

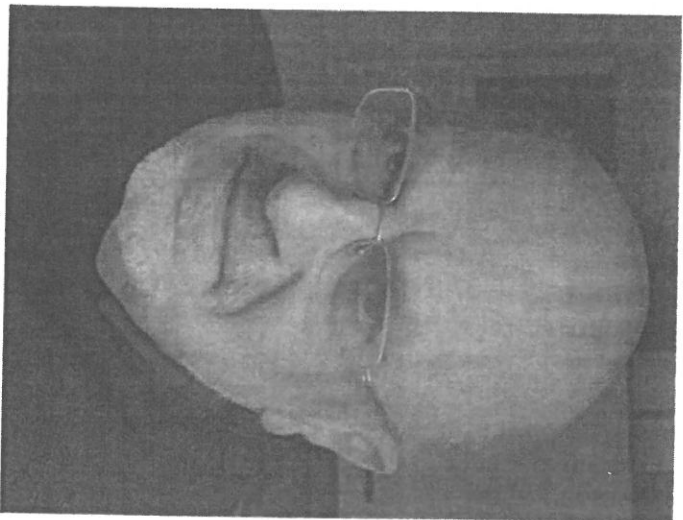
Conception, Reception, and the Spirit



Essays in Honor of Andrew T. Lincoln

Edited by

J. Gordon McConville
and Lloyd K. Pietersen



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CONCEPTION, RECEPTION, AND THE SPIRIT
Essays in Honor of Andrew T. Lincoln

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Another Look at "Lifting Up" in the Gospel of John

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ONE OF THE DISTINCTIVE ways in which John's Gospel communicates Jesus' identity as God's heavenly revealer on earth is by attributing to him a profoundly enigmatic mode of speech. Figurative vocabulary and riddles feature prominently in the discourses of this "stranger from heaven," not least in the cluster of declarations whose verbal building blocks consist of words to which more than one level of meaning can be ascribed (e.g., John 3:3-4; 4:10-11). Among the most well known, and baffling, of these Johannine cases of *double entendre* is the use of the verb *ὑψόω* to describe Jesus—in his capacity as the Son of Man—being lifted up on the cross, which, ironically and at the same time, is also his exaltation (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34).

Most commentators agree that John deliberately plays on the literal and figurative associations of *ὑψόω* and that it relates in some way to Jesus' death. It is also widely recognized that his three "lifting up" sayings function as the Johannine counterpart of the threefold Synoptic predictions of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Son of Man (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Where there is less agreement is *how* and *why* Jesus' death and exaltation came to be telescoped together in John's Gospel. What does it

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mean to combine the physical act of lifting up Jesus through crucifixion with an understanding of that act as pointing, in some way, to his exaltation? Does John's (re)positioning of the exaltation motif, which in some NT texts (Acts 2:33; 5:31; cf. Phil 2:9) is linked to Jesus' resurrection-ascension, amount to its *expansion* so that Jesus' crucifixion is now included within the integrated "event" of his death, resurrection, and return to heaven? Or is it a *transference* of that motif to convey Jesus' death exclusively as his moment of exaltation?

These are far from insignificant questions for the interpretation of John's Gospel, particularly for determining the significance it attaches to the death of Jesus,¹ and for establishing what is means to describe Jesus' death, narratologically, as "the resolution to the Johannine narrative plot," and, theologically, as the revelation of God's glory, as testimony to the truth, as the means of the gift of eternal life.² While Johannine scholarship on the "lifting up" sayings has centered largely on whether Jesus' exaltation is fulfilled *in part* or *in full* on the cross, this essay focuses on another set of interpretative questions and perspectives. It firstly examines the use of *ὑψόω* in a variety of texts outside John's Gospel before analyzing its function within the Gospel narrative, particularly with reference to the immediate literary context of the three passages in question (3:13-15; 8:28-29; 12:31-34). The essay concludes by considering the likely implications of the progressive ex-plication of Jesus' "lifting up" within the narrative, and the extent to which its gradual elucidation can shed light on what it means, from a Johannine perspective, to speak of "Jesus' exaltation to glory by means of his death by crucifixion."³

ELEVATION, EXALTATION, AND CRUCIFIXION

Though relatively rare, the verb *ὑψόω* can mean "lift high/raise up" and "exalt/elevate" in classical Greek.⁴ A similar semantic range is attested in the various Septuagint translations, although surprisingly, given the frequent occurrence of *ὑψόω* in the LXX (around 200 times),⁵ this evidence has not been subjected to much systematic treatment,⁶ even by Johannine scholars.

