WHO SAYS THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD?
A HISTORICAL ARGUMENT TO IDENTIFY THE AMBIGUOUS SPEAKERS IN JOHN 3

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Stuart Benjamin Langley

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APPROVAL SHEET

WHO SAYS THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD?
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. General Abbreviations

ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ANF	Schaff's *Ante-Nicene Fathers*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BibSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BMSSEC	Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary Series
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSS	Cisterian Studies Series
CTQ	Concordia Theological Quarterly
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the New Testament
ExpTimes	The Expository Times
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentary
HTCNT	Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITQ	Irish Theological Quarterly
IVP	InterVarsity Press
IVPNTC	IVP New Testament Commentary Series
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JPC	John Phillips Commentary Series

JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NAC	New American Commentary Series
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NCC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NTS	New Testament Studies
PJBR	Pacific Journal of Baptist Research
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

B. Abbreviations for Pre-Modern Works

Adv. Felic.	Alcuin's *Against the Heresies of Felix*
Bapt.	Tertullian's *On Baptism*
C. Ar.	Athanasius' *Orations against the Arians*
C. Eun.	Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*
C. Felic.	Paulinus' *Against Felix*
C. Jul.	Augustine's *Against Julian*
C. Nestor.	Cassian's *Against Nestorius*
Cod. reg.	Benedict's *Codex Regularum Monasticarum et Canonicarum*
Cog. bapt.	Ildefonsus' *On the Knowledge of Baptism*

Cog. bapt. B.	Bede's *On the Knowledge of Baptism*
Comm. Apoc.	Victorinus *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*
Comm. Ev.	d'Étaples' *Commentary on the Four Gospels*
Comm. Hab.	Bede's *Commentary on the Prayer of Habakkuk*
Comm. Jo.	Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*
Comm. Jo. T	Theodore's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*
Comm. Prov.	Bede's *Commentary on Proverbs*
Comm. Ps.	Jerome's *Commentary on the Psalms*
Comm. Song	Philo of Carpasia's *Commentary on the Canticles*
Comm. Zech.	Didymus' *Commentary on Zechariah*
Conc. Ev.	Zacharias' *Harmony of the Gospels*
De Inc.	Alcuin's *On the Incarnation of Christ*
Di. verit.	Anselm's *Dialogue on Truth*
Divi Jo. Ev.	Musculus' *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*
Enchir.	Augustine's *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*
Enarrat. Apoc.	Haimo's Exposition on the Apocalypse of John
Enarrat. Ps.	Remigius of Auxerre's *Commentary on the Psalms*
Enarrat. Reg.	Angelomus' Exposition on Kings
Ep. Aeg. Lib.	Athanasius' *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*
Ep.	Augustine's *Letters*
Ep. Alb	Alcuin's *Letters*
Ep. Adriani	Charlemagne's *Letters*
Ep. decreta	Leo IX's *Letters and Dogma*
Ep. Hinc.	Prudentius' *Letter to Hincmar and Pardul*
Eran.	Theodoret's *Eranistes*
Exp. Ev.	Major's *Commentary on the Four Gospels*
Expl. Isa.	Theodoret's Commentary on Isaiah

Fide Sanct.	Alcuin's *On the Holy Faith*
Fr. Ps.	Hippolytus' *Fragments in Psalms*
Haer.	Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*
Haer. fab.	Theodoret's Compendium of Heretical Falsehoods
Hexaem.	Bede's *Hexaemeron*
Hom. 1 Cor.	Chrysostom's *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*
Hom. Act.	Chrysostom's *Homilies on Acts*
Hom. Eph.	Chrysostom's *Homilies on Ephesians*
Hom. Gal.	Chrysostom's *Homilies on Galatians*
Hom. Jo.	Chrysostom's *Homilies on John*
Hom. Ps.	Hilary's *Homily on Psalm 1*
Instit. laic.	Jonas' Institutes for Laypeople
Lucif.	Jerome's *Against the Luciferians*
Misc.	Haimo's *Miscellanies*
Ord. bapt.	Theodulf's *Book on the Order of Baptism*
Ord. creat.	Isidore's Book on the Order of Creation
Paed.	Clement's *The Instructor*
Paen.	Ambrose's *Concerning Repentance*
Pecc. merit.	Augustine's *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*
Praed. C. Scot.	Prudentius' Letter on Predestination
Praed. lib. arb.	Hincmar's On the Predestination of God and Free Will
Prax.	Tertullian's *Against Praxeas*
Pron.	Theodoret's *On Divine Providence*
Serm.	Augustine's *Sermons*
Serm. ascens.	Luther's *Sermon for the Day of Ascension*
Serm. Leo	Leo the Great's *Sermons*
Serm. Max.	Maximus' *Sermons*

Strom.	Clement's *Miscellanies*
Bapt.	Tertullian's *On Baptism*
Test.	Cyprian's *To Quirinius: Testimonies Against the Jews*
Tract. Bapt.	*A Treatise on Baptism*
Tract. Ev. Jo.	Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John*
Tract. jud. pot.	Richard's *Tractatus de judiciaria potestate in finali et universali judicio*
Trib. ep. liber.	Remigius' *Three Letters on Freedom*
Vita	Autpert's *Lives of Saints Paldo, Tuto, and Vaso*
WA	Weimarer Ausgabe Edition of Luther's Works

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PREFACE

This project has made me keenly aware of my indebtedness to those who have come before me. I am thankful for the centuries of Johannine scholars presented in the following pages who continued to teach me and nourish my soul long after their time. I am thankful to Matt Copeland, who first taught me how to read and interpret the Bible, as well as Ben Cornish, Wright Liliedahl, Rigoberto Herrera, and Gage Lambert, who have been sources of counsel and friendship. Dr. AJ Levine has had a lasting impact on my academic career, and I am particularly thankful for the ways that she helped me to become a better writer and scholar. I also appreciate the help of Dr. Alicia Myers, who served as my external reader, offered her expertise, and helped strengthen my dissertation.

The New Testament and World Religions departments at Southern Seminary have been instrumental in shaping not only this project, but also my understanding of faith and scholarship. Dr. Jonathan Pennington has helped me to navigate my academic pursuits while keeping my feet firmly planted within the gospel. I am a more well-rounded and whole scholar because of him.

I am also personally thankful for the family that has paved the road before me. My father, Captain Scott Langley, taught me the value of dedication, education, and service. My mom, Sally Langley, MD, encouraged my curiosity and creativity and taught me the importance of family. And my brother, Dr. Dennis Langley, quite literally came before me in pursuing higher education, and he is to me a great example of intellectual honesty.

My wife, Callie, has been an unrelenting source of encouragement, comfort,

and, when necessary, a kick in the pants to get my work finished. She has sacrificed years of her life to support me while I pursued my vocational calling. I am quite sure I never would have finished this project without her. And to my daughter, Felicity, you have been a source of immeasurable joy to my heart. I hope that this work is as much a testimony to your mother's perseverance as it is to mine.

Finally, I am thankful to God for the way he has changed me over the last decade. He has used Immanuel Nashville and Antioch Church, Vanderbilt Divinity and Southern Seminary, Chi Alpha, and my own family into order to draw me closer to himself. This project is, above all, a testament to the work Jesus has done in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> In this way God loved the world: he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).[1]

These words, from perhaps the most well-known verse in the Christian Bible, describe the act by which God demonstrates his love for the world: He gave his only Son.[2] The ubiquity with which people in the Christian West recognize this verse makes the uncertainty surrounding the basic interpretation of these words all the more astounding. The first question which finds little consensus among interpreters is also the most basic of questions: Who says? When the Gospel of John tells us that "God loves the world," who is speaking? A quick survey of various translations of the New Testament—and their use of quotation marks or red letters—reveals that there are two basic answers: either Jesus is still speaking with Nicodemus or the Evangelist has begun offering his own theological reflections on the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus which ended in the previous verses.[3] The second question is related and equally fundamental to the passage: How did God "give" his Son? Again, two main interpretations are offered: either God gave his Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world or God gave his Son to the earth as a human being in the incarnation. To put it simply, the primary focus of the passage is either on the crucifixion or on the

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[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] The popular interpretation that "God so loved the world" means that God loved the world in an extraordinary amount is inaccurate. Most scholars agree that the phrase conveys the quality, not quantity, of God's love.

[3] "The Evangelist" is the term I will use to identify the author of the Fourth Gospel. Debate surrounding the identity of the author(s) of the text are beyond the scope of this project.

incarnation.[4] The interpretation of John 3:17-21 also depends on the answer to these questions. When verse 18 describes belief in the Son, does it mean belief in Jesus' claims of divinity, or does it encourage belief that Jesus died on the cross for sin? When verse 17 says that God intends to save the world through his Son, is the world saved from something (i.e., saved from sin) or saved for something (i.e., relationship with the Father)?

The same issues related to the ambiguous speaker in John 3:16-21 apply to John 3:31-36, the interpretation of which depends on the identity of the speaker. John 3:31-36 follows a dialogue between John the Baptist and his disciples concerning the identity of the Christ. Does this conversation continue with a monologue from the Baptist until the end of chapter 3? Or, like the alternative interpretation of 3:16-21, does Evangelist insert his own theological reflections as a commentary on the previous dialogue? Still a third option is that Jesus himself picks up his monologue to Nicodemus in verses 31-36. The meaning of this final passage in John 3 also depends upon the identity of the speaker. Is the "one from above" the Son, or merely a representative of all Christians (v.3)? Is the "one of the Earth" John the Baptist, Nicodemus, or is it those who reject the testimony of the Evangelist?

The ambiguity of these passages has not gone unnoticed by modern commentaries. Indeed, almost every commentator acknowledges the difficulty and most offer their own thoughts on the matter. Some dedicate time to present various arguments and defend a specific interpretation as the most accurate. While discussion on the speaker of these passages is certainly not lacking, consensus regarding the identity of those speakers certainly is. Indeed, modern commentaries use quite similar methodologies and arrive at quite different interpretations. This lack of consensus results

[4] Most readers would agree that both crucifixion and incarnation are in the mind of the author. However, within the narrative of the story a single issue becomes the primary focus.

in what I call a "theological impasse." The historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation do not result in a definitive answer to the basic question at the heart of this research: Who says that God loves the world?

Thesis

In this dissertation, I will argue that the history of interpretation of the ambiguous passages in John 3 will reveal a consistent correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the passage which suggests that Jesus is speaking in *both* John 3:16-21 *and* 3:31-36. Throughout Christian history, authors who attribute the words of John 3 to Jesus and/or the Baptist interpret the passage to be focused on the identity of the Jesus as the Son of God, the work of Christ on earth, or simply on the teachings of Jesus. Conversely, those who attribute the words of John 3 to the Evangelist, particularly those who do so on 3:16-21, interpret the passage to be focused on the crucifixion of Christ as a sacrifice for sin. While a focus on the incarnation does not ignore the crucifixion—nor does a focus on the crucifixion ignore the incarnation—the citations of John 3 most often occur in texts which are focused on one or the other theological points.

By using the history of interpretation as my starting point, I can overcome the theological impasse and recover an interpretation for John 3 which identifies the speaker as Jesus while also unifying the theological focus of John 1—12. The purpose of John's "Book of Signs" is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Evangelist waits until chapter 12 to shift focus away from the *identity* of Jesus and toward his *crucifixion*. Indeed, it is not until 12:32 that the Evangelist connects the exaltation of Christ with his crucifixion. The idea that chapter 3 focuses primarily on the crucifixion disrupts the overall strategy of the Evangelist. Instead, my argument demonstrates that John 3 is part of the larger goal to demonstrate Jesus' identity as the Son of God and has the specific goal of describing why Jesus came to earth in the

incarnation.

Most commentaries arrive at the identification of the speaker in 3:31-36 through a comparison of the themes presented in 3:16-21. Thus, those that conclude that 3:16-21 is the theological reflection of the Evangelist also conclude that 3:31-36 is the Evangelist. A smaller group identifies the Baptist as the continuing voice for 3:31-36 and that the Baptist is testifying to the truth of Jesus' claims about himself. Significant issues arise, however, when these words are compared to the testimony of the Baptist found anywhere else in the New Testament. Identifying Jesus as the speaker eliminates both concerns: Jesus is speaking in both 3:16-21 *and* 3:31-36; therefore, it makes sense for those passages to reflect each other thematically.

By recovering a pre-modern reading of John 3 which identifies Jesus as speaking and focuses primarily on the incarnation, I suggest that modern readers can gain insight into John's understanding of the love of God displayed through Jesus. While modern readers tend to understand God's love displayed primarily through the crucifixion, my suggested reading balances out that focus and gives room for readers to incorporate the incarnation into their understanding of the love of God. John is describing that the very act of Jesus' incarnation is a grand display of God's love for humanity. Belief in the Son, then, is not *only* belief in his death and resurrection, but *also* belief in his identity as the Son of God who came as a gift from God in the incarnation.

Background

Beginning in the nineteenth century, scholars have identified Erasmus as the first to call into question the identity of the speaker in John 3.[5] Because modern scholars

[5] Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1885), 100; August Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1859), 122–23; Edwin Wilbur Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1893); William Milligan and William Fiddian Moulton, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 69; Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, trans. Thomas Brown and John Gill, vol. 3, Clark's Foreign Theological Library 16 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1849), 393–96.

have—erroneously—identified Erasmus as the first to identify the Evangelist as the speaker, most discussions on the history of interpretation of this passage do not include anyone prior to the Reformation. The one notable exception to this chronological focus is Jeremy Paulovkin's MA thesis, "The Patristic Reception of the Speakers in John 3," which discusses relevant texts written prior to 450 CE.[6] Paulovkin is interested in attributing specific verses to a speaker. Or, at the least, he only demonstrates confidence in the individual verses which are explicitly linked to a speaker. I, on the other hand, am operating under the assumption that an author who places the words of John 3:16, for instance, in Jesus' mouth will in that context understand all of 3:16-21 to be the words of Jesus. I do not carry this assumption for those who identify 3:13-15 as Jesus to carry that identification through to 3:21 because many authors both modern and ancient have identified v15 as the conclusion of the conversation with Nicodemus. A simple attribution of John 3:13-15 is not sufficient evidence to conclude anything about 3:16-21.

