—“the hour” (see 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23), the “gathering” at the cross (see 10:16; 11:51–52), and glory and glorification (see especially 11:4, 40; 12:23, 27–28)—themes that have been generating narrative momentum across the unfolding story and that climax in 12:21–33. In these words that serve as a climax to Jesus’
public ministry, John skillfully draws his account of the ministry to a close by gathering major themes associated with the cross of Jesus.

The crowd will not understand and accept his words and promises, as they have their own ideas about who “the Son of Man” should be (vv. 34). As throughout the first half of the story, and increasingly from 7:1–12:36, they remain locked in their closed religious system. They maintain their response to the man born blind: “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from” (9:29). They have not read the prologue, and have shown themselves unwilling to accept Jesus’ claims, especially at the celebration of Tabernacles (see 8:31–59), that he is “from God” and that the authority of his word and revelation depends upon that original relationship (see 5:19–30). The time of Jesus’ presence to Israel has come to a close. After these dramatic words on his judgment of this world (12:31) and his being lifted up to draw everyone to himself in his death (vv. 32–33), Jesus issues a final warning (vv. 35–36a) and departs from their presence: “When Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them” (v. 36b).

Before leaving this brief consideration of the Fourth Gospel’s preparation of the hearer/listener for the full meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion by means of the use of the double-meaning “lift up/exalt,” we must notice two further details. In two of these sayings (3:14; 8:28), the future lifting up and exaltation on the cross are associated with Jesus as “the Son of Man.” This enigmatic expression, used exclusively by Jesus to speak of himself in all four Gospels, has its own unique meaning in the Fourth Gospel. In a way that parallels its use in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus uses it in the Fourth Gospel when he speaks of his forthcoming death and exaltation. But this does not

15. For further comment on this important statement from “the Jews,” see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 294–95.
16. On this section of the story, especially its association with the lifting up on the cross, the use of the expression “the Son of Man,” the glory, and the gathering, see Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 160–85.
exhaust the significance of its use in the Gospel of John. We will encounter other passages—especially in the reflection on Jesus’ manifesting the glory of God, thus achieving his own glorification—that use the expression “the Son of Man.” For the moment we focus upon the lifting up of the Son of Man. Jesus does not use the term in the final saying (12:32), when he speaks of himself in the first person singular: “When I am lifted up from the earth.” But in the immediate context, the crowd identifies Jesus with the Son of Man when they ask: “Who is this Son of Man?” (v. 34). They rightly associate the lifting up (v. 32) with the death of the Son of Man, who, as far as they are concerned, should remain forever, and certainly should not be eliminated in death by crucifixion (v. 34).

The Johannine prophecies of Jesus’ crucifixion/exaltation parallel the so-called passion predictions of Synoptic Gospels. Many scholars refer to John 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32–33 as Johannine passion predictions. As Jesus speaks of himself and his future suffering, death, and vindication in the Synoptic Gospels as “the Son of Man” (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34; Matt. 16:13, 21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:2; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31–33), the expression “the Son of Man” reappears in the Gospel of John in passages that point forward to Jesus’ death—and exaltation (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34). This leads to a final comparative reflection on the “lifting up” in John and on the cross in the earlier tradition.18

Two other major New Testament witnesses indicate the uniqueness of this Johannine point of view.19 In the Gospel of Mark Jesus marches relentlessly to Jerusalem, prophesying his oncoming death (see Mark 8:31; 9:31;

18. For a suggested “tradition history” that led to the continued Johannine use of an expression that most likely goes back to Jesus of Nazareth, was crucial in the Synoptic tradition, and is still used in a Gospel written in a very different world for a very different audience, see Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 215–20.

19. This rapid focus upon Mark and Paul highlights the perspective of the two most formative traditions in the early church. Matthew and Luke certainly have their own “theology of the cross” (and Paul is especially creative), but they are both very dependent upon the Markan understanding of the cross. Paul has been a fundamental point of reference for all subsequent understandings of the cross of Jesus in the Christian tradition, including the Markan view, in my opinion. See Joel Marcus, “Mark—Interpreter of Paul,” NTS 46 (2000): 473–87; Brendan Byrne, “Paul and Mark before the Cross: Common Echoes of the Day of Atonement Ritual,” in Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament; Essays in Honor of Francis J. Moloney, ed. Rekha M. Chennattu and Mary L. Coloé, BibScRel 187 (Rome: LAS, 2005), 217–29. Although the earlier Q is marked by a theme of rejection, and “the Son of Man” appears in these contexts, they contain no passion predictions and no passion narrative. For an excellent introduction to Q, see John S. Kloppenborg, Q the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008). On Jesus’ passion and resurrection, see pp. 73–84.
10:32–34). He is arrested, tried, and hammered to a cross, from which he cries out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (15:34 NRSV). But that is not his only cry from the cross. The narrator recalls that, at the moment of his death, “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last” (15:37 NRSV). Not until he has been ignominiously done to death do the consequences of this unconditional gift of himself in response to the design of God begin to appear. The curtain of the temple is rent from top to bottom, a gentile confesses that he was a Son of God (15:37–39), and women discover God’s messenger and hear the Easter proclamation at an empty tomb (16:1–8). God’s intervention into the events of the story indicates that Jesus’ cry from the cross has not been in vain: God has not abandoned him.20

The lordship of God appears, and Jesus’ victory over death is ensured as a consequence of the event of the crucifixion (see this sequence already in 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34).

In the great christological hymn in the second chapter of the Letter to the Philippians, Paul traces Jesus’ career from his beginnings with God to his return to glory. Jesus Christ did not regard his equality with God something to be grasped jealously to himself, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, born into the human condition (see Phil. 2:6–7). The centerpiece of the hymn describes Jesus’ lowest moment: “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (v. 8). It is as a consequence of this humility and humiliation that God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, that every knee should bend, and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord (vv. 9–11). It is especially important for this reflection on the theme of “lifting up” to see Paul’s use of traditional words to explain the exaltation of Jesus as a consequence of Jesus’ humbling himself unto death, even death on a cross. The hymn explicitly states that “therefore also” (διὸ καί), because of this humbling, God has “highly exalted him” (ὑπερύψωσεν) (v. 9).

For both Mark and Paul the experience of the cross is the lowest moment in Jesus’ human experience, and his exaltation is the consequence of this unconditional commitment to the will of God. The verb Paul used in Philippians 2:9 (which may have been part of an early Christian hymn that Paul inserted into his letter) to speak of God’s exaltation of Jesus because of his preparedness to humble himself unto death, even death on a cross (ὑπερύψωσεν), is a compound formed from the verb used in the Fourth

Gospel to speak of Jesus’ being exalted upon the cross (ὑψωθῆναι). In its Pauline context it only has one meaning: God’s exaltation into glory of his obedient crucified one. In the Gospel of John, as we have seen, the simultaneous association of the crucifixion with Jesus’ exaltation becomes increasingly obvious across the narrative (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33). Jesus’ exaltation is not a consequence of the event of the cross. In John, the lifting up and the exaltation are identified as taking place at one event: on the cross. The crucifixion of Jesus is simultaneously both the lifting up of Jesus from the earth on a cross and his exaltation, so that all who believe in him will have eternal life (3:14–15); the cross is the place where Israel will be called to a decision before the one whom they have lifted up, the presence of the divine among them (8:28). At the cross they will face the event that leads to judgment, glory and glorification, and the “gathering” of all people (12:31–34).

The comparison of these Johannine predictions with the Markan and the Pauline descriptions of Jesus’ death by crucifixion illuminates the Johannine preparation of the reader and listener for a unique understanding of Jesus’ cross. If one were to use a parabola, the Markan and Pauline descriptions would be located at the lowest point of the downward sweep. This is especially clear in Philippians 2:5–11, which begins with Jesus’ being in the form of God (v. 6) and closes with his being Lord of all creation (vv. 9–11). His career reaches its nadir in the humiliation he accepts: “even death on a cross” (v. 8). The location of the Johannine understanding of the cross calls for the inversion of the parabola. John’s presentation of Jesus’ cross is at the very summit of an inverted parabola, at its greatest height. Central to this theology of the cross is the use of the double-meaning verb “to lift up” and its association with God’s design for Jesus: he had to be lifted up (see 3:14: ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ). The cross plays an essential role in Jesus’ bringing to perfection the task given to him by the Father (4:34; 13:1; 17:4; 19:30), making known a God who so loved the world that he

21. Most commentators regard Phil. 2:5–11 as an early Christian hymn, known by the Philippian community, that Paul uses in his letter to them to remind them what they say about Jesus, so that he might ask them to “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Jesus Christ.” See the summary and exegesis of Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), and the briefer Jean-François Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, trans. A. W. Heathcote (London: Epworth Press, 1979), 80–108.

22. The use of the Greek expression δεῖ, indicating that it had to happen in response to God’s will, is also part of the Synoptic understanding of Jesus’ passion and resurrection (see Mark 8:31; Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:7, 26).
handed over his Son to death, so that others may be saved and have life (3:16–17; 17:2–3). 23

The Hour of Jesus

As Jesus and his disciples accompany his mother to a wedding at Cana, she points out that those attending have no wine. Jesus replies: “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (2:4). Despite the rebuke, Jesus’ mother has faith in the efficacy of Jesus’ word, and she tells the attendants, “Do whatever he says to you” (2:5). This is the first appearance of the expression “the hour” (ἡ ὥρα), used here by Jesus to point forward to some future moment that “has not yet come.” 24 The response of his mother creates a situation where Jesus is challenged to see through and beyond his expectations and plans (v. 4) and recognize that something greater is at stake. His final response to his mother’s instruction of the attendants informs the reader that “the hour” will be the result of Jesus’ response to someone else (vv. 6–9). 25 “Jesus first makes a remark which brings home the distance between them, and then informs her that the law according to which he works is imposed on him by another.” 26 The mother’s instruction that the attendants do whatever Jesus tells them indicates that she accepts her new role. It is openness to the word of Jesus that will bear fruit, because he is ultimately responding to God’s designs and not the concerns, however caring, of his mother. The miracle that follows is a symbol of the messianic fullness promised by the prophets: an abundance of wine, happiness,
and good things (see Isa. 25:6–8; 54:4–8; 62:4–5). The best will be kept till last (see 2:10). Although the comment from the storyteller in verse 11 that this was the “first of his signs” looks forward to the parallel concluding comment after his second miracle at Cana (4:46–54)—“This was now the second sign that Jesus did” (4:54)—it also looks further into the narrative.\(^\text{27}\) If this is the “first” of his signs, and it is marked with an event that summons up imagery of a final messianic feast, what might the “last” of these signs hold? Jesus’ response to his mother looks toward a later moment in the narrative; and so also does this opening “sign,” which asks the reader/listener to wait and look forward to Jesus’ final and perfect response to his Father.\(^\text{28}\) Already in this \textit{first} moment, the “hour” of Jesus promises to be associated with a \textit{final} messianic gesture, of which the marriage feast is an anticipatory sign.\(^\text{29}\)

The overall context of the Gospel’s narrative again provides important background for the next appearances of the theme and the expression “the hour” of Jesus. At three moments across Jesus’ troubled and angry encounters with “the Jews” at the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1–8:59), the “timing” of Jesus’ hour is mentioned. On each occasion the context of anger and violence, now emerging with greater intensity, is the setting for “the hour” of Jesus that has not yet come. When Jesus remains in Galilee because of the hostility of “the Jews” (7:1), John mentions the advent of Tabernacles (v. 2). Jesus’ brothers want him to go to Jerusalem to perform his marvelous works and thus convince his disciples there and bring them to faith (vv. 3–4). Although he does not use the expression “the hour,” Jesus responds to his brothers with another Greek expression associated with a particular point of time. Rather than use the phrase “my hour” (ἡ ὥρα ἡμῶν [2:4]), he tells them that his “time” (ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ἐμὸς) has not yet come (7:6). Jesus changes the expression because he wishes to compare his “time”

\(^{27}\) For some, e.g., Bultmann, \textit{Gospel of John}, 114n4, these numbers indicate that prior to the Gospel there was a “Signs Source” made up of Synoptic-like miracle material. The signs were numbered, and what we find in 2:11 and 4:54 are remnants of that earlier Signs Gospel, whose original ending is 20:30–31. See also Robert T. Fortna, \textit{The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel}, SNTSMS 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 102–3. See the helpful comments of von Wahlde, \textit{Gospel and Letters of John}, 210–11. For an exhaustive, and ultimately negative, assessment of a Signs Source theory, see Gilbert van Belle, \textit{The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Investigation of the Semeia Hypothesis}, BETL 116 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994).

\(^{28}\) See Raymond F. Collins, “Cana (Jn. 2:1–12)—The First of His Signs or the Key to His Signs?,” \textit{Irish Theological Quarterly} 47 (1980): 79–95.

\(^{29}\) See Moloney, \textit{Belief in the Word}, 77–92.
(καιρός) with the “time” (καιρός) of his brothers. The Greek noun καιρός is always used to speak of a point or period of time that is “appropriate, the right, proper, favourable time.” There can be many such “times” (καιροὶ), but for the Fourth Gospel there is only one “hour” of Jesus. There will be a “right time” for Jesus, but that God-determined program does not apply to his brothers. The expression reserved by John uniquely to refer to Jesus’ God-determined program is “the hour.” Thus Jesus needs another expression to tell his brothers: “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. . . . Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come” (7:6, 8).

Despite the shift away from the language of Jesus’ “hour,” this discussion between Jesus and his brothers over the “time” of Jesus and their “time,” as they plan their journey to Jerusalem for the celebration of Tabernacles, is intimately associated with the theme of Jesus’ future “hour.” The tension generated by something that is “not yet,” first articulated by Jesus in 2:4, continues explicitly. The “time” of Jesus has not yet come (7:6). But the evangelist continues to hint that these words of Jesus to his brothers link Jesus’ “time” with the larger theme of his “hour.” The threat of Jesus’ death opens this discussion with his brothers: he would not go about in Judea, “because ‘the Jews’ sought to kill him” (7:1). Violence is in the air, and is yet to be played out, but only at the “time/hour” appointed by God. Jesus’ words to his brothers encourage them to go up to the feast, but he tells them that he will not go up to this feast (εἰς τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην). As the story unfolds, Jesus does “secretly” go up to the feast (v. 10), but the “hour” of Jesus will not take place at this feast. The strong demonstrative adjective (“this”) clearly hints to the reader/listener that the “hour” will come at another feast. The Christian reader/listener knows that Jesus was crucified at Passover. That feast lies somewhere in the future, and it will be associated with the violence of Jesus’ execution. At the “time” (καιρός) of this celebration of Tabernacles, the celebration that will accompany “the hour” (ἡ ὥρα) has not yet come.

During the celebration of Tabernacles Jesus claims that he is the living water (7:37–39) and the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), associating his

30. BDAG, 497, s.v. καιρός.
32. The expression “secretly” (ἐν κρυπτῷ) in v. 10 is an attempt to maintain the logic of Jesus’ refusal to show his wonder-working authority in Jerusalem, as requested by his brothers (vv. 3–4). However, his presence in Jerusalem for the celebration of Tabernacles (7:10–10:21) is far from “private” (RSV).
presence at the feast with the symbols of water and light that dominated the annual celebration.\(^33\) Crucially, however, when he is questioned about, and even abused for, his authority and his origins, he regularly points to his unique unity with the Father (see 7:28–31; 8:12–20, 25–30, 39–47, 48–59). Jesus makes his claims to be from the Father, the one true God of Israel, against the backdrop of the rituals of the celebration of Tabernacles.\(^34\) Each morning the priests repudiated the falseness of earlier generations (see Ezek. 8:16) and declared their faith in the God of Israel.\(^35\) But by angrily refusing Jesus’ claims, they are ironically making a lie out of their morning confession of faith. The reader/listener recalls Jesus’ words to “the Jews” in 5:23: “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” At the height of these controversies Jesus’ opponents resort to violence and attempt to arrest him, but they cannot “because his hour” has “not yet come” (7:30; see 7:28–31). This, then, is the second of the three times during this feast that Jesus’ “hour” is mentioned. Later, still in the temple precincts, he accuses his opponents of not being able to know God because they do not know him. The angry tension between Jesus, who claims access with God as his Father who sent him, and “the Jews,” who reject this possibility, continues and threatens to flare into violence again. “But no one arrested him, because”—the third mention—“his hour had not yet come” (8:20; see 8:25–30).

In the end, frustrated by their inability to have their way with him, “the Jews” take up stones and drive him out of the temple (8:59). The plot intensifies, and “the hour” will play an important part in its resolution. On arrival at 8:59 the reader/listener is aware that not only will “the hour” be associated with the messianic event (2:1–12), but it points forward to a later feast of the Jews (7:6–8) when those who will violently lay hands upon him and will have their way (7:30; 8:20, 59).\(^36\) Until that time, however, his hour has not yet come.

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33. The identification of the source of living water in 7:37–39 is notoriously difficult. For the case that Jesus is its source, see Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 252–53, 256–57. See also below, pp. 152–57.


36. On these dense and complex encounters between Jesus and “the Jews” in the temple on the occasion of the celebration of Tabernacles (John 7–8), see Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 169–204. This chapter is entitled “Between Different Paternities: Making the Choice (7:1–8:59).”
In 11:55 the narrator announces, “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand.” The temporal aspect of the narrative, which has moved rapidly through at least a two-year cycle of the festive celebrations of Israel—Pentecost (1:19–2:12), Passover (6:1–71), Tabernacles (7:1–10:21), and Dedication (10:22–42)—almost comes to a stop. Jesus’ story told in John 1:1–11:54 covers at least two years, but 11:55–20:31 fills only a few days. The “slowing down” of a narrative almost always points to the singular importance and solemnity of the events reported there. On the first of these few final days (see 11:55; 12:1) some Greeks come to see Jesus (12:20–21). On hearing from his disciples (Philip and Andrew) that the Greeks wish to see him, Jesus announces: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12:23). The narrative is at an obvious turning point. After Jesus’ presence at the Jewish feasts, he turns toward his death and resurrection in 11:1–12:36. Despite the use of the double-meaning “lifting up/exaltation” and the “the hour,” which point the reader/listener to the end of the story, the noun “death” and the verb “to die” have never been used of Jesus. With a variety of applications, it is associated with Jesus and his mission in 11:1–55 no less than nine times (vv. 14, 16, 21, 25–26, 32, 37, 50–51). This pattern continues into 12:1–36, where it appears in three crucial passages (12:24 [twice], 33). The steady insistence on the imminence of Jesus’ death is marked by the first declaration from Jesus that the much-awaited “hour” has come (12:23), further clarified by Jesus in the parable of the

37. On 1:19–2:12 as reflecting the preparations for the celebration of the gift of the law at Pentecost, see Moloney, Belief in the Word, 53–60; Coloe, “Johannine Pentecost,” 41–56.

38. I have twice written “at least,” as some would suggest that the timing of the feasts could be indiscriminate. I do not think that is the case. See Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 30. For another point of view, see Michael A. Daise, Feasts in John: Jewish Festivals and Jesus’ “Hour” in the Fourth Gospel, WUNT 2.229 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Daise claims that the cycle of feasts is deliberately set across one year and directed at all times toward the fulfillment of the “hour” of Jesus.

39. On the use of “time” in narrative, see the fundamental work of Genette, Narrative Discourse, 33–85. See Rimmun-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 51–56, on “duration,” “acceleration and deceleration,” and their effects on the reading process.

40. I regard “the Greeks” of 12:20 as gentiles. This has been strongly contested, especially by John A. T. Robinson, “The Destination and Purpose of St. John’s Gospel,” NTS 6 (1959–60): 119–20. Against this view, see the excellent essay of Mary L. Coloe, “Gentiles in the Gospel of John: Narrative Possibilities; John 12,” in Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. David Sim and James S. McLaren, LNTS 499 (London: Continuum, 2013). Coloe summarizes the discussion well and shows historical, linguistic, and narrative reasons for inferring that “the Greeks” are gentiles. She also adds a further dimension to the discussion by showing the possible intertextual influence of Zeph. 8–9 and Zech. 3. See also Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 371: “They stand for the great world at large, primarily the Hellenistic world which is his (the Evangelist’s) own mission field.”
grain of wheat that must fall into the earth and die in order to bear fruit (v. 24), and in a prayer to the Father that he glorify the Father in his hour (vv. 27–28). The close association of Jesus’ “hour” and his death cannot be missed.

In a passage that evokes the Synoptic agony of Jesus at Gethsemane (see Mark 14:32–42 [see the use of “the hour” in a threatening sense in vv. 35, 37, 41]; Matt. 23:36–46; Luke 22:40–46), Jesus expresses his anguish. But he firmly asserts that he will not ask the Father to save him from this hour, because for this purpose he came to this hour. The Father replies to Jesus’ prayer that the Father’s name be glorified by assuring him that the Father has already glorified it and will glorify it again (vv. 27–28). Jesus’ first indication that the hour has come is accompanied by the claim that it will be the moment of the glorification of the Son of Man (12:23). But this theme is not new for the reader/listener. As Jesus spoke to his disciples about the reason for Lazarus’ illness, he set the agenda for the miracle that follows and for the Book of Glory (13:1–20:29): “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God might be glorified by means of it” (11:4). The raising of Lazarus manifests the glory of God in Jesus’ “work” (11:40; see 5:36), but it sets in motion a rejection of Jesus and a plot to kill him (11:49–53, 57). The cross approaches; the glory of God and the glorification of the Son by means of it cannot be limited to the Lazarus event. On the cross Jesus will make the love of God known, and the glory of God will be manifested. But through the cross the Son will be glorified, as it is the place by means of which he will return to the glory that was his before the foundation of the world (17:5). The Lazarus event triggers “the Jews’” decision that he must die (11:49–50), the coming of the Greeks (12:20–21), and Jesus’ proclamation that “the hour” has come for his glorification (12:23–24).


42. For a more detailed exegesis of 11:4 in support of this claim, see below, pp. 93–96, and Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 156–57. A number of commentators see “the glory of God” as looking forward to the miracle (see 11:40), and the “glorification of the Son” as pointing forward to the cross. See, for example, Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 187; Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten*, 141–64. I agree with this assessment but wish to associate the completion of the glorification of Jesus with his ascension and return to the Father (17:5).

The theme of “the hour” plays an important part across the narrative that reports Jesus’ final days. From the eloquent and evocative arrival of “the hour” in 11:1–12:36, a section of the story that forms a “bridge” from Jesus’ ministry into his passion, it will be elaborated further in what remains to be told of Jesus’ story (13:1–20:29). “The hour” marks the beginning and the end of Jesus’ final night with the disciples (13:1; 17:1), and it will return at the central scene of the Johannine Passion Narrative (19:25–27). We will consider this climactic use of the theme of “the hour” in following chapters, dedicated to Jesus’ showing, teaching, and praying through the hour (13:1–38; 15:12–17; 17:1–26); in his final revelation of God’s glory in “the hour” of the cross (18:1–19:42); and in his return to the Father, leaving a community gifted with the Holy Spirit and founded on love (19:30; 20:1–29; 21:15–24).44

The Gathering

Anticipating the decisive turn toward the cross in 11:1–12:36, a theme of “gathering” first appears in the narrative in 10:16.45 Within the broader context of the celebration of the Jewish feasts (5:1–10:42) and the immediate context of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1–10:21), in a discourse shot through with images that have their roots in the traditions and symbols of Israel,46 Jesus speaks of the willingness of the good shepherd to lay down his life for his sheep in an unconditional obedience that flows from his oneness of will and purpose with the Father (10:15). He announces, “And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed

44. See Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 64: “Any view than minimizes the importance of the Cross in the Fourth Gospel may be ruled out of serious contention on the basis of the hour concept.”

45. On the “gathering” in 11:50–12:33, see Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 200–201. See especially the important but neglected work of Aristide Serra, Contributi dell’Antica Letteratura Giudaica per l’Esgeesi di Giovanni 2,1–12 e 19,25–27, Scripta Pontificiae Facultatis Theologicae “Marianum” 31 (Rome: Edizioni Herder, 1977), 306–429. See also Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 145–57, 164–67. Morgan-Wynne also draws 4:34–36 and 15:1–11 into the discussion because those passages refer to bearing “much fruit.” Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes, 329–54, analyzes the “gathering” and other texts in his study of the mission of the community. He makes no link with the cross in his argument that the Johannine community is to meet the hatred of the world with the love that comes from the love of God for Jesus and the communication of that love to them through Jesus.

my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (10:16). There is considerable debate about who is meant by Jesus’ “other sheep, that are not of this fold,” but an awareness of the universal appeal of the Johannine Jesus and the subsequent growing strength and importance of the “gathering” theme as the event of the crucifixion approaches (see 11:50–52; 12:11, 16, 24, 32) calls for as broad an interpretation as possible. The Savior of the world (4:42) will lay down his life to gather into one flock all who are drawn to him (see 6:44), Jew and gentile.

The good shepherd discourse within the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, highlighted by the autumn “ingathering,” opens the theme of “gathering,” and the shepherd image continues into the final celebration of Dedication (10:27–29) as the cycle of Jesus’ presence at Jewish festivals comes to an end. In immediate narrative proximity, but shifting the discourse into another key, 11:1–12:36 turns decisively toward the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the “gathering” theme intensifies. The raising of Lazarus creates division among “the Jews” (11:45–46). The chief priests and the Pharisees puzzle over what is to be done with this man who performs many signs (vv. 47–48). This consternation leads Caiaphas to instruct his faltering colleagues: “You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish” (11:49b–50). The narrator adds, “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (11:51–52). These verses contain two affirmations; the first by Caiaphas, that Jesus must die for the people (λαός) to save the whole nation (ἔθνος) of Israel (v. 50), and the second by the narrator, that Jesus not only dies for the people and the nation of Israel but will also gather into one those scattered abroad, are both true (v. 52). The first is true because Caiaphas, unaware of the ultimate truth of his words, spoke prophetically, a charism traditionally associated with the

47. The theme of “gathering” is found in the use of the verb ἀγαγεῖν (the second aorist infinitive of ἀγω) to speak of Jesus’ “bringing in” sheep of other folds.

48. For an excellent summary of the discussion, see Keener, Gospel of John, 818–19.

49. Deep irony lies behind the concern of the chief priests and the Pharisees that the Romans might come and destroy the temple and the nation (11:48). As this passage is read late in the first century, the temple and the nation have been destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and for the Johannine readers and listeners (see 20:30–31) the man whom they plan to destroy (see vv. 53, 57) has been raised and is alive. This hermeneutic perspective is very important for a number of contemporary Johannine scholars, preeminently Udo Schnelle, Jean Zumstein, and Jörg Frey.
high priest (v. 51).50 The words of the narrator reflect the infallible point of view of the person telling the story.51 “The children of God are all those who in their faith in Jesus Christ find unity, be they Jews or gentiles. Thus Jesus dies for the Jewish ἔθνος when he accomplishes God’s universal salvific plan and leads all the children of God scattered across the world into oneness.”52

The raising of Lazarus remains a problem for the leaders of “the Jews.” After the meal and the anointing of Jesus’ feet at Bethany, presumably at the home of Lazarus (12:1–8), the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem for his final Passover is reported (vv. 12–16). However, two small episodes frame the account of the entry, and in each of them John mentions the problem generated by Lazarus (vv. 9–11 [esp. vv. 9–10]; vv. 17–19 [esp. vv. 17–18]). In verses 9–11 the chief priests express concern over the crowds that are going to see Lazarus, so they decide “to put Lazarus also to death” (vv. 9–10). Jesus’ destiny has already been decided (see 11:53), but they have now made a further decision. Lazarus also must be put to death.53 They plot to put both Jesus and Lazarus to death “because on account of [Lazarus] many of the Jews” are “going away and believing in Jesus” (12:11). The theme of “gathering” continues as, because of the raising of Lazarus, “many of the Jews” are going to Jesus.

After Jesus enters Jerusalem, the leaders of Israel become even more anxious, as people who were present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead bear witness to him (12:17). The narrator reports that the reason why the crowd went out to meet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem was that they had


52. Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 195. See also the rich study, which cannot be tested here, by John A. Dennis, Jesus’ Death and the Gathering of True Israel: The Johannine Appropriation of Restoration Theology in the Light of John 11:47–52, WUNT 2.217 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). Dennis persuasively shows that Isaian “second exodus” themes, present in Second Temple Judaism, lie behind the Johannine claim that Jesus’ death restores the dispersed people of God. He argues against the inclusion of gentiles and points to the Johannine community as the “restored Israel,” even though he admits that this community may well reach beyond the boundaries of ethnic Judaism (see p. 310).

53. One of the amazing features of the reception history of the Lazarus story is that there is none. Early Christianity did not develop the Lazarus story at all. Nothing beyond John 11–12 is said of him. However, in Martin Scorsese’s memorable film The Last Temptation of Christ, 12:10 is grimly portrayed as Lazarus is murdered.
heard the witness of those who had been present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (v. 18). But now the situation is becoming even more problematic. It is not only “many of the Jews” who are going to Jesus (see v. 11). The Pharisees comment, “You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him” (v. 19). In fulfillment of those words, some Greeks ask to see Jesus (vv. 20–21). In 10:16 Jesus spoke of his mission to bring others, not of this flock, into the fold; in 11:50–52 Caiaphas and the narrator state that Jesus will die for the nation and to gather into one the people of God scattered abroad. In 12:11 and 12:19 these prophecies of a final “gathering” begin to be fulfilled as “many of the Jews” (v. 11, fulfilling Caiaphas’ prophecy of 11:50) and “the world” (v. 19, fulfilling the narrator’s prophecy of 11:52) seek and believe in Jesus.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter in the study of the lifting up of the Son of Man, 12:19 is fulfilled in the story by means of the coming of Greeks who wish to see Jesus (vv. 20–21). This news enables Jesus to announce the advent of “the hour” of the glorification of the Son of Man (v. 23). However, there is a further important implication of his glorification: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (v. 24). Enigmatically, the glorification of Jesus, which he elsewhere described as a “lifting up” from the earth (see 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33), is here described as a “falling into the earth.” The symbol of the life-giving process that is essential for a grain of wheat to produce fruit determines and enhances the imagery surrounding the interpretation of Jesus’ death in the Gospel of John as a “lifting up” that gathers (10:16; 11:50–52; 12:11, 16). Only by dying can the grain of wheat produce fruit. Notice in Jesus’ words the comparison between the grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies and the one that does not. Without the process of dying, there remains but a single grain of wheat. In and through death “much fruit” is borne. John continues to develop the link between Jesus’ death and the “gathering.”

After instructing his followers that they, being his servants and thus honored by his Father (12:25–26), must also adopt this pattern of life, dying so that others may have life, Jesus again states unequivocally: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw everyone to myself” (vv. 31–32). The narrator adds: “He said this to show by what death he was to die” (v. 33). Although the expression “the hour” is not present, Jesus’ twofold use of “now” (νῦν) catches that theme, already explicitly announced as having arrived in the immediate context of verses 23 and 27. In the hour of Jesus’
lifting up from the earth, God’s judgment arrives. In the blazing light of the love of God manifested in Jesus’ cross, the world will be able to make its decision for or against Jesus. Despite the appearances of a man crucified by his enemies, the promise of 1:5 is fulfilled: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Note how this dense message repeats and intensifies the theme of “gathering.” Whatever might be thought of the many sheep in 10:16 or those scattered abroad in 11:52, Jesus’ words in 12:32 are unambiguous: when he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw everyone (πάντας) to himself. The Greek expression can mean only “all people,” not “all things.” This is Jesus’ final appeal to “the Jews” before he withdraws from them (v. 36b). It concludes the narrative development of the theme of “gathering” that has been articulated across the latter pages of the story of Jesus’ ministry in 10:16; 11:50–52; 12:11, 16, 23, 31–33. However, this is not the last time the reader/listener will encounter the theme. All the passages we have seen point dramatically toward the moment of Jesus’ death, as the narrator explains in 12:33: “He said this to show by what death he would die.” The reader/listener expects the “gathering” theme to reappear when that death is narrated. She or he will not be disappointed.

The Glory of God and the Glorification of Jesus

In reflecting upon Jesus’ prayer to the Father in 17:5 that the Father return him to the glory he had before the world was made, we examined the background and meaning of the Johannine use of the noun “glory” (δόξα) and the verb “to glorify” (δοξάζω). The biblical meaning of “glory,” coming from the Old Testament use of the Hebrew expression kābōd, translated

54. Reflecting developing Christian thought, some Greek manuscripts have πάντα instead of πάντας. The former Greek expression, a neuter plural, would indicate that the exalted Jesus would draw all reality to himself. This is not what John means, despite its theological attractiveness. See Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 361.

55. Many scholars attempt to link the “lifting up” with the ascension of Jesus. See, for example, Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Ascent-Descent Schema*, SBLDS 63 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 98–103, 136–38; William Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Structure and Issues*, 2nd ed., BBET 23 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 107–21. As well as the parallel drawn between Moses physically “lifting up” the serpent and the “lifting up” of the Son of Man in 3:14 (“just as Moses lifted up . . . so also must the Son of Man be lifted up”), the comment in 12:33 makes John’s meaning clear: “lifting up from the earth” = “what death he was to die.” See especially Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu*, 1–37.

56. See above, pp. 51–53.
into the Greek δόξα, is unique. The Bible uses the expressions not only with the widely accepted meaning of “fame and honor” that comes from extraordinary achievement, but also to refer to the visible splendor of the divine, the shining forth of a transcendent presence.  

On occasion, John plays on both the traditional and the biblical meaning of the word, as can be seen in 12:43: “For they loved the praise [glory] of men [τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων] more than the praise [glory] of God [τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ].”

Our study to this point has suggested that God will be glorified in and through Jesus’ accomplishment of the task given him by the Father (see 4:34; 11:4; 17:4), and that Jesus will be glorified by means of the cross (11:4; 12:23). As (despite Käsemann) the story of Jesus’ ministry gives the reader/listener information essential for understanding the end of Jesus’ life in death and resurrection, this theme calls for some further reflection.

Significantly, John associates the noun “glory” with Jesus’ signs, an essential consequence of the truth articulated in the prologue. In the incarnate Jesus we have seen the glory of God, glory as of the only begotten Son of God (1:14). All that he says and does tells the story of God (v. 18), and this reveals his glory. In 2:11, when Jesus performs his first sign at Cana, the narrator informs the reader/listener that the sign manifested Jesus’ glory; and in 11:40, when he performs his last by raising Lazarus, the narrator explains that this miraculous intervention of God in and through Jesus manifested God’s glory. Jesus’ miraculous activity makes clear his transcendent authority, based in his oneness with his Father. This is particularly clear in the account of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus tells Martha, the sister of Lazarus, that only if she believed that Jesus was the Sent One of God would she

57. See BDAG, 256–58, s.v. δόξα, δοξάζω. Johannine scholars have shown increasing interest in this important theme. For a sampling, see the 747-page study of Chibici-Revneanu, Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten, and the subsequent essays of Frey and Nielsen: Frey, “... dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen (Joh 17,24),” 375–97, and Nielsen, “Narrative Structures,” 343–66. As Nielsen comments, “It is tempting to call 2007 a glorious year in Johannine scholarship” (p. 344).


59. There is considerable support for a reading of “seven signs” in the Gospel of John. See the fine treatment of Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 297–389, esp. 383–89. Six are clear: water to wine at Cana (2:1–12), the curing of the official’s son at Cana (4:46–54), the healing of the paralytic (5:1–14), the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (6:1–15), the curing of the man born blind (9:1–7), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1–44). The seventh is, for some, Jesus’ walking on the water (6:16–21), and for others, the resurrection (20:1–29). For Joseph A. Grassi, “Eating Jesus’ Flesh and Drinking His Blood,” BTB 17 (1987): 24–30, it is the blood and water from the side of the crucified Jesus (19:34). Dodd’s use of the seven signs for his study of John 2–12 has much to recommend it, but other approaches do not do justice to the literary structure and narrative flow of the Gospel.
see the glory of God shine forth (v. 40). Then, immediately before raising Lazarus, Jesus turns in prayer to his Father, but with the crowd also in mind: “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me” (vv. 41–42 NRSV). Indeed, the whole of 11:1–44 is not about Jesus but about his frustrated attempt to bring people to belief in the truth that he is the Sent One of the Father (see 11:14–15, 23–27, 40, 42). In the miracle at Cana Jesus indicates his relationship with God in his apparent unwillingness to act on the word of his mother, but his eventual commands to the attendants lead to the miracle. Jesus responds to a divine imperative that directs his “hour” (2:3–8).

