

GOSPEL OF GLORY

MAJOR THEMES IN JOHANNINE THEOLOGY

RICHARD
BAUCKHAM



Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2015 by Richard Bauckham

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bauckham, Richard.

Gospel of glory : major themes in Johannine theology / Richard Bauckham.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8010-9612-9 (pbk.)

1. Bible. John—Theology. I. Title.

BS2615.52.B379 2015

226.5'06—dc23

2015003289

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Dedicated to the memory of the great
British Johannine scholars:

Brooke Foss Westcott
Edwyn Clement Hoskyns
Charles Harold Dodd
John Arthur Thomas Robinson
Barnabas Lindars
Charles Kingsley Barrett

Contents

Preface ix

Abbreviations xiii

1. “Individualism” 1
2. Divine and Human Community 21
3. Glory 43
4. Cross, Resurrection, and Exaltation 63
5. Sacraments? 77
6. Dualisms 109
7. Dimensions of Meaning in the Gospel’s First Week 131
8. The Johannine Jesus and the Synoptic Jesus 185

Bibliography 203

Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Sources 217

Index of Modern Authors 227

Index of Subjects 231

Preface

In this volume, I do not attempt a comprehensive coverage of the theology of John's Gospel but focus on some major themes, including some that have been much neglected and others that have been very much debated during the last century of New Testament scholarship. The most neglected of the topics I tackle is what in chapter 1 I call the "individualism" of the Gospel of John. (I put the term in quotes to indicate that it does not refer to the kind of individualism that characterizes contemporary Western culture.) This is a prominent aspect of the Gospel that most recent scholars have managed to ignore, probably because it is the last thing they would expect to find in John. Working on this topic, I became aware that in order to do justice to the Gospel, we must recognize that it lays emphasis both on the individual believer and on the community of believers. We should not allow either to cancel out the other. But the theme of community in John has the added dimension of characterizing John's understanding of God as well as his understanding of believers, and so chapter 2 explores the relationship of divine and human community.

Most Johannine scholars recognize that "glory" is a key term in the Gospel of John, but there are few extended treatments of it. Chapter 3 therefore offers an analytical overview of this theme. The cross of Christ, on the other hand, along with his resurrection and exaltation, has received a great deal of attention, not least in the commentaries. But in chapter 4 I have adopted a fresh approach by viewing the cross and the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus in relation to four key themes of the Gospel: love, life, glory, and truth. I believe this approach throws fresh light on John's understanding of the key events in his christological story. Chapters 5 ("Sacraments?") and 6 ("Dualisms") treat aspects of John's theology that have proved highly problematic and debatable

in Johannine scholarship. There is nothing approaching a scholarly consensus on sacraments in John, not even on whether there is a sacramental aspect to his theology at all. This topic requires some methodological rigor if it is to be significantly clarified. In the title of chapter 6, I have used the plural noun in contrast to the usual talk of Johannine dualism. Discussion of this topic has suffered from oversimplification. By making distinctions between different kinds of duality in John, I hope to clarify the roles they play in his theology.

Chapter 7 adopts a quite different approach, focusing not on a theme but on a key section of the Gospel's narrative (1:19–2:11). The aim is to illuminate the way theological meaning is conveyed by narrative in this Gospel, one very remarkable feature of which is the wide range of additional dimensions of meaning beyond the literal meaning that the narratives are constructed to evoke. Finally, chapter 8 takes up the issue of the differences between the Johannine Jesus and the Jesus(es) of the Synoptic Gospels, not as an issue about the historical Jesus but as an issue about how Christian readers of the Gospels can read the four different Gospels as providing complementary angles on the ultimately one Christ of faith. It is a serious failure of Gospels scholarship in the service of the church and Christian faith that scholars seem commonly quite content to emphasize the distinctive portrayal of Jesus in each Gospel without facing the subsequent question: what are Christian believers to do with this diversity? This chapter is a first approach to reflection on how the diversity within the fourfold Gospel canon can function for Christian faith and theology that takes that fourfold canon seriously as its means of access to the one Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Each chapter of this book is a self-contained essay, and so the chapters can be read in any order. Readers who are interested in my approach to such questions as the historical origins and context of the Gospel can turn to my earlier collection of essays¹ and in particular its introduction. In the present volume, I have left aside all such questions in order to focus entirely on the theological content of the Gospel.

Most of the chapters have a prehistory. The origins of chapter 1 lie in the third C. F. D. Moule Memorial Lecture, entitled "John: A Gospel for Individualists?," which I gave in June 2010 at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. (It was inspired by a significant but neglected article by Moule.) In a later incarnation, this lecture became the Graham Stanton Memorial Lecture, given in September 2010 in Bangor, Wales, at the British New Testament Conference of that year. I was delighted to be able to honor these two great New Testament scholars,

1. *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

the latter a pupil of the former. Chapter 2 was designed as a companion to chapter 1, and I gave the two lectures at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, in January 2012, when I also gave the lecture on which chapter 2 is based at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana. This lecture made another appearance in the New Testament seminar at the University of Durham in February 2012. In 2013 I gave the Trinity Lectures at Trinity College, Singapore, under the title “Aspects of the Theology of John’s Gospel.” The four lectures in the series were those on which chapters 1, 2, 3, and 8 of this book are based. Chapter 8 also formed the Henton Davies Lecture for 2014, given at Regent’s Park College, Oxford. I am very grateful to my hosts and my audiences on these various occasions, for making them enjoyable events and for the stimulating comments and questions I received. Finally, chapter 4 originated as a paper for a small symposium on the Gospel of John that took place at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, in January 2014. The highly interdisciplinary discussions of the small group of people chosen and gathered by David Ford for that occasion went beyond the confines of the discussions New Testament scholars usually have among themselves and proved very rewarding.