Another aspect of Paulovkin's work which I will not imitate in this project is his argument that the earliest interpreters of the text are more likely to have interpreted that text correctly. His work demonstrates that all authors of the Patristic era attribute the words of 3:16-21 to Jesus, and he uses this conclusion to argue that modern interpretations should conclude the same. I will diverge from both aspects of this argumentation. First, I will demonstrate in the following pages that not all authors of the Patristic era understood Jesus to be the speaker—although the vast majority of them did—and, second, I do not think the early interpretations deserve more weight than later ones. Rather, I will argue that it is the preponderance of evidence, not the earliness of it, that should weigh more heavily in the interpreter's decisions.

The current debate on the speakers of John 3 discuss the history of

[6] Jeremy S. Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception of the Speakers in John 3" (MA thesis, Florida International University, 2015).

interpretation only as a means to discuss the arguments made by other modern authors. These discussions center around the arguments formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the current views on the subject will be covered in detail at the end of part one, a brief overview will help establish the lay of the land in current Johannine scholarship. No real categories exist to distinguish the following arguments, so I have named them "Continued Speech Theory," "Reflection Theory," and Blended Theology Theory."

Continued Speech Theory

The first theory contends that the characters in John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36—Jesus or John the Baptist—continue to speak until the end of each scene. Modern scholars arrive at this conclusion through different methods which require further division of this theory. First, some scholars hold to the traditional interpretation common throughout Christian history and claim that the author would have indicated clearly if a change in speaker was intended. Second, some scholars contend that the stories in John 3 are displaced narratives from earlier source material. These interpreters offer rearrangements of the various verses of chapter 3 in order to produce what they consider to be the most comprehensible order of the texts.

Traditional theory. By traditional, I do not mean merely "conservative." Those that hold this view are not committed to a specific theological interpretation of John's Gospel. Instead, these scholars hold that the author of John was not a novice and, therefore, would not have spliced disparate passages together. Perhaps the earliest modern author who argues for this position is Frederic Louis Godet, who specifically contends against those who hold that the Evangelist picks up in verse 16 or verse 31. Godet presents their argument but rebuts by pointing to the use of "for" in verse 16 which does not, in itself, indicate the "passing from the teaching of Jesus to the commentary of the disciple" and he claims that "the author must have marked much more distinctly such

an important transition."[7] In the same way, Godet argues that verse 30's "he must increase and I must decrease" marks the transition from what precedes—the decrease of the Baptist—to what follows—the increase of the Christ.[8]

Other authors that hold to this theory include Elizabeth Harris, who contends that the Baptist continues to testify until the end of verse 36, Dorothy Lee, who says that Jesus, rather than the Baptist, speaks in verses31-36, and Paul Julian, who focuses on the Jewish law that "a testimony of two witnesses is valid and binding" to contend that the Baptist must be testifying concerning the Christ.[9] Although some claim that Jesus picks back up the speech in verses 31-36, these scholars do not argue for a rearrangement of the text or that this passage represents previous material that has been placed in different locations. Instead, John's stylistic choices allow for Jesus to continue his speech and conclude the themes found throughout chapter 3.

Rearrangement theory. Although Bultmann was not the first to argue for a rearrangement of the text in John 3, he is perhaps most well-known for doing so.[10] Bultmann contends, first, that the speech of verses 31-36 cannot be understood if it is attributed to the Baptist.[11] They only make sense if placed alongside the original speech

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[7] Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John with an Historical and Critical Introduction*, trans. Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 395.

[8] Godet, 410.

[9] Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, JSNT 95 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 38; Paul Julian, *Jesus and Nicodemus: A Literary and Narrative Exegesis of Jn. 2,23-3,36*, European University Studies 23 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 29.

[10] For other authors who rearrange the text of John 3, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1, HTCNT (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968); J. G. Gourbillon, "La Parabole du Serpent d'Airain et La 'Lacune' du Chapitre III de l'Evangile selon S. Jean," *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942): 213–26; Siegfried Mendner, "Nikodemus," *JBL* 77, no. 4 (December 1958): 293–323; John Bligh, "Four Studies in St John, 2: Nicodemus," *The Heythrop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1967): 40–51; G. H. C. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John*, MNTC (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933).

[11] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1971), 131–32.

of Jesus, likely after verse 21. Bultmann's rearrangement of John 3 is relatively simple: he moved 3:22-30 to follow after v36, and has Jesus' speech run from verse 11 to verse 36, excluding verses 22-30. Others, like Greville P. Lewis, make more drastic changes to the arrangement of the text. Lewis suggests that the reference to the cross in 3.14 is clearly out of place and fits much better in chapter 12. His suggested rearrangement runs thus: 12:1-19, 2:13-3:11, 12:20-32, 3:14-15, 12:34, 13:12-13, 13:16-21, 12:35-4.

While the Traditional view and the Rearrangement view both place the words in the mouths of the characters in John 3, the methods by which they arrive at those conclusions are quite different. These approaches highlight different arguments which will be detailed later. Namely, the focus on thematic connections between 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 (and, indeed, with chapter 12 as well), the question about whether these passages reflect the speech patterns of the characters portrayed elsewhere, and whether the focus of the passage is on the cross itself. The identification of the speaker impacts each of these interpretive decisions, reinforcing the importance of the current research.

Reflection Theory

On the other end of the interpretive spectrum comes the "Reflection Theory." According to this interpretation, the speeches of Jesus and the Baptist end—most often at verses 15,30—and are replaced with the theological reflections of the narrator. This interpretation is originally attributed to Erasmus by a variety of authors, and many of these authors claim that "most interpreters" subscribe to this interpretation.[12] Narratively, these reflections of the Evangelist expand and universalize the themes already presented in the characters' speeches. For example, John Pryor argues that "John adds two major segments to the chapter" in order to take "what has been essentially a challenge to a Jew

[12] Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 122–23; Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 100. Hovey cites Westcott and Milligan and Moulton.

and making it a challenge and appeal to all the world."[13] In other words, "in verses 1-15 the categories and concerns are Jewish" while "verse 16 to verse 21 the claims of Christ are now universalized."[14]

The idea that verses 16-21 and verses 31-36 are the universalizing reflections of the Evangelist is perhaps the most common current interpretation which ranges across the ideological spectrum. Conservative theologians like Leon Morris, Craig Blomberg, and Andreas Köstenberger all argue for the Reflection Theory,[15] as do representatives of the liberal Christianity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[16] Similar to the Rearrangement theory above, one primary argument in support of this interpretation is the thematic similarity between verses16-21, verses 31-36, the Prologue (1:1-18) and 12:20-50. Additionally, reference to Nicodemus drops out and, according to Morris, "the death on the cross appears to be spoken of as past" in verse 16.[17]

Blended Theology Theory

The final interpretative theory offers a middle ground between the two categories presented above. Scholars here argue that the words of Jesus and the Baptist are gradually replaced by the words of the Evangelist. In this theory, there is no need to identify a specific verse wherein the speaker shifts immediately. Borchert offers a clear example of this interpretation in his New American Commentary on John:

> These questions [of where Jesus or the Evangelist speaks] are brought to a focus in the third chapter of John with the movement from the conversation between Jesus

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[13] John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People. The Narrative & Themes of the Fourth Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 20.

[14] Pryor, 20.

[15] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 136–40; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 228; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 94.

[16] Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, 3:396; Marie-Joseph LaGrange, *Evangile Selon Saint Jean*, Etudes Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1927).

[17] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 228.

> and Nicodemus and the insertion of the plurals…. Very much as Bultmann, editors of the red-letter Bibles try to decide which words go back to Jesus and which words do not. But all the words are directed at fulfilling John's purpose of leading the reader to believe in Jesus and experience life.[18]

The governing idea behind this theory is that, ultimately, the identity of the speaker does not matter for the interpretation of the passage. Whether Jesus or the Evangelist is speaking, the theological focus of the passage is that of the Evangelist who recorded and ordered the words. In this sense, the words are a "blending of both Jesus' and the narrator's voice" which allows "the reader to better understand the content of Jesus' words."[19]

These scholars identify grammatical and thematic aspects of the passages which indicate the reflections, but what separates this theory from the Reflections theory is the continued claim that the words of Jesus are indeed the words of the Evangelist. Stated another way, there is no way to distinguish between the words of Jesus and those of the Evangelist because the words of Jesus are those of the post-ascension, glorified Lord. As the risen Lord, the reflections of Jesus are the reflections of the Evangelist. As James Plastaras describes it, "the discourse represents not only the historical words of Jesus from the public ministry but also the collective witness of the apostolic preaching."[20]

Method

The necessity of this research arises from the theological impasse in current biblical scholarship. Contemporary biblical criticism has resulted in such a variety of answers concerning the identity of the speakers in John 3 that it appears to have reached

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[18] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, vol. 25A, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), 166.

[19] Jacob Bryan Born, "Literary Features in the Gospel of John: An Analysis of John 3:1-21," *Direction* 17, no. 2 (1988): 11–13.

[20] James C. Plastaras, *The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology*, Contemporary Theology Series (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1972), 87.

the limits of its efficacy. To be clear, biblical criticism—in all its various forms—is a powerful methodological tool capable of answering myriad questions regarding the New Testament. However, for the particular question of who is speaking in John 3, another approach is necessary.

It should come as no surprise, given the material discussed above, that I am employing the history of interpretation as an alternative methodology to offer a direct answer to the current question. My choice to use this method will raise several concerns which I will attempt to address by discussing two overarching questions. First, is the methodology employed rightly called Reception History or History of Interpretation, and what does that method entail? Second, does the History of Interpretation belong in New Testament studies proper, if the focus of the investigation is historical figures rather than the biblical text?

Reception History or History of Interpretation?

Wirkungsgeschichte—Gadamer's original idea, used as the umbrella term for the sub-field—is broadly used across biblical studies.[21] As Michael Sandford describes, there has been a "substantial increase in both monographs and edited volumes on the reception of the Bible in the arts and popular culture, and the use of biblical texts in contemporary political contexts" in recent years.[22] The reception of the Bible in the arts, particularly as allusions in pop music and film, falls into the broad category of Reception History, which examines the influence of a biblical text on various cultures over time. However, this approach is too broad for my present purposes and does not address the specific needs of this research. History of Interpretation is a narrower subfield which

[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method CITATION NEEDED.

[22] Michael Sandford, "On the Past and Future of New Testament Studies: A Response to Larry Hurtado," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 4, no. 2 (2014): 234.

focuses not on the influence of a biblical text in culture, but the active attempts to interpret a passage over time. Both fields are concerned with the times in history in which a biblical text pops up, but the History of Interpretation is specifically interested in those times where someone—most commonly a writer—intentionally attempts to interpret the passage. For this reason, the History of Interpretation is the most accurate description of the method used in this research.

Does History of Interpretation Belong to New Testament Studies?

Some might ask, "what does the History of Interpretation have to do with New Testament Studies?"[23] The relevance of historical interpreters of a biblical text is particularly contested within Protestant circles, largely construed, due to the commitment to the Reformation ideal of *ad fontes*. Steve Walton describes how "classic protestant Christian biblical interpretation… follows the Renaissance principle of *ad fontes*—back to the sources."[24] Walton attributes *ad fontes* and the desire to revive the study of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible as a key driver for the Reformation. He goes on the describe the "potential danger in Reception History" that it might obscure true New Testament studies or, specifically, the reading of the primary texts. While he concedes that it is a valuable exercise, he argues that "reading later interpreters of the New Testament . . . should be seen, instead, as a sub-section of cultural studies or historical theology."[25] Don Moffat describes how Biblical Studies itself had been experiencing growing pains, as it were, and that Reception History "added yet more pressure" to that growing strain."[26] Perhaps the most significant voice which has called

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[23] I am thankful to the New Testament department at Southern for challenging me to think critically about these issues.

[24] Steve Walton, "What Is Progress in New Testament Studies?," *ExpTimes* 124, no. 5 (2013): 215.

[25] Walton, 215.

[26] Don Moffat, "Reception History: Signaling Change in Biblical Studies," *PJBR* 13, no. 2

into question the validity of the History of Interpretation as an aspect of New Testament Studies is Larry Hurtado.

Hurtado became a central figure in the debate regarding Reception History in New Testament Studies after a 2011 blog post narrowly defined the field of Biblical Studies to require, in essence, historical-critical methods alone. While Hurtado did not reject Reception History in his post, James Crossley wrote a rebuttal in Relegere which argued that

> if we follow Hurtado's argument, there is potentially little scope (certainly within the time constraints of a PhD) for intellectual risk-taking and invention but plenty of scope for reinforcing consensus, more paraphrasing the Gospels, Acts, Paul, and Josephus (sometimes known as 'New Testament history'), and longer footnotes with more reference to French and German scholarship.[27]

William John Lyons continues this thread by arguing that Reception History would help in two significant ways. First, Reception History might assist in the "schism between historical criticism and postmodern interpretation." Second, Lyons argues that Reception History might offer hope for "the viability of New Testament studies itself."[28]

In response, Hurtado defined more clearly his view of the place of Reception History within New Testament studies. Hurtado affirms that "it is perfectly appropriate for biblical scholars to study the history of the reception of the biblical writings," and offered several examples of his vision for Reception History in New Testament studies.[29] First, he agrees that the New Testament writings themselves are the early church's reception of the Old Testament and, second, he describes the study of the "formative

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(2018): 44.