1. See Frey, "Die *theologia crucij*," 169-238, especially 176.
2. Lincoln, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," 123-24.
3. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 89; cf. Lincoln, *John*, 269.
4. See LSJ, 1910.
5. See the entry on "*ὑψόω*" in Lust et al., *Lexicon*, 498.
6. See Bertram, "*ὑψόω, ὑπερῆψόω*," TDNT 8: 606-7; and, most recently, Mardaga, "Repetitive," 105-7.

There are some examples of *ὑψόω* to denote upward movement, either for the lifting of the head (e.g., IV Kgdm 25:27) or voice (e.g., IV Kgdm 19:22; Isa 37:23) or even for the raising of the ark by water (Gen. 7:17: *ὑψώθη ἄνω τῆς γῆς*). However, in the majority of cases where the referent is God, the emphasis falls upon status or position, not movement. God is frequently acclaimed as “exalted” within the context of judgment, particularly in the Psalms (e.g., 17:47; 45:11; 96:9) and also the prophecies of Isaiah (cf. 2:11; 30:18), whose use of *ὑψόω* will be subjected to closer treatment in the next section of this essay.

Both the literal and figurative use of *ὑψόω* is attested in other Jewish texts composed in, or translated into, Greek during the late Second Temple period.⁷ It is striking, therefore, that the extant New Testament evidence centers primarily on the notion of exaltation.⁸ Of particular interest is the possible wordplay between the various connotations of *ὑψόω* in Jesus’ oracle to Capernaum in Matt. 11:23//Luke 10:15. The oracle refutes the possibility that the city will be exalted/lifted up to heaven (*ὑψωθήσεται*) and, though rhetorically phrased, it conjures up the image of spatial elevation as well as change in status, as indicated by Jesus’ subsequent announcement of abasement: “You shall be brought down (*καταβήσεται*) to Hades.” Nevertheless, the three New Testament passages that have received most attention in this connection—even sometimes functioning as the lens through which the Johannine “lifting up” sayings are interpreted—are those in which *ὑψόω* denotes the post-resurrection exaltation of Jesus. If Peter, in his first speech in Acts, declares that Jesus has been raised (2:32: *ἀνέστη*) and exalted (2:33: *ὑψωθείς*) to God’s right hand, he is attributed the same expression for the same purpose after his subsequent reference to God “raising up” (*ῥύξειν*) Jesus (5:30). The emphasis in Paul’s declaration about Jesus’ super-exaltation (Phil. 2:9: *ὑπερῷωσεν*) is also on resurrection-ascension as resulting from (*ὅτι καὶ*) Jesus’ death on the cross.

This rich depository of Jewish and early Christian evidence provides significant comparative material for assessing the five occurrences of *ὑψόω* in the Gospel of John. The fact that none of this evidence relates specifically to “lifting up” in death has occasioned several attempts at identifying

7. The verb is used figuratively in the sense of “exalt” (e.g., *Let. Artis*, 263; *Pss. Sol.* 1:5; *Sib. Or.* 3:583; *T. Jud.* 21:8) and literally as “lift high/raise up” (e.g., Josephus, *B.J.* 2:219; 5:523).

8. Of the fifteen NT occurrences of *ὑψόω* outside John’s Gospel, all connote exaltation rather than physical movement, with ten occurring in connection with the motif of exalting vs. humbling (Matt. 23:12 (x2); Luke 1:52; 14:11 (x2); 18:14 (x2); 2 Cor. 11:7; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:6). Cf. also Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 13:17 (Phil 2:9: *ὑπερῷωσεν*).

