

JOHN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

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Introduction

We can tell the story of Jesus' suffering and death—the betrayal, capture, interrogation, sentence and crucifixion—without touching on the significance of those two words. In similar fashion we can become involved in explaining and proclaiming their significance without actually relating the events of those dramatic final days in Jesus' earthly life. The former is what the evangelists have done;¹ indeed our impression of what happened in Jerusalem at the Last Passover stems in all essentials from the Gospel writers. The latter is Paul's achievement.² It is largely from his letters that we come to understand the significance of Jesus' death.

The question immediately arises as to whether it is possible to say anything at all about each individual evangelist's understanding of Jesus' death. Is it not futile, especially in John's case, to seek for a particular understanding? It is common knowledge that John plays down the aspect of suffering and emphasizes instead Jesus' exaltation and glorification. Opinion is thus divided as to whether Jesus' death has any real and independent significance in Johannine theology.

1. Although the Eucharist tradition in Mk 14.22-25 par. and passages such as Mk 10.45 par. contain to some degree an interpretation.

2. Despite passages such as 1 Cor. 11.23 and 15.3-8 it is impossible to gain from Paul's letters a coherent conception of the course of events during the last days in Jerusalem.

1. *From the History of Research*

A brief glimpse into the history of research on the subject is expedient here, partly to recall the various theories concerning Johannine understanding of the death of Jesus and partly to add perspective to my standpoint. R. Bultmann is unarguably the greatest Johannine scholar of the century. His interpretation must therefore be of particular interest, not least for its understanding of Jesus' death. He may emphasize 'the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (Jn 1.14a), but in doing so he does not regard Jesus' death as having any real and independent significance in the Gospel.³ What humankind needs with its lack of faith, its darkness and its ignorance of God is a revealer, and thus in Bultmann's view Jesus' death has no soteriological meaning. It is his work as a revealer in word and deed that carries this meaning, his death being both the final expression of his obedience and simultaneously his transition to glorification.

There is also good reason to mention the work of E. Käsemann, who differs from Bultmann on a number of points.⁴ Where Bultmann gives prominence to 1.14a, Käsemann stresses 1.14b and discovers a naive Docetism in the gospel. For the evangelist Jesus' earthly life is only

'Folie des durch die Menschenwelt schreitenden Gottessohnes' and
'Raum des Einbruches himmlischer Herrlichkeit'.⁵

the foil for the Son of God walking through the world of man and place
and possibility for the appearance of the heavenly glory.

According to Käsemann's frame of understanding the evangelist found it difficult to incorporate the passion narrative, for it simply did not fit in. Since on the other hand he could hardly omit it, he was forced to reinterpret it. This he did by stamping it with the idea of Jesus' victory and the glory to which 1.14b already bore witness. In this context the tradition concerning Jesus' death has no real meaning. He passes through death, undismayed and triumphant, on his way back to glory with the Father. In soteriological terms his death means nothing. It also remains unclear,

3. See, e.g., R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 6th edn, 1968), pp. 402-12.

4. See, e.g., Käsemann's interpretation, primarily in *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1966).

5. Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille*, p. 29.

'weshalb Gott in das Fleisch kam und selbst dem Tod sich anheimgab'.⁶

why God became flesh and gave himself up to death.

In his book *The Word of the Cross*⁷ J.T. Forestell presents a reading that is reminiscent of Bultmann's in several ways. For him too it is Jesus' work as a revealer that is central to John's Christology and soteriology. But unlike Bultmann he does not see death as the culmination of Jesus' obedience or as a transition to glorification but as a central element of Jesus' mission as revealer, since death is the clearest revelation of God's love for humankind. Even though his death is not understood, for example, as vicarious or expiatory, it is nevertheless a condition of salvation. For it is above all the love revealed in that death which moves a person from non-faith to faith, and it is likewise this love that destroys the power of evil in the world.⁸

In 1996 M.C. de Boer published *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*,⁹ a monograph that takes as its starting-point the assumption of various perspectives in John's understanding of Jesus' death. Instead of attributing priority to one particular perspective, de Boer allows them to stand side by side, to be seen in the light of the history of the Johannine community as it can be concluded from the Gospel and the Epistles. In the course of this history there have been three crises, and thus we can speak of four phases.¹⁰ De Boer attributes no particular importance to

6. Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille*, p. 50. J. Ashton, who is in very much in line with Käsemann says at one point: 'John transforms the cross into a throne.' See J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 489. Criticism of Käsemann is to be found in, among others, G. Bornkamm: 'Zur Interpretation des Johannes-Evangeliums: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Ernst Käsemanns Schrift: Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17', in *idem*, *Geschichte und Glaube. I. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, III (BEvT 48; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1968), pp. 104-21.

7. J.T. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib, 57; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974).

8. A critical evaluation of R. Bultmann's and especially J.T. Forestell's interpretation has been made by M. Turner. See 'Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell', *EvQ* 62 (1990), pp. 99-122.

9. M.C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology, 17; Kampen: Kok, 1996).

10. The first crisis was created by the Jews' decision to exclude from the synagogue those who confessed Jesus as the Christ (9.22. Cf. 12.42 and 16.2a). The second crisis came about with a further decision to persecute and even execute

Jesus' death in the first two phases. But the threat of martyrdom in the third phase forced them to see their own situation in the light of the traditions concerning Jesus, for they knew that the way to exaltation and glorification for him was through crucifixion and death. In the fourth phase it is the realization of Jesus' death as being both vicarious and expiatory that begins to dominate.¹¹ The attraction of de Boer's book is his willingness to let all statements concerning Jesus' death receive their due weight. The problem he faces is how to reconstruct four different versions of the Gospel based on the hypothetical assumption of three crises in the Johannine community.

A relevant insight into the history of research is afforded by the answers to the question of whether we can speak of a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) in John's Gospel. A further question lies hidden within the first, namely whether the cross and thus Jesus' death have a significant soteriological meaning, which according to Paul they do.¹² Many would answer negatively on the grounds that John's accentuation of glory (δόξα) is not compatible with a theology of the cross. On the other hand there is much greater justification, many would argue, for speaking of a glorification theology (*theologia gloriae*). This is Käsemann's view and especially that of scholars who in their reading of John are particularly influenced by his and Bultmann's ideas. An example is U.B. Müller, whom we shall look at later.¹³

There are nonetheless scholars who find it justifiable to speak of a theology of the cross in John, as two recent monographs maintain. One

those who confessed to Jesus as God's Son in a way that made him equal with God (5.18; 8.53; 10.33 and 19.7). The third and final crisis was provoked by the schism testified in particular to in 1 Jn (1 Jn 4.2 and 5.6; 2 Jn 7).