Two of the chapters are also published elsewhere. Chapter 5 is a longer version of “Sacraments and the Gospel of John,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, edited by Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and is used here by permission of Oxford University Press. Chapter 6 was first published under the title “Dualism and Soteriology in Johannine Theology,” in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, edited by Bruce W. Longenecker and Mikeal C. Parsons (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 133–53, and appears here by permission of Baylor University Press.

Abbreviations

General and Bibliographic

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASBF	Analecta Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BRBS	Brill's Readers in Biblical Studies
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
ConC	Concordia Commentary
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011.
DRev	<i>Downside Review</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>

FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JAJJS	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
LD	Lectio divina
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>LTP</i>	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique</i>
LTPM	Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs
LXX	Septuagint, Greek Old Testament
<i>NBf</i>	<i>New Blackfriars</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NETS</i>	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983–85.
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevScRel</i>	<i>Revue de sciences religieuses</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SBAZ	Studien zur biblischen Archäologie und Zeitgeschichte
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLECL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Christianity and Its Literature
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology

SC	Sources chrétiennes
SHS	Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTA	Studiorum Novi Testamenti auxilia
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SVTQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–.
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Theological Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song	Song of Songs
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
P ^s (s).	Psal ^m (s)	Hag.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil.	Philippians	Rev.	Revelation
Col.	Colossians		

Other Jewish and Christian Writings

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>1 Apol.</i>	Justin, <i>Apologia I (First Apology)</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>b. Yebam.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Yebamot</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>Life</i>	Josephus, <i>The Life</i>
<i>m. Abot</i>	Mishnah, <i>Abot</i>
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
<i>m. Ketub.</i>	Mishnah, <i>Ketubbot</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>Phld.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Philadelphians</i>
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>
1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>
1QpMic	<i>Pesher to Micah</i>
1QS	<i>Community Rule</i>
4Q177	<i>4QCatena A</i>

11QT	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Sir.</i>	Sirach
<i>Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromata (Miscellanies)</i>
<i>T. Jos.</i>	<i>Testament of Joseph</i>
<i>Tob.</i>	Tobit
<i>Trall.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Trallians</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Virtues</i>
<i>Wis.</i>	Wisdom of Solomon

1

“Individualism”

The title of this chapter echoes that of an article that Charles F. D. Moule published in 1962: “The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel.”¹ But, unlike Moule, I have put the word “individualism” in quotation marks. It has become quite a slippery word, and the issues it might evoke for New Testament scholars today are not necessarily those that Moule had in mind. He was not thinking of the contrast between individualist and collectivist cultures that may well occur to us, either because we have become aware of how exceptional the extremely individualistic culture of the modern West is, or because we have been warned not to read modern Western individualism, anachronistically or ethnocentrically, into the New Testament. When Moule referred to the individualism of the Fourth Gospel, he meant that this Gospel lays considerable emphasis on the relationship of the individual believer to Jesus Christ,² by contrast with

1. Charles F. D. Moule, “The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel,” *NovT* 5 (1962): 171–90; reprinted in Charles F. D. Moule, *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 91–109; and in *The Composition of John’s Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum*, ed. David E. Orton, BRBS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 21–40. See also Charles F. D. Moule, “A Neglected Factor in the Interpretation of Johannine Eschatology,” in *Studies in John: Presented to Professor Dr. J. N. Sevenster on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. M. C. Rientsma, NovTSup 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 155–60, where he extends his argument to 1 John.

2. This is also what John F. O’Grady means by the “individualism” of the Gospel (“Individualism and the Johannine Ecclesiology,” *BTB* 5 [1975]: 235–45).

the more corporate understanding of the Christian community to be found in the Pauline literature.³ As we shall see, Moule was quite correct in claiming that, even though he presented only a small part of the evidence for it. It is remarkable how few scholars writing since Moule have noticed this feature of the Gospel at all,⁴ perhaps because the imaginary Johannine community has cast such a spell over Johannine scholarship.⁵

Clarifications and Definitions

Daniel Shanahan remarks that “the term ‘individualism’ opens up a labyrinth of meaning.”⁶ There is a large literature—in anthropology, classical studies, medieval and modern history, political philosophy, postmodern philosophy, social psychology, and other disciplines. There is also considerable debate over whether the individualism of the modern West should be evaluated positively or negatively. It is not surprising that the meaning of the term is not entirely stable, and so I want to begin with some clarifications and definitions.

First, I would distinguish between individualism, on the one hand, and individuation or individuality, on the other.⁷ Individualism is a cultural variable, but individuality is a feature of all human experience. At least, if ever there was human experience without individuation, it predated the historical

3. Moule, “Individualism,” 104.

4. Those who have noted it include O’Grady, “Individualism”; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975), 354–55; Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (London: Chapman, 1984), 84–101; Jerome H. Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John’s Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 145; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31–39; George B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 221; D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145; Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John* (London: SPCK, 1993), 140–41; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 226–27.

5. For my view that the Gospel of John was not written for any specific Christian community and that the quest for the “Johannine community” has been fruitless, see Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 9–48; Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 21–22, 113–23.