a possible link between the Johannine sayings and examples of the double connotation of being “raised up” and “impaled/crucified” in Aramaic (*קריט* or *קריטא*) and Hebrew (*קריט*; cf. Gen 40:13, 19, 20).⁹ However, what undoubtedly warrants a more prominent place in the discussion of tradition-historical questions is the intriguing cluster of possible parallels in *Oneirocritica*, a second-century-CE compendium of dream interpretations by Artemidorus of Daldis.¹⁰ This text is of interest because its interpretation of certain dreams of crucifixion as predictions of the future “elevation” of the one crucified demonstrates how a cross, with the aid of *ὑψόω* and its cognates, can be “transformed from an instrument of execution to one of exaltation.”¹¹ Artemidorus states:

It is also auspicious for a poor man [to dream of crucifixion]. For a crucified man is raised high (*καὶ γὰρ ὑψηλὸς ὁ σταυρωθεὶς*) and he nourishes <many birds>. But if [a dream of crucifixion] means the exposure of what is hidden. For a crucified man can be seen (*ἐκφανής*) by all. (*Oneirocritica* 2:53).

Admittedly, this passage does not provide a precise verbal parallel to the Johannine evidence (*ὑψηλός* is used, rather than a form of *ὑψόω*), and it centers on transformation rather than recognition of the actual status of the one who is “lifted up” through crucifixion, the latter arguably being the case with the Johannine Jesus. Nevertheless, it suggests that the semiotic potential of *ὑψόω* would have been culturally familiar to John and his first readers/hearers.¹² This is a form of dream interpretation which highlights the possibility of viewing a highly positioned cross as a symbol of honor and a corpse as a symbol of nourishment/wealth.¹³ And whatever the actual socio-political reasons for placing those crucified in such an elevated position,¹⁴ Artemidorus indicates that the *visual display* achieved through crucifixion is an effective way of bringing what is hidden to light (2:53: *ἐκφανής*). The

9. E.g., McNamara, “Ascension,” 450–59.

10. See Hollis, “Root,” 475–78.

11. See Harris McCoy, *Oneirocritica*.

12. Meggitt, “Artemidorus,” 204. See also Labahn, “Bedeutung,” 452–55.

13. Meggitt, “Artemidorus,” 206–7, demonstrates how dream interpretations in *Oneirocritica* probably already belonged to a “popular cultural context” in a wide variety of locations in the first century CE.

14. Cf. Labahn, “Bedeutung,” 453–54. See further Harris McCoy, *Oneirocritica* 4:49: “So, for example, someone dreamt of being crucified, which signifies honor and wealth (*δόξαν καὶ εὐπορίαν*)—honor, because the crucified person is in a very high position (*ὑψηλότερον*), and wealth, because he provides food for many birds.”

15. On associating (ironic) high elevation on a cross with the public shaming of those who had sought self-elevation, see Marcus, “Crucifixion,” 77–80.

symbolic interpretation of crucifixion emerging from this wordplay points to the close link that can be forged between death and exaltation—that is, a “lifting up” not *from* the cross, but *on* the cross.

“LIFTING UP” AND THE ISAIANIC SERVANT

The association between ὑψόω and the Servant of the Lord (Isa 52:13 LXX) requires separate discussion, not least because the influence of this Isaianic passage on the Johannine “lifting up” sayings is already widely acknowledged.¹⁶ If the texts surveyed in the previous section enable one to appreciate the broad semantic range of ὑψόω within John’s cultural repertoire, the primary contribution of LXX Isaiah is its capacity to supply a theological impetus for the presentation of Jesus’ “lifting up” as an event of revelation and salvation. Of particular relevance is God’s opening declaration in the fourth servant song: “See, my servant shall understand, and he shall be exalted and glorified greatly” (52:13 LXX: ἰδοὺ στυγῶναι ὁ παῖς μου καὶ ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δόξαθήσεται ὀφθόρῳ). The juxtaposition of ὑψόω and δόξαζω is a distinctive characteristic of LXX Isaiah,¹⁷ and the fact that the same verbal pattern is used with reference to the future exaltation (ὑψωθήσεται) and glorification (δόξαθήσεται) of Yāhweh (5:16; 33:10) points to an intentional alignment of God and his servant.