The transcendent glory of God, reflected in Jesus and his activities, is also present in the words from the voice that comes from above in 12:28. Jesus asks: “Father, glorify your name” (v. 28a). The voice from heaven replies: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (v. 28b). As the narrative “crosses the bridge” from Jesus’ public ministry, during which all the signs have taken place, into the account of his death and resurrection, the Father looks back across all that Jesus has done and announces audibly that his name has already been glorified in those events. However, the Father also looks to the future and points to Jesus’ death and resurrection as the imminent further moment when his name is yet to be glorified. “Throughout the ministry Jesus’ words and deeds have glorified the Father (v. 28a: edoxasa). Those who have believed have seen the revelation of the doxa (2:11; 9:3; 11:40), but the hour has come (12:23), and these words and events are in the past. Much is still to happen in the association with the completion of the hour, and these events will go on glorifying the name of God (v. 28b: palin doxasō [“again I will glorify”]).”

The revelation of the glory of God in the death of Jesus will be an important theme during Jesus’ final evening with his disciples, but another passage, beyond that in which the voice from heaven says that God’s name is yet to be glorified (12:28b), further sets the scene for the Book of Glory. As John opens the Lazarus story, which will lead the reader/listener into the passion and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus explains to his disciples, who

60. On this, see Moloney, “Can Everyone Be Wrong?,” 505–27.
61. In the biblical tradition, the “name” of anyone is the person’s very essence (see, for example, the “naming” of the animals and Adam’s fitting partner in Gen. 2:18–25). To glorify the “name” of the Father means to glorify the Father in a most perfect fashion. See H. Bietenhard, “ὄνομα, κτλ.,” TDNT 5:258–61; Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 189–91.
have heard from the sisters, Mary and Martha, that Lazarus was ill: “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it” (11:4). In interpreting John 11 we must see far beyond the stunning miracle of a dead man being raised to life by Jesus’ calling upon him to come forth from the grave (vv. 43–44). There is much more to it: this event sets in motion the death of Jesus. Because of the raising of Lazarus, Caiaphas announces that Jesus must die for the people and the whole nation (v. 50), the Jewish leaders “[take] counsel how to put him to death” (v. 53), and the chief priests and the Pharisees give orders that anyone who knows where Jesus is should let them know so that they can arrest him (v. 57). The impact of the raising of Lazarus continues to motivate the decision to execute Jesus. Because many wanted to see Lazarus, the chief priests decided “to put Lazarus also to death” (12:10). The execution of Jesus is taken for granted. This message lies at the heart of 11:4. The illness of Lazarus is not “unto death.” Lazarus will not remain among the dead because of this illness, but his being raised from the dead by Jesus sets in train a process that will lead to Jesus’ death (and resurrection; see 11:25–26).

The illness will lead to a raising from the dead that will set in motion the death of Jesus and manifest “the glory of God.” It will also be the means by which the Son of God “will be glorified.” The reference to the glory of God looks forward to Jesus’ promise to Martha in verse 40 that she would see the glory of God in the miracle if she would only believe. However, that does not exhaust its meaning. The death of Jesus will have two consequences, set in motion by the raising of Lazarus. In the first place, the cross will be the place where the glory of God will shine forth. This suggests, extraordinarily, that the crucified Jesus will also be the exalted Jesus, and in his exaltation on the cross he will make God known. As we have seen, Jesus’ task is to make known a God who loved the world (3:16–17; 17:3). It can only be by means of a consummate act of love that God will be made known. The glory of God will shine forth from the cross of Jesus. However, the Book of Glory will further clarify that for the reader/listener.

Jesus’ glorification does not take place on the cross. The glory of God will be seen there, but the cross is only part of the process of Jesus’ glorification. As Jesus tells his disciples, his death is the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (11:4b). Other passages from Jesus’ public ministry fill out this explicit statement from Jesus. On the final great day of the celebration of Tabernacles, Jesus promised the gift of living water
(7:37–38). The narrator interprets this gift as “about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive” (v. 39a). However, all this is in the future. The Spirit had not yet been given, “because Jesus was not yet glorified” (v. 39b). The reader/listener will eventually learn that the Spirit Paraclete can be given only by the Father, sent by Jesus from the Father, when Jesus has returned to him (see 14:16–17, 25; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 12–15). A similar note is struck after Jesus’ entry in Jerusalem. He does not accept the messianic acclamations that surround this event but enters humbly, riding on a young ass (12:14–15). The disciples cannot understand this, but later, when Jesus is glorified, “then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him” (12:16).

Only in the post-Easter time, after Jesus has been glorified in his return to the Father (see 17:5), can the followers of Jesus look back on the words and events of his life and understand what they meant, no doubt under the guidance of the Spirit Paraclete (see esp. 16:12–15). The narrator’s comment in 2:22 comes into play, as it makes the same point. The disciples were totally nonplussed by Jesus’ speaking of the raising up of the temple of his body in three days. However, “when therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (2:22). As with the entry into Jerusalem (12:16), only after Jesus’ glorification can the disciples understand his words on the temple of his body.

The glory of God shines forth from the cross, as Jesus makes love known. However, the glorification of the Son takes place through the cross. Jesus must go through the whole paschal event—death, resurrection, and return to the Father—before he achieves the glory that was his before the world was made (see 20:16–17; 17:5). Only then, once Jesus is glorified, do the disciples, under the care and direction of the Paraclete, understand the Scriptures and the word of Jesus. As with the revelation of the love of God on the cross, the glorification of the Son by means of the cross is yet to be fully unraveled within the narrative as Jesus goes to meet his “hour” (see 13:1; 17:1; 19:27).  

63. See the analysis of Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 101–204. Thüsing convincingly argues that Jesus’ glorification is intimately associated with the cross (the first moment), but then reaches beyond the cross into his return to the Father, producing the “fruit bearing” of the disciples, who live under the direction of the Spirit (second moment).

64. See especially the detailed study of Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 43–47, 50–249, and Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 80–83. He summarizes his agreement with Thüsing: “We can accept that John has sought to indicate that something
Conclusion

The cross of Jesus is never far from the surface in John 1:1–12:50, especially in 11:1–12:36 as the narrative turns decisively to the explanation and enactment of Jesus' death and resurrection. Already present in 1:5, it lurks behind the theme of the lifting up and the exaltation of the Son of Man (3:14; 8:28; 12:31–34), and behind the steady use of the tension across the story generated by an hour that “has not yet come” (2:4; 7:5–6, 30; 8:20) and that eventually comes as the moment of the cross looms (12:23, 27, 31). Similarly, as the story turns toward the event of the cross and its explanation during Jesus’ final evening with his disciples, a theme of “gathering” emerges that also points toward Jesus’ death for its resolution (10:16; 11:50–52; 12:11, 16, 23, 32–33). Finally, the ministry of Jesus promises the people in the story, and the readers and listeners who receive the story, that God will be glorified on the cross and the Son will be glorified by means of the cross (11:4; cf. 7:39; 12:16 [2:22]).

This study’s focus upon the crucial action of Jesus’ life, his death, for an understanding of the Johannine development of the theme of love is supported by the expectations generated in the reader/listener across the prologue and the ministry of Jesus (1:1–12:50), as they are steadily directed toward that action. Two “actions” mark the following half of the Gospel. The first is Jesus’ presence with “his own” as the hour approaches (see 13:1; 17:1), dedicated to explaining his departure through death and its consequences for the disciples and, beyond them, for those who hear of Jesus through their word (13:1–17:26). The second “action” is Jesus’ eventual glorification through death and resurrection (18:1–20:29). Will the further telling of Jesus’ story respond to the promises made to the reader/listener from 1:1–12:50? From what we have seen to this point in our study, the reader/listener expects the Fourth Gospel to present Jesus’ death as unique, decisive and important occurs in the cross which marks the cross off from the ministry and which flows into the post-cross era as the results of what happened in the cross are actualized.” The fine study of Nielsen, “Narrative Structures,” 347–66, adopts the narrative theory of Aristotle (based on the action [peripeteia] and its meaning [cognitive level: anagnōsis]) and traces the use of δόξα and δοξάζω across the narrative. He concludes: “The narrative course is constituted by God’s wish to be recognized through Jesus. . . . In the narrative structures of the Fourth Gospel δόξα/δοξάζω principally means divine identity and recognition of this identity” (p. 366). Chibici-Revneanu, Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten, tends to overattach Jesus’ glorification to the event of the cross and the resurrection, not leaving enough space for his return to the glory that was his before the world was made (see 17:5). See, for example, pp. 141–64, where she analyzes 11:4 and closely links the glory of God in the miracle (see 11:40) and the glorification of Jesus on the cross.
as his most significant achievement. It promises to be the moment when he brings to perfection the task given him by the Father, the one who sent him, glorifying God by making him known, and achieving his own glory by means of it.  

The Fourth Gospel is unique in its dramatic slowing down of the action of Jesus’ story across 11:55–20:29. After the prologue (1:1–18) the ministry has taken place between a first celebration of Passover, mentioned in 2:13, a second Passover in 6:4, and a final Passover mentioned in 11:55. Once the Book of Signs has ended (1:19–12:50) and the Book of Glory begins (13:1–20:31), John gives the Passover first mentioned in 11:55 as the chronological setting of the remainder of the narrative in 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; and 19:14. This is part of the “overlap” that John creates in the narrative, with 11:1–12:50 acting as a “hinge” between the ministry of Jesus (1:19–12:50) and the Book of Glory (13:1–20:31). A major feature of this “slowing down” is the careful and lengthy reporting of events and discourses that Jesus shares with his disciples on their final evening together (13:1–17:26). Inaccurately known as the Last Discourse, these chapters contain the narrative of Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet and sharing the piece of bread with them (13:1–38), a series of discourses (14:1–16:33), and a final prayer (17:1–26).¹ As “the hour

¹ Many interpreters recognize that John continues and develops the well-used practice of the farewell discourse and prayer, evidenced in many places, but especially in The Testaments of
has come” (12:23; 13:1; 17:1), John draws the theme of love into the theme of Jesus’ bringing to perfection the task given to him by the Father (4:34), especially in the account of the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread (13:1–38), in the double use of the command to love (15:12–17), and in the final prayer (17:1–26). The love theme and love words also appear in 14:21–24 and 16:27. The literary and theological context of these passages determines their meaning, and we will consider them below. However, as I hope to show in what follows, both structurally and theologically, the Johannine presentation of love, as it is acted out (13:1–38), as it is spoken of (15:12–17), and as it is prayed for (17:1–26), at the beginning (13:1–38), at the end (17:1–26), and at the heart of John’s account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples (15:12–17), completely determines our understanding of the love theme in 13:1–17:26.

The Literary and Theological Structure of John 13:1–17:26

Scholars and commentators have long focused upon the tensions and apparent contradictions found in 13:1–17:26. Especially obvious is Jesus’ command in 14:31: “Rise, let us go hence.” Nothing happens after this command except further discourse and a final prayer. It is not until 18:1 that Jesus and the disciples “go forth.” But this is only one of many difficult passages and transitions in 13:1–17:26. Until quite recent times the resolution to these problems was found by tracing a variety of literary sources that were eventually put together to form our 13:1–17:26. The tensions that can be found in this long passage come from the ragged edges that remain as material from different sources, stemming from different stages in the unfolding history of the Johannine community and its Gospel. Some claim that problems remain in the text because of the respect that the final author(s) of the Gospel had for these sources. Others would suggest that these problems are the result of careless editing, or even that the present form of the Gospel is unfinished.

Although there are many suggestions, the identification of the sources behind 13:1–17:26 is based on the following elements. It is agreed that 13:1–30 comes from a special narrative source, related to other narratives in early The Twelve Patriarchs. For further details and bibliography, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 4–7; Keener, Gospel of John, 893–98.

2. See below, pp. 102–3.

3. For a good survey of the problems and their possible solution, see Brown, Gospel according to John, 581–604.
Christian tradition that surrounded Jesus’ final evening with his disciples. On the basis of the very obvious statement and restatement of the same themes in 13:31–14:31 and 16:4b–33, most accept that the oldest and original form of Jesus’ final discourse appears in 13:31–14:31. It begins with Jesus’ cry in 13:31–32 and closes with the summons to go forth to meet the ruler of this world, who has no power over Jesus (14:30–31). This discourse was a precious memory in the storytelling tradition of the Johannine community and was retained and eventually incorporated into the final form of the Gospel. However, as time went by, the community developed the thoughts and the message of Jesus in that earliest form of the discourse, producing a more elegant and theologically developed repetition in 16:4–33. Both discourses focus upon the necessity of Jesus’ departure, the fact that he will not leave them orphans but will gift them with the Spirit Paraclete, that he will instruct them on the need to love Jesus, and thus be loved by the Father, as they obey his commandments in the in-between time, at the end of which he will return. The message of 15:1–16:3 is quite different. It opens with an insistence on the need to abide in Jesus (vv. 1–11), followed by a short section that begins and ends with Jesus’ command to love (vv. 12–17). It closes with Jesus’ warnings about the hatred and persecution his followers will experience (15:18–16:3). Some have argued that the constituent parts of 15:1–16:3 just outlined also existed independently at some stage (e.g., 15:1–11; 15:12–17; 15:18–16:4a). That leaves the final prayer of 17:1–26, which also came from its own source, matching the practice of other farewell speeches that end in a prayer from the person about to depart.

Something like this literary history most likely played a role in the formation of 13:1–17:26. However, whoever was finally responsible for the Gospel as we have it devoted no less than five chapters to Jesus’ final evening with his disciples. This is about one quarter of the story. If so much space is


7. The expression “chapters” is a handy way to describe the allocation of the material in the New Testament. There are no chapters and verses in our earliest manuscripts. After various
given to the account of this final evening, it meant a great deal to the final author of the Gospel. This must be respected. Whatever we might make of the tensions in this part of the Gospel, we accept it as it came to us and attempt to trace in it a deliberately designed and consistent message directed to readers and listeners.8

Before providing a suggested reading strategy for 13:1–17:26, we must resolve a further critical issue. Although most argue that the narrative surrounding the footwashing and the piece of bread closes at 13:30 and that the first discourse begins in 13:31, there are sound reasons for questioning this division. In the first place, verses 31–38 do not constitute “discourse.” In a way that matches verses 6–9, Jesus’ discussion with Peter and his prophecy of future denials in verses 36–38 are part of a longer narrative that began in 13:1. This is further supported by noticing that the theme of love opens the narrative (v. 1) and closes it (vv. 34–35). As well as my decision to read 15:1–16:3 as a literary unit,9 the study of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples also regards 13:1–38 as a unit. The first part of the discourse proper, dealing with Jesus’ departure and its consequences, is found in 14:1–31.10

In 13:1–38, against the backdrop of Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples and his gift of the piece of bread, even to Judas, Jesus shares with the reader/listener a message of the unconditional love that he has for “his own,” even in their failure. But Jesus’ making love visible in his actions and his request that his disciples do the same (vv. 15, 34–35) are not limited to a focus upon the person of Jesus. He shows and tells them of his consummate love (v. 1:

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8. See Fernando E. Segovia, The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 48–49. As Dodd once wrote: “I conceive it to be the duty of an interpreter at least to see what can be done with the document as it has come down to us before attempting to improve upon it. . . . I shall assume as a provisional working hypothesis that the present order is not fortuitous, but deliberately devised by somebody—even if he were only a scribe doing his best—and that the person in question (whether the author or another) had some design in mind, and was not necessarily irresponsible or unintelligent” (Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 290).


εἰς τέλος so that they might see in him the revelation of God: “I tell you this now . . . so that . . . you may believe that I am he” (v. 19).

Scholars agree that, even though there is development from 14:1–31 to 16:4–33, the Johannine Jesus states and restates the same message: Jesus must depart, and the departure brings consequences. He must return to the Father and send the Spirit Paraclete upon the community that remains. They must live in an in-between time, observing the commandments and loving Jesus, so that the Father might love them. But between that statement and restatement of the theme of departure, in 15:1–16:3 Jesus addresses three other questions. First, in 15:1–11 he uses the image of the vine to insist upon abiding in Jesus, even in the in-between time, so that the lives of the disciples will produce fruit. Second, in 15:12–17 he instructs them to love one another as he has loved them, for he chose them; they did not choose him. Third, in contrast to the “abiding” of verses 1–11, Jesus tells the disciples of the hatred and rejection they will experience in 15:18–16:3. As Jesus was rejected because his mission from the Father was not recognized, so will it be with the disciples.

Finally, in 17:1–26 Jesus prays for himself, his immediate disciples, and all future hearers of the word. He prays for a unity of love that will make known to the world that a God of love sent him, and that all will be swept into the oneness of love that exists between the Father and the Son.11

The love theme is explicit in 13:1–38, 15:12–17, and 17:1–26. In terms of the literary structure of 13:1–17:26, this means that Jesus’ making known the love of God is a major focus of the first and the final episodes in John’s report of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples (13:1–38; 17:1–26). At the very center of the report of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples, he issues his love command: they are no longer his servants but his friends, and he has chosen them so that they might love one another as he has loved them (15:12–17). “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (v. 13 NRSV).

Outside 13:1–38, 15:12–17, and 17:1–26 in this part of the narrative, the love theme appears in Jesus’ statement and restatement concerning his departure and its consequences in 14:1–31 and 16:4–33. Jesus’ message on love in these two parallel discourses is determined by their context, namely, his instruction on how they are to live their lives in the in-between time. Jesus loves the Father (14:31). For the disciples to be loved by the Father,

11. For a schematic presentation of the structure described by this paragraph, see above, pp. 27–28. This structure and theological perspective depends heavily upon the study of Simoens, La gloire d’aimer; see esp. pp. 52–80.
and by Jesus, they must observe his commandments in his absence (14:15, 21, 24 [negatively]; 16:27). Manifesting love for Jesus by keeping his commandments in the in-between time will lead to the disciples’ experiencing the love of both the Father and the Son, who will make their dwelling in them (14:21, 23). What Jesus means by his commandments he spells out by his actions in 13:1–38, his discourse in 15:12–17, and his prayer in 17:1–26.

Love in Action: John 13:1–38

A feature of the Gospel of John is Jesus’ use of the introductory expression “Amen, amen, I say to you.” Elsewhere, especially in the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., 5:18; 6:2, 5, 16), Jesus introduces some of his statements with “Amen, I say to you” (ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν). Only in the Fourth Gospel does Jesus use the double “amen.” It can thus be classed as a stylistic feature of the Johannine story of Jesus.12 The expression is found four times in 13:1–38 (vv. 16, 20, 21, 38) and plays an important role in establishing the internal structure and argument of the passage.13 The argument unfolds in three stages:

Verses 1–17: Jesus washes his disciples’ feet and gives them instructions, ending with the double “amen” in verses 16–17.

Verses 18–20: At the center of the episode, Jesus explains why he is telling his fragile disciples these things, ending with the double “amen” in verse 20.

Verses 21–38: Jesus gives the piece of bread and further instructions to his fragile disciples, beginning (v. 21) and ending (v. 38) with the double “amen.”

The Footwashing and Its Aftermath (13:1–17)

This first section (as also the third section [vv. 21–38]) unfolds in three parts, identified by the events and the major players in those events:

Verses 1–5: The narrator announces that what is about to be told will indicate the consummate perfection of Jesus’ love for his own (v. 1), even though these words are immediately followed by a reference to

12. It appears twenty-four times in the Gospel of John. The single “amen” appears more than thirty times in Matthew, thirteen times in Mark, and seven times in Luke.

Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (v. 2). Knowing these things does not deter Jesus from preparing himself and washing the disciples’ feet (vv. 3–5). Love and knowledge flow into action.

**Verses 6–11:** Peter objects to Jesus’ washing his feet, and Jesus dialogues with him (vv. 6–10b). This leads to Jesus’ first statement on Judas’ future betrayal (vv. 10c–11).

**Verses 12–17:** Jesus instructs the disciples on the significance of what he has done for them and asks that they do the same (vv. 12–14). Jesus points to his lifestyle as an example for them (vv. 15–16). As Jesus’ love and knowledge flowed into action in verses 1–5, he tells the disciples: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (v. 17).

Forward-looking themes from the ministry of Jesus return in verse 1. He indicates that the mission that was yet to be accomplished (4:34) and the hour that had not yet come (2:4; 7:6–7, 30; 8:20) are present. “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father” (13:1). The death, resurrection, and return of Jesus to the Father are at hand. In this hour, Jesus loves his own “to the end” (εἰς τέλος). As we have seen, at the beginning of his ministry Jesus explained to his disciples that his task was to bring to perfection the work that he had been given (4:34). In 4:34 the Greek verb used to speak of accomplishing/bringing to perfection is τελείω. A noun from the same root as this verb returns in 13:1 to announce that “now” the hour has come (εἰς τέλος).

But the Greek expression εἰς τέλος, used in 13:1, as well as indicating to the reader/listener that Jesus has now come to the completion of his mission in a temporal sense (in the moment of his departing out of this world to his Father), also tells of the quality of Jesus’ act of love for his disciples. To say that Jesus loves his own εἰς τέλος is to say that he loves in a way that is unimaginable. He loves in a way that crosses all boundaries of loving: he loves his disciples consummately. The use of the same word (τέλος) to speak of “the end” (chronology) and “consummately” (quality) is a further indication that Jesus will reveal that love on the cross. The footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread are symbols and images of Jesus’ boundless love manifested on the cross. The introduction of verse 1 is “the most significant transition in the Gospel, introducing not only the scene of the footwashing, but the entire second half of the Gospel.”

Thus motivated, Jesus moves into action, aware that the hour has come and also that “the devil had already made up his mind that Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, would betray him” (v. 2). In this ambiguity, knowing that he is from God and is returning to God (v. 3), Jesus prepares to wash the disciples’ feet and begins to do so (vv. 4–5). The dialogue between Jesus and Peter highlights Peter’s inability to understand the purpose of Jesus’ gesture, even when Jesus explains it to him (vv. 6–10). Jesus’ stripping for the washing and his telling Peter that he must accept this washing “to have part” with Jesus look to the cross for their meaning. The laying down of his clothes recalls the “laying down” of life that marked the good shepherd (see 10:11, 15, 17, 18), and the demand for a washing so that one can have part with Jesus (ἐὰς μέρος) recalls the baptismal practices by means of which the new Christian is drawn into the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus (13:8). Peter fails to understand (vv. 9–10b). Jesus closes this scene with a prophecy about the future denials of Judas (vv. 10c–11). The passage opened with Jesus’ love and knowledge, including a reference to Judas that led to the action of the footwashing (vv. 1–5). But his gesture of self-gift in love and service is surrounded by Peter’s failure to understand (v. 9) and a further notice of Judas’ future betrayal (vv. 10c–11).

In verses 12–17 Jesus addresses this situation, asking that his disciples continue his knowledge, love, and action. Resuming his position at table, he asks if they “know” what he has done for them (v. 12). The pattern of teacher and lord kneeling in self-gift for his own must continue as one of the marks of the followers of Jesus. He has given them an example they must repeat in their lives of service, no matter what their role might be. The choice of the Greek word for “example” (ὑπόδειγμα) continues the theme of self-gift in love, even to death. The Greek expression, found only in John 13:15 in the New Testament, appears in some well-known Jewish texts that use it to

15. The Greek expression behind this translation can mean that the devil had put it into Judas’ mind or that the devil had made up his mind. The former is the majority position (see, for example, Koester, *Word of Life*, 77, and the recent commentaries of Schnelle, Lincoln, Keener, Zumstein, and Bruner, all in the bibliography of this book). Nevertheless, the latter meaning should be chosen; as yet Judas has not been taken over by Satan. See the supportive note of the expert in Hellenistic grammar Édouard Delebecque, *Évangile de Jean: Text traduit et annoté*, CahRB 23 (Paris: Gabalda, 1987), 183: “The Greek phrase demands this meaning.” In terms of the narrative, if Satan already controls Judas in v. 2, what is the point of Satan’s “entering” Judas in v. 27? See also Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 439.

16. See Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 441: “John has penetrated beneath the surface of baptism as an ecclesiastical rite, seen it in its relationship to the Lord’s death, into which converts were baptized (cf. Rom. 6:3), and thus integrated it into the act of humble love in which the Lord’s death was set forth before the passion.”
speak of exemplary death (LXX 2 Macc. 6:28; 4 Macc. 17:22–23; Sir. 44:16).

“Jesus’ death . . . as it is here interpreted through the footwashing, is the norm of life and conduct for the believing community.” Jesus’ instruction closes with the double “amen.” He states the Christian tradition that begins from a cultural truism: a servant is not greater than his master (see Matt. 10:24). He adds the further Johannine development of that theme: Jesus is not greater than the one who sent him. The discourse turns toward God, as the established cultural order has been reversed: Jesus has served them, as God has lowered himself to make his love known to them in the one whom he has sent (v. 16). Finally, Jesus associates his servants and sent ones, the disciples, with his knowing and doing that led to this example of love and service unto death. As the passage began with Jesus’ “knowing” and “doing,” aware of what lay ahead of him (vv. 1–5), he offers a blessing to the disciples if they will also know and act as he did: “If you know THESE THINGS, blessed are you, if you do THESE THINGS” (v. 17). As Jesus has demonstrated love in action in the footwashing, they are to demonstrate love in action by following his example (ὑπόδειγμα), unto death.

The Central Statement (13:18–20)

The stunning centerpiece of 13:1–38 is verses 18–20. Between verses 1–17 and verses 21–38 Jesus spells out the rationale for both the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread. In verses 18 and 20 he speaks of his relationship with the disciples. He is aware of their fragility, their inability to understand, and the fact that one of them will betray him. He knows whom he has chosen, even though he is aware that one of them will strike out

17. Culpepper, “Johannine hypodeigma,” 144. See also Burridge, Imitating Jesus, 343–45. For the possibility that the Johannine Christians practiced a rite of footwashing to recall the teaching of Jesus, see John C. Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community, JSNTSup 61 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 126–85; Keener, Gospel of John, 902.

18. See Jean Zumstein, “Die johanneische Auffassung der Macht, gezeigt am Beispiel der Fusswaschung (Joh 13,1–17),” in Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannevangelium, 2nd ed., ATANT 84 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004), 161–76. Zumstein shows how disparate elements from the tradition (vv. 4–5, 6–10, 12–17, and finally vv. 1–3) have been “reread” (relecture) in the post-Easter community to show the Johannine enigma of the all-powerful Christ revealing his greatest power in loving self-gift “to the end.” He concludes: “Eternal life presents itself under the mask of death” (p. 176).

19. The English translation shows the balance of the original Greek with two conditional phrases framing a blessing: εἰ ταῦτα οἴδατε (conditional)—μακάριοί ἐστε (beatitude)—εὰν ποιῆτε αὐτά (conditional). See Simoens, La gloire d’aimer, 84–85.

20. This passage (vv. 18–20) even forms the “material center” of thirty-eight verses, with the center of the center in v. 19. See Zumstein, L’Évangile selon Saint Jean, 31–33.
against him. He recalls Psalm 41:9, stating that one of them, who shares the
table and eats his bread (ὁ τρώγων μου τὸν ἄρτον), has lifted his heel against
him (v. 18). The betrayer lurks throughout this narrative (see vv. 2, 10c–11,
18). Despite the failures and the betrayals, however, Jesus has chosen these
disciples. In verse 20 he points out that not only has he chosen them (v. 18),
his will send them out (v. 20). Closing this central section with a further
double “amen,” Jesus assures them that he sends them out so that they can
make Jesus known, just as Jesus has made the Father known. Anyone who
receives his sent ones, therefore, will also receive the Father. Jesus will send
out these disciples. Jesus has chosen and sent out ignorant, fragile disciples,
even one who will betray him.

The question why must be asked. To choose and send out those who fail,
betray, and deny makes no sense. Jesus answers that question in verse 19,
the central statement of 13:1–38: “I tell you this now, before it takes place,
that when it does take place you may believe that I am he [ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅταν γένηται ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι].” In Jesus’ act of footwashing, symbolizing his
consummate love-unto-death for disciples who fail to understand and who
will betray him, God is made manifest. He will shortly match this gift with
that of the piece of bread, which also tells of self-gift unto death for disciples
who do not understand him, who betray him, and who deny him (vv. 21–38).
Jesus has not yet given his fragile disciples his unconditional self-gift, but he
clearly anticipates it in the loving gestures of the footwashing and the gift of
the piece of bread. The reader/listener of the story is well aware that what
these gestures anticipate will take place on the cross, but the disciples in the
story are not. They continue in their ignorance, their false promises, and their
misunderstanding. The Gospel tells the post-Easter Johannine community
that Jesus has knowingly chosen disciples and sent them out as bearers of
his presence and the presence of the Father who sent him (vv. 18, 20). He
is telling his disciples all these things now, before the event of the cross, so
that when that consummate revelation of love takes place, then they might
believe that he is the presence of the divine among them (v. 19: ἐγώ εἰμι). If
the earlier statements about the countercultural nature of Jesus’ actions in
his example to the disciples are surprising (vv. 12–15), his revelation of why
he is giving himself unconditionally in love to disciples, chosen and sent out
by him, who not only do not love him in the same way but who will deny
him, betray him, and misunderstand him, transcends all possible human
explanation. This is what it means to love εἰς τέλος, consummately, in a way
that the world can never comprehend. The love of Jesus εἰς τέλος for his own
is the revelation of the incomprehensible love of God. In these gestures of loving self-gift, anticipating the cross, Jesus makes known the love of God. They demonstrate Jesus’ love in action to stunned readers and hearers of the story, who are themselves fragile disciples of Jesus.\(^{21}\)

**The Gift of the Piece of Bread and Its Aftermath (13:21–38)**

Paralleling the structure of verses 1–17, the closing section of 13:1–38 has three parts:

**Verses 21–25:** The narrator indicates Jesus’ profound emotional condition as he again forecasts that one of them will betray him. The Beloved Disciple, at the request of Simon Peter, asks who this might be.

**Verses 26–30:** Jesus indicates that he will give the piece of bread to his betrayer. A brief dialogue follows the gift of the piece of bread to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. No one at the table understands what is happening as Judas goes out into the darkness of the night.

**Verses 31–38:** As Judas departs, the passion begins. Jesus announces that the moment of the glorification of the Son of Man and the revelation of the glory of God is “now.” He issues a new commandment: that they love one another as he has loved them. Peter continues to misunderstand Jesus and his destiny, and Jesus, closing this section with a final double “amen,” foretells Peter’s threefold denial, before cockcrow.

In verse 21 Jesus’ words open with the double “amen.” Jesus raises the question of the betrayer and begins a dialogue with his own that will lead to the revelation of the identity of the betrayer at the table (v. 26; see v. 18). There is also a parallel between verse 1, where the narrator reported Jesus’ knowledge and love, and verse 21a, where the narrator mentions another emotional experience: Jesus is troubled in spirit. Verse 1 established a link with the cross through words that spoke of Jesus’ love for his own εἰς τέλος. The cross is again close at hand in the words “troubled in spirit,” which echo Psalms 42/43.\(^{22}\) As well as the double “amen,” the solemn nature of

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21. Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 31–33, also makes a strong link with the post-Easter church but does not fully appreciate the christological significance of vv. 18–20. He explains how Jesus’ choice of Judas was not a mistake but part of God’s design, indicated by the fulfillment of Scripture in v. 18. This is true, but is not the major thrust of vv. 18–20, the centerpiece of 13:1–38.

the verb “testified” (μαρτυρέω) indicates a break between verses 18–20 and what follows. Jesus’ words on the betrayal highlight that one of the disciples, present at the table (see vv. 12, 18), will betray him (v. 21b). These words set off a reaction among the disciples around the table, who are not moving in the world of Jesus. “The disciples [were] uncertain [ἀπορούμενοι] of whom he spoke” (v. 22). Ignorance, confusion, and misunderstanding continue (see vv. 6, 7, 9, 12–13).

The Beloved Disciple appears for the first time in the story. He is lying at table, “close to the breast of Jesus” (v. 23), a position of affectionate closeness. Despite his position of honor, he is among those perplexed in verse 22. Peter, subordinated to the Beloved Disciple, asks, “Tell us who it is of whom he speaks” (v. 24). This special disciple, like all the other disciples at the table, is ignorant of the full meaning of Jesus’ words and must ask Jesus. His question shows his ignorance and triggers the words and actions that follow: “Lord, who is it?” (v. 25).

The one who is to betray him will be part of an intimate human gesture: dipping the piece of bread at table and sharing it with him (v. 26a). Jesus’ actions fulfill his words: “So when he had dipped the morsel, he took it and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot” (v. 26b). Only after Judas receives the piece of bread does Satan enter into him (v. 27a). In verse 2 the reader was told that the devil had decided that Judas was to betray Jesus, but in verse 27a Satan enters into Judas. He is now part of a satanic program, diametrically opposed to the program of God revealed in Jesus. Yet, in an exquisite final gesture of love, Jesus shares the dipped piece of bread with


25. The Greek expression indicating this closeness to the breast of Jesus (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) is very close to the expression used in 1:18 to speak of Jesus’ being turned in loving union with the Father (ἐἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρός) during his ministry. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 40–41, 46–47.

26. Because of the possibility that the piece of bread given to Judas might be regarded as eucharistic, the ancient textual tradition is very disturbed here. I will discuss this below, including my reason for including the words “he took it [λαμβάνει κατά].”
his future betrayer (v. 26). The most evil disciple in the story (see 6:70–71; 12:4–6; 13:2) shares a piece of bread that points to the Eucharist (13:26)\(^{27}\). The unbelievable continues to happen as Jesus’ unconditional love (see v. 1: εἰς τέλος) is revealed in his actions.\(^{28}\)

In verse 18, as Jesus addressed his disciples, he told them that the events about to happen will fulfill Psalm 41:10b: “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” (v. 18). The LXX translation of the first part of the psalm (“He who ate my bread”) uses a Greek verb normally used to refer to human eating (ἐσθίω), but in John 13:18 the verb “to munch, to grind with the teeth” is used (τρώγω).\(^{29}\) The verb used in the Greek of the LXX has been replaced by a more vigorous word.\(^{30}\) The verb τρώγω appears elsewhere in the Gospel of John only in the eucharistic passage of 6:51c–58. It appears four times (6:54, 56, 57, 58). Framed between uses of the usual verb (φάγω; see 6:51, 52, 53, 58), the more physical verb appears in the most explicit eucharistic material in the Gospel (6:51–58), in the wider setting of John 6, where φάγω is otherwise universally present (see 6:5, 23, 26, 31 [twice], 51, 52, 53).\(^{31}\) The only other use of this verb (τρώγω) in the Gospel of John is at the gift of the morsel in 13:18. John refashions this Old Testament passage,

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\(^{27}\) For the discussion, see Michel-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), 362–63. Most modern scholars regard the use of the piece of bread as either a method of eliminating Judas from the upper room (e.g., Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*, 3:30) or an indication that Judas chooses Satan rather than Jesus (e.g., Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 578).

\(^{28}\) Not recognizing Jesus’ consummate love for his failing disciples (εἰς τέλος) as the key to interpreting John 13, almost all scholars shy clear of an eucharistic interpretation, aided by the fact that the word “morsel” (ψωμίον) and not “bread” (ἄρτος) is used in v. 26. See, for example, Lincoln, *Gospel according to Saint John*, 379; Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 38–39. Those who have seen the passage as eucharistic (e.g., Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 175) use 1 Cor. 11:29 to claim that Satan enters the sinful Judas because he takes the eucharistic morsel without discerning. This interpretation has no place within the Johannine story of Jesus’ unbelievable love for his disciples. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 4:564, led by his focus upon the words of the love command in vv. 34–35, ignores what Jesus did with Judas. He claims that “it is only after Judas leaves the supper room and plunges into the night of evil (v. 30) that Jesus draws the ultimate lesson from his sacramental act of washing.”