[27] James G. Crossley, "An Immodest Proposal for Biblical Studies," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2, no. 1 (2012): 159.

[28] William John Lyons, "Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History," *JSNT* 33, no. 2 (2010): 208.

[29] Larry Hurtado, "On Diversity, Competence and Coherence in New Testament Studies: A Modest Response to James Crossley's 'Immodest Proposal,'" *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2, no. 2 (2012): 361–62.

centuries" of the Church, including "the composition, distribution, use, influence, and emerging canonization of the New Testament writings."[30] Finally, Hurtado agrees with Lyons that modern biblical studies is itself a form of Reception History because it examines and discusses other modern biblical scholars who have come before. Hurtado maintains his stance on the necessity of historical-critical training and expertise in the ancient languages. He desires that scholars with competency in the languages and critical methodology would be able "to consider the reception of New Testament writings in light of how they were read and used in the early settings in which they originated and were first used, giving a distinctive perspective on the matter."[31] While my argumentation is slightly different than what Hurtado suggests, this project does indeed attempt to understand how John 3 was interpreted throughout history and then offer "a distinctive perspective on the matter."

Procedure Moving Forward

I am indebted to several secondary sources which helped in my efforts to gather and catalogue the texts discussed in the following pages. First, Paulovkin's MA Thesis, discussed above, was instrumental for the framework of my own research even if I diverge from his work after chapter 2.[32] Second, the collections of works in ANF, NPNF, PG, and PL were key to my investigation of John 3. In the areas where I have attempted to be exhaustive in my research, I was only able to do so based on these collections. Finally, contemporary collections such as Sean Kealy's *John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation* and the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture and Reformation Commentary on Scripture volumes on John helped ensure that I was not

[30] Hurtado, 361–62.

[31] Hurtado, 362.

[32] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception."

missing crucial exegetes who have identified a speaker in John 3.[33]

This dissertation proceeds chronologically and examines interpretations of John 3, but I do not claim that the "early settings in which they originated and were first used" are necessarily the "correct" interpretation merely because of their chronological closeness to the writing of John's Gospel. I do not find this argument convincing. Rather, the History of Interpretation will serve as a springboard from which to dive into a theologically unifying interpretation of John 3.

The following chapters are largely divided into two parts. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 make up part one and lay out the history of interpretation of the ambiguous speakers in John 3. Part two consists of chapters 6 and 7 and offer a fresh interpretation of those ambiguous speakers which both addresses the concerns of modern biblical criticism and unifies the theological purposes of John's author. Each chapter will be briefly outlined here to offer a "road-map" for the rest of this project.

Chapter 2 examines the earliest extant texts which explicitly identify a speaker in John 3. Beginning with Origen in the second century and ending in the sixth century, this chapter demonstrates the foundational relationship between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the author who made that identification. Throughout these centuries, authors commonly identify the characters in the story as the continuing speakers. The dissenting identification—that the Evangelist is inserting his own theological commentary—appears much less frequently. The one constant throughout this period is the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the author. Specifically, every author who identifies the Evangelist as speaking in either or both passages does so while focusing explicitly on the crucifixion of Jesus.

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[33] Sean P. Kealy, *John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1, Mellen Biblical Press Series 60A (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 2002); Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1-10*, ACCS 4A (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006); Craig S. Farmer, ed., *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IV, John 1-12* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

Conversely, the authors who identify Jesus or the Baptist as the speaker focus on Jesus' ministry, teaching, and character. Broadly speaking, these latter authors are focusing on the incarnation rather than the crucifixion.

Chapter 3 follows the same principles laid out in its predecessor and examines texts from the seventh century through to the end of the twelfth century. The number of extant texts drop off near the end of this period, but the textual evidence is enough to trace the continuation of both themes identified in the previous chapter: the tendency to identify the characters in the story as speaking and the correlation between speaker and theology. This chapter benefits from the developed theological focus of medieval Christianity which reveals the importance of correctly identifying the speaker in John 3. The words, "God gave his only Son," take on a different meaning for authors who believe that the passage is concerned with the crucifixion. God's "gift" is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. However, for those who identify Jesus as continuing to speak, the "gift" of God is the very presence of Jesus. The revelation of the Christ as the exact representation of the Father is the gift which demonstrates God's love.

Chapter 4 dives into the tumultuous debates of the Reformation era and shows that, despite the various theological developments throughout this period, authors maintain the correlation between speaker and theology. What does develop in this period, however, is the enhanced focus on the Evangelist as the ultimate source of the words in John 3. The common interpretation begins to shift to focus on the Evangelist and, even in the cases in which the author identifies Jesus as the speaker, the emphasis is placed on the Evangelist as the one who crafts Jesus' words and inserts them in a specific way. Chapter 4 also discusses the early modern era which marks a significant shift in the trends established before. Several authors within a few years of each other correlate the words of John 3:16-21 to Jesus and use them to focus on the crucifixion. In the seventeenth century, then, the correlation between speaker and theology seems to disappear. The abrupt and stark shift in interpretations helps to underscore the

consistency with which authors had interpreted John 3 prior to the seventeenth century.

Chapter 5 concludes part one and shifts from a chronological exploration of interpretations toward a synthesis of ideas and fresh interpretation. To begin this shift, chapter 5 discusses the various arguments presented by modern interpreters of John 3. Using a variety of grammatical, theological, and narrative arguments, authors argue for a range of interpretations, some of which have been seen repeatedly in the two millennia prior. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the concerns of modern biblical criticism which I must address in subsequent chapters. Namely, the apparent thematic connection between 3:16-21 and 3:31-36, the disparate words of John the Baptist in the Synoptics when compared to John 3:31-36, and the use of words in 3:16-21 which are not seen elsewhere in Jesus' teachings.

Chapter 6 begins part two and places John 3 within the thematic context of John's Gospel as a whole and determines that the theological focus of John 3 must be on the incarnation of Christ. This chapter examines John's intended purpose and audience, his overall rhetorical strategy, and the focus of the Book of Signs. I conclude that the first twelve chapters of John intend to demonstrate that Jesus is the pre-existent Christ and to define what that means about his person. Because of this theological focus on the incarnation throughout the Book of Signs, I find it compelling that John 3 contributes to this theological focus and likewise discusses the incarnation.

Chapter 7 begins with the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus and argues that John 3 focuses on the incarnation which necessitates identifying Jesus as the speaker in *both* ambiguous passages. This fresh interpretation alleviates many tensions found in modern scholarship, unifies the theological focus of John 3, and reorients the audience's focus toward the love of God expressed in Jesus' incarnation. Chapter 7 also anticipates and addresses several challenges to my claim, not least of which is the connection between the serpent in the desert being "lifted up" (John 3:14) and Jesus being "lifted up" to the cross (John 12:33-34). The concluding chapter

recapitulates what has been argued and identifies the key outcome of my research: by recognizing Jesus as the speaker in John 3, the audience realizes that the great display of God's love toward the world is found in his sending the Son to earth as a perfect representative of himself.

PART 1

HISTORY

CHAPTER 2

PRE-MODERN INTERPRETATION: EARLY CHRISTIANITY

> The one who comes from above is above all. The one who comes from the earth is earthly, and speaks from an earthly perspective. The one who comes from heaven is above all (John 3:31).

I begin part one with several goals in mind. First, I will demonstrate the majority opinion regarding the disputed speakers in John 3 throughout the early Christian era.[1] Namely, the mainstream opinion is that Jesus is speaking through 3:16-21, and the Baptist is speaking through 3:31-36. Throughout the early period, there is mindful debate concerning the speaker of John 1:16-18—but not 3:16-21 or 3:31-36—and there are dissenting voices to the mainstream regarding Jesus and the Baptist.[2] As time progresses, the dissenting voices—which identify the Evangelist as commenting in one or both passages—become more common. An alternative, though not uncommon, opinion is that John 3:31-36 returns to the speech of Jesus from 3:16-21.[3]

In addition to identifying all relevant references to John 3 throughout the pre-modern era, this part's second goal is to demonstrate the connection between the christological focus of a given historical document and the speaker which that document

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[1] I define "Pre-Modern" as the scholarship written before the development of historical-critical methodology. "Early Christian" is similarly loose terminology to refer to the time between the writing of the NT and the end of the sixth century. Delineating between "early Christian" and "medieval" is difficult, and whether a text belongs to one group or the other does not impact the data obtained therein.

[2] While not the focus of this project, John 1:16-18 will be a helpful, tangential topic against which I will compare the arguments for or against the speakers in John 3. There is considerably more debate concerning the speaker in John 1:16-18, making it more difficult to identify a mainstream and dissenting opinion.

[3] Prior to the Reformation, half of the texts identify the Baptist as speaking in 3:31-36 and a third identify Jesus as speaking.

identifies as the voice in John 3.[4] I will not argue for causation one way or another—that the identification of one speaker results necessarily to a certain christological focus, or that a christological focus results in a certain identified speaker—but instead I will demonstrate the correlation between these two concepts.

In order to paint the picture of the history of interpretation of John 3 best, I will proceed chronologically from the earliest extant writings about John through to the latest pre-modern discussions on the texts. I will divide the discussion in part one loosely around the eras of "Patristics," "Medieval," and "Reformation." Accordingly, I will discuss all relevant texts of the same author as well as the theological implications therein within the same section. This method—as opposed to grouping the texts by the speaker identified or the theological implications—will best avoid repetitive information regarding the same author across multiple sections. Finally, I will attempt to be as exhaustive as possible. Therefore, authors not discussed in these chapters are those for which I found no relevant passages in their corpus of writing.[5]

I will loosely define the Patristic era in chapter 1 as the period ranging from the first interpreters of the Christian New Testament to the end of the sixth century. This period is marked by the foundational theological arguments which shape Christian thought to this day. Many of the texts examined in the following pages are set in the context of Christological debate and Christian formation.

The Second and Third Centuries

This examination begins as close as possible to the writing of the Gospel of

[4] My goal is not to argue that a specific historical author has a particular christological focus but, instead, that a particular work has a given emphasis. This distinction means that the same author might have different foci in different writings. Additionally, the same author might identify different speakers for the same passage in different theological writings. I will demonstrate this phenomenon and argue that it further corroborates my claim for the connection between the speaker and the christological focus of a given document.

[5] Table A1, found in the appendix, contains a list of all pre-modern texts used throughout this dissertation.

John, which has two implications. First, this closeness means that the least amount of extant material exists for these earliest centuries. The lack of extant material limits the scope of discussion, but it also ensures that all relevant texts can be included in the discussion. Second, because the earliest texts are closest to the writing of the Gospel of John, these texts share similar cultural and social contexts to the original Gospel texts. While the similarities in context do not conclusively mean that the oldest interpretations are the most accurate, they do offer insight into how the Gospel was original received in the second century.

Origen (c. 184-253)

Origen's contribution to the present study comes from his acknowledgement of the debate concerning the ambiguous speakers in John's Gospel. While his focus is on the contested verses in John 1—the debate surrounding John 1:16-18 increased the scope of this research too much to include a detailed discussion throughout—Origen does offer a helpful framework through which he connects the identity of the speaker to a specific christological argument. The framework Origen uses will serve as a helpful guide for the following discussion on the speakers in John 3.

In his *Commentary on John* book 6, Origen twice references the incorrect interpretation of John 1:16-18 made previously by Heracleon. Indeed, Origen's *Commentary* is the only extant source on Heracleon's comments, so for that reason alone his remarks are valuable. Origen quotes Heracleon directly and argues that the latter's interpretation is "not sound." Origen claims that

> Heracleon supposes the words, 'No one has seen God at any time, etc.,' to have been spoken, not by the Baptist, but by the disciple. But in this he is not sound. He himself allows the words, 'Of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace; for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' to have been spoken by the Baptist (*Comm. Jo.* 6.2).[6]

[6] Quoted from ANF 9:653.

And again:

> It may be said that John's earlier testimony to Christ is to be found in the words, 'He who comes after me exists before me, for He was before me,' and that the words, 'For of His fullness we all received, and grace for grace,' are in the mouth of John the disciple. Now, we must show this exposition to be a forced one, and one which does violence to the context; it is rather a strong proceeding to suppose the speech of the Baptist to be so suddenly and, as it were, inopportunely interrupted by that of the disciple, and it is quite apparent to anyone who can judge, in whatever small degree, of a context, that the speech goes on continuously after the words, 'This is He of whom I spoke, He that comes after me exists before me, for He was before me' (*Comm. Jo.* 6.3).[7]

Origen concludes this section by saying that, "We have also shown that the words belong to John the Baptist and form part of his testimony to the Son of God." It appears, then, that the point which Origen intends to demonstrate, which he spends two sections of book 6 defending, is that the Baptist is a prophet in the line of the HB prophets. When one refers to "the fathers and the prophets" who longed to see the things of Christ, Origen believes that this collection of testifiers includes the Baptist. If, as Heracleon and others argue, the words belong to the Evangelist, then the "grace upon grace" received might only apply to NT believers who come after the revelation of Jesus Christ. However, if, as Origen argues here, the words belong to the Baptist, then the "grace upon grace" received is received by all those prophets who came before. Indeed, Origen argues that "the prophets also received their gift from the fulness of Christ and received a second grace in place of that they had before" (6.2) against those who claim that "the Apostles [are] wiser than the fathers or the prophets" or who "invented a greater God for the later period" and "cancel the whole of the gift conferred by God on the fathers and the prophets" (6.3).