Other features, particularly in the first divine oracle of the song (Isa 52:13–15 LXX), yield valuable clues as to why this passage, above all others, could have motivated John to describe Jesus’ death as his exaltation and glorification. First, and in contrast to the Hebrew text (cf. 52:14, 15 MT), all of God’s introductory speech is orientated towards the future. The future tense is used not only to express God’s promise regarding the exaltation and glorification of his servant (52:13), but also to describe the servant’s dishonoring among people (52:14)¹⁸ and the amazement of nations and kings when they finally see and understand him.¹⁹ Secondly, the casting of all these different facets of God’s speech as future “events” means that they lend themselves to mutual interpretation. The most widespread estimation of the introduction

16. E.g., Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47–51, 64–65; Tang Nielsen, “Lamb of God,” 228–33, 244–49.

17. The three-part declaration in Isa 52:13 MT (לִמְדָה בְּנִי וְנִשְׁבַּח עַמִּי) becomes a twofold formulation in 52:13 LXX. The same correlation, but with the remnant of Israel as referent, occurs in Isa 4:2, 10:15.

18. This involves interpreting the oracle as shifting from a statement *about* the servant (52:13) to one addressing him directly (52:14: ὅτι καὶ σὺ).

19. For further details, see Ekblad, *Isaiah’s Servant Poems*, 170–71, 179–94; Schwindt, *Gesichte*, 81–83.

to the oracle (52:13 MT and LXX) is that it offers an anticipatory outline of the exaltation that will *follow* the servant’s suffering and death, as described in the main part of the song (53:1–11). Another proposal is that John reads this particular verse (52:13) as a summary assessment of the message of the song in its entirety: the exaltation of the servant is “the whole sequence of humiliation, suffering, death, and vindication beyond death which chapter 53 describes.”²⁰ However, in view of the consistently future-orientated focus of 52:13 LXX and of what follows in 52:14–15 LXX, it can be argued that the “humiliation-as-exaltation” pattern is in fact already established in the LXX version of the oracle, or at least that it has the potential to be read in this way: although the servant’s appearance and “glory” (δόξα) will be “deglorified” (ἀδοξήσεται) in the eyes of other people, he will, at the same time, be exalted and greatly glorified by God.

Given that the LXX version of Isa 52:13–15 points to a twofold “vision” of the servant—one that characterizes those who see him in a physical sense (52:14) and the other centered on the divine perspective on “seeing” (52:13)—this passage attests a motif already encountered in the dream interpretation of Artemidorus, namely their shared interest in the visual aspect of “lifting up” to focus, more specifically, on the unveiling of that which has so far been hidden.²¹ This is already firmly established in the opening call of Isaiah’s song (ἰδοὺ) and then receives affirmation and fulfillment when they—to whom it was not previously announced about the servant—will finally see (52:15: ὄψονται) and understand. A much stronger connection is thus forged in LXX Isaiah between the divine challenge to “see” the exaltation and glorification of the servant and the eventual “coming to see” attributed to the nations. The relevance of these features for understanding how John perceives the “lifting up” of Jesus will be considered after the sayings in question have been examined.

“LIFTING UP” AND JESUS’ DEATH

The first occurrences of ὑψόω in John’s Gospel bind together one of its many explanations of the significance of Jesus’ mission, in this case through a comparison of the lifting up (ὑψωθήσεται) of the Son of Man (3:14b) and the wilderness incident in which Moses lifted up (ὑψώσεται) the bronze serpent (3:14a)—an act intended to heal the Israelites from the bites of the fiery snakes (Num 21:4–9). John’s framing of this correspondence (καὶ ὡς . . .

20. See especially Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 64. Cf. also Dodd, *Interpretation*, 247.

21. On the focus on visibility in Isa 52:13–53:12, see now Heath, *Paul’s Visual Picty*, 228–31.

οὐτως) establishes a tight correlation between two events now regarded as mutually illuminating. The elevation of the serpent acts as a kind of type or foreshadowing of Jesus' "lifting up," whereby the scriptural incident is compressed to include only essential components for the comparison and its vocabulary harmonized with that of the "present" event through the deliberate use of *ὑψόω* (not *ἐρτάω* in Num 21:9 LXX) to denote the elevation of the serpent.²² The intended correspondence, therefore, is not between Moses and Jesus but between the effects of the two acts of "lifting up" and, implicitly, of seeing/believing the one who is elevated. It is also a connection that involves some degree of contrast: gazing at the serpent led to physical healing, but "seeing" Jesus with faith will lead to eternal life (3:15; cf. Wis 16:6–7).²³