11. This phase of the community's history, however, has, according to de Boer, left only very minor traces in the Gospel.

12. The phrase 'theology of the cross' is not especially felicitous. It is primarily associated with Pauline literature and when used in connection with John's Gospel can be mistakenly assumed to apply Pauline views to Johannine aims.

13. See in particular U.B. Müller, 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium: Erwägungen zur Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament', *KD* 21 (1975), pp. 49-71; *idem*, 'Zur Eigentümlichkeit des Johannesevangeliums: Das Problem des Todes Jesu', *ZNW* 88 (1997), pp. 24-55. More balanced is the view of P. von der Osten-Sacken, 'Leistung und Grenze der johanneischen Kreuzestheologie', *EvT* 36 (1976), pp. 154-76.

is H. Kohler, *Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium*.¹⁴ The other is T. Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*.¹⁵

We must make do with these few glimpses from the history of research, for they are nonetheless sufficient to give the impression of a great divergence of views on John's Gospel, and especially on Jesus' death. They are also sufficient to testify to a general focusing on its meaning in recent research compared with previous decades, as Johannine scholarship moves away from the shadows of Bultmann and Käsemann.

There is demonstrable justification for raising certain questions about John's understanding of Jesus' death, not least because of all the four Gospels John contains the most statements that suggest an understanding of it. It would also be a mistake to interpret the limited discussion on suffering to mean that Jesus' death no longer has any real significance.¹⁶ A leading Johannine scholar, J. Zumstein, even argues that the structure of John actually moves towards Jesus' death.¹⁷ M. Davies agrees, arguing in her chapter 'Structuring Time in the Fourth Gospel'

14. H. Kohler, *Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium: Ein exegetisch-hermeneutischer Versuch zur johanneischen Kreuzestheologie* (ATANT, 72; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987).

15. T. Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums: Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der johanneischen Inkarnations- und Erhöhungs-christologie* (WMANT, 69; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994). In this context see Bornkamm, 'Zur Interpretation'. See also U. Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannesevangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur Stellung des vierten Evangeliums in der johanneischen Schule* (FRLANT, 144; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); H. Thyen 'Johannesevangelium', *TRE* 17 (1988), pp. 200-25; and P. Bühler, 'Ist Johannes ein Kreuzestheologe? Exegetisch-systematische Bemerkungen zu einer noch offenen Debatte', in M. Rose (ed.), *Johannes-Studien: Interdisziplinäre Zugänge zum Johannes-Evangelium* (Freundesgabe der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Neuchâtel für Jean Zumstein; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), pp. 191-207.

16. This is rightly underlined by R. Bergmeier, 'TETEAEΣTAI Joh 19,30', *ZNW* 79 (1988), pp. 282-90.

17. See J. Zumstein, 'L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ', in F. Van Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle and J. Verheyden (eds.), *The Four Gospels 1992* (Festschrift Frans Neirynck; BETL, 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), pp. 2119-38.

that 'Jesus' death...is anticipated from the beginning in a variety of ways'.¹⁸ This incidentally is one of G. Bornkamm's arguments in his criticism of Käsemann's reading.¹⁹ It is true that glory receives particular emphasis in John compared with the other Gospels and that Jesus' death can rightly be described as an exaltation, but that does not allow us to subordinate all the statements concerning Jesus' death to the concepts of glory and exaltation; for that would be to belittle their importance, at worst to silence their voice.²⁰ In this present article I seek to understand the words concerning Jesus' death, 'exaltation' and 'glorification', in the paradoxical context in which they appear in John. When in the following we touch on some of the statements regarding Jesus' death, they are to be regarded as equally representative as the traditions emphasizing the exaltation and glorification.

2. Understanding the Death of Jesus

a. Jesus' Death is God's Will—and his own Decision

In both 3.14 and 12.34 we read that the Son of man will be lifted up. This is declared with the use of the verbal form *δεῖ*, known *inter alia* from the prophecy of suffering in Mk 8.31 par. and generally assumed to express God's will. Some might say that, characteristically for John, it is precisely the exaltation that is willed by God. Unlike the prophecy in Mark, suffering and death are not mentioned in John, so no firm conclusions can be drawn on his understanding of the death of Jesus. Yet we cannot thereby dismiss the thought of death in the Johannine concept of exaltation. In the verb *ὑψωθῆναι* (to be lifted up, to be exalted) John gathers the synoptic prophecy of suffering and death as well as

18. M. Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup, 69; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 54.

19. Bornkamm, 'Zur Interpretation', p.114.

20. I have argued elsewhere that the opposite is the case when reading Paul. In the emphasis on Paul's preaching about the cross and human weakness there is a clear tendency to overlook his statements regarding Jesus' glory and power. See H.K. Nielsen, 'Paulus' Verwendung des Begriffes *Δύναμις*: Eine Replik zur Kreuzestheologie', in S. Pedersen (ed.), *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie* (TS, 7, Århus: Forlaget Aros; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), pp. 137-58.

resurrection,²¹ with exaltation, as we shall see later, pointing in particular to the lifting up on the cross. There are also traditions in John that contradict the narrow interpretation of exaltation by clearly testifying to the understanding that Jesus' death happens precisely according to God's will.

This is the case, for example, in 18.11. As Peter raises his sword to prevent Jesus' arrest and possible death, Jesus says, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?' Since 'to drink the cup' is a paraphrase for 'to die', Jesus is actually saying that it is his Father's will that he should die. That, according to the passion story in John, is the goal towards which Jesus is constantly moving.²² For he knows why he has arrived at this crucial point and therefore he is able to reject the thought that he should pray to the Father to be spared. This is underlined in 12.27-28 on the threshold of the passion narrative in a verse that is clearly related to the Gethsemane prayer in the synoptic Gospels (Mk 14.36 par.). Jesus goes to his death not at the hands of his opponents in this world; nor is it the doing of the prince of this world; it is his Father's decision, or rather command, as we read for example in 14.30-31. Jesus treads the path of suffering and death precisely as his father has commanded him (καθὼς ἐνετείλατό μοι ὁ πατήρ, οὕτως ποιῶ). The script of Jesus' drama is written by God, and Jesus' death is the central event in that drama.