\(^{29}\) BDAG, 396, s.v. ἔσθιον; 1019, s.v. τρώγω. As with common verbs in many languages, ἔσθιον also appears as φάγω/φάγωμαι (see 6:5, 23, 26, 31, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53).

\(^{30}\) Some have discussed whether the two verbs differ greatly in meaning in the late Greek of the New Testament. For the position taken above, see Ceslaus Spicq, “ΤΡΩΓΕΙΝ: Est-il synonyme de ΦΑΓΕΙΝ et d’ΕΣΘΙΕΙΝ dans le Nouveau Testament?,” NTS 26 (1979–80): 414–19.

\(^{31}\) In agreement with Spicq, I regard the fourfold use of τρώγω in a setting where φάγω is used eight times as deliberate, and not just a “use of verbal variety” (as is argued, among others, by Gignac, “Use of Verbal Variety,” 195). Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 31–32, recognizes this connection with the eucharistic passage in 6:51–58 but does not link this with the event reported in v. 26.
linking the gift of the piece of bread to Judas with Christian traditions that surrounded the Last Supper (see also Mark 14:18 and Luke 22:21, where Ps. 41:10 provides background). These eucharistic hints would not be missed by the reader/listener.

But there is more. Above I included “and he took” in my translation of verse 26, but these words do not appear in some early manuscripts. They recall Jesus’ deliberate action of taking bread in the bread miracles of all four Gospels (Mark 6:41; 8:6; Matt. 14:19; 15:36; Luke 9:16; John 6:11), reflecting the eucharistic thought and practice of the early church. The same expression appears in the Synoptic and Pauline reports of the Last Supper (Mark 14:22; Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23). Given the eucharistic hints in the verb used by John in 13:18 and in 6:54, 56, 57, 58, the originality of the words indicating that Jesus took the piece of bread before giving it to Judas should be maintained. Eucharist is a subtheme to the meal and the gift of the piece of bread (vv. 21–38), just as baptism is a subtheme to the footwashing (vv. 1–17). Jesus gives the piece of bread to the most despised character in the Gospel’s narrative. The reader/listener and all subsequent Christian readers of the Gospel have been horrified by this suggestion. But Jesus’ never-failing love for such disciples, a love that reaches out even to the archetype of the evil disciple, reveals the unique God and Father of Jesus Christ, who loves the world unconditionally (see 3:16–17; 13:18–20).

Jesus knows Judas’ intentions (vv. 2, 10c–11, 18, 21–26). Satan’s designs for Judas now unfold: Satan enters into Judas (v. 27a). Jesus sends Judas on his way, recommending that he do his task as quickly as possible (v. 27b). No subtle allegories lie behind these words of Jesus; they are dramatic words that

32. See the discussion of the evidence in Metzger, Textual Commentary, 205.
34. As also in Bauer, Das Johannevangelium, 174; Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:30. It is easier to explain why it was eliminated (to avoid any hint of Judas and the Eucharist) than to explain why a scribe would insert it, if it was not there originally.
35. It is impossible to establish what actually took place at the meal. As in the early church, many contemporary Christians continue to be shocked by the above proposal, an important part of the Johannine presentation of the love theme. Largely unrecognized, however, is the fact that the same possibility appears in the Synoptic account of the Last Supper. Judas has already associated himself with the plot to kill Jesus (Mark 14:10–11; Matt. 26:14–16; Luke 22:3–6), but he is present at the last meal (Mark 14:17–21; Matt. 26:20–25; Luke 22:14, 21–23). Indeed, Luke has Jesus state: “The hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21).
lead to verses 28–29, indicating the universal ignorance of the disciples. Not one of the people at the table understood. The “no one” (οὐδείς) includes the Beloved Disciple (v. 28). How is it possible that no one understands, after the clarity of the question and the response to the question in word and deed in verses 25–26? But ignorance and confusion reign, and the best some of the disciples can do is guess that Jesus is telling Judas, the guardian of the money box, to make some purchases for the feast or give something to the poor (v. 29). After receiving the piece of bread, Judas immediately went out, and it was night (v. 30). Now controlled by Satan, Judas walks away from the light of the world (see 1:4, 7; 8:12; 9:4; 11:10; 12:35, 46). At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry Nicodemus, one of “the Jews,” moved from the night toward Jesus (3:2). That journey is still in progress (see 7:50–51; 19:38–42). Now, as Jesus’ life comes to an end, one of “his own” moves away from the light into the night (13:30).

Judas’ action leads to a “shout of triumph” from Jesus. The author links Jesus’ proclamation in verses 31–32 with the departure of Judas. As we have seen, Jesus will be “lifted up” to make God known (see 3:13–14; 8:28), to draw everyone to himself (12:32–33). As this is the case, Judas’ departure into the darkness, to betray Jesus unto death (31a), leads logically to Jesus’ statement of verses 31–32. Themes foreshadowed across the Gospel gather. The “hour” has come (see 12:23, 27, 31; 13:1); now is the time for the glorification of the Son of Man and for God to be glorified (11:4; 12:23, 28). On the cross Jesus begins his “hour” of his glorification; but his death will reveal “the glory of God.” The term “glory” (δόξα), once used to describe the visible manifestation of God at Sinai, has been consistently applied in the Gospel narrative to refer to the works of Jesus (see 2:11; 5:44; 7:18; 11:4, 40; 12:41, 43). In these works God has been manifest, and the cross will be the time when and the place where that manifestation reaches its perfection (τέλος). Because Judas has been taken over by Satan after receiving the piece of bread, in a radical rejection of the love of God revealed in and through

36. On this passage, see Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 220. On its function for the story of Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel, see Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 90–93.
38. This is one of my many problems with the majority position that ends the narrative in John 13 with v. 30 and makes 13:31–14:31 the first discourse. For example, Schnackenburg’s detailed commentary on vv. 31–32 (Gospel according to St. John, 3:49–52) does not give one word to v. 31a.
39. See Moloney, Belief in the Word, 55–57.
Jesus’ gift of the piece of bread, Jesus will be “lifted up.” Jesus can thus proclaim that now the Son of Man will be glorified, and the glory of God will be seen in the self-gift of Jesus on the cross (vv. 31b–32b). The glorification of Jesus and the revelation of the glory of God, so intimately associated with the crucifixion, will take place now (v. 32c). Judas’ exit sets in motion the events promised by Jesus in verses 18–20 as the time when and the place where the disciples, chosen and sent by Jesus, might come to believe that Jesus is the revelation of God (v. 19: “that when it does take place you may believe that I AM HE”).

Opening with a term of endearment, “little children,” which reinforces the presentation of Jesus’ unconditional love for his failing disciples, Jesus looks back to words spoken to “the Jews” in 7:33. That moment, also marked by conflict and danger, is recalled as Jesus tells his disciples that they will seek him but not find him because, as he told “the Jews,” “Where I am going you cannot come” (13:33; cf. 7:34). The reader finds in one verse a term of endearment, a statement from Jesus that a time is close at hand when he will no longer be with his disciples, and a close association of the disciples with “the Jews.” As “the Jews” would not and could not understand who Jesus was and where he was going in his return to the Father, so it is also with Jesus’ ignorant and failing disciples. Yet they remain his disciples, his “little children,” lost, yet loved, in their misunderstanding, failure, and ignorance (13:33).

To these “little children,” he gives a new commandment (vv. 34–35). Earlier Jesus gave the disciples an example (v. 15a). Both the example and the new commandment are closely associated with Jesus’ demand that his disciples follow him into loving self-gift unto death, symbolized by the footwashing and the piece of bread. It was also implied by the command to follow Jesus’ example: that the disciples do to one another as Jesus had done for them (v. 15b). It becomes more explicit in the new commandment that they love one another even as Jesus has loved them (v. 34b). The link between the example and the commandment is clear. Disciples of Jesus will be identified as such because they love one another as Jesus has loved them (v. 35).


In the time of Jesus’ absence (see v. 33), they are to repeat the love of Jesus and render present the lifestyle of Jesus (vv. 34–35). In 14:21–24 and 16:27 Jesus will instruct his disciples that they will be loved by both Jesus and his Father if they keep his commandments. The reader/listener is now aware of the challenge of Jesus’ commandment: to love as he has loved. The challenge will be restated and developed further in 15:12–17.

In 13:7a Jesus told Peter, “What I am doing you do not know now.” In proof of Jesus’ statement, Peter now asks what is meant by the proximate absence of Jesus, caused by his going to a place where they cannot come (v. 36a). Jesus repeats the words he said to all the disciples in verse 33: he is going to a place where Peter cannot follow “now.” Jesus tells Peter that even though he cannot follow him “now” (v. 36b), he shall follow “afterward” (v. 36c; cf. v. 7b). A narrative tension exists between the “now” of the story, as failing and misunderstanding disciples are at the center of the action (vv. 7a, 36b), and the time of an “afterward” when this situation will be transformed (vv. 7b, 36c; cf. 2:22; 12:16; 21:18–19).42

But Peter claims there is no tension. As earlier he attempted to dictate terms to Jesus both about whether he, Peter, should have his feet washed (vv. 6–8) and about how he should be washed (v. 9), he now asks Jesus a question indicating that there is no journey he is not prepared to make with Jesus (v. 37). Peter is thinking of human journeys into some dangerous place and time; Jesus is speaking of his return to the Father. Peter and Jesus are working on two different levels. Peter claims he is prepared to lay down his life for Jesus, as the good shepherd earlier said that he would lay down his life for his sheep (see 10:11, 15, 17). This is exactly what Jesus asks of his disciples in the gift of his example (v. 15) and the gift of the new commandment (vv. 34–35), but such love flows from a radical following of Jesus and never from an imposition of one’s own worldview upon God’s designs. Jesus prophesies that Peter will be thwarted by his own ignorance. He will fail, as he will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows (v. 38). The setting of the meal ends, bathed by the light of Jesus’ incredible demonstration of his unconditional love for “his own” (v. 1), made even more brilliant by the darkness of the forthcoming betrayal of Jesus by Judas (see vv. 2, 10–11, 18, 21–30, 31a), the ignorance of Peter and all the disciples (vv. 6–9, 28–29, 36–37), and the future denials of Peter (v. 38).

42. Although not normally pointed out by those who advocate the literary unity of John 1:1–21:25, there is a close link between this “later” following of Peter in 13:36 and Jesus’ command to follow, associated with the death of Peter in 21:18–19.
Concluding Reflection on 13:1–38

The first events in the Johannine account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples (vv. 1–5) have highlighted three major themes: the arrival of “the hour” of Jesus, Jesus’ love for his own, no matter how sinful they might be (vv. 1–3), and Jesus’ bringing to perfection his task by means of a consummate act of love (v. 1). Another theme is added: the glorification of Jesus and the revelation of the glory of the Father (vv. 31–32). This theme has also been present at the center of the passage, in Jesus’ claim that his disciples would come to recognize him as the unique revelation of God (v. 19). John 13 is a description of the glory shown by unconditional love. Jesus asks, by both deed and word, that his disciples live and love in imitation of him. This is his example (v. 15) and his new commandment (vv. 34–35). In the end, the example and the new commandment coalesce.

Themes adumbrated during the ministry reappear as “the hour has come” (v. 1), the cross as the moment of Jesus’ glorification (see 11:4; 12:23, 33), and the revelation of the glory of God in and through the cross (see 3:13–14; 8:28; 12:32). Most of all, 13:1–38 tells a tale of the revelation of love in the actions of Jesus. Jesus commits himself to fragile disciples, loving them until death (13:1), washing their feet (vv. 4–11), and sharing bread, even with his betrayer (vv. 21–30). At the center of the narrative (vv. 18–20) we find the point of these actions. Jesus knows whom he has chosen: these disciples, whose feet he has washed (vv. 1–17), who have received the piece of bread (vv. 21–38), and who will turn against him (see v. 18). The cruel reality of their turning against him (vv. 2–3, 10–11, 21–30, 36–38), their lifting their heel against their host (v. 18b), alters nothing. Indeed, he will send them forth as his representatives and as the representatives of his Father (vv. 18a, 20). By accepting these failed, yet loved, disciples one will receive both Jesus and the Father (v. 20). In Jesus’ choosing and sending ignorant and failing disciples, dramatically portrayed in the failure of both Judas and Peter, Jesus’ uniqueness and oneness with God can be seen. Jesus’ love for his failing disciples is, above all, the final proof for his claim to be the one who makes God known (see v. 19: “that I AM HE”). God’s love, which transcends and challenges all human criteria and experience, is revealed.  

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is that, despite their ignorance, failure, betrayals, and denials, the disciples are to imitate Jesus, loving one another as he has loved them, so that the world might recognize them as disciples and sent ones of Jesus Christ (vv. 15, 20, 34–35). That theme is developed by Jesus’ words at the heart of the discourse (15:12–17).

**Love in Discourse: John 15:12–17**

At the end of 15:1–11, dominated by the image of the vine (vv. 1–8), the disciples were told to keep the Father’s commandments in order to abide in the love of Jesus (vv. 9–10) and have the fullness of joy (v. 11). What are these commandments they must keep in order to abide in his love? The heart of the discourse (vv. 12–17) provides the answer. Jesus has *shown* love in 13:1–38. He now *tells* them of the need for their response to that love (15:12, 17), built on his prior love for them (vv. 13–16).

The disciples are to love one another with a love that is continuous and lifelong. In order to show this, the command is expressed in the present tense in a subjunctive mood (v. 12a: ἀγαπᾶτε). However, the measure of their love is to be the supreme act of Jesus’ love for them in his self-gift unto death. This is expressed by the use of a verb in the aorist tense (v. 12b: ἠγάπησα). The aorist tense refers to a once-and-for-all event in the past. The narrative of the self-gift of Jesus in the footwashing (13:1–17) and the gift of the piece of bread (13:21–38) comes into play. Jesus loves “his own” εἰς τέλος (13:1). The disciples are to love one another with an unconditional love, matching the love of Jesus for them (13:15, 34–35).47

46. For a detailed exegetical study of 15:12–17, see Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 64–67.

In 15:12–14 Jesus explains that their love must be based upon the quality of his love for them. The greatest of all loves is shown by one who lays down his life for his friends (v. 13). While Jesus loves without limit, the disciples have not shown great signs of love for him. Throughout the Gospel, and dramatically in the roles of Judas and Peter in John 13, disciples have been portrayed as not understanding, locked into their own way of seeing and doing things, betrayers and deniers. Despite this, Jesus lays down his life for them, as the good shepherd (see 10:11, 14–15, 18), and he will be lifted up to gather everyone to himself (11:50–52; 12:32–33). He will not hold past and present failings against the disciples, whom he will soon call his “friends.” No one has greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. In the post-Easter situation, Johannine disciples are aware that Jesus now uses only “words” to describe “no greater love,” but the later “action” of his crucifixion has fulfilled the promise of laying down his life for his friends. Despite their performance in 13:1–38, the disciples are Jesus’ friends. He responds to the commandments of the Father in loving people he calls his “friends” (φίλοι). He asks that they live up to this friendship by doing what he commands them (15:14): love one another as he has loved them (see v. 12; cf. 13:34–35).

In 15:12–14 Jesus pointed to the quality of his love for fragile disciples; in verses 15–16 he tells them of the priority of his love for them. The disciples, despite the failures indicated by 13:1–38, have been drawn into a new relationship (15:15). They are not servants (δοῦλοι) in a dependent relationship with a master. Indeed, never throughout the Gospel have they

48. This interpretation links vv. 12–13. Verse 13 is primarily christological, spelling out for the disciples how Jesus loved them (see v. 12b), thus indicating how much they should love one another (v. 12a). Some would link v. 13 with vv. 14–15, and others would regard it as a later insertion. For the position adopted above, see Hartwig Thyen, “Niemand hat grössere Liebe als die, dass er sein Leben für seine Freunde hingibt’ (Joh 15:13): Das johanneische Verständnis des Kreuzestodes Jesu,” in Theologia Crucis—Signum Crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Carl Andresen and Günther Klein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 467–81; Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 242; Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 406–7; Zumstein, L’Évangile selon Saint Jean, 108.

49. This striking statement from Jesus, “No one has greater love than this . . .” (v. 13), used in the title for this study, may have been a well-known proverbial statement, as claimed by Martin Dibelius, “Joh 15.13: Eine Studie zum Traditionsproblem des Johannesevangelium,” in Festgabe für A. Deissmann, ed. Günther Bornkamm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1927), 168–86. This suggestion does not detract from the power of Jesus’ use of it in this context.


51. The word δοῦλος can refer to either a slave or a servant. Whichever translation one adopts, the question of a radical change of status from a dependent δοῦλος to an equal φίλος is clear. See Gignac, “Use of Verbal Variety,” 193–95. See also Keener, Gospel of John, 1004–15.
been called such. They have always been followers, people who have been going through a learning process as disciples (μαθητής) of Jesus. They are not δοῦλοι, depending upon the wishes and the whims of a master, but φίλοι, intimate and equal associates of Jesus, who loves them without limit (see 13:1).

In a succinct statement, central to this story’s strengthening presentation of the love of God revealed in Jesus, Jesus tells the disciples: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (15:16a). Again 13:1–38 comes into play. At the heart of the account of the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread Jesus told his disciples: “I know whom I have chosen... He who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (13:18, 20). Jesus has chosen disciples and established them as the ones who will be sent out to bear fruit that will endure (15:16b). The initiative lies with Jesus, but in the end the disciples must turn to the Father in their need, asking in the name of Jesus (v. 16c). As Jesus describes his ongoing mission, now entrusted to his chosen ones, the language of the metaphor of the vine returns. The disciples are the friends of Jesus, for whom he lays down his life in love (see v. 13), and they are the branches abiding in the vine (see v. 5a), bearing much fruit (vv. 5b, 8), a fruit that will endure. They, in the name of Jesus, who has chosen them and commissioned them to “go and bear fruit” (v. 16b), will turn to the Father (v. 16c; cf. v. 10). As they bear fruit, continuing the mission of the one who chose them, all they ask will be granted to them (v. 16c). The oneness that exists between Jesus and the Father will also be enjoyed by the disciples chosen (v. 16a) and sent out (v. 16b) by Jesus (see 13:18–20).

In 15:17 Jesus returns to the words of verse 12, generating an “inclusio,” or a frame, that makes verses 12–17 a literary unit. This repetition, however, is not only literary closure. Jesus’ words on his prior choice of the disciples (v. 16a), their being established as the bearers of a lasting fruitfulness (v. 16b) in their new situation as his friends (v. 15), conclude with the essential condition of their status and mission. They must accept the commandment of

52. The word “disciple” (μαθητής) has been used to speak of the disciples forty-two times to this point in the story. The expression “slave/servant” (δοῦλος) has never been used of the disciples, but is found in 13:16 when Jesus tells his disciples that a slave is not greater than his master. Importantly, however, when Jesus speaks directly to his disciples as “servants,” he uses the Greek noun and verb διάκονος and διακονέω in 12:26.

53. Some critics read 15:16 as the Johannine version of the appointment of the foundational apostles. It applies to all disciples of Jesus. For the discussion leading to this conclusion, see Léon-Dufour, Lecture de l’Évangile, 3:182–85. See also Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 243; Zumstein, L’Évangile selon Saint Jean, 110–11.
Jesus; they must love one another (v. 17). The reader has experienced an increasing insistence upon the love of Jesus for his own. The narrator stated it explicitly in 13:1, and Jesus dramatically symbolized it in the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread (13:1–38). It has returned in 15:12–17, introduced by Jesus’ call to the disciples to abide in his love in verses 9–11. Across the latter part of Jesus’ ministry and into the story of his final meal with the disciples, a close connection was made between the death of Jesus and the revelation of the glory of God (see 11:4; 12:23; 13:18–20, 31–32). Jesus’ words on love focus upon his gift of himself for his disciples in death (see 13:1–17, 21–38). Jesus’ death will be the manifestation of love, the revelation of God, and the glorification of the Son (see 11:4; 12:23; 13:18–20, 31–32). The disciples have been told that by abiding in Jesus and bearing much fruit they will join with Jesus in the glorification of the Father (see 15:8). They have been chosen by Jesus to bear much fruit (v. 16ab). The disciples, friends of Jesus whom he loves in a way that cannot be surpassed (v. 13), must continue that quality of love in their love for one another (vv. 12, 17). The reader traces a link between Jesus’ mission to make God known through his loving self-gift and the task of the disciples to continue that mission in their obedience to his commandment that they love one another as he has loved them (13:34; 15:12, 17). The quality of their love for one another will mark them out as disciples of Jesus (13:35; cf. 15:8).

Beginning with his parable of the grain of wheat that must fall into the earth and die to produce much fruit, where the theme of the “gathering” appeared (12:24; see earlier 10:16; 11:50–52), Jesus summoned the disciples to a future association with that death and gathering in 12:25–26. He further developed his instruction on the future mission of the disciples in 13:15 (the example) and 34–35 (the new commandment) and has now articulated it most clearly in 15:12–17. This instruction of the disciples to love one another, based upon the incredible love of Jesus (15:13), who has first loved them as “friends” (v. 15), generates a “leap-frog” effect that goes beyond the boundaries of the story. No “Acts” are attached to the Fourth Gospel. The

instruction to love as Jesus has loved is directed to the readers and listeners, “those who believe without seeing” (20:29). Jesus also directs his prayer in 17:1–26 to them (see v. 20). In this prayer, he asks his Father to sweep them into the love and oneness that mark the relationship between the Father and the Son (17:24–26).

Love in Prayer: John 17:1–26

There is widespread agreement that 17:1–26 unfolds in three stages: verses 1–5, verses 6–19, and verses 20–26. But, developing the suggestion of a number of earlier scholars, Raymond Brown has proposed an alternative structure based upon three formal indications of prayer in 17:1–26. In verse 1 the narrator describes Jesus’ raising his eyes to heaven, adopting a position for prayer. In verse 9 Jesus states, “I am praying for them” (ἐγὼ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐρωτῶ), and in verse 20 he indicates that he is praying for another group: “I do not pray for these only οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, but also for those who believe in me through their word.” These formal indications create three more-evenly distributed sections: verses 1–8, 9–19, 20–26.

As one division closes, it opens the way to the subject of the following section. Thus in verse 4 Jesus tells the Father, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do.” This theme is then exemplified in verses 6–8, where Jesus does not pray for his disciples but tells the Father that he has accomplished the work among the disciples (v. 6). Having described the situation of the disciples, he then begins to pray for them (vv. 9–19). As his prayer for the disciples draws to a close, Jesus parallels his own mission with the disciples’ mission to make God known in a hostile world (vv. 17–19). Some in the world will believe in Jesus through the word of the disciples. Having described the mission of the disciples, in the final part of his prayer Jesus also prays for “those who believe in me through their word”


57. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 748–51. Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:433n3, is unjustifiably critical of this position, claiming that its motivation is “probably because of ἐρωτῶ in v. 9.” As the same verb appears in vv. 15 and 20, he simply affirms that it can “hardly be regarded as a factor on which to base a division.” There is more to Brown’s structure than the use of ἐρωτῶ, despite its importance. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 750, for a summary of five further features that support his structure.
As the final section of the prayer ends, Jesus prays for those whom God has given him (v. 24). This petition looks back across the prayer, asking that all who believe might be swept up into the love that unites the Father and the Son (vv. 25–26). This conclusion begs for a resolution, but that will not be found within the narrative itself. Its resolution can be found only in the faith and love of the post-Easter Johannine reader/listener. A tripartite shape emerges.

**The Tripartite Literary Structure of 17:1–26**

**Jesus Prays to the Father (17:1–8)**

a) Verses 1–5: Jesus asks for the consummation of both God’s glory and his own glorification, to bring eternal life into the human story by making God known (vv. 1–5). Jesus’ petition “to glorify” (δόξασον) both opens and closes this subsection (see v. 1 and v. 5).

b) Verses 6–8: Jesus has perfected the task that the Father gave him to do: he has made God known. The disciples know and believe that Jesus is the Sent One of the Father (vv. 6–8). This subsection is marked by the repeated use of various forms of δίδωμι, the verb “to give” (ἔδωκας [twice in v. 6], δέδωκας [v. 7], ἐδώκας, δέδωκα [v. 8]).

**Jesus Prays to the “Holy Father” (17:9–19)**

a) Verses 9–11a: Jesus is about to depart from this world, and the disciples will remain. This subsection is highlighted by Jesus’ negative words on “the world,” which both open (v. 9: “I am not praying for the world”) and close it (v. 11a: “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world”).

b) Verses 11b–16: Addressing God as “holy Father” (πάτερ ἅγιε), Jesus first asks the Father to be “father” to them, keeping them safe (vv. 11b–16). This subsection opens with a petition that the Father “keep” the disciples (v. 11b) and closes with the reason for such a petition: “keep” them from the evil one (v. 15).

c) Verses 17–19: Jesus asks that the Father extend his holiness, to sanctify the disciples (v. 17: “make them holy”), that they may parallel the holiness of Jesus. They have been sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world (vv. 17–19). This subsection both opens (v. 17) and closes (v. 19) with the use of the verb “to make holy” (ἀγιάζω).

**Jesus Prays to the Father (17:20–26)**

a) Verses 20–23: Jesus prays for those who will believe in him as a result of the ongoing presence of the disciples in the world. He prays that
oneness among them might make God known to the world, *showing* that the love that drives the mission of Jesus also unites them. This subsection is highlighted by the prayer “that they may be one” (vv. 21, 22, 23).

**b) Verses 24–26:** The prayer closes as Jesus points the disciples in the story and the readers of the story further into the narrative . . . and beyond the narrative. He asks that they might be swept into the oneness of love that unites the Father and the Son and makes God known (vv. 24–26). This subsection opens with a change of literary form. Jesus expresses his will (Θέλω ἵνα) rather than his petition (see vv. 9, 20). It then refers to the love of God for Jesus (v. 24) and closes with a prayer that all be swept up into the love that exists between Jesus and the Father (v. 26).

Purely on the basis of this structure, some important thematic and theological issues emerge. The theme of the fragility of the disciples *flanked* the central statement of 13:18–20. Jesus chose and will send out betraying, denying, and ignorant disciples (see 13:1–17; 21–38). Although not as dramatically in 17:1–26, the fragility of the disciples is recognized at the prayer’s *center*. Jesus prays that they be kept safe and made holy as they remain in the world during his absence (vv. 9–19). The reverse happens with the *central* statement of 13:18–20. In the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread to his disciples, Jesus speaks and acts as he does so that they might believe that he makes God known in a hostile world (v. 19). The theme of Jesus’ role in making God known *flanks* the centerpiece in 17:1–26. Jesus has made God known (17:1–8; see vv. 2–4), and he passes on this task to his disciples and to subsequent generations who come to believe in Jesus because of their word (17:20–26; see v. 23). Other fascinating relationships exist between John 13 and John 17. The theme of “love” opens and closes 13:1–38 (13:1, 34–35), while the theme of “glory” and “glorification” is stated near the end (vv. 31–32); the theme of “glory” and “glorification” opens and closes 17:1–26 (vv. 1–4, 24–26), while the theme of “love” becomes explicit only at the end (vv. 24–26). Now, in “the hour” (13:1; 17:1), Jesus is bringing to completion (13:1: εἰς τέλος; 17:4: τελεσθήσεται) his task (4:34) to make God known. Despite the difference in literary form, the themes of making God known to fragile disciples and, through them, to “the world,” so crucial to 13:1–38, return in 17:1–26.58 What follows in our interpretation, based upon

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the literary structure suggested above, focuses upon passages relevant to the Gospel’s portrait of Jesus’ completion of his task in making known a God who so loved the world, and of his commissioning of a later generation to continue that revealing task beyond the limits of the Gospel, to “those who have not seen, yet believe” (20:29).59

Glory, Glorification, and Making the Father Known (17:1–8)

In 17:1 the evangelist makes a link with 13:1 in Jesus’ words of address to the Father. As this final encounter between Jesus and his disciples opened, the narrator alerted the reader, “Jesus knew that his hour had come” (13:1); as it closes, Jesus announces: “Father, the hour has come” (17:1b). Because of the arrival of “the hour” of Jesus, the time of his glorification has come. We have already seen the link between the glorification of Jesus and “the hour” in earlier narratives. The “not yet” (see 2:4) was later associated with a future feast (see 7:8), and violence was part of the mounting attempt by “the Jews” to eliminate Jesus (7:30; 8:20). In 11:4 Jesus explicitly links the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son, and the decisions of “the Jews,” in their final negative response in the story to Jesus’ words and actions (see 11:45–50, 57; 12:9–11), reinforce the relationship between that revelation and glorification, on the one hand, and Jesus’ oncoming death, on the other. Jesus’ words in 12:23—“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”—have confirmed the reader’s increasing association of “the hour” and the glorification of Jesus. This was further clarified in 12:32–33 by the two most authoritative voices in the Gospel: Jesus and the narrator. Jesus spoke of his being lifted up to draw everyone to himself (v. 32), and the narrator added a clarifying remark associating the glorification (see v. 23)—that is, the lifting up and the “drawing” (v. 32)—with the crucifixion: “He said this to indicate the way in which he was to die” (v. 33). These themes continue to intertwine, in a further identification of “the hour,” the revelation of the glory of God, and the glorification of the Son, in 17:1b. The prayer that follows unfolds under the shadow of “the hour.”60

Jesus’ role as the one who will glorify God and thus be glorified is associated with his having been given prerogatives traditionally belonging to God (see 17:2a). Jesus’ having authority and power over all flesh, so that he might give eternal life to all whom God has entrusted to him (v. 2b),

59. For a detailed exegetical study of 17:1–26, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 102–26.
60. See Thüsing, Herrlichkeit und Einheit, 10–13.
conjures up memories of the prologue (see 1:12–13), further developed in Jesus’ discourse on his authority as life giver and judge in 5:19–30. Jesus does nothing of his own authority, as “the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing” (5:20a). The glorification of the Father and the Son (17:1) flows from the Son’s giving eternal life to those entrusted to him (17:2), clarified in 17:3. Widely regarded as a later editorial comment added to an original prayer, verse 3 can also be taken as the leitmotif of the prayer.\(^61\) The reader knows that the believer comes to knowledge of God in and through the Sent One, Jesus Christ (see 1:9–14, 16–18; 3:14–15, 16–17, 31–36a; 4:13–14; 5:24–25; 6:35, 51; 7:37–38; 8:12; 9:5; 10:27–29; 11:42; 13:18–20; 14:6–7). This is no gnostic promise of a saving “knowledge” but the promise of life that can be had by those who believe that Jesus Christ has told the story of God (see 1:18).\(^62\) Thus, ‘eternal life’ consists in the experienced knowledge of the figure of God, as it is revealed by the man Jesus, the perfect representative of the Father.”\(^63\) The believer comes to life by knowing the God revealed by Jesus, the Logos of God. Revelation, through which all flesh can come to eternal life (17:2–3), has taken place in Jesus’ revealing words and works (see 5:36).

Having indicated at the beginning of his ministry that the fundamental orientation of his life was to complete the task given him by the Father (see 4:34), Jesus now regards that task as accomplished (17:4). We have reached a decisive turning point in the story of Jesus. The revelation of God is complete, and Jesus can ask that the Father enter his story in a final way, glorifying him by restoring him to the Father’s presence, with the glory that was his before the world was made (see 1:1–2; 6:62; 8:58). Jesus’ origin with God determined his ministry. Now, as the story comes to a close, Jesus asks that he come to glory by returning to his origins. But the reader knows this can happen only through “the hour” of the “lifting up,” in an act of perfect love for his own, so that God will be glorified and Jesus might come to his glory (see 12:23, 32–33; 13:31–32). The hour is “now” (17:1). As Jesus crosses the threshold into his “hour,” he looks back across his life and ministry to the

\(^{61}\) This passage may well have been added to an original prayer. The use of “Jesus Christ” on the lips of Jesus is strange (for its only other use, see 1:17), and the expression “the only true God” is found only here. But why was it added? See Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 503. No doubt a traditional “summary,” v. 3 is inserted here to make an important point. See Thüsing, *Herrlichkeit und Einheit*, 40–41.


people at table and claims to have brought to completion the task given by the Father (see 4:34).\(^{64}\) But if the hour has come, and its completion will not be achieved until Jesus passes through it, how can he claim to have perfected the task given to him by the Father (see v. 4)?

As he concludes the first part of his prayer, Jesus answers this question by looking to the fragile group of disciples sharing his table (vv. 6–8). There is an intimate link between Jesus’ words in verses 3–5 and verses 6–8. Jesus has said that eternal life flows from the knowledge of God, the result of accepting the revelation that takes place in Jesus Christ (v. 3). Jesus has made God known, and his revealing ministry is at an end. He is about to return to the glory he had with the Father before the world was made (vv. 4–5).

Nevertheless, Jesus is able to indicate to the Father the group around him, his disciples, given to him by the Father from “the world.” A theme at the center of the discourse (see 15:12–17, esp. vv. 14–16) returns as the disciples at the table hear Jesus’ words to the Father, recalling that they are disciples of Jesus because of the initiative of God. God “gave” them to Jesus; they are part of God’s larger “gift” of all things to Jesus (v. 7), and Jesus, the Son of the Father, has “given them” (v. 8a) the words that the Father “gave” to him (v. 8a). Jesus’ positive assessment of his disciples cannot be regarded as the result of their achievements.\(^{65}\) Everything is the result of God’s gracious “giving.”

Jesus has made known the name of God to them (v. 6). Using the past tense, he looks back and sums up his ministry (see v. 4). To reveal “the name” of God means to make known all that can be known of the reality of God. “The name stands for God’s being and nature, his holiness, ‘justice’ and love.”\(^{66}\) Jesus has completed the task given to him by the Father because these people have kept this word. Made clean by the word of Jesus (see 13:10; 15:3), abiding in Jesus and in God, as Jesus abides in God (see 15:9–10), the disciples know that everything that Jesus has passed on to them is from God (17:7; cf. 15:15). “Gifted” in a remarkable way, they have now (νῦν) reached a greater maturity of faith and knowledge. Jesus describes the disciples in

\(^{64}\) However much the later experience and thought of the Johannine community may be present in the prayer, its place in the narrative, before the death and resurrection of Jesus, must be kept in mind, as Jesus looks both backward and forward. In his response to Käsemann, Beda Rigaux, “Les destinataires du IVe Évangile à la lumière de Jean 17,” RTL 1 (1970): 299n32, points out that it is not true to claim that “the whole of this prayer is written sub specie aeternitatis.” See also Lagrange, Évangile selon Saint Jean, 437, and especially Jean Zumstein, “Die verklärte Vergangenheit,” 207–17.


\(^{66}\) Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:175.
terms that make them models of the Johannine believer: they have received from Jesus the revelation of God that comes to Jesus from God. They have accepted that Jesus is the Sent One of the Father (17:8).

The disciples’ knowledge and belief reflect Jesus’ accomplishment of the task that his Father gave him: he has made God known to them (see vv. 3–4). How they will respond to the challenges that lie ahead of them is not yet known, but the future success or failure of the disciples of Jesus takes nothing away from Jesus’ claim: “I have glorified you on earth, having brought to completion the task which you gave me to do” (17:4). 67

Jesus’ Prayer for the Future of Fragile Disciples (17:9–19)

Jesus turns away from petitions for himself (see vv. 1, 5) to pray for the disciples present with him (v. 9). Jesus prays not for the world (see 14:30; 15:18–19, 21; 16:3) 68 but for those whom the Father has given to him (see 17:6–8). In the closing stages of the discourse, Jesus told his disciples that everything belonging to Father had been given to the Son (see 16:15). The disciples are part of this gift of the Father to the Son (v. 10a). But the disciples have their own responsibility: Jesus is glorified in them (v. 10b). They are no longer “servants/slaves”; they are “friends” of Jesus (15:14–15). They will demonstrate their new status by doing what Jesus has commanded (15:14). Jesus has commanded that they love one another as he has loved them (see 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). The repetition in the life of the disciples of the loving self-gift of Jesus will reveal that they are disciples of Jesus (see 13:15, 35; 15:12). Initiating an argument that will gather momentum through the prayer, Jesus’ words to the Father inform the reader and listener that as his own gift of self in love glorifies the Father, so the ongoing presence of the same quality of love among his disciples glorifies Jesus (17:10b).