The role of *ὑψόω* within this comparison is complex and yet instructive. Its first occurrence (3:14a), to denote the raising up of the serpent (on a pole), inevitably prompts questions about the semantic force of its second appearance (3:14b): does it similarly refer to a literal "lifting up" of Jesus, thereby alluding to the manner of his death, or does it (in addition) connote the more widespread, figurative use of *ὑψόω* to denote exaltation? Semantic interaction between these two levels of meaning must be activated when the life-giving purpose (*ὅνα*) of the "lifting up" of the Son of Man is brought into view. And yet, the comparison appears to be phrased in a way that seeks to promote rather than settle possible ambiguities. While the analogy of two literal acts of "lifting up" would also work with other verbs (e.g., *αἰψόω*), only *ὑψόω* has the capacity to point to other potential semantic associations. The elusive character of the comparison is also indicated by the passive form (*ὑψωθήναι*), even if the element of necessity (*δεῖ*) suggests God as subject (cf. 10:16; 11:51; 12:34; cf. Mark 8:31), whereas the lack of concrete "hooks" (such as an explicit reference to the location of the Son of Man's elevation/exaltation) means that no steer is given as to the precise connotation of *ὑψόω* in the second part.

Even if the comparison with the serpent appears to presuppose the physical "lifting up" of Jesus by crucifixion, the second level of meaning associated with exaltation is left open at this point. The typological correspondence in 3:14–15 can certainly be interpreted in terms of Jesus' exaltation on the cross: in the same way as the Israelites must look at the image of the serpent set high on a pole in order to be healed (Num 21:8–9), it is

22. For a detailed examination of this passage, see Frey, "Wie Mose," 153–205.

23. Although the second part of the comparison refers to "believing" rather than "seeing" Jesus ("Wie Mose," 184) argues for their close alignment on the basis of the parallel structure and content of John 3:15 (*πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον*) and Num 21:8 LXX (*πᾶς ὁ θεὸν ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ὑγιαίνει*).

necessary to ("see" and) believe in the one who is lifted high and simultaneously exalted on the cross in order to receive eternal life (John 3:14b–15; cf. 19:36–37).²⁴ Salvific correspondence between these two acts is ascribed additional dimensions by Craig Koester,²⁵ who proposes that both the elevated serpent and the crucified Son of Man visibly exhibit the results of human sin and opposition to God, so that, through their "lifting up," they demonstrate God's ability to transform the results of sin (Num 21:4–7; cf. John 8:28) into a means of giving life.

Nevertheless, the elusive character of the "exaltation" of Jesus persists. John maintains the open-endedness of the image by referring to belief in (*πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων*), rather than seeing, the elevated Son of Man (3:15). Although verbs of sight are frequently used to denote belief (e.g., 6:40; 12:21, 45; 14:9), they may have been avoided here to ensure that "seeing" is not limited to the visually concrete "lifting up" of the crucified Jesus. Furthermore, the presence of the ascent-descent schema in the immediate context of this analogy cannot be overlooked. Notwithstanding the interpretative challenges posed by the initial reference to no one having "ascended" (*ἀνελβύκειν*) to heaven except the Son of Man who descended *ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*,²⁶ a link between this claim (3:13) and the subsequent scripturally based comparison (3:14–15) is suggested by their connecting *καί* and also by the use of the designation "Son of Man" in both statements. Some propose that the emphasis in 3:13 lies on Jesus' credentials as the exclusive revealer of the heavenly things (*τὰ ἐντοκρυφῶντα*), with 3:14–15 then explaining how his death on the cross is the supreme moment of that revelation.²⁷ And although the two verbs in question (*ἀνελβάναι* and *ὑψόω*) are certainly not synonymous in John's Gospel,²⁸ their close proximity to each other and their shared vertical-spatial connotations make it difficult to isolate them from one another in this part of Jesus' discourse.²⁹ The question, then, is the extent to which the "lifting up" of Jesus on the cross belongs to the pattern of his ascent to heaven and return to the Father; in other words, does the first of the Johannine "lifting up"

24. The visual aspect implicit in this interpretation of the correspondence is highlighted by Knoppler, *Die theologia crucis*, 155–60. Cf. Moloney, *Johannine Son of Man*, 59–61; Frey, *Die theologia crucifixi*, 228.