In an effort to refute the claim that the prophets of old only understood in part, were only blessed with partial insight, or only worshiped a lesser God, Origen argues at length that the words of John 1:16-18 belong to the Baptist and, therefore, apply to all

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[7] Quoted from ANF 9:657. Indeed, the name of this section of Origen's work is "Grace and Truth Came Through Jesus Christ. These Words Belong to the Baptist, Not the Evangelist. What the Baptist Testifies by Them." This title alone indicates the importance, to Origen, of the correct identification of the speaker.

believers both before and after the advent of Christ. Although it is unclear from Origen's quotations whether Heracleon himself made the argument of a different or greater God revealed in the NT, Origen interprets Heracleon's argument to result in the same conclusion. So, it becomes clear that, for Origen, the speaker of the text is important. It is important not only because the insertion of the words of the Evangelist would, in Origen's words, "do damage to the text," but also because the change of speaker carries with it some theological implications. The fundamental question which is addressed in these passages concerns the identity of Christ: does Jesus represent a new revelation from God, or does he represent the fulfillment of the former revelations? For Origen, the answer is undoubtedly the latter: Jesus himself, as the incarnate Son of God, represents the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises found in the HB, and confirms what the prophets of old testified.

One final note on the works of Origen: he elsewhere attributes the words of John 3:18 to Jesus himself (*Comm. Jo.* 10.28).[8] While he merely says that "the Lord says" 3:18, he elsewhere attributes a different passage to the Evangelist himself, which indicates that Origen had a rhetorical way to distinguish between the words of the Evangelist and the Lord.[9] This, coupled with the lengthy argument just prior concerning the speaker in 1:16-18, indicates that Origen did indeed understand 3:16-21 to belong to the mouth of Jesus.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130-202)

Irenaeus is said to have learned from Polycarp who, in turn, learned from the Evangelist John himself. It appears that Irenaeus was the first to attribute the Gospel of

[8] Quoted from ANF 9:776.

[9] Jeremy S. Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception of the Speakers in John 3" (MA thesis, Florida International University, 2015), 76–77. Paulovkin identifies passages in Origen's *Homily 11 on Ezekiel* and *Treatise on the Passover* which explicitly connect John 3:14 to Jesus. Paulovkin uses these references, coupled with the explicit connection of John 3:18 to Jesus, to conclude that Origen saw Jesus as the speaker of the entire passage.

John to John the Apostle, and that he first argued for a four-Gospel canon. Irenaeus' most famous work, however, is his five-book refutation of Gnosticism and Marcionism, *Against Heresies*.

The first extant reference to John 3 which identifies a speaker in the disputed passages comes from AH 5:

> And therefore, the Lord declared, 'He that believes in Me is not condemned,' that is, is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, He says, 'He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God;' that is, he separated himself from God of his own accord. 'For this is the condemnation, that light has come into this world, and men have loved darkness rather than light. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and comes not to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that he has wrought them in God' (AH 5.27.2).[10]

Irenaeus' quotation of John 3:18-21 and his interspersed commentary on the passage reveal several things about his understanding of the text. First, and most importantly for the purposes of this research, Irenaeus understands John 3:18-21 to be spoken by Jesus. Not only is this demonstrated by the "declaration" of the Lord, but also by the first-person references found within the quoted verses. While John describes that one should believe in "the Son," here Irenaeus describes Jesus saying that one should "believe in me." In both verse 18 and 19, reference to the Son is replaced with first person pronouns.

While it is true that this reference to John 3 comes in a chapter in which Irenaeus is discussing "the future judgement by Christ," the immediate context of the Johannine reference adds insight to the theological argument Irenaeus is making. Section 2 of chapter 27 is juxtaposing those who "continue in their love towards God" against those who "cast away by apostasy these aforementioned things." Irenaeus is discussing the eternal ramifications of belief or rejection of the Son, but his immediate reason for the discussion is to encourage believers to continue in their belief in the Son. He describes how "communion with God is life and light" and that those in the light "are united to God

[10] Quoted from ANF 1:934.

through faith." Irenaeus is, therefore, describing the eternal ramifications of a present decision, a decision expounded in the quotation of John 3:18-21. In this passage, Irenaeus (1) identifies Jesus as the continuing speaker in the text and (2) discusses the immediate benefits of belief in the Son.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215)

Clement, best known for his "trinity" of works—*Protrepticus, Paedagogus,* and *Stromata*—offers several relevant texts in the latter two works. *Paedagogus* (*The Instructor),* was written just prior to the turn of the century, and *Stromata* (*Miscellanies)* was written in the first decade of the third century.[11] Due to the speculative nature of the relevance of the *Stromata* for the present discussion, I will discuss that citation first and follow it up with a more detailed look at the reference found in *The Instructor.*

> And Abraham said, 'By no means. The Lord is He who judges the earth;' since he that believes not, is, according to the utterance of the Savior, 'condemned already' (*Strom*. 4.26).[12]

Clement refers to the one who believes not being condemned already, which appears to be a reference to John 3:18. However, the attribution of this text to Jesus himself is less than certain. The translation offered above suggests a clarity as to the "utterance of the Savior" which might not exist in Clement's writing. Other translations offer "the utterance of Salvation" as the rendering, which could imply a reference to the gospel of Jesus generally, rather than the words of Jesus specifically. In this way, the text could be interpreted as citing the words through which people are saved, i.e., the words of the Bible as a whole.

The Instructor offers a clearer reference to the speaker of John 3:36:

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[11] For a detailed discussion of the provenance of Clement's Trilogy, as well as the details of references to Clement's completed works, see William H. Oliver, "Documents Written by the Heads of the Catechetical School in Alexandria: From Mark to Clement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017), https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1766. Oliver argues that the Trilogy is "interconnected with one idea, that of the *Logos,* the Word, the Son of God."

[12] Quoted from ANF 2:727.

> Now the Lord Himself has most clearly revealed the equality of salvation, when He said: 'For this is the will of my Father, that every one that sees the Son, and believes in Him, should have everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day.' As far as possible in this world, which is what he means by the last day, and which is preserved till the time that it shall end, we believe that we are made perfect. Wherefore He says, 'the one who believes in the Son has everlasting life' (*Paed.* 1.6).[13]

Clement here refers to both John 6:40 and 3:36 and attributes both texts, it seems, to "the Lord Himself." John 6:40 is an unambiguous quotation of Jesus' words in the story, so the identity of the speaker must be Jesus and not a possible reference to the words of God generally speaking. Additionally, Clement's commentary following directly after the reference to 6:40 describes what "he means by the last day," referring to Jesus and using a masculine pronoun to refer to him. It is unlikely, then, that Clement uses the same pronoun in the following line to refer to someone other than Jesus.

In the context of Clement's argument following his reference to John 3:36, the topic is focused specifically on faith and the object of one's faith. Clement argues that believers, "in anticipation, grasped by faith that which is future" and that "after the resurrection we receive it as present" (*Paed. 1.6).* The faith of believers, then, is in the promise of eternal life which will be received upon death. This eternal life, according to Clement, is promised by Jesus himself in John 6:40 in that "all who believe on the Son has everlasting life." It appears that, in the context of Clement's argument, the believer is not to place faith in the testimony that Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead but, instead, to place their faith in the testimony of Jesus that all who believe in him will have eternal life. The cross is not the focus of this faith; the promises of Jesus are the focus.

Tertullian (c. 155-240)

Tertullian very much represents the mainstream interpretations for both John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36, at least as it relates to the identity of the ambiguous speakers. In both *Against Praxeas* and *On Baptism,* Tertullian identifies the most recently named

[13] Quoted from ANF 2:341.

character as the speaker in each passage. For the purposes of this discussion, only *Against Praxeas* will be discussed at length, but the other relevant passages will be discussed briefly.

> But he who 'prepares' does not himself 'perfect,' but procures for another to perfect. John himself professes that the celestial things are not his, but Christ's, by saying, 'He who is from the earth speaks concerning the earth; He who comes from the realms above is above all;' and again, by saying that he 'baptized in repentance only, but that one would shortly come who would baptize in the Spirit and fire' (*Bapt.* 10).[14]

In this passage, Tertullian appears to refer to both John 3:30-31 and Matthew 3:11 and attributes both to John the Baptist. The purpose of this passage for Tertullian is merely to describe the fundamental difference between the baptism of John and that of the coming Christ. Tertullian further defines the Christ by describing his supremacy even over the Baptist, but he is not discussion the incarnation specifically or the testimony of Jesus' divinity. It is for this reason—the lack of a christological focus—that the passage is not immediately helpful for my overarching argument. Instead, it is merely worth noting that Tertullian is here consistent in his identification of the speaker as the Baptist.[15]

The primary work relevant to the current discussion was written in reaction to Praxeas, a second/third-century Christian theologian who passionately defended the unity of the Godhead. For Tertullian, Praxeas missed the distinctions which separated the persons of the unified Trinity. Chapter 21 in Tertullian's *Against Praxeas* is—quite specifically—titled "In This and for Four Following Chapters It is Shown, by a Minute Analysis of St. John's Gospel, that the Father and Son are Constantly Spoken of as Distinct Persons." Tertullian's focus is on the identity and characteristics of the second person of the Trinity: Jesus Christ:

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[14] Quoted from ANF 3:1486.

[15] Tertullian quotes John 3:35 in *Prax.* 16 but does not attribute it to a specific speaker and, therefore, does not warrant inclusion in this discussion. See ANF 3:1352. He also quotes John 3:31 and connects the verse to the Baptist in *On Prayer*. See ANF 3:1502-3. The passage discusses the differences between the forerunner and the Christ and, therefore, agrees with the correlation already identified.

> When [Jesus] entered the temple, He called it 'His Father's house,' *speaking* as the Son. In His address to Nicodemus He says: 'So God loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And again: 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world trough Him might be saved. He that believes on Him is not condemned; but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God' (*Prax*. 21).[16]

Tertullian references John 3:16-18 and, although he does not change the pronouns to refer to Jesus in the first person, Tertullian clearly identifies Jesus as the speaker in both John 2:16 and 3:16-18. As with previous authors, the focus here is on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. While the point is to separate the functions of the Godhead contrary to Praxeas' emphasis on the unity of the Godhead, the identity of the Son of God is still the christological focus of the passage. The crucifixion is again not discussed in the passage in which John 3:16-21 is attributed to Jesus.

In the same chapter of *Against Praxeas,* Tertullian identifies the Baptist as the speaker at the end of John 3:

> Moreover, when John [The Baptist] is asked what he happened *to know* of Jesus, he said: 'The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' (*Prax*. 21).[17]

Although the passage merely says "John" and does not identify which John is in mind, the clear referent is the Baptist. It is the Baptist who is "asked what he happened to know of Jesus" and who responds by describing the differences between himself and the Christ. It seems clear, then, that the Baptist is speaking when Tertullian is quoting John 3:31-36, and that the character identification correlates again to the identity of Jesus as distinct from the Baptist. The testimony of the Baptist, what it is that he "happens to know of Jesus," is the relationship between Jesus and the Father. The Baptist here is not concerned with testifying to the death and resurrection of Jesus but, instead, the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and his relationship to the Father.

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[16] Quoted from ANF 3:1362, emphasis original to ANF.

[17] Quoted from ANF 3:1362.

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-235)

Hippolytus' single relevant reference to the Gospel of John comes in his *Exposition on the Psalms*.[18] In a quite strange analogy, Hippolytus compares the relationship of Jesus to the Father to that of David and his musical instrument. David's instrument is without curve and produces a high tone. This sound, he says, "may be taken as like the body of Christ and His saints" and that, "He [Christ] did nothing out of measure, but maintained in all things, as it were, harmony towards the Father; for, as He says: 'He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaks of the earth. He that comes from Heaven, testifies of what He has seen and heard' (*Fr. Ps.* 1.6)."[19]

The only figures mentioned by Hippolytus prior to the reference to the "he" who is speaking are Christ, His saints, and the Father. Because "His saints" are never speakers in the Gospels—and indeed are a plural referent and not singular—and because no interpretation suggests that John 3:31 is spoken by the Father, the only reasonable interpretation is that Hippolytus here identifies Christ as the speaker in 3:31. Again we see the ancient author who identifies a named character as the speaker, although in this instance as in others, the speaker for 3:31-36 is Jesus and not the Baptist. The focus of this passage, as of those before it, is the christological claim concerning the harmony between the Father and the Son. The testimony which Christ shares concerning what he has seen and heard is that of his relationship to the Father. It is not, as later interpreters will suggest, a testimony concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258)

The North African Bishop, Cyprian, was respected as a scholar due to both his Christian and secular works.[20] Among his works, the most relevant is also perhaps the

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[18] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 70. On Hippolytus, Paulovkin only cites from *Against the Heresy of Noetus* 4 in which Hippolytus quoted John 3:13. While 3:13 is not within the scope of my investigation, Paulovkin considers it "relatively certain" that the verse is placed on the lips of Jesus.

[19] Quoted from ANF 5:495.

[20] Indeed, Cyprian's *De Mortalitate* records descriptions of a plague which ravaged the Roman

poorest-named: *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews.*[21] This text quotes the relevant passages several times, but only one of those citations contains an explicit reference to the identity of the speaker:[22]

> In the Gospel: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father but by me.' Also, in the same place: 'I am the door: by me if any man shall enter in, he shall be saved.' Also, in the same place: 'Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them.' Also, in the same place: 'He that believes on the Son has eternal life: he that is not obedient in word to the Son has not life; but the wrath of God shall abide on him' (*Test.* 2.27).

