LOVE IN THE GOSPEL of JOHN

An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study

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

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover”
(see John 15:13; 19:28–37)
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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Francis J. Moloney, SDB, AM, FAHA
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
Abbreviations

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

AB Anchor Bible
ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library
AnBib Analecta biblica
ATANT Abhandlungen zur Thologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AThR Anglican Theological Review
AusBR Australian Biblical Review
AYBRL Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BBET Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BETL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum loyaniensium
Bib Biblica
BibInt Biblical Interpretation
BibIntS Biblical Interpretation Series

Francis J. Moloney, SDB. Love in the Gospel of John
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BibScRel</td>
<td>Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJRL</td>
<td>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</td>
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<td>BNTC</td>
<td>Black’s New Testament Commentaries</td>
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<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
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<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>BZNW</td>
<td>Beifüge zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>CahRB</td>
<td>Cahiers de la Revue biblique</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBET</td>
<td>Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>CCSL</td>
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<td>CNT</td>
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<td>DRev</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
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<td>ETR</td>
<td>Études théologiques et religieuses</td>
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<td>EvT</td>
<td>Evangelische Theologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Forschung zur Bibel</td>
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<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<td>HeyJ</td>
<td>Heythrop Journal</td>
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<td>HKNT</td>
<td>Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>Herder’s Theological Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>HUT</td>
<td>Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie</td>
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<td>IBS</td>
<td>Irish Biblical Studies</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>JB</td>
<td>Jerusalem Bible</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal for Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>κτλ.</td>
<td>καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ = et cetera</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Lectio divina</td>
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<td>LNTS</td>
<td>Library of New Testament Studies</td>
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<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTZ</td>
<td>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>New Century Bible</td>
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<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>NovT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
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<td>NovTSup</td>
<td>Supplements to Novum Testamentum</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>NRTb</td>
<td>La nouvelle revue théologique</td>
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<td>NTAbh</td>
<td>Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen</td>
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<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
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<td>ÖTK</td>
<td>Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar</td>
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<td>PNTC</td>
<td>Pelican New Testament Commentaries</td>
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<td>PTMS</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series</td>
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<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<td>RvbB</td>
<td>Rivista biblica italiana</td>
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<td>RSR</td>
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<td>Sal</td>
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<tr>
<td>SANT</td>
<td>Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<td>SB</td>
<td>Studi Biblici</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBFA</td>
<td>Studium biblicum Franciscanum analecta</td>
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<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLSS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series</td>
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<td>SBS</td>
<td>Stuttgarter Bibelstudien</td>
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<td>Sem</td>
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<td>SHR</td>
<td>Studies in the History of Religions</td>
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<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Sacra pagina</td>
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<tr>
<td>s.v.</td>
<td>sub voce: “under the word”</td>
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<tr>
<td>THKNT</td>
<td>Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>TynBu</td>
<td>Tyndale Bulletin</td>
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<td>TZ</td>
<td>Theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZKT</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</td>
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<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</td>
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The Gospel of John, which appeared toward the end of the first Christian century, continues the tradition of Jesus’ speaking about love. The source of his teaching about love of God and neighbor, as found in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, is the Old Testament.1 When asked to identify the most important commandment (Mark and Matthew) on what to do to inherit eternal life (Luke), he responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31; cf. Matt. 22:35–40). The expressions come from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (love of God) and Leviticus 19:18 (love of neighbor). In Luke the same words appear, but Jesus elicits them from a lawyer (Luke 10:25–27). The settings are different. For Matthew and Mark the episode belongs to a series of conflicts with Israel’s leadership (see Mark 11:27–12:44; Matt. 21:23–22:46). For Luke, it introduces the parable of the good Samaritan, which Jesus tells

1. Throughout I will refer to “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” using these traditional expressions to indicate that one is older than the other, not to express a value judgment. Other suggestions (e.g., Hebrew Scriptures/Christian Scriptures; First Testament/Second Testament) either are not accurate or do make value judgments. All translations from European languages are those of the author.
The use of this command to love develops and changes direction from the Old Testament through Jesus into the Synoptic Gospels and finally in John. Jesus’ command to love as it appears in Mark, Matthew, and Luke never appears in the Gospel of John. Indeed, nowhere in John does Jesus request that the disciples love God. John has replaced this with a request by Jesus that the disciples love him and his commandments (14:15, 21, 23, 28; 16:27). He promises the disciples that if they love him and his commandments, his Father will love them (14:21, 23). Jesus and the Father share a union of love that Jesus does not share with the disciples for most of the Gospel (3:35; 10:17; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26). Only at the end, in his final prayer for disciples of all ages (17:20–26), does Jesus ask the Father that they be swept into the love that has always united the Father and the Son: “that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (17:26 NRSV).