As an element in Jesus' reference to himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life, he says, 'No-one takes²³ it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority (ἐξουσία) to lay it down, and authority to take it up again' (10.18). It is thus Jesus' own will to surrender his life, yet characteristically he continues, 'This command I received from my father'. For it is simultaneously his Father's will and

21. See, for example, M.D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 95-96.

22. It is also made plain that Pilate among others plays his part and administers the power that is invested within him from above, corresponding to God's will for Jesus (19.11).

23. There is a textual problem in that important manuscripts such as P⁴⁵, N*, B and sy^P have the aorist form ἦρπεν, whereas the text is read in the present tense αἶρει. Presumably the aorist reflects a post-resurrection perspective.

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command.²⁴ A further testimony to this interpretation is to be found in the passages where Jesus' death fulfils the scripture, for example his words on the cross in 19.28-30.²⁵

In conclusion we can say that according to John's Gospel it is God's will that Jesus should die but at the same time it is his own choice. However, it is unclear from what we have read so far *why* he should have to die.

b. *Life Presumes Death*

In 12.24 we find an image, a brief parable, perhaps: 'I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' We shall not dwell on the question whether a pre-Johannine tradition exists here,²⁶ since the verse is a totally valid expression of John's understanding.²⁷

The image of the grain of wheat that dies to produce fruit appears in a context introduced by v. 20. Through Andrew and Philip some Greeks have asked to see Jesus, to which Jesus replies, 'The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified' (v. 23). It is the content of this glorification that is made clear in the image in v. 24; for the meaning of Jesus' glorification and exaltation (v. 32) has not superseded the purpose of

24. Cf. F.J. Matera: "'On Behalf of Others", "Cleansing" and "Return": Johannine Images for Jesus' Death', *LouvStud* 13 (1988), pp. 161-78 (166).

25. Cf., e.g., A. Obermann, *Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannevangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur johanneischen Hermeneutik anhand der Schriftzitate* (WUNT, 2/83; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), pp. 350-64.

26. In an article entitled 'Christus, granum frumenti (Jo 12,24)', *VD* 37 (1959), pp. 12-25, 65-77, A. Rasco argues that in 12.24 we have an authentic word of Jesus. Cf., e.g., B. Lindars, 'The Passion in the Fourth Gospel', in J. Jervell and W.A. Meeks (eds.), *God's Christ and his People* (Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), pp. 71-86 (73). Others point to the kinship with some of the synoptic parables and to 1 Cor. 15.36. A possible kinship with ideas from the mystery religions has also been suggested.

27. R. Schnackenburg remarks: 'Die Struktur erinnert an syn. Gleichnisse; aber der Inhalt findet unter ihnen keine Parallele', *Das Johannevangelium. II. Kommentar zu Kap. 5-12* (HTKNT, 4/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1971), p. 480. In his reading J. Ashton chooses to ignore 12.24-26 for the poorly documented reason that it is a later addition (*Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p. 367 n. 86; cf. pp. 491 and 494).

his death.²⁸ Unless he dies, there will be no fruit.²⁹ The meaning of *μόνος μένει* would seem to be that without his death his life will have been in vain.

When we further enquire as to what the fruit of his death will be, our attention is drawn to the context in which the image stands. Human-kind, here, the Greeks, will come to see Jesus, that is come to believe in him.³⁰ Without his death he would be alone, but with his death Jesus creates a fellowship of believers. We can therefore say that the image of the grain of wheat bears witness to the soteriological meaning of Jesus' death, since it is quite simply the condition of salvation. And since according to this text his death allows Greeks access to him, also, a universal perspective simultaneously presents itself.

We have moved a step further on from Jesus' choice for death being God's will; now the grain of wheat shows that it was necessary for Jesus to die for there to be fruit, that is, life and salvation.

c. Jesus' Death Opens up a new Fellowship (13.1-17)

A number of circumstances suggest that the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet is of central importance in John, due to its position at the head of the second main section of the Gospel³¹ and the detailed introduction with which the story is introduced.³²

The episode has been the object of many surveys into the tradition-historical criticism.³³ One major question has been whether the account as we now have it—with two interpretations, one for vv. 6-10 and

28. In S. Schulz, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD, 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), p.166, we find: 'Sein (Jesu) Sterben wird hier... weniger als Vorbedingung seiner eigenen Verherrlichung angesehen, es ist vielmehr Bedingung für den Erfolg seines Heilswerkes.'

29. In *The Gospel According to John, i-xii* (AB, 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 472, R.E. Brown writes 'What is the peculiar feature of this parable is the insistence that only through death is the fruit born.'

30. Cf., e.g., W. Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannevangelium* (NTA, 21; Münster: Aschendorff, 2nd edn, 1970), p. 105: 'der καρπός in 12,24 (besteht) in den an Jesus Glaubenden.' It may be relevant to refer here to 4.34-38, as some, including W. Thüsing, do.

31. Cf. the main division in most commentaries on the Fourth Gospel.

32. Particularly vv. 1-3. Not until v. 4 does the real story get under way.

33. Among the more detailed studies is G. Richter, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannevangelium: Geschichte ihrer Deutung* (BU, 1; Regensburg: Pustet, 1967), esp. pp. 285-320.

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another for vv. 12-17—can be explained by reference to the history of the tradition, or whether we must assume that the two interpretations are genuine parts of one whole account. Whatever the case regarding the tradition, J. Beutler is surely right to regard the washing of the disciples' feet as one of the most important texts for an understanding of the death of Jesus in John's Gospel in the form in which we find it.³⁴ Scholarship in general accepts the episode as highly illuminating for the entire Gospel and not just for Jesus' death.