At the threshold of “the hour,” Jesus tells the Father he is no longer in the world (v. 11a). In strictly physical terms, Jesus is at table with his disciples and thus still part of the human story. However, his public revelation of God through word and deed came to a close as he “hid himself from


them [i.e., “the crowd”]” (12:36b). The inevitable end of Jesus’ story, “the hour” (12:23, 31–32; 13:1; 17:1)—the lifting up on the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32), the gathering of the whole world (10:16; 11:52; 12:11, 19, 32), which will also be the moment when he reveals the glory of God and begins his own glorification (11:4; 12:23; 13:31–32; 17:1, 5)—still lies ahead. There will be an in-between time not reported in the narrative of the Gospel but prepared, especially in the instructions of 14:1–16:33. The disciples are in the world and will remain in the world (v. 11a), but Jesus is returning to the Father (v. 11). He has one further task; he is to love his own εἰς τέλος (13:1).

Throughout the prayer, Jesus addresses God as “Father,” but now he prays to his holy Father (v. 11b: πάτερ ἅγιε). These two words, “holy” and “Father,” are the determining elements of the remaining subsections of this central section of the prayer (vv. 11–16 [father]; vv. 17–19 [holy]). Jesus takes for granted the fragility of the disciples, already exposed in 13:1–38. He asks that his Father be a genuine “father” to them. Jesus has done so much for them and has not lost one of them. He asks that the Father grant them oneness with God, full of the joy of Jesus, “in the world” but not “of the world” in his absence (17:11b–16).

Disciples of Jesus cannot simply bask in the protecting care of God as their father (vv. 11b–16). To continue Jesus’ mission of making God known, they must be made holy by a holy God (vv. 17, 19) while remaining in the world. Jesus now prays that they be made holy by aggressively identifying with the design of God. Jesus prays that they might live holy lives, corresponding


70. On 17:11–16, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 112–17. Jesus does not remove the disciples from the world. They do not belong to some secret enclave but must make Jesus’ revelation of God’s love known in a hostile world. For this they need God to be “father” to them.

71. I am rendering the Greek verb ἁγιάζω as “make holy,” rather than “consecrate,” in the sense of setting apart for sacred things. This has become an important issue in Catholic scholarship. The latter translation is closely associated with the tradition, which has its beginning at least as early as Cyril of Alexandria (In Joannis Evangelium 11.8; PG 74:543) and was made popular in the sixteenth century by David Chytraeus (1530–1600), that this prayer was priestly, associating the disciples with Jesus’ self-oblation. Some—for example, Hoskyns, Fourth Gospel,
to the holiness of God, revealed to them in and through Jesus. 72 As Jesus’ association with the Father has determined his life, the disciples’ association with Jesus, who has revealed the truth to them, determines theirs. The disciples are to become the sent ones of the Sent One. They are to make God known in the world. 73 As Jesus made God known in and through his mission as the Sent One of a holy God, so must the disciples continue to make the same God known as the sent ones of Jesus (v. 18b). The revelation of a holy God calls for a holy sent one. It is a mission to make God known (v. 18) that determines the demand for holiness (vv. 17 and 19).

**To Make God Known (17:20–26)**

Jesus prays not only for the disciples with him at the supper but also for those who will be fruit of the missionary activity of his sanctified disciples: “for those who believe in me through their word” (v. 20). The situation at table must not be lost from view. While the Gospel has not reported that the


72 See da la Potterie, *La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, 2:747–58, for a full discussion of “in the truth” (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), concluding that it serves as place of holiness, a means for sanctification, closely related to “in your name” (ἐν τῷ ὄνομαί σου) of v. 11b.

73. The mission of the disciples “into the world” (ἐις τὸν κόσμον) must be taken seriously and should not be explained away, as does Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 29–30, as aimed at church order. Nor should it be regarded as an indication that the Johannine community was a sectarian conventicle (Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 524–25). See below, pp. 203–9.
disciples have successfully brought people to faith, the narrative presupposes such believers.74 Jesus prays for those already believing because of the word of the disciples.75 The readers/listeners across the Christian generations read themselves into Jesus words “for those who believe in me through their word.”76

Jesus now prays that all future believers be taken into the oneness between the Father and the Son. Jesus first asks the Father that the many believers be united as one (21a). The juxtaposition of the many (“all”) and the one (“be one”) expresses the point of Jesus’ request. He gives a unique model of unity: as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, so also might it be among believers (v. 21b). As with the unity between the Father and the Son, the unity among believers is not an end in itself, but “so that the world might believe that you have sent me” (v. 21c). Jesus may not be praying for “the world” (v. 9), but he has been sent into the world (see 3:16–17; 17:18), and he sends his disciples into the world (17:18). The missionary chain, however, runs on unendingly, always with the same purpose: that “the world” might believe that Jesus is the Sent One of God.

The prayer pauses in verse 22 as Jesus tells the Father, in an aside heard by the disciples listening to the prayer, that the mutuality between himself and the Father that he passes on to believers is “glory” (v. 22: δόξα). God was made known through the gift of the covenant at Sinai, and has continually been made known throughout Israel’s history in “the glory of God” (kābōd YHWH), especially in and through the law. But the love and oneness existing between the Father and the Son from all time (see 1:1–2; 17:5) have been made visible in and through the gift of the Son (see 1:14; 2:11; 3:16–17; 5:44; 7:18; 8:50–54; 11:4, 40). This too is “glory.” The glory, the love bestowed upon the Son by the Father, is present in the human story in the glory that Jesus has given to the believers. The love that the believers bear for one another reflects the love that exists between the Father and the Son.77 They too will reveal “the glory of God.”

74. See the hint of such activity in 4:35–38. See Moloney, Belief in the Word, 163–68.
    75. Verse 20 is almost universally read as addressing the time of the church. Yet the present participle πιστευόντων could be a hint of the disciples’ mission (see 4:35–38).
    76. I am rejecting a theory of “timelessness” for the interpretation of the prayer, or a reading of the words of Jesus entirely from the point of view of the later Johannine church. For this perspective, see O’Day, “I Have Overcome the World,” 153–66. The Gospel must be read from the perspective of the Johannine church, as from the perspective of every reader and community of readers. Nevertheless, the narrative has its own “time,” which must be respected. See especially Zumstein, “Die verklärte Vergangenheit,” 207–17.
    77. The position taken here, only one of many possible, depends upon the principle that the reader will regard the use of the Greek words δόξα and δοξάζω across the story as having the same basic meaning, linked to the revelation of God.
After this brief pause, describing the uniting love between the Father and the Son and between the Son and the believers as “glory,” the prayer resumes. A chain of relationships continues into verse 23. Jesus now prays for the interrelated mutual indwelling stated in verse 22: that the mutual abiding be realized in a mutual indwelling between Jesus and the believers and between the Father and Jesus (v. 23a; see 15:1–11). The realization of this indwelling will produce a situation in which the Father enables the perfection of oneness among a newer group of believers (v. 23b). Again, however, Jesus does not make intense communion among disciples an end in itself; it exists that God might be made known. Jesus’ loving his own is not for their comfort and encouragement. It inevitably leads to a mission, matching the mission of Jesus: to make God known (v. 23b; cf. vv. 3, 17–19).

Jesus has already asked the Father that he be restored to the glory that was his before the world was made (see 17:5). The tone changes as Jesus expresses a desire that all those whom the Father has given him may be with him “there” (v. 24a). His desire is that the gulf between the union of the Father and the Son and the ambiguous situation of fragile disciples and believers who are in the world but not of the world (see vv. 11, 14–16) be bridged, that all fragility be overcome. Then they will join Jesus in a new “place” (see 14:2–3), to behold the “glory” that Jesus had as a result of the Father’s love from before all time (v. 24). Such a transformation is, for the moment, impossible for the disciples in the story of Jesus. They have seen the “glory” in Jesus’ revealing life and actions (see 2:11; 11:4, 40). They wait for its consummation in the lifting up, the gathering, the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son. They also wait for the return of Jesus, as he has promised them, to take them to the place he has prepared for them (14:1–3). But as the prayer concludes, bringing the narrative closer to Jesus’ death, he articulates transcendent hope. His words to the Father open the mind and heart of the reader to the possibility of “a world” that lies beyond “this world”: the vision of the glory of Jesus that existed, as the result of the Father’s love for the Son, “before the foundation of the world” (v. 24b).

Jesus addresses God as “righteous Father” (v. 25). As a holy God is asked to make holy all those to whom he is Father (vv. 17–19), so also a just God will act justly. Disciples, in the world but not of the world, have come to know the one true God in and through their belief in Jesus. The sound of a

78. The difficulties and challenges of the in-between time, so much a part of 14:1–16:33, will be finally overcome.
single theme tolls across all three sections of the prayer: to make God known (see vv. 3, 6, 8, 11, 18–21, 23, 26). The culmination of Jesus’ revelation of the love of God lies ahead (see 13:1, 19, 34–35; 15:12–13), but “the hour has come” (12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

Jesus’ first request in this closing passage (v. 24) offers hope to all believers. It transcends their life in the world and their mission to the world: that they might behold the glory that the Son possessed before the foundation of the world. His closing prayer (v. 26bc) missions the disciples for the world, united by the same love that unites the Father and the Son, making God known in loving self-gift, as Jesus has made known the name of his Father. Between these requests Jesus again states that he has made God known (vv. 25–26a). The first two sections of the prayer (vv. 1–8; vv. 9–19) closed with a subsection bridging the current section with the next (vv. 6–8; vv. 17–19). The prayer closes (vv. 20–26) with words that end Jesus’ prayer to his Father (vv. 24–26), pointing the reader/listener into the remaining moments of the story of Jesus (see vv. 25–26a), into the future story of Jesus’ disciples (v. 26b), and into a place that transcends the story time of both Jesus and his followers, beyond the in-between time, contemplating the glory given to the Son by the Father before the world was made (v. 24; cf. 14:2–3).79

Concluding Reflection on 17:1–26

One theme dominates 17:1–26: the mission to make God known.80 Jesus prays for himself, now that he has made God known (vv. 1–8). He prays to his holy Father for his fragile disciples so that, in the midst of a hostile world, cared for and made holy, they might make God known (vv. 9–19). He also prays that all who believe in Jesus as the Sent One of God might make God known (vv. 20–26), until such time as they are with Jesus in the place he has prepared for them (see 14:2–3), beholding the glory that was his before the foundation of the world (17:24). This is eternal life, that they know God,

79. For a comprehensive study of the “glory” that emerges from the mutual love of the Father and the Son and the sharing of Jesus’ disciples in this glory, see Chibici-Revneanu, Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten, 299–314.

which they can now do through the revelation that has taken place in and through Jesus Christ, whom God has sent (see v. 3).

Conclusion

A reading of the events and words that took place at a table the night before Jesus was “lifted up” has come full circle. The evening began with the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread, even to Judas (13:26). Jesus makes God known in the perfect love that he shows for his fragile disciples. In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognized as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by the love they have for one another (13:1–38). At the center of the discourse of 14:1–16:33 the reader hears the voice of Jesus, commanding that the disciples of Jesus are to love as he has loved, as a consequence of all that he has done for them (15:12–17). A prayer of departure instructs the reader that Jesus makes God known in the perfect love and unfailing care that he shows for his fragile disciples, even Judas (see 17:11–12). In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified, and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognized as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by the love they have for one another (17:1–26).

The account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples encourages the reader to look further into the story for the resolution of the many questions that flow from this insistence that Jesus’ loving is the revelation of God. In short, the reader must read on to discover how this happens in the life (and death) of Jesus. But Jesus’ loving actions (13:1–38), teaching (15:12–17), and praying (17:1–26) point beyond the boundaries of the Jesus story.81 The reader in the narrative is instructed that Jesus has made God known in a consummate act of love. But only the reader and hearer of the narrative can answer the question posed at the structural heart of the story of Jesus’ last encounter with his disciples (15:12–17). Are his disciples still making God known by fruitfully loving one another, proclaiming that they are no longer servants (15:12–17)? This should be the case, as Jesus has made God known to them in his incomprehensible love for them. He has asked that they be protected and made holy, and that they, and all who hear of God through their word, might live a oneness of love that reveals that Jesus is the Sent One of God (13:1–38; 17:1–26).

There is a sense in which the Johannine story is driven by its ending. It has long been said of the Gospel of Mark that it is a passion story with a long introduction. 1 Something similar could be said about the Fourth Gospel, but the way that “long introduction” functions in the Johannine narrative is very different from anything else in the New Testament. From the prologue’s first mention of the light shining in the darkness, the inability of the darkness to overcome it (John 1:5), and the further indication that the Logos came to his own home, but the people there did not receive him (1:11), the cross looms as an essential part of the story. 2 But the forward-looking thrust of the narrative is not marked by ominous indications of a

2. See the important essay of Schnelle, “Cross and Resurrection,” 127–51, especially pp. 133–45. All original, and subsequent, readers/hearers of the Gospel of John know that Jesus’ life ended in death on a cross. However, to the best of our knowledge, they had not heard the story of the cross told in this way in other Jesus traditions. See Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 43: “There can be no doubt that while the evangelist writes a Gospel about Jesus of Nazareth, he does so from the perspective of after the cross, resurrection, and exaltation.”

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forthcoming suffering and death, vindicated subsequently by resurrection, as in Mark (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34).

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks of the need (δεῖ [“must”]) for the future “lifting up/exaltation” of the Son of Man (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33), the coming of “the hour” of Jesus (2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1), when everyone will be “gathered” (10:16; 11:50–52; 12:32–33), the glory of God will become manifest, and the Son of God will be glorified (11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:4). “Framing” this steady presentation of the end of Jesus’ story is Jesus’ insistence at the beginning of the story that his mission is to bring to perfection the task given him by the Father (4:34) and his statement at the end that he has accomplished that task (17:4). All of these themes are also “framed” by Jesus’ claims that he was sent by the Father because God loved the world so much (3:16–17) and that he has made known God’s saving love and thus brought eternal life to all who believe in him (17:2–3). The Johannine story of Jesus’ death and resurrection tells of the accomplishment of all that he has promised. The focus on the “accomplishment” of Jesus’ task (19:30) is intensely christological. In the passion story Jesus brings to a perfect end all that he was sent by his Father to do. However, that is not the end of the Johannine development of the love theme. In his death Jesus consummates his task to make God known by making love known, but during the story he has also instructed the disciples to love as he has loved (13:15, 34–35; 15:12–17; 17:20–26). The response of Jesus’ disciples remains unresolved and reaches outside the limitations of the Johannine story, as it is directed not only to Jesus’ immediate disciples (13:15, 34–35; 15:12, 17) but also to all subsequent believers (17:20–26). The theme of “gathering,” so closely linked with Jesus’ forthcoming death in 10:16, 11:50–52, and 12:24, is essential to an ongoing Johannine community that has its beginnings at the cross and is further commissioned in the Johannine accounts of the resurrection (20:1–29; 21:1–25).

3. As Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 432, puts it: “For we are, of course, intended to understand the Passion-narrative in the light of all that has been said in earlier parts of the Gospel, directly or indirectly, about the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection.”

4. This chapter will focus upon the Passion Narrative (John 18:1–19:42). The following chapter (chap. 6) will consider the role of the “hour” of Jesus in directing the disciples of Jesus into the world that lies outside the temporal and geographical limitations of the narrative, responding to his command to love (13:34–35; 15:12–17; 17:20–26). In this I differ from Koester, Word of Life, 108–32, and elsewhere. Like many contemporary commentators (Udo Schnelle, Jean Zumstein, and Nicole Chibici-Revneanu), Koester links the cross with the resurrection, including 21:1–25. Under the influence of Wilhelm Thüsing, in my reading of the Johannine story 18:1–19:42, 20:1–31, and 21:1–25 play different, even though complementary, narrative and theological roles. On the “two-stage” glorification of Jesus, see the summary in Thüsing,
The Johannine Passion Story

The literary structure of the Johannine passion story presented earlier in this study will be taken for granted in what follows, which attempts to identify the theological uniqueness of that narrative. With that in place we can locate the climax of the themes of the lifting up of the Son of Man, the hour of Jesus, the gathering, and the glory of God and the glorification of Jesus, which we traced across the story as a whole in chapter 3.

The single most obvious feature of the Johannine story of Jesus’ passion and death is the careful and impressive elimination of descriptions of insult and excruciating suffering from the passion tradition. This tendency of the Johannine passion story is driven by its Christology. John 18:1–19:42 also systematically presents Jesus as king, “lifted up” on the throne of the cross in a consummate revelation of love in self-gift, the perfection of all that he has been sent to achieve. However, this event is not only christological. It is the foundational moment of a “new family” to which he bestows the gifts
of the Spirit (19:30) and baptism and Eucharist, symbolized by the water and blood that flow from his pierced side (vv. 31–37).

This does not detract from the fact that in John 18:1–19:42 Jesus is arrested, interrogated by both Jewish and Roman authorities, crucified unto death, and buried. The traditional story remains at the heart of its Johannine version, an indication that the earliest Christian response to the scandal of the crucifixion of the Messiah was to tell the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection as its longest coherent narrative. Early Christianity could not sidestep the historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they now regarded as their Messiah, and even the Son of God, had been done to death by crucifixion. But each Gospel tells that story with its own slant in order to make sense of the dramatic and ignominious ending to Jesus’ life. In John it has been boldly reimagined. The story, and the discourse contained within that story, can now be sketched so that the remainder of this chapter can focus upon the culmination of Jesus’ being “lifted up” on the cross, his “hour,” the “gathering,” and the revelation of the glory of God.

Jesus’ so-called arrest in a garden (18:1–11) is not an arrest. Jesus is in total command of the situation, laying his opponents low with his self-revelation (v. 5: “I am he” [ἐγώ εἰμι]) and insisting that his purpose to found a community on his disciples not be thwarted (vv. 5–8). There is no moment of deep personal anxiety (see, in contrast, Mark 14:43–50; Matt. 26:47–56; Luke 22:47–53), and the episode with the sword is transformed; Jesus must drink the cup that the Father has given him (v. 11). He is the master of the situation. In order to keep the story moving, the narrator tells of Jesus being taken and led to Annas in verses 12–13, while Peter follows and waits.

8. For a good summary of the dark side of the story, see Koester, Word of Life, 70–72.


10. An appreciation of the way a narrative works calls for this distinction. “Story” refers to the events as they are related and the order in which they are related. The story contains the “facts” told by the narrator. “Discourse” refers to the meaning that a storyteller wishes to communicate to a reader or listener by telling a “story” in a certain way. “Story” means the events narrated; “discourse” means what the author wants to communicate. See Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

11. See Coloe, God Dwells with Us, 185: “Jesus’ sovereignty during the scene of his ‘arrest’ dramatizes the powerlessness of the world’s ruler.” The naming of the high priest’s servant as Malchus is uniquely Johannine and leads into the undeniable accusation against Peter in v. 26 made by one of Malchus’ kinsmen.
“outside.” Jesus is not “tried” by Annas in verses 19–24. He is questioned about his disciples and his teaching (v. 19). He reduces his opponents to a frustrated slap in verse 22 after he has pointed out that his teaching is well known, but that his time of making it known is over (see 12:36b). The slap is one of two found in the story (see also 19:3); both take place as the truth has been proclaimed, but rejected by this gesture. The teaching of Jesus has now been entrusted to those who have heard him (18:21). As Jesus again hints at the future existence of a community that will be the bearers of his word, one of its leading members, Peter, is denying Jesus (vv. 17, 25: “I am not he [οὐκ εἰμί”), as Jesus said he would, before the cock crowed (vv. 15–18, 25–27; see 13:38). Jesus has entrusted his word to a community of fragile disciples (see also 13:18–20). A theology of a fragile church bearing the word of Jesus is emerging. There is no violent rejection of Jesus’ status nor a condemnation to death (see, by way of contrast, Mark 14:61–64; Matt. 26:63–66; Luke 22:67–71).

The trial before Pilate lies at the heart of the passion story, preceded by an episode in a garden (18:1–11) and Jesus’ revelation (vv. 12–27). After the introduction (v. 28), Pilate presents Jesus to “the Jews” outside (18:29–32; 38b–40; 19:4–7, 12) as their innocent king and discusses Jesus, his kingship, and his origins inside (18:33–38a; 19:8–11), after which he hands Jesus over to be crucified (19:16a). Only one episode in this long report is not introduced by a verb indicating a change of place from outside to inside or vice versa: 19:1–3. It lies at the very center of the narrative, the fifth of nine scenes. Only in this scene is Jesus treated violently: he is scourged, crowned with thorns,

12. On this, see Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 21–29. “The Jews” have already tried him during his public ministry. They have come to their verdict (11:47–53), and Jesus has accepted their sentence of death (12:27–33).

13. See de la Potterie, Hour of Jesus, 72–73. The English translations of v. 23 that render Jesus’ response to the attendant “If I have spoken wrongly [κακῶς . . . but if I have spoken rightly [καλῶς]” miss the play on the Greek κακῶς λαλεῖν and καλῶς λαλεῖν. It is a question not of correct speech but of blasphemy. If he has blasphemed, a slap is not the adequate response, as witnesses must be brought. If he has spoken the truth, why is it rejected? See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 488–89; de la Potterie, Hour of Jesus, 72–74; Brown, Death of the Messiah, 1:413.


15. 18:28–19:16a as an ironic “trial in reverse,” see Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 123–38. Against the background of Second Isaiah, Lincoln concludes: “He can be seen as confuting every tongue that rises against him in judgment (cf. Isa. 54:17) and even, though on trial, as the judge who executes justice (cf. Isa. 42:1, 2, 4)” (p. 138).
and struck. But these gestures are symbolic and mean more than might be assumed in a first reading of the passage. The soldiers scourge Jesus and crown him with thorns and dress him with a purple robe (vv. 1–2). Ironically, the suffering Jesus is dressed as a king, and the soldiers proclaim the truth as they say: “Hail, the king of the Jews!” As in 18:22, the slap indicates a rejection of the truth that they have just proclaimed: Jesus is the suffering king, crowned and dressed as such. There is no mention of his being “stripped” of his clothing, no one kneels before him, mocks him, spits on him, strikes his head with a rod. Most important, in contrast to Mark and Matthew, the royal signs of the crown and the purple robe are not taken from Jesus at the end of the mockery (see Mark 15:16–20; Matt. 27:27–31 for this contrasting presentation). Jesus goes to the cross dressed and crowned as a king. He suffers, as he must in the story of the crucifixion, but John mutes and totally subordinates the suffering to his christological and theological agenda. Jesus is innocent but must be “lifted up” (18:29–32). He is born to be king (vv. 33–38a), an innocent king (38b–40), crowned and dressed as king (19:1–3), “the man” whom “the Jews” insist must be “lifted up” in crucifixion, the Son of God (vv. 4–7), authorized and empowered by heaven (vv. 8–11), the rejected king, as “the Jews” now have no king but Caesar (vv. 12–15). The king is handed over to be lifted up (v. 16a).

The description of the crucifixion, understandably, is heavy with significance. The physical “lifting up” is briefly described (v. 18). But once Jesus is enthroned, he is universally proclaimed as a king, a claim rejected by “the Jews” (vv. 19–21). The unity of his precious inner garment, which cannot be torn apart by the attending soldiers (23–25), is a symbol of the community that he will found in the central scene as he consigns mother to disciple and disciple to mother, and “because of that hour” they become one family (vv. 25–27). His death marks his end, the perfection of the Scriptures, and the final consummation of the task that the Father had given him, and in death he pours down his spirit upon his “new family” (vv. 28–30). From his side flow the waters of baptism and the blood


17. See Jean Zumstein, “Der Prozess Jesu vor Pilatus: Ein Beispiel johanneischer Eschatologie,” in Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannevangelium, 2nd ed., ATANT 84 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004), 241–52. Zumstein rightly shows that John uses this central scene in the Passion Narrative to tell ironically of the judgment of the world and its powers by the mocked king who is, in fact, the eschatological king.
of Eucharist, which will nourish the newly founded community. In his death they will gaze upon the pierced one, their perfect paschal sacrifice, to behold Jesus’ final demonstration of his words in 15:13: “No one has greater love than this” (vv. 31–37 NRSV).

There is no cry of dereliction, no mocking, no ironic request that he come down from the cross, no questioning of his ability to save himself as he saved others, no questioning of his trust in God, no abuse from the crucified criminals, no accompanying apocalyptic signs (earthquakes, darkening of the day, the tearing of the curtain, the rising from the grave of the saints), no recognition that a great wrong has been done (for this contrasting portrait, see Mark 15:22–32; Matt. 27:33–44; Luke 23:33–43 [the crucifixion]; Mark 15:33–41; Matt. 27:45–56; Luke 23:44–49 [the death of Jesus and subsequent events]). If the events that preceded the trial before Pilate (18:12–27: Peter and Jesus’ interrogation by Annas) were concerned with the church, however fragile, the events that immediately follow the Roman trial (19:16b–37: Jesus’ crucifixion and death) return to a Johannine theology of the church. As Raymond Brown has correctly remarked, “The Johannine crucifixion scene is, in a certain way, less concerned with the fate of Jesus than with the significance of that fate for his followers.”

Jesus’ burial in a garden follows immediately. Unlike the Synoptic tradition (see Mark 15:42–47; Matt. 27:57–61; Luke 23:50–56), John reports that two former “secret disciples,” Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, bravely request Jesus’ body. Jesus has been “lifted up” and draws everyone to himself, as these earlier fear-ridden men come out of the darkness into the light and anoint Jesus with a hundred pounds of a mixture of precious myrrh and aloes. The church moves into action as it anoints the body of Jesus in a way that parallels a royal burial and places it in a new tomb. It is the Jewish day of Preparation, and the Christian reader waits expectantly, knowing that this burial is not the end of Jesus’ story (19:38–42).


19. A long patristic tradition has linked the two “garden scenes” in 18:1–11 and 19:38–42 with paradise and the story of the fall in Gen. 3:1–23. What was lost in a garden is restored in a garden. See especially Frédéric Manns, L’Évangile de Jean, 401–29, and Mary L. Coloe, “Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John,” Pacifica 24 (2011): 1–12. There may be more to this tradition than most scholarly interpretation will allow. Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 486, points to the two uses of “garden” (18:1; 19:41) and looks forward into Mary Magdalene’s identification of Jesus as the “gardener” (20:15).
The Lifting Up of the Son of Man

The expression “the Son of Man” is not found in 18:1–19:42, nor is the double-meaning expression “to lift up.” There is a hint of the former description of Jesus, as we shall see, but there is no need for the future promise of a physical lifting up that is also Jesus’ exaltation. That promise, made steadily across the story of Jesus’ ministry (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33), is fulfilled in the Passion Narrative itself. According to the Johannine reading of the passion of Jesus, that event is simultaneously a lifting up from the earth on a cross and a moment of exaltation. The brief overview of the structure and message of 18:1–19:42 offered above has shown that such is the case. John does not sidestep the historical fact that Jesus was crucified. However, the crucifixion takes place because Jesus, in command of the situation from the beginning of the process, in a garden (18:1–11), entrusts his word to a fragile church (18:12–27); is proclaimed, crowned, and dressed as king (18:28–19:16a); founds and nourishes the church from his royal throne on the cross (19:16b–37); and is buried as a king, in a garden (19:38–42). The crucifixion of Jesus is the most significant moment in his mission to make God known (1:18; 17:3), to bring to perfection the task given him by the Father (4:34; 17:4).

There is, however, one ironic moment where the Passion Narrative recalls the promise of the lifting up of the Son of Man, despite the lack of explicit linguistic connections with “lifting up” and “the Son of Man.” 20 Recall the background. In 3:14 Jesus announced that it was necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up. In 8:28 he told “the Jews” that they would lift up the Son of Man, and that he would then be revealed as the presence of the divine among them (“then you will know that I am he”). In a context of rejection, as plans to execute Jesus are already in place (see 11:50, 57; 12:10), in 12:32–33 Jesus utters his final statement on the need for the Son of Man to be lifted up on a cross. “The Jews” recognize that he is talking about his forthcoming death (v. 34), and thus question how he can claim to be “the Son of Man.” 21 Across the Son of Man sayings there is a link between what

20. This is an example of the weakness of some biblical interpretation that cannot draw theological conclusions unless there are obvious linguistic/philological parallels within the text. They are important, and I have regularly drawn attention to them. But the interpreter must not sacrifice thematic links that are theological when there are no philological links. What follows is an example of this process, even though there may be some linguistic links between “man” and “Son of Man.”

“the Jews” will do to Jesus by means of crucifixion and his being lifted up and exalted. This is most clearly stated by Jesus in 8:28, addressing “the Jews” during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.”

The moment in the Passion Narrative when “the Jews” decide to lift up Jesus on a cross appears in 19:6. Within the carefully articulated account of the trial before Pilate, immediately after Jesus’ royal coronation and investiture (19:1–3), Pilate presents Jesus to “the Jews” with the puzzling words: “Behold the man” (v. 5). When the chief priests and the officers see him they cry out, “Crucify him, crucify him” (v. 6). Although there is a hint that they are seeking a Roman crucifixion by bringing Jesus to Pilate in 18:29–31, it is not explicitly stated. The narrator keeps the reader/listener informed of their ultimate intentions by explaining why “the Jews” would not judge him according to their own law, as requested by Pilate. They want him to be sentenced to death by a Roman authority. An explanatory note follows: “This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die [σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ ἤμελλεν ἀποθνῄσκειν]” (v. 32). These words from the narrator refer, verbatim, to Jesus’ words and their explanation in 12:32–33: “‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.’ He said this to show by what death he was to die [σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ ἤμελλεν ἀποθνῄσκειν].” Across 12:23, 32–34, Jesus has clearly stated the link between the glorification (v. 23), the crucifixion/exaltation (v. 32), and the death (v. 33) of the Son of Man (vv. 23, 34). Not until 19:6, however, do “the Jews” explicitly demand, “Crucify him.” They ask that he be “lifted up.”22 Ironically, they have done to him just what he foretold they would do.

Pilate’s presenting Jesus to them in 19:5 (“Behold the man”) leads them to demand that Jesus be crucified/lifted up from the earth (v. 6), the fulfillment of 8:28: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.” Although the expression “the Son of Man” does not appear in the Passion Narrative, the crucifixion is the result of the demand of “the Jews” that “the man” be crucified. The expression “the man” to describe Jesus in 19:5 is the culmination of the association of “the Son of Man” with the lifting up/exaltation of Jesus that has pointed forward to this moment in the story.23 Failure to appreciate the theological and christological nature

22. On the possible literary and historical links between the verbs “to lift up” and “to crucify,” see Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 36–37.
23. For a detailed study suggesting that 19:5 is the culmination of the Johannine use of the expression “the Son of Man,” see Moloney, Johannine Son of Man, 202–7.
of the Johannine Passion Narrative has led many scholars to undervalue the presentation of Jesus as “the man,” reading it in the light of Jesus’ suffering, not a major issue in the Johannine Passion Narrative. They have suggested that Pilate calls Jesus “the man” to excite pity, to goad the crowd into freeing Jesus, to identify a human being after the flogging, or as a way of indicating that he is not a political threat.\(^{24}\) For Rudolf Bultmann the scene represents total humiliation, the ultimate consequence of the Word’s becoming flesh.\(^{25}\) Jesus is king by means of his deepest humiliation.\(^{26}\) It is among human beings that this “man” makes known the love of God by means of his unconditional self-gift,\(^{27}\) or it recalls the moment in 1 Samuel when God points to David as the future ruler with the words, “Here is the man” (1 Sam. 9:17).\(^ {28}\)

A text must receive its meaning from its context. At the center of Jesus’ trial before Pilate he was ironically crowned and dressed as a king, and the soldiers hailed him as “the king of the Jews” (19:1–3). In the scene immediately prior to this coronation, Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd as an innocent man, “the king of the Jews” (18:38b–39). Immediately following the coronation Jesus is again presented to “the Jews.” But he is not “led out.” Jesus “came out” (ἐξῆλθεν). He is not “crowned and dressed in the purple robe” but is “bearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe” (v. 5a). Nothing is done to Jesus. The Greek verb used to speak of Jesus “bearing” the insignia of a king (φορέω) indicates a habitual and long-term wearing of clothes or insignia, often associated with a sense of pomp.\(^ {29}\) Matching the title of honor ironically given to Jesus in the scene before the coronation, investiture, and royal proclamation of Jesus by the soldiers (19:1–3), Pilate again presents Jesus to “the Jews” with a title of honor. The context of the words of Pilate in the scene that immediately follows the royal investiture and proclamation (19:4–8) demands that he presents Jesus with a title of honor: “Behold the (the Son of) Man” (v. 5c). At the level of the story this is a moment of suffering, but at the level of the Johannine discourse it is the culmination of Jesus’ being lifted up as the Son of Man.\(^ {30}\)

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\(^{26}\) Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu*, 30.


\(^{28}\) Lincoln, *Gospel according to Saint John*, 466.

\(^{29}\) BDAG, 1064, s.v. φορέω; LSJ, 1950–51, s.v. φορέω.

Throughout, the Gospel has directed the reader to look forward. In 8:28 Jesus told “the Jews” that sometime in the future they would lift up the Son of Man in crucifixion. In 12:23 Jesus announced: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” In 13:31, in his final explicit use of the expression, Jesus proclaims: “Now is the Son of Man glorified.” Finally, following the ironic coronation, investiture, and royal proclamation of the soldiers (19:1–3), and repeating his earlier presentation of Jesus to “the Jews” as the innocent king of the Jews, it is Pilate who announces: “Here he is: the Son of Man” (v. 5). The absurd glorification through humiliation has reached its high point.31

The Hour of Jesus

The expression “the hour” appears only twice in the Passion Narrative. The first of these is without theological significance, as it indicates the hour of the day when Pilate, in his final ironic proclamation of the truth, presents Jesus to “the Jews” as their king only to be told that he must go ahead with crucifixion, as now they have only one king: Caesar. “Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about the sixth hour” (19:14 NRSV).32 The other appearance of the expression is widely understood in the same way: an expression of a point of time. It appears at 19:27, when the narrator informs the reader, after Jesus’ gift of the mother of Jesus to the Beloved Disciple, and vice versa, “From that hour the disciple took her to his own

31 Throughout the Gospels it is only Jesus who refers to himself as “the Son of Man” (12:34 is no exception, as “the Jews” respond to Jesus). For some, this is a good reason to reject any connection with “the Son of Man” (see Schnelle, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 277). On the other hand, it may be a reason why the expression is not used in full by Pilate. But behind the term “the man” used by Pilate might lie the Hebrew ben ‘ādām or the Aramaic bar nāshā’, used ambiguously in the Semitic languages to refer to “the man” or “the son of man.” The same linguistic tradition is found in the Arabic bani Ādam.

32 There may not be theological significance to the use of “hour” in 19:14, but its association with the slaying of the Passover lamb has long been seen as a crucial link between Jesus and the Lamb of God (1:29, 36). Among many, see the excellent indications of Coloe, God Dwells with Us, 190–94.
home.” It may be that this use of “hour” merely indicates that the Beloved Disciple obeyed the command of the crucified Jesus and immediately did what he had been told, taking the mother of Jesus to his home from that moment. However, as with everything in this subtle and rich narrative, the meaning of 19:25–27 must be determined by its context, as well as the obvious meaning of the words used. This is especially the case for words used earlier in the Gospel that point beyond their immediate setting, looking for an eventual resolution.