The Fourth Gospel also uses two different words to speak about the act of loving. All the passages cited in the previous paragraph use the Greek verb ἀγαπάω. In describing another series of relationships, Jesus, or John, uses the verb φιλέω. General Greek usage of these two expressions subtly distinguishes between them. The verb ἀγαπάω has come to be used for self-giving Christian love, while φιλέω maintains its classical meaning of “friendship love.” Though scholars have long debated the significance of John’s use of...
the two expressions, we need not resolve the matter here. However, with a summary glance at the passages using φιλέω we can see that some of the themes mentioned in the previous paragraph return. The Father loves the Son (5:20), Jesus loves Lazarus (11:3, 36), the one who loves his life loses it (12:25), the world loves its own (15:19), the Father loves the disciples (16:27), and Jesus loves “the other disciple” (20:2). The main difference is the use of φιλέω to refer to the negative loves of those who reject Jesus (the love of some for their own lives and the love of the world for its own). John uses φιλέω to describe Jesus’ love for “the other disciple” in 20:2 but not elsewhere in the Gospel. He regularly singles out the Beloved Disciple with the verb ἀγαπάω (13:23; 19:25–27; 21:7, 20).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This overview of the impressive use of the love theme in the Gospel of
John indicates its importance for this early Christian story of Jesus. But there
is more to the theme of love in the Fourth Gospel than those places in the
narrative where nouns and verbs that ask for love or express love are found.
Jesus not only speaks about love in words; he also shows it in actions. 10 He
spells it out in a special way in washing his disciples’ feet and giving Judas
the piece of bread in 13:1–38; 11 in his final prayer in 17:1–26; and in submit-
ting to crucifixion, that “greater love” he referred to in 15:13 when urging
the disciples to love as he has loved, εἰς τέλος (13:1, 34–35; 15:12, 17).

Contemporary Approaches

Over the centuries interpreters have assessed the meaning and importance
of the love theme in the Gospel of John variously. Currently, three major ap-
proaches predominate. Since the groundbreaking work of Ernst Käsemann
on the Johannine community as viewed in the light of John 17, and Wayne
Meeks’s essay on the Johannine man from heaven, a number of scholars
have seen the love command as a major element in identifying the Johannine
community as an early Christian sect. 12 For Käsemann, the love theme is es-
tentially inward looking—it urges love for fellow members of the community:
“There is no indication in John that love for one’s brother would also include
love toward one’s neighbour.” 13 He regards 3:16, on God’s love for the world,

10. On the need to attend to both dimensions (word and action) in assessing early Christian
narratives, see Richard A. Burridge, Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament
Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 19–32. For the hermeneutical reasons for this insistence,
see idem, What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biography, 2nd ed. (Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), esp. 247–51, 322–40. Contemporary studies of the love theme in the
Fourth Gospel hardly ever pay close attention to those parts of the Johannine narrative that
tell of loving action, especially at the cross. Meier, Marginal Jew, 479, explains why: “Let us
therefore simply stipulate for the record and grant what no serious critic denies: Jesus was in
favor of love, mercy, and forgiveness. The question we pursue . . . is the more focused one of
Jesus’ command that x must (or ‘shall’) love y.”
11. The translation “piece of bread” reflects the NRSV translation of 13:26–27. The Greek
word ψωμίον means a small portion of food, not necessarily bread. However, the context sug-
gests that the translation/interpretation of the NRSV is correct.
of Chapter 17, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM, 1968); Wayne A. Meeks, “The Man from
as a reflection of an earlier tradition that does not reflect true Johannine thought. He claims that this famous passage does not “give us the right to interpret the whole Johannine proclamation from this perspective.”