The washing of the disciples' feet is naturally a symbolic action, one of many in John, but *what* does it symbolize? The obvious answer is Jesus as servant, particularly in relation to his imminent death.³⁵ In the action of the humble servant—or rather slave, for this is a slave's task—Jesus gathers his entire mission into a single symbol, a mission that is now reaching its culmination with his death. Hence the story's position in the Gospel, and its elaborate introduction: it is just before his death and Resurrection, he loved his own to the last,³⁶ and the traitor Judas is present. The evangelist may use expressions such as exaltation and glorification about what happened at the last Passover, but Jesus' death also belongs here, indeed this is primarily what the washing of the disciples' feet focuses on.³⁷

We are given the first and most fundamental interpretation of his death in the section vv. 6-10 and particularly in Jesus' words in v. 8, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me'. Peter will be excluded from fellowship with Jesus if he rejects Jesus' servant mission. Clearly John places a soteriological interpretation upon Jesus' death, which opens up the fellowship referred to in the words about having 'part with

34. J. Beutler, 'Die Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium nach Joh 13,1-20', in K. Kertelge (ed.), *Der Tod Jesu: Deutungen im Neuen Testament* (QD, 74; Freiburg: Herder, 1976), pp. 188-204 (194). Cf. J. Zumstein, 'L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ', p. 2129. Zumstein points out how the washing 'atteste une réflexion autonome et originale sur la signification de la mort de Jésus dans la milieu joh'.

35. Cf., e.g., Matera, "On Behalf of Others", p. 171.

36. The prepositional phrase εἰς τέλος can also be translated as 'to the extreme', the meaning being that he loved them to such a degree that he would die for them. The one reading in no way excludes the other.

37. Cf. H. Kohler: 'Für Joh 13,1ff bedeutet dieses gehäufte Vorkommen, dass die Fusswaschungsgeschichte ganz in den Horizont des Todes Jesu gerückt wird' (*Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium*, p. 197).

me'. Being in the fellowship means sharing in the salvation, the new life.

In the second reading, vv. 12-17, the ethical consequences of his death are explained. To accept Jesus' love and service as consummated in his death, that is, sharing life by being in fellowship with him, implies a particular form of duty, the duty of serving one another. 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet' (v. 14). Life in the new fellowship depends on the love that led Jesus to his death and thus opened the fellowship to everyone who is willing to receive and live by his service.³⁸

In its interpretation of Jesus' death the washing of the disciples' feet is primarily an underlining and clarifying of the understanding that we found in the previous passages. It testifies even more than 12.24, and the context in which that verse stands, to the realization that it is the death of Jesus that enables humankind to share in a new life, and that this new life, nourished by Jesus' love, must unfold in the disciples' lives with each other.³⁹

d. *Jesus' Death on Behalf of Others*

Not least from the washing of the disciples' feet it is clear that Jesus' death is to be understood as being on behalf of others, a death by which others can benefit. This interpretation is also confirmed by a number of passages dealt with below containing the preposition *ὐπέρ*.⁴⁰

38. Also in the verses immediately following the parable of the grain of wheat in 12.24 we can trace the understanding of Jesus' death as having ethical consequences for those who belong to him.

39. Inspired partly by the fact that Jesus *washed* the disciples' feet, and partly by his exhortation to be *clean* (v. 10), and incorporating inter alia 1 Jn (and here not least 1 Jn 1.7), some scholars argue with varying force for the view that the water symbolizes Jesus' blood, by which he washes all sin away. See for example M.C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, pp. 289-91; Matera, "On Behalf of Others", p.172. See also B.H. Grigsby, 'The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel', *JSNT* 15 (1982), pp. 51-80 (62). The basis for this interpretation is unsure—particularly if 1 Jn is left out of the reckoning.

40. The preposition *ὐπέρ* can carry a number of nuances in meaning. Most important in this context are the meanings *instead of*, *for the benefit of*, *for the sake of*, *on behalf of*.

i. 6.51c. In v. 51c⁴¹ we read: 'This bread is my flesh (ἡ σὰρξ μου), which I will give for the life of the world (ὕπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς)'. In v. 33 there is a related statement: 'For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' This verse (v. 33) can be interpreted in the light of John's theology of revelation. Jesus' coming down from heaven as the bread of God to reveal who God is presents the world with the possibility of the true life. Cf. v. 51ab.

In relation to v. 33 we find in v. 51c that in plain terms it is Jesus' flesh,⁴² that is, his body and blood, which is called bread, and this bread he will give for the life of the world, meeting death-so that the world may gain life.⁴³ This must be the proper understanding whether or not we follow, for example, H. Schürmann in 6.51c and see only a reference to Jesus' death on the cross,⁴⁴ or agree with most interpreters that there is a sacramental understanding already in this passage and not first in the following one. For the flesh he gives—as the Gospel readers would undoubtedly know among other things from the Eucharist traditions—is what he gave in death.⁴⁵

The basic understanding is again that Jesus' death is for the life of humankind. However, it seems less sure that there is a basis for further defining Jesus' death by saying that in John's Gospel it is Jesus' death

41. R. Bultmann's and others' view that 6.51c-58 is an addition with a supplementary and correcting view no longer has much support. Those who do regard the passage as an addition usually take it therefore as a 'Johannine' addition. In *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, p. 236, de Boer writes, 'In Jn IV, however, John 6.51c-58 is being redeployed to meet a new situation, the problem of those who have left the community (Jn 6.66; 1 Jn 2.19) because they cannot accept that the death of Jesus remains at all relevant to their faith or to their identities as believers.' De Boer is referring to the community's third crisis. The arguments for and against this passage as a later addition are summarized by Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, II, pp. 85-89.

42. Cf. σὰρξ in 1.14.

43. Remarking on vv. 52-53 M.J.J. Menken writes: "'To eat Jesus' flesh and to drink his blood" then means: to believe in him as the one who dies for the life of the world.' See M.J.J. Menken, 'John 6, 51c-58: Eucharist or Christology?', *Bib* 74 (1993), pp. 1-26 (16).

44. H. Schürmann, 'Joh 6, 51c—ein Schlüssel zur grossen johanneischen Brotrede', *BZ* 2 (1958), pp. 244-62.

45. Matera, "'On Behalf of Others'", p. 168, puts it thus: 'the eucharistic giving of Jesus' flesh mirrors the self-giving of Jesus upon the cross, a death intended for the life of the world'.

understood as a death of atonement which has that effect.⁴⁶ Any position we take up here will be partly decided by whether we can find other passages to support this one.

ii. 10.11-15. In 10.1-5 we find one of the Gospel's very rare parables, which in its breadth is reminiscent of the synoptic parables. The evangelist uses the term *πορομῖα* about it. In immediate continuation of the image comes the interpretation, which is unusual in selecting, so to speak, a couple of elements that then become the objects of a christological interpretation. First in vv. 7-10 it is the door. Then in vv. 11-15 the shepherd, and in the passage *ὑπέρ* is used twice, in v. 11 and v. 15.

