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AN EXEGESIS OF THE SEVEN "I AM" STATEMENTS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation from Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* (DV), states in paragraph no. 2 that "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9)." His desire is for men, whom he made in his own image and likeness, to know him in a more intimate manner. There is no other way by which man could know God unless he reveals himself and his will to him. "His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4) (DV 2)."

God revealed himself to the world because of love. "The nature of that love is revealed as self-giving love in the giving of the Son. Thus the incarnation of the Word arose out of and expresses the Father's love for the world (1.17; 1 John 4.9–10)."[1] The fullness of God's revelation of himself came through the sending of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—Jesus Christ.

[1]John Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1975), 27.

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The Fourth Gospel (FG) expresses this stark reality beautifully in the Prologue (Jn 1:1–18). In these verses the author of the FG spells out the central message of the whole gospel that in the whole life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth the glory and splendor of God was uniquely and perfectly disclosed.[2] Bruce explains further: "As the prologue to the Gospel puts it, Jesus is the eternal Word or self-revelation of God, expressed in many ways at various times, but finally incarnated in a human life."[3]

Jesus is the Logos, the Word of God, God's self-revelation to the world. The FG portrays him as both the revealer and revelation itself. He reveals God as Father and their intimate relationship with each other. He declared, "'The Father and I are one (10:30)"; "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? (14:10)." "Jesus, who is the Word of God, speaks God's words (17.8, 14)."[4]

However, Jesus as the Word of God not only reveals God as Father but he also reveals himself. The object of revelation is both Jesus and God (cf. 8:14, 10:25). Jesus did not only reveal God but testifies to him. One purpose of revelation is to show Jesus as human and God as Father.[5] Jesus does not only speak God's words; he also communicates himself *in* his words and *through* his words. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in revealing himself Jesus revealed God.

This self-revelation of Jesus takes a more significant form with the use of *ego eimi* in the Fourth Gospel. Schnackenburg notes:

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[2]F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 28.

[3]Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 14.

[4]Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 26.

[5]J. F. O'Grady, "Jesus the Revelation of God in the Fourth Gospel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25:4 (1995), 163.

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> A survey of the occurrences of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι in the gospel of John which takes into account its frequency in all uses (Mt 5 times, Mk 3 times, Lk 4 times, John 29 times), and in the mouth of Jesus (Mt once, Mk twice, Lk twice, Jn 26 times), and the manner of its use … leaves no doubt that this is a consciously used and theologically significant expression which has become a highly compressed formula.[6]

Exegetes have identified categories of *ego eimi* uttered by Jesus himself in the FG. The most common system of grouping gives three distinct categories:

1.) the absolute use of *ego eimi* without the predicate or the image

- 8:24 "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he (Gk *ego eimi*)."
- 8:28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me."
- 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."
- 13:19 "I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he (Gk *ego eimi*)."

Schnackenburg describes this category thus:

> The ἐγώ εἰμι here concentrates in itself the full content of faith (8:24; 13:19) and knowledge (8:28). In these passages the formula has such an emphatic ring that it must contain a unique and particular claim. There is a slight difference in 8:58, which, in relation to Abraham's coming into existence, refers to Jesus' pre-existence, his eternal divine being.[7]

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[6]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* II (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 79.

[7]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 80.

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2.) "The use where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed."[8]

- 6:20 But he said to them, "It is I (Gk *ego eimi*); do not be afraid."
- 18:5 They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he."
- 18:6 When Jesus said to them "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground.
- 18:8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go."

In explaining this use of *ego eimi* Schnackenburg elaborates:

> In the walking on the lake (6:20) and Jesus' arrest (18:5, 6, 8), the phrase is first an identifying formula. The disciples are frightened by their experience at night on the lake, and Jesus makes himself known through the formula, and adds "Do not be afraid." His "It is I" tells the soldiers who want to seize him that he is the person they are looking for ("Jesus of Nazareth"). On both occasions, however, it is more than a means of recognition; it is also a unique expression of authority, as can be seen from the epiphany on the lake and the collapse of the soldiers on hearing the words.[9]

It is clear, therefore, that whenever *ego eimi* is used in this manner Jesus does not only reveal his identity but also his authority.

3.) the use of *ego eimi* with a predicate or an image[10]

- 6:35, 51 "I am the bread of life."
- 8:12 "I am the light of the world."
- 10:7 "I am the gate."
- 10:11 "I am the good shepherd."

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[8]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 533.

[9]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 80.

[10]This use of *ego eimi* will be referred to as the "I am" statements in this article.

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- 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life."
- 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life."
- 15:1 "I am the (true) vine."

The uniqueness of these seven "I am" statements in contrast with the other two categories described above is that with this latter group, Jesus, more than simply revealing his identity, reveals his role and function in relationship with human life, i.e., the very reason of his coming as Immanuel, God-with-us. Moloney explains that

> these sayings are not primarily concerned with defining or describing Jesus in himself. All the predicates indicate what Jesus is in relation to women, men, and the world.
>
> There is a difference between the "I am" sayings without an expressed predicate, which are directly concerned with the presentation of Jesus as revealer and the revelation of God, and these sayings. Even here, however, the theme of revelation is present. Jesus, who is one with the Father, is able to reveal the Father in a unique way. Only because this is true can he be described as the vine, the life, the resurrection, the way, the gate, the good shepherd, the truth, and the bread of life—the unique saving revelation of God among men and women.[11]

Undoubtedly therefore, the seven "I am" statements as Jesus' self-revelation have a salvific purpose. Every single statement is a declaration of God's call to each person to enter into an intimate relationship with him in the person of Jesus, for "his self-revelation is … his affection and his promise, a revelation of salvation for those who believe in him."[12] Schnackenburg continues:

> Since his revelation is a means of salvation to those who accept it and attach themselves to him, he must insist that he is the one true bread from heaven which gives life to the world (6:33, 35), the light of the world (8:12), the door which leads to life (10:7, 9), the good shepherd

[11]Francis J. Moloney, "Johannine Theology," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1424.

[12]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 88.

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who looks after the life of his sheep (10:11, 14, 28), the resurrection which becomes an event in the here and now (11:25).[13]

In the "I am" statements Jesus presents himself as the one whom people are searching for. The statements point to the person of Jesus as well as to what he signifies for the people.

I am the bread of life (6:35, 51).

The Context

The pericope is part of Jesus' discourse on "the bread come down from heaven" (6:22–59). The discourse follows two major events narrated in chapter six: the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 1–15) and Jesus' walking on the water (vv. 16–21). The discourse takes the form of a dialogue between the crowd, the Jews, and Jesus. The two preceding events establish the Christological context from which the dialogue emerges.[14] The setting of the discourse is the synagogue in Capernaum (vv. 22–24, 59).

The discourse may be divided into the following sections as suggested by Culpepper:

Setting (vv. 22–24)
Opening (vv. 25–31)
The crowd questions Jesus (v. 25)
Jesus makes the contrast between the ordinary bread and the bread from heaven (vv. 26–27)
The crowd asks Jesus how to do the works of God (v. 28)
Jesus demands that they believe in him (v. 29)
The crowd asks for a sign (vv. 30–31)

[13]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 88.

[14]Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 97.

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The Father gives bread from heaven (vv. 32–34)
Jesus tells the crowd that it was not Moses who is the giver of the bread from heaven but his Father (vv. 32–33)
The crowd asks for the bread (v. 34)
The Bread from heaven (vv. 35–51)
Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life (vv. 35–40)
The Jews from the crowd begin to grumble (vv. 41–42)
Jesus explains further his role as the bread of life (vv. 43–51)
The Jews asks for clarification in disbelief (v. 52)
Jesus promises to raise up on the last day those who will eat his flesh and drink his blood (vv. 53–58)
Conclusion and another reference to the setting (vv. 58–59)

The introductory verses (vv. 22–24) set the stage for the discourse on the bread from heaven. The transition is made by using the phrase "on the next day," which is the favorite device of the evangelist when he wants to link related passages more closely (cf. 1:29, 35, 44; 12:12).[15] These verses serve to give the readers an idea that the participants in the events which took place the previous day—Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd—are reassembled again. However, Marrow sees a deeper motive for these verses in that the primary interest of these verses is the fact that "the crowd" is "seeking Jesus" (6:24).[16] In their search for Jesus the crowd, too, exhibits a certain sense of persistence and urgency.

Another point of interest is the phrase "after the Lord had given thanks" in verse 23. Brown comments:

> We may note that in vss. 22–24 there is a deepening of the theological motifs that we found in the multiplication scene … the fact that the Lord had given thanks (*eucharistein*) has become very important, an emphasis reflecting the Eucharistic interpretation of the scene. No longer is

[15]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 34.

[16]Stanley B. Marrow, *The Gospel of John: A Reading* (Makati: St. Pauls, 1997), 83.

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> it a question of the loaves (plural) but of the *bread*, again a seeming concession to the eucharistic language of the New Testament.[17]

After a careful search the crowd finally found Jesus "on the other side of the lake." As soon as they saw him they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (v. 25) since the crowd did not witness the miracle of Jesus walking on the lake. At this, Jesus did not offer any explanation and simply ignored their question. Instead, he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their penchant for food that perishes (v. 26). Schnackenburg observes that

> a true "seeing of signs" means realizing the divine meaning of Jesus' actions. The experience of the feeding did not lead these people to a deeper vision. Their eating of "the loaves" … gave them pleasure, but it was enough for them to have their stomachs filled. Their thoughts and searching have no higher object.[18]

Jesus then takes the conversation to a higher level. He makes a contrast between "the food that perishes" and "the food that endures for eternal life." Concerning the latter Schnackenburg elaborates:

> Three properties are ascribed to the food: (a) It "endures," i.e., it has lasting effect … ; (b) it is a food connected with "eternal life," which creates that life … ; (c) the Son of man will give it to them. This last statement is very significant, since "the Son of man" is not one of Jesus' ordinary ways of referring to himself without disclosing his identity.[19]

This title "Son of Man" was not accidentally used here by the author of the FG. Its use has its purpose to bolster Jesus' claim that he himself is the "bread of life." Brown observes:

> In v. 27 Jesus identifies the food that lasts for eternal life as the gift of the *Son of Man*. This is often an eschatological title … and the use here probably reflects Johannine realized eschatology. Whether we

[17]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 259.

[18]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 35.

[19]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 36.

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> read "will give" or "gives," the food that lasts for eternal life is in part a present gift, just as eternal life itself is a present gift. These heavenly realities are realized in the ministry of Jesus.[20]

Blind as they are due to their lack of faith, the crowd fails to grasp the very essence of Jesus' reply, i.e., that they put their heart on the food that remains unto eternal life. Instead they turn their attention on the "doing." They ask Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Schnackenburg comments:

> Jesus tells them in reply that there is only one work of God that matters, to believe in the person God has sent. The plural "works of God" is now used emphatically in the singular; for John there is only this one demand of God. Faith is the only, and essential, human answer to God's sending of the revealer and bringer of salvation, faith not only in God but also in this messenger of his who speaks God's word (cf. 3:34, 16, 17).[21]

The crowd was led by Jesus to go beyond the superficial, material level of food, but their response (v. 28) is in terms of works that they can do. Jesus in turn (v. 29) puts the emphasis on faith.[22]

At the mention of faith and Jesus' claim to be God's representative, the crowd becomes hostile. They demand that he perform a sign in order to prove his claim. Again Schnackenburg explains:

> Jesus' demand that his hearers should believe in him as God's representative closes their hearts. If they were previously prepared to do something to "perform the works of God," their attitude now is

[20]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 264. In John, Jesus is portrayed as the unique revelation of God and it is in Jesus where one can see God "here and now." For the evangelist the moment of judgment is "now" and therefore, one has to make his decision to believe in Jesus also "now." This is John's so-called present or realized eschatology and this springs from Jesus' claim, "The Father and I are one" (10:30).