This passage goes on to cite "also Paul to the Ephesians," "also to the Romans," "also in the Epistle of Peter the Apostle," and "also in the Epistle of John," all of which indicates a certain level of specificity concerning Cyprian's biblical quotations. He does not merely refer to these texts as "as it is written" or "according to Scripture." The block quotation above references John 14:6, 10:9, Matthew 13:17, and John 3:36 all as "In the Gospel." This generic introduction seems to indicate a unity in the Gospels, especially considering the inclusion of a quotation from Matthew. It is not, it seems, a reference to a specific Gospel but, instead, to "the gospel" of Jesus Christ. While this is not definitive to conclude a speaker in the passage, it is important to note that the other three passages are explicit quotations from Jesus. In two of the passages, Jesus is speaking about himself in the first person and, in the Matthean quotation, he is speaking to his disciples in the second person. My conclusion, then, is that Cyprian understands John 3:36 to also be a quotation of self-reference made by Jesus.

Empire. His contemporaneous description of the plague has led to its current reference as "The Plague of Cyprian."

[21] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 83–84. Paulovkin cites *To Quirinus 2.20* as the only passage of Cyprian's which explicitly identifies a speaker. The passage he cites quotes John 3:15 and attributes it to Jesus, but Paulovkin does not include this passage from *Against the Jews,* perhaps because of the debated authorship.

[22] ANF 5:1157,1266 both cite John 3:18-19. The former, contained in "Also That They Should Lose the Light of the Lord" speaks of the scriptures generally and could easily refer to Jesus or the Evangelist. The latter, "That He Who Does Not Believe is Judged Already" does not offer any attribution.

The christological focus of this passage of Cyprian comes into view when all of the cited texts are taken together.[23] These passages all refer to the relationship between Jesus and the Father, as well as the identity of Jesus as the gate, way, access point to have relationship with the Father. Only one of the passages—1 Peter 3:18—explicitly refers to the death of Jesus for sins, while all of them refer either to (1) the relationship between the Father and Son or (2) the identity of the Son as the avenue to the Father. Because of this, I conclude that the theological argument being made—that Jesus is the only way to attain to the Father—is bolstered by the references to Jesus' identity as the Son of God and that, in the case of John 3:36, this identity is made clearer because Cyprian understands Jesus to be the speaker of the passage.

Miscellaneous Third-Century Writings

The miscellaneous writings which close out this discussion on the third century are mostly short and, often, only tangentially relevant to the research. Both Novatian and Dionysius quote from John 3 in the relevant passages, but neither of them offer an identification for the speakers.[24] The anonymous writer of *A Treatise on Re-Baptism* quotes John 3:16 but, interestingly, attributes the text to God.[25] In the same passage, the author quotes from "John the Evangelist" in 1 John 4:7-8 while comparing that text to John 3:16 which is "according to God." Because the author has a method for referring to the Evangelist specifically as the speaker, it is possible that his indication of God as the speaker means that he does not have the Evangelist in mind, but this is a weak argument. Because of this ambiguity in the anonymous author's identification of the speaker, this text does not assist the project in moving forward.

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[23] In addition to those mentioned above, Cyprian goes on to cite Eph 2:17-18, Rom 3:23-24, 1 Peter 3:18, 4:6, and 1 John 2:23.

[24] For Novatian, see ANF 5:1471, 1489-90. For Dionysius, see ANF 6:266 and ANF 7:989. Both authors quote John 3:31-36, and Dionysius quotes John 3:19.

[25] ANF 5:1561-62.

One final text which falls into the miscellaneous category belongs to Victorinus of Pettau. Victorinus wrote commentaries on several biblical texts but, unfortunately, only his *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* remains. The relevant text for my present purposes is found in his comments on the first chapter:

> Moreover, John the Baptist had also anticipated this, by saying to his discipled: 'For God gives not the Spirit by measure *unto Him*. The Father,' says he, 'loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands' (ANF 7:784).

The explicit identification of the speaker as the Baptist helps to highlight the point of this passage. Here, Victorinus is discussing the power given to Jesus by the Father when he sat at the right hand of the throne and how Jesus continues to empower believers through the gift of the Holy Spirit. According to Victorinus, the power given to Jesus which is described in John's Apocalypse is foretold by the Baptist prior to Jesus' crucifixion. Therefore, this passage, perhaps more than any other so far, correlates the identity of the speaker in John 3:34-35 specifically to the christological focus on the relationship between the Father and Son, the power which exists between them, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in this focus, however, is the crucifixion referenced. John the Baptist's foretelling of Jesus' power does not rest on his death and resurrection but, instead, on Jesus' status within the Trinity.

The Fourth Century

The fourth century marks a shift within Christianity toward codification and uniformity across Christian doctrines, scriptures, and traditions. Within this century, several key creeds were written to establish Orthodoxy within the Church, and several key figures and texts became centralizing forces within the Church. Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus both came into prominence at this time, as did the legendary preacher Chrysostom, the legendary theologian Augustine, and the legendary scholar Jerome. Each of these figures contribute to the conversation and further demonstrate both of the key points made above: that the most common interpretation is to identify the

named character in the story as the speaker and to correlate the identity of the speaker with the christological focus of the author.[26]

Before the discussion turns to the people of interest, the codices mentioned above need to be examined. Vaticanus shows no break in the lines between John 3:15 and 16, nor between 3:30 and 31. This does not help greatly in the investigation, but it is worth noting that Vaticanus has comparatively few breaks in the lines between any passages. Sinaiticus, however, does have line breaks which, perhaps, contribute to the conversation. Sinaiticus contains no line break between verses 15 and 16—which would indicate some shift in topic or speaker—but it does include a break between verses 13 and 14. This break is small, but the only other breaks in John's third chapter are found before verse 1 and after verse 30. Therefore, it appears, for Sinaiticus, John 3 is split into three significant sections: John 3:1-13, 3:14-30, and 3:31-36. Because Sinaiticus does not offer commentary or insight, no christological focus can be discussed for the text. However, the investigation of this text is helpful to set the tone for the upcoming people who likewise identify separations within the Gospel of John.

John Chrysostom (349-407)

The prolific preacher John Chrysostom serves as a perfect starting point for individuals in the fourth century. He frequently references John 3 and at several points identifies a specific speaker in John 3:16-21. What is most striking, however, is that Chrysostom sometimes identifies Jesus as the speaker and, other times, identifies the Evangelist John. While at first glance this might appear contradictory or, for my present purposes, contrary to the argument I have presented thus far, I will demonstrate that Chrysostom's use of different speakers for John 3:16-21 in different sermons actually

[26] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 96ff. Paulovkin cites Eustathius of Antioch to begin his discussion of the fourth century, but Eustathius only cites John 3:13-14 and, thus, does not merit inclusion in the present work. Paulovkin identifies *On the Medium Against Origen* 18.2-5 and *Against the Ariomaniacs* 20 for Eustathius' attribution of John 3:13-14 to Jesus.

supports the larger argument that I am making: when an author identifies Jesus as the speaker, the focus is on the incarnation; when an author identifies John as the speaker, the focus is on the crucifixion. I will begin by discussing the references which clearly identify Jesus as speaking.

In his *Homilies on Acts*, Chrysostom discusses the different punishments received by those who reject Christ or his apostles. His argument seems to against the apparent arbitrariness in who receives punishment and who does not. To solve this problem, Chrysostom cites John 3:17: "'For I am not come,' says Christ, 'to judge the world, but that the world might be saved'" (*Hom. Act.* 19.8,9).[27] The argument Chrysostom presents is that Jesus came that the world might be saved and, therefore, the punishments received for disbelief are not universal. While this passage is not explicitly referring to the incarnation or identity of Christ, it is also clearly not related to the crucifixion. Instead, I posit that the connection here is between Jesus as the speaker of 3:17 and the purpose for which Jesus came to earth. In that sense, then, the focus is indeed incarnational in that the passage is explaining the function of Christ on earth following the incarnation.

In the same way, Chrysostom cites 3:17 in his *Homilies on the Gospel of John* to argue that Christ's purpose is not to sit on his judgment throne but to invite those who are sensitive to their own need to come into the light. Of the two advents of Christ, Chrysostom says that, "It is of the first that he says, 'I came not to condemn the world, but to save the world'" (*Hom. Jo.* 28).[28] Chrysostom's argument is that if Christ came to judge, people would run away from him for fear of that judgment. But if Christ comes to free them from darkness and bring them to the light, they have no excuse and no one to pity them for their disbelief. This argument is anthropocentric, but it also relates the

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[27] Quoted from NPNF 1.11:468.

[28] Quoted from NPNF 1.14:194-7.

speaker of 3:17—in this case, placed in the mouth of Jesus in the first person—to the purpose of Christ on the earth vis-à-vis judgment and life.

The other two passages in which Chrysostom identifies Jesus as the speaker in John 3:16-21, the focus appears to be on the free will of human beings in choosing or rejecting Christ. Chrysostom says, "From this place we learn that Christ had good reason for saying, 'He that does evil comes not to the light;' and that unclean life is an obstacle to high doctrines, not suffering the clear-sightedness of the understanding to show itself (*Hom. 1 Cor.* 8)."[29] And, speaking about the apparent contradiction of claiming that "God gave them up" and that they "Gave themselves up," Chrysostom says that "'Everyone,' says the Lord, 'who does ill hates the light, and comes not to the light'" (*Hom. Eph.* 4:17-19).[30] In both of these instances, the focus is anthropocentric: Chrysostom is claiming that, "if they had been unable by nature, one might perhaps have been forgiven them; but since it was from choice, they were bereft of all excuse" (*Hom. 1 Cor.* 8).[31]

The rejection of Christ is based on the personal decision and not on the efficacy of Christ's ministry. In fact, Chrysostom indicates that the God allows them to give themselves over to the darkness.[32] For the purposes of the present argument, though, these passages identify Christ as the speaker of 3:17 and set the focus on the anthropological claim that people who reject Christ were unable to choose otherwise. They do not focus on crucifixion, as seen in the passages above, and again the focus on anthropology is a direct result of Chrysostom's understanding of Christ's purposes in the incarnation. One of the functions Christ performed while on earth was forcing the

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[29] Quoted from NPNF 1.12:81.

[30] Quoted from NPNF 1.13:210.

[31] Quoted from NPNF 1.12:81.

[32] God allowing the free choice to reject Christ is how Chrysostom reconciles the apparent contradiction mentioned above.

separation of the sheep and the goats, and this function was not performed through the cross but through the incarnation and the claims Christ made about his relationship with the Father.

Shifting gears slightly, Chrysostom twice identifies John the Evangelist as the speaker for John 3:16-21. At first glance, this might appear as either a contradiction or simply an indication that the identity of the speaker did not particularly matter to Chrysostom. However, I will demonstrate that in both cases, his identification of the Evangelist as the speaker offers the best evidence thus far that the christological focus of a passage correlates directly to the identity of the speaker quoted.

Both passages come from Chrysostom's *Homilies on Galatians*, and each will be examined in turn. First, Chrysostom argues concerning Jesus' ministry that

> the ministry which He undertook was free and uncompelled; that He was delivered up by Himself, not by another. Let not therefore the words of John, 'that the Father gave His only-begotten Son' for us, lead you to derogate from the dignity of the Only-begotten, or to infer therefrom that he is only human (*Hom. Gal.* 1:1-3).[33]

At first glance, the point of this passage seems to be to indicate that Jesus is not "only human." However, Chrysostom identifies that the "free and uncompelled" ministry which Jesus undertook was to be "delivered up" by Himself. The idea of Jesus being "delivered up" does not refer to the incarnation—for Jesus' incarnation could not have been carried out by anyone other than himself—but instead refers to the crucifixion. The focus for Chrysostom is the crucifixion and, indeed, the death of someone who is not "only human." While in previous passages Chrysostom connected the words of John 3:16-21 to Jesus and focused on the incarnation and function of the Christ on earth, this passage connects the Evangelist's words to the focus on the crucifixion. While at this point the reasoning may be speculative, I would argue that the Evangelist, just like the Apostle Paul who is the author of the homily's larger focus, is writing from a post-

[33] Quoted from NPNF 1.13:14

resurrection perspective and therefore, if he is directly speaking it indicates that he is primarily interested in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This focus is juxtaposed to the focus if Jesus is speaking which, by definition, must be a pre-crucifixion speech.

In a later homily on Galatians, Chrysostom makes a similar claim:

> How is this, O Paul! Why do you appropriate a general benefit, and make your own what was done for the whole world's sake? For he says not, 'Who loved us,' but, "who loved me.' And besides the Evangelist says, 'God so loved the world;' and Paul himself, 'He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up,' not for Paul only, but, 'For us all' (*Hom. Gal.* 2:1-2).[34]

This passage is clearly attributed to "the Evangelist" and is discussing the crucifixion, as demonstrated by Chrysostom's use of "God so loved the world" and "spared not his own son, but delivered him up" as interchangeable or, at least, discussing the same gift of God to all people. According to Chrysostom, Paul is claiming that Christ died for him specifically, which does not contradict the Evangelist's claim that Christ died for the world as a representation of God's love for the world.

Through the examination of all of Chrysostom's relevant passages, several points become clear. First, the identity of the speaker in John 3 is not dependent upon the author who attributes speakership. Instead, the identity of the speaker is merely dependent upon the context into which the author places the speaker's words. Second, the identity of the speaker continues to correlate directly to the christological focus of the author in each passage. When an author describes Jesus as speaking, the focus of the passage is on the incarnation or, at the minimum, the function of Christ on earth in his pre-crucifixion ministry. When an author identifies the Evangelist as speaking, the focus is placed on the crucifixion/resurrection of Christ. While at first glance, it may appear that Chrysostom throws a metaphorical wrench into my argument because he shifts his identification of speakers, his shift actually bolsters my argument more than other authors have so far. My argument is supported because Chrysostom identifies both Jesus and the

[34] Quoted from NPNF 1.13:47.