Following the trial of Jesus by Pilate and his being handed over to “the Jews” for crucifixion (18:28–19:16a), five brief scenes report Jesus’ crucifixion. He is summarily crucified, but Pilate continues to insist, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, that this man is king of the Jews. The chief priests reject this claim, but Pilate insists it must remain (19:16b–22). At the cross, the soldiers decide not to tear apart Jesus’ seamless garment (vv. 23–24).\textsuperscript{33} The third (of five)—and thus central—scene reports Jesus’ gift of mother to son and son to mother (vv. 25–27). Events leading up to Jesus’ death, and his bowing his head and handing down the Spirit, follow (vv. 28–30). The scene at the cross of Jesus closes with the piercing of Jesus’ side, the flow of blood and water, the fulfillment of Scripture, and the promise that they shall gaze upon the one whom they have pierced (vv. 31–37). Jesus’ death is not so much about what happened to him as what that event does for his followers. The episode unfolds:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Verses 16b–22: Jesus publicly proclaimed as king
  \item Verses 23–24: A garment that will not be torn apart
  \item Verses 25–27: Mother given to son and son to mother
  \item Verses 28–30: The death of Jesus
  \item Verses 31–37: Consequences of the death of Jesus
\end{itemize}

At the heart of this crucial moment in the Johannine Passion Narrative one might expect to find the account of Jesus’ death by crucifixion, his long-awaited lifting up/exaltation. But that is not what one finds. The physical “lifting up” is summarily reported at the very beginning of these episodes, in 19:18 (see also v. 23). At the cross, a new community is formed, and the foundation of this community is associated with “the hour” (v. 27).

\textsuperscript{33} There is a tension in the story here. In 19:23–24 the soldiers discuss what they are to do with Jesus’ own clothes. But at no stage in the account has it been reported that the royal insignia of 19:1–3 were taken off him, as in the Synoptic accounts (see Mark 15:20; Matt. 27:31).
Focusing attention on that passage (19:25–27), we must again glance at the previous scene (vv. 23–24) and the one that follows (vv. 28–30). A long patristic tradition regards the seamless garment that is not to be torn apart in verses 23–24 as a symbol of the Christian community, symbolically founded in verses 25–27, which will not be torn apart. It is difficult to be certain on the basis of the stand-alone text. As Robert Kysar has rightly pointed out, clear signals to the right interpretation are missing. The reader must proceed further into the story to discover the garment’s significance within the context of the Johannine Passion Narrative as a whole. The following interpretation of verses 25–27 will endorse the “community” interpretation of verses 23–24. The scene that follows verses 25–27 reports the death of Jesus (vv. 28–30), to which we will return as this chapter closes. Taking for granted the presence of the newly founded community of the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, Jesus is aware that all has been brought to perfection and that he has fulfilled the Scriptures. He thus bows his head and pours down the Spirit on the newly formed community. With that “context” in place, we can turn to verses 25–27, where “the hour” is mentioned for the last time in the Gospel of John.

A group of women are gathered at the foot of the cross: the mother of Jesus, her sister Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (v. 25). After introducing these three women, the narrator mentions only one in the action that follows. The Beloved Disciple, not mentioned in verse 25,
will also appear. Two important characters from the earlier story are now given significant roles by the crucified Jesus. From his throne on the cross (vv. 16b–22), Jesus speaks to the woman who was the first to commit herself unconditionally to the word of Jesus (see 2:3–5), and commands her, in terms that recall 2:4 (“woman”) to see (ἴδε) the Beloved Disciple and to accept him as her son (v. 26). He then turns to the Beloved Disciple, by now clearly indicated for the reader as the model disciple, who has lain close to the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper (see 13:23), and repeats his command. He is to see (ἴδε) the mother of Jesus and accept her as his mother (v. 27a). This “formula” of a command to “see,” and to act as a consequence of that seeing, continues a biblical pattern of a revelatory experience. The pattern of the command and subsequent action is not a trivial domestic arrangement but part of the revelation of the ongoing design of God. Jesus’ words are unquestioningly obeyed. The narrator reports the response of the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple to Jesus’ commands: “And because of [or “from”] that hour the disciple took her into his own home” (v. 27b). The reader/listener is well aware that the cross is “the hour of Jesus” (see 2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Given the tension generated in the narrative by the steady forward-looking use of “the hour” toward a moment that was “not yet” (2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20), is it not likely that the use of the expression “the hour” in this intense moment in the Johannine passion story means something more than a point of time, after which the Beloved Disciple looked after the mother of Jesus? The reader/listener has been told too often that “the hour has come” (12:23; 13:1; 17:1) to read verse 27 in this trivial way. Something more than a domestic arrangement is established at “the hour” of the cross.

The Greek of verse 27b (ἀπ᾿ ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας) is open to two translations, with serious implications for the meaning of the passage. One of these interpretations is almost universally accepted by the translators and commentators; the other rarely appears in discussions of this passage. There is no doubt that the expression has a temporal meaning: “from that particular time.” But

41. See, on the faith of the mother of Jesus in 2:3–5, Moloney, Belief in the Word, 80–85. Robert G. Maccini, Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John, JSNTSup 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 184–206, argues against this. He claims that she is only one of four female witnesses at the cross.


43. Against, for example, Haenchen, John, 2:193: “He has taken over the case of Jesus’ mother.” For a critique of this widespread interpretation, see Brown, Death of the Messiah, 2:1021; Zumstein, “Johannes 19,25–27,” 254–56.
the other possible translation, given above (with the temporal interpretation in parenthesis) catches the theological and dramatic significance of “the hour of Jesus.” It depends upon the interpretation of the Greek preposition ἀπό, followed by the genitive case (as here), as causal: “because of that hour.” The remaining words of verse 27 lead me to suggest that “the hour” in this context must be the “cause” of something. As a result of the lifting up of Jesus on the cross the Beloved Disciple and the mother of Jesus become one in a situation where the Beloved Disciple takes the mother of Jesus “to his own home” (εἰς τὰ ἴδια). The reader/listener recalls the situation described in the prologue, where the Word came “to his own home” (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) but was not received (1:11). Because of “the hour” of Jesus’ being lifted up and exalted on the cross, that rejection has now been reversed.

From the moment of the cross, Jesus has created a new family. His mother, a model of faith, and the disciple whom Jesus loved and held close to himself are one, as the mother accepts the disciple and the disciple accepts the mother. Some have made exaggerated mariological claims for this passage, but the reader/listener has learned that at the cross and because of the cross the lifted-up Son of Man has established a new family. Among the many commentators on the Fourth Gospel, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns has eloquently expressed the point of verses 25–27:

At the time of the Lord’s death a new family is brought into being. If the unity of the Church is symbolised by the seamless robe, the peculiar nature of that unity is indicated here. The Church proceeds from the sacrifice of the Son of God,

44. For this causal meaning of “because of” for ἀπό with the genitive, see BDF, 113, par. 210. See also Zumstein, L’Évangile selon Saint Jean, 251n20.
45. Another important link between 1:11 and 19:27 is the use of the Greek verb λαμβάνω (to accept, to receive, to make welcome). In 1:11 John uses it negatively to indicate that the Logos’s people “did not receive” him (οὐ παρέλαβον), while in 19:27 the narrator uses the same verb positively to speak of the Disciple’s “receiving” the mother of Jesus (ἔλαβεν αὐτήν).
and the union of the Beloved Disciple and the Mother of the Lord prefigures and foreshadows the charity of the *Ecclesia* of God.\(^4\)

At this supreme moment of a revelation of love, a community of love is founded *because of the hour*. The crucified Jesus will do more for this community before and after he pours down the Spirit (v. 30). But this passage also enhances another theme that appeared across the closing stages of the ministry of Jesus. The promise of the “gathering” that has been emerging from the closing scenes of Jesus’ public ministry (see 10:16; 11:49–52; 12:11, 19, 20–24, 32–33) has reached fulfillment as a new family is founded at “the hour” of the cross of the crucified King.\(^4\)

**The Gathering**

The theme of “gathering,” so intensely developed over the final episodes of the public ministry (10:16; 11:50–52; 12:11, 19, 24, 32–33), is resumed and finally resolved in the Passion Narrative.\(^5\) The theme of the future community of Jesus appears as Jesus encounters his enemies in the garden (18:1–11). After leveling them with his self-revelation, “I am he” (v. 5), he insists: “If you seek me, let these people go.’ This was to fulfill the word he had spoken ‘Of those whom you gave me I lost not one’” (vv. 8b–9; see 17:12). The Jewish hearing is designed to have Jesus at its center, telling Annas that his ministry and teaching has come to an end but that his word has been “spoken openly to the world” (18:20). It will now be found among those who have

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4. Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 530. See also the rich textual, contextual, and intertextual study of Zumstein, “Johannes 19,25–27,” 260–75, that supports this ecclesiological reading, the fruit of the reflection of the post-Easter Johannine community. See also idem, *L’Evangelie selon Saint Jean*, 246–51; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 288–89; Lincoln, *Gospel according to Saint John*, 476–77. None of this is appreciated, or even referred to, in Murphy-O’Connor’s assessment of the “motivations” that shaped the canonical form of the Johannine cross scene (“Descent from the Cross,” 550).

5. See Campbell, *Kinship Relations*, 189–91, who argues strongly for this scene as the narrative foundation of the Johannine antisociety over against their opponents who claim to be “brothers” of Jesus: “The Johannines can also claim to a biological connection with Jesus. Their relationship with his mother is intimate. She is one of them!” (p. 191).

50. On this theme, see the extended treatment of Serra, *Contributi dell’Antica Letteratura Giudaica*, 370–429. Typically, for Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 72–73, the gathering is a gnostic gathering of the souls scattered on earth as the goal of world history. He regards the following suggestion that the “gathering” is around the cross (see also Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu*, 23–24, on 12:32) as “absurd” (72n27). I regard Käsemann’s reading as “absurd,” too strongly influenced by elements not in the Johannine text but introduced by Käsemann for reasons that are theological (and perhaps personal) rather than literary.
heard Jesus. They know what he said (v. 21). A community that has heard the word of Jesus now exists. As has been made clear in 13:1–38, they are fragile witnesses, but they are nonetheless the bearers of the word of Jesus (see 13:18–20). In this episode they dramatically reveal their fragility in the scenes surrounding Jesus’ witness to Annas: Peter’s threefold denials of Jesus. But even that is a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise (18:15–18, 25–27; cf. 13:38).

The Roman trial is more christological, focusing upon Jesus as king, but the theme of a gathering around Jesus is resumed in the description of Jesus’ crucifixion. The event of the physical crucifixion is very sparsely narrated in three Greek words (ὅπου αὐτὸν ἐσταύρωσαν: there they crucified him). But this terseness throws into relief the lengthy and complicated description of the fact that he is crucified between two others. The Synoptic tradition reports the likely historical event that Jesus was crucified with criminals, although Luke deals with the event and the roles of the characters in a way different from the parallel in Mark and Matthew (Mark 15:27//Matt. 27:38; Luke 23:32, 39–43). John goes to considerable lengths, even to the point of grammatical clumsiness, to indicate Jesus’ role at the center of the scene: “and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them [καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἄλλους δύο ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν, μέσον δὲ τὸν Ἰησοῦν]” (John 19:18). The gathering has begun. “In his very ‘lifting up’ there is a gathering, and he is at its centre.”

The future gathering of a community returns as a major theme in the rest of the Passion Narrative. The episode of the seamless garment indicates this community’s future unity (19:23–25), its future nourishment in the blood and the water flowing from the side of the pierced Jesus. Because of the event of the cross, they will gaze upon the one they have pierced (v. 37). Enthroned on the cross, Jesus, in giving mother to disciple and disciple to mother (19:25–27), brings the gathering, with significant ecclesial allusions, to its conclusion. “The Church proceeds from the sacrifice of the Son of God, and the union of the Beloved Disciple and the Mother of the Lord prefigures and foreshadows the charity of the


52. The identity of the “they” in v. 37 has been debated. It is nowadays widely accepted that it refers to the Johannine Christians and all who will later believe through them. See Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:292–94; Dauer, Die Passionsgeschichte, 277; Senior, Passion of Jesus, 127–29; Obermann, Die christologische Erfüllung, 320–23; Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 510; and especially Maarten J. J. Menken, Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form, CBET 15 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 167–85, for a complete survey and discussion, coming to this conclusion. On the importance of the Johannine passion account for the post-Easter community, see Frey, “Die ‘theologia crucifixi,’” 231–36.
Ecclesia of God.”53 Only now, when the gathering promised by Jesus during his public ministry has been established in the union of the first of all believers (his mother) and the disciple whom Jesus loved, can Jesus call out in death, “It is finished” (19:30a). Jesus has brought to perfection the task given him by the Father.54 The hour has come, and a new family of God has begun at the foot of the cross. Upon this family he pours down the Spirit (v. 30b) and gifts them with the blood and water that flow from his side (vv. 34–35). The community emerges from the darkness as “secret disciples.” Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, no longer “secret disciples,” courageously accost Roman authority, ask for the body, and bury the deceased Jesus as a king in a new tomb where no one has been laid (vv. 38–41).55 It was the Jewish day of Preparation (v. 42), and the post-Easter readers and listeners wait to discover how this story will report what they know takes place in the days that follow.

The Glory of God and the Glorification of Jesus

The expressions “glory” and “glorification” do not appear in the Johannine Passion Narrative. Parallel to the use of “lift up/exalt” found earlier in the story, the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of Jesus has directed the reader forward, creating a tension in the narrative. This tension is particularly evident toward the end of Jesus’ ministry (11:4, 40; 12:23, 28) and during his final evening with his disciples (13:31–32; 17:1–5, 20–26). Two other moments across the story also generate this narrative tension, and, taken together, they recall a third moment. Two of them explicitly associate Jesus’ death and resurrection with glory and glorification. The first explicit moment occurs within the Feast of Tabernacles when Jesus promises rivers of living water that will flow from his heart. “Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:38–39).56

53. Hoskyns, Fourth Gospel, 530.
55. Koester, Word of Life, 171, correctly remarks: “Nicodemus is drawn out of the shadows to claim Jesus crucified.”
56. This passage has long been the subject of intense debate. Out of whose heart does living water flow? Which Old Testament passage is referred to in v. 38? How is the Greek to be punctuated? For a presentation of these difficulties, and the reasons for claiming that the water
second moment arrives as Jesus enters Jerusalem on a young ass. At this
time the disciples did not understand the meaning of this action, “but when
Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him
and had been done to him” (12:16). These two moments make explicit a
future time, linked to Jesus’ glorification. The future remembering of the
disciples in 12:16 recalls an earlier event in the Gospel when the disciples
could not understand Jesus’ words about the temple of his body: “When
therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he
had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had
spoken” (2:22). Although the words “glory” or “glorified” are not used in
this temple scene, the parallelism between these passages is clear: “They
remembered that this had been written” (12:16); the statement “his disciples
remembered that he had said this” (2:22) establishes the link between “when
Jesus was glorified” (12:16) and “when he was raised from the dead” (2:22).
The “not yet” of Jesus’ glorification in 2:22, 7:39, and 12:16 is “now” (12:23;
13:31–32). The death of Jesus will reveal the glory of God, and Jesus will
be glorified by means of it (11:4; see also 12:28; 13:31–32). It remains to
trace how this happens in the account of that death and its aftermath in

In 19:28–30 the reader/listener is bombarded with the steady repetition
of two verbs that mean “to bring to an end, to perfect, to fulfill, to consum-
mate,” both related to the noun τέλος (cf. 4:34; 5:36; 13:1; 17:4). In 19:28
Jesus knows that everything is now finished (τετέλεσται). In order to bring
Scripture to fulfillment (τελειωθῇ), he received the vinegar (v. 29), and then
said: “It is finished” (τετέλεσται) (v. 30). Jesus’ knowing that he has come
to the end of his life recalls the words of the narrator from 13:1: “When
Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father,
having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them ἐις τέλος.”
To fulfill the Scriptures he cries out in his thirst and is assuaged
with vinegar on “hyssop.”57 He has drunk the cup that the Father gave him
(see 18:11), and there is a possible link with Jesus’ role as the Passover Lamb
in the explicit reference to “hyssop.” In Exodus 12:22–23 Moses instructs
the Israelites to sprinkle their lintels by using a “hyssop.” In

57. See L. Th. Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst in John 19:28–30: Literal or Figurative?,”
the exodus.\(^{58}\) Jesus’ statement “I thirst,” “to fulfill the scripture” (19:28), may echo LXX Psalm 68 (see LXX Ps. 68:22).\(^{59}\) But the climax of all these indications of fulfillment is Jesus’ final cry, “It is finished” (v. 30). This is an exclamation of achievement, almost of triumph. The task given to him by his Father (see 4:34; 5:36; 17:4) has now been consummately concluded.\(^{60}\)

He has now brought everything to its perfect conclusion, and the narrator confirms this by informing the reader/listener of an event that accompanies his death: “He bowed his head and handed down the Spirit \(\pi \alpha \rho \epsilon \delta \omega \kappa \varepsilon \nu \tau \omicron \pi \nu \varepsilon \omega \mu \alpha\)” (19:30). Here we find an intimate association with the theme of glory and glorification. At the Feast of Tabernacles, as Jesus promised living water, the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified (7:39). Now the Spirit is poured down. If the seamless robe was a symbol of the church, and if the gift of mother to son and son to mother foreshadowed the unity of love and faith that is the \(\epsilon \kappa \sigma \varsigma \lambda \alpha \varsigma \varsigma \) of God, then it is upon that tiny church that the Spirit is poured.\(^{61}\)

The words of the narrator are not a euphemism for death. The text does not say that Jesus “gave up his spirit,” though modern translations universally render it this way. Influenced by the Synoptic tradition, translators read the expression as a gentle way of describing death. This is certainly the case with Mark’s “he breathed his last” (Mark 15:37: \(\epsilon \xi \epsilon \pi \nu \varepsilon \sigma \omega \nu \varepsilon \omicron\)), an expression repeated by Luke 23:46. Matthew has the more elegant “he yielded up the spirit” (Matt. 27:50: \(\alpha \phi \varepsilon \kappa \varepsilon \nu \tau \omicron \pi \nu \varepsilon \omega \mu \alpha\)). In all three Synoptic Gospels the “spirit” named is the human life of Jesus that comes to an end. This is not the case in John 19:30. The verb that is used has a primary meaning of “hand over, to give (over), deliver, entrust.”\(^{62}\) Equally important, the Greek text of


\(^{59}\) John has already used Psalm 68 in 2:17 and 15:25. On this possibility, see Andreas Obermann, \(\text{Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannesevangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur johanneischen Hermeneutik anhand der S"chriftzitate} \) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 350–64; Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst,” 302–9.

\(^{60}\) See Dauer, \(\text{Die Passionsgeschichte, 20} \); Brown, \(\text{Death of the Messiah, 2:1077–78} \); Koester, \(\text{Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, 193–96} \); Roland Bergmeier, “\(\text{TETEAEeTAl Joh 19:30,} \)” \(\text{ZNW} 79\) (1988): 282–90; Obermann, \(\text{Die christologische Erfüllung, 362–63} \); Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst,” 489–510. For the case that John regards 19:28–30 as the theological climax of the story, indicating that the Scriptures are fulfilled, see Obermann, \(\text{Die christologische Erfüllung,} \) and, depending upon Obermann, Moloney, “\(\text{Gospel of John as Scripture,” 454–68} \); idem, “\(\text{Gospel of John: The ‘End’ of Scripture,” 356–66} \); Frey, “Die ‘theologia crucifixi,}” 222–27. See also Morgan-Wyne, \(\text{Cross in the Johannine Writings, 98–101.} \)

\(^{61}\) See Thüsing, \(\text{Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 159–65.} \)

\(^{62}\) See BDAG, 761–63, s.v. \(\pi \alpha \rho \delta \delta \omega \mu \alpha \).
John 19:30 does not say “his spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ) but “the Spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμα). Only the definite article is found, and there is no possessive “his.”

Given the promise of the earlier part of the story, including the Paraclete material in 14:1–16:33, the moment of Jesus’ glorification is at hand. In handing down “the Spirit” Jesus brings to perfection the task that the Father gave to him. Jesus hands over, entrusts, the Spirit to his new family (19:30), gathered at the foot of the cross (see vv. 25–27).

The fifth and final scene at the cross has two major elements. In a first moment, the day of Preparation for the Passover necessitates that the crucified be removed from their place of torture. The concern for cultic purity, evident in “the Jews’” unwillingness to enter the praetorium in 18:28, is ironically pursued to the end of the passion story (19:31). The two who had been crucified with Jesus have their legs broken, but this does not happen to Jesus. As he is already dead, his side is pierced with a lance, and blood and water flow from his pierced side (vv. 31–34). Scripture is fulfilled, as the Passover lamb is slain without a bone being broken (see Ps. 34: 20–21; Exod. 12:10, 46; Num. 9:12). Once allowance is made for the fulfillment of the Scriptures concerning the Passover lamb, this simple narrative could

63. Admittedly, the definite article is not found in Matt. 27:50. However, there Matthew is polishing up Mark’s Greek expression, and the verb associated with the spirit is “to yield up.” Thus, Jesus’ life spirit is required by the context.


65. For chiasitic readings of 19:17–37, see Brown, Death of the Messiah, 2:907–9; Stribbe, John, 193–94. Whatever we make of this possibility, Senior, Passion of Jesus, 99–100, rightly insists on “the forward motion of the story.”

66. There may also be a reference to the righteous sufferer (see Ps. 34:20–21). See Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Old Testament Quotation in John 19:36: Sources, Redaction, Background,” in The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck, ed. Frans van Segbroeck, Christopher M.
be no more than a reporting of facts, as everything could have taken place, even the blood and the water flowing from the side of Jesus. But the narrator unexpectedly launches into a personal comment with no parallel in the rest of the Gospel. The narrator insists on personal witness and on the truthfulness of his testimony. It is important that the reader accept this witness—“that you also may believe” (v. 35). The blood and the water must mean something to the reader, and the narrator is anxious that there be no doubt that blood and water flowed from the crucified Jesus. Jesus has entrusted the Spirit to the community; now he entrusts the blood and the water of Eucharist and baptism. The community realizes the promise of Jesus’ words and the narrator’s comment in 7:37–39: “If any one thirsts, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” The “not yet” is “now,” as Spirit (v. 30) and water (v. 34) are given to the community of Jesus’ disciples by the crucified one.

The author presupposes the reader’s knowledge and experience of the “water” of baptism (see 3:5; 13:1–11) and the “blood” of Eucharist (see 6:53–56) and links them with the cross. The Johannine passion account deals both with what happened to Jesus and with how this affects the community of the followers of Jesus. Where is the pierced one in the life of such a community, which looks back across at least two generations?
to the events of Jesus’ death? It is precisely the absence of the physical, historical Jesus to the community that lies behind the narrator’s passionate intervention in verse 35. Despite his physical absence, Jesus is still present in the blood and the water of their community practices. The narrator tells the reader that Jesus has fulfilled the Scriptures in two ways. First, he is the perfect paschal lamb, as not one of his bones was broken (v. 36; see Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). The earlier indications of John the Baptist, that Jesus was the Lamb of God (see 1:29, 36), are fulfilled here. Second, despite his absence, the community of his disciples, of all generations, will be able to rediscover the presence of the absent one and thus gaze upon the one whom they have pierced (v. 37; see Zech. 12:10). God has been revealed in the pierced one, and this revelation of God continues in the flowing water and the spilled blood of baptism and Eucharist. Thus the worshiping community experiences the presence of the absent one. The urgency of this question for a community that no longer sees Jesus has led the narrator to intervene with verse 35: “He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe.”

Conclusion

No verb or noun associated with the theme of “love” appears in John 18:1–19:42, except in the naming of the Beloved Disciple in 19:26. Another expression is used in 19:12 when “the Jews” threaten Pilate that if he releases...
Jesus he can no longer be regarded as “a friend [ὁ φίλος] of Caesar.” But the account of Jesus’ encounter with his enemies in a garden, the Jewish hearing, the Roman trial, the crucifixion, and the burial in a garden is a narrative statement of the truth of Jesus’ words during his final discourse: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13 NRSV).

In his death he brings to completion the task that the Father has given him (4:34; 5:36; 17:4), making known the God who sent him in order to bring eternal life to all who believe in him. God so loved the world that he sent his Son to bring life to the world by making God known (3:16–17; 17:2–3). There are many ways to make known innumerable truths, but the task of Jesus is to make love known. This is not a simple “mission.” He certainly does this through his deeds and words during his ministry, and especially through his actions, the discourse, and the prayer of 13:1–17:26 (13:1–38; 15:12–17; 17:1–26). But they all point forward to “the hour.” The Father loves the world in an unimaginable fashion. The fact that he “handed over” his Son because of that love is evidence enough that this love is beyond all human understanding (3:16). The love of God reaches beyond all right reason and good judgment. This is the love revealed by Jesus in the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread to disciples who are ignorant and who will betray and deny him (13:1–38). At the center of that narrative Jesus announces that a moment lies ahead when the immensity of his love, already shown as he washed their feet and shared the piece of bread with them, will become clear. Something will happen that will reveal that Jesus is the revelation of the divine among them (v. 19: “that I am he”). The same immeasurable love lies at the heart of his prayer for his disciples (17:9–19), for all who will hear of Jesus through their word (vv. 20–23), and for those also whom the Father has given him (vv. 24–26). He asks that the love that unites Jesus and the Father will unite everyone who believes in him so that they may be one with Jesus and his Father, with Jesus in the glory that was his before the world was made (17:4, 20–26).

74. In a society governed by social status and situation, “friend,” when used of a relationship with an influential figure, was a technical term, indicating the importance of patronage in the social hierarchy. See Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 267 (on 19:12), 117–19 (on patronage). For a more Johannine reading of the ironic use of “friend” in this context, see Lee, “Friendship, Love and Abiding,” 62.

75. As we have seen above (pp. 129–32), Jesus speaks to his Father about an unspecified group in 17:24–26, thus leaving open the possibility that everyone is referred to: the disciples present with Jesus (vv. 9–19), those who will hear of Jesus through their word (vv. 20–23), and all post-Easter believers.
The event that brings the revelation of God’s love to a consummate conclusion is “the hour” of Jesus, the “lifting up” and exaltation of the Son of Man, the “gathering” of everyone around the lifted-up and exalted Jesus, the place where and time when the glory of God will be seen, and by means of which the Son of God will be glorified (11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32). Throughout the Gospel the reader is drawn further into the action, waiting for that moment when the well-known death of Jesus will be told as the culmination of the mission of Jesus in the revelation of the love of God. A careful reader/listener arrives at the passion story with an air of expectancy, and is not disappointed. Because of the cross, as Jesus broaches his “hour,” he founds a new family, which, in its own turn, must manifest the love of God, as Jesus did (19:25–27; cf. 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). As promised (see 8:28), “the Jews” ask that the Son of Man be lifted up in crucifixion (19:6). But the consequence of the fulfillment of that promise is that they will see Jesus as the presence of the divine among them (“then you will know that I am he” [8:28]). Then they will know. Jesus achieves the promised “gathering” into the one fold of all the children of God scattered abroad (see 10:16; 11:50–52; cf. 12:11, 19, 24, 32–33; 19:18, 25–27, 30, 31–37). Jesus’ revelation of a God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son takes place in what he does at the cross. It is on the cross that Jesus makes known the glory of God in this moment of consummate loving (13:1; 17:4), and it is through the cross that he himself is glorified (11:4; 17:4).

Stated simply, God loved the world so much that he handed over his Son (3:16–17). Jesus, the Son of God, must make that love known (4:34; 17:2–3). No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (15:13). Jesus makes love known by laying down his life for his friends (18:1–19:42). In the Johannine passion story Jesus says nothing about love but shows perfect love (13:1; 19:28–30) in what he does. The high point in Jesus’ making love known is his exaltation on the cross, with all its accompanying consequences for believers, including the challenge of gazing upon the pierced one to see there the saving love of God (19:37).  

76. It is beyond the limits of this study to enter into the debate over the relationship (or absence of one) between salvation from sin and the cross. For a fine survey of this debate, see Morgan-Wyntje, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 3–44. See the attractive proposals of Coloe, God Dwells with Us, 190–96, and Jean Zumstein, “Sünde in der Verkündigung des historischen Jesus und im Johannevangelium,” in Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium, 2nd ed., ATANT 84 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004), 83–103. My position can be summarized by the words of Koester, Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, 244–45: “Divine love is the center around which the varied dimensions of meaning of the crucifixion revolve. . . . Thus if sin is estrangement from God, it is ‘taken away’ when it is replaced by faith,
The centrality of love holds together the human and divine, the sacrificial and the militant dimensions of Jesus’ death. Love also creates the consummate paradox in John’s understanding of the crucifixion: the death of Jesus can be a source of life. It is by dying that Jesus reveals the love of God, and when this love evokes faith, it brings people into the relationship with God that is true life (3:16).77

The role of Jesus in making love known to the world has come to an end. He has achieved what he was asked to do (4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:28–30). But the Johannine love theme extends beyond Jesus’ task to make God known. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so does Jesus send his disciples into the world (17:18; cf. 20:21). They are to love as Jesus has loved them (13:34–35; 15:12, 17). Jesus has prayed that their holiness might replicate his holiness (17:19). As the Gospel is the story of Jesus, and not the story of the disciples, the success or failure of the disciples to live out Jesus’ command to love is not told. However, there are further indications of what Jesus wants from his disciples in 20:1–31, and also in 21:1–25, which will eventually lead us into the world of disciples that lies outside the pages of the Gospel of John, the world of those who are blessed by Jesus because they believe without seeing (20:29).

and faith is evoked by the love of God that is revealed through the crucifixion of Jesus.” See also idem, *Word of Life*, 157–60, and the following citation.

77. Koester, *Word of Life*, 123. See the fine extended study of Jesper T. Nielsen, *Die kognitive Dimension des Kreuzes: Zur Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT 2.263 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Nielsen argues that Jesus’ death is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel, once the whole narrative is taken into account, as the definitive demonstration of Jesus’ identity as the Son and the revealer of God. A “cognitive issue” has been raised by the unfolding “events” of the story. That issue is resolved at the cross: there is now no doubt about Jesus’ identity and his fulfillment of his task to make God known.
It has been claimed that so much happens in the Johannine passion account that there is little need for a story of the resurrection. Jesus has been exalted as universal king by means of his being “lifted up” (esp. 18:28–19:16a); the community has been founded (18:1–11; 18:12–27; 19:25–27); the Scriptures have been fulfilled; Jesus has perfected his task and poured down the Spirit (19:28–30); the ongoing presence of the crucified Jesus in baptism and Eucharist have been granted so that later generations might also believe, even in his absence (19:31–37); the nascent community exits bravely from its former obscurity (19:38–42); and all who accept the revelation of a God of love in this man who laid down his life because of his love for his friends will gaze upon the pierced one (19:37; see 15:13). As Jesus stated in his final prayer: “This is eternal life, that they know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (17:3). The crucified Jesus Christ has made God known. What more is needed?

Charles H. Dodd, Rudolf Bultmann, and others are correct in seeing the Johannine Passion Narrative as the culmination of the Gospel’s Christology. Jesus has made known a God who loves the world by loving his own to the end (13:1; 17:4; 19:30). He has now made possible eternal life for all who believe in him by making known a God who loves by means of his own singular gesture of incredible love (13:18–20; 17:2–3). But this is not the end of the story. Early readers of the Gospel of John would have been well aware of the message that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and they wanted to hear that ending. However, as with the Passion Narrative, John tells that part of the Jesus story in his own way. As we will see below, the major concern of John 20:1–31 is the disciples and all those who will believe in Jesus even though they have never seen him. This Gospel has been written for them (v. 29; vv. 30–31). They are the recipients of Jesus’ love command: “Love one another as I have loved you.” The story of Jesus’ revealing presence among them has ended, but the story of the disciples’ response to the love command is just beginning.

But some christological issues are yet to be resolved. Jesus has indicated earlier that even though he will willingly lose his life, he will take it up again (10:17–18). He has described his situation as “no longer in the world” but as coming to the Father (17:11, 13). The promises are yet to be fulfilled. Part of his “hour” will be his glorification in his return to his Father, to the glory that was his before the world was made (17:4–5, 24). His departure from this world, and what that might mean for his disciples, is a central theme in 14:1–31 and 16:4–33; his request to return to the glory that was his before the world was made opens and closes his final prayer (17:5, 24). There are thus two major elements in the Johanne resurrection narratives: the consequences of the completion of the “hour” for Jesus, and the consequences of his death, resurrection, and ascension for believers of all times. The final chapter of the original Gospel narrative (20:1–31) faces both of these issues, while the epilogue (21:1–25) is concerned only with the latter, the challenges that Johanne disciples of all ages must face and, most important, the apostolic foundations of subsequent discipleship.

and glorification, his resurrection cannot be an event of special significance. No resurrection is needed to destroy the triumph which death might be supposed to have gained in the crucifixion.”

The Risen/Ascended Jesus and the Disciples in John 20:1–31

The resurrection of Jesus from death, fulfilling his earlier promises, is stated with simplicity and assuredness. Indeed, it is almost understated; by this stage of the development of the Christian tradition the resurrection is taken for granted. There is no need for “proof.” The action of God in raising Jesus is indicated by Mary Magdalene’s discovery of an empty tomb and by the use of the passive verb indicating that “the stone had been taken away” (v. 1: ἠρμένον), supported by Mary Magdalene’s enduring conviction that someone had taken away the body and placed it elsewhere (see 20:1–2, 13, 15). She may have been wrong in her understanding of who was responsible, but she was correct in suggesting that someone other than Jesus has entered the narrative. The description of the empty tomb and the location of the burial clothes in verses 5–7 reinforce this conclusion. The description of the state and the location of the linen cloths and the napkin are in the passive voice (vv. 5–7: κείμενα/κείμενον, ἐντετυλιγμένον [placed, folded]). Someone has entered the story of the crucified one and seen to it that all the signs of death have been removed from his crucified body, folded, and laid aside. Recalling the episode of Lazarus, who emerged from his tomb still wrapped in the clothing of death and who will finally die, Jesus’ death clothing has been emptied once and for all.3 This is John’s way of capturing the widespread practice of the Gospels, and indeed the rest of the New Testament, to indicate that Jesus was raised by God (see, for example, 1 Cor. 15:3–7, 12–14, 17; Rom. 1:3–4; Mark 16:6; Matt. 28:7; Luke 24:7; Acts 2:24, 32; 13:33; Col. 2:12). It is true that earlier in the Gospel Jesus indicated that he would lay down his life and that he has power to take it up again (10:17–18), but these initiatives on the part of Jesus take place because of the prior love of God (10:17a: “For this reason the Father loves me”). God is behind everything that Jesus does and everything that is done to Jesus. The action of God is present in the allusions to Jesus’ resurrection in John 20: Jesus has been raised by God.4

The disciples, both female and male, are confused and lack belief. Mary Magdalene does not even imagine resurrection as the explanation of an


4. On this, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 519–20, and the summary of scholarly discussion on pp. 522–23.
empty tomb (20:1–2, 11–15), Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to the tomb in puzzlement and perhaps hope (vv. 3–7), while Thomas will believe only if he is granted a physical experience of Jesus’ crucified and risen body (vv. 24–29). Mary Magdalene is led to belief in the risen Lord by means of an appearance, a desire to touch, and a commission (vv. 16–18); Thomas believes in Jesus as Lord and God by means of an appearance, a desire to touch, and a challenge (vv. 26–29); while the Beloved Disciple sees and believes, but he does not see the risen Jesus, nor does he seek physical confirmation of a risen body (v. 8).