[21]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 39.

[22]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 264–5.

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> the opposite, and they insist that he should do something … it is up to him to "perform" a sign (τἰ ἐργάζῃ). This is the evangelist's way of making the transition to unbelief.[23]

In Jewish tradition faith is never isolated from works. "Yet in contrast to their tradition (in which faith was often one work among many), Jesus defines the work essential for eternal life as faith in him (6:29); this proves to be the one work they are unwilling to do (6:30; cf. 6:41, 52, 66)."[24]

In v. 31 the crowd introduces the theme of the manna: "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'." The crowd's demand for a sign is now connected to the theme of the manna—the sign they are asking for is for Jesus to perform a divine sign like that of the manna given to their ancestors in the wilderness.

There is here a progression of Jesus' revelation with regards to the theme "bread from heaven" which has its climax in v. 35. First, he tells the crowd that it was not Moses who gave their ancestors the manna in the wilderness but God, his Father.

Schnackenburg suggests:

> In our passage God himself is identified as the giver of the bread from heaven to emphasize its superiority to the old manna and prove the new manna to be the genuine food, really from heaven (cf. 33). The mention of Moses also implies that Jesus is the "second redeemer," the Messiah in the sense of the prophet promised by Moses (see on 6:14). However, he far surpasses Moses and his gift; he himself is the bread of life which comes from heaven (35).[25]

Second, this act of "giving" by his Father is not a thing of the past but a present reality for he "gives" the true bread from heaven. Schnackenburg continues:

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[23]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 40.

[24]Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003), 677.

[25]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 42.

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> Jesus proclaims that this time has come to pass, and that God is giving the promised bread from heaven here and now. This reflects the realized Johannine eschatology: in Jesus the eschatological salvation is present (cf. on 4:23). Everything that happens in this eschatological present is God's "true" purpose (4:23), the "real" gift from the fullness of the divine reality (cf. 7:28).[26]

Third, the "bread from heaven" which Jesus is referring to and which the Father continues to give is the "true bread from heaven." Lastly, this "true" bread which the Father gives "comes down from heaven" and now it does not give life only to the chosen people but "gives life to the world."

> For John, this "coming down" from heaven does not properly apply to the manna in the wilderness, but is the exclusive attribute of the personal, eschatological bread of God. This true "bread from heaven" also has a totally different force and effect from the food in the wilderness. Since it really comes from heaven, from the domain of divine life, it also has the power to give true, divine life, and not only to Israel, but to the whole world. This is the distinctive power and function of this bread (cf. 27b).[27]

To this revelation the crowd responds by asking for this bread (v. 34) just as the woman at the well had asked for the living water so that she would not have to come to the well (cf. 4:15).

The Statement Itself

C. H. Dodd in his book *The Interpretation of the Gospel of John* discussed the traditional rabbinic interpretation of "bread" as a "standing symbol of the Torah."[28] After tracing the historical foundation of this tradition he concludes:

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[26]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 42.

[27]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 43.

[28]C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University, 1968), 336–7.

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> If then we may suppose that our evangelist was acquainted with a school of thought for which the manna was a symbol of the Torah, as the expression of divine wisdom … the argument would then run: Moses did indeed give the Torah, of which manna is the symbol; but the "bread of Torah" is no more the knowledge of God which is life eternal than the manna is *άρτος άληθινός*; so Moses did not, in the true sense, give *αρτος άπ ούρανοϋ*, which, as the Scripture itself says, is God's own gift, and which is given through Christ.[29]

Koester is of the same opinion, saying, "Readers familiar with Jewish tradition would probably have connected the bread metaphor with God's word, wisdom, and law. The Scriptures said that manna pointed to the central place of God's word in human life."[30]

In verse 35 Jesus discloses to the Jews that he himself is "the bread of life." This is the first of the seven "I am" statements with an accompanying image or predicate. "This 'I am' collects together all the force of Jesus' claim to divine authority …. All the statements made in verses 32–33 about the bread which has come down from heaven and is now given by God to men apply to him. He now sums them up in the phrase 'the bread of life', since the imparting of divine, imperishable life is the most important feature of this bread of God."[31]

Brown, in his study of the meaning behind the expression "bread of life," pointed to two ways by which scholars have interpreted it. He speaks of the "sapiential theme" and of the "sacramental theme" in the expression. He writes:

> The fundamental reaction to Jesus' presentation of himself as bread in 35–50 is that of belief (35, 36, 40, 47) or of coming to him, which is a synonym for belief (35, 37, 44, 45). Only once (50) in this section is it said that anyone must eat the bread of life; it is in 51–58 that "eating"

[29]Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 337.

[30]Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 101.

[31]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 43.

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> appears over and over again. The citation that Jesus uses (45) to illustrate what is happening to the people who hear him and come to him is: "And they shall all be *taught by God*"—a clear reference to the sapiential symbolism of the bread. […] This is true in ch. vi as well, for the divine word and wisdom are often presented under the symbolism of food or bread in the OT. […]
>
> If the "bread of life" in this part of the discourse refers primarily to revelation in and by Jesus, there are also indications of secondary, eucharistic undertones …. In the discourse itself, it is significant that Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life. We remember that in ch. iv Jesus spoke of giving the living water but did not identify himself with the water; yet he *is* the bread of life. While such identification is not impossible in a purely sapiential interpretation of vss. 35–50, it certainly fits the eucharistic motif as well. […]
>
> The mention of manna which introduces the discourse would have had Eucharistic association for early Christian audiences. […T]here is respectable evidence for holding that there is a secondary, eucharistic reference in 35–50, and this reference will become primary in 51–58.[32]

If "bread" here has both sapiential and sacramental connotations, what then of "life?" Koester offers an explanation:

> At the level of the literary context, bread is explicitly connected with life that is not merely physical. In its theological dimension "life" indicates life in relationship with God, so that "life" means "eternal life" (6:40, 47). Death is no longer an abiding threat for those who believe, because Jesus has promised that he will raise them up at the last day. The eternal life Jesus offers is a relationship with God that begins in faith and continues beyond the grave into eternity.[33]

Verse 35 also gives a hint on how people could have access to Jesus, the bread of life. He demands that people "come to him" and that they "believe in him." There is no other way to partake of this "bread of life" from heaven unless they come to Jesus. Each demand, however,

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[32]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 273–4.

[33]Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 101–2.

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has a twin promise, for those who come to Jesus will "never be hungry" and those who believe in him will "never be thirsty" (35).

Schnackenburg emphasizes:

> The saying is constructed as a synonymous parallel, with the first expression, "whoever comes to me," interpreted by the second, "whoever believes in me." "Coming to Jesus" means believing in him again …. The promise corresponds to the call: the believer (cf. 29) receives in Jesus and through Jesus the personal "bread of life," the "food which endures" (27); he will never again hunger or thirst ….[34]

The verse also assures the hearers that everyone has the possibility of allowing oneself to be drawn by the Father as well as the possibility of resisting him. "So faith is not the result of our initiative but of God's initiative with us."[35]

Verses 36–40 stress again the necessity of having faith in Jesus, and in what he reveals about himself and the Father. Brown asserts:

> These verses spell out the necessity of believing in Jesus and the will of the Father that men should have life through him. The eschatology is interesting. In vs. 37 Jesus speaks of not *driving out* anyone who comes to him. This is the same expression the Synoptics use in the context of final judgment when men will be driven out of the kingdom (Matt viii 12, xii 13). For John the context is that of realized eschatology. However, in 39, which resembles 37, the context switches to final eschatology ("the last day"). And 40 has both aspects: everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life now, and still he will be raised up on the last day. […]
>
> The stress in v. 37 that God destines men to come to Jesus does not in the least attenuate the guilt in vs. 36 of those who do not believe.[36]

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[34]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 44.

[35]Alan R. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 162.

[36]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 276.

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At this point the Jews begin to complain and grumble at Jesus' revelation that he is the "bread that came down from heaven" (v. 41). There is now the question of Jesus' origin. This only shows that the Jews again misunderstood Jesus' self-revelation. Both Brown and Schnackenburg are of the same opinion that this attitude of the Jews is reminiscent of their ancestors' murmuring in the wilderness. The Jews object to Jesus' revelation of his divine origin and they arrogantly claim that they are certain of his parentage. To this objection Jesus authoritatively reiterates his declaration of his divine origin. He tells them that he was sent by the Father (44) and that he is from God (46). Because of this he can rightfully claim that he comes from heaven. Jesus urges them to stop their murmuring, a sign of unbelief, so that they could be drawn to the Father and be raised up on the last day. Jesus invites them to listen and to learn from what God teaches them. Brown states:

> This is the age spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when they are being taught by God, if only they will listen. This teaching has its external aspect in the sense that it is embodied in Jesus who walks among them, but it is also internal in the sense that God acts in their hearts. […] This internal moving of the heart by the Father will enable them to believe in the Son and thus possess eternal life.[37]

In verse 48 Jesus reaffirms his claim: "I am the bread of life," and again in verse 51a, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." By claiming so he stresses the fact that those who ate the manna in the desert have all died while those who will eat of the "bread of life" will live forever. In verse 51c Jesus introduces the final section of the discourse by offering his flesh as the bread that will give life to the world.

The idea of "eating the flesh" sparked a fierce dispute among the Jews. They asked themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52). Culpepper explains:

> Believers who know the Gospel story know immediately how Jesus will give his flesh, both at the table and at the cross, but for those

[37]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 277.

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> who do not know, Jesus' words are those of a madman. Jesus' demand that they "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood" (v. 53) continues the metaphorical language of eating and drinking, but now has clear Eucharistic overtones. Verses 52–58, therefore, probably reflect the Johannine community's use of this material in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper. "Eating" the bread means receiving Jesus and the life he offers. Participating with the community of believers in the Lord's Supper when the community is being persecuted and ostracized would have been an open and public declaration of one's faith.[38]

Verses 52–58 obviously deal exclusively with the Eucharistic theme of the discourse as has already been pointed out by Brown. He adds further:

> No longer are we told that eternal life is the result of believing in Jesus; it comes from feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood (54). The Father's role in bringing men to Jesus or giving them to him is no longer in the limelight; Jesus himself dominates as the agent and source of salvation. Even though the verses in 51–58 are remarkably like those of 35–50, a new vocabulary runs through them: "eat," "feed," "drink," "flesh," "blood."[39]

Again in his commentary on Jesus' discourse on the "bread of life," Brown points out two indications that John has the Eucharist in mind in writing this portion of Jesus' revelation:

> The first indication is the stress on eating (feeding on) Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood … if Jesus' words in vi 53 are to have a favorable meaning, they must refer to the Eucharist. They [s]imply reproduce the words we hear in the Synoptic account of the institution of the Eucharist (Matt xxvi 26–28): "Take, *eat*; this is *my body*; … *drink* … this is *my blood*."
>
> The second indication of the Eucharist is the formula found in vs. 51: "The bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world." If we consider that John does not report the Lord's words over the bread and the cup at the Last Supper, it is possible that we have preserved

[38]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 163.

[39]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 284.

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> in vi 51 the Johannine form of the words of institution. In particular, it resembles the Lucan form of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" ….[40]

Summary

This "I am" statement, being the first of the seven, sums up all the power of Jesus' claim to divine authority. Every single description Jesus makes about the "bread from heaven" he claims for himself.