In v. 11 we read: 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' The expression *τιθέναι ψυχὴν ὑπέρ τινος*⁴⁷ is—with regard to 10.11, 15—occasionally translated by 'set his life at risk for someone', that is, 'risking his life for someone'. But the prevailing choice of 'lays down his life' is undoubtedly to be preferred. Other passages where the phrase appears speak for this reading, including v. 17 and v. 18 in the following text. It thus becomes clear that the introductory parable is split by the reality it testifies to. For it is not the parable of vv. 1-5 but the awareness that Jesus on the cross laid down his life for humankind which determines the central statement that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.⁴⁸ That the shepherd can be called the good shepherd is primarily because his loving care for his sheep stretches so far as to laying down his life for

46. E.g., F. Hahn, in *Christologische Hoheitstitel: Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (FRLANT, 83; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd edn, 1966), p. 60, refers to v. 6.51c by the term 'Sühneaussage' and sees an influence from Isa. 53. Lindars, 'The Passion in the Fourth Gospel', p. 73, sees in 6.51c the 'language of sacrifice', and Knöppler defends the view, in *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, p. 202, that Jesus' death is a death of atonement by saying that it is precisely the world (*κόσμος*), i.e. humanity, lost in sin and death, which receives life through Jesus' death.

47. This is found only in Johannine literature, namely in 10.11, 15, 17-18; 15.13; and 1 Jn 3.16.

48. See for example B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), p. 361; and R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, II, pp. 370-72. The latter discusses the relevant history of religion material and underlines that in John's Gospel it is not the pastoral aspects of the shepherd parable but the soteriological ones that are crucial.

them. He confronts the powers of evil and secures their lives. Again the crucial significance of Jesus' death is underlined.⁴⁹

In vv. 14-15 we read: 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.' In addition to repeating the message of v. 11 we find here a characteristic of the reciprocal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. They know each other, meaning in John's usage, they love each other. They have stayed together in a loving fellowship.⁵⁰ The idea here must be that this fellowship has as its condition Jesus' death, the soteriological importance of which is also in this way made plain. Whatever the conclusion, this fellowship has Jesus' death as its precondition. In this way the passage testifies that the new life with Christ to which humankind is called is made possible by Jesus surrendering his own life.⁵¹

49. J. Blank, *Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus Verlag, 1964), p. 116, believes that the idea of Jesus' vicarious and expiatory death is present in the saying about the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The metaphor cannot, however, justify the reading that the death is vicarious in the sense that Jesus takes the guilt of others upon himself.

50. Regarding John's use of the verb γινώσκειν see my article: 'Die Definition des ewigen Lebens in Joh 17, 3', in P. Bilde, H. Kjær Nielsen and J. Podemann Sørensen (eds.) *Apocryphon Severini* (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), pp. 106-20.

51. F. Hahn, 'Die Hirtenrede in Joh. 10', in C. Andresen and G. Klein (eds.), *Theologia crucis—signum crucis: Festschrift für E. Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1979), pp. 185-200, concludes by strongly underlining the importance of this text as a witness to John's understanding of Jesus' death. He writes: 'Nirgendwo sonst im 4. Evangelium ist die Kreuzesthematik so nachdrücklich herausgearbeitet wie in dieser Rede. Bei der Gesamtinterpretation des Evangeliums und der Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Niedrigkeits- und Hoheitschristologie wird man gerade einen solchen Textabschnitt nicht übersehen dürfen. Hier kommt besonders klar zum Ausdruck, dass es eine Heilswirklichkeit allein durch das Sterben Jesu gibt und dass eine Partizipation der "Seinen" an der Einheit des Sohnes mit dem Vater nur möglich ist in der Zugehörigkeit zum Gekreuzigten, der die ἐξουσία erhalten hatte, sein Leben hinzugeben und es wieder zu nehmen' (pp. 199-200). To what extent the text is quite so prominent as Hahn suggests remains open. In any event he is right to say that it contains a significant testimony to the Gospel's understanding of Jesus' death. In contrast U.B. Müller says of 10.11, 15: Here 'liegt nur vorgeprägte Rede vor, die noch nicht das Eigentliche johanneischer Theologie umgreift', and by way of argument he refers to vv. 17-18 as a demonstration of obedience to the Father that justifies Jesus

iii. 11.49-52. We now return to the expression 'to die for the people' (*ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ*), which appears twice in 11.49-52. For the high priest Caiaphas the belief that 'it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish' is reason enough to kill Jesus, for his death will be able to spare the people from being the object of a punitive Roman force. In this sense Jesus would only die for the people. His death would to all intents and purposes be a vicarious one.⁵² It is the evangelist who underlines that without apparently being aware of it Caiaphas has spoken prophetically in these words, giving expression to a deep truth about Jesus. For his death was to be understood precisely as a vicarious one in a far deeper sense than Caiaphas could ever imagine.

Verses 11.49-52 raise many aspects regarding John's understanding of Jesus' death. One has already been mentioned, the vicarious aspect, though it is difficult to gauge the weight of this idea in the evangelist's further interpretation of Caiaphas's statement.⁵³ We can certainly say that in the evangelist's mind Jesus' death is for the benefit of the people. And the further definition that his death is 'not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (v. 52), might suggest that the fundamental idea is one we have previously encountered, namely that by his death Jesus opens up a completely new fellowship (cf. also 12.32).⁵⁴ A further aspect is the universal one, found in 10.16 and in the pericope concerning the meeting with the Greeks in 12.20-24, and again here in 11.52, where it is made clear that Jesus' death has as its aim to gather God's scattered children into one.⁵⁵ John's understanding of Jesus' death in 11.49-52

giving his life ('Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium', pp. 63-64). It seems somewhat arbitrary, however, to take 10.11, 15 out of the argument in an interpretation of John's Gospel.

52. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 440, remarks that *ὑπὲρ*, which often means 'for, on behalf of' in John, is employed here in the sense, 'in place of'.

53. J.T. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, p. 82, notes: 'In any event the phrase *ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ* of itself does not tell us how Jesus' death benefited the people of God.'

54. On the *ὑπὲρ* usage in ch. 11 J. Beutler remarks: 'im Sinne des Evangelisten dürfte von der Abendmahlstradition und der christlichen Deutung von Is 53 her der Sühnegedanke wenigstens mitspielen.' See Beutler, 'Die Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium nach Joh 13,1-20', p. 190. Characteristically, Beutler presumes that other traditions must call forth this *ὑπὲρ* usage.

55. Cf., e.g., Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, pp. 100-101.

also contains the previously mentioned aspect that it is an expression of God's will. When Caiaphas prophesies without realizing it, it is of course the evangelist's understanding that God is speaking through him, interpreting Jesus' coming death as being for the people and God's scattered children. Thus it is not without justification that as in T. Knöpler's reading of the verb ἔμελλεν before ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἔθνους we hear 'das göttliche Muss' (the divine 'must').⁵⁶

iv. 15.13. 'Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' are the words of the final ὑπὲρ-usage under discussion. According to H. Thyen this verse is quite simply the key to the understanding of Jesus' mission and death,⁵⁷ its theme being the central motif and structural principle for the Johannine passion narrative and Christology.⁵⁸

15.13 is indeed central to John's understanding of the death of Jesus,⁵⁹ since it is among the most powerful expressions of the love that makes Jesus go to his death. For it is in that death that love reveals itself, opening up for the new fellowship and giving it content. Not least through his death does Jesus' love attain its goal.

When we turn to the context for 15.13, we find it introduced in 13.1 with the words: 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he now

56. Knöpler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, p. 206. In this context the ὑπὲρ usage in 17.19 could also be included: 'I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.' There can hardly be any doubt that the thought here is that it is in his coming death that Jesus sanctifies himself for his disciples. The soteriological perspective finds expression in Jesus sanctifying himself so that his disciples can be sanctified in fellowship with him. Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium. III. Kommentar zu Kap. 13-21* (HTKNT 4/3; Freiburg: Herder, 1975), pp. 212-13; Knöpler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, pp. 210-15.

57. See H. Thyen, '“Niemand hat grössere Liebe als die, dass er sein Leben für seine Freunde hingibt” (Joh 15,13): Das johanneische Verständnis des Kreuzestodes Jesu', in Andresen and Klein (eds.), *Theologia crucis—signum crucis*, pp. 467-81. H. Thyen refutes among others both M. Dibelius, who regards 15.13 as 'Fremdkörper' (p. 467), and E. Käsemann, who uses the expression, 'überkommenes urchristliches Traditionsrudiment' (p. 468).

58. Thyen, 'Das johanneische Verständnis', p. 476. Even though the verse is part of an ethical teaching and indicates the norm for a disciple's way of living, it is a fully valid christological formulation. Cf. v. 9.

59. It would also be wrong to understand the statement as meaning death alone serves as a sign of the degree of love.

showed them the full extent of his love (εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς) and concluded in 19.30 with 'It is finished (τετέλεσται)'. The former interprets Jesus' imminent death, whose soteriological significance the subsequent washing of the disciples' feet unmistakably testifies to as an expression of his love, while in the latter we realize through his death on the cross that Jesus completes the mission his Father has given him (cf. 17.4). Commenting succinctly on 19.30 J. Jervell says that Jesus' suffering and death are an integrated part of his life's work and also the culmination of it.⁶⁰

e. *The Son of Man's Exaltation—3.14-15*

The Son of man's lifting up, which in 3.14 in a καθὼς...οὕτως statement is compared with Moses' lifting up of the serpent of brass (cf. Num. 21.8-9), has a soteriological meaning according to the evangelist, inasmuch as the effect of believing in the exalted Son of man is compared to the effect of seeing the serpent of brass.⁶¹ That this is the case is apparent not only from the ἵνα sentence in 3.15, but also from the fact that 3.14 introduces the answer to the question raised in 3.9 as to how seeing God's kingdom by being born again (v. 3) can come about. The answer is that for all who believe, salvation, eternal life, has become possible through the exaltation of the Son of man. The question then is whether this answer throws light on the meaning of Jesus' death. In other words, what is being alluded to through this exaltation being stated as the condition of salvation?

The answer is not immediately apparent through reference to Num. 21.8-9.⁶² A number of scholars find it crucial that the allusion is to exaltation rather than suffering as in the synoptic Gospels.

Das Heilsinteresse hängt anscheinend nicht am Leiden und damit am Kreuz Jesu, sondern an seiner Erhöhung,

60. J. Jervell, *Større kærlighed har ingen: Om Johannesevangeliets Jesusbillede* (Copenhagen: Unitas Forlag, 1995), pp. 40-44. Cf., e.g., Obermann, *Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannesevangelium*, pp. 395-96; M. Hengel, 'The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel', *HBT* 12 (1990), pp. 19-41 (33); Zumstein, 'L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ', p. 2132.

61. It must be the effect of the two exaltations that are the determinants, even though formally the simile is applied to the exaltations themselves.

62. Interpretation of these verses in the earliest Judaism and among the church fathers is characterized by wide variations.

Apparently the concern for salvation does not refer to the sufferings and thus to the cross of Jesus but to his exaltation.

says U.B. Müller.⁶³ It is the exaltation that is the point of similarity between Num. 21.8-9 and Jn 3.14:

Das Kreuz ist damit in Joh 3,14 noch nicht heilskonstitutiver Inhalt der Erhöhung Jesu.⁶⁴

Thus in 3.14 the cross does not yet constitute the salvation-giving exaltation of Jesus.

But one must ask whether the placing of a snake on a stick does not lead our thoughts back to Jesus' crucifixion rather than to his exaltation to the Father.⁶⁵ Further evidence is that the meaning of exaltation (ὕψω-θῆναι) in 8.28 and 12.32-34 argues for the view that the allusion is to the death on the cross. In 8.28 it appears from the fact that it is the Jews who are the subject of Jesus' exaltation, and in 12.33 we are plainly told that 'exaltation' refers to how Jesus would die, namely on the cross. With its message that God gave (ἔδωκεν) his only Son, 3.16 also speaks for this reading.⁶⁶ The particular terminology of John's Gospel,

63. Müller, 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium', p. 56.

64. Müller, 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium', p. 57. Cf. J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1-10* (ÖTK, 4/1; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1991), p. 144, who sees the death alone as 'Durchgangsstadium'.