25. Koester, "Messiah," 178.

26. On the various possible interpretations of John 3:13, see now Pierce and Reynolds, "The Perfect Tense-Form," 149–53.

27. See, e.g., Moloney, *Johannine Son of Man*, 59.

28. Cf. Frey, "Wie Mose," 182 n.40, for the different semantic context of both verbs in John's Gospel.

29. On *ἀνελβάναι* (3:13) as the guiding category for the meaning of *ὑψόω* (3:14), see Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium*, 204–6, 588.

sayings view the exaltation of Jesus as somehow “completed” in his death or must necessarily include his resurrection-ascension? No further clues are provided at this narrative juncture to enable one to give a decisive answer.

Some illumination is offered by the second saying, where the Jewish opponents of Jesus are ascribed the role of agents in his elevation: “When you have lifted up (ὑψώσῃτε) the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he (ἐγὼ εἰμι)” (8:28). The primary reference is undoubtedly to the physical raising of Jesus on the cross, even though John’s Gospel certainly has the capacity to present these words as an ironic anticipation of how “the Jews” will ultimately exalt Jesus to heaven by means of his death. That the use of ὑψόω in this pronouncement points to other levels of meaning is strongly suggested by the way in which it overtly attributes revelatory significance to the crucifixion: the consequence of the “lifting up” of Jesus is that it will bring about recognition of his true identity as the visible manifestation of God, as the bearer of his exclusive self-declaration (ἐγὼ εἰμι).³⁰ In what is arguably John’s most thoroughgoing attempt at explaining Jesus’ appropriation of ἐγὼ εἰμι, the claim is set within the context of his unique relationship with the Father: everything he does and says comes from God (8:28b; cf. 8:26), the one who sent Jesus and remained with him throughout his mission, even on the cross (8:29). As a result, the depth of their unity is revealed when Jesus submits fully to death by crucifixion, and this concrete-visible sign of his divine identity becomes the locus of *xpístos* for salvation or condemnation.³¹ That Jesus’ elevation-exaltation on the cross involves his “lifting up” to the Father’s presence is more overtly expressed in 8:28–29, although it is difficult to determine whether this also assumes his return (to heaven) after his resurrection and ascension. The different time periods of the predicted exaltation (8:28a: ὅταν) and anticipated knowledge (8:28b: τότε) indicate that recognition is not concurrent with the act of “lifting up,” and yet once again, this declaration—despite its inevitable shaping by the Gospel’s post-Easter perspective—yields no clear signals as to whether exaltation is deemed to be fully enclosed within, or extends beyond, Jesus’ death by crucifixion.

The final “lifting up” saying of the Johannine Jesus occurs in a narrative section dominated by declarations about his imminent death and departure (12:20–36). The arrival of the eschatological “hour” amounts to judgment (ῥῆ) on this world and its ruler (12:31), which then leads (κἀγὼ) Jesus to pronounce that when he is lifted up from the earth (ἐκτὸν ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς)

30. See further Williams, *I am He*, 255–303.

31. Whoever accepts or refuses this revelation will come to life or death (cf. John 3:16–21; 3:31–36; 5:19–29; 12:46–50). See Williams, *I am He*, 269–70.

he will draw all (πάντας) to himself (12:32). With regard to the immediate context of this declaration—but also the cumulative effect of the three sayings—there is no doubt that the primary connotation of ὑψόω here is the physical elevation of Jesus on the cross. That it refers to the manner of his death is confirmed by John’s inclusion of an explanatory aside (12:33: τοῦ βεβῆναι; cf. 18:31–32), although it cannot be ruled out that a second-level connotation (elevation-as-exaltation) is also embedded in that explanation. Nevertheless, with an echo of Jesus’ initial (3:14b), rather than final, words (12:32) about his “lifting up,” the crowd’s response indicates that they interpret Jesus’ declaration in terms of his departure by death and fail to grasp any other possible level of meaning.