Almost all scripture exegetes agree that this "I am" statement can be interpreted in two ways: the "sapiential" and the "sacramental" themes as identified by Brown. Since "bread" is understood as either the law, the word of God, or God's wisdom in Jewish tradition, then "to eat" of this bread could be interpreted as to be taught by God, or to be guided by his word or wisdom. People should be willing to be instructed by God's divine wisdom.

To "eat of the bread" could also be taken to mean to partake of the Lord's Supper. This is its sacramental or Eucharistic meaning. Both interpretations apply to all those who have faith in Jesus. He demands faith in him as the necessary requirement in order that people would be drawn by God to him. To "eat of this bread come down from heaven" is to have Jesus in one's life, and to possess Jesus in one's life is tantamount to having eternal life. He offers his flesh and blood as nourishment so that all those who partake of him may have life eternal.

I am the light of the world (8:12).

The Context

This section follows the incident with the adulterous woman (8:1–11). However, the majority of biblical exegetes believe that the

[40]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 284–5.

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discourse following Jesus' claim of himself as the "light of the world" is connected to the festival of Booths or Tabernacles[41] described earlier in chapter 7. On the last day of the festival, Jesus is seen teaching in the temple area, "Again Jesus spoke to them saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'" (8:12).

This self-revelation of Jesus introduces the whole section which deals with Jesus bearing witness to himself, and with his authority to be the judge of the world (vv. 12–20). Brown suggests three parts to the structure of the discourse which in turn correspond to a theme discussed in each part.[42] The whole discourse may be divided as follows:

Jesus' claim to be the light of the world (v. 12)
Jesus bears witness to himself (vv. 13, 14b, 17–18)
Jesus' judgment and knowledge of his Father (vv. 14c, d, 15–16, 19–20)

Biblical scholars observe that verse 12 would fit more appropriately in chapter 9 where Jesus reiterates once more his claim to be the light of the world, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:1–12). He reinforces this claim by performing a sign—he gives sight to a man born blind. However, Barrett believes that this claim of Jesus as light of the world in 8:12 is "entirely suitable to its context, since light cannot but bear witness to itself and is authenticated by its source."[43]

Culpepper theorizes that in proclaiming "I am the light of the world," Jesus uses an image closely related to the celebration of the

[41]This celebration is a harvest festival for the fruits of the threshing floor and the wine press and is a feast of rejoicing. It is to be celebrated for seven days as prescribed in the book of Deuteronomy 16:13–15. During the festival the individual is prescribed to offer a basket of harvest fruits and recite the saving acts of Yahweh who delivered his chosen people from Egypt.

[42]Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 343.

[43]C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 338.

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Festival of the Booths. In the same manner wherein Jesus claims that he is the source of living water in chapter 7:37–39, the claim to be the light of the world is "tantamount to saying that he himself is the fulfillment of that Jewish festival."[44] Perkins also proposes:

> The image of light may have been associated with the lighting of the four huge golden lamps in the courtyard of the women on the first night of Tabernacles …. The reader knows that Jesus is the light of the world (1:9), whose coming has divided humanity into those who "come to light" and those whose "evil deeds" lead them to prefer darkness (3:19–21).[45]

Obviously Jesus doesn't speak of himself as the light of the world only on the physical level. Jesus is more than just the light of the night-time festival which illumines and gladdens the whole of Jerusalem; he himself is the light of the world.[46]

Several interpretations have been made to explain Jesus' use of light as an image of himself. Painter points to light as the symbol of the Law and he connects this to Jesus as the bringer of judgment to the world. He writes:

> Light was also a symbol for the Law (Psalm 119, 105). Thus Jesus claims that he, not the Law, has brought about the judgment of the world. Judgment is the primary function of the revelation portrayed as light …. In John, it is clear that the judgment brought about by Jesus has a positive side for those who believe, they have life for the light of the world. Because Jesus is the light of the world, he came into the world and the world was judged by his coming (3.19–21; 9.39–41; 15.22–24).[47]

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[44]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 171.

[45]Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1990), 965.

[46]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 189.

[47]Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian*, 40.

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In turn, Schnackenburg comments, "Jesus has come into the world as the eschatological light (3:9; 12:46) to bring light and life to the whole of mankind."[48] He connects this symbolism of the eschatological light with the Logos which John speaks of in the Prologue of his Gospel. He says that, "From the beginning the Logos was already the light of men, but through his coming in history he becomes it in a unique and special way (cf. 1:9)."[49]

Brown, on the other hand, connects the symbolism of light to Wisdom. In Hebrew tradition Wisdom is identical with the Law. He explains:

> Just as with metaphors of water and bread, the Wisdom passages of the OT offer some valuable background for Jesus' use of light as symbol of his revelation. In Prov viii 22 Wisdom says that she was made at the beginning of the Lord's ways, and in Hebrew tradition the first creation was light (Gen i 3). Wisdom vii 26 tells us that Wisdom is a reflection of everlasting light. Already in the pre-Christian era Wisdom was identified with the Law, and we saw above that the Law was spoken of as imperishable light.[50]

For John, "light" is more than just an element of the cosmos. For him Jesus as the "light of the world" gives light by being the light itself. This light is both active and salvific. Any disciple of his is saved from the darkness of the world because they "will never walk in darkness"[51] and "will possess the light of life" (v. 12b). In this invitation, Schnackenburg observes that instead of using to "believe" or to "come to Jesus" (6:35; 7:37; cf. 12:36), the characteristically synoptic expression "follow" is used. This synoptic expression is closely connected with the vocation

[48]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 189.

[49]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 189–190.

[50]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 344.

[51]The phrase "walking in darkness" is generally understood in their context as well as in ours as "living in sin."

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to discipleship; in the Fourth Gospel, however, the verb changes its meaning as the concept of discipleship also changes.[52]

The light which Jesus imparts is the "light of life" because it is life-giving.[53] Jesus, being both light and life, illuminates human existence and gives meaning to it. He promises that not one of his followers will ever "walk in darkness," i.e., no one will ever live in sin for he himself will illumine their life and will possess him, the "light of life." Those who possess him are in turn called to become light, "While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light" (12:36).

Typical of the FG, this self-revelation of Jesus is, more often than not, misunderstood by his hearers. Such misunderstanding elicits unbelief on the part of those who refuse to recognize him. Reactions such as this, instead of discouraging Jesus, provoke further teaching from him. He never seems to tire of explaining to them the deeper meaning of his revelation. But for those who refuse to be enlightened by the "light" and who choose to continue to "walk in darkness," no explanation of his will ever dispel their blindness. "That Jesus' hearers do not understand his appeal to his Father at this point indicates that they do not know Jesus or the Father."[54] Knowledge of and belief in Jesus' person is necessary if one is to understand his revelation.

Summary

This imagery of "light of the world" will not be taken up again until chapter 9:5. The succeeding verses (8:13–20) point to Jesus as witness to himself and as judge. Although the discourse starts with Jesus' self-revelation as "light of the world," biblical scholars believe that the main focus of the discourse is in reality Jesus' revelation of

[52]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 189.

[53]Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 188.

[54]Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 742.

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his identity and divine authority by emphasizing where he comes from and where he is going (v. 14). His testimony needs no other witness except that of his own and his Father's because he comes from the Father and goes back to him. His origin gives him then the authority to be the judge. But he also makes clear that he did not come to judge anyone: "I judge no one" (v. 15), he says.

Jesus as the "light of the world" could have several layers of meaning. Culpepper suggests that this claim means that Jesus is the fulfillment of the festival of Booths. Perkins, meanwhile, proposes that in this claim Jesus invites humanity to come to light, i.e., to him, otherwise they will remain in darkness. To remain in darkness is to be judged as not worthy of the light, as Painter points out. He also concludes that "light" is a symbol of the Law in Jewish tradition, but when Jesus proclaims that he himself is the light then it is no longer the Law that brings judgment to the world but Jesus, the light of the world. For Schnackenburg, Jesus, the Logos, came into the world as the eschatological light in order to bring light to the whole world immersed in the darkness of sin. For Brown, however, light is Wisdom and Wisdom is identical to the Law. All of these interpretations are not mutually exclusive.

For the author of the FG, Jesus as the light of the world brings salvation to all. He saves those who turn away from the darkness of sin and draw close to him. To draw close to Jesus does not mean only to draw close to the light but also to have life, because Jesus is not only "the light" but he is also "the life."

I am the gate (10:7, 9).
I am the good shepherd (10:11).

The Context

This section on the figure of the good shepherd follows the event where Jesus gave sight to a man born blind described in chapter 9, a deed which elicited a bitter confrontation with the Jewish leaders in

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the temple. The main message of the preceding chapter is Jesus' claim to be the light of the world (9:5) and therefore he has both the power and the authority to give light to the man born blind by giving him sight. It turned out that the man's physical blindness was easier to heal than the obstinate spiritual blindness of the leaders.

Although some exegetes question the appropriateness of this section in its present context, i.e., following the event described in chapter 9, the majority still believe that in purposely putting this pericope here, the author may have wanted to show the link between the shepherd imagery described in the Old Testament[55] and the attitude of the present leaders of Israel. Culpepper also believes that the primary background for this passage is Ezekiel 34, in which the prophet castigates the religious leaders for being poor shepherds.[56] With this Old Testament background in mind and given the attitude of the Jewish leaders described in chapter 9, the author of the FG could have placed this section here on purpose. Morris opines, "It is apt, accordingly, that, immediately after Israel's shepherds have failed so conspicuously in the case of the man born blind, we should have set forth the nature and functions of the Good Shepherd."[57] Although the passage from chapter 9 to this chapter may not be construed as problematic, still there is no denying that chapter 10 marks the start of a new stage for one of Jesus' polemical discourses which leads to another controversy with his opponents. The hearers of Jesus were surely familiar with such imagery of shepherd and sheep and probably were interested to hear some more of Jesus' speech.

The literary genre of the whole discourse, likewise, seems to be problematic. Scholars differ in their opinion as regards this. However,

[55]Cf. Jer 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Zech 11; 34 and Is 56:9–12.

[56]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 179.

[57]Leon Morris, "The Gospel of John," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 499.

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most exegetes refer to it as a symbolic or figurative discourse in which allegories, parables and symbolisms are interspersed. In short, the speech doesn't fit any single literary genre; rather it is a mixture of a variety of literary forms.

The discourse may be structured as follows: [58]
The parable (vv. 1–7)
Jesus, the gate *vis-á-vis* the thieves (vv. 7–10)
Jesus, the good shepherd *vis-á-vis* the hired hand (vv. 11–18)
Division among the hearers (vv. 19–21)

Verses 1–6 present the parable where Jesus describes how pasturing and herding sheep is done in ancient Palestine. Although there is the absence of an introductory explanation as to the occasion and to what triggered the speech, the opening words, "Truly I assure you," could indicate that what will follow is of extreme importance and that what will be said is still connected to the preceding event, the healing of the man born blind in chapter 9. This connection is reinforced by the fact that the transition does not suggest the presence of a new audience or a lapse of time.[59]

Jesus speaks of "the sheep," "the gate" (or door in other translations), "the shepherd," "the doorkeeper," "the thieves," "the robbers," and "the strangers" in this figurative discourse. He makes his self-revelation as he describes a typical pastoral scene during his time, a scene very common to people's everyday life in villages where families usually own a few sheep for their use.