6. Daniel Shanahan, *Toward a Genealogy of Individualism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 13.

7. For the distinction, see Nigel Rapport, *Transcendent Individual: Towards a Literary and Liberal Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1997), 6; Anthony P. Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 168–69; Gary W. Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual*, BIS 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 46.

record. By individuality, I mean self-awareness, the individual’s awareness of self as a distinguishable entity, not merely in a physical sense but in terms of subjectivity. Human beings in all cultures throughout history have been aware of themselves as distinct subjects of feeling, thinking, decision, and action. After all, it is demonstrable that even nonhuman primates have a degree of self-awareness, evidenced by their ability to recognize themselves in a mirror. There is no doubt that first-century people could recognize themselves in mirrors. Perhaps somewhat more controversially, I would say that the self-awareness that is universally characteristic of humans makes introspection and inner dialogue possible.⁸

This universal self-awareness need not imply the strong sense of unique personality that modern individualism entails, nor does it make the individual the sovereign arbiter of his or her destiny in the modern, “I did it my way” sense. Doubtless for many ancient people their personal narrative was more about what happened to them and what God or the gods did to them and for them than it was about personal achievement. It was closely entwined with the narrative of the group to which they belonged, and it distinguished the unique individual more in terms of roles, types, and relationships than in terms of complex personality.⁹

Debates about individualism in ancient Mediterranean societies are sometimes clouded by the mistaken perception that what I have called individuation or individuality is at stake. Usually it is not. On the contrary, individuality is presupposed. The “dyadic personality” that Mediterranean anthropology reveals, according to Bruce Malina,¹⁰ is a case in point. To say that an individual’s self-perception is dependent on, even determined by others’ perception of him or her, presupposes that the individual does have self-perception. Similarly and importantly, to claim that ancient people perceived the self in relational terms, as essentially related to others or to the group, rather than as the autonomous and atomized individuals that modern individualism envisages, presupposes selves that were distinguishable, however closely related. Without individuation there would be, not relationality, but sheer undifferentiated mass.

8. For the Greco-Roman world, see F. Gerald Downing, “Persons in Relation,” in *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, JSNTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 43–61, here 57–60.

9. But portraiture (e.g., at Palmyra and in Roman Egypt) deserves study as evidence of a strong sense of individuality.

10. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 67. For an argument that modern Western people are more “dyadic” than their individualist ideology admits, see Downing, “Persons in Relation,” 45–46.

Individualism is usefully understood by contrast with its opposite: collectivism. A minimal definition is that in an individualist society the goals of the individual take precedence over the goals of the group, whereas in a collectivist society the goals of the society take precedence over the goals of the individual.¹¹ But it is very important to note that societies are not simply individualistic or collectivist; rather, they are located on a spectrum, making them more or less individualistic, more or less collectivist. Moreover, within any society there will be some people who are more individualistic, some more collectivist. These variables mean that the mix and the pattern of individualism and collectivism in any historical society cannot be predicted through the dogmatic imposition of a model but must be allowed to emerge from detailed study of the historical evidence.

With regard to first-century Greco-Roman society, including Jewish Palestine—although ideally one would want to be more specific than that—I work with a very general hypothesis: as societies go, it was a relatively collectivist one, certainly much more so than our own; but, whereas social goals and norms were powerful, they were not irresistible by the individual. We can observe them being resisted especially in two kinds of ways. First, there is the selfish individual who breaks with the conventions and expectations of the group in order to pursue personal gain.¹² Such behavior was strongly disapproved but certainly occurred, as in the case of the prodigal son in the parable. But, second, individuals could break with group norms and responsibilities for reasons of religious or philosophical conviction. It seems to me that it is with figures such as the Cynics or the desert fathers that Malina's model is insufficiently flexible to deal adequately.

The Johannine Evidence

Aphoristic Sayings about the Individual's Relationship with Jesus

As far as I know, the evidence in the Gospel of John for a strong emphasis on the individual's relationship with Jesus has never been adequately assembled or assessed. I offer two main types of evidence, of which the first is *aphoristic sayings about the individual's relationship with Jesus*. I have analyzed this material in table 1.1, where I list sixty-seven sayings in five different grammatical forms. I call them aphoristic sayings because they conform to these fixed literary forms and because the majority of them, though they suit their

11. Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (London: Routledge, 1996), 74; Burnett, *Paul*, 46–50, both following cross-cultural psychologist Harry C. Triandis.

12. See Burnett, *Paul*, 33.

context, could also be lifted out of their contexts and would make sense as stand-alone aphorisms. In the case of double sayings like the first example in table 1.1 (“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life”), I have counted such a double saying as two sayings. If one counted only one saying in such cases, then the total number of sayings would fall, but would still be more than fifty. For the sake of comparison I have also listed the quite numerous examples in the Johannine letters.

In most cases these sayings are quite explicitly about the individual’s relationship with Jesus, but in a few cases the relationship with Jesus is only implicit. Nevertheless, we clearly have here a type of saying, prolific in the Gospel, whose specific function is to speak of the individual’s relationship with Jesus. (It is unfortunate that some recent translations, such as the NRSV, turn many of these sayings into plural form. This has the laudable purpose of avoiding gendered language, but it obscures a notable feature of the Gospel.)

To appreciate the significance of these sayings, consider, for example, the justly famous 3:16 (justly famous because it admirably summarizes this Gospel’s narrative of salvation): “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John could have said “so that all who believe in him should not perish. . . .” Indeed, following the reference to the world (“God so loved the world”) and preceding further references to the world in the following verse (God sent the Son “so that the world may be saved by him”), one might expect the plural rather than the singular form. But instead, even in this rather universalistic context, John’s choice of the singular highlights believing in Jesus as the act of each individual. It is as though every individual stands alone before Jesus and must make his or her own act of faith—or of disbelief, as the case may be.

Many of these sayings are about “the one who believes” in Jesus, or use expressions broadly equivalent, such as “to come to” Jesus, “to drink from the water” Jesus gives, “to eat” the bread of life or the flesh of Jesus, “to look” to Jesus, “to accept” Jesus’s testimony, “to enter the sheepfold through” Jesus the gate. Most of these sayings refer to eternal life as the consequence of believing in Jesus. Such sayings function to invite unbelievers to put faith in Jesus, and it is therefore not surprising that there are concentrations of them in Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3, in the Bread of Life Discourse in chapter 6, and in the summary of Jesus’s message in the closing verses of chapter 12. In chapters 14–15, on the other hand, where Jesus addresses the disciples, the aphoristic sayings lay more emphasis on loving Jesus and keeping his commandments.