The disciples, gathered in a room with the doors tightly closed, for fear of “the Jews,” are full of joy when they see the risen Jesus among them, bearing the signs of his crucifixion in his hands and his side; they see, but they do not seek to touch the risen body of the Lord or the marks of crucifixion (20:19–20). These disciples are the only characters in 20:1–29 who do not hesitate to accept that God has raised Jesus from the dead. But they have been prepared for their encounter. From Mary Magdalene they have already heard of the resurrection and of Jesus’ proximate return to his Father and God, who is now their Father and God. She has done as the risen Jesus instructed her: she has returned to the new family of God (v. 17: “Go to my brethren... I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”) and informed them that the transforming moment of Jesus’ return to the Father is at hand (vv. 17–18). As across the Gospel resurrection narratives, also in John, resurrection produces confusion and puzzlement (see Mark 16:8; Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:1–11, 13–35). Even though John does not describe a resurrection moment (cf. Matt. 28:1–3), the evangelist joins the unified chorus of all New Testament witnesses: Jesus has been raised from the dead, as he promised. But the “hour” of Jesus is driven by Jesus’ love for his disciples (see 13:1) and God’s design to give life to the world through him (3:16–17). The resurrection of Jesus may be briefly sketched because it is taken for granted in the Johannine tradition. But how does the resurrection of Jesus continue the theme of love? That question can be answered only by examining what the risen Jesus does for the disciples.

Before that, however, the final element required for the completion of Jesus’ story is his return to the Father. John’s story begins in an intimate union between the Word and God (1:1–2) and informs the reader/listener that throughout the life and ministry of Jesus his gaze will always be toward the Father as he tells God’s story (1:18). The climax of Jesus’ mission is his return to the Father, to the place and the glory that he had before the world
The crucial importance of Jesus’ departure from this world and his return to the Father was introduced in 13:33, 36 and has formed the theological heart of 14:1–31 and 16:4–33 (see 14:2, 6, 18–19, 28; 16:5, 7, 16–20, 28). There can be no gift of the Spirit Paraclete unless Jesus returns to the Father, as Jesus explains: “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you” (16:7; see also 15:26–27). As with the fulfillment of Jesus’ earlier promises of resurrection, the important christological theme of Jesus’ return to the Father is stated. Indeed, it is almost understated in 20:17–18. The care with which the revelation of the glory of God on the cross (11:4; 19:28–37) and the glorification of the Son of God by means of the cross (11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:4–5, 24–26) has been argued must be recognized and respected.

The “hour” of Jesus is not limited to the crucifixion. It embraces the sequence of events that begins with Jesus’ passion and closes with his return to the glory that he had with the Father before the world began. Jesus is aware that the “hour” has come for his departure from this world to return to the Father (13:1), and through the “hour,” Jesus is glorified (12:23, 27–28; 17:1–5). The ultimate result of Jesus’ return to oneness with the Father, which he enjoyed before the world was made, is to draw all believers into the oneness and love that bonds Jesus and the Father (17:21, 24–26). Thus, the story of the passion and the resurrection closes with Jesus’ departure by means of ascent to the Father. These events all belong to one “hour” at which and during which Jesus bestows life, love, and the Spirit upon the disciples (12:23, 27–28, 31–33; 13:1; 17:1–5; 19:25–27). Jesus announces the end of his presence in this world and his return to the Father to Mary Magdalene, who clings to him (20:17a) as she seeks to reestablish with him the relationship they had had in the days before the onset of “the hour.” That form of relationship has come to a close as the nature of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples has radically changed. Jesus informs her that she

5. The references to the return of Jesus to the Father in 13:33, 36 are one of the reasons many scholars regard 13:31–38 as the beginning of the last discourse, despite its being a narrative. It must be granted that 13:31–38 “bridges” the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread, on the one hand, which determine the literary unity of 13:1–38, and the discourse of 14:1–16:33, on the other, where the return of Jesus to the Father is so central. The theme of the “discourse” has already been adumbrated in the “narrative” of 13:31–38 (which also looks back to the love theme and the discussion with Peter in 13:1–11).


7. See the remarks of Schneiders, “Resurrection (of the Body),” 176.

8. See below for further reflection on the encounter between the risen Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
must cease all attempts to restore former ways: “For I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (v. 17bc).

Throughout the Gospel, John has presented Jesus as the Sent One of the Father. Everything depends upon his relationship with the Father (see esp. 5:19–30; 8:21–59). There is only one “Son of God” in the Gospel of John. That is now transformed. As Jesus is leaving this world by means of his ascent to his Father and God, the relationship between the disciples and the Father and God of Jesus is radically transformed. Because of the hour of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, along with the subsequent gift of the Spirit Paraclete, the Father and God of Jesus is also the Father and God of the disciples of Jesus. This also dramatically changes the nature of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. He has loved them (13:1), and he has asked them to love him, and through him to love the Father (14:21, 23). Because of the “hour” they are now his “brethren,” his brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), enjoying a more intimate relation than that indicated by his caring address to them as “little children” (τέκνα) in 13:33 and even more intimate than that signified by their appointment as “friends” (φίλοι) to whom he promises the greatest love possible in 15:13–15. Jesus and the disciples, because of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, are “brethren,” children of the same Father and God.

Love has been shown on the cross, the Spirit has been given at the cross, Jesus has been raised from the dead, and he is about to ascend to his Father. The “hour” is reaching its completion as the desired oneness of love between Jesus, the Father, and the disciples begins. As brothers and sisters of Jesus, his disciples join him in a unique relationship with the same Father and God because of his return to the glory that was once his (17:5; see also 1:1–2; 20:17). Mary Magdalene transmits this message to the disciples, along with her confession of faith, “I have seen the Lord” (20:18). Having arrived at genuine resurrection faith, she is able to recognize the risen Jesus as “the Lord.” The “hour” continues to bestow life and love upon disciples,

9. There is a subtle play upon the Greek word κύριος, through the mediation of “Rabboni,” across 20:15–18. The Greek work can simply be a respectful form of address (“sir”), or it can carry the full weight of divine recognition. The LXX regularly uses it to translate the Hebrew word for “God.” In v. 15, thinking that Jesus is the gardener, she addresses him as “sir” (κύριε). Once Jesus calls her by name, she recognizes him as her Rabbi (v. 16: Ραββουνί) and attempts to reestablish that relationship. After Jesus’ revelation that “the hour” is coming to a close with his return to his Father and the establishment of a new relationship between God and the disciples (v. 17), she confesses him as “Lord” (v. 18: τὸν κύριον). On this encounter, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 163–68.
from the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene, and through her to the rest of the frightened disciples (see v. 19).

The departure is imminent, but before it takes place Jesus commissions his disciples in verses 19–23. Prepared by the Easter message from Mary Magdalene (v. 18), when the crucified and risen Jesus appears among them, instead of the usual doubt and puzzlement, they are full of joy (vv. 19–20). They receive his peace, and Jesus tells them that as the Father sent him, so Jesus is now sending them (see also 13:18–20; 17:18–19). Given the importance of Jesus’ promise in the discourse to give the disciples his “peace” (see 14:27 [twice]; 16:33), the peace greeting of Jesus in 20:19, 21, 26 must be seen as a fulfillment of that promise, also taking place as the “hour” concludes. The same process of fulfillment is also indicated by the joy of the disciples “when they saw the Lord” (v. 20). Throughout his discourse, and also in his prayer, he has told them of the joy that will flow from his departure from them (15:11; 16:20, 21, 22 [verb “rejoice” and noun “joy”], 24; 17:13). The association between the departure of Jesus and the gift of joy is explicit in 16:20 (“Your sorrow will be turned into joy”) and 17:13 (“Now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves”). The joy of the disciples at the sight of the risen Lord fulfills Jesus’ promises. However fragile, full of the peace and joy generated by the “hour,” they are to be his sent ones, the bearers of his word (see 18:21), and whoever receives them will receive both Jesus and the one who sent him (13:20). As Sandra Schneiders has shown:

How are post-paschal disciples to encounter the risen Lord? The negative answer from the first two scenes is that it is not through physical sight or touch of his earthly body, that is, not in the flesh, but somehow in his disciples. Scene three [vv. 19–23] narratively explores this cryptic answer.

Jesus further defines the commission of the disciples with a second gift of the Spirit and the command that they continue his critical presence in the

10. The greeting “peace be with you” can be read as simple Semitic greeting, just as modern Jews greet one another with the word shalom and the Arabic-speaking people with the expression salâm. The context makes this possibility most unlikely. See further Rekha M. Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 158–59.

11. The steady use of the Greek verb ἔχαρησαν (to rejoice) and the noun χαρά (joy) across the promises and the prayer of 15:11; 16:20–22, 24; and 17:13, and the appearance of the verb ἔχαρησαν (“they were glad”) in v. 20, in the clause “when they saw the Lord,” is a clear case of a fulfillment that takes place at the “hour” of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

world as they forgive and retain sin (vv. 22–23). He indicates the importance of this second gift by breathing upon them, recalling the moment of creation in LXX Genesis 2:7 (see also LXX Ezek. 37:9–10; Wis. 15:11). The disciples who have received the command to love as Jesus loved them continue to be gifted by his life-giving love. They receive his peace that produces joy (vv. 19–20), they are commissioned as sent ones of Jesus, just as he was the Sent One of the Father (v. 21), and they receive the second gift of the Spirit as they are commissioned to repeat Jesus’ judging presence in the world during his absence (vv. 22–23).  

Jesus gives the first gift of the Spirit from the cross to the symbolic infant church, the mother and the disciple (19:30). Not all interpreters recognize this. As we have seen, most translations avoid a direct rendering of the Greek as “he handed down the Spirit,” preferring to repeat a euphemism for death (RSV: “gave up his spirit”) parallel to the Synoptic Gospels. Apart from failing to recognize the theological importance of 19:28–30, most translators and commentators cannot accept that Jesus gives the Spirit at the cross because he gives the Spirit in 20:22, and it is not possible that the Spirit be given twice. But recognizing that both 19:30 and 20:22 form part of Jesus’ “hour” makes the question of “two gifts of the Spirit” irrelevant. The gift of the Spirit, promised across the Gospel, and especially in the Paraclete sayings in the discourse of 14:1–16:33, cannot be limited to 20:22, which is closely tied to the authority of the disciples to forgive and retain sin (v. 23). The Spirit Paraclete offers more to the disciples of Jesus than their role, gifted by the Spirit, as the ongoing presence of Jesus’ light in a dark world (see 9:4).  

13. On this as part of the second stage of the Johannine teaching on Jesus’ glorification, see Thüsing, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu, 141–92.

14. See, among many, Burge, Anointed Community, 133–35, and Koester, Word of Life, 146, who desires to have it both ways, with 19:30 foreshadowing the gift of 20:22. See also Lincoln, Gospel according to Saint John, 498–99: the Spirit is “available” at 19:30, and in 20:22 Jesus “confers” it on his disciples. Lurking behind most of these objections is the influence of Luke-Acts, where the promise of the “power from on high” (Luke 24:49) is dramatically fulfilled during the celebration of Pentecost, accompanied by fire and thunder, matching elements of the Sinai event of Exod. 19:18–19 (Acts 2:1–4). For too many exegetes, the gift of the Spirit can only be a “one-off” event, an approach that misunderstands the Johannine “hour.”

15. This sentence succinctly suggests my interpretation of v. 23. What exactly is meant by “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” is a notorious problem for Johannine interpretation. It has been further complicated by the Roman Catholic identification of this passage as a biblical basis for the sacrament of penance. It is beyond the reach of this study to discuss the matter in detail. The interpretation suggested above is that after Jesus’ return to the Father, his critical presence in the world, bringing into darkness a light that is sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected, will continue in the
to the Spirit-filled church than this: “another Paraclete” continuing the revealing presence of Jesus (14:16–17), teaching all things, calling to their remembrance what Jesus has said (14:26), witnessing Jesus’ presence to them as they witness (15:26–27), guiding into all truth and glorifying the absent Jesus by taking what was of Jesus and declaring it to the disciples (16:13–14). “The community and all its members is Jesus at work in the world and his work is to take away sins by giving life in all its fullness.”

At the cross, the Spirit is poured down upon the community of faith and love in a foundational moment within the context of the “hour.” In his final appearance to the disciples, equally part of the “hour,” Jesus gives the disciples their mission to continue his critical presence in the world during the time of his absence. Both moments are needed for the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of the Paraclete.

experience of the disciples. Put positively, they will continue to embody the critical presence of the revelation of God in the world, thus forgiving and retaining. Rather than linking the Paraclete saying in 14:26 with the Spirit in 20:22, as is often done, we should recognize the stronger link between the Paraclete’s role of “exposing/laying bare” sin, righteousness, and judgment in 16:7–11 and the forgiving and retaining of sin in 20:23 as a consequence of the gift of the Spirit. This is the Spirit-filled future mission of the disciples.


16. For a rich summary of the Johannine promise of the gift of the Spirit Paraclete, see Koester, *World of Life*, 147–60. What Koester describes in these pages (v. 22) cannot be limited to the authority to forgive and retain sin (v. 23). Ruth Sheridan, “The Paraclete and Jesus in the Johannine Farewell Discourses,” *Pacifica* 20 (2007): 125–41, rightly points to the continuity-but-distinction between Jesus and the Paraclete, necessary for the “departure” of Jesus and the “gift” of the Paraclete.


The oneness of the hour and all that is achieved by and through it is nowhere clearer to the reader than in these two episodes that take place at the hour: the founding gift of the Spirit (19:30; see 14:16–17) and the commissioning of the disciples who have been with him from the beginning to be his witnesses empowered by the Spirit (20:22; see 15:26–27).  

Jesus has now brought the “hour” to a close. His has made visible the love of God on the cross, and by means of the cross and resurrection he will be glorified by returning to the Father and the glory that was his before the foundation of the world (11:4; 12:23, 27–28; 13:1; 17:1–5). He has loved and founded a Spirit-filled community of disciples, and he has commissioned them (19:30; 20:22–23). One further episode remains in the original story, Jesus’ encounter with Thomas (vv. 24–29). Turning away from Thomas to speak to generations of readers, those who have not seen Jesus but still believe (v. 29), John will close his book by telling those readers why he wrote this book (vv. 30–31). It is to those subsequent generations that we must now turn, as they are the recipients of Jesus’ love command. They too are to love as he has loved (13:34–35; 15:12, 17).

**Future Disciples and the Beloved Disciple in John 20:1–31**

A literary characteristic of the Fourth Gospel is a tendency to “frame” episodes (see, for example, the oneness between God and the Logos in 1:1 and the oneness between Father and the Son in 1:18; the use of the Mosaic law to put Jesus on trial in 5:16–18 and Jesus’ showing that Moses accuses his opponents in 5:45–47; Cana in 2:1–12 and 4:46–54; a garden in 18:1–11 and Jesus’ departure in 14:18–19 and 16:16–22. The same must be argued for the gift of the Spirit in both 19:30 and 20:23 for the fulfillment of the Paraclete promises of 14:1–16:33.


A feature of the Cana to Cana section of the Gospel (2:1–4:54) has been the presentation of differing responses to Jesus by a number of characters in the story (the mother of Jesus, “the Jews,” Nicodemus, John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman [twice], Samaritan villagers, the royal official). Reading these successive episodes led the reader/listener through a catechesis on true faith by means of examples of the nonfaith of those who rejected Jesus (“the Jews” and the Samaritan woman in a first instance), partial faith from those who accepted him on their terms (Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman in a second moment), and true faith from those who unconditionally accept Jesus and his word, cost what it may (the mother of Jesus, John the Baptist, the Samaritan villagers, and the royal official). As this “journey of faith” began the story (2:1–4:54; after the prologue and the call of the first disciples [1:1–1:51]), a parallel “journey of faith” closes the story (20:1–29).22 At the end of the story, however, a well-schooled reader/listener finds that the journey of faith is made not by different characters but by the same character, and each character involved is a foundational figure for the Johannine church: the Beloved Disciple (20:2–10), Mary Magdalene (vv. 1–2, 11–18), and Thomas (vv. 24–29). Apart from Jesus, the only other characters who appear in John 20 are the disciples assembled in a locked room (vv. 19–23). They receive Jesus gifts of peace and joy, the Spirit, and their commission from the risen Jesus because the Easter message has already been proclaimed to them by Mary Magdalene. As she saw “the Lord” (v. 18), so they have also seen “the Lord” (20). The focus of the narrative upon these foundational characters who will bridge the gap between the story of Jesus and subsequent generations of Johannine disciples leads directly to Jesus’ blessing future disciples who will believe without seeing (v. 29).

The Beloved Disciple

The Beloved Disciple is with Peter when Mary Magdalene brings the bad news of the empty tomb along with the claim that the body has been stolen (v. 2). He is explicitly named as “the other disciple whom Jesus loved” in verse 2, even though throughout the remainder of this episode he is spoken of as...

21. See especially the work of Mlakhuzhyil, Christocentric Literary Structure.
22. For a more complete presentation of what follows, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 153–81; idem, Gospel of John (SP 4), 515–45.
“the other disciple” (vv. 4, 8). The storyteller has singled out this figure for major roles at crucial moments earlier in the narrative: at the supper (13:23) and at the cross (19:25–27). Unique to this disciple is the love that he shares with Jesus. This fact is a key to understanding the subtle commissioning of all future disciples to love in 20:1–29. Both Peter and the Beloved Disciple return to the tomb that Mary Magdalene has just left. Nothing is said about their acceptance or rejection of the message; they are going to see for themselves (v. 3). However, even though Peter initially leads the way, the other disciple outruns him and arrives first. There is something special about the other disciple, but there is still no indication of faith, even though he looks into the tomb and sees the clothes of death empty and waits for the arrival of Peter (vv. 4–5). Peter arrives and sees the linen cloths and the further sign of the headcloth rolled up and laid in a separate place. The empty clothes are a sign of the presence of God, who has entered Jesus’ story and raised him from death. The clothing of death has been emptied. However, we are told nothing of Peter’s response to this sight (vv. 6–7).

Only now does the other disciple enter the tomb and see the signs of God’s victory over death, and the narrator announces: “He saw and believed” (v. 8). This is an important moment. The other disciple, described in verse 2 as “the other disciple, whom Jesus loved,” did not see the person of Jesus; he saw the signs of the victory of God and believed. The episode closes with an acknowledgment that the two disciples as yet did not know the Scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead (v. 9). The Beloved Disciple comes to belief without seeing Jesus and without the Scripture. The Scripture that they did not know is the Scripture (ἡ γραφή) of the Johannine story, as we

23. The Greek text of 20:2 makes it clear that an earlier version referred only to “the other disciple” (ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής), a disciple who also played an important role under that title in 18:15–18. The crucial role that this disciple plays in 20:1–29 leads the storyteller to clarify that “the other disciple” in 18:15–18 and 20:2 was “the other disciple whom Jesus loved [τὸν ἀλλὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς],” already well known to the reader from 13:23 and 19:25–27 as “the Beloved Disciple [ὁ μαθητὴς ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς].” Many features indicate the late addition of “whom Jesus loved” to “the other disciple” in 20:2. Not the least of them is the change of the verb “to love” from ἀγαπάω (13:23; 19:25–27) to φιλέω (20:2), heavily used in 21:15–17. If the storyteller went to this trouble in editing 20:2, then it was important to him, within the overall context of 20:1–29, that the reader be aware of the identity and the role of the disciple in question: the Beloved Disciple.

24. Some have attempted, over the decades, to argue that the Beloved Disciple does not arrive at resurrection faith. See, for example, Dorothy A. Lee, “Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20,” JSNT 38 (1995): 39–40. She strangely argues that v. 8 “has no narrative impact.” For Lee, John 21 is required to resolve the initial faith of the Beloved Disciple. In defense of this statement as a narrative climax that expresses full Johannine faith, see Moloney, Glory Not Dishonor, 161–63.
will see below. It was impossible for characters in the story to be readers of the story. Thus the “Scripture” of the Gospel of John is not available to the Beloved Disciple. But he has been presented as the first disciple to come to belief in the risen Jesus, even though he does not see Jesus. Both disciples are dismissed from the scene, return home, and do not appear again. The response of the other two foundational disciples, one a woman and the other a man, differs strikingly from that of the Beloved Disciple.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is oblivious to any possibility of resurrection. When she discovers an empty tomb (vv. 1–2), she insists that the body has been stolen and is inconsolable despite seeing angels in the tomb (vv. 11–13), and even with Jesus, whom she thinks is the gardener (vv. 14–15). There is no trace of resurrection faith. However, once Jesus identifies her by name, she greets him as her rabbi and wishes to cling to him (16–17a). Her attachment to Jesus is very physical, and Jesus asks her to abandon that form of conditioned faith and to announce the completion of the “hour” to his brethren. She finally confesses that she has seen the risen Lord (v. 18). She has made her journey of faith but has been called to abandon all attachment to the physical reality of the body of Jesus, as he is ascending to God.


26. It could be assumed that they were at the gathering in vv. 19–23. However, v. 10 states that they returned to their homes (plural), not to the disciples locked in the room for fear of “the Jews” in v. 19.

27. As Schnieder, “Resurrection (of the Body),” 183, puts it: “She voices the position of one who has not grasped the meaning of ‘the hour,’ Jesus’ transition from the dispensation of the flesh to the dispensation of glory. She is seeking ‘the Lord’ whom she equates with his corpse.” Reimund Bieringer, “I Am Ascending to My Father and Your Father, to My God and Your God’ (John 20:17): Resurrection and Ascension in the Gospel of John,” in The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John, ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer, WUNT 222 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 209–33, argues that the main point of Jesus’ command not to cling to him is positive: she is to move immediately to fulfill her mission of announcing the risen Jesus to the disciples. Her role is crucial to the disciples’ awareness of Jesus’ departure and its consequences. This does not negate what has been suggested above but adds to its importance.

28. See the important remarks of Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship, 150–55, which suggestively point to Mary’s role as a “reclaiming of the covenant relationship.”
Thomas

Despite the different situations, Thomas goes through a journey parallel to that of Mary Magdalene. Initially, he is not present when Jesus appears to the disciples and commissions them (v. 24). On hearing that Jesus is risen and has been with them, he will not believe unless Jesus fulfills certain physical conditions. Thomas must be able to see and touch the body of the risen Jesus. Only under those conditions will Thomas believe (v. 25). Finally, Jesus comes again, and Thomas is there. He asks Thomas to do exactly as he required for proof but commands him to abandon his situation of “no faith” (vv. 26–27). There is no indication that Thomas responded to Jesus’ invitation. Overcome, he makes his final confession of faith: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). Thomas has also made a striking journey to faith, through a conditioned faith that insisted upon the physical reality of the body of Jesus. But he is privileged in a way that all subsequent generations of disciples cannot be:

Through his death, Jesus gives himself completely in love for others, and this love gives them life. Through his resurrection Jesus shows that this love has a future. To see the love and the life that the crucified and risen Jesus gives is to see who God is. Therefore, when shown the wounds of the living Christ, Thomas can say, “Here I see God.”

Mary Magdalene has come to love, life, and faith because she saw Jesus, and the same must be said of Thomas. But what of later generations of disciples, who will never be “shown the wounds of the living Christ,” those who are reading and hearing this story of Jesus? They too are summoned to a future determined by the love and the life of the crucified and risen Jesus. It is at this point that Jesus says his final words, blessing future generations: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (v. 29). Wherein lies that blessedness?


30. The Greek word ἄπιστος is found only here in the Gospel of John. It is a strong way of saying “no faith.” It is best known from its use in the Synoptic tradition to describe a “faithless generation” (see Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41).

Disciples Who Do Not See Jesus Yet Believe

Looking back across the faith journeys recorded in the episodes of the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas, we see an important link between Jesus’ final blessing of those who do not see and yet believe, on the one hand, and the experience of the Beloved Disciple, on the other: he did not see, and yet he believed (v. 8). This is what it means to be a beloved disciple. The author, in fact, suggests that later generations, those who do not see and yet believe (v. 29), have an advantage. They have been provided with a “Scripture” (ἡ γραφή) that the Beloved Disciple did not have (v. 9). Jesus did many signs, but they have not been written (γεγραμμένα) in this book (v. 30). There is a purpose behind the selection. What has been written (γέγραπται) was “so that you [later generations of disciples who have not seen but have this Gospel, this “writing” (γραφή)] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (v. 31). This was not yet available for the Beloved Disciple (v. 9), but it is in the hands of those who are reading John’s story of Jesus and in the ears and hearts of those who are hearing it. The Beloved Disciple believed without seeing, and he did not yet have the Scripture (vv. 8–9). All subsequent disciples are to become beloved disciples by also believing without seeing, but having the Scripture of the Gospel of John in hand. “The rhetorical purpose of this Gospel is to bring the narrative tradition of the Bible to a culmination in Jesus.” But the crucial issue is that these disciples, like the first Beloved Disciple to believe without seeing, are also beloved disciples who do not see. It is only through loving disciples that the love and the life of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ will be made visible, experienced by those who hear of Jesus through their word (see 17:20–23). As Dorothy Lee

32. For an important study of John 20:29 that makes this point with vigor, see Raymond F. Collins, “‘Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen’: John 20:29,” in Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament; Essays in Honor of Francis J. Moloney, ed. Rekha M. Chennattu and Mary L. Coloe, BibScRel 187 (Rome: LAS, 2005), 173–90. Collins writes that 20:29 “extends the narrative time of the Evangelist’s story beyond the story itself.” And he adds: “The faith commended in the beatitude is belief without the benefit of physical sight. This is faith in the full Johannine sense of the term.”


34. Brown, Gift upon Gift, 225. See also Schnelle, Human Condition, 121.
puts it, “The whole narrative of John 20 functions to reassure the reader that the incarnation is still palpable, even if in a different way, through the life-giving presence of the Spirit-Paraclete activating the eucharistic life, love and mission of the community.”

Originally, the Gospel ended with this strong recommendation that all subsequent disciples be “beloved disciples.” The love theme is never far from the surface of the narrative that tells of Jesus’ “hour.” Throughout the story Jesus has commanded the disciples to love (13:34–35; 15:12, 17). But the narrative has expressly identified only one disciple as the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23; 19:25–27; 20:2–10). He has played a crucial role at the supper (13:23), at the cross (19:25–27), and at the resurrection (20:2–10). He is the model disciple, and the characteristic of his discipleship is that he is loved. Jesus has asked, however, that disciples love as he has loved (13:34–35; 15:12, 17). Only in this way will others recognize them as Jesus’ disciples (13:34–35); only in this way will they make known to the world that the Father sent Jesus to give love and life to the world (3:16–17; 17:21, 23). For this reason, later in the history of the development of the Johannine storytelling tradition, a further resurrection chapter is added to an original that ended in 20:30–31. The theme of love is one of several issues left unresolved by John 1:1–20:31 and responded to in 21:1–25, especially in the narrative presentation of the relationship between Peter and the Beloved Disciple. They are to provide the foundational experience for further disciples who are to make known the love of Jesus and the love of God (3:16–17; 13:1–38; 17:1–26). Whether subsequent “Johannine communities” will bear fruit depends upon their responding to Jesus’ command to love (15:12–17).


Whatever one makes of the debate over the place of John 21 in the Johannine narrative or over the history of the tradition that produced this second set of resurrection stories, on the basis of the most ancient manuscripts we can affirm that there has never been a Gospel of John that ended at 20:30–31. The story of Jesus told in 1:1–20:31 left some crucial issues unresolved,

especially concerning the nature of the ongoing life of the community of faith and love founded at the cross (19:25–27). Who could belong to this community? Who were its authorities, and what was the nature of their authority? During the Gospel Jesus has issued only two commandments: believe and love (see 13:34; 14:1, 11, 15, 21; 15:10, 12; 16:27, 31). They are both essential to Christianity, but a Christian community needs more than belief and love to exist—both in itself and in its relationships with the world around it. Most likely only sometime later in the life of that community, in a period closer to the writing of the Letters of John, which also show the internal tensions of communities trying to live according to the Jesus of the Gospel, John 21 was added to the original Gospel. It has always been part of the Fourth Gospel that has been read and heard in the Christian church for almost two thousand years. One of the tensions that emerged from the Gospel concerned the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter. What was their role, and how were they to exercise their authority?37

The narrative of John 21:1–25 unfolds in three sections, determined by the characters and the action in each section. Many commentators read verses 24–25 as the conclusion to the chapter and the end of the final edition of the Gospel.38 However, given the importance of Peter and the other disciple, foundational leaders of future disciples commanded to love as Jesus has loved, verse 24 closes verses 15–24. A traditional final statement appears in verse 25, matching the original ending of 20:30–31.39 The following literary structure traces the establishment of the respective roles of the two disciples in the community.40

a) Verses 1–14: Jesus’ appearance to his disciples at the side of the Sea of Tiberias leads to a miraculous catch of fish and a meal by the lake, during which both the Beloved Disciple (v. 7) and Peter (vv. 7, 11) play important cameo roles.

38. See, for example, Brown, Gospel according to John, 1065; Beasley-Murray, John, 396.
39. For a detailed discussion of 21:25, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 562–68.
b) Verses 15–24: A discussion between Jesus and Peter clarifies the role of Peter the shepherd (vv. 15–19), and a question from Peter to Jesus concerning the Beloved Disciple establishes his role as the one who has written this story. One is shepherd, the other is witness, and love is crucial to both ministries.

c) Verse 25: Conclusion.

The account opens with a laconic statement from the narrator that the Lord “revealed himself.” The verb used (φανερώω) has never been used in John 20 (or elsewhere in the New Testament) to speak of resurrection appearances. Its use is extremely rare in the Synoptic tradition (Mark 4:22; 16:12, 14), but it has been used regularly in the Fourth Gospel to speak of the revelation that takes place in Jesus (see 1:31; 2:11; 3:21; 7:4; 9:3; 17:6). What is about to be reported is something more than a physical appearance. “The whole verse makes the effect of the announcement of a theme.”

The characters are introduced as they decide to go fishing. Among the seven disciples introduced there are some surprises. Simon Peter is named first, as one would expect (see 6:67–69; 13:6–9; 20:2–7), and the identification of Thomas as “the twin” looks back to 20:24. But only here is Nathanael described as “the man from Cana of Galilee,” and the sons of Zebedee appear in the Johannine story for the first time. The two remaining, unnamed disciples leave open the possibility of the presence of the Beloved Disciple, but given his importance in verse 7 and verses 20–24, it is strange that he is not listed. This omission, however, adds to the drama when he first appears from nowhere as an active character in verse 7. Peter’s decision to go fishing, the other disciples’ decision to join him, and the information that their night in the boat produced no catch have prompted much speculation that need not concern us here.

At a time that links Mary Magdalene’s unbelieving visit to the empty tomb in the darkness of very early morning (cf. 20:1: πρωΐ), Jesus stands on

42. What is the tradition history of 21:1–14, especially in the light of Luke 5:1–11 (see Moloney, *Gospel of John* [SP 4], 552–53)? In a unified story, how is it possible that the disciples, after 20:19–23, could so easily give themselves to their everyday activity? Solutions range from speculations about the mental state of the post-Easter disciples (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 399–400) to Peter’s symbolic leading of the mission as “fishers” of people (Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 579) to aimless disorientation (Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1096), to apostasy (Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 552).
the beach “just as day was breaking” (21:4: πρωΐας). Another traditional resurrection motif emerges as they are unable to recognize him. He initiates contact as he addresses them as “children” (παιδία). This form of address, not found elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel (but see 1 John 2:12, 18; 3:7), indicates an intimate authority. Jesus commands them to cast the net on the right side of the boat, promising that they will find fish (6a). The obedient response of the disciples to Jesus’ command bears fruit. On several occasions during his ministry, Jesus exercises authority over nature (see 2:1–11; 6:1–15, 16–21), and the miracle that results from the disciples’ wordless performance of his commands does not come as a surprise (v. 6b).

In recognizing Jesus and responding to the miracle, the two disciples who played such an important role at the empty tomb, Peter and the Beloved Disciple (cf. 20:3–10), assume leading roles. The Beloved Disciple recognizes the risen Jesus and tells Peter but not the other disciples: “It is the Lord” (21:7). The Beloved Disciple and Peter are “paired,” as in the rest of the Gospel (see 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–10). Paralleling events reported in John 20, the narrator recalls the response of these same two disciples at the empty tomb (see 20:4–10): the Beloved Disciple is the one who confesses his faith in Jesus as the risen Lord, while Peter responds to his indications, just as he had “followed” him in 20:6. He adjusts his scant clothing and leaps into the water. The other disciples bring the boat to land, dragging the net with them (v. 8). The reader is told not of Peter’s belief but only of his energetic

43. This Greek word used for “early in the morning” in 20:1 and 21:4 is found only in an indeclinable form (see also 18:28) in John 18–20. This is one of many indications of close linguistic connections between John 1–20 and John 21. For further indication, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 551–52, 558. They indicate what I have called “continuity and discontinuity” between the Gospel and its epilogue. They were written separately but are written to be read together.

44. See BDAG, 749, s.v. παιδίον: “one who is treasured in the way a parent treasures a child.” The regular presence of the expression to address believers in 1 John may indicate a chronological proximity between John 21 and 1 John. For the possible theological significance of the expression, see Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship, 170–71.

45. The confession of the Beloved Disciple that Jesus is “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος) matches the resurrection confession of Mary Magdalene in 20:18.

46. My paraphrase “adjusts his scant clothing” renders a strange indication that before Peter leapt into the water, he dressed himself. Normally, one would do the opposite. Brown, Gospel according to John, 1072, helpfully explains that while fishing, Peter was only lightly clad in a single garment. To remove that would have left him naked, so “he tucked in his outer garment, for he was otherwise naked” (Brown). See also Lagrange, Evangile selon Saint Jean, 525. See the interesting recent suggestion of Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, “Kleiderschwimmen: Die Begegnung zwischen Petrus und Jesus in Johannes 21,” Theologische Beiträge 41 (2010): 79–82, that Peter’s shame over his denial matched the shame of Adam and Eve in Gen. 3. As they had to be clothed, so also Peter had to be clothed in order to go to Jesus.
response to the Beloved Disciple’s confession. The other disciples serve merely to round off this part of the story, bringing the boat (presumably along with the Beloved Disciple) and the fish to join Peter and Jesus on the shore.

The account of the miracle and the Easter meal are skillfully joined. On arrival at the shore, the disciples see that a meal has been prepared: a charcoal fire with fish lying on it, and bread (v. 9). Peter’s restoration is under way. He earlier drew near a charcoal fire to join those who went out to arrest Jesus with lanterns and torches (see 18:3, 18: ἀνθρακίαν). He is now invited to join Jesus at a meal prepared on another charcoal fire (v. 9: ἀνθρακίαν). Peter’s presence links the miraculous haul of fish with the meal. He responds to Jesus’ instruction to bring some of the fish that were caught (vv. 10–11) by hauling the net ashore. The detail of the great catch of 153 large fish, which, miraculously, did not tear the net, has teased the minds of readers of this Gospel for centuries. It is impossible to summarize the many suggestions made over the centuries to explain the use of the detail “153 large fish.”47 No doubt the author had good reason for choosing the number 153, for either symbolic meanings or as the result of a mysterious combination of possible numbers, or even because he had it on good tradition that there were exactly 153 fish in the net! The risen Jesus has worked a miracle, resulting in many fish, which should have torn the net. The author may have in mind the seamless garment that could not be torn (see 19:23–24).48 The universality of the Christian community—the result of the initiative of Jesus (see v. 6), the leadership of the Beloved Disciple and Simon Peter (see vv. 7, 11), and the participation of the disciples in the mission (see 4:34–38; 13:18–20; 17:18; 20:22)—is the main point of the story.49

Jesus continues to determine the action as he commands them to eat the first meal of the day. The disciples are transformed from their condition in verse 4, where they did not recognize Jesus. Guided by the faith of the Beloved Disciple and the actions of Simon Peter, they no longer dare query the identity of Jesus. They now recognize that the risen Lord is present, as the Beloved Disciple announced to Peter in verse 7 (cf. v. 12). In verse 9 fish and bread were already prepared for a meal, and these elements recall the miracle of 6:1–15, where Jesus multiplied both bread and fish to feed a multitude at Passover time. That meal hinted at early Christian eucharistic

47. For a good survey of the suggestions, see Beasley-Murray, John, 401–4.
48. The same Greek verb (σχίζω) is used in 19:24 and 21:11.
49. On this, see Brown, Gospel according to John, 1075; Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship, 171–73.
celebrations, and so does this one, particularly in the indications that Jesus “took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish” (v. 13; see 6:11). Within an overall message of a universal community, gathered by the initiative of the risen Christ, recognized as “the Lord” by the Beloved Disciple (v. 7) and under the leadership of Simon Peter (vv. 7, 11), the eucharistic hints indicate the presence of one of the central acts of worship of the Johannine community (see 6:1–15, 51–58; 13:21–38; 19:34). This episode closes with the narrator’s announcement that this was the third time that the risen Jesus was revealed (v. 14: ἐφανερώθη) to the disciples, looking back to the use of the same verb in verse 1.