Already at the onset of this discourse (v. 6), the author points out that Jesus' hearers are not able to decipher the deeper meaning behind Jesus' words. Brown asserts:

[58]Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 383 and Morris, "The Gospel of John," 500.

[59]For a detailed explanation of the sequence of these events, cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 388–90.

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> The failure to understand causes Jesus to explain these parable(s) of the sheepgate and the shepherd, even as it caused him to explain the Parable of the Sower in the Synoptic tradition. The failure is not primarily an intellectual problem; it is an unwillingness to respond to the challenge of the parables. In the Synoptic Gospels that challenge is centered around the kingdom of heaven; in John it is centered around Jesus himself. The familiar Synoptic phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like…," has its Johannine parallel in "I am [*egō eimi*]…" (x 7, 9, 11, 14).[60]

"I AM THE GATE" (10:7, 9).

At first, Jesus contrasts himself as the true shepherd and the gate for the sheep with the thieves and the bandits. He portrays the true shepherd as one who enters by the gate, the one whom the gatekeeper recognizes and allows to enter, and the one whose voice the sheep of the flock recognize and follow. On the contrary, the thieves and bandits are those who do not enter by the gate but instead climb in by other means. They are the strangers whom the sheep do not follow because they do not recognize their voice. As a result the flock run away from them. Kysar explains this image of the true shepherd:

> The point is simple, Jesus is the true leader of the people (the believers), and they know him, as he knows them. Consequently, they will follow him. This is in contrast to those who try to lead the people but fail because they are not the true revealers but blind guides.[61]

Tasker elaborates further:

> In the Old Testament, the relationship between God and His people is often symbolized as that of a shepherd and his flock. The flock is always regarded as belonging to God though the care of it may be temporarily entrusted to others. Some of those guardians of the flock, such as Moses and the genuine prophets, tend the sheep with care, and in this respect are forerunners of Christ Himself. Others, such as

[60]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 393.

[61]Robert Kysar, *John's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 52.

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> the prophets who prophesy falsely, care not for the sheep; they come into the fold only to plunder, and they stand under divine judgment (see Je. xxiii. 1, 2).[62]

Besides being the true shepherd, Jesus claims, "I am the gate for the sheep" (v. 7), and "I am the gate" (v. 9). Being "the gate," he saves those who enter through him and he comes that the sheep "may have life and have it abundantly" (v. 10b). On the other hand, he calls as "thieves and bandits" all those who do not pass by him, the gate. Precisely because they are thieves they come "only to steal and destroy" (v. 10a). Tasker again explains:

> All who claim to be caring for God's flock but who do not enter into the sheepfold through the door which is Christ Himself—all, in other words, who hold out before men and women the prospect of a higher and better life apart from the necessity of redemption through the blood of Jesus, are deceivers, spiritual charlatans depriving men of the salvation that might otherwise be theirs. Those who have heard the authentic word of God, and who by obeying it have become members of God's flock, His elect people, will no more listen to such shepherds, however much they claim to be speaking with divine authority, than sheep will take notice when a stranger calls to them. […]
>
> The opposition of God to all such false prophets finds clear expression in the writings of the genuine prophets, especially in Ezekiel, who predicts the day when God will search for His sheep and bring them out from among the foreign peoples and gather them from distant countries, whither they have been driven for lack of trustworthy leaders (see Ezk. xxxiv. 11).
>
> This prophecy is now being fulfilled in Jesus who has been sent by God as His good Shepherd, and who will gather together the sheep at present scattered far and wide.[63]

[62]R. V. G. Tasker. *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (USA: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997), 129.

[63]Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 128–9.

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In revealing himself as the gate or door Jesus declares that he alone is the one true access to God. The meaning of this "I am" statement is closely connected to "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Both illustrate the truth that it is through Jesus Christ alone that human beings have access to God, attain salvation, and receive spiritual freedom and sustenance.[64] Schnackenburg also suggests that

> in v. 7 "the door" appears as the symbol of the entrant's legitimacy, the proof of the shepherd's right. And it is precisely as "door" that Jesus is also shepherd. […] But the door-word is meant to show at the same time that, because of Jesus' self-revelation, all other claimants are usurpers through being convicted of a false claim to being saviours. So long as Jesus, the shepherd, is installed in his function as door, every illegitimate claim in respect of revelation, leadership and the bringing of salvation falls to pieces when it comes into contact with him. […] There is but one bringer of salvation, one way to the Father (cf. 14:4–6)—Jesus, the "door." As this one absolute way to salvation Jesus is the door for the sheep (v. 9). As the exclusive revealer who exposes the non-salvation ways of other "bringers of salvation," he is the one door to the sheep.[65]

The repetition of the "I am" statement in v. 9a points to one more function of Jesus as the gate. He gives his followers protection from harm and abundant life, and the contrast with thieves is repeated, for they do exactly the opposite, that is, they steal and kill and destroy.[66]

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD" (11, 14A).

Twice in chapter 10, vv. 11 and 14a Jesus reveals himself as "the good shepherd." These two ἐγώ εἰμί sentences with two short

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[64]J. N. Sanders, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 249–50.

[65]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 289–90.

[66]Ramsey J. Michaels, "John," in *The New International Biblical Commentary*, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1989), 178–9.

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explanations show the former contrasting the shepherd with the hireling, while the latter delineates the solidarity of the shepherd with his sheep.[67]

In v. 11 Jesus is the good shepherd because he lays down his life for his sheep. Morris gives his interpretation of Jesus' statement:

> The great act of care for the sheep which He is impressing on His hearers by this figure is that of laying down the life. Moreover when the Palestinian shepherd did die in defence of his sheep that was an accident. He planned to live for them, not die for them. With Jesus, however, death for the sheep was the set purpose. There is an element of voluntary acceptance of death in the expression "layeth down his life" which ought not to be missed (cf. v. 18). […] Jesus is not classing Himself as one among many shepherds. He is speaking of his own distinctive activity. "A" good shepherd does not characteristically give his life for the sheep. "The" Good Shepherd does. Finally the death of the Palestinian shepherd meant disaster for his sheep. The death of the Good Shepherd means life for His sheep.[68]

In contrast to this willingness of Jesus, the good shepherd, to die for his sheep, the hired hand instead abandons the sheep in the face of danger because he does not care for the sheep. But, unlike the figures of the thieves and bandits in the preceding verses who are compared to the bogus shepherds of Israel, the "hired hand" here is used to highlight and emphasize the figure of the "good shepherd."

In v. 14a, Jesus declares again that he is the good shepherd but this time it is because he has intimate knowledge of his sheep and likewise his sheep know him. Kysar opines:

> The new focus of this verse and the next is the mutual and reciprocal knowledge between Jesus and believers. […] Here the intimate relationship of knowing includes commitment and love between two parties. The relationship between Jesus and the believer is modelled after the relationship between the Father and the Son (v. 15), as is often the

[67]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 294.

[68]Morris, "The Gospel of John," 510.

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> case in John (e.g., 17:11). […] The relationship of knowledge involves a commitment of love which makes possible the surrendering of life.[69]

Jesus then extends his sheepfold and welcomes those who do not yet belong to it—usually understood as either the gentile believers or Jewish believers from other communities—so that there will only be one flock under one shepherd. This shows the universality of Jesus' self-offering. Jesus' laying down of his life for his sheep as well as for those who still do not belong to his flock is done of his own accord. Culpepper observes that Jesus is not seized but goes willingly with his captors and that Jesus in the FG is not "raised by the Father" but he lays down his life on his own and takes it up again also on his own.[70]

A sharp division among the Jews erupted as a result of Jesus' self-revelation. The adverb "again" used by the author of the FG implies a repeated act on the part of Jesus' audience. This reaction from Jesus' hearers is a recurring leitmotif in the FG. Some Jews conclude that Jesus is possessed by a demon and judge him to be insane. Schnackenburg explains:

> For people living in those times, insanity and possession were often connected. Hence the statement would only require a stronger form of expression for it conveys the thought: his speech is so strange and incomprehensible (cf. 8:43) that it is not worthwhile listening to him. Possibly there also lurks behind the words the contemporary Jewish polemic: the claim Jesus makes about himself is madness; one should pay no heed to preaching about Christ.[71]

On the other hand, there are also those who, reflecting deeply on Jesus' words and being witnesses of Jesus' healing of the man born blind (cf. chapter 9), deduce that Jesus' claims could not come from a possessed person, especially when that person is able to perform such an incredible sign. "Their respect for the facts prevented this group

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[69]Robert Kysar, *John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 162–3.

[70]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 181.

[71]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 303.

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from prejudging the case. So they refuse to condemn Jesus. Yet their position remains entirely a negative one. They say what Jesus is not, but they make no attempt to say what he is."[72]

Summary

At first glance this discourse seems to present some form of difficulty, and not without any reason, to the reader. How could Jesus claim to be both the gate for the sheep and its shepherd? However, a careful look into the deeper significance and meaning of both claims could yield an internal unity in Jesus' message.

Schnackenburg explains that by claiming to be "the door," Jesus appoints himself to be the only way to the Father and the lone bringer of salvation for the sheep. Tasker points out that in the Old Testament, more often than not, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is symbolized by the relationship of the shepherd and his flock. However, God has also appointed leaders to shepherd his chosen people, Israel, some of whom abused their power and authority and did not take care of the people. It is in this note that Jesus castigated the leaders of his time and contrasts himself with them by claiming to be the only true and good shepherd. As the good shepherd, he is laying down his life for his sheep. Morris points out that in laying down his life for the sheep, Jesus in turn gives life to them.

Kysar identified four related themes from both sayings. He concludes that the two sayings reflect:

1. Jesus' exclusive and intimate relationship with his community;
2. his sole claim to leadership of that group;
3. his person as the singular means of access to the eschatological community in which there is salvation; and
4. his radical commitment to those of that community.[73]

[72]Morris, "The Gospel of John," 515.

[73]Kysar, *John*, 165.

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I am the resurrection and the life (11:25).

The Context

The fifth "I am" statement, "I am the resurrection and the life," is part of the long story about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The story covers the whole of chapter 11.

The narrative starts with Lazarus being ill and his siblings, Martha and Mary, sending a message to Jesus to tell him about their brother's serious condition. Evidently these siblings are Jesus' close friends and he loves them. But Jesus chooses to delay his journey to meet with the family for two days. When he decided to go and meet with them, Lazarus has already "fallen asleep" (v. 11), meaning he is now dead. Arriving at Bethany, Jesus learned that Lazarus has been previously buried for four days. Upon hearing that Jesus has finally come, the two sisters rushed to meet with him, Martha first (vv. 20–27) and then Mary (vv. 28–33). The author of the FG takes time to narrate the story in stages. He does not hasten to go immediately to the central miracle, but describes Jesus' encounters first with Martha, then with Mary, and he makes these meetings the means to bring out Jesus' important teaching.[74] Jesus' pronouncement and claim to be the "resurrection and the life" takes place during the course of his conversation with Martha. After his conversation with both sisters, Jesus went to the tomb and raised Lazarus up from the dead (vv. 34–43).

At first glance the story would seem to be just a simple narrative, but this Johannine narrative is considered by most exegetes as the best and most loaded source of Johannine theology and Christology. The self-revelation of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25), is complemented by Martha's profession of faith, "I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God: he who is to come into the world" (v. 27). This act of self-revelation from Jesus is affirmed by a sign which forms the climax of all Jesus' signs, the raising of Lazarus. However, this also marks the peak of his enemies' hostility towards

[74]Kysar, *John*, 545–6.