Of course, statements in the Gospel about people's relationship to Jesus are not limited to these aphoristic sayings. We find, for example, statements in the second person plural, addressed by Jesus to the crowds or the Jewish authorities or the disciples, the last especially in chapters 13–16. Jesus also talks about his disciples and future believers, in the third person plural, in his prayer to the Father in chapter 17. He pronounces a blessing on those who do not see and yet believe (20:29). This material is not insignificant, but in formal terms it is quite varied. Nothing like a standard aphoristic form is employed. Beside the second person plural and third person plural statements of many kinds, the third person singular aphoristic sayings stand out as dominant.

**Table 1.1 Sixty-Seven Aphoristic Sayings
about the Individual's Relationship with Jesus**

Type 1. "The one who . . ." (*ho* + participle) (37 sayings)

Examples:

The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath. (3:36)

The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him/her, and reveal myself to him/her. (14:21b)

John 3:18a; 3:18b; 3:21; 3:33; 3:36a; 3:36b; 5:23b; 5:24; 6:35a; 6:35b; 6:37b; 6:45; 6:47; 6:54; 6:56; 6:57; 6:58; 7:37–38; 8:12; 8:47; 11:25; 12:25a; 12:25b; 12:35; 12:44; 12:45; 12:48; 13:10; 13:20a; 13:20b; 14:9; 14:12; 14:21a; 14:21b; 14:24; 15:5; 15:23

(1 John 2:4; 2:6; 2:9; 2:10; 2:11; 3:7; 3:10c; 3:14b; 3:24; 4:6a; 4:8; 4:16c; 4:18b; 4:21b; 5:10a; 5:10b; 5:12a; 5:12b; 2 John 9b; 3 John 11a; 11b)

Type 2. "If anyone . . ." (*ean tis* . . .) (14 sayings)

Examples:

If anyone keeps my word, he/she will never see death. (8:51)

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him/her. (12:47)

Readers or hearers are simply not allowed to forget that response to Jesus has to be individual to be real.

John could have created similar aphoristic sayings in the third person plural—“those who believe in me . . .”; “all those who keep my words . . .”—but he actually does so only once. This exception is a prominent as well as singular one because it occurs in the prologue: “To as many as [*hosoi*] received him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (1:12). The explanation for this exception lies most likely in the fact that the aphoristic sayings in the rest of the Gospel have a paraenetic function: they invite belief or love or obedience. The prologue, on the other hand, is not

John 3:3; 3:5; 6:51; 7:17; 7:37; 8:51–52; 10:9; 11:9; 11:10; 12:26a; 12:26b; 12:47; 14:23; 15:6

(1 John 2:11)

Type 3. “**Everyone who . . .**” (*pas ho* + participle) (12 sayings)

Examples:

Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I shall raise him/her up at the last day. (6:40)

Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. (18:37)

John 3:15; 3:16; 3:20; 4:13; 6:37a; 6:40; 8:34; 11:26; 12:46; 15:2a; 15:2b; 18:37

(1 John 3:4; 3:6a; 3:6b; 3:8; 3:9; 3:10b; 3:15; 4:7; 5:1a; 5:1b; 5:4; 2 John 9a)

Type 4. “**Whoever . . .**” (*hos an . . .*) (1 saying)

John 4:14

(1 John 3:17; 4:15; cf. 1 John 4:6b: *hos*)

Type 5. “**No one . . .**” (*oudeis . . .*) (3 sayings)

John 6:44; 6:65; 14:6

inviting but narrating. It tells the story of the Word's procurement of salvation and views the faith of believers in Jesus as a historic fact, not as possibility for the present or the future. The plural is therefore more appropriate.

There are some aphoristic sayings about the individual's relationship to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Here are three examples from Mark: "Whoever does the will of God, that one is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35); "If anyone wishes to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34); "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words . . . , the Son of Man will be ashamed of him/her when he comes in the glory of his Father" (8:38). There are not many of these, and they do not use the characteristic Johannine language of believing in Jesus, loving Jesus, having eternal life, and so forth, but they show perhaps that, as in other cases, something characteristic of the words of Jesus in John has a starting point in the traditional sayings of Jesus.

We may now consider the significance of these sayings in the context of a relatively collectivist society. They do not, of course, preclude groups of people becoming believers in Jesus (e.g., the siblings Lazarus, Martha, and Mary), but they do seem to insist that each individual must make a personal response in faith to Jesus, and they allow the possibility of an individual making that step of faith alone (e.g., the formerly blind man in chap. 9).

Bruce Malina discusses conversion in the case of people becoming disciples of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Since the Synoptics lay considerable emphasis on the fact that conversion may mean breaking completely with the extended family in-group, Malina needs to explain how making such a break is possible for persons whose self-awareness is entirely dependent on the group. He makes two points. One is that conversion must be from one in-group to another, in this case to the fictive kin group of Jesus and his disciples.¹³ In the context of the Synoptic Gospels, this point has something to be said for it. The second point is that the step of conversion cannot be taken without the support of at least one other member of the person's group. Malina cites the pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the fact that disciples come from the same locality, such as Capernaum.¹⁴ But it is easy to cite contrary examples, such as Bartimaeus or Zacchaeus, while the three would-be followers of Jesus in Luke 9:57–62 surely present as typical Jesus's invitation to lone individuals to become his disciples.