As with the other two “lifting up” sayings, the immediate—and in this case slightly wider—context provides some clarification about the intended meaning of ὑψόω (12:32a), particularly with a view to its anticipated consequences (12:32b). In this respect the drawing of people to Jesus as a result of his elevation is often interpreted in the light of the earlier statement about the necessity for a grain of wheat to die (12:24): it is by means of his death that Jesus brings fruit and draws “all” to himself, as proleptically implied by the request of the Greeks to see him (cf. 12:20–22).³² Indeed, as was highlighted earlier in this essay with reference to texts other than John’s Gospel, the description of Jesus being lifted up “from the earth” may deliberately play on the visual aspect of him being set up high on a cross *for all to see* (cf. 3:14), so that it is Jesus exalted to God on the cross who can offer salvation for those who “see” him. This need not imply that he literally draws believers to himself at the moment of crucifixion: it is rather the consequence of post-Easter “remembering” of the true significance of his death. Having said that, the inclusion of the phrase ἐκ τῆς γῆς (12:32b), otherwise not encountered in the “lifting up” sayings, opens up—or even confirms—the other semantic possibilities of ὑψόω: Jesus’ exaltation involves his return from the world “below” to the heavenly sphere “above,” in full circle following his descent to earth ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (3:13).

What is striking, and rarely noted by scholars, is that John’s gradual elucidation of the “lifting up” theme coincides with a progressively more explicit outworking of links between Jesus and the Isaianic servant. On the first occasion (3:14), the possible influence of Isaiah’s portrayal of the servant is restricted to the verb ὑψόω itself (3:14). The connection between them is more apparent in the second saying (8:28), particularly due to the linking of two key Isaianic motifs (ὑψόω and ἐγὼ εἰμι). Indeed, the reasoning behind

32. See in particular Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie III*, 279–80. Cf. also Knöpler, *Die theologia crucis*, 161–63.

drawing these two motifs together—as an expression of Jesus' oneness with God—becomes clearer when it is noted that the closest Deutero-Isaianic parallel to Jesus' words (*τὸτε γνώσεσθε ἐπὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι*) occurs in Isa 43:10 LXX: God's role as witness is added to that of "the servant whom I have chosen," so that the ἐγὼ εἰμι claim that follows can even be read as their joint proclamation. Nevertheless, the fullest and most intricately woven explication of Jesus' mission through an Isaianic lens (52:12–53:1) occurs in relation to his final "lifting up" saying: declarations about his future glorification (12:23) and exaltation (12:32, 34) come about as a result of the approach by the Greeks to "see" (*ἰδεῖν*) him, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that nations who had not previously been told about the servant will eventually see (52:15 LXX: *ᾄδοντα*).³³ This stands in stark contrast, "as the prophet Isaiah said," to the inability of "the Jews" to believe in Jesus because their eyes have been blinded (John 12:37–40; quoting Isa 53:1 and 6:9–10). Thus, the Isaianic testimony bubbling under the surface since the early stages of this narrative now comes to clear expression in John's reflections on seeing—and not seeing—Jesus' true identity and mission.

SEEING THE EXALTED ONE

It seems evident, after examining all three of the Johannine "lifting up" sayings, that semantic interaction between the literal and metaphorical use of *ὑψόω* is designed to underscore the opaque character of Jesus' words. That Jesus' death by crucifixion is central to John's "elevation-as-exaltation" framework is indicated by both the content and sequential effect of the sayings, particularly their emphasis on the necessity of the cross as a means to divine revelation and salvation for those with eyes to "see" (cf. 3:13–21; 12:27–36). What is less frequently observed is that these passages also exhibit another level of verbal dynamics, due to the multilayered significance of *ὑψόω* within its second (figurative) level of meaning. In other words, a degree of open-endedness characterizes the Johannine use of *ὑψόω* until the very end, because even the process of gradual elucidation from the first, through the second, to the third pronouncement does not conclude with a clear-cut scenario of exaltation. What kind of exaltation is envisaged? Is it Jesus' elevation in honor and glory on the cross, or does it (also) anticipate his exaltation in heaven following his return to the Father? Its description as a characteristically Johannine example of *double entendre* does not, as a

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result, really capture the polyvalence of *ὑψόω* and the way that it operates within the narrative.