The rest of the chapter is entirely dedicated to Simon Peter, the Beloved Disciple (vv. 15–24), and the author’s conclusion (v. 25). Continuing the previous narrative with the connecting clause “When they had finished breakfast” (v. 15a), the author focuses upon the figure of Simon Peter. Jesus’ thrice-repeated question asks Simon Peter to commit himself to love Jesus more than everything that has determined his life to this point: boats, nets, the catch, or anything else that might be self-serving (see v. 3: “Simon Peter told them, ‘I am going fishing!’”). Peter responds unconditionally, further confessing that the all-knowing risen Lord knows his love. On the basis of this response to his question, Jesus commands Peter to pasture his sheep. Thus Jesus establishes a relationship between the role of Peter and the role of the good shepherd in 10:1–18, and especially in 10:14–18. What is surprising, however, is that this same question, answer, and imperative are repeated three times (vv. 15–17). The interaction may have precedent in a custom of making a threefold declaration in front of witnesses before binding oneself to a contract,50 and there are subtle changes in the words of both Jesus and Peter that have also been exploited by interpreters.51

51. Here, more than anywhere else in the Gospel, the debate over the Johannine use of the two verbs for love (ἀγαπάω and φιλέω) is most intense. For some, Jesus tries twice to have Peter confess that his love is unconditional (using ἀγαπάω), but on both occasions Peter responds that he has “friendship love” for Jesus (using φιλέω) (vv. 15–16). On the third occasion, Jesus gives in and asks Peter for his “friendship love,” and Peter is happy to remain there (v. 17). This is attractive, as Peter’s journey with Jesus lies ahead of him (see vv. 18–19). However, a similar variety of different Greek words is used in these few verses for “lambs” (v. 15) and “sheep” (vv. 16–17), “feed” (vv. 15, 17) and “tend” (v. 16). This has led the majority of scholars to regard the three questions and their answer as using different words for stylistic reasons. They all say the same thing, despite the different Greek words used. See the excellent summary of Barrett, Gospel according to St. John, 584–85. For an impressive differing opinion, see David Shepherd, “‘Do You Love Me?’ A Narrative-Critical Reappraisal of ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in John 21:15–17,” JBL 129 (2010): 777–92.
But the major reason for Jesus’ demanding a threefold confession of love is Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus at the outset of the Passion Narrative (cf. 18:15–18, 25–27). However fragile, Peter has been close to Jesus throughout the ministry (cf. 1:40–42; 6:67–69; 13:6–10, 36–38; 18:15), a closeness dramatically destroyed by the disciple’s threefold denial and the subsequent events of the crucifixion of Jesus. The royal lifting up of Jesus on the cross, the foundation of a new family of God, and the gift of the Spirit (19:17–37) have been marked by the presence of the Beloved Disciple (cf. 19:25–27)—and the absence of Simon Peter! The denials must be overcome, and by rhythmically repeating the same question Jesus hints at an accusation: “You once denied me. . . . Are you sure of your relationship to me now?” Essential to that relationship is love for Jesus (see 8:42; 14:21, 23–24 [framed positively and negatively], 28; 16:27). In the dynamism of love within the Fourth Gospel, the disciple must love the Son, as the Son loves the Father and the Father loves the Son. Only when that dynamism of love is in place is Jesus’ request of the Father possible: that his disciples be swept up into the love that exists between the Father and the Son (17:24–26). It is a relationship of love that must be established, and Peter’s embarrassed but honest protestations of love lead to the establishment of a new relationship: Jesus appoints Peter as the one who shepherds his sheep. As Rekha Chennattu rightly remarks: “The threefold profession of love and commitment on the part of Peter therefore reinforces the idea that Peter’s unconditional love for Jesus is the foundation and source of his mission as the shepherd of the new covenant community.”

The pastoral role that Peter is called to fill associates him with the good shepherd. He is charged to “shepherd” and “feed” the “lambs” and “sheep” of Jesus. Discussions of the Petrine office in the Roman tradition of Christianity are out of place in any reading of this passage. Peter must show

52. The point of comparison in “more than these” is sometimes read as asking Peter whether he loves Jesus more than the tools of the fishing trade, or whether his love is superior to that of the other disciples. The context demands a focus upon an unconditional love for Jesus.


54. See the wise, detailed discussion in Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1112–17.
his love for Jesus (vv. 15c, 16b, 17b) in his preparedness to make his own the words of Jesus, the good shepherd (vv. 15d, 16c, 17c): “I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly” (10:10); “I know my own and my own know me” (10:14); “I lay down my life for my sheep” (10:15; cf. vv. 11, 17, 18); “I have other sheep, that are not of this fold . . . there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (10:16). Although Peter does not yet know it, this will cost him no less than everything (vv. 18–19).

Beginning with the Johannine double “amen,” Jesus reminds Peter of a time in the past, during the ministry of Jesus, when Peter showed a great deal of good will (esp. 6:67–69) but ultimately went into denial. That was the time when Peter was young, when he girded himself and went where he would (v. 18a). He has now overcome the scandal of his rejection of Jesus and has unconditionally committed himself to the way of the good shepherd (vv. 15–17). The time will come, when he is old (v. 18b), when Peter will lay down his life for the sheep Jesus has entrusted to his care. Another will gird him and carry him where he would prefer not to go. Despite scholarly squabbles over exactly how to apply this to crucifixion, there can be little doubt that by the time this episode was written Peter had already stretched out his hands, an executioner had girded him with a cross, and he had laid down his life for the flock of Jesus.55

Simon Peter’s commitment to the way of the good shepherd associates him with the meaning of the death of Jesus. Death did not fall upon Jesus as a terrible end to a self-sacrificed life. His unconditional acceptance of the will of the Father (cf. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4) revealed the love of God for the world (3:16). Through this Jesus was glorified (cf. 11:4; 12:23; 13:31–32; 17:1–5) and Jesus gave glory to God (cf. 11:4, 40; 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:1–5). Peter’s unconditional acceptance of the role as shepherd of the sheep of Jesus (21:15–17) will also lead to the glorification of God in his self-gift in love unto death (v. 19a). The link between Peter and Jesus reaches beyond the pasturing task of the good shepherd; Peter is also to glorify God by his death, as Jesus did by his death (v. 19a; cf. 11:4; 12:27–28; 13:31–32).56 Having explained all

55. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 1118; Haenchen, John, 2:226–27. For early Christian references to Peter’s death, see Schnackenburg, Gospel according to St. John, 3:482n76.
56. The reader/listener also recalls the closeness between the words of the narrator in v. 19 (“This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God [τὸ τέ ο δὲ εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν]”) and the words of 12:33 and 18:32. They repeat what the narrator has already said of Jesus’ death in 12:33 and 18:32: “This he said to show by what death he was to die [τούτῳ δὲ ἐλέγεν σημαίνον ποίῳ θανάτῳ ἠμαλλῆν ἀποθνῄσκειν].” See further Chibici-Revneanu, Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten, 314–25; Blaine, Peter in the Gospel of John, 172–75.
the implications of being the shepherd of his flock (21:15–19a), Jesus need do little else besides invite Peter to follow him down this way (v. 19b). This “following” has a physical meaning, as Peter walks behind Jesus (cf. v. 20a), but it also means an “undeviating discipleship all the rest of his days,” a discipleship that follows Jesus’ revelation of the love of God by loving his sheep as Jesus has loved him (13:34–35; 15:12, 17).

Responding to the call to “follow” Jesus in 21:20, Peter does what Jesus commanded in verse 19. However, as he follows he turns and sees the Beloved Disciple, described as the one who had lain close to Jesus’ breast and had been asked for the identity of the betrayer (see 13:23–25). He is also “following” (21:20). These two figures, one whose love for Jesus has just been reestablished (vv. 15–17), and the other whose love has never been in question (13:23–25; 19:25–27; 20:2–9), are again paired as “followers” of Jesus, with all that this entails (see 21:18–19). Peter poses a question that will be answered first by Jesus in verse 22 and then by the narrator in verses 23–24: “Lord, what about this man?” (v. 21). The question of the relative roles of these two disciples is raised and answered. A Johannine community of “followers,” aware that they have all been commanded to love as Jesus has loved, look back upon these two foundational figures and ask about the relative significance of their roles in the ongoing life of love to which they have been called.

Peter has been firmly established as a disciple and a pastor as a result of his loving commitment to Jesus (vv. 15–17), but questions remain around his relationship with the figure of the Beloved Disciple. The paths of these two characters have been entwined across the latter part of the Gospel: at the last meal (13:23–25), in the court of the high priest (18:15–16), and at the empty tomb (cf. 20:3–10). On those earlier occasions, despite Peter’s obvious importance, the Beloved Disciple held pride of place (13:23; 18:15–16; 20:4, 8). Peter denied his association with Jesus (18:17–18), while the Beloved Disciple was with the mother of Jesus at the cross and, “because of that hour,” took her to his own home (19:25–27). He was the only one reported to have come to faith at the empty tomb (20:8). As his role at the final meal, at the cross, and at the empty tomb indicates, the community whose Jesus story is found in the Gospel of John regarded the Beloved Disciple as the

founding figure of the community (cf. 19:25–27). However, if the story has reported that Jesus appointed Peter as disciple and pastor of the community as a result of his love for Jesus (21:15–17), not only Peter in the story but also the readers of the Gospel might ask: “What about this man?” (v. 21). Has the epilogue relegated the Beloved Disciple to a lesser role?

Jesus’ response addresses an issue the community must have wondered about. They have in their recorded memory of Jesus’ words a promise that the Beloved Disciple would not die before Jesus’ return, but this memory needs correction. The exact words of Jesus were: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” (v. 22). Jesus challenges Peter to maintain his role as a follower of Jesus, and he is not to worry about the destiny of the Beloved Disciple. His own destiny has been made clear to him in verses 18–19. But the community’s memory of these words seems to have focused upon the wrong issue. What is central to Jesus’ words, comments the narrator, is the conditional: “If it is my will.” Jesus said not that the Beloved Disciple would not die before the coming of Jesus but that his future would be determined by the will of Jesus. The problem behind this clarification of what exactly Jesus had said is the death of the Beloved Disciple. “The saying spread abroad . . . that this disciple was not to die” (v. 23a), but “this saying,” this expression of popular opinion, was based on a faulty understanding of Jesus’ earlier words. The Beloved Disciple is no longer alive, and the community should not wonder at his death. Whatever has happened to the Beloved Disciple is but the fulfillment of the will of Jesus for him. Both Peter (cf. vv. 18–19) and the Beloved Disciple (vv. 22–23) have died, but they have both been established by Jesus as foundational figures of a future community of disciples commanded to love as Jesus loved (13:34–35; 15:12, 17)—because of their love for Jesus (21:7, 15–17, 20).

The community that received this Gospel lived in a time after the death and departure of Jesus and the deaths of Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. The narrator, therefore, has more to say about the Beloved Disciple.

58. This is not the place to discuss the person of the Beloved Disciple and his relationship to John, the Son of Zebedee. For further information on these and related matters, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 6–9. See especially R. Alan Culpepper, John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

Matching Jesus’ establishment of Peter as pastor and disciple whose love for Jesus will lead him to death (vv. 15–19), the final words from the narrator clarify the significance of the Beloved Disciple. The mutual consigning of mother and disciple at the cross and the gift of the Holy Spirit to this nucleus of the new family of God (cf. 19:25–30) point unambiguously to subsequent disciples’ esteem for the Beloved Disciple as the founding figure of the Christian community to which they belong. But the narrator has done more than this. The Beloved Disciple is also the author of the community’s story of the life and teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus (21:24). The narrator’s words, “We know that his testimony is true,” are close to the earlier intervention of the narrator in 19:35.60

As the community lives in the in-between time, after the death and departure of Jesus and the deaths of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, the Beloved Disciple’s witness links for them the events of the past and the experience of the present. He was a disciple of Jesus who both witnessed “these things” and then wrote a record transmitting “these things.” The witnessing of what was written is still present (ὁ μαρτυρῶν is a nominal use of a present participle) because of the action of the Beloved Disciple (ὁ γράψας is a nominal use of an aorist participle indicating a task completed in the past).61 On the basis of this recorded witness, alive despite the death of the Beloved Disciple, the community can be confident of the truth of their Jesus story and their commitment to love as Jesus has loved.

In John 21 a very significant Christian tradition has its formal beginnings. Because of his love, Peter is the appointed shepherd of the flock, called to love to the point of death (cf. vv. 15–19), while the Beloved Disciple is the bearer of the authentic Jesus tradition (v. 24).62 Both are crucial to a community of disciples called to love as Jesus loved. Behind both roles lies the primacy of love. As Bradford Blaine has remarked, “Peter is described as one who loves Jesus while BD is described as one who is loved by Jesus. This is further evidence that we are to think of the two disciples as composite

60. See Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 152–58.

61. On the Beloved Disciple as the “writer” of the text as we have it today, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 561–62, and the discussion documented there.

62. There is strength in the argument of Alv Kragerud, Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannesevangelium: Ein exegetischer Versuch (Hamburg: Osloer Universitätsverlag, 1959), 29–32, that Peter represents the pastoral ministry while the Beloved Disciple represents the prophetic ministry. However, these roles must not only be read symbolically. They certainly are powerful symbols, but rooted in the living memory of the original Johannine experience inspiring a later generation that has not seen Jesus (20:29). See Brown, Gift upon Gift, 235–36. Other symbolic readings of the two figures have been proposed. For a summary, see Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 523.
halves of the ideal Johannine Christian.” But the two ministries must be distinguished. Considering the story of the entire Gospel, there can be little doubt about the identity of the most significant disciple. He is the one whom Jesus loved. However, Peter is also called to service and death, on the basis of a restoration of his love. The ministry of the Beloved Disciple has been to witness to Jesus in a way that goes on generating life and love because of what was written. The ministry of Peter is to shepherd the flock. The former is the more charismatic role of witnessing, the latter is the difficult task of governing and caring for the flock. Both are essential, as the Johannine community was discovering, but both ministries are founded on love. The love shown in the witnessing of the Beloved Disciple and the love shown in the service unto death of Simon Peter are the bedrock upon which subsequent Johannine disciples might attempt to obey the commandment of Jesus: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34–35).

Conclusion

Only twice in the text of John 18:1–20:31 do words associated with the theme of love explicitly appear. They are found in 19:26 in the indication of “the disciple whom he (Jesus) loved” (τὸν μαθητήν ... ὃν ἠγάπα) and in the different indication of the same figure in 20:2 (τὸν ἀλλὸν μαθητήν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς). As we have seen, these two episodes play a key role in the Johannine Passion Narrative. However, despite the absence of words used for affirmations of love or descriptors of love as a theme, loving actions abound. Jesus goes to his passion in command of the situation, caring for those who have been given to him (18:1–11). He is proclaimed and crowned as a king (18:28–19:16a). He points away from himself to a community of disciples who know what he has said, because they have heard his word, however fragile they may prove to be (18:12–27). From his royal throne on the cross he establishes a community that will not be torn apart, founded on love

63. Blaine, Peter in the Gospel of John, 182.
64. See Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship, 173–76.
65. As indicated above, the use of both ἀγαπάω and φιλέω to refer to the same Beloved Disciple suggests that there is no distinction in the meaning of these expressions. However, they may indicate a time when an earlier stage of the story (using ἀγαπάω) was being brought into its final form (using φιλέω). The heavy use of φιλέω in 21:15–17, most likely a later narrative, suggests this possibility.
and faith (19:16b–27). In his death, which perfects the task given to him by the Father (4:34; 17:4), he pours down the gift of the Spirit (19:28–30), and from his pierced body, the blood and water of Eucharist and baptism have their source (19:31–38). The firstfruits of the “hour” that is now decisively under way appear in the nascent community’s emergence from the darkness. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ask for the body of Jesus and bury him as a king (19:38–42). Love abounds, as no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (15:13). Everything that has been told has been directed to the disciples, so that they could eventually “gaze upon him whom they had pierced” (19:37). There they will “see” the revelation of a God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son to give them life and save them from condemnation (3:16–17).

During his ministry Jesus announced that God so loved the world that he handed over his Son that the world might have eternal life, and that his task was to make God known (17:2–3). The promise of those words of Jesus has now become reality in the actions of Jesus. Only now can Jesus’ command that the disciples love one another have a point of reference. In order to empower his disciples to respond to his command, the risen and ascending Lord brings his “hour” to completion in his gifts: peace, joy, mission, the Spirit, and the commission to be the ongoing, revealing presence of Jesus in the midst of a world that will reject them as it rejected Jesus (20:19–23; cf. 15:18–16:3). Although so few words are associated with the love theme in John 18–20, all the loving actions of Jesus summarized above ultimately result from God’s love for the world and for Jesus, whom he has sent to make God known (see 3:16–17; 17:2–3). Jesus has called the disciples to love one another as he has loved them (13:34–35; 15:12, 17), so that everyone will know that they are disciples of Jesus, who loved them first (13:34–35), and to make known to the world the love that the Father, who sent Jesus, has for them (17:21, 23).

Words for love return in 21:1–25 in Jesus’ encounter with Simon Peter in verses 15–17 (both ἀγαπάω [from Jesus] and φιλέω [from Peter, and finally Jesus]) and in the naming of the Beloved Disciple in verses 7 and 20 (only ἀγαπάω is used). However, continuing the thrust of the narrative across its description of Jesus’ hour in 18:1–20:31, the actions that flow from Jesus’ initiative with these disciples in 21:15–24 determine the importance of this

66. As Koester, Word of Life, 123, puts it: “The death of Jesus can be a source of life. It is by dying that Jesus reveals the love of God, and when this love evokes faith, it brings people into the relationship with God that is true life (3:16).”
final and decisive presentation of the respective identities and roles of the two foundational figures. The love that Simon Peter professes for Jesus in verses 15–17 will be tested. By the time this Gospel was written he had already stretched out his hands and been girded and carried where he did not wish to go. He had given himself unconditionally in a death that glorified God, as the death of Jesus glorified God (vv. 18–19). The same must be said of the Beloved Disciple. The love between Jesus and this disciple has led to a misunderstanding; that he would not die until Jesus returned. It was not Jesus’ will that the disciple remain until Jesus returned, and so it has come to pass that he has died (vv. 22–23). Both foundational disciples are to “follow” Jesus (vv. 19–20, 22). One will become the shepherd who gives his life for his flock. The other will also die, leaving behind a “writing” (v. 24: ὁ γράφας ταῦτα; see 20:30–31) that will witness to the story of Jesus. This “writing” (γραφή; cf. 20:9) guarantees the life-giving truth of the witness that generations of disciples will read and listen to. It will lead them into a deeper commitment to Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (20:30–31). Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple form the “bridge” out of the story of Jesus into the lives of a later generation of disciples. Love has produced these two foundational disciples; their shepherding and their witness nourished those “who have not seen and yet believe” (20:29).

67. Koester, Word of Life, 122, writes of the relationship between Jesus’ death and glory: “If glory defines what the crucifixion is, the crucifixion defines what glory is. The crucifixion manifests the scope of divine power by disclosing the depth of divine love.” This is also claimed for Peter’s death in v. 19a.
“Those Who Have Not Seen and Yet Believe”

John 20:29

For John, the God of Jesus is a God who so loved the world that he sent his only son, so that everyone could have eternal life and salvation. Jesus came not to judge the world but to offer it life (see 3:16–17). This life is possible because Jesus has made God known (see 17:3). If you wish to know and understand the God of Jesus, the narrator instructs the reader/listener, gaze upon the lifted up, pierced Son of Man: “And they shall gaze upon the one whom they have pierced” (19:37). There is found the revelation of a God who loves. A first-century church did not imagine the later practice of the veneration of an icon of the cross. They gazed upon the pierced one in their self-giving love for one another, living the example that Jesus had given them (see 13:15) and being known as his disciples by their obedience to the new commandment that Jesus had given them: that they love one another as he had loved them (see 13:34–35; 15:12, 17)—that is, to the end (13:1: εἰς τέλος).¹ This gazing was accompanied by decisive action. The Johannine

Christians crossed the road from the security of their former ways within Judaism (see 9:22; 12:43; 16:2) to enter the kingdom by being born again by water and the Spirit (see 3:3–5; 19:34), by recognizing the broken body of Jesus and the spilled blood in the fragments that were gathered at the table of the Lord (see 6:1–15, 51c–58; 19:34).

The cross tells the story of the love of Jesus “to the end” (13:1), and Jesus calls the disciples to love as he loved—to the end, with both meanings that expression entailed: to the chronological end of life and consummately. The connection, already made within the fabric of the Johannine narrative, between baptism, Eucharist, and love is another story that is heavily debated and cannot detain us here.² But was it possible for an early Christian community to respond to Jesus’ command that its members love one another as he had loved them? The evidence is slight, but the indications are that the Johannine practice of love in the concrete life of communities where most had not seen Jesus, but believed, was not without its problems. What God had done in and through Jesus could not be questioned; it was told authoritatively in their Jesus-story (see 19:35; 20:30–31; 21:24). But the response of subsequent disciples to God’s love (3:16–17) and Jesus’ revelation of that love (13:1–38; 17:1–26) continued to be ambiguous, as it had been in the responses of Simon Peter, the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas to the presence of the Risen Jesus in 20:1–29.³

1, 2, and 3 John: Letters to Believers Who Have Not Seen

This study has intentionally avoided all discussion of the love theme in the Johannine Letters, mainly because each body of literature is unique in form and has a unique background. The Gospel of John is a narrative, with its own internal literary structure. We can analyze it by tracing the temporal flow of the narrative; following the interaction of its characters,

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² For some initial reflections on these passages and their place in the Christian experience of the Johannine community, see Francis J. Moloney, “When Is John Talking about Sacraments?,” AusBR 30 (1982): 10–33.
³ For an impressive and up-to-date survey of the contemporary understanding of the process that leads from the “narrative time” of the story itself into the “evangelist’s time,” during which this Gospel is being read, interpreted, and applied to the life and practice of the reading/listening community, see Campbell, Kinship Relations, 154–63. See also below, note 46.
especially the interaction between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus and “the Jews,” and Jesus and major characters (the mother of Jesus, Simon Peter, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, Mary and Martha of Bethany, the Beloved Disciple, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas); and following what an implied author is trying to say to an implied reader (sometimes through a very invasive narrator [1:1–18; 19:35; 20:30–31]).

In the end, the Gospel’s presentation of the love theme is associated with the story of Jesus, and especially in and through the consummate manifestation and communication of that love in and through his “hour.” Although inspired by the theology of the Gospel, the Letters of John are very different as literature and in their purpose. It is difficult to describe 1 John as a “letter,” as it does not conform to the canons of letters from that period. Nevertheless, it was directed to a reading/listening audience by the Elder, and is something of a tract. It is an authoritative written communication, to be read or heard by communities that received it. On the other hand, 2 and 3 John, although very brief, are genuine letters, written to explicitly named recipients (“the elect lady”: 2 John 1; “Gaius”: 3 John 1).

Further, the presentation of the love theme in the Johannine Letters is different from that of the Gospel of John, as all who have attempted to analyze the theme across all the Johannine literature have discovered. This may come as a surprise, since much in the Gospel is also found in the Letters, especially in 1 John. Both the Gospel and the Letters come from the same faith experience and life in a Christian community inspired by the same...

4. This technical language comes from contemporary narrative critical theory. For indications of what is meant, see Moloney, *Gospel of John* (SP 4), 13–20.

5. Although far from certain, I am assuming that the same senior figure in the community wrote all three letters. He does not identify himself in 1 John, but wrote to the “elect lady” and Gaius as “the elder” (ἡ πρεσβύτερος) in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 respectively. I will use the term “the Elder” throughout to speak of the author of all three letters. See Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 44–57, and Brown, *Epistles of John*, 14–19. Both scholars lean toward accepting that the same person is the author of all three letters, as was universally accepted by older scholarship. See, for example, Brooke F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, with new introduction, “Johannine Studies since Westcott’s Day,” by Frederick F. Bruce (Sutton Courtenay, UK: Marcham Books, 1966), xxx–xxxii; Alan E. Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), lxiii–lxxix.

6. On these questions, see the comprehensive treatment by Brown, *Epistles of John*, 788–95 (on epistolary format) and 86–92 (on the literary nature of 1 John). Brown regards 1 John as a comment, written for the Johannine communities, patterned on the structure and theology of the Gospel of John (pp. 90–92).

7. For an excellent and well-documented survey of scholarship, see Morgan-Wynne, *Cross in the Johannine Writings*, 212–53.
Johannine understanding of God, Christ, and the believer. What follows accepts that the Letters are later than the Gospel and offer a glimpse of the difficulties faced by those who believed without seeing in later Johannine communities. An initial reading of 1 John indicates that it is directly linked with, and continuously affirms, the centrality of the love theme as it was expressed in the Gospel of John. The letter is replete with powerful affirmations of God as love, God’s love for us, the need for Christians to love one another, and the crucial role of love for a Christian life throughout the author’s exhortations. Indeed, the theme of love is more explicit and direct in 1 John than in the necessarily more subtle twists and turns of the Gospel narrative. A list of major exhortations to love in 1 John, and the reasons for that love, produces an impressive catalog.

- God is love (4:8, 16)
- God’s love for us is manifested in God’s sending of his Son (4:9–10)
- The reason believers must love one another is that love has its origins in God (4:7)
- Whoever loves is born of God and knows God (4:7)
- Not to love means not to know God (4:8)
- Perfect love takes away all fear (4:18)
- No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (4:12)

8. While the question whether they appeared before or after the Gospel is still a lively discussion (see below, p. 196, note 13), there is nowadays universal agreement that the Gospel of John and the Johannine Letters come from the same early Christian setting.

9. On the debate over the relative “timing” of the Gospel and the Letters, see below, p. 197, note 14. We do not know whether the narrative of the Gospel grew and was eventually communicated within one or several “Johannine communities.” However, the Letters make it clear that there are several communities. In 2–3 John the Elder speaks of movement between groups and of the criteria to be used in accepting people into one or the other community or refusing them admission.

10. Understandably, many theologians and preachers plunder the following and other texts from 1 John in their reflections on God as love and the consequences of the truth that God is love. However, there is always the danger that such reflections objectify these textual affirmations without giving them their appropriate contextual setting. New Testament and literary critics find this approach theologically unsatisfactory. While the love theme is strong in 1 John, it is seldom asked why it is so important and why it is so often found in literary contexts that are somewhat polemical. For a sustained rich and sensitive use of the love theme in 1 John in his systematic theological writing, see the work of Anthony J. Kelly, “‘God Is Love’: A Theological-Moral Reading of 1 John,” Studia Moralia 37 (1999): 35–72; Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 388–409; Kelly, God Is Love. For his important essay on this question, see Anthony J. Kelly, “Dimensions of Meaning: Theology and Exegesis,” in Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament; Essays in Honor of Francis J. Moloney, ed. Rekha M. Chennattu and Mary L. Coloe, BibScRel 187 (Rome: LAS, 2005), 41–55.
• Belief in the love of God, manifested in confessing that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, ensures the abiding presence of us in God and God in us (4:15–16)
• God’s love is manifested in the fact that Christ first died for us (3:16; 4:19)
• This calls for love of neighbor, never refusing help to the needy (3:17)
• As Christ laid down his life in love, we ought to lay down our lives for one another (3:16)
• Not to love is to be a murderer (3:15)
• Anyone not sharing goods with those in need cannot claim to live in God’s love (3:17)
• Let us love, not in words but in deeds (3:18)
• Anyone who claims to love God but does not love other people is a liar (4:20)
• Love for God can be achieved only by loving his Son and keeping his commandments (5:1–3)
• The commandments are that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another (3:22–24)

But within this impressive and partial catalog one senses some negativity. It not only eloquently presents the primacy of God’s love, manifested in the gift of his Son for us (3:16; 4:8–16), and repeats Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel that one loves the Father by loving the Son (5:1–3) and Jesus’ command to love one another (3:16; 3:22–24; 4:7, 12); it also issues some severe warnings. Not loving is associated with liars (4:20), murderers (3:15), selfishness (3:17), and the loss of the abiding presence of God (3:17). The focus upon the theme of love comes from a passionate commitment to the Gospel of John; the negativity comes from the circumstances that determined the writing of the Letters.

Some of this negativity can also be found in the Gospel, although not generally associated with the love theme. It is best expressed in John 15:18–16:3, where Jesus describes the world’s hatred for him and his disciples. As we have seen, this passage balances Jesus’ use of the image of the vine in his call to “abide” (15:1–11). The reason for this hatred and rejection is a refusal to accept that Jesus is the Sent One of the Father (see 15:21, 24).11 Another significant difference between the Gospel and 1 John is the agent of this negativity.

11. See Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 262–332, for this element in the “trial” of Jesus and his disciples in the social and historical setting that produced the Gospel.
hatred and rejection. For the Gospel it is “the world” under the dominion of
its ruler (12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and those associated with this power of dark-
ness; in 1 John the situation appears to be more personal, even though, in
1 John 3:13, the Elder describes those who oppose his interpretation of the
Johannine tradition as “the world” that hates the brethren.12 The message
of the Gospel is never far from the message of 1 John, but the situation is
different. There is danger of further serious division and breakdown within
the believing community, rather than the hostile external threat of the powers
of darkness and authorities that rejected Jesus and will reject his disciples
by putting them out of the synagogue and even killing them, thinking that
in doing so they are rendering praise to God (John 15:18–16:3). The clearest
indication that such a situation produced 1 John (and the subsequent 2 and
3 John) is found in 1 John 2:19, in a context where the author is describing
the imminent (“the last hour”) coming of the antichrist: “They went out
from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have
continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are
not of us.” It is universally agreed that one of the fundamental motivations
for the Elder’s writing 1 John was some form of schism within the Johannine
community.13 Accepting that all three letters are subsequent to the Gospel of
John, and reading the Letters in the light of that reception, it appears that
in the community, different interpretations of a number of aspects of the
teaching of the Gospel, but especially in its Christology, its eschatology, and
its ethics, have led to such serious internal division that some have “gone

12. Especially in the light of the use of the expression “the world” in 1 John 2:15–17, which
is different from the Gospel’s use of the same expression. See the excursus on “the world” in

13. See, for example, Westcott, Epistles of St. John, 71–72; Rudolf Bultmann, The Johann-
nine Epistles, trans. R. Philip O’Hara, Lane C. McCaughey, and Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia
Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 151–52; Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, WBC 51 (Waco: Word, 1984),
101–4; David Rensberger, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
(Nashville: Abingdon 1997), 78–79; Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 139–41, rightly points to
the Elder’s purpose in mentioning this breakdown: “The author is less concerned with polemics
than he is with the positive side of the question. They have been given strength, enabling them
to put up resistance” (p. 139). See also Brooke, Johannine Epistles, 53–55. Brooke concludes:
“The author finds comfort and assurance, for himself and for his readers, in the thought that
whatever happens is included in the one purpose of God, however much appearances may
seem to indicate the contrary” (pp. 54–55). Bultmann points out that the group that “went
out” need not be regarded as a “sect,” and that they may even regard themselves as still part
of the community. The Elder rejects that possible claim (Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 36).
out.” 14 The author of 1 John argues, with an authority rooted in deep personal conviction, for one understanding of certain critical issues, but some former members of Johannine communities clearly disagree. For these, and no doubt other reasons, they have “gone out” (1 John 2:19).

Into this situation an early Christian author writes with authority to affirm central issues of his (and his community’s) interpretation of the Gospel, over against others who “have gone out” from an original community but who never really belonged to them. Hostility is in the air. One has only to sense

14. There is a never-ending debate over the relationship between the Gospel and the Letters. Following a major intervention from Charles H. Dodd, “The First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel,” BJRL 21 (1937): 129–56, many have argued that at least 1 John preceded the writing of the Gospel. For a recent presentation of this position, see Allen D. Callahan, A Love Supreme: A History of the Johannine Tradition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). More nuanced is the argument of a number of scholars who claim that the Letters appeared at some stage during the process of the gradual evolution of the Gospel, inspired by the Johannine tradition and generated by difficulties within the community. Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, claims that we cannot be sure which came first, suggesting that the Letters may have appeared “between the dissemination of the Gospel in oral form and its completion in writing” (p. 39), and von Wahlde, Gospel and Letters of John, 3:1–27 (see also 1:364–67), is more precise in his identification of the timing and the cause of the writing of the Letters as the Gospel went through its three editions. As we will see below, the understanding of the Johannine mission theology by Popkes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes (329–54), insists on the unity of the Johannine literature and claims that the Gospel and the Letters are to be interpreted as a unified utterance (pp. 52–55). The love commands in the Gospel are a call to start again in mission, to put into place the Johannine ideals, especially as they are found in 1 John 4:7–5:4 (pp. 93–161). Teresa Okure, Johannine Approach to Mission, 235–70, constructs a mission theology by dating the Letters before the Gospel. The position adopted here (see also Moloney, James to Jude, 108–15) argues what might be called a majority position, but the majority is not overwhelming, as is clear from the recent important study of Udo Schnelle, “Die Reihenfolge der johanneischen Schriften,” NTS 57 (2011): 91–113. Schnelle argues that all three Johannine Letters were available before the Gospel appeared and that 2–3 John began what became a “Johannine literature.” What follows accepts that the Letters follow the appearance of the Gospel and reflect the situation of the subsequent tensions that grew in the communities as differing interpretations of the Gospel emerged. Important representatives of this position are Brown, Epistles of John, and Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John. Both Brown and Painter are open to the situation suggested by Schnackenburg, but insist on the Gospel as the inspiration for the teaching of the Letters. Brown’s claim that 1 John follows the literary structure of the Gospel (Epistles of John, 90–92) logically requires that this letter is chronologically located after the completed Gospel narrative. For a description of the history of the interpretation of the Johannine Letters, especially 1 John, see Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 1–26. A popular speculative reconstruction of the history of the Johannine communities that supports the position taken above can be found in Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), and idem, The Churches the Apostles Left Behind (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 84–123. On the history of the Johannine literature, see also Miguel Rodriguez Ruiz, Der Missionsgedanke des Johannesevangeliums: Ein Beitrag zur johanneischen Soteriologie und Ekklesiologie, FB 55 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1987), 306–35. Ruiz dates the Letters after the Gospel and reads the Gospel as the work of an evangelist and a redactor.
the polemic in the opening pages of 1 John, in the light of what is said in 2:19, to be aware that all is not well.\textsuperscript{15}

- “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth” (1:6)
- “If we say we have no sin . . . the truth is not in us” (v. 8)
- “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (v. 10)

Despite the beauty and the challenge of the articulation of the theme of love in 1 John, most of which is informed by and reflects the Gospel of John, including continual reference to the cross as the place where Jesus showed this love (see esp. 3:16; 4:10), one senses an atmosphere of hostility in the situation that generated the letter. The Elder exhorts his communities to remain firm in the beliefs that they have had “from the beginning” (1:1), in the face of other interpretations that he regards as unacceptable. He describes the adversaries, once members of the same community (see 2:19), as “antichrist” (2:18, 22), “deceivers” (2:26), “of the devil” (3:10), “murderers” (3:15), “liars” (1:6; 4:20), and “false prophets” (4:1). He shows little affection toward those who have “gone out” from the community.