In the case of the Johannine sayings that speak of the individual's conversion to belief in Jesus, the absence of any hint of joining a new group, the

13. Malina, *Social World*, 86–87.

14. Malina, *Social World*, 90.

community of Jesus’s disciples, is striking. Of course, there is such a group, but it is apparently irrelevant to these sayings, which represent believing in Jesus as a matter between Jesus and the believer and no one else. Like the blind man healed by Jesus who stubbornly maintains his loyalty to Jesus when even his parents fail to support him (9:1–31), the individual of the aphoristic sayings finds it sufficient to belong to Jesus. This person is not, of course, the modern individualist who takes his or her own chosen path in complete independence of anyone else, free from all commitments to others. The prodigal in the parable is more like that; but the individual who comes to Jesus in these Johannine sayings finds a new relational focus for life. Jesus himself is all the in-group such a person needs. Their identity and self-awareness are now entirely dependent on him.¹⁵

There are just two passages in the Gospel in which aphoristic sayings occur in relation to the Christian community, but in both cases it is notable how the stress is still on the individual’s relation to Jesus. First, there is the Good Shepherd Discourse, in which the sheep certainly belong to a flock, but the remarkable feature is that the shepherd calls each of the sheep by name (10:3).¹⁶ The second passage is the parable of the vine, in which it is each branch’s relationship to Jesus that determines whether it remains in the vine or is removed (15:1–6). But in this case the stress on the individual also serves to ground the community, since it is only by keeping Jesus’s commandments that the individual remains in relation to him (15:10). As the Gospel goes on to explain, Jesus’s commandments really amount to the single new commandment: the disciples must love one another (15:12). Thus the life of the community, the disciples’ mutual love, stems from the relationship between each individual and Jesus. The latter entails the former, but individual relationship to Jesus has priority.¹⁷ The community is constituted by individual relationship with Jesus and subsists only through individual relationship with Jesus.

“In-One-Anotherness” (Personal Coinherence)

The aphoristic sayings about the individual’s relationship with Jesus concern not only the individual’s initial coming to faith in Jesus, but also the continuing Christian life, envisaged as an intimate and abiding relationship between

15. Note also the story of Mary’s extravagant act of anointing Jesus in John 12:1–18. Here Judas expresses the social norm (12:5) to which Mary shockingly fails to conform. What justifies Mary’s break with social expectations is that her action recognizes Jesus as the one who inspires it.

16. This feature of the parable is surely echoed in John 20:16; 21:15.

17. Evidently this point is compatible with “Mediterranean anthropology,” because it is made by Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 234.

the individual and Jesus. In order to investigate the nature of this relationship further, I shall begin with one of the many aphoristic sayings in the Bread of Life Discourse of chapter 6. This is the saying that makes the last fresh point before the discourse recapitulates its dominant theme in closing. It is the saying “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him/her” (6:56). This is the first occurrence in the Gospel of the theme I call “in-one-anotherness”; it could also be called “personal coinherence” (see table 1.2).¹⁸

We should notice, first, the individualizing use of eucharistic language (also in 6:54). The *language* cannot but be eucharistic in origin, whether or not (the point is disputed) it is used here with reference to the Eucharist.¹⁹ Certainly the rather shocking image of drinking blood as well as eating flesh indicates the individual’s participation in the life of Jesus, the divine life that he shares with the Father. Paul, when he uses eucharistic language, envisages the corporate body of Christ, united by the one loaf we all share and the one cup we all drink (1 Cor. 10:16–17), but here in John’s only use of such language only the individual believer is in view.

On the words “abides in me and I in him/her” Barnabas Lindars makes a perceptive comment:

This is the climax of the discourse. All the metaphors are dropped, and the whole thing is put into terms of personal relationship. . . . John’s thought never moves in ontological or quasi-magical categories. As the mode of receiving Jesus is to “come to” him and to “believe in” him, so the effect must be put into terms of personal, ethical, relationship. It is this relationship which persists beyond the present age to the time of the general resurrection.²⁰

In other words, what it means to have eternal life and live forever is here spelled out in terms of intimate relationship with Jesus, whose life is the life of God. Of course, the language of “in-one-anotherness,” despite Lindars’s comment, is still metaphorical. It uses a spatial image (being “in” one another) to suggest the most intimate form of personal relationship.²¹ The use of this language here anticipates the rather frequent use of it in chapters 14–17.

John’s use of this image of relationship should not be assimilated to Paul’s talk of being “in Christ,” because although Paul can use this language

18. On the closely related image of “abiding” in John, see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 88–99.

19. This issue is fully discussed in chapter 5, “Sacraments?”

20. Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 269.

21. This point is made by Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1992), 139.

Table 1.2 “In-One-Anotherness” (Personal Coinherence)

The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him/her. (6:56)

I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. (10:14–15)

The Father is in me and I am in the Father. (10:38)

I am in the Father and the Father is in me. (14:10)

The Spirit of truth . . . abides with you, and he will be in you. (14:17)

I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (14:20)

[My Father and I] will come to him/her and make our home with him/her. (14:23)

Parable of the Vine

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ²Every branch in me that bears no fruit he removes. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. . . . ⁴*Abide in me and I will abide in you.* Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you *abide in me*. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who *abides in me and I in him/her* bears much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone *does not abide in me*, he/she is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you *abide in me, and my words abide in you*, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. . . . ⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. (15:1–2, 4–7, 9–10)

Jesus’s Prayer to the Father

[I ask] that they may all be one. As you, *Father, are in me and I in you*, may they also be *in us*, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³*I in them and you in me*, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me. . . . ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that *the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them*. (17:21–23, 26)

individually (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17), and although he occasionally also speaks of Christ being “in” Christians (Rom. 8:10) or even in the individual believer (Gal. 2:20), he does not put these things together in a phrase like “Christ in me and I in Christ.” By contrast, John’s usage is characteristically reciprocal. Usually the form is “A in B and B in A,” though there are variations. Moreover, John also applies the same formula to the relationship between Jesus and the Father, for which there is no sort of parallel in Paul. The difference between John and Paul exempts us from any need to enter the discussion of the meaning of the Pauline language.