Rejecting other forms of Christianity, as well as their non-Christian neighbors, the Johannine Christians developed their own “inner” Christian culture with its unique language and practices. In their Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John, Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh categorize all the passages that deal with love as exhibiting socially conditioned “antilanguage” in an honor-shame society. All exhortations to mutual love demand loyalty and unconditional commitment to the “core group,” “members of John’s antisociety.”

The command to love and the experience of love are limited to the members of the community.

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


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

These more sectarian readings of the Johannine Gospel and its background accept that love for one another has a “missionary aspect” (see 13:34–35; 17:23). However, the Gospel calls those outside to believe in order to be saved. It does not offer them love but exhorts them to believe. As Herbert Preisker puts it: “Love has already experienced a narrowing. . . . The depth of warmth and love remain, but it has lost in breadth and unlimitedness.”

After a careful study that endorses and develops Käsemann’s argument with material from the Johannine Epistles, Jack T. Sanders pursues this understanding of this movement in early Christianity, claiming that Johannine Christianity is morally bankrupt. He strikingly concludes:

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

Supporters of the second major approach locate the Gospel’s teaching on
the love of God, the love of Jesus, and the love that disciples are to have for
one another within a literary stratum in the history of the redaction of the
Gospel that reflects the changing social and religious settings of the Johannine
community. Most recently, Urban C. von Wahlde has joined a long line of
scholars who claim that we can uncover these “stages” in the development of
the Gospel as we now have it.21 He has argued that all the material describ-
ing God’s love or Jesus’ love or exhorting love for Jesus and for one another
comes from the final stage in the redaction of the Fourth Gospel. Attempts
to trace the strata in the Gospel, identified as a reflection of various stages
in the text’s history, and the allocation of those strata to different people,
settings, conflicts, and even ideologies, have long been a significant part of
Johannine scholarship.22 Urban von Wahlde’s recent addition to this work,
however one assesses it, has the advantage of tracing a unified and positive
development of the Johannine tradition. For example, he makes no use of
an “ecclesiastical redactor,” who attempts to draw the tradition in a more
conservative direction, losing touch with the fundamental message of the
evangelist.23 For von Wahlde no one has “betrayed” an earlier version. Each
edition builds upon what has gone before.

The love material, found exclusively in what von Wahlde identifies as a
third edition, has been strongly influenced by the teaching of the Johannine
Letters. The first edition was a Synoptic-like Gospel. The second reflects
the community’s separation from the synagogue (which took place, for von
Wahle, in the early 60s), evident in changed terminology for Jewish leader-
ship and in the tension between Jesus and “the Jews.” After this breakdown
of relationships with the synagogue, the community began to disagree on the
humanity of Jesus, eschatology, and ethics. Into this situation stepped “the
Elder,” the author of 1 John, who appeared at this time (late 70s). The other

Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).
Clark, 1928); Walter Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 3rd ed., HNT 6 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr
Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971; first published 1941); Jurgen Becker, *Das Evangelium
nach Johannes*, 2 vols., OTK 4/1–2 (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1984); Ernst Haenchen, *John*,
23. This is one of the defects of Bultmann’s source theory, also present in Becker and Haenchen.

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

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


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

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

We must examine moments across John’s story of Jesus that point to Jesus’ future accomplishment of the task given to him by the Father. They prepare the reader/listener for the culmination of Jesus’ mission, and they are many: references to “the hour” of Jesus, the “lifting up” of the Son of Man, the glory of God and the glorification of the Son, and the theme of “gathering.” Other passages, recording actions (13:1–38), discourse (15:12–17), and prayer (17:1–26), demonstrate and describe the love associated with that future event and its consequences for Jesus’ disciples. These themes and events serve as a prelude to analyzing the culmination of Jesus’ mission to cannot be found in the ‘traditions.’ . . . The true interpretation of text begins only when the history of the tradition building blocks have been put into their place.”