Evangelist, and focuses on both the crucifixion and the pre-crucifixion identity of Jesus, but never crosses the line I have drawn in my examination of texts.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Throughout his corpus, Augustine consistently identifies the speaker of John 3 as Jesus himself. Of these references, three are immediately relevant to the current exploration. Two of his passages connect Jesus to John 3:16-21, while the final text connects Jesus to John 3:36. In all these citations, Augustine is consistent in correlating the christological focus of the incarnation to the identity of the speaker as Jesus. First, in *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants*, Augustine quotes all of John 3:1-21 in references to his opponents who appear to use the text for their argument. He summarizes the quotation by stating that, "Thus far the Lord's discourse wholly relates to the subject of our present inquiry; from this point the sacred historian digresses to another matter" (*Pecc. merit* 1.59).[35] The clear reference separates the words of Jesus from those of John (the sacred historian) between verses 21 and 22.

The previous passage and the forthcoming one both discuss the baptism of infants and the reasoning for why such a practice is acceptable. In chapter 62 of the same text, Augustine says, "Of what does He say, 'Light is come into the world,' if not of His own advent? And without the sacrament of His advent, how are infants said to be in the light?" (*Pecc. merit* 1.62).[36] The light coming into the world, which enlightens all, is the advent of Jesus. The incarnation, then, is the equalizing factor which qualifies infants for baptism. Or, to put it another way according to Augustine's argument, baptized infants are to be considered among the believers while unbaptized infants are to be considered

[35] Quoted from NPNF 1.5:184. *The Context of Their Chief Text.*

[36] Quoted from NPNF 1.5:188. *No One Can Be Reconciled to God, Except by Christ.*

among unbelievers. Either way, the christological focus on the incarnation is clear. The advent of Christ is the incarnation, and Augustine connects Jesus' speech in John 3:16-21 to the incarnation of Christ in the world.

The final passage of Augustine worthy of merit in this discussion is interesting for a different reason than the other two. In his *Enchiridion*, Augustine is discussing original sin and the wrath of God by describing how, "Of which wrath also the Lord Jesus says: 'he that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him" (*Enchir.* 33).[37] The clear attribution of the quote is to Jesus, and the focus is on belief in the Son as the source of eternal life. What makes this passage of particular interest is that the original editors of Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers added a footnote at the conclusion of this passage which reads: "These words, attributed by the author to Christ, were really spoken by John the Baptist."[38] The editors, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, correctly saw that Augustine understood Jesus to be speaking but added that they thought he was incorrect to attribute the passage to him. This "correction" of Augustine's interpretation merely foreshadows what this dissertation will demonstrate in chapter 5: the modern interpretations often assume the Evangelist's hand in both speeches.[39]

Hilary of Poitiers (310-367)

Hilary references John 3:18-19 once in his *Homily on Psalm 1*:

> Now what we are to understand by the privilege of rising again and being judged is declared by the Lord in the Gospels where He says: 'He that believes in me is not judged: he that believes not has been judged already. And this is the judgment, that

[37] Quoted from NPNF 1.3:515.

[38] Quoted from NPNF 1.3:515 n1141.

[39] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 233–34. Paulovkin makes a similar assumption in his desire to reconcile the apparent contradiction of Augustine attributing 3:31-35 to the Baptist and 3:36 to Jesus. Paulovkin blames Augustine's quotation from memory as the source of discontinuity, but I am arguing that authors felt no need to attribute the same verse to the same speaker across the board. Instead, the speaker correlated to the theological context into which they placed the verse being quoted.

> the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light.' (*Hom. Ps.* 1.20).[40]

The context of this quotation from Hilary comes in his discussion about who is judged in the coming judgment. He argues that believers are not judged because they are already believing, and unbelievers are not judged because they have been judged already. The judgment is only for those who love both Christ and the darkness but love the darkness more than Christ. These ones, who exist between the godly and ungodly, will be judged. But the separation of those who love the light and those who love the dark occurs upon the coming of the light into the world. It is the function of Christ, as the light entering the world, to be a beacon of light to those who believe in him. Conversely, those who love the darkness are made to reveal their love and distance themselves from the light by its coming. All this discussion centers around the light *coming into the world*. The judgment does not follow the crucifixion or resurrection. Instead, the incarnation is the catalyst which begins the new state of being, and the function of Christ is the focus of Hilary's discussion.

In *On the Trinity*, Hilary explicitly attributes John 3:16-17 to Jesus himself: "Nor, when He calls Himself the Son, as in, 'For God sent not His Son into this world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved´" (6.25), and again, "[John] had heard his Lord say, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'" (6.40).[41] Hilary uses these references in order to argue against the idea that Jesus was the Son of God by adoption only. In his argument, it would be presumptive of Jesus to call himself the unique Son of God if he were merely adopted as such. The connection, then, is between Jesus as speaker and the identity of Jesus as the true Son of God.

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[40] Quoted from NPNF 2.9:528.

[41] Quoted from NPNF 2.9:307,317.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-373)

As with Chrysostom, Athanasius identifies Jesus and the Evangelist as the speaker in various passages throughout his corpus. His corpus offers further insight into the various contexts into which passages from John 3 are cited, and the christological focus of each as it relates to the identity of the speaker. As with previous authors, and clearly evident here by his use of both speakers which correlate to two different christological foci, Athanasius connects Jesus as the speaker to the focus on the incarnation and identity of the Son of God, and he connects the Evangelist as the speaker to the focus on the crucifixion/resurrection of Christ.

Two documents of Athanasius identify the Evangelist as the speaker, while two identify Jesus as the same. First, in his *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*, Athanasius quotes both Acts 1:1 and John 3:17:

> All things whatsoever our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as Luke wrote, 'both has done and taught,' He effected after having appeared for our salvation; for He came, as John said, 'not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved' (*Ep. Aeg. Lib.* 1).[42]

After this, Athanasius goes on to describe the false teachers which Christ promised would arise after his departure. The reference to Acts 1 includes both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as part of what Luke recorded that Jesus did and taught. Additionally, Athanasius indicates that the purpose of Jesus' appears was "our salvation" which he equates to the light coming into the world so that "the world through Him might be saved." Taken together, along with the focus on those false teachers who would arise after Jesus' ascension into heaven, indicate that Athanasius is focusing on the post-resurrection functions of Jesus as the source of salvation and, in the case of the false teachers, the source of the Holy Spirit who will protect believers from false doctrine.

In Athanasius' lengthy *Orations against the Arians,* discourses 2 and 3 quotes from John 3. While Athanasius appears consistent in attributing John 3:16-21 to the

[42] Quoted from NPNF 2.4:636.

Evangelist and 3:31-36 to Jesus, the final quotation appears to include reference to both 3:35 and 3:20. In all of these references, Athanasius is consistent in the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the christological focus of the passage. Discourse 2 includes a chapter which describes why the Savior came:

> [He came] to give a witness then, and for our sakes to undergo death, to raise man up and destroy the works of the devil . . . and this is the reason of His incarnate presence. For otherwise a resurrection had not been, unless there had been death; and how had death been, unless he had had a mortal body? And John says, 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (C. Ar. 2.20.55).[43]

In this passage, Athanasius is clearly arguing that Jesus became incarnate; that Jesus had a mortal body. However, the purpose of his entire argument is to say that a mortal body was necessary for the death and resurrection of Christ to be meaningful. The crucifixion was not necessary for Christ to be incarnate, but the incarnation was necessary for Christ to be crucified. Therefore, I contend that the purpose of this passage for Athanasius is to prove the mortality of Jesus' body by focusing on the event of Jesus' death and resurrection. For this reason, it continues to fit into the pattern I have argued for which correlates the identification of the Evangelist as the speaker with the christological focus on the crucifixion. While the text does discuss both incarnation and crucifixion, John 3:17 is brought into the conversation while Athanasius is focusing on the death of Jesus' mortal body via the crucifixion.

Discourse 3 includes two passages which attribute verses from John 3:31-36 to Jesus himself:

> For, 'The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand;' and, 'All things were given unto Me of My father;' and, 'I can do nothing of Myself, but as I hear, I judge;' and the like passages do not show that the Son once had not these prerogatives . . . not then because once He had them not, did He say this, but because, whereas the Son has eternally what He has, yet He has them from the

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[43] Quoted from NPNF 2.4:954-5. Also see Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 107ff. Paulovkin argues that the manuscript reliability allows him to omit the explicit attribution of this passage to the Evangelist. However, his argument is based on a lack of evidence, and does not, I feel, adequately deal with Athanasius' other methods for attributing a passage to Jesus and not the Evangelist.

Father (*C. Ar.* 3.27.35).[44]

And again:

> Since then the Son is by nature and not by will, is He without the pleasure of the Father and not with the Father's will? No verily; but the Son is with the pleasure of the Father, and, as He says Himself, 'The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things.' For as not 'from will' did He begin to be good, nor yet is good without will and pleasure, . . . so also that the Son should be, though it came not 'from will,' yet it is not without His pleasure or against His purpose (*C. Ar.* 3:30.66).[45]

Both passages place the words of John 3:35 in the mouth of Jesus himself. In the first, Athanasius quotes John 3:35, Matthew 11:27, and John 5:30. The latter two are unambiguous quotations of Jesus, and Athanasius attributes all three equally to Jesus. The first passage is concerned with the relationship between the Father and Son and argues that the Son eternally has all the attributes which are given to him from the Father. This argument is centered around the person and identity of Jesus as the Son of God, and aptly correlates the Johannine passage to Jesus.

The second passage is slightly more complex in that the author edits the quotation from John 3:35. Whereas the original text discusses all that the Father *gives* to the Son, Athanasius references all that the Father *shows* the Son. The argument Athanasius is making focuses on the role of the Son in carrying out the purposes and pleasure of the Father, which includes the judgment of those who hate the light and cling to the darkness. The editors of NPNF helpfully indicate that this quotation comes from both 3:35 and 3:20, which suggests that Athanasius sees Jesus as carrying out the purposes of God because he is shown the evil deeds which are revealed to him by the Father. If the editors of NPNF are right—and I think that they are—then it appears that Athanasius is also attributing 3:20 to Jesus and combining verses 20 and 35 into a mixed quotation. This connection correlates directly with what I have demonstrated thus far: the identity of the speaker as Jesus is connected to the christological focus on the identity of

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[44] Quoted from NPNF 2.4:1029.

[45] Quoted from NPNF 2.4:1064.

the Son of God.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c395)

For all of Gregory's length of work, it comes as a surprise that he only once identifies a speaker for John 3.[46] He does so in his *Against Eunomius* where, in comparing his contemporaries who place their faith in someone other than the Only-Begotten Son (i.e., they do not believe Jesus to be begotten of the Father) to the Israelites who were carried into captivity, Gregory describes how

> even as Jehoiakim was mutilated, so this man, having voluntarily deprived himself of the light of the truth, has become a prey to the Babylonian despot, never having learned, poor wretch, that the Gospel enjoins us to behold eternal life alike in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as the Word has thus spoken concerning the Father, that to know Him is life eternal, and concerning the Son that every one that believes on Him has eternal life, and concerning the Holy Spirit, that to Him that has received His grace it shall be a well of water springing up unto eternal life. Accordingly, every one that yearns for eternal life when he has found the Son, . . . has found in Him in its entirety what he longed for, because He is life and has life in Himself (*C. Eun.* 10.2).[47]

This text cites John 17:3, 3:36, and 4:14, placing each of them in the mouth of "the Word." While the focus of the text is on acquiring eternal life, Gregory does not assume that eternal life is gained only after the resurrection of the body. Instead, eternal life is something the believer presently obtains, and which swells up inside them. This eternal life is granted by "the true Son, and not the Son falsely so called." The overall argument which Gregory is describing at length here concerns the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit alongside the Father. He discusses the heresies of Sabellianism, Montanism, and that of Eunomius, and the specific area in which they err is that they admit "neither the Only-begotten God nor the Holy Spirit to share the Deity of the God Whom they call 'great,' and 'first' (*C. Eun.* 10.2)."

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[46] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 186ff. Paulovkin only cites 2 passages of Gregory's, both of which quote John 3:14. I am unsure why the quotations from *Against Eunomius* are excluded in his work, but my exclusion of John 3:13-15 from this project subsequently excludes the references found in *The Life of Moses* 2.31,227.

[47] Quoted from NPNF 2.5:426-7.

The final point to discuss concerning this passage of Gregory is the identity of the "Word," to whom he attributes the words of John 3:36. While it is possible to infer that the Word simply refers to the words of Scripture, I contend that Gregory has the eternal Word in mind. I see this evidenced primarily in the joint quotations of three verses, two of which are attributed directly to Jesus. The third, that of my present inquiry, can safely be attributed to Jesus along with the other two verses. In Gregory's single reference to the speaker in John 3, he correlates the words of Jesus to the focus on Jesus' identity as the only-begotten son of the Father.

Ambrose of Milan (c.340-397)

Like Gregory, Ambrose's lengthy corpus contains only a single reference to John 3 which identifies a speaker for the ambiguous passages. All other relevant quotations from John 3 simply say that "it is written" or likewise. In *Concerning Repentance*, Ambrose appears to be arguing against the Novatians, who would deny pardon and fellowship to those who had a lapse of faith but who eventually wanted back into the fold:

> For he [John] writes that the Lord said: "God so loved this world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that every one of them that believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life." If, then, you wish to reclaim any one of the lapsed, do you exhort him to believe, or not to believe? Undoubtedly you exhort him to believe. But, according to the Lord's words, he who believes shall have everlasting life (*Paen* 11.48).[48]

Ambrose contends that those who have even a little faith can be pardoned and accepted back into the faith. These lapsed believers are, in the end, still believers who have received eternal life from Christ. Because, according to Ambrose, they have received a crown from Jesus, the Novatians are incorrect in denying them pardon. This text clearly attributes the words of John 3:16 to Jesus himself, as recorded by the Evangelist. Indeed, Ambrose attributes the verse to Jesus both before and after he quotes it. Additionally, the

[48] Quoted from NPNF 2.10:740.

passage refers to the teachings of Jesus and his example of offering forgiveness even to those of slight faith. The focus here is not related to the crucifixion in the slightest and, therefore, continues to demonstrate the correlation between Jesus' words and the focus on Jesus' identity and mission on earth.