Perhaps under the influence of the Pauline language, commentators on John tend to be anxious to make the point that the relationship that John envisages is not symmetrical.²² The way in which the believer relates to Jesus cannot be just the same as the way Jesus relates to the believer. The immediate context in John itself makes this point: the believer receives eternal life from Jesus but does not give Jesus eternal life. But to make this point only is to miss the fact that what the “in-one-anotherness” language itself *expresses* is precisely reciprocity.

Attempts to find precedents for or parallels to this Johannine language in Philo, the Hermetica, or even Ignatius²³ fail because these, like Paul, lack the distinctive and simple reciprocity of the Johannine formula. Old Testament formulae—“I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (e.g., Lev. 26:12); “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Sam. 7:14)²⁴—offer an emphatically asymmetrical sort of reciprocity rather than the simple reciprocity of the Johannine formula. Rather than seeking the background to John’s usage in any language, Old Testament or Hellenistic, about the relationship of humans to the divine, I think we should regard the Johannine formula of reciprocity as most likely an original coinage, invented by John to express the personal coinherence that mutual love involves. This alone explains the simple, rather than asymmetrical, reciprocity.²⁵

This Johannine image of in-one-anotherness is of considerable significance for our understanding of the Johannine stress on the individual’s relationship with Jesus. One ingredient of modern Western individualism is an

22. For example, Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 298.

23. Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 187–92; David L. Mealand, “The Language of Mystical Union in the Johannine Writings,” *DRev* 95 (1977): 19–34.

24. These are cited by Mealand, “Language,” 28–29.

25. Compare Song 6:3: “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” This is unlikely to lie behind John’s usage, since it does not employ the spatial metaphor (“in”), but it does illustrate how a love relationship is naturally expressed in simple reciprocity.

understanding of the self as an independent and firmly bounded unit,²⁶ averse to compromising its independence through committed involvement with others. This probably owes something to a spatial image of the body as a physical boundary that encloses the person and marks it out as an independent unit. One thinks of the notion of personal space. For individuals for whom personal space is essential, the Johannine spatial image of two individuals occupying the same space, somehow coinciding or overlapping, may not easily appeal. But even modern Western individualists experience some degree of dissolution of personal space in intimate relationships. When the body is understood more as the medium of transcending the bounded self in relationship with other reality (one need only think of the experience of hugging), then the Johannine spatial image becomes more accessible. Bodies do not isolate us from each other but rather make openness to others possible. The Johannine image posits centered selves with open boundaries, persons who can be part of each other without losing their self-identity. It is an image that breaks open the self-enclosed independence of the bounded self.

John’s “in-one-another” language is used of the individual’s relationship with Jesus, of the relationship of the group of disciples with Jesus, and also of the relationship between Jesus and his Father. This last is the relationship from which the Gospel’s whole narrative of salvation derives. It is the source of the eternal life that Jesus brings into the world and also of the life of loving relationship that is the inner nature of eternal life. As the love between the Father and the Son overflows into the world, the in-one-anotherness of the Father and the Son becomes the source of the in-one-anotherness of Jesus and the believer.²⁷ It may therefore be worth considering whether the fact that the Gospel portrays the divine life itself as the closest conceivable relationship between two individual persons, the Father and the Son, may in part account for the Gospel’s emphasis on the one-to-one relationship of the believer to Jesus.

Jesus in Dialogue with Individual Gospel Characters

A prominent feature of John’s narrative is the series of extended conversations that Jesus has with individuals. The most extensive are these seven:

Nathanael (1:47–51)

Nicodemus (3:1–21)

Samaritan woman (4:7–26)

26. On the bounded self, see Kenneth J. Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–28.

27. This point is developed further in chap. 2, “Divine and Human Community.”

Martha (11:20–27)

Pilate (18:33–19:12)

Mary Magdalene (20:14–17)

Peter (21:15–22)

There are other, shorter dialogues (such as with the royal official, the man born blind, Peter at the supper, Thomas after the resurrection). However, the seven I have listed are significant not only for their relative length but also because, with the possible exception of the dialogue with Nathanael, they take place in private. In most of these cases it is made abundantly clear that no one else is present. Of course, the Synoptic Gospels also feature many encounters between Jesus and individuals, but the conversations are usually much briefer, and they are almost never in private. (The only exception may be Matthew’s version of Peter’s rebuke of Jesus [Matt. 16:22–23]. In Mark’s version it is clear that the other disciples are within earshot [Mark 8:32–33], but not in Matthew.) The extended private conversations are a distinctive feature of John’s Gospel, one of its many differences from the Synoptics.

Moreover, John has exercised his considerable storytelling skills to very good effect in these conversations. They are full of memorable moments: the Samaritan woman’s evasive answer when Jesus refers to her husband (4:17); Pilate’s cynical question, “What is truth?” (18:38); Mary Magdalene’s delayed recognition of Jesus when he speaks her name (20:14–16); Peter’s hurt at being asked three times whether he loves Jesus (21:17). Some of Jesus’s most important theological claims occur in these dialogues: “You must be born from above” (3:7); “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “My kingdom is not from this world” (18:36); and others. Unlike Jesus’s debates with the Jewish authorities, these dialogues are never repetitive. Each has its own theme. In most cases the dialogue is a journey for Jesus’s interlocutor. These individuals end it in a different place from where they began it. Their lives are significantly changed.