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him. They now resolve to eliminate him and meticulously plan how to accomplish it. Schnackenburg explains further:

> A word of revelation in the centre of the chapter gives its literal interpretation (vv. 25–26). Its Christological (v. 4) and soteriological (v. 40) significance are also briefly mentioned in the introduction and at the climax of the narrative. Together with the healing of the blind man, the raising of Lazarus expresses the central Christological idea of the fourth gospel, that Jesus is the light and life of the world (cf. 1:4). Wherever he found the story, the evangelist has placed this greatest of signs of Jesus as bringer of life quite deliberately at this point in his gospel. […] In the evangelist's deeper vision, it is no accident that at the moment that the Son of God gives the supreme demonstration of his power over life, the unbelievers resolve to destroy him and take all the steps necessary to that end. The path to the cross is marked out in advance, but it is marked in God's plan; the raising up on the cross will become the glorification of God in his Son. The sign of the raising of the dead is already pointing towards the final glorification (11:4), and the high priest's involuntary prophecy (11:51–52) shows how human purposes inevitably serve God's plan.[75]

Brown's structure of the narrative elucidates further John's careful laying out of Jesus' self-revelation and the eventual plotting of his death. It clearly shows how the evangelist meticulously laid down the progressive development of the narrative.

Setting (vv. 1–6)
Should Jesus go up to Judea? (vv. 7–16)
To die (vv. 7–10, 16)
To help Lazarus (vv. 11–15)
Jesus arrives at Bethany (vv. 17–33)
Arrival and setting (vv. 17–19)
Martha comes out to greet Jesus (vv. 20–27)
Mary comes out to greet Jesus (vv. 28–33)
Raising of Lazarus (vv. 34–44)
Setting and preliminaries (vv. 34–40)

[75]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 316.

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The miracle (vv. 41–44)
The Sanhedrin condemns Jesus to die; withdrawal to Ephraim.
Session of the Sanhedrin addressed by Caiphas (vv. 45–53)
Jesus withdraws to Ephraim (v. 54)[76]

Verses 1–6 set the stage for Jesus' miracle. Lazarus, Mary and Martha are named as three family members who live in Bethany. Lazarus is described as being ill, while Mary is the one "who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair" (v. 2). Martha, on the other hand, is introduced as their sister. These particular references to the two sisters imply, biblical scholars believe, that their story was well known and it circulated around the Christian communities.

The name Lazarus is also used in a parable in the Gospel of Luke in which he is portrayed as a poor beggar who dies and is taken to the bosom of Abraham. "Interestingly, that parable ends with the lament, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' (16:31)."[77] Lazarus in John is referred to also as Jesus' beloved (cf. 11:3).

When Jesus heard of his friend's illness he exclaimed, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4b). This suggests that the illness of Lazarus has a special purpose and that is to make the "glory of God" manifest so that the Son will be glorified (cf. 9:3), a theme which recalls John 2:11 and which points toward the real glorification on the cross (cf. 13:31–32; 17:1).[78]

After delaying for two days, Jesus proposes to go to Judea (v. 7). The disciples are worried about this because of their previous experience

[76]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 419.

[77]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 186.

[78]Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," 970.

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of Jesus' opponents trying to stone him. Jesus tells them that they should work while there is still light and that Lazarus has already "fallen asleep" (v. 11). This euphemism of sleep as referring to death is common, but John uses it as a typical Johannine misunderstanding. At this point the narrator simply explains the misunderstanding, and Jesus declares plainly, "Lazarus is dead." In the first conversation, therefore, death is likened to sleep, and so Jesus is going to Bethany to wake Lazarus up.[79] It was Thomas who understands clearly the meaning of Jesus' journey to Judea. He challenges the others, saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (v. 16).

In vv. 17–19 the evangelist takes pains to detail the setting of Jesus' conversation with Martha. First, he specifically tells his readers that Lazarus has already been buried for exactly four days. Secondly, he carefully points out the precise location of Bethany which he describes as "near Jerusalem, some two miles away" (v. 18). Finally, he says that "many of the Jews had come" to console Martha and Mary because of the death of their brother Lazarus. Michaels makes a noteworthy observation:

> The purpose of the statement that Lazarus **had already been in the tomb for four days** (v. 17) is not to construct a chronology or to help fix the location of the puzzling Bethany east of Jordan (cf. 1:28). […] The purpose of mentioning the four days is to provide a backdrop of Martha's comment in v. 39, and thus for Jesus' dramatic encounter with the grim reality of death in verses 40–44.
>
> The narrator is more interested in Bethany's location in relation to *Jerusalem* (v. 18) than in relation to the other Bethany to the east. Part of the reason may be that he knows this distance and does not know the other, but more significantly, he wants to explain the presence there of some Jews from Jerusalem (v. 19) who will play a small yet crucial role in the story (cf. vv. 31, 33, 36–37, 45–46). The fact that their presence in Bethany needs to be explained (most of the townspeople of Bethany, after all, were Jews!) suggests that here, as frequently in this Gospel, religious authorities of some kind are meant. Because Bethany was as

[79]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 187.

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> close to Jerusalem as it was, people from Jerusalem had come to join in the mourning, and among these were many of the religious leaders.[80]

Another interesting point is that studies show that the importance given by the evangelist in specifying "four days" is to emphasize that at this time the body is already in the state of decomposition and therefore would heighten more the significance of the sign to be performed.

Immediately after Martha hears that Jesus is within the vicinity, she goes out to meet him. Commentators believe that this act of Martha only confirms the fact that Jesus is indeed in danger in that place and therefore she meets with him in secret instead of allowing him to come and be seen by the Jews who have come to mourn with them.

As soon as she sees him Martha greets him saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21). These are the very same words Mary uses when she meets Jesus after Martha summons her (v. 32). Although these words may sound as having a tinge of resentment, reproach or rebuke, Martha expresses her belief in Jesus, "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (v. 22). The majority of biblical commentators interpret these words of Martha as a statement of a living faith which shows that she is a believer of Jesus, although at this point her belief is not yet mature. Her faith will progress as Jesus leads her to its fullness in the course of the narrative. Martha's purpose (as with Mary's in v. 32) in this statement is more to assert her conviction in Jesus' power to heal the sick. Even in the present tragic circumstances she still believes in the possibility of a miracle, though she has no idea how it will take place.[81] In the face of a great and painful situation, Martha demonstrates confidence in Jesus' power to intercede with God. This idea that a person has power to make intercession with God is consonant with Jewish custom and piety.

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[80]Michaels, "John," 200.

[81]Michaels, "John," 201.

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Does Martha expect Jesus to raise her brother from the dead? Most commentators say that this is very unlikely. Schnackenburg proposes that Martha's statement should be read in accord with the evangelist's intention. He expounds:

> Martha is presented as a woman prepared to believe (καὶ νυν οἰδα), who, in a form deliberately kept general (ὁσα ἀν) and indefinite, indicates a hope and expresses a request which leaves all possibilities open. […] Martha's faith is directed more at Jesus' person than at the nature of the help.[82]

Jesus' response directs Martha to hope for the resurrection of her brother—"Your brother will rise again" (v. 23), he tells her. Jesus' words express a general and inexplicit hope for life beyond death. They may refer either to resurrection on the last day or to the spectacle about to occur as Lazarus is summoned out of the tomb.[83] Martha affirms Jesus' reply, but in the way by which she understands his words, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (v. 24). Martha's statement is in accordance with the general belief of the Pharisees in the resurrection of the dead. Schnackenburg explains further:

> In Jesus' time belief in the eschatological raising of the dead was held by the Pharisees in opposition to the Sadducees (cf. Mk 12:18–27 parr), and was widespread among the people. […] The Jewish profession of faith which Martha makes directs attention forcefully to the "last day," the end of the ages. Without any doubt, the mention of this day, which only describes as "the last," come[s] here (in contrast to 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 12:48) from the evangelist. He wants to make a pointed contrast between Jewish expectations for the future and the presence of salvation here and now of which Christians are assured in the Lord.[84]

This misunderstanding on the part of Martha paves the way for Jesus to reveal himself in yet another "I am" statement.

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[82]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 330.

[83]Kysar, *John*, 177.

[84]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 330.

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Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25–26a). This "I am" statement, as with the other "I am" statements which have a predicate, describes again what Jesus is in relation to people. "Resurrection" and "life" are what Jesus has to offer to everyone. Schnackenburg adds:

> In this context the "I am" of Jesus' answer has a particularly powerful and authoritative ring. As far as resurrection is concerned, Martha does not need to look to the future; it is close to her, present in the person of Jesus. The saying of the Revealer, which impressively presents one of the fundamental ideas of the fourth gospel, has the same structure as all these "I am" sayings of Jesus; there is therefore no need either for the ἐγώ to be made a predicate or for particular emphasis to be placed on ἐστίν (as present). Jesus is bearing witness to himself as the one who has been given and fully possesses (5:26) the power which belongs to God alone to "give life" (cf. 5:21), a power which has been demonstrated beyond doubt by the other great signs performed on the sick (cf. 4:50–53 with the triple ζῇ), but which receives its highest expression in this raising of a dead man. […] The powerful cry with which Jesus calls Lazarus out of the grave (v. 43) is only an external echo of the call with which he, God's messenger, calls all men who believe in him to God's life (cf. 5:24–25).[85]

Jesus reveals himself as "the resurrection and the life," and he promises that those who believe in him, even if they die, will live. Exegetes agree that this "dying" which Jesus is referring to is physical death. In his notes on vv. 25–26, Brown indicates that this statement could mean, first, that belief in Jesus will lead to eternal life despite physical death and that this physical life will not be subject to death if it is combined with belief in Jesus; and second, that the believer will have spiritual life even if he dies a physical death and that this believer who lives spiritually will never experience spiritual death.[86] In the same line of thought, Morris interprets Jesus' statement thus:

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[85]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 330.

[86]Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 424.

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> The paradox brings out the truth that physical death is not the important thing. For the heathen or the unbeliever death may be thought of as the end. Not so for the man who believes in Christ. Such a man may die in the sense that he passes through the door we call physical death, but he will not die in the fuller sense. Death for him is but the gateway to further life and fellowship with God. […] It means that the moment a man puts his trust in Jesus he begins to experience that life of the age to come which cannot be touched by death. Jesus is bringing Martha a present power, not the promise of a future good.
>
> Everyone who lives and believes in Jesus … will never die. Jesus does not of course mean that the believer will not die physically. […] But He means that he will not die in the sense in which death has eternal significance. He will not die with reference to the age to come. He has eternal life, the life of the age to come.[87]

There is here a tremendous revelation on the part of Jesus. He is able to promise life eternal to the believer not only because he possesses life but because he himself is the resurrection and the life *in person*. Jesus is not just the revealer and simply the giver of this life by having the power to raise the dead, but he is the source and the giver of salvation not only in the future but in the here and now. To possess him is to possess life.

This promise of eternal life is given only to those who believe in him, thus, the importance of faith. Faith in Jesus is an essential condition in order for one to possess eternal life. He demands faith as a response to his revelation. In this case the faith that Jesus demands is basically that the believer cling to him as the source and giver of life—a faith that results in a deep communion with him. This is why Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" In response to Jesus' question Martha unhesitatingly professes her faith in him, saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

[87]Morris, "The Gospel of John," 550.