A post-Easter perspective inevitably shapes the way(s) in which John interprets Jesus' death, which is why so many scholars have claimed that his "lifting up" by crucifixion cannot be viewed in isolation from his return to the Father; it belongs to the "cross event" which must also incorporate Jesus' resurrection and ascension.³⁴ Raymond Brown, for this reason, draws the following conclusion:

In John, "being lifted up" refers to one continuous action of ascent: Jesus begins his return to the Father as he approaches death (xiii 1) and completes it only with his ascension (xx 17). . . . The first step in the ascent is when Jesus is lifted up on the cross; the second step is when he is raised up from death; the final step is when he is lifted up to heaven.³⁵

Though describing Jesus' ascent as "continuous," it seems that Brown envisages a temporally orientated three-stage process, but one that plays down the *metaphorical* focus of the language of "elevation-as-exaltation" and, arguably, literalizes the second-level meaning of *ὑψόω* in order to (re)introduce the notion of ascent through physical "lifting up." This is not to deny the inextricable link between Jesus' death and resurrection in the Gospel of John, as indeed has been persuasively argued by Andrew Lincoln in a number of his studies on John's Gospel.³⁶ The heightened ambiguity of *ὑψόω* within the Gospel narrative in fact accentuates the inseparability of Jesus' death and resurrection insofar as the salvation of believers is concerned. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the interplay of the literal/figurative associations of *ὑψόω* is being used by John to convey the "beginning" of a temporal sequence of events. To argue in this way is to overlook the fact that John's Gospel is underpinned by two different axes—vertical and horizontal. There is no doubt that, with a view to the vertical-spatial perspective of John's "lifting up" imagery, Jesus' ascent "from the earth" (12:32) involves his elevation to, and oneness with, the Father. However, by virtue of the complex, sometimes "irrational,"³⁷ nature of metaphorical language, to speak, *within discourse*, about the vertical-spatial "lifting up" of Jesus cannot necessarily be dovetailed with the horizontal-temporal perspective

33. The influence of Isaiah 52–53 on John 12:20–43 has received considerable attention in recent decades. See especially Evans, "Obduracy," 232–36; Beutler, "Greeks," 341–46; Frey, "Wie Mose," 188–89.

34. See, e.g., van der Watt, "The Cross/Resurrection Events," 123–41, who speaks of the "cross-resurrection events" as different facets of one integrated event, albeit without collapsing the different events into an undistinguishable whole (123 n.1).

35. Brown, *John*, 1:146.

36. Lincoln, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," 122–44; Lincoln, *John*, 13.

37. Meeks, "Man from Heaven," 191.

that characterizes John's *narrative* of the death, resurrection (and ascension) of Jesus (cf. John 19–20). Thus, while the vertical and horizontal axes of John's Gospel may frequently intersect with each other, it does not always follow that they can be fully harmonized with one another.³⁸ Jesus' heavenly exaltation on/from the cross may well be viewed as a prefiguring of his post-resurrection exaltation, but this is not explored in the text because this is simply not where John's interest lies.

The enduring effect of *ὑψόω* within John's narrative is that it succeeds, through a single metaphorical image, to encapsulate two fundamentally different perspectives on the significance of Jesus' death by crucifixion. From an earthly perspective, this is no more than his physical "lifting up" on the cross, but, for those with eyes to "see," it signifies his exaltation to the Father's presence, whether on the cross or in heaven—it is a vision of divine reality that can only be seen "from above."

38. For another example of how the vertical and horizontal axes of John's narrative cannot be superimposed on each other, see Williams, "Abraham," 216–18.

6

John, Jesus, and "The Ruler of This World"

Demonic Politics in the Fourth Gospel?

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INTRODUCTION

ONE MIGHT THINK THAT of all the New Testament books the least likely to be caught up in debates about anti-imperial politics would be the Gospel of John. The old nineteenth-century prejudices about John linger on. John is a "spiritual" gospel, a "theological" gospel, not like the rough-and-tumble Synoptics, still less like that argumentative fellow Paul. John is about the incarnation of the Word, the love of God in sending the Son, and the glory revealed on the cross. At the heart of John we find the Farewell Discourses, seen by many as the deepest and richest focus and source of Christian spirituality. What can all this have to do with the messy business of politics, still less the dangerous suggestion of a counter-imperial agenda?

And yet, before we even glance at contemporary scholarship, we should pause. John is a deeply *Jewish* book: the older prejudice that screened out his