A story of an individual is generally more engaging than that of an undifferentiated group, as John’s story of Mary Magdalene is by comparison with those of the women at the tomb in the other Gospels. An individual attracts greater empathy or identification. Is this just because we are modern individualists or would it have been the case for early hearers or readers of John? That it was the case for them I take it the very existence of these stories in John, as well as many similar in ancient literature, is sufficient evidence. Of course, these individuals are embedded in groups—the Samaritan woman in

her village, Martha in her family, Mary Magdalene in the group of disciples—but they are far from merely typical of their group.

The characters in John’s Gospel have usually been judged to be flat rather than round characters, one-dimensional in exhibiting only single character traits, static rather than developing through experiences, types rather than personalities. The work of Cornelis Bennema has recently challenged this view.²⁸ He rightly cites studies that have shown that ancient literature can deliver more complex and subtle characterizations than has often been thought, and that round personalities are portrayed, not merely one-dimensional types.²⁹ (The best studies have been of Greek tragedy; more work needs to be done, for example, on the Greek novels, Greco-Roman biography, or the portrayal of biblical characters in Josephus or the Pseudepigrapha.) Bennema adopts a theory of characterization that enables him to analyze the portrayal of characters in John’s Gospel, assessing them for complexity, development, and penetration of inner life, and then to plot the characters along a continuum that shows degrees of characterization. The continuum runs from agent (a mere walk-on part) through type (a stock or flat character) and personality (showing a degree of complexity and development) to, finally, individual or person (the most developed or complex characters). (It is unfortunate that he uses the term “individual” very differently from how I have used it earlier in this chapter.)

The results for the seven characters in the extended one-to-one dialogues with Jesus are of interest.³⁰ Only one of them (Nathanael) emerges as merely a type, one other (Martha) Bennema places on the borderline between type and personality, three count as personalities (Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman), one (Pontius Pilate) Bennema places on the borderline between personality and individual, while Peter emerges fully as an individual (though through a series of narratives, not only his private dialogue with Jesus). Thus, generally, the characters in the extended private dialogues with Jesus are among the most developed in the Gospel.

However, I think that characterization is only one aspect of the way these dialogues work. At least as important is that each of the characters has a unique story. They encounter Jesus in quite different and particular circumstances. It is not only, as has often been noticed, that they respond differently to Jesus, but that Jesus deals with each of them differently, according to their individual

28. Cornelis Bennema, “A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature,” *BibInt* 17 (2009): 375–421; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

29. Bennema, “Theory,” 379–89.

30. Bennema, *Encountering*, 203–4.

circumstances.³¹ Sometimes he initiates the dialogue, as, for example, rather shockingly in the case of the Samaritan woman, or tenderly, as a familiar friend, in the case of Mary Magdalene. Sometimes he responds to an approach, as with Nicodemus or Pilate. He does not deal with them according to some standard formula, but rather he engages the particular point in their lives at which he encounters them: Martha mourning for her brother, Peter in his awareness of having failed. With Nicodemus he starts quite bluntly with the point that this religious expert does not understand and especially needs to understand. The particularities of each encounter determine the themes of the dialogues, different in each case.

The view that the characters in John function to typify a range of different responses to Jesus (a view that Bennema endorses) neglects the particularities of the circumstances and the uniqueness of each character's story. It is not just that they respond differently, in ways the narrator leads hearers or readers to approve or disapprove, but also Jesus approaches them differently at unique moments or distinct circumstances in their lives. To classify the characters only in terms of characterization and type of response to Jesus, as Bennema does, reduces the particularities of the stories. What the stories do is to draw the hearers or readers into imaginative empathy with each character encountering Jesus in his or her particular circumstances. The stories surely do draw hearers or readers into their own encounters with Jesus, but the idea that the hearer or reader must run through a range of characters and responses until finding the one that fits for him or her is much too schematic and artificial. These characters are not models of faith so much as illustrations of the wide variety of ways in which different people in different circumstances may encounter Jesus.

Finally, we need to bring these stories of individuals in one-to-one dialogue with Jesus into relationship with the aphoristic sayings about the individual's relationship with Jesus that were our first area of Johannine evidence. The characters act out the contents of the aphoristic sayings. They come to faith in Jesus or renew and deepen their faith after the interruption of Jesus's death. Pilate exemplifies the negative sayings about the individual who resists Jesus's message and appeal. Peter exemplifies the believer's love for Jesus and obedience to Jesus. The emphasis of the sayings on the individual is replicated in these stories that portray actual individuals in relationship with Jesus. But the stories also do something that the sayings cannot. Their particularity enables

31. This aspect is explored in Jason Sturdevant, "The Pedagogy of the Logos: Adaptability and the Johannine Jesus" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), which I have not seen. The author tells me that it will be published.

them to evoke the diversity of circumstances in which Jesus can be expected to call a variety of different individuals to faith or discipleship. Not only do they confront the hearers or readers with different possibilities of response (the sayings also do that); they surely also encourage hearers or readers to expect Jesus to meet them and direct them in the particularity of their individual lives and circumstances.