65. As Lindars believes, in 'The Passion in the Fourth Gospel', pp. 77-78. According to M.C. de Boer in *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, p.171, it is in John III that the weight comes to rest on the crucifixion.

66. As an argument for 3.14 referring in large measure to Jesus' death J. Frey points out that the scriptural quotations in John serve most often to underline the fulfilment of the scripture 'im Kontext der Passion Jesu. Dem entspricht es, dass das erste johanneische Schriftzitat überhaupt, Joh 2,17, auf Jesu bevorstehenden Tod verweist und dann auch das erste "Wort vom Kreuz" im Munde Jesu selbst in Joh 3,14 mit einer Reminiszenz an eine Begebenheit der Mosezeit, d.h. einem Rückbezug auf die Schrift, verbunden wird.' See J. Frey, 'Wie Mose die Schlange in der Wüste erhöht hat...': Zur frühjüdischen Deutung der "ehernen Schlange" und ihrer christologischen Rezeption in Johannes 3,14f.', in M. Hengel and H. Löhr (eds.), *Schriftauslegung im antiken Judentum und im Urchristentum* (WUNT, 73; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994), pp. 153-205 (200).

which 3.14 also testifies to, undoubtedly reflects the paradoxical connection between the death on the cross and the exaltation and glorification. They are in a certain sense part of one coherent movement.⁶⁷ But there is no reasonable doubt that 3.14-15 refers to Jesus' death on the cross. It is first and foremost there that we are to find the soteriological meaning mentioned at the beginning.⁶⁸

It is possible that by reference to the tradition surrounding the serpent of brass we can claim that Jn 3.14-15 reveals a link between humankind's sin and the Son of man's exaltation so that Jesus' death is to be understood as a death for the sin of humankind, but if so the evangelist has not made it unequivocally clear. On the other hand there are good grounds for stating that 3.16 confirms the previously mentioned understanding that it is love which is the real reason why Jesus gave his life for humankind.⁶⁹

f. *Jesus as the Lamb of God/Paschal Lamb*

Central to John the Baptist's witness to Jesus is his designation of him as the Lamb of God (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) in 1.29 and 1.36. It is not immediately clear, however, what the term means precisely, for a number of lambs spring to mind.⁷⁰ M.D. Hooker may well be right in thinking that had he been asked directly the evangelist would have found it difficult to say which particular lamb he was referring to.⁷¹ The truth is probably that within the Baptist's term, Lamb of God, various ideas are

67. It is possible that Isa. 52.13, where we are told that the suffering servant of the Lord shall be lifted up and exalted (LXX: ὑψωθῆναι καὶ δοξασθήσεται), may have furthered this understanding, as a number of critics think. Cf., e.g., Frey, who also puts forward other texts from Isaiah as possibly having significance for an understanding of John's Gospel as well as of Num. 21.8-9 ("Wie Mose die Schlange in der Wüste erhöht hat...", pp. 188-91).

68. A similar interpretation is to be found in R. Kieffer, *Johannesevangeliet 1-10* (KNT, 4A; Uppsala: EFS-förlaget, 1987), pp. 78-79 and 87; Blank, *Krisis*, pp. 80-85; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 145-46; Kohler, *Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium*, pp. 251-55; Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, pp. 154-60; J. Frey, "Wie Mose die Schlange in der Wüste erhöht hat...", esp. pp. 182-203.

69. The fact that it is κόσμος which serves as the object of love must be taken to mean that the thought is universal.

70. A list of the possibilities that serve to interpret the passage is to be found in W. Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Structure and Issues* (BET, 23; Bern: Peter Lang, 2nd edn, 1992), pp. 95-96.

71. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 98.

gathered. However, in the opinion of most scholars, myself included, ideas linked to the paschal lamb play a significant role, as the following demonstrates.

First of all comes the Gospel's dating of Jesus' death on the preparation day for the Passover, his death coinciding with the slaughtering of the paschal lamb.⁷² Among others J. Zumstein also sees an intended connection between 1.29 and 19.14 in the evangelist's composition.⁷³ A further argument is found in 19.34-36 with the information that the soldiers did not break Jesus' bones, followed by the underlining of this fulfilment of the scripture: 'Not one of his bones will be broken'. Here we clearly see the commandment of Exod. 12.46 and Num. 9.12 regarding the paschal lamb.⁷⁴ Finally, as a recent article by S.E. Porter suggests, the paschal motif is prominent throughout John's Gospel.⁷⁵ This is clearly substantiated, even if one cannot see the motif quite so often as Porter.

What then does the fact that Jesus in all probability is regarded as a paschal lamb mean for the evangelist's understanding of Jesus' death? In the light of the Old Testament Exodus tradition we can begin by saying that in general it testifies to a soteriological understanding of Jesus' death.⁷⁶ In 1.29 we hear, however, that as the Lamb of God Jesus bears the sins of the world, and thus the Old Testament picture of the paschal lamb is superseded. Whether it can be explained by, for example, the

72. See 18.28 and 19.14, 31.

73. 'Le constat est clair: la narration construit grâce à la figure de l'agneau pascal une *courbe de tension* qui place l'ensemble de la narration sous le signe de la croix' (Zumstein, 'L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ', p. 2120). Cf. Kohler, *Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium*, p. 199.

74. See especially the thorough analyses in M.J.J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology, 15; Kampen: Kok, 1996), pp. 147-66; and Obermann, *Die christologische Erfüllung der Schrift im Johannesevangelium*, pp. 298-310. Also the passages on the suffering righteous in Ps. 34.21 may have influenced the formulation in Jn 19.36.

75. S.E. Porter, 'Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel? An Examination of the Old Testament Fulfilment Motif and the Passover Theme', in C.A. Evans and W.R. Stegner (eds.), *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup, 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 396-428.

76. With regard to the blood on the doorposts we can say that it had an apotropaic function and in this sense was seen as salvatory. This, however, is not the meaning that the evangelist identifies with.