Skeireins

Skeireins is an early fifth-century Gothic commentary on the Gospel of John. Only portions of it remain, and the authorship and original language are debated today. It deserves inclusion in the present discussion, and indeed in the present century, because of its close connection to the fourth-century Gothic Bishop Wulfila, the Little Wolf. Wulfila is recognized as creating the Gothic alphabet and translating the Bible into that language, and he was originally thought to have been the author of the Skeireins. While this authorship is now in question, the text of the Skeireins nevertheless must be included in this discussion:

> And therefore, the greatness of the Lord's glory being clear indeed, [John the Baptist] proclaimed the words 'He who comes from above is above all.' He would not have proclaimed Him supreme without a reason, but declared as well how vast the power of His greatness, saying Him to be born of heaven and come from above, but himself born of earth and speaking from the earth because he was by nature a man. . .. But 'He who has come from heaven,' even if He seemed to be in the flesh, nevertheless, 'Is above all, and what He has seen and heard, that He testifies, and no man receives his testimony.'[49]

The author attributes the words of John 3:31-36 to the Baptist. This identification goes against previous authors who identified Jesus, but also goes against future authors who will argue that the Evangelist is speaking. For the present purposes, however, the importance of John the Baptist speaking is equivalent to that if Jesus is speaking: both instances require a character in the story to be speaking in the passage as opposed to the outside narration of the Evangelist. Because the character exists inside the

[49] William Holmes Bennett, *The Gothic Commentary on The Gospel of John: A Decipherment, Edition, and Translation* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1960), 64–66.

plot of the story, the speech assumes a pre-resurrection understanding or, at the very least, a pre-resurrection christological focus. In this text, the author is concerned with the claims of Sabellius and Marcellus (i.e., the claims of Sabellianism and Modalism) and seeks to "censure and rebuke that impious contention" which says "that the Father and the Son are one." The christological focus, then, is on the identity of the Son and his relationship to the Father. The crucifixion is not in mind, and this correlates to the identification of the Baptist as the speaker. Again, this identification is slightly different than that of identifying Jesus, but it is identical in terms of the pre-resurrection understanding of the christological focus.

Fortunatianus of Aquileia (d.396)

Fortunatianus, Bishop of Aquileia, offers a commentary on the Gospels which survives only in part today. In his work, he interprets the Gospels in light of each other and offers theological commentary. In discussing Matthew 13:31-32, Fortunatianus cites both John 3:31 and Romans 9:5:

> 'But after it has grown, it becomes greater than all vegetables;' evidently this demonstrated that, after the Resurrection, when he took back the glory which he had laid aside, he would be above and over everything at the right hand of the Father. As John the Evangelist also says: 'The one who comes from above is over all,' and the Apostle Paul: 'Who is over everything, God, blessed forever.'[50]

This passage is unclear whether Fortunatianus is merely attributing the reference to the Evangelist who recorded it in John 3:31 or if he has the Evangelist in mind as the speaker in the passage. What is clear, however, is the christological focus on the crucifixion and resurrection. The seed which grows is, according to Fortunatianus, the glory of Christ following the resurrection. Therefore, it is necessary that the author has the crucifixion in mind when he references John 3:31.

The only reason why I say that the passage is unclear as to the attribution of

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[50] Fortunatianus, *Commentary on the Gospels*, trans. H.A.H. Houghton, CSEL (Göttingen, Germany: De Gruyter, 2017), 55–56.

the text is because in another instance, Fortunatianus attributes texts to "the Evangelist" when the words are clearly spoken by Jesus himself: "As the Evangelist John says: from his stomach will flow rivers of living waters" (John 7:38). I interpret this passage as an allegorical explanation for the four rivers, the four Gospels, which flowed from the testimony of Christ. In this sense, then, Fortunatianus is not so much attributing the words of John 7 to the Evangelist as he is pointing out that it is the Evangelist who applies this quotation to the fourfold Gospel text.

Aphrahat (c.280-c.345)

The Persian Sage Aphrahat wrote his *Demonstrations* in response to the needs of the easternmost portions of Christianity in the fourth century. One concern which he addresses at length is the hesitation to argue that Christ gave his own spirit out to his believers. The problem with such an argument appears to be the concern that Christ would lose something of himself if he were to give away his own spirit to his followers. However, Aphrahat argues that the Spirit was given to Christ without measure and, therefore, there is no deficiency in him when he gives it away:

> Something of Christ is in us, yet Christ is in heaven at the right hand of His Father. And Christ received the Spirit not by measure, but His Father loved Him and delivered all into His hands, and gave Him authority over all His treasure. For John said: 'Not by measure did the Father give the Spirit to His Son, but Loved Him and gave all into His hands.' And also, our Lord said: 'All things have been delivered unto Me by My father' (*The Demonstrations* 6.12).[51]

This text suggests that John the Evangelist is speaking in John 3:34-35.[52] If Aphrahat imagined Christ himself to be speaking, he would have indicated such as he did in his subsequent quotation of Matthew 11:17, "Our Lord said." However, by stating that

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[51] Quoted from NPNF 2.13:617.

[52] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 121. Paulovkin argues that it is "highly unlikely" that Aphrahat had the Evangelist in mind as the speaker, but his reasoning is based largely on speculation. He argues that Aphrahat nowhere else identifies other Gospel writers, and that he identifies passages spoken by the Baptist as spoken by "John" without the Baptist epithet. Thus, Paulovkin concludes that the Baptist must be speaking here.

John spoke, and comparing it immediately with what "our Lord said," the text strongly indicates that Aphrahat viewed the text explicitly as that spoken by the Evangelist.

The christological focus of this text is more difficult to determine than the imagined speaker. On a surface level, the discussion is not christological at all; the discussion is Pneumatological. The author compares the dividing up of Moses' spirit among his elders in Numbers 11:17 with Christ bestowing his spirit unto all believers. The pouring out of Christ's spirit, however, is equated to what was prophesied in Joel 2:28-29 and quoted in Acts 2:17-21: "And of the Spirit of Christ again there is poured forth today upon all flesh, and the sons and the daughters prophesy, and the old men and the youths, and menservants and the handmaids." The context of this quotation, particularly when it comes to the Acts 2 context, comes in the time following the resurrection of Christ and the "last days" which follow. Acts 2 explicitly connects the Joeline quotation with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and states that "[Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Given the ambiguity of the focus within Aphrahat's own passage, and the clarity of christological focus in the reference in Acts, I posit that Aphrahat, too, understood the pouring out of the Spirit as an action subsequent to the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, while it is not the focus of the passage, the Christology which is at work is focused upon the crucifixion and resurrection. This focus correlates to Aphrahat's explicit attribution of the passage to the Evangelist himself.

The Fifth Century

The end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth marks the beginning of the end for the Western Roman Empire. With the invasion of the Goths and other barbarians beginning in 376, the sharp decline in power of the Roman empire culminated in the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476. From this point until the creation of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the extant texts which merit inclusion in the

present discussion are limited. Whether this lack of texts is because of a true decline in academic production in the time, because of the destruction of such texts by barbarian or Muslim conquests, or for some other reason is yet unknown. However, it shall become apparent that substantially fewer texts are available which attribute the ambiguous passages in John three to a specific speaker.

John Cassian (c.360-c.435)

Cassian is venerated in both Eastern and Western variations of Christianity for his asceticism, theological writings, and mystical understanding of the faith. Of his works, reference to the speakers in John 3 is made in only one:

> If you would know how admirably the Apostle preached [Rom 8:3], hear how this utterance was put into his mouth; as if from the mouth of God Himself, as the Lord says: 'For God send not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.' For lo, as you see, the Lord Himself affirms that He was sent by God the Father to save mankind (*C. Nestor.* 4.4).[53]

Following these words, Cassian goes on to describe what kind of Son was sent by God to heal humanity and asks, "Can you twist this so as to refer it to the flesh as if you could say that a mere man was sent by God to heal mankind?" The christological focus of the passage, then, is on the identity of Jesus as the only-begotten, divine Son of God. For Cassian, the incarnation points so the dual nature of Jesus as both divine and human, which was necessary for him to "heal" humanity. From the passage quoted, Cassian repeatedly identifies Jesus as speaking the words found in John 3:16-21, and it appears that Cassian finds this point to be important: he uses it as the basis through which his audience should believe the claims of Romans 8:3. Because John 3:17 is spoken by Jesus and the ideas represented there reflect those found in Romans, Cassian argues that Paul is validated in his claims. So, in perhaps the most succinct example thus far, Cassian correlates the identity of the speaker as Jesus with the christological focus on the

[53] Quoted from NPNF 2.11:1446. The full title of the work is *The Seven Books of John Cassian on the Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius.*

incarnation.

Cyril of Alexandria (c.376-444)

Cyril is considered both a Father and Doctor of the Church, although his biography is not without controversy.[54] For the purposes of the current research, Cyril's commentary on the Gospel of John serves as the primary text through which Cyril identifies specific speakers in the passages at hand.[55] Throughout his commentary on John 3, Cyril identifies both Jesus and the Baptist as the speakers in 3:16-21 and 3:31-36, respectively: "Having plainly called Himself the Son of God the Father, He thought not good to leave the word without witness, but brings forward proof from the quality, so to say, of the things themselves, making the hearers more steadfast unto faith."[56] Speaking on John 3:16, Cyril says, "He desires to show openly herein, that He is God by Nature, since one must needs deem that He Who came forth from God the Father, is surely God also, not having the honor from without, as we have, but being in truth what He is believed to be," and again on 3:18, "Having proved by facts, that He is both Son of God the Father, and having introduced into the world grace which is more excellent than the ministration of Moses."[57]

In all his commentary on John 3:16-21, Cyril consistently identifies Jesus as the speaker and, just as consistently, argues that the purpose of Jesus' speech in these

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[54] Cyril reportedly expelled Jews and heretics from Alexandria and was declared a heretic by his Nestorian opponents. Like Cassian, Cyril's main theological opponents were the Nestorians.

[55] In addition to identifying speakers in both John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36, Cyril identifies John 1:18 as the words of the Evangelist and not, as others have argued, the Baptist. Nonnus of Panopolis, not included in the current investigation, also identifies the Evangelist as the speaker of John 1:16-18. This argument is not uncommon throughout the centuries, but is worth remembering as a contrast to the consistency of the interpretation of the verses in John 3. In his *Paraphrase on John*, Nonnus loosely quotes all of John 3:1-21, but merely says "he spoke" all of these things, which indicates that Jesus was speaking but does not offer much evidence to discuss in the present project. See *Paraphrase on John* 3.48-111. Also see Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 295–99, for a full discussion of the *Paraphrase*.

[56] Cyril, *Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Kessinger, 1874), 175.

[57] Cyril, 1:174–76.

verses is to define his identity as the Son of God. He specifically argues that Jesus is "not a creature, I mean Son of the essence of the father, that is to say, consubstantial with him who begat him, and God verily and in truth."[58] The constant point throughout his argument is that Jesus is divine and not to be considered a mere human or creature. This argument correlates directly to the identity of Jesus as the speaker in the passages, describing himself as the divine Son of God.

Concerning John 3:31-36, Cyril begins his discussion in a new chapter of his work, but still consistently identifies the Baptist as the speaker through the end of John 3. He asks, "What then persuaded the blessed Baptist to attribute that which was in the power of many to the Son alone specially, and as to one coming down from above to call him, 'He That comes from above?'"[59] Cyril argues that "from above" indicates Jesus' being sent from the Father, not merely from heaven. He uses this argument to conclude that "If then the Son be by nature God, and has been ineffably begotten of God the Father, *from above* signifies the nature of the Father. Therefore the only-begotten is *above all*, inasmuch as he too is seen to be of that nature."[60] Later, Cyril explicitly defines the "testimony" of the Baptist as the testimony "that Christ is God by nature and, sprung from above and the Father, *is above all*."[61] Cyril's point in this argument is similar to that in John 3:16-21: Jesus presents himself as the Son of God, and the testimony which must be accepted is the testimony concerning the identity of Jesus. In neither instance does Cyril focus on the crucifixion. The christological focus is on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, and the speakers are those found within the narrative.

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[58] Cyril, 1:174.

[59] Cyril, 1:185.

[60] Cyril, 1:187.

[61] Cyril, 1:189.

Pope Leo the Great (c.400-461)

Leo is the first historical figure who stands in apparent contradiction to the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the christological focus of a given passage. In his *Sermons*, Leo attributes the words of John 3:16 to Jesus, but in the given passage those words correlate to the crucifixion. Leo says, "and seeing that that is certain which the Lord also says, according to John's Gospel" (*Serm. Leo* 58.7) and proceeds to quote from John 3:16.[62] The verse is placed in a larger discussion on the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, particularly the administration of the sacraments at the Last Supper and the betrayal of Judas. Leo goes on the discuss how, "in assuming true and entire manhood [Jesus] took the true sensations of the body and the true feelings of the mind," which indicates a nod to the incarnation. However, the focus of the passage, the point which Leo is trying to make, concerns the crucifixion explicitly.

But Leo is adding the quotation from John 3:16 to the conversation surrounding the Last Supper. The context into which Leo places the verse is not the conversation with Nicodemus but rather, the moments leading up to the crucifixion. Because of this, it makes sense narratively for Jesus to be discussing the way in which God loved the world and sent his son *to die on the cross*. Therefore, although Leo attributes the words of 3:16 to Jesus as he focuses on the crucifixion, it does not contradict the correlation already identified because the context into which the verse is placed changes the theological ramifications therein.