Conclusion

In the next chapter we shall see that John also has a central place for community in his theology, but it is important to appreciate the prominence of “individualism” and not allow it to be canceled or obscured by the material on community. The emphasis on the faith and discipleship of the individual is a distinctive feature of this Gospel that has not been given its due. Despite the fact that Johannine scholars work in the context of a highly individualistic culture and some of them within a context of rather individualistic piety, the strong emphasis on community in late twentieth-century theology, in the form-critical heritage of modern Gospels studies, and in the currents of social-scientific ideas that have influenced New Testament scholars in recent decades seems to have prevailed in Johannine scholarship.³²

But what accounts for this unusual emphasis on the individual in John’s Gospel? This question is not easy to answer. There may well be more than one factor. John may have been particularly aware that in a relatively collectivist society individuals needed strong encouragement to step outside the social norms and expectations of their group. It may be significant that in chapter 6, where we have noted the strikingly individualizing use of eucharistic language, the “people” and the “Jews” speak with one voice, as though speaking for collective opinion. To eat of the bread that Jesus gives, individuals must opt out of the customary reactions of the group. It is also notable that the language of the aphoristic sayings climaxes in truly shocking and offensive language: the only way for the individual to receive eternal life is to eat Jesus’s flesh and to drink his blood (6:55–57). Even many of Jesus’s disciples find these claims

32. David Rensberger’s *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1989) is a good example of an interest in community simply overriding the role of the individual in John. For example, Nicodemus is said to function as a “communal symbolic figure” (p. 38). It is true that, in the perspective of the whole Gospel, “birth from above” makes one a member of the new community of Jesus’s disciples, but there is nothing about that in John 3, and reading group conflicts within the “Johannine community” into that chapter runs counter to the clear concern of the chapter, which is with how individuals may receive the eternal life that Jesus brings.

unacceptable (6:60–61) and so desert him (6:66). The radical clash between Jesus’s requirement and the accepted norms of the society is dramatized, so that the need for the individual who adheres to Jesus to break with such social expectations stands out the more starkly. This is also the effect of Jesus’s repeated statement that no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father (6:44, 65). The social solidarity is too strong for anyone on personal initiative to break out of it.

All this, however, could conceivably have been presented in terms of the difficult exercise of forsaking one in-group in order to join another (which is how “Johannine community” readings of the Gospel are inclined to read it). But instead, the aphorisms focus exclusively on Jesus. It is to Jesus—not into a new community—that the individual must come. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood are not participation in a common meal but rather eating Jesus (6:57) so that the individual may abide in Jesus and Jesus in the individual (6:56). Nothing permits us to import ideas of eucharistic fellowship into this passage. Instead, we have an example of this Gospel’s remarkable concentration on the person of Jesus. The focus of the aphoristic sayings, like that of the narratives of individual dialogues, on the individual believer or disciple is matched by their focus on Jesus. Consequently, as we have noticed, when there is a movement from individual to community, it is a movement from individual to Jesus and thence to the community of those who believe in and love Jesus. The parable of the vine (15:1–11) takes up the Hebrew Bible’s use of the vine as a symbol for the people of God (Ps. 80:8–16), but it is Jesus who is the vine and the disciples his branches. Each must abide in him. This is the closest John gets to the “in Christ” language of the Pauline Epistles, but John has nothing like the Pauline image of the body of Christ in which the different members function in reciprocal interaction.

The Gospel’s focus on the individual and Jesus has a further dimension that will help to explain its “individualism.” This Gospel values the relationship of personal intimacy between the individual believer and Jesus. We see this in the Beloved Disciple’s own special closeness to Jesus (13:23; 21:20), which plausibly depicts this disciple’s actual friendship with Jesus during Jesus’s earthly life, a friendship that lay at the root of the Gospel’s spirituality. We see it also in the Gospel’s moving depiction of Jesus’s reunion with Mary Magdalene, in which he evokes her recognition by the familiar way he speaks to her (20:16), but in which there is also a recognition that the intimacy between them can continue only in another mode (20:17).³³ In the next chapter we shall explore further the “in-one-another” language that the Gospel uses

33. See Sief van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John*, BIS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 200–206.

to suggest the special intimacy of relationship between Jesus and the disciples and between Jesus and the Father. But we have already observed that it can be used of the risen and exalted Jesus’s relationship both with the disciples as a group and with individuals. It is not used of the earthly Jesus’s relationship with anyone, and it is not used of the disciples’ relationship with one another, suggesting that it designates a relationship whose intimacy goes beyond the closeness that human persons may experience with one another in this world. Perhaps the word “mysticism” may be cautiously used in this connection.³⁴ In any case, in the perspective of Christian history, there is nothing strange about a focus on the individual’s intimacy with the living Jesus. This need not be “individualistic” if that means excluding an important role for the corporate life and worship of the community, but it does mean that there is individual experience that is not reducible to the corporate. Among the New Testament documents, it is in John’s Gospel that this individual experience of relationship with Jesus is most clearly and frequently evoked, and we should not be tempted, either for theological or for sociological reasons, to flatten the contours of the canon to the detriment of this specially Johannine emphasis.

It has often been noticed that there is a resemblance between what is said of the Beloved Disciple’s closeness to Jesus (he reclined “on the breast” [*en tō kolpō*] of Jesus [13:23]) and what is said of the Son’s closeness to the Father (he is “on the breast” [*eis ton kolpon*] of the Father [1:18]).³⁵ This resemblance is matched by the parallel use of “in-one-another” language: Jesus is in the believer and the believer is in Jesus (6:56; 15:5), while Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him (10:38; 14:10; 17:21). As I have already suggested, there may be a connection here with the “individualism” of the Gospel. The love between the Father and the Son, their unsurpassable intimacy, is the source from which relationship between God and humans derives. The one-to-one relationship in the divine life is reflected especially in the Beloved Disciple’s closeness to Jesus and in every believer’s “personal coinherence” with Jesus. In neither case does the one-to-one relationship exclude others: the kind of love this Gospel describes cannot be confined to any one relationship but always overflows. Yet in both cases the one-to-one relationship is special and irreplaceable.

34. It used to be a topic of discussion “whether the type of religion represented by the Fourth Gospel can or cannot properly be described as ‘mysticism’” (Dodd, *Interpretation*, 197), a discussion that involved the relationship between John and so-called Hellenistic mysticism. See also André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964), 169–80. The trend away from a “Hellenistic” background to John may account for the rarity with which the topic is raised in more recent Johannine scholarship.

35. For example, van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 89.