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Martha's response reflects her unwavering faith in the person of Jesus. By saying "Yes, Lord," she demonstrates her agreement to what Jesus has just revealed to her, although obviously she has not yet come to a full realization of what he really meant. Previously she has already declared her belief in the resurrection of the dead, but even after Jesus' self-revelation she still fails to grasp its full meaning, which is that here in front of her and speaking to her is "the resurrection and the life" himself. However, Martha's great faith in Jesus even when she is grieving is worth emulating by any believer. Human experience shows that a firm believer of Jesus who experiences crisis in life would continue to hold fast to him, full of faith and confidence that Jesus would not withhold his help from him.

Rather than repeating Jesus' words, Martha uses three significant titles for Jesus: Messiah, Son of God, and the one who is to come. Here it is worthwhile to quote extensively the study of Schnackenburg:

> Martha's confession, like Peter's, is a Messianic confession in the full Christian sense. She declares her firm faith (πεπίστευκα), in the identical words which the evangelist uses at the end of his book to sum up what he understands by Christian faith (20:31): "You are the Messiah, the Son of God." The term "Messiah" (RSV "Christ") is meant to show that the Jewish expectations are fulfilled in Christ. The second title, "the Son of God[,]" is meant at the same time to lift the idea of the Messiah above the Jewish perspective and indicate that Jesus' Messiahship surpasses all Jewish expectations, that his union with God is unique. It is the same concern not to let the Jewish title Messiah stand alone and open to misunderstanding which was apparent earlier in Nathaniel's confession (1:49) and, in a different way, in the title "the Holy One of God" in Peter's confession (6:69). All these professions of faith are phrased directly for the Christian community, and transposed from Jesus' time into the time of the evangelist. […T]hey are confessions attached by mature faith to the historical Jesus.
>
> It is therefore no surprise that at the end of the couplet another characteristically Johannine phrase is added, "he who is coming into the world." It belongs to both Christological titles, which are to be taken as a single unit, and its function is to designate Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, as the bringer of salvation sent by God. […] The fact that the two titles which were joined in the Johannine community's Christological confession are here combined with this Johannine

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> phrase is an outward sign that Martha's confession is a high-point, though one which only matches the supreme importance of Jesus' word of revelation.[88]

After this significant conversation with Martha, Jesus speaks with Mary who uses the same words as her sister Martha. Exegetes also agree that Mary's greeting does not imply any hint of criticism of Jesus' delay in coming. But, unlike with Martha, Jesus does not answer her. Instead, he proceeds to perform the greatest sign of raising Lazarus from the dead. Barrett aptly gives the meaning of this narrative for believers:

> The meaning of this narrative for John is as simple as the narrative itself. Jesus in his obedience to and dependence upon the Father has the authority to give life to whom he wills. The incident is a dramatic demonstration of the truth already declared in 5.21 (cf. 5.25, 28), which is itself the best commentary on the incident. The raising of Lazarus is no piece of black magic, or even the supreme achievement of a saint; it is an anticipation of what is to take place at the last day. It means that the believer has eternal life; that he has passed from death into life.[89]

Following his short comment about the nascent faith of some who saw the sign, the evangelist goes on to describe those who are offended by what they just witnessed. This party immediately departed to report the event to the chief priests who, together with those who are already hardened of heart, start to plot the death of Jesus. The narrative ends on a sad note of this plot against Jesus' life. While Jesus offers the gift of everlasting life to those who believe, those who do not believe instead plot to deliver him up to death. Jesus' gift of life earned for him his own death. But being the resurrection and the life, death has no power over him.

Summary

This astonishing narrative about Lazarus being raised from the dead, interspersed with Jesus' conversations with Martha and Mary,

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[88]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 332–3.

[89]Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 388.

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which in turn become the vehicle for Jesus' divine revelation, brings out several theological and Christological teachings. Schnackenburg emphasized the following points: (1) that Jesus as the life is the Son of God, the Messiah and the bringer of salvation; (2) that the raising of Lazarus manifests the glory of God and is a prelude to Jesus' own final glorification; and (3) that Jesus' promise of resurrection is not only true for the future but is already present here and now in his very person.

Biblical commentators like Brown, Morris and Michaels accentuate Jesus' promise to the believer as well as the importance of having a firm faith in the person of Jesus. Some of the most important and valuable aspects they have indicated are: (1) that Jesus demands faith as a necessary requirement to avail of his promise of eternal life; (2) that the promise of life eternal does not literally mean that the believer will not die a physical death but that this death is only a passageway to the promised everlasting life; and (3) that "the resurrection and the life" is not something but Someone, i.e., Jesus!

I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).

The Context

The sixth "I am" statement forms part of the farewell discourse which runs from chapter 13 verse 31 up to chapter 17. In chapter 13 vv. 31–35 Jesus begins to speak of his glorification and gives a hint of his impending departure. He has just foretold his betrayal and Judas has just left the group. He also gives his disciples a new commandment, the command that they love one another just as he has loved them. This talk is interrupted by Peter (v. 36) and he promises Jesus that he would be willing to lay down his life for him. Jesus in turn does not hesitate to tell Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crows that night.

Biblical exegetes differ significantly in determining the structure of this segment of the farewell discourse. However, Brown in his commentary cited Lagrange's suggested division as to the internal

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organization of chapter 14: vv. 1–11, vv. 12–26, and vv. 27–31. Bultmann on the other hand divided the chapter thus: vv. 1–4, vv. 15–14, vv. 15–24, and vv. 25–31. Culpepper instead suggests the following structure of the chapter:

> Jesus' departure to prepare a place for the disciples (vv. 1–7)
> Jesus as the revelation of the Father (vv. 8–14)
> The Promise of the Paraclete (vv. 15–24)
> The Coming of the Paraclete (vv. 25–31)[90]

Chapter 14 opens with Jesus telling his disciples "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (v. 1a). There is reason enough for the disciples to be troubled. Jesus has just intimated to them that one of them would betray him (13:21), that Peter would deny him three times (13:36–38), and that he would soon leave them and go to a place where they could not follow. Jesus in turn urges them to believe in God and to also believe in him (14:1b). He assures them that he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house where there are many dwelling-places (v. 2). Jesus also comforts them with the promise that he would come back and take them to himself so they could be together again (v. 3). This promise may have caused great consolation to the disciples, for being with Jesus again is their greatest desire. But Jesus makes it clear to them that all of these will only take place if they believe in him and that the sadness in their hearts would dissipate only if they put their faith in him.

In verse 4, Jesus confidently declares to his disciples that they already know the way to the place where he is going. Thomas blurts out his confusion, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way" (v. 5)? Most biblical scholars believe that Thomas' objection to Jesus' statement embodies the disciples' slowness in understanding Jesus' revelation. However, Thomas' objection makes it possible for Jesus to articulate further and in a more precise manner his revelation.

[90]Cf. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 209–12.

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Jesus answers Thomas with another "I am" statement, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (v. 6). Again, biblical scholars vary in their interpretation as to how these three terms may be related to each other. In his notes on this statement Brown uses De la Potterie's summary of some exegetes' opinions regarding how this saying may be interpreted:

A. There are explanations wherein *the way* is directed toward a goal that is *the truth* and/or *the life*:
   1. Most of the Greek Fathers, Ambrose, and Leo the Great (Leo I) understood the way and the truth to lead to the life (eternal life in heaven). Maldonatus modified this, seeing behind the Greek a Hebraism wherein the truth is taken as just an adjectival description of the way: "I am the true way to life."
   2. Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and most of the Latin Fathers understood that the way leads to both the truth and the life. In this interpretation both truth and life are eschatological, divine realities (the truth is the mind of God, the *Logos*). Thomas Aquinas instead held a medieval form of this theory wherein he saw Christ as the way according to his humanity, but he is the truth and the life according to his divinity. Many modern scholars still hold a modification of the theory (De la Potterie lists Westcott, E. F. Scott, V. Taylor, Lagrange, and Braun).
   3. Other modern scholars (W. Bauer, Bultmann, and Dodd) interpret John according to Gnostic dualism, Mandean, and Hermetic thought …. They think of the ascent of the soul along the way to the heavenly sphere of truth, light, and life. […] Their way is already their goal. The truth is the manifested divine reality, and the life is that reality shared by men.

B. Other interpretations point to *the way* as the primary predicate, while *the truth* and *the life* are just explanations of the way. Jesus is the way **because** he is the truth and the life. […] That "the way" is the dominating phrase in 6 is suggested by the fact that Jesus is reaffirming his statement

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> about the way in 4, in response to Thomas' question about the way in 5. Moreover, the second line of 6 leaves aside the truth and the life and concentrates on Jesus as the way: "No one comes to the Father except *through me*."[91]

Brown holds this latter explanation. Culpepper simply puts the relationship between these three terms by claiming that "the way" could be seen as the process, "the truth" as the means or the goal, and "the life" as the result. "The way may lead to truth and life, or truth and life may explain why Jesus is the way."[92] Whitacre also gives a concise explanation of how these three terms may be interpreted according to their relationship. He says:

> The three terms *way*, *truth* and *life* are simply linked together with "and" in the Greek (*kai*). But the central term is *way* because that was the subject of the question (vv. 4–5) and the second half of the verse speaks of coming to the Father *through* Jesus. […]
>
> The other two terms explain how Jesus is the *way*; "Jesus is the way inasmuch as He is the truth and the life" (Michaelis 1967: 81). *Truth* and *life* correspond to Jesus' roles in this Gospel as revealer and life-giver. God alone is truth and life, and when our rebellion separated us from God, we plunged into ignorance and death. It follows that the way to the Father requires both revelation, because of our ignorance, and life, due to our death.[93]

Schnackenburg holds the same opinion:

> The concept "the way" is, in itself, an unusual metaphor to apply to a person, but its meaning is made clearer by the additional statement that "the truth" and "the life" are also incorporated into that person. It almost sounds like a justification, but it is really a clarification: "I

[91]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 620–1.

[92]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 210.

[93]Rodney A. Whitacre, "John," in *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Illinois: Intervarsity, 1999), 351.

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> am the way, that is, the truth and the life" for everyone who wants to reach the goal. In other words, by revealing the truth that leads to life and mediating that true life to the one who accepts and realizes that truth in faith, Jesus takes everyone who believes in him to the goal of his existence, that is, "to the Father"; in this manner, he becomes the "way."[94]

Jesus' claim to be "the way" implies that he is the *only* way to the Father: "No one comes to the Father except through me." He claims for himself an exclusive role, "the way" to the Father. In fact, in vv. 6–11 Jesus explains in a straightforward manner how he is the way to the Father. Since he is the truth or the revelation of the Father he is "the way" to Him, and men can come to know the Father if they know him: "If you know me, you will know my Father" (v. 7). To see Jesus is to see the Father, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 8). "He is the way because he is the life—since he lives in the Father and the Father lives in him (10–11), he is the channel through which the Father's life comes to men."[95] Jesus alone has the authority to claim this exclusive means to God because he alone knows God fully (3:13, 6:46). According to Bultmann this *ego eimi* saying of Jesus is a pure expression of revelation.[96] Jesus, the Revealer, is the only access to God which men and women are looking for.

This exclusive claim of Jesus is seen by Kysar as more than just a declaration but a confession of faith in the context in which the first Christian community found itself. He says,

> Jesus is the only means by which the revelation is bestowed. These words are best seen not as a universal declaration for all time and place but as a confession of the Johannine community in the midst of their

[94]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* III (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 64–5.

[95]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 628.

[96]Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Westminster, 1971), 605.