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

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

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

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

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

30. The pages that follow are the result of a long association with this Gospel and reflection upon it. More detail can be found in Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4). The presentation would be regarded by some as somewhat idiosyncratic in places and by others as reasonably traditional. This study will not attend to the love theme in the Johannean Letters. From the same literary and theological background, they reflect a slightly later period (see Francis J. Moloney, James to Jude, Daily Bible Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007], 108–15) and thus have their own historical and literary setting (see John Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John, SP 18 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002], 58–74). Poppes, Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes, 51–60, argues that the love theme should be assessed across all the Johannean writings, without distinction. Theologically he has a point, but in literary terms, the presentation of the love theme in the Gospel stands alone. For more detail, see below, pp. 192–203.

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narrative about Jesus’ public ministry begins. As with the other Gospels, we first read of John the Baptist’s activity, but once Jesus enters the scene, he is the main focus of attention. From 1:19 to 12:36 we see him in Jerusalem and Galilee, in discussions with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the disciples, “the Jews,” and many others. There, after threatening darkness for those who reject him, Jesus leaves the scene and hides himself (12:36b). In 13:1, John introduces the final evening Jesus spends with his disciples, and the account of those last days runs until 20:29. Finally, the author intervenes to conclude his story. He tells readers and listeners why he wrote the Gospel (20:30–31). A further chapter (John 21), added after the author had penned 20:30–31, but always part of the Gospel as it has been transmitted, shows that there was more to be said to the disciples, and to all subsequent disciples who might read this Gospel.

Reading John 1–12

The Prologue (1:1–18)

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

The argument next shifts into history, through the intervention of John the Baptist. The Baptist points away from himself toward the true light (vv. 9–11). The Baptist’s role is to prepare the way for Jesus, the Logos, the Word, the light and life of humankind. The discussion with Nicodemus (1:19–51) has already demonstrated that the light and life of humankind come to their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The Samaritan woman at the well (4:1–26) is another example of Jesus light and life in action. Further, Jesus’ conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees (5:1–47) and with the Jewish leaders (6:47–59) show that the light and life of humankind come to their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

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

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

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

The First Days of Jesus (1:19–51)

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

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

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

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

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

**From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Signs and Shadows (5:1–10:42)

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

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

**Sabbath (5:1–47)**

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

**Passover (6:1–71)**

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

38. For more background to the Johannine use of the expression “I am he,” see below, pp. 34–35, note 58.

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

**Tabernacles (7:1–10:21)**

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

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


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

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

Dedication (10:22–42)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 12:37–43 the narrator raises a question that plagued the early church: why did Israel refuse the revelation of God in Jesus (see Rom. 9–11)? The narrator first gives a traditional answer: the heart of Israel was “hardened,” and this hardening was a part of God’s plan so that the message might be preached to the gentiles (12:37–41; see Isa. 53:1; 6:10). John gives his own response in 12:42–43: “the Jews” preferred the praise (δόξα) of men. Thus they failed to acknowledge the living presence of their God in Jesus of Nazareth. They did not see the glory (δόξα) of God.

The public ministry closes with words of Jesus (vv. 44–50). He has come into the world as the unique revelation of light and truth. His coming leads to a judgment, but it is a judgment we bring upon ourselves. Those who

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

45. Although Jesus has departed from “the Jews” in 12:36b, his voice returns, “crying out” to the reader in v. 44, restating the heart of the message of his public ministry by repeating or rephrasing many of his revelatory statements from 1:19–12:36. See Moloney, Gospel of John (SP 4), 365–66.
believe in Jesus and all he has come to reveal will not remain in darkness; but those who refuse the light and the truth of Jesus will live in darkness.

Reading John 13–20 (21)

The Theme of Glory

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

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

Footwashing (13:1–38)

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

46. Scholarship has made much of the temporal and literary tensions in John 13–17. See, most famously, 14:31. Jesus tells his disciples that he will no longer talk much with them (v. 30), and invites them to rise and go forth (v. 31). Two further chapters of discourse (chs. 15–17) and the prayer of Jesus (17:1–26) follow. On these tensions, and the need to resolve them, see Francis J. Moloney, “The Function of John 13–17 within the Johannine Narrative,” in “What Is John?,” vol. 2, Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 43–65.
The Discourse (14:1–16:33)  

A—Departure (14:1–31)

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

The gift of the Paraclete will ensure that the oneness between the Father and the Son will be revealed in the disciple who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments, who is now swept into that same oneness (vv. 18–21). This promise of an in-between time undermines all consternation and fear (see vv. 1, 27b). The Spirit-filled disciples will experience love (see vv. 15, 21, 23–24, 28), further belief (see vv. 15, 21, 23–24, 29), and joy (see v. 28). Jesus announces that he will no longer talk much (v. 30a) but that the prince of this world is coming (v. 30b). A tension lies behind Jesus’ summons to rise and face the prince of this world (14:31c), and also behind the need for further words from Jesus that will guide all disciples of Jesus through the conflicts and hatred of the in-between time.  