This is not the place to assess the merits of one side or the other of the debate over what caused this tension and antagonism. Many have attempted reconstructions,\textsuperscript{16} but it is an interesting speculation to wonder what the Elder’s adversaries might have been saying about him and his community.\textsuperscript{17} As far as this reflection is concerned, whatever one makes of the chronological sequence of the Gospel and 1 John, reading 1 John’s statement on love in a setting of the rejection of “the other” within contexts that reflect conflict indicates that living the perfect law of love in the community that produced and then inherited the Gospel of John was more difficult than proclaiming it.

\textsuperscript{15} See the synthesis of the signs of this “polemic” in Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 84–87. Painter, rightly, does not like the expression “polemic,” as the Elder’s pastoral goal is to sustain those who have been shaken by the schism. He writes so that his readers may know that they “have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). His primary aim is not “polemics.”

\textsuperscript{16} Especially important are those of Brown, Epistles of John, 47–115, and Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 82–94, and the summary of Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 218–24, 229–40.

\textsuperscript{17} As so often in the reconstruction of the past on the basis of limited evidence, we are hearing only one end of a telephone conversation. We have no idea of what is being said on the other end of the discussion that is generating such tension and anxiety.
All three documents are issued as authoritative statements from a senior and significant person in the post-Gospel situation, exercising a rhetoric of persuasion, attempting to comfort and maintain the loyalty of those to whom he is writing. They must show this loyalty in their adherence to what the Elder has to say about God, Jesus Christ, the end of time, and the way Johannine Christians should relate to one another. But even in 1 John, where he is at his most eloquent, there are clear signs that he does not have a great deal of tolerance for those who do not accept his point of view, calling them the antichrist, deceivers, murderers, liars, and false prophets. The situation worsens in the later letters. Brief as they are, they indicate an irretrievable breakdown in relationships between formerly united Christians. In 2 John 9–11 the Elder makes his mind clear about how one should receive (or rather, not receive) those who do not accept what he regards as the correct teaching:

Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one abiding in the teaching has the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and he does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into the house and do not speak a greeting to him, for the one who greets him shares in his evil works.

Either they accept the Elder’s interpretation of the Johannine tradition, or they are to be totally shunned: not welcome into the community (“the house”) and not even spoken to.

However, the situation has worsened by the time 3 John is written. Now the shoe is on the other foot! The Elder is disturbed by the behavior of a certain Diotrephes, the leader of a local Johannine community (3 John 9a: “who loves to be first among them”), who is putting into practice what the Elder recommended in 2 John 9–11. The Elder is upset that when people from other Johannine communities visit the community of Diotrephes their orthodoxy is tested, but Diotrephes does not accept the authority of the Elder (v. 9). If visiting brethren do not meet the standards set by Diotrephes and question his authority (in much the same way as the Elder has recommended to his loyal community in 2 John 9–11), they are excluded from the community. The Elder writes of Diotrephes’ behavior:

He does not receive us. Because of this, if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, slandering us with evil words. Not content with this, he personally

18. On the authoritative nature of the Elder’s dealings with the communities, see Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 82–83.
19. Other issues may have contributed to the conflict as well, but these are the most obvious ones.
does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who would welcome them, and casts them out of the church. (3 John 9–10)

We cannot be sure, but the antagonism between Diotrephes and the Elder may well have been created by what the latter wrote in 2 John 9–11.20 We have come a long way from the “brethren” of Jesus, now the children of Jesus’ God and Father (John 20:17), despite the Elder’s firm adhesion to that hope for members of the community (see, for example, 1 John 4:7–12; 5:1–5).

We need not enter into reconstructed speculations concerning the reasons for this breakdown across the communities, nor a historical reconstruction of when and why it took place. The evidence of the Johannine Letters is that a once-unified community has divided (1 John 2:19), and there is now theological and socio-ecclesial hostility between the different churches. Both the Elder (2 John 9–11) and Diotrephes (3 John 9–10) have reached a point where Jesus’ command to love one another as he has loved them is no longer possible to put into practice. Even though there are many correlations between the understanding of Jesus’ “hour” in the Gospel and in 1 John, the central theological role it played in the Gospel has been redirected. The first epistle insists more strongly on the death of Jesus as a sacrificial and expiatory action of God (see 1 John 1:7; 2:2; 3:5; 4:10). These themes were not absent from the Gospel (see 1:29; 19:14), but they now play a major, rather than a minor, role in the Letters.21 Enigmatically, as has often been pointed out, the more conservative approach of 1 John to Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of God, a more mainstream understanding of the end time, and a clearer indication of what was required to live a Christian life helped the Gospel of John to find its place within the Christian canon that we now call the New Testament.22

20. See the extensive discussion of this issue in Brown, Epistles of John, 732–39, 743–49. See also Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 375–77.
21. For a study of the understanding of the cross in 1 John and a comparison with the Gospel, see Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 241–53.
22. The more abstract and speculative story of the Gospel was much loved by second-century gnostics (see Elaine Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis, SBLMS 17 [Nashville: Abingdon, 1973]). They were the first to comment upon it, and Johannine language and imagery are found in many of their “systems.” The early church had its concerns about this, but the more down-to-earth and mainstream presentation of core Johannine thought in 1 John (and the support of Irenaeus) eventually saw to the Gospel’s acceptance in the Christian canon. See Brown, Epistles of John, 106–15. This process has been questioned by Hill, Johannine Corpus, but reaffirmed by Keefer, Branches of the Gospel of John. For a collection of essays reflecting different aspects of this debate, see Tuomas Rasimus, ed., The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel, NovTSup 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
This brief reflection on what little we can trace about post-Gospel Johannine Christianity makes it clear that “those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29) found it difficult to put their lives where their words were. We suspect that all the early Christian communities that had their origins in the Johannine mission (see 4:1–42) used the story of the Gospel of John as their inspiration. But they found it difficult to love as Jesus had loved (13:34–35; 15:12). Indeed, if 1–3 John are an indication, they failed to make the love command the all-determining principle of their Christian lives, and one must wonder about the eventual effectiveness of the outreach to “the world” that Johannine love was supposed to generate (see John 3:16–17; 13:34–35; 17:21, 23).

As time went by, the Christian church readily accepted the Johannine Christology as the basis for the emerging Christian dogmas of the Trinity (325 CE: Nicea) and the union of the human and divine in the person of Jesus Christ (451 CE: Chalcedon). These are not Johannine doctrines, but the Fourth Gospel’s narrative rhetoric and theological understanding of God the Father of Jesus, the Son, and the life-giving gift of the Spirit Paraclete opens the door to later Christian speculation and ultimately to its doctrinal formulation. Indeed, as history has shown, reflection upon the Gospel of John in the early Christian centuries made such doctrines necessary. But the command to love unconditionally (εἰς τέλος) and the lack of clear instructions on church order and “commandments” led to the adoption of the more “ecclesial” Gospel of Matthew for matters of church order. As John 21 indicates, a community based on love and faith alone (see 19:25–27) is inevitably destined to run into internal difficulty. An attempt was made in that later epilogue to the Gospel to establish some principles surrounding such questions as who belonged to the community (21:9–14), who was the chief pastor (vv. 15–17), and what

23. For an outstanding presentation of a Johannine theology of mission, based upon a reading of John 4:1–42, see Okure, Johannine Approach to Mission. See also Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, The Biblical Foundations for Mission (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 280–96; Wins- stanley, Symbols and Spirituality, 159–70; and Rodriguez Ruiz, Der Missionsgedanke. Rodriguez Ruiz’s study is valuable because it attempts to trace the unfolding of the theme of mission across the narrative of the Gospel, from the first days (pp. 42–72, with a focus on 3:16 and 4:1–42), through the ministry (pp. 74–127, with a focus on 7:35, 10:16, and 11:52), the announcing of the “hour” of Jesus (pp. 130–62, with a focus on 12:20–36), the Last Discourse (pp. 164–218, with a focus on 13:34–35; 14:12; 15:8, 16, 20, 26–27; 16:7–11), the final prayer (pp. 222–55), the Easter foundation of mission (pp. 258–76, with a focus upon 20:1–18), and the fishing trip of 21:1–14 (pp. 278–304). Many of his “mission” passages across the narrative are passages used earlier in this study to argue that love is often shown in deeds as well as in words.

was the relationship between the pastor and the Beloved Disciple (vv. 18–24).
But internal difficulties continued in the post-Gospel situation, if the scarce
resources of 1–3 John and the later reception of the Gospel into the life of
the Johannine communities are any indication. As John Painter pointedly
describes the situation: “Certainly there is no hint in 1 John that the opponents
might be won over to the truth, and this constitutes something of a problem
in the context of the understanding of God, who is love.”

Do the indications of subsequent failure, and even the dissolution of the
Johannine communities as such, invalidate the role of the love theme in the
Gospel of John? There are at least two sides to the issue, and the first of
these is theological. The Gospel of John is firm in its presentation of the
love of God for the world (3:16–17), the unconditional love of Jesus for “his
own” (13:1, 18–20), and Jesus’ desire to draw the disciples into that circle of
love so that others and “the world” might believe that Jesus is the Sent One
of God (13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 17:21, 23). This cannot be challenged without
dismantling the Gospel. God’s love for the world and God’s sending of the
Son to manifest that love lie at the heart of John’s story. In equal fashion,
Jesus’ manifestation of the love of God in his loving self-gift on the cross,
his foundation of a community based on love and faith (19:25–27), and the
gift of the Spirit and a foundational leadership that makes sense because
The “God side” of the equation is clear.

The problems that emerged within the life of those who believed without
seeing were not “theological” but “Christian,” although John was most likely
unaware of that description of Jesus’ followers (see Acts 11:26). God’s design
is made clear, but the response of those who “have not seen and yet believe”
(20:29) is, at best, ambiguous. The divine agenda that lies at the center
of the story of Jesus told in the Fourth Gospel remains in place and lies at the
heart of the teaching of the Elder in 1 John.

25. Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 108.
26. As Brown, Churches the Apostles Left Behind, 123, puts it: “Johannine ecclesiology is the
most attractive and exciting in the NT. Alas it is also one of the least stable. One rejoices that at
the end of the first century, when much about the Church was being formalized and institution-
alized, there were Christians who still marched to the sounds of a different drummer; and one
is sad that the road down which they went was inevitably a dead end.” Although one cannot
be sure, Brown is probably close to the truth when he suggests that the Johannine communities
took different directions, some to become part of the emerging mainstream church catholic, and
others into some form of early heterodoxy, including gnosticism. See Brown, Epistles of John,
112–15; idem, Community of the Beloved Disciple, 145–64. For a survey of recent alternative
suggestions, see Morgan-Wynne, Cross in the Johannine Writings, 229–40.
Even if 1 John is preoccupied with the life and faith of the community, that life and faith are founded in Jesus Christ come in the flesh as the ground of faith and of the obligation to love one another. As the ground of faith, the Son who gave his life for us reveals the God who is love.27

What emerges from the story of the Johannine communities, indicated by John 21 and 1–3 John, is that those who have not seen and yet believe find it difficult to live the dream of accepting the love of God, revealed in the loving self-gift of Jesus, in their day-to-day lives by loving one another in a way that matches the love of Jesus: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34; 15:12). They are not alone in their struggle, and their ultimate failure, to attain that lofty goal.28

Love One Another—An Early Christian Sect?

The Fourth Gospel has shifted the focus of the biblical love command from love of God and one’s neighbor (see Deut. 6:4–5; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:30–31; Matt. 22:35–40; Luke 10:25–27) to a passionate command (13:34–35; 15:12, 17) and prayer (17:21, 23, 26) that the disciples love one another. Jesus tells them that their love for one another must match the love that he has shown for them in the self-giving perfection of his task on the cross (13:34; 15:12). Jesus prays that they be one as the Father and the Son are one (17:21), united by the love of the Father for the Son (17:23), finally swept into the love that has existed from all time between the Father and the Son (17:26). This appears to restrict the traditional circle of love, and a number of scholars have claimed that the Johannine love commands indicate Johannine sectarianism.

As we saw earlier in this study, Ernst Käsemann and Wayne Meeks claimed that the Johannine community showed clear signs of sectarianism.29 Various subsequent studies of the Johannine love commands and essays on the ethics of the Gospel of John and the Johannine writings have adopted this suggestion, claiming that the community is developing a narrow focus upon itself,

27. Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, 93. See the careful presentation of the close links between the Gospel and 1 John on pp. 58–73, and a synthesis of the theology of the Letters on pp. 94–104.
losing interest in anyone other than itself. No one has put the case more forcefully than Jack T. Sanders:

Johannine Christianity is interested only in whether he (the “outsider”) believes. “Are you saved, brother?” the Johannine Christian asks the man bleeding to death on the side of the road. “Are you concerned about your soul?” “Do you believe that Jesus is the one who came down from God?” “If you believe you will have eternal life,” promises the Johannine Christian, while the dying man’s blood stains the ground.30

Approaching the narrative of the Gospel of John, with its intense focus upon Jesus’ perfection of his task (4:34) to make known a God who loves (3:16–17; 17:2–3) by means of his self-gift in love on the cross (13:1; 17:1; 19:28–30), and with its focus on his return to the Father by means of the “hour” (20:17), leads us to question such conclusions. Whatever the practice of Johannine Christians, the Gospel’s theology and Christology have their place in the Christian tradition. The love of the disciples for one another is totally determined by the love of God, made manifest in the love of the Son for his Father and for “his own,” however well or poorly the latter have observed the love commands.

Some years ago Teresa Okure argued cogently for the missionary nature of the Fourth Gospel. Essential to her thesis is that the Letters are not a postscript to the Gospel. For Okure they are written by the same person. Both the Gospel and the Letters are responding to the same crisis within the Johannine setting. She argues that the Gospel, just like the Letters, is concerned about “doctrinal” issues, especially that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The “doctrinal” crisis in the community preceded both the Gospel and the Letters. In this situation, she argues the Gospel is missionary in its purpose (see 20:30–31). The Gospel is written for a more focused group, most likely located in one place, while the Letters are directed to people of the same christological persuasion who are living in more scattered situations. However, “the question at issue on the level of Jesus and his audience (the Gospel) and that of the Evangelist and his audience (the Epistles) is exactly the same.”31 For Okure, the figure of Jesus as the humble and loving figure makes it clear to those in danger of falling away, and perhaps even to some who are hearing the Jesus story for the first time, that he is the Christ and the Son of God.32 Johannine Christians must start

32. On the role of the humble Jesus, see ibid., 264, and on the need for mutual love, see p. 268.
again in mission, adopting the same humility and love. The theme of mission pervades the whole Gospel in order to generate that response.\(^{33}\)

The recent study of Enno Popkes argues that the love theme in the Fourth Gospel is essentially missionary.\(^{34}\) For Popkes, the clearest articulation of the Johannine love theme, and its role, is found in 1 John 4:9–10: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an expiation for our sins.”\(^{35}\) In the light of their resurrection faith, the community must recognize that it has failed. Popkes argues that the development of the love theme in the Gospel is responding to the failure of love within the community itself, a failure that has led to community breakdown. *They must start again.* The members of the Johannine communities must accept the fact that they live in a world hostile to them, as it was hostile to Jesus because it would not accept that Jesus was the Sent One of the Father (see John 15:18–16:3). This is the essential background to the Gospel, generated by its dualistic worldview.\(^{36}\) Johannine dualism is not a negative element in the Gospel, an unassailable chasm between “us” and “them.” The reality that Johannine Christians must face is that they live and love in a world that hates them. They, however, are never called to hate the world.\(^{37}\) On the contrary, they are to embrace the world with a life-giving message of love reflecting the love of God, manifested in the love of the Son.\(^{38}\)


\(^{34}\) Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes*. For Popkes, unlike Okure, there is no call for a decision concerning the chronological relationship between the Letters and the Gospel. They are to be interpreted as a literary and theological whole. See pp. 52–55.

\(^{35}\) In a way similar to Painter, Popkes regards the Elder not as setting up a sectarian conventicle but as doing all he can to restore and preserve the faith and love of his community in the face of an acute breakdown (*Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes*, 136–61).

\(^{36}\) For a clear introduction to the Johannine dualistic worldview, see Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), 47–64.

\(^{37}\) Never in the Gospel are disciples instructed to hate the world. Their role as disciples of Jesus is in the world, to which they do not belong (see 17:14) but from which they must not be taken (see 17:15). Similarly, Jesus is not “of the world,” and his kingship is not “of the world” (see 18:36), but his mission is to give life and salvation to the world because God so loves the world (3:16–17). It is in the world that the disciples are to make God known, in the midst of hostility. Although more nuanced, the relationship between the disciples and the attractions of “the world” in 1 John 2:15–17 is not one of hatred. The Elder exhorts them not to love those attractions, but not to “hate” the world.

\(^{38}\) Right until his last encounter with “the Jews” in his public ministry, Jesus exhorts “the Jews” to walk in the light before the darkness takes them over (see 12:35–36). However acrimonious the encounter between Jesus and “the Jews” in 7:1–8:59, the door is always open to the possibilities of an acceptance of what Jesus is offering as the Sent One of the Father.
By means of what Popkes calls a *Dramaturgie*, a drama that is acted out step by logical step, the Gospel tells of union of everlasting love between the Father and the Son that has its dwelling place in the community (17:24–26). The handing over and sending of the Son is motivated by God’s love for the world (3:16–21). The love of Jesus is the reason for the existence of the Johannine community, and they must either accept or reject the revelation of Jesus as the Sent One. This will be visible only in the love that exists in the community (13:34–35; 15:12; 17:21, 23). These truths are the foundation stone of the role of the community in the world. Jesus has sent them into the world to overcome hatred by means of the quality of their love. They are not “over against” the world, as a sectarian interpretation would suggest; supported by their love for one another, and showing “the world” the exquisite fruits of mutual love (see 13:34; 17:21, 23), they embrace the hostile world with their dramatic presentation of a story of God’s saving love, made manifest in the self-gift of his Son.

Whatever one makes of the suggestions of the arguments of Teresa Okure and Enno Popkes, all the love commands directed to the disciples in the Gospel and to the readers/hearers of the Gospel are missionary. Within the context of the dramatic presentation of Jesus’ love for his disciples in the footwashing and the gift of the piece of bread (13:1–38), during which he tells the disciples that his actions are to reveal the living presence of the divine among them (v. 19: *I am he*), he issues his first command to love. They are to love one another as he has loved as a sign to everyone, not just to the community itself, that they are disciples of Jesus. Their mutual love is to generate knowledge of Jesus’

39. For an analysis of the love commands, regarded by Popkes as the basis for the very existence of the community, see *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes*, 249–72. On the importance of the love theme for mission, see Rodriguez Ruiz, *Der Missionsgedanke*, 339–40, 348–50.

40. On the Johannine “mission theology” generated by this *Dramaturgie*, see Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes*, 329–54. For a synthetic presentation of the *Dramaturgie*, see p. 174. What is missing in the work of Popkes is an explicit treatment of the cross of Jesus. Often during his study (for example, in his analysis of 3:14, 16–21 and 15:13) he sees that the cross lies behind what Jesus is saying. However, he never deals with what actually happens at the Johannine cross. For a parallel challenging acceptance of the “sectarian” nature of the Johannine situation and acceptance of the need to respond theologically to a situation that raises “an alternative voice,” see David Rensberger, “Sectarianism and Theological Interpretation in John,” in “What Is John?,” vol. 2, *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSS 7 (Atlanta: SBL, 1998), 139–56. See also his earlier fine study, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988). For Rensberger, Johannine Christianity can play a provocative role in a world that does not understand or accept it. He rightly argues that, for John, saving the world “meant to recall it from its self-absorption to its stance as creature before its Creator, yielding an obedience to God that could undo the structures that maintained it apart from God in the darkness of its hatred” (*Johannine Faith*, 142).
love for them: as he gave himself unconditionally for them, so they are to give themselves unconditionally and in this way make Jesus known (vv. 34–35).

At the heart of the final discourse, Jesus twice commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved them (15:12, 17). He describes self-gift unto death for one’s friends as the greatest love possible (v. 13). Again the union of love among disciples is not an end in itself. They have been chosen and appointed by Jesus as his friends, people who love one another so that they may go out and bear much fruit, a fruit that will abide (vv. 14–16). The “bearing of fruit” is not an inner-community process but a mission that flows from the love that they have for one another, matching the love of Jesus, who has called them and sent them (15:12–17). In his prayer for his disciples, the reason for their oneness that matches the oneness between the Father and the Son is “so that the world may believe that you sent me” (17:21) and “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you have loved me” (v. 23).

Returning to the narrative principle that not only what is said but where it is said is important, we observe that the story of Jesus’ relationship with “the world” has come full circle. With only one exception (in 1:10), the prologue and the witness of the Baptist, with which the story opens, strongly affirm the positive and even “salvific” relationship between the Logos and “the world” (1:9–10, 29). The reader/listener is next told that God so loved the world that he sent and handed over his only Son so that the world might have eternal life and be saved through him (3:16–17). John has no illusions about the hatred and rejection that the world has demonstrated toward Jesus (esp. in 7:1–8:59) and will continue to demonstrate toward his disciples (see esp. 15:18–16:3). Never, however, does the Gospel indicate that Jesus “hates” the world, and never does he exhort his disciples to do so. Thus, as the Gospel closes, an overwhelmingly positive presentation of the world, and of God’s design for the world in and

41. Only in one of the three uses of ὁ κόσμος in v. 10 is it negative: the world did not receive him. This certainly introduces the reader to the forthcoming trial and conflict between Jesus and his disciples, on the one hand, and “the world,” on the other. The use of ὁ κόσμος in 1:10 is a fine example of the several possible meanings of the symbol of “the world” in this Gospel. In the one verse the expression is used in a neutral sense (the world as a place), a positive sense (the world made through the Logos) and a negative sense (the world did not receive him). See the earlier studies of Blank, Krisis, 186–98, and 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, and the more recent work of Koester, Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, 249–53. In 1:29, the Baptist’s presentation of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world looks forward to 3:16–17. There the Son is sent to give life and save the world, lest it perish.
through Jesus and his disciples, returns. In his final evening with the disciples, Jesus prays for his disciples, who are in the world, even though not of the world, that the oneness of love that they experience will make known to the world that Jesus is the Sent One of the Father. Since he is the one sent by God out of love for the world (3:16–17), his concern for “the world” dominates the prayer (17:5–6, 9, 11, 13–16, 18, 21, 23–24). Despite negative tones (vv. 9, 14) that recall 15:18–16:3, “the world” is the object of Jesus’ concern and the “mission field” for the disciples. As Jesus was sent, “given” so that the world may have life (3:16–17), so the disciples are sent into the world (17:18) that it may believe and know that Jesus is the Sent One of a God who loved the world (17:21, 23; 3:16–17). In his encounter with the Jewish authorities, he announces that he has spoken his word openly to “the world” (18:20). Only in 18:36, before Pilate, does he disassociate himself from the kingships of “this world.” But in the same breath he announces that the purpose of his coming into “the world” was to give witness to the truth (18:37). It is in “the world” that Jesus reveals a God who loved that world. The disciples are responsible for continuing that revealing mission.

One cannot shirk the evidence of the text itself. The presentation of a positive relationship with the world, and the mission of Jesus and the disciples to the world, form a tight literary “clamp” around the story itself. As Andrew Lincoln has put it:

The Gospel speaks of God’s love for the hostile world, a love that discloses itself in the divine self-giving in the Son as the victim of the world’s violence. It witnesses to a God whose justice is not only directed toward life but contains within it the grounds and the motivation for remaining open toward the hostile other. With this as its founding narrative, the community from which the Fourth Gospel originated, whatever its temptation to reciprocate the hostility of the world, was continually reminded that the cross of Jesus is the radical openness of that God toward that world.42

Jesus prays for the world into which he was sent by the Father, “given” so that the world may have eternal life and not perish (3:16–17), asking that it will come to recognize the love that stands behind the drama of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus: the love that exists between the Father and the Son, that has been shared with the disciples, and that now reaches out to the world (17:21, 23). Jesus’ prayer that disciples be swept into the love that exists between the Father and the Son (17:26) is a prayer for the

42. Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 417.
world that God loved so much that he sent his only Son (3:16–17). The word of Jesus is now openly available to the world (18:20), a witness to the truth (18:37): ask those who have heard him; they know what he said (see 18:21). 43

What Jesus has said in 13:34–35, 15:12, and 17:21, 23 he has acted out in his revelation of the love of God in the cross, the revelation of the glory of God’s love. By means of the cross he has ascended to the Father, established a new community founded in love and faith (19:25–27), and gifted it with the Spirit, baptism, and Eucharist (19:28–35). If God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that it might be saved and have eternal life (3:16–17), and the perfection of that gift takes place in the “hour” of Jesus (4:34; 13:1; 17:1, 4; 19:30), the community can gaze upon the pierced one and there see Jesus’ manifestation of God’s love (19:36–37). But there is more. Jesus has returned to the glory that was his before the world was made (17:5), and he promises that he will not leave them orphans (14:18). In union with his Father, Jesus will send the Spirit Paraclete to a community founded on disciples who love and have been loved (21:14–24: Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple) to strengthen, guide, remind, and instruct them (14:15–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:6–11, 12–15). As the Father sent Jesus, so the risen Jesus sends the disciples bearing his gifts of peace and joy, as well as making his love known (20:19–23). Living in the in-between time, they are blessed because they believe without seeing (20:29), just as the Beloved Disciple believed without seeing (20:2–10), transcending the desire of Mary Magdalene and Thomas for fleshly contact with the Jesus who is now glorified (20:11–18, 24–29).

Conclusion

All Johannine Christians are asked to be beloved disciples, made holy by God so that they may be the holy sent ones of the Father, as Jesus was the holy Sent One of the Father (17:18–20). 44 As we have seen, subsequent history


44. This Johannine “mission theology” has its own integrity, whether or not one accepts the majority position that sees the Letters as indicating the communities’ struggle to live the Gospel’s love commands, adopted above, or whether one accepts the alternative suggestion (e.g., Okure and Popkes) that the Gospel reflects a situation later than, or contemporaneous with, the Letters, responding to a lack of love, unity, and shared faith in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. That alternative position asks that the mission start again. The recent work of Schnelle, “Die Reihenfolge,” 91–113, deserves careful attention.
indicates that they were not successful, but their failure was not because they closed the doors and became an early Christian sect. They failed because the command to make God known to the world by loving as Jesus had loved them was easier to talk about than to live. The problem remains. *Words* about love can come easily enough; *lives* that demonstrate love are harder to come by. Whatever we make of this early Christian tradition’s failure as an ongoing community experience within the Christian church, the great success that the tradition has left us is its story of Jesus, which the community must have told and retold, despite (or perhaps because of) their struggles. If this were not the case—if John’s Gospel were a sectarian tract, an “inner secret” written for the private mutual exhortation of a secret enclave that failed—we would not have it as part of the Christian canon. It would have disappeared, and “the world” would never have known of its existence. But in fact the Gospel of John is a story of Jesus that has been publicly proclaimed for almost two thousand years. It continues to ask readers and hearers to “remember Jesus” and to put their lives where their words are.

45. For a fuller statement of the case against a sectarian interpretation of the Johannine community, see Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations*, 288–94. There is a sense of arrogance in the claim that for two thousand years the Gospel of John has enjoyed favor and had influence because it has been misinterpreted (see Meeks, “Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist,” 317). At last, it appears, with the arrival of a social science reading of the text, true light has dawned. For a very different perspective on the lasting relevance of the Fourth Gospel, see Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 418–97. For a critique of biblical scholars’ use of social sciences (although it is a closing essay directed to a collection of “honor-shame” studies), see Gideon M. Kressel, “An Anthropologist’s Response to the Use of Social Science Models in Biblical Studies,” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 153–61.

Epilogue

What does an understanding of a God who is made known in the loving self-gift of Jesus “to the end” say to contemporary Christianity? We must not claim that the Fourth Gospel articulates a complete vision of Christian love, as it does not.¹ In a recent and important theological study of love, Werner Jeanrond has pointed to the complexity of love and loving.² There is much to be learned from his overview of the theme of love in Christian sources, including an analysis of the love theme in John.³ Like many who reflect upon the love theme in John, he is somewhat wary of “the shift from a love that is actively concerned about all the others now to a love that is primarily directed toward the inner circle of a particular Christian church.”⁴ Unfortunately, like most scholarly debate that surrounds the Johannine use of the love theme, Jeanrond does not link love with the “hour” of Jesus. Nevertheless, despite the claims made throughout this study, we must be careful to avoid any impression that in tracing the development and articulation of the Johannine love theme we have come up with the appropriate Christian response to the love of God (in both the subjective and objective senses), in

¹See, for example, the salutary assessment of Lincoln, Truth on Trial, 497: “To view this Gospel as authoritative or true is not thereby to ignore what we may be able to discover of its original ideological function, nor is it to imagine that our own confession of its truth can be removed from inevitable disputes of interpretation with their own interests of power.”

²Werner G. Jeanrond, A Theology of Love (London: T&T Clark, 2010). See his introduction, with the title “Horizons of Love,” on pp. 1–23, concluding (pp. 22–23) with a brief reflection on the complexity of love.

³Jeanrond, Theology of Love, 35–38.

⁴Ibid., 37. He claims that the effort of Popkes to stress the universal significance of the Johannine love theme “fails to appreciate how these aspirations are compromised by the inward-looking perspective on love in the community” (37n30).
which “all aspects of the Christian praxis of love culminate . . . [in which] divine and human love . . . salvation, sexuality and forgiveness in the light of love” are taken into account.5 He is correct to warn against a tendency to limit oneself to an attempt “to lift all human differences and forms of otherness to a higher spiritual level in the name of love.”6 As Jeanrond’s fine book illustrates, there are many elements in the Christian “history of love” and the “social locations” of love,7 and the Gospel of John occupies only a small part in what is a very large portrait.

However, if what this study has attempted to bring to light has any truth, that small part in a much larger portrait has something important, and perhaps novel, to offer Christian life. It appears to me that the intimate association that exists in the Fourth Gospel between the love theme and the “hour” of Jesus contributes significantly to the larger portrait. It has the capacity, if properly understood and applied to the Christian life, to question the traditional use of the historical memory and the ongoing symbolic value of the cross of Jesus Christ. For many reasons, an understanding of the cross as a place where Jesus reveals God’s glory and is himself glorified (see 11:4; 12:28; 13:31–32) has not played a great role in Christian spirituality. If I might insert a personal experience into these closing pages, an example of the default position of a Christian theology and spirituality of the cross will illustrate my meaning.

I was leading a Christian community in a practice of lectio divina during Holy Week in preparation for the liturgical reading of John 18:1–19:42 on Good Friday.8 My brief presentation of the Johannine story matched what can be found above, especially in chapter 5. However, once the group began to voice its response to the text in prayer, they invariably saw the cross as an instrument of torture, the place where Jesus took on all our sinfulness and died for us, along with the need for us to accept pain and disappointment as our share in the cross, our taking up the cross every day to follow Jesus (see

5. Ibid., 23. The subjective meaning for the expression “love of God” indicates the love that God has for me. The objective meaning indicates my love for God.
6. Ibid., 44.
7. On the history and social location of love, see ibid., 9–10.
8. Lectio divina (sacred reading) is an ancient practice, developed strongly in Christian monastic traditions, that reflects prayerfully upon texts from the Bible. It is taking on an increasingly important role in many Christian circles. Part of the process is a brief presentation of what the text actually says. Another part is the public articulation of prayer that flows from reflection on the text and the explanation. For a strong endorsement of this practice in the Roman Catholic tradition, see Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini: The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), paras. 86–87 (pp. 140–46).
This is how most Christians understand the cross, and it certainly has its place in the biblical Word (especially, but not only, in Mark and Paul). But it is not the only biblical way.

In the day-to-day life of so many Christians this traditional understanding of the cross underpins much of what we do and how we do it; the Johannine theology of Jesus’ “hour” uncovered in this study plays no role. Yet it can be very relevant to contemporary Christianity. It provides a Word of God that supports living and believing in the revelation of love that shines forth from the steady, day-to-day commitment to the often challenging and painful messiness of life. Not only in Jesus of Nazareth is the glory of God present in his physical presence among us, and not only in Jesus does the love of God shine out in his unconditional accomplishment of the task given by the Father (see 4:34; 17:4). The relentless search for a lifestyle that is free of anxiety and pain, and even free from a commitment to values, to our nearest and dearest, to society in general, and to the betterment of the world in all its manifestations, is a frustrating search and can produce a wasted life. Our daily acceptance of anxiety and pain and of commitment to values, to our nearest and dearest, to society in general, and to the betterment of the world in all its manifestations—cost what it may—is the “stuff” of love. It has biblical roots in the theme of love, as it is explored in the Gospel of John. As one of the earliest Christian defenders and interpreters of the Gospel of John so famously said: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive, and the living human being consists in beholding God.” It is the unconditional gift of self that lies at the very heart of the glory revealed in the sexual and

9. Interestingly, earliest Christian iconography did not portray the crucified Jesus, and Constantine forbade his depiction. The second-century mockery of the Alexamenos graffito (a man adoring a crucified ass) indicates why. Eventually the so-called *crux gemmata* and splendid processional crosses appeared without a figure. Once a figure did appear, which was not until the Middle Ages, Jesus was presented as a royal and/or priestly figure, indicating the impact of the Johannine understanding of the cross. During the Middle Ages, with their times of widespread suffering and death (e.g., the Black Death), the agonized Jesus on the cross began to appear. Perhaps the earliest was the transitional *Cross of Lothair* (late tenth century), a gemmed cross with a figure on the crucified Christ etched on the reverse side. The agonized figure on a cross is classically represented by Matthias Grünewald (circa 1470–1528) in a number of now-famous paintings. For a history of pictures of the crucifixion, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001–7), 3:554–59.

10. See Jeanrond, *Theology of Love*, 239–59, where he analyzes divine love, the relationship between divine and human love, love and salvation, love and sexuality, love and forgiveness, and love in creation.

celibate manifestations of love; it is the unconditional self-surrender of the
dying believer in which all present at the final hours of the passage from life
to death see the glory of God. The revelation of God’s glory and the means
by which we are ourselves glorified (see John 11:4) can also be found in the
“hour” (see 12:23) of these fundamental moments of the human experience:
physical loving and physical “passing over” among those who have not seen,
yet believe. The Gospel of John does say something about an understanding
of Christian love, even though it must not be claimed that it says everything.

Ernst Käsemann is correct when he insists that love in John is no mere
emotional or ethical feeling. Dorothy Lee has said it beautifully as she
writes of abiding in love and intimacy: “As a force for life, [it] does not by-
pass suffering and death; the vinedresser prunes, the world pours scorn, the
seed ‘dies,’ the Son buds forth with his dying breath.” As Gerard Manley
Hopkins puts it:

Sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine.

It is not only Jesus of Nazareth whose death can be understood as the su-
preme moment of his life, the time and the place where he makes known
a God of love and is himself glorified. Glory and pain, love and suffering,
self-gift in the moment of self-loss as “the world pours scorn,” entwine in
the death of all those who have taken to heart the words of Jesus: “No one
has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are
my friends” (John 15:13–14a).

There is more to those last lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “The Wind-
hover,” subtitled “To Christ Our Lord.” Quoted in full, they strike at the
heart of both Johannine Christology and Johannine Christianity:

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.

12. A further personal recollection illustrates this truth. Accompanying my mother through
her “hour,” I was with her as she entered into a coma many hours before she died. But in the
final few peaceful hours before she gave up her spirit she regularly uttered, quite clearly and
calmly, words from the Catholic Hail Mary: “Now and at the hour of our death . . . Amen.”
Of course, only to the “believer” are these moments of self-gift in sexual or celibate loving and
13. This is his underlying insistence in Testament of Jesus, 59–63.
15. Quoted from W. H. Gardner, ed., Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection of His Poems
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