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> own situation. The exclusiveness of this statement had its source in the difficult and threatening dialogue with the synagogue and affirms over against Judaism the effectiveness of Christian faith. […] The thought of the clause emerges, moreover, out of the relationship of Christ and God and declares the functional reality of that relationship for humans. Jesus serves as the passage to **the Father** (cf. 10:7).[97]

Many biblical scholars believe that this exclusive claim to be the only way to the Father also means that Jesus is presenting himself as the only route to salvation as he claims in 10:9, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved …." This "I am" statement is firmly grounded on his divine identity as the one who comes from the Father, and it expresses his saving mission and his relation to men. This interpretation is closely related to Jesus being the truth and the life. He alone leads men to salvation because he is the truth and he is the life. Brown explains:

> In calling himself the truth, Jesus is not giving an ontological definition in terms of [transcendence] but is describing himself in terms of his mission to men …. "I am the truth" is to be interpreted in the light of xviii 37: "The reason I have come into the world is to testify to the truth." […] Furthermore, it reflects what Jesus is in *himself*; the whole Johannine emphasis on "the real" (*alēthinos:* the real bread, the real vine) would be in vain if what Jesus is in relation to men was not a true indication of what he is in himself.
>
> If Jesus is the way in the sense that he is the truth and enables men to know their goal, he is also the way in the sense that he is THE LIFE (*zōē*). Once again this is a description of Jesus in terms of his mission to men: "I came that they may have life and have it to the full" (x 10). The destination of the way is life with the Father; this life the Father has given to the Son (v. 26), and the Son alone can give it to men who believe in him (x 28). The gift of natural life to Lazarus was a sign of eternal realities behind Jesus' claim to be the resurrection and the life (xi 25–26): "Everyone who is alive and believes in me shall never die at all."
>
> If Jesus is the way because he is the truth and the life, "truth" and "life" are not simply coordinates: life comes through the truth. Those who

[97]Kysar, *John*, 223.

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> believe in Jesus as the incarnate revelation of the Father (and that is what "truth" means) receive the gift of life, so that the words of Jesus are the source of life: "The words that I have spoken to you are both Spirit and life" (vi 63); "The man who hears my word and has faith in Him who sent me possesses eternal life" (v. 24).[98]

De la Potterie summarizes the theological significance of Jesus' declaration in the context of the Trinitarian slant of Jesus' revelation: (1) First, "I am" statements make it plain that Jesus is essentially the revealer of the Father, the one who passes on to us the words of the Father. But the phrase Jesus uses here compels us to go beyond this purely functional interpretation. As St. Jerome observed, no prophet or apostle could ever say, as Christ did, "I am the truth." This declaration recalls the teaching of the Prologue, but expressed with all possible clarity, i.e., *the identification, pure and simple, between the person of Christ and the truth.* (2) Second, in order to understand clearly and to justify fully this declaration of Jesus, we are forced to contemplate the mystery of his person, the mystery of the trinitarian relationships between Father and Son. In the broader context of 14:6 (cf. 14:7–14) as well as its parallel in the Prologue, it can be deduced that Christ is the truth and the life because he can lead us to the Father. He can lead us to the Father simply because he himself, in person, is in close communion with the Father. Therefore, Jesus is the truth, because of the fact that in his own person he reveals to us the mystery of the trinitarian life, the intimate and vital relations which unite him to the Father.[99]

Summary

Studies show that throughout the centuries biblical scholars including the Church Fathers differ in their views on how to read this particular "I am" statement, that is, the relationship of the three predicates of Jesus' claim: the way, the truth, and the life. De La Potterie

[98]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 630–1.

[99]Ignace De La Potterie, "The Truth in Saint John," in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. John Ashton (Pennsylvania: Fortress, 1986), 58.

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in his study identified two common modes by which biblical scholars and theologians interpret the statement:

A. that the "truth" and the "life" are *the goals* of the "way," and
B. that the two predicates, "truth" and "life," are the *explanations* of the "way."

It is clear that modern scholars, although they vary in their approach, adhere to the latter interpretation. They agree that Jesus is the way to the Father because he is "the truth" and "the life." Their studies also accentuate the exclusivity of Jesus' claim, that he alone is the only access to the Father and consequently to man's salvation. Jesus' claim has divine authority because of his provenance: he has come from the Father, and also because of his destination: he will return to the Father. He alone has the full knowledge of the Father because he comes from him.

Jesus' claim to be the way, the truth, and the life makes him more than just a moral figure for the Christian. This claim gives the full force of Jesus' divine identity and salvific mission. Schnackenburg wisely concludes:

> Jesus' self-revelatory statement, which is given a precise and absolute expression in the sentence that follows: "No one comes to the Father, but by me," is a culminating point in Johannine theology. It forms a classical summary of the Johannine doctrine of salvation that is based entirely on Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the evangelist is saying, the invisible and incomprehensible God has, in his will to save men, made himself so tangible and so comprehensible that they are able to reach the goal of their existence along this way, by accepting in faith the truth that has been revealed to them in Jesus Christ and by sharing in his life. […]
>
> The concept of truth is different in John, where it is not a reality that is divine and discloses itself, but a reality of salvation that is revealed by the historical Jesus.[100]

[100]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* III, 65–6.

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I am the true vine (15:1).

The Context

Chapter 15 begins with the last of the "I am" statements, "I am the true vine," which gives this chapter an authoritative tone even if it may sound quite abrupt. Jesus has just declared himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6) and revealed the mutual indwelling that exists between him and the Father (cf. 14:10–11). He promised the coming of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, and assured his disciples of his abiding presence even when he has departed to return to the Father. He instructed them to obey his commandments as proof of their love for him, and he promised too that he and the Father would dwell in those who love him and keep his word (cf. v. 23). The final paragraph of chapter 14 sums up the themes of this part of Jesus' farewell discourse. He would continue to reveal his legacy to his disciples, and leave them his love and peace.

In the first part of chapter 15 in which Jesus claims to be the true vine, he refers to his Father as the vine-grower and his disciples as the branches. The discourse now shifts from the theme of Jesus' departure to the theme of the necessity of his disciples' remaining in him. By using the image of the vine Jesus develops the theme of the mutual abiding and indwelling of himself in the disciples and the disciples in him.

Just like the discourse on the gate and the shepherd, exegetes differ in categorizing this speech with finality. Some settle on referring to it as an allegory, a parable (though not in the same sense of parables found in the Synoptic Gospels), a "literal" or a "figurative" discourse. Brown refers to 15:1–6 as a *mashal*.[101] No matter how they call it, they somehow agree on the fact that this particular *ego eimi* saying is very

[101] *Māšal* is a Hebrew term covering all figurative illustrations such as parable, allegory, proverb, maxim, simile, metaphor, etc. For a detailed discussion on this cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 390–1.

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similar to the discourse of Jesus on the gate and the shepherd and that the imagery of the vine is developed in a very powerful way. "That Jesus would appeal to a vine image is not surprising. Aside from evidence that Jesus used Isaiah's comparison of Israel with a vineyard (Mark 12:1), vineyards and vines were so much a part of ancient Mediterranean life that they presented themselves naturally for comparisons."[102]

Although some biblical scholars fall back on Gnostic and Mandean sources as background for the imagery of the vine and the branches, the majority still believe that the FG's author used the Old Testament and Jewish background as his possible sources. Brown summarizes:

> In the OT the vineyard is a frequent symbol for Israel. Occasionally the symbol is one of fruitfulness (Is xxvi 2–6); more often the vineyard is unproductive or desolate and disappointing to Yahweh (Jer v. 10, xii 10–11). In the Synoptic tradition Jesus draws on the OT vineyard symbolism: his Parable of the Vineyard (Mark xii 1–11 and par.) implicitly cites Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" (Isa v. 1–7). See also the Parables of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt xx 1–16), of the Obedient and Disobedient Sons (Matt xxi 28–32), and of the Fig Tree Planted in the Vineyard (Luke xiii 6–9). Now in John we are dealing with a vine rather than a vineyard.[103]

Although it is true that the use of the image of vine or vineyard as a symbol for Israel is common in the OT as well as in the NT, Brown cites two difficulties in identifying these as sources for John's use of the imagery. The first difficulty is that the image of vineyard or vine usually stands for Israel, while in John the vine is identified with Jesus. Secondly, he stresses the idea that none of the OT passages on the vine identifies the vine as the source of life for its branches, while in John this is an essential and central conviction. To overcome such difficulties, Brown says that

> it is a feature of Johannine theology that Jesus applied to himself terms used in the OT for Israel and in other parts of the NT for the Christian

[102]Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 988–9.

[103]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 669–70.

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> community. This is part of the Johannine technique of replacing "the kingdom of God is like …" with "I am …." In the present instance, however, we should note that the element of the collective is not absent. Jesus is not the stalk but the whole vine, and the branches remain part of the vine. […]
>
> In conclusion, it is clear that John's mashal of the vine and the branches has a unique orientation, consonant with Johannine Christology. This orientation is not found in the OT or in Jewish thought, but many of the images and ideas that have been blended together under this orientation are found there. Granting the originality of John's thought, we suggest that the OT and Judaism supplied the raw material from which this *mashal* was composed, even as they supplied the raw material for the *mashal* of the sheepgate and the shepherd.[104]

There are also references wherein the vine is likened to Wisdom. For instance, Culpepper cites Sirach 24:17–19 where Wisdom compares herself to a vine:

> Like the vine I bud forth delights,
> and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit.
> Come to me, you who desire me,
> And eat your fill of my fruits.

Many exegetes also agree that this discourse may have some Eucharistic symbolisms. Brown for example cites the fact that the discourse on the vine is narrated just before Jesus' death and the explanation given by him talks about sacrificial death. "This motif of the death of Jesus is, of course, part of all the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist. The theme of intimate union with Jesus would also be shared both by the *mashal* of the vine (remaining in Jesus) and by the eucharistic theology of the early Church."[105] Barrett is also of the same opinion by maintaining that the discourse is said in the context of the narrative of the Last Supper. "Such a connection would confirm the view of the

[104]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 669–70.

[105]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 673.

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symbolism … it is at least in part eucharistic, and the union of believers with Christ which it represents is a union in his death."[106]

As for the structure of the discourse on the vine two divisions are suggested:

The vine and the branches (vv. 1–11)
The commandment of love and bearing fruit (vv. 12–17)

For the last time in the FG Jesus utters a predicated "I am" statement with an authority that he alone possesses. He uses the image of the vine which, as pointed out above, is usually used to symbolize Israel but which he now applies to himself. The author may have intentionally done this in order to emphasize the fact that indeed Jesus is *the* vine and this is stressed all the more by the opening words *ego eimi*. Schnackenburg argues:

> Jesus described himself as *the* vine and does so with a precision that is similar to that of the other images. The addition of the words ἡ ἀληθινή is striking, because they are strongly emphasized by being placed after the noun. […T]he best interpretation is that Jesus is the true vine; he merits the name of "true vine" and the name applies fully to him.[107]

Culpepper also argues that one striking feature of the symbolism of the vine in this discourse is that it ceases to represent Israel and takes on a significance which is highly Christological. The vine now represents Jesus himself. Whereas before salvation comes by being a member of the chosen people, Israel, now Jesus claims that one's life depends on remaining in him. Jesus becomes the source of life. Other scholars also interpret these words as Jesus claiming to be the new Israel; "Christ is God's servant who stands in the place of Israel."[108] Whitacre elaborates on this, saying that

[106]Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 393.

[107]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* III, 97.

[108]Kysar, *John*, 236.