B—Abiding in the True Vine (15:1–11)

The focus of Jesus’ argument changes in 15:1–11. By using the symbol of the vine and claiming to be the true vine, Jesus links himself to Israel’s traditional claim to be a vine or a vineyard (see Hos. 10:1–2; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer.

47. The literary form of 13:1–38 is recognized as “narrative,” including Jesus’ dramatic discussion with Peter in vv. 36–38, and the literary form of 17:1–26 is “prayer.” This means that only 14:1–16:33 is regarded as “discourse.” Most commentators begin the discourse with 13:31. For the case against this decision, see below, pp. 102–3.

48. The summons to depart in v. 31c, which only leads into further discourse and the prayer, is most likely evidence of the ending of an early discourse (14:1–31), the original form of what eventually became 14:1–16:33. See Brown, Gospel according to John, 582–86, 656; Jean Zumstein, L’Evangile selon Saint Jean (13–21), CNT Deuxième Série 4b (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007), 88–89. For von Wahlde, Gospel and Letters of John, 1:591–92, v. 31c resulted from the combination of the second and third editions of the Gospel (see also pp. 229–393). But in a narrative reading of the story as a whole, the interpreter must try to see why the final story retained this difficult passage and not explain it away as reflection of an earlier stage.

Francis J. Moloney, SDB, Love in the Gospel of John
But more important than the image of the vine is Jesus’ command to his disciples “to abide,” and his explaining what this abiding will mean for them. Some form of the verb “to abide” appears ten times in verses 1–11. Jesus’ command asks that disciples take on a new and deeper reciprocity with the one who is about to come to his glory through a cross.

C—Loving (15:12–17)

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

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

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

A’—Departure (16:4–33)

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

Because the disciples have believed that Jesus comes from the Father, the Father loves them (vv. 25–27). Jesus’ return to the place of oneness with the Father (v. 28) leads the disciples to a final glimmer of understanding. They see that Jesus’ origins ensure the uniqueness and authority of his revelation (v. 29). Between the “now” of the upper room and the “then” of perfect faith, the disciples will sometimes suffer and be lonely. Jesus is about to suffer, but his oneness with the Father overcomes all loneliness. Jesus has overcome the
world, and the disciples’ awareness of this victory should bring them joy in the midst of tribulation (v. 33).

**Prayer (17:1–26)**

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

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

The oneness of love that marks the unity between the Father and the Son is to be repeated within all future communities of believers, generated by the word of Jesus’ immediate disciples (v. 20), so that the world may believe that...
Jesus is the Sent One of God (vv. 21, 23a) and that God loves the disciples just as he has loved the Son (v. 23b). The prayer closes with a request that disciples of all generations be swept up into the oneness of love that exists between the Father and the Son (v. 26). As the theme of love opened 13:1–38 (see 13:1), it closes 17:1–26 (see 17:24–26). In and through this love God has been glorified, and the Son is glorified (vv. 1b, 5, 24). The unity of love granted to the disciples, who are aware of the truth about God in a way unknown to the world, will enable them to contemplate that glory (vv. 24–25).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Passion of Jesus (18:1–19:42)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<th>Conclusion: 19:16a</th>
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<td>“He handed them over to them to be crucified.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1st Scene: 18:29–32</strong></td>
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<td>“Pilate went out.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pilate entered . . .”</td>
<td>“Pilate entered . . .”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus proclaims that he is the king of truth. Pilate waves Jesus away with the retort: “What is truth?”</td>
<td>Jesus tells an arrogant Pilate that all authority comes from above. Pilate has lost his opportunity to know the truth.</td>
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<td>“Pilate went out . . .”</td>
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<tr>
<td>He declares Jesus innocent and “king of the Jews.” They ask for Barabbas.</td>
<td>He declares Jesus innocent and says, “Behold the man!” They ask for crucifixion.</td>
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52. As, among others, Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 21–29, points out, this passage is a “hearing” and not a Jewish “trial.” Unlike the Synoptic tradition (see Mark 14:53–72), this passage presents no witnesses against Jesus and records no condemnation of Jesus. The experience of a trial between Jesus and “the Jews” takes place across Jesus’ ministry, and he is already condemned there (11:47–53). Jesus has submitted to this verdict (12:27–33). John uses this moment in the tradition of a passion narrative to announce the presence of Jesus’ word “in the world” and the role of his disciples as hearers of that word.
4th (Central) Scene: 19:1–3
No change of place mentioned. Jesus is crowned and dressed as a king. He is acclaimed: “Hail, king of the Jews!” But this truth is rejected with slaps.