Passover celebration in Jesus' day⁷⁷ (on the basis of the tradition of the Lord's suffering servant in Isa. 52.13–53.12),⁷⁸ or through an interpretation in the light of the Christian Eucharist tradition,⁷⁹ is not in itself a decisive point. More important is the fact that with his image of Jesus as the paschal lamb the evangelist testifies to the realization that Jesus' death has a soteriological meaning in that it removes the sins of the world. We seem justified in saying that we find here a notion of atonement—one that does not otherwise play a particularly prominent role in John's understanding of Jesus' death.⁸⁰

A number of scholars take the weight out of 1.29, 36 and indeed out of the idea in general that Jesus is the paschal lamb, not so much by attacking the above reading as by maintaining that we are dealing here with ideas that are atypical for the Gospel. As in other places in John's Gospel where Jesus' death has soteriological significance, so U.B. Müller finds in 1.29 'vorgeprägte Rede' (earlier formulated words),⁸¹ while E. Käsemann sees a distance from that view from the

77. See text references in Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, pp. 84–85. On the other side is de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, pp. 279–80.

78. It is a general view that the tradition concerning this servant has played a significant role for the understanding of Jesus' mission.

79. As C.K. Barrett says, 'The eucharist is a Paschal meal and in it the death of Christ for the remission of sins is portrayed' (See *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 2nd edn, 1996), p. 176.

80. This is also R. Schnackenburg's assessment, though he says of 1.29, 36: 'Sosehr die nähere Deutung auch umstritten ist, der Gedanke an den Sühne und Heil schaffenden Tod dieses so ausgewiesenen Messias lässt sich schwerlich eliminieren.' See R. Schnackenburg, 'Die Messiasfrage im Johannesevangelium', in J. Blinzler, O. Kuss and F. Mussner (eds.), *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze* (Festschrift J. Schmid; Regensburg: Pustet, 1963), pp. 240–64 (246). Cf. Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums*, pp. 67–101. He finds the atonement concept in 1.29, 36; 3.16; 6.51c and 19.14, 29, 33–36; and with reference to the link between atonement and vicarious death he mentions 10.11, 15; 11.50–52; 13.37–38; 15.13; 17.19 and 18.14 as passages where the idea of atonement can be traced (p. 99). M.C. de Boer has far greater reservations on the idea of atonement in John, see *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, p. 279–80, for example. He believes, however, that the idea is present in the fourth 'edition' of the Gospel. Cf. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives* (after the third crisis).

81. Müller, 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium', p. 63, *idem*, 'Zur Eigentümlichkeit des Johannesevangeliums', pp. 51–52. Cf., e.g., Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 97.

evangelist's side in the fact that it is John the Baptist who presents Jesus as the Lamb of God bearing the sins of the world.⁸² However, we cannot in that way just refer certain traditions to a category that can be kept to one side while we seek for the Gospel's meaning. The argument against Käsemann is that the Baptist is presented as such a powerful witness to Jesus. The inescapable conclusion is that also the traditions just discussed are of vital interest for an understanding of Jesus' death in John's Gospel. They serve primarily to underline the aspects that are known from other passages, the important one here being that Jesus is the Lamb of God who by his death takes the sins of the world upon himself.

Summary

Jesus himself chooses to meet his death, while simultaneously following his Father's will. His death is clearly understood as part of God's salvation plan. Death is also a fundamental part of this universal plan, being quite simply the essential condition for salvation. Jesus gives his life as the strongest expression of his love for humankind, and his death is depicted as being on behalf of others, a death for the benefit of others. Its salvatory significance lies in its offering access to a completely new life, a new fellowship—the fellowship of love that has always existed between the Father and the Son. This understanding contains certain ethical perspectives, for in the new fellowship love prevails.

Without doubt Jesus' death is understood as a crucial soteriological event. In what sense this is so in John's Gospel is harder to answer. The weight that can be placed on the passages that seem to reflect ideas of a vicarious and expiatory death are by and large dependent on the degree to which the Gospel is seen at all to be marked by cultic ideas. Although the views of others differ widely on that point, this study remains rather cautious.

Characteristic of the Johannine Jesus is the emphasis on his exaltation and glorification, a fact which is used as an argument against his death having any real meaning. A few comments are apposite here. While the perspective of all four evangelists is from the situation after

82. Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, p. 23.

Jesus' resurrection, this is particularly clear in John's Gospel.⁸³ Not only the farewell discourse but also a number of passages in the Gospel show that the evangelist (der nachösterliche Johannes) (the post-Easter John) is aware that his perspective is the new situation after Jesus' glorification and after he himself and his community have gained a share in the new life. This marks his Christology. From the beginning the earthly Jesus carries the stamp of the glorified. And it is also reflected in his depiction of Jesus' death as one of exaltation and glorification. Yet we cannot justifiably claim that the evangelist's particular perspective precludes a recognition of the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. On the contrary, it is the evangelist's understanding that Jesus' death has made it possible for himself and his community to share in the glorification and the new life. The crucial importance of Jesus' death can therefore not be left out of John's thinking. But with the clarification of his perspective the evangelist has given readers a significant hermeneutic direction as to how we should read his Gospel, including the passages concerning Jesus' death. Instead of speaking of *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis* as alternatives, if indeed we are to use these phrases at all, we would be better employed in linking them together in John's Gospel.⁸⁴

It is rightly pointed out that in John's Gospel Easter and Whitsun fall together. In similar fashion we can say that Good Friday and Easter Day fall together in John, and that this is reflected in the passages on Jesus' death. But there is nevertheless both a Good Friday and an Easter Day.

John's Gospel is not therefore satisfied just to tell us the course of events that led to Jesus' death. It also contains important testimony to the meaning of this death. In the deepest sense, however, the evangelist reveals just as little as the other New Testament authors about the mystery of the cross.

83. See not least C. Hoegen-Rohls, *Der nachösterliche Johannes: Die Abschiedsreden als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zum vierten Evangelium* (WUNT, 2/84; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996).

84. See for example U. Luz, 'Theologia crucis als Mitte der Theologie im Neuen Testament', *EvT* 34 (1974), pp. 116-41 (118); Jervell, *Større kærlighed har ingen*, pp. 41-47; Zumstein, 'L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ', p. 2136.