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> when Jesus refers to himself as the true vine (v. 1) he is once again taking an image for Israel and applying it to himself. Jesus himself is true Israel …. Israel's place as the people of God is now taken by Jesus and his disciples, the vine and its branches. This is not a rejection of Judaism as such, but its fulfillment in its Messiah. The identification of the people of God with a particular nation is now replaced with a particular man who incorporates in himself the new people of God composed of Jews and non-Jews.[109]

Aside from claiming for himself the image of the vine, Jesus qualifies it by stressing the fact that he is not only *the* vine but he is the *true* vine. He insists that he is the real vine. Brown explains further:

> It does not seem that in claiming to be the real vine Jesus is directly polemicizing against a false vine; rather he is emphasizing that he is the source of "real" life, a life that can come only from above and from the Father. Jesus is the vine in the sense in which only the Son of God can be the vine. "Real" here is the language of Johannine dualism distinguishing what is below from what is above.[110]

Culpepper suggests that the added emphasis on Jesus' words "I am the *true* vine" may very well imply a warning not to accept any other substitute for him.[111]

Together with the authoritative "I am" statement, Jesus mentions his Father to validate his claim. He refers to him as the vine-grower. "The imagery acknowledges the differences between Jesus and his Father, but it also conveys their unity. […H]e calls himself the genuine or "true" (alēthinos) vine, using a term appropriate for God (7:28; 17:3) and for what is of divine origin (1:9; 6:32; 8:16; cf. 4:23)."[112] Furthermore, even if the main idea of the discourse is that of "remaining in Jesus"

[109]Whitacre, "John," 372.

[110]Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 674.

[111]Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 215.

[112]Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 272.

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(vv. 4–7), still, as Schnackenburg points out, the Father does not play a secondary role. He posits:

> His activity, as described in v. 2, leads to the idea of bearing fruit and this is another dominant aspect of the discourse (vv. 4–5) and its objective (v. 8). The Father is mentioned again in this latter verse, according to which he is glorified in the disciples' bearing of abundant fruit. As the vine-dresser, God carries out his work in Jesus, the vine. And this increases the importance of the activity of the disciples as well.[113]

More often than not in the FG the Father and the Son are portrayed as always being together in whatever they do, and so it is not surprising that after declaring himself as the true vine Jesus immediately refers to his Father as the vine-grower who does the work of taking care of the vine. It is the Father who ensures the fruitfulness of the vine by pruning it and by taking out the branches that do not bear fruit.

One major theme of the discourse is "abiding" in Jesus, resulting in the disciples' "bearing fruit." He solemnly tells his disciples that unless they abide in him, and he in them, they can not bear fruit just like the branches which cannot bear fruit unless they are securely attached to the vine (cf. vv. 4–5). Those branches that do not bear fruit are thrown away and burned. Some biblical scholars interpret the imagery of "bearing fruit" as leading a virtuous life and doing good works. In line with this, some commentators see the pruning and the cleansing as an act of divine judgment on those disciples and/or Christians who do not live a virtuous way of life nor produce good works. Nonetheless the "abiding in Christ" aspect must not be overlooked in the effort to stress the moral dimension of the verses since the fruitfulness of the branches is largely dependent on their remaining attached to the vine. This suggests that if one continues to abide in Christ, he in turn will continue to abide in that person and this mutual indwelling will result in the person's fruitfulness.

[113]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* III, 97.

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Another major theme of the imagery is the love that exists between the Father and the Son and the love of the Son for the disciples. Koester comments:

> Jesus explains that love comes from God the Father, who loves him, and the love that Jesus receives from the Father is the love that he gives to the disciples. Therefore, for the disciples to abide in Jesus means that they abide in his love like branches on the vine, drawing strength from the main stalk and thereby bearing fruit (15:9). With a seamless interplay of thought, readers find that Jesus the vine produces fruit through the love expressed by his disciples and that by showing love the disciples reveal the love they receive from the vine.[114]

It can also be construed that this love for Jesus is demonstrated through obedience to what he has commanded. This obedience will ensure their abiding in his love just as he abides in the Father's love by his unwavering obedience to his will. In this manner the Father is glorified. Jesus wills that this revelation would produce joy in the disciples, a joy that is the result of the assurance of having Christ present in one's life. Obedience to his commandment would also merit Jesus' friendship. The disciples will no longer be considered servants, but rather his friends, if they will obey his commandment of love. The test of discipleship is obedience, and Jesus' friendship is the prize for it. "Jesus' friendship with his followers therefore is both the source and the norm for their relationships with each other. As the one 'true vine,' he displaces anything else that might claim to be the source of a disciple's life."[115]

This love between Jesus and the disciples must not stop there, but must be extended towards others. Jesus' commandment is that the disciples should love each other with the kind of love that he has loved them. This is the new commandment that he gives his disciples. The theme of love reaches its climax in Jesus' declaration that the greatest love is being able to lay down one's life for one's friends. This is exactly

[114]Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 272.

[115]Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 275.

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what Jesus does when he lays down his life for all. "True honor and glory are given by God to his servants. Jesus laid down his life in an ignominious death out of obedience to God, and God glorified him. Those who lose themselves in the service of Jesus will also be honored by God even if dishonored by other people."[116]

Jesus promises that the prayer of the disciples will be answered as a consequence of fruit-bearing, of living always in union with him, and of sharing his love with others. "Thus while the disciples themselves must go and bear fruit or risk being cut off (v. 6), they have the assurance that Jesus has chosen and appointed them for this activity and that the Father will answer their prayers."[117]

Summary

This last "I am" statement remains enigmatic because of the richness of the imagery used by the author of the FG and the varied themes embedded therein. It also shows the acute knowledge of the author of viticultural practices in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Just like the discourse on the gate and the shepherd in chapter 10, this pericope is not easy to classify as proven by the differing opinions of exegetes in this regard. Schnackenburg concludes that it is better to classify it as a "figurative discourse" while Brown calls it a *mashal*. Both, though, have strong arguments to support their choice.

The seeming paradox of Jesus' self-revelation, "I am the true vine," is that he applies to himself an image that usually refers to Israel, the people of God. Biblical scholars agree that this shift employed by the author is influenced by his OT and Jewish background but highly motivated by his theological and Christological goal.

[116]Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 276.

[117]Whitacre, "John," 381.

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The whole discourse on the vine and the branches is replete with themes characteristic of the FG. Jesus being the "true vine" is supported by his Father whom he calls the vine-grower. Jesus makes several demands from his disciples such as: (1) abiding in him, (2) bearing fruit, (3) loving one another, (4) being able to lay down one's life for one's friends, and (5) obedience to his commandment especially the commandment of love. With all these demands comes the promise of the abiding presence of Jesus, being loved by him, his friendship, and prayers being heard by the Father. However, the warning of being cut off, of withering away, and of being broken and burned like the fruitless branches of the vine, must also be taken seriously. Schnackenburg aptly sums up:

> The passage concludes with a repetition of Jesus' commandment to love one another (v. 17). This completes the unit of the discourse and throws light once more on the place that it occupies in the whole discourse. The object of this discourse on the vine was to point to the bearing of fruit by the disciples. This is given concrete expression and is even more powerfully motivated—by the idea of the love of friends—in the exposition in vv. 12–17. The admonition to the community, which consists of Christ's disciples and friends, culminates in this repeated commandment of mutual love.[118]

The community of the beloved disciple could not but understand this treaty in all its richness, and invest all of their best efforts to put it into practice even in the midst of the not so encouraging situation they were in.

General Summary and Conclusion

This study gives an exposition of Jesus' self-revelation using the "I am" statements. A survey of the frequency of the use of the *ego eimi* formula in all the Gospel narratives shows that the author of the FG utilized this tool the most number of times. Biblical exegetes identified

[118]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* III, 113.

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three distinct usage of *ego eimi* uttered by Jesus Christ himself in the FG: (1) the absolute use of the formula without employing any image or predicate, (2) the use where a predicate is implied, and (3) the *ego eimi* sayings with a predicate or where an image is used. The latter category was used by Jesus seven times and in this chapter they are identified as the "I am" statements.

The seven "I am" statements prove to be the vehicle by which Jesus reveals not only his identity but also his relationship to all men and women of his time and for all time, thus expressing his saving action in history. This relational dimension of his self-revelation is that which makes the seven "I am" statements unique and different from the first two categories of the *ego eimi* sayings.

The "I am" statements are firmly grounded in Jesus' divine identity, yet by them Jesus describes himself using images which are rather commonplace and readily perceptible to his audience. The images of "bread," "light," "gate," "shepherd," and "true vine" are deeply rooted in his hearers' cultural and religious traditions. Even the concepts of "resurrection and life," as well as the "way and truth," are no stranger to them. One might say that Jesus chose these images with such care and used them with such precision that it leaves no doubt in anybody's mind that he intended to be understood by his listeners. Unfortunately, the Gospel narratives show that he failed in this dismally. The apparent obstinacy of his hearers as they reacted to his revelation in a repeated pattern of misunderstanding and unbelief led to a total rejection of Jesus' revelation and person. This rejection brought Jesus to his passion, death and later to his glorification.

But Jesus' revelation is not dependent on his audiences' reaction but solely on his Father's will. The Father's will is for all people to be saved. Thus, the purpose of Jesus' self-revelation is for everyone to have life and to be saved. As "bread of life" Jesus instructs and gives God's people his wisdom as he also nourishes them at the table of the Eucharist. He is the "light of the world" who takes away the darkness of sin from people's lives. As "the gate" he leads his sheep to eternal life, and being the good shepherd he takes care of his sheep to the point of willingly laying down his own life for them so that they may

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have life in abundance. Jesus is "the resurrection and the life" who promises eternal life to those who believe in him. He claims to be the only "way" to the Father because no one can have access to the Father except through him. He is "the way" because he is also "the truth and the life." Finally, Jesus is "the true vine" without which the disciples cannot survive nor bear fruit. Attachment to Jesus, "the true vine," is a guarantee of continuous life and fruitfulness.

All seven "I am" statements were proclaimed by Jesus with resounding authority. He proclaimed them with such authority as could come only from his deep awareness of his divine identity, that of being the Son of the Father. Everything that he did he did because it was the will of the Father, and every word he uttered he spoke because it was commanded to him by the Father; "… for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me" (12:49–50). Every word he spoke carries with it the authority that comes from God himself for he is the *Logos*, the Word that was from the beginning, the Word who was with God, and the Word who is God (cf. 1:1).

Springing, too, from the authority that lies behind these "I am" statements is the exclusivity of Jesus' claims. When he reveals himself to be "the bread of life" he does not liken himself to any bread; he literally claims to be *the* bread. He is not just any bread but "the bread of life." In like manner, he alone can claim to be "the light of the world," "the gate of the sheepfold," "the good shepherd," and so on and so forth. His authority to make these claims is so complete such that it nullifies all previous claims (if ever there were) and it eliminates all other possibilities for anyone to make the same claim. In the "I am" sayings Jesus makes an exclusive assertion of being the *only one* who can touch and influence *every* facet of *every* human person's life and that of *all* creation. Because of his provenance (he comes from the Father) and his divine identity as the Son, he has all the authority and power to make such claims. He cannot tolerate nor can he accept any rival.

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Five out of seven "I am" statements are coupled with a solemn promise and assurance of eternal life while two assure the believer of a deeper intimacy with Jesus and the Father. One promises "fruitfulness" of the disciples, aside from the assurance of Jesus' love and friendship. Jesus' self-revelation does not end in making himself and his Father known to people. He makes himself known in order that those who hear his revelation may gain life in him. His revelation is not self-serving; rather it offers his hearers the chance to choose life and be saved. However, Jesus' promise demands from his listeners unwavering faith in him as well as being attached to him and obeying his commandment. There is no other way by which a person could hope to obtain fullness of life except through Jesus.

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