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

B²—The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Beloved Disciple and the Mother (19:16b–37)

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

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

ultimate revelation of a God who is love: “They shall gaze upon him whom they have pierced” (v. 37).

C’—Jesus in a Garden with His Friends (19:38–42)

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

The Resurrection of Jesus (20:1–29)

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

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

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

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**An Important Addition (21:1–25)**

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

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


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

**Conclusion**

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

John tells his readers and listeners about God’s love, Jesus’ love, the disciples’ love, and the interaction of love between all the players by means of

55. The study that follows will focus attention on both the words and actions of the Johannine Jesus that can be associated with the love theme. However, it is beyond our scope to attend to the subtle argument of Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, AnBib 77 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), that the Gospel works with three semantic fields that deal with love: the bridegroom and the bride, friendship, and covenant. For Varghese, the Fourth Gospel integrates personal and intimate love (bridegroom and bride), social love (friendship), and love reflected in obedience to the commandments (covenant). For a critical survey of studies of the theme of love in the Fourth Gospel, from Claude G. Montefiore (1894) to Sjef van Tilborg (1993), see pp. 15–28. Also beyond the scope of this work is Sjef van Tilborg’s *Imaginative Love in John*, BibIntS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), a study of the various “love relationships” established during the narrative that argues that Jesus demonstrated a variety of genuine relationships of love with various “others” in the story. Van Tilborg assesses Jesus’ relationship with the central figure of the Beloved Disciple as a homosexual one. The Beloved Disciple is “the centre of his affective life” (see pp. 77–110, 239–52; the citation is from p. 252).

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a story that begins with an action of God who so loves the world that he gives his only Son, sending him so that the world might be saved (3:16–17). From that point on in the story God no longer acts, except manifested in the gift of his only Son. God is revealed in and through the Son, and only in and through the Son.\(^{56}\) In being the revelation of God, the Son brings to perfection the task given him by his Father (4:34; 17:4). The command that his disciples, by loving as he has loved (13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 17:21, 23), make known that God has sent his Son in an act of love for the world looks beyond the story of the Gospel into the lives and relationships of all who read and hear the Gospel of John, that they may be swept into the oneness of love that unites the Father and the Son (17:24–26).

The nature of the love that must mark his followers is indicated by Jesus’ words during his final evening with his disciples: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13 NRSV). Not only did Jesus say these things, he did these things.\(^{57}\) As he says to his disciples earlier in that final evening: “I am telling you this now, before it takes place, so that when it takes place you may believe that I am he” (13:19). The story takes the reader through a full circle: the love of God initiates the presence of Jesus in the world (3:16–17), and the life and death of Jesus manifest the ongoing presence (glory) of the divine in the world (13:19; see 13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 17:23, 24–26).\(^{58}\) By means of the cross, resurrection, and ascension,
however, Jesus brings his “hour” to completion and returns to the Father (20:17). But before leaving, in the two accounts of the presence of the risen one in this Gospel, Jesus challenges all disciples to continue his mission of making love known by becoming beloved disciples, believing without seeing (20:2–10, 29), and he founds a community on a pastor who must profess his love in words and action (21:15–19), nourished by a Scripture that comes from the witness of the Beloved Disciple (21:20–24).

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

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