Maximus of Turin (c.380-c.423)

Maximus cites passages from John 3 frequently in his collection of sermons, but he offers only a single instance in which he identifies the speaker of a relevant passage for the present research: John 3:17.[63] In sermon 59, A Sequel, Maximus

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[62] Quoted from NPNF 2.12:444.

[63] In sermons 13B and 100, Maximus identifies the Evangelist as the speaker in 1:16-18. Sermons 39A and 37 identify Jesus as speaking in 3:14-15. Sermons 42, 62, 65, and 99 identify the Baptist

attributes 3:17 to "The Evangelist":

> We read in the Scriptures that the salvation of the whole human race was purchased by the blood of the Savior, as the apostle Peter says: *For you have not been purchased with corruptible gold or silver but with the precious blood of the pure and spotless lamb, Jesus Christ.* Therefore, if the price of our life is the blood of the Lord, see that it is not an ephemeral earthly field that has been purchased but rather the eternal salvation of the whole world. As the Evangelist says: *For Christ did not come to judge the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him.*[64]

The topic of the passage focuses on the purchase of salvation through the blood of the Savior. The clear reference is to the crucifixion as the event through which the Savior's blood was spilt. At first glance, the attribution is equally clear: Maximus says that 3:17 is the words of the Evangelist. However, Paulovkin discusses this passage and Maximus' use of *ait* as an argument that Maximus could simply be stating that the Evangelist records the words, and not necessarily that he says them. On the verb *ait,* Paulovkin says that it is "most often employed as an action of speech" and that the most obvious meaning is "say," but that Maximus' uses of the verb indicates that "he probably did not have the historical context of the passage in mind, and that his use of *ait* did at times go beyond the ordinary sense of speaking."[65] Paulovkin concludes his discussion by stating that the attribution of the passage by Maximus is unclear; he does not conclude that Maximus is attributing 3:17 to the Evangelist, nor that he would deny such an attribution. The argument within Paulovkin's larger work is to maintain that *all* interpreters of John 3 in the early Christian period identified the characters in the story as the speaker, and this passage would throw a wrench in his argument if it was taken at face value. Because of Paulovkin's lack of certainty as to his argument, as well as the lack of an alternative explanation, I am confident in maintaining that Maximus here demonstrates another correlation between the identity of the speaker as the Evangelist and the christological

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as speaking in 3:29-30.

[64] Maximus, *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 1989), 142. Italics original to translation.

[65] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 206–7.

focus on the crucifixion.

Theodoret of Cyrus (c.393-c.460)

Theodoret is another figure who attributes the passages at hand to different voices at different times.[66] In two of his works, Theodoret cites 3:16 along with a reference to Paul, attributing the verse to the Evangelist and discussing the death of Jesus:

> We have learned this from the divine Scripture. The divine John exclaims 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,' and the divine Paul, 'For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His life' (*Eran.* 3, *The Impassible*).[67]

And again:

> Now the blessed Paul recognized this as the greatest proof of the love of God for men and exclaimed: *But God commends His charity towards us because when as yet we were sinners Christ died for us*. And again: *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how has He not also, with him, given us all things?* Saint John agrees that this is so: *For God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for it so that whosoever believe in Him may not perish but may have life everlasting* (*Pron.* 10.12-13).[68]

Both passages indicate a correlation between the identity of the speaker as "Saint John" or "the Divine John" to the explicit focus on the death of Christ. As other texts have demonstrated, the focus on the crucifixion is made most clear through the inclusion of Pauline quotations alongside those of John. By placing these verses side-by-side, Theodoret makes the theological focus explicit.

In his commentary on Isaiah, however, Theodoret attributes John 3:16 to Jesus quite explicitly: "The Beloved, called the only-begotten of God, the Word, says, 'God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall

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[66] In addition to those discussed below, Theodoret references John 3 in *Eranistes* 3 and his *Compendium of Heretical Mythification* 5. Paulovkin discusses both texts at length, but they contribute little to the current project. Paulovkin, 318ff.

[67] Quoted from NPNF 2.3:484.

[68] Theodoret, *Theodoret of Cyrus: On Divine Providence*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawley, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 49 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 139. Italics original in translation.

not perish, but have eternal life" (*Expl. Isa.* 197).[69] This passage clearly, and indeed repeatedly, attributes 3:16 to Jesus. In the larger context in which Theodoret is discussing the meaning of "the Beloved," it appears that the focus of his argument is largely centered on the person and identity of the Son of God. His argument thus focuses on the incarnation and, appropriately, correlates that focus to the words of Jesus. As with authors before him, Theodoret identifies Jesus as the speaker when discussing the incarnation while identifying John as the speaker while discussing the incarnation.

Jerome (c.347-420)

For all of Jerome's extensive writing, only a single reference to John 3 is helpful for the current investigation.[70] In his *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, Jerome discusses the differences between John's baptism and that of the Lord: "For as he himself preceded Christ as His forerunner, so also his baptism was the prelude to the Lord's baptism. 'He that is of the earth,' he said, 'speaks of the earth; he that comes from heaven is above all'" (*Lucif.* 7).[71] In his understanding of the passage, Jerome imagines the speaker to be the Baptist and not the Evangelist. This identification appears to be important for Jerome's argument concerning the difference in the two baptisms. Because John sees himself as "of the earth," his baptism must also be from the earth and, in that way, is inferior to the baptism which comes from the Lord. Although Jerome goes on to argue that the baptism from the Lord is perfect because it "depends on the cross and resurrection of Christ," his reference to the crucifixion is future-oriented and serves as a juxtaposition to the baptism about which he is currently writing. It seems accurate to

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[69] PG 81:251. This passage was brought to my attention through Paulovkin's work, wherein he attempts to reconcile the differing attributions of John 3:16 within Theodoret's corpus. See Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 313ff.

[70] Paulovkin includes reference to *On the Psalms* 1, which quotes loosely from John 3:18. However, the referent is unclear at best, as is the christological focus. Jerome does reword 3:18 into the first person, indicating that Jesus is imagined as speaking. For his full discussion, see Paulovkin, 177–78.

[71] Quoted from NPNF 2.6:734.

conclude, then, that Jerome correlates the identity of the speaker to the characteristics of his baptism. Jerome does not discuss the 'testimony' which has been dominant in previous discussions on 3:31-36, but his brief comparison of the two baptisms does help to corroborate the connection already established.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350-428)

Theodore's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* offers several instances in which the speakers in John 3 are identified. With regard to 3:16-21, Theodore discusses the dual-nature of Christ:

> *For God*, he continues, *so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.* 'That is,' he says, 'a sign of the love of God who gave his Only Begotten Son for the salvation of the world.' And notice how he took up, just a few lines above, the example of the serpent, which indicates the human who was taken up, in order to demonstrate, as in the case of the serpent, that he gave believers something that he does not possess through his own power but through the power that lives in him. How then did he say, he gave his Only Begotten Son? For it is obvious that the Godhead cannot suffer; nevertheless, they [humanity and divinity] are one through their conjunction. Therefore, even though the other suffers, the whole is attributed to the divinity.[72]

In the context of Theodore's passage, the pronoun 'he' necessarily refers to Christ, as the previous and following sections discuss the words of Christ. While at first glance, the focus of the text is on the crucifixion—or at the least, the death-resurrection of Christ as the mechanism through which believers are saved—the point which Theodore expands upon here is that Christ was indeed divine and, therefore, God suffered during the crucifixion. In discussing this passage, Paulovkin concludes that "Incontrovertibly, this statement alludes to the incarnation; in Theodore's view Jesus himself was declaring why he was sent to the world."[73] Theodore goes on to describe 3:16-21 as a statement of purpose for why the Christ had to come to earth: "[Jesus] says, 'the intention of God is

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[72] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Marco Conti, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 34.

[73] Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 246.

this: that all may believe and be saved, and this is why I came to be among humanity.'" The correlation between the speaker and the christological focus is consistent: Jesus is speaking and explaining the purpose of the incarnation.

Regarding 3:31-36, Theodore identifies the speaker as the Baptist and interprets the passage as the Baptist's teachings on the greatness of Christ:

> *He must increase, but I must decrease.* 'This certainly will not happen in a short time,' he says, 'but it is necessary that the things that are his increase while those that are mine decrease.' Why? *The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things.* 'Since he came from above,' he says, 'he is consequently above everything. I, because I am of the earth, am necessarily like one who is of the earth. . .. He is superior to all,' he says, 'and does not speak according to tradition but rather teaches those things about which he himself has gained an accurate knowledge.'[74]

Theodore goes on to explain how "whoever believes [Jesus'] words as true openly confesses him and testifies to God that the words said by him are true" and that all of these descriptions concern the divine and human nature of Christ. The purpose of the entire passage, for Theodore, is the trust placed in Christ by the believer that the things he says are true. Because Christ comes from heaven, he testifies with certainty concerning heavenly things. The testimony which believers profess, then, is the belief in the words of Christ. Theodore here does not refer to the testimony that Christ died and was raised from the dead for the forgiveness of sins. In this way, throughout his commentary on 3:16-21 and on 3:31-36, Theodore correlates the identity of the speaker to the christological focus on the incarnation and the testimony of the truth of Christ's words.

The transition from the fifth to sixth centuries marks the transition from the Church Fathers toward the beginning of the medieval era. The texts examined above consistently demonstrate the correlation upon which I will base my interpretation of John 3 itself.[75] When an author imagines Jesus or the Baptist to be speaking, the christological

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[74] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 38.

[75] In addition to those examined above, Paulovkin discusses excepts from Philo of Carpasia, Severian of Gabala, Quodvultdeus of Carthage, and Prosper of Aquitaine. These texts are included in Table 1A in the Appendix. In each instance, the author attributes the words to the character in the story,

focus is often on the incarnation, the role of Christ on earth, and the testimony of those who believe in Jesus' identity. Conversely, when an author attributes the ambiguous words of John 3 to the Evangelist, the christological focus is on the crucifixion and the benefit obtained through the shedding of Christ's blood.

The Sixth Century

In addition to marking the shift toward the "medieval" era, the sixth century is also marked by a decline in extant material which can contribute to this investigation. Indeed, out of the number of sixth-century authors examined from Patrologia Graeca/Latina, only two attribute the ambiguous passages in John 3 to a speaker: Pope Gregory the Great and Ammonius of Alexandria.[76] Both figures offer insight into the present discussion.

Gregory the Great (c.540-604)

Gregory's *Forty Gospel Homilies* offer two instances in which he identifies the speaker of a passage in John 3. In Homily 5, Gregory describes how "John was a prophet and more than a prophet; he pointed out the Lord as he was coming to be baptized . . .. Pondering both his humility and the power of his divinity, he said: *He who is of the earth speaks of the earth; he who comes from heaven is above all.*"[77] Gregory goes on to describe the other major events in the Baptist's life, including his declaration that Jesus was the redeemer of the world and John's imprisonment. In quoting from John 3:31, Gregory attributes the passage to the Baptist and this attribution to the Baptist is important for Gregory's argument. He explains that the Baptist understood his role as

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either Jesus or the Baptist. Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception," 184–333.

[76] Benedict of Nursia and the Benedictine rule, Romanos the Melodist, Cassiodorus, and Severus of Antioch all have extant writings for examination, but none offer attribution for the ambiguous passages.

[77] Gregory, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst, CSS 123 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 28. Italics original to translation.

subordinate to Christ's and that the Baptist sought no focus on himself after the Christ appeared. Gregory's evidence for this argument comes from his understanding that 3:31 comes from the words of the Baptist. The point of the passage is the juxtaposition of the Baptist against the Christ and, therefore, the passage sets out to describe the nature of Christ over against the Baptist. In this sense, then, Gregory correlates the speaker—the Baptist—to the christological focus on the identity of Christ as the "Lamb of God."

Homily 38 appears to throw a metaphorical wrench into the correlation for which I am arguing. In it, Gregory discusses the unity of the hearts of the Church through the incarnation of Christ: "A clearer and safer thing to say is that the Father made a marriage feast for his son by joining the church to him through the mystery of his incarnation."[78] He follows this line of reasoning and argues that "Only God's love brought it about that his only-begotten Son united the hearts of his chosen to himself. John says that *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son for us*."[79] It appears that Gregory is connecting John 3:16 to the incarnation in that it is the mystery of the incarnation which joins the hearts of the church together. Gregory also appears to attribute the passage to John [the Evangelist] and moves on without further discussion. I argue, however, that this instance is not as clear as it appears and that, as discussed previously, the attribution to John could simply mean that John records the saying.

Elsewhere in Gregory's work, and indeed in Homily 38, he attributes the words of Jesus to the Evangelist who recorded those words. In the introduction to Homily 38, Gregory discusses the differences between Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the marriage feast and points out that Luke describes a dinner scene against Matthew's midday meal.[80] I observe, however, that in Luke 14:16-24, the description of the

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[78] Gregory, 341.

[79] Gregory, 347. Italics original to translation.

[80] Gregory, 339.

marriage dinner is clearly the words of Jesus speaking in parables; the words are not those of the Evangelist Luke. This alone raises suspicion as to the attribution of John 3:16 to the Evangelist. Additionally, in stark contrast to the focus on the speaker in Homily 5 discussed above, Gregory cites the passage from John 3:16 and moves into his argument without further mention of the speaker. While he cites John as saying the verse, the attribution is not important to his argumentation at all. With the evidence available, I cannot conclude that Gregory specifically attributes 3:16 to Jesus, but I also cannot decisively argue that he has the Evangelist in mind, either. So, it appears that this passage, although it offers a christological focus on the incarnation, cannot guarantee support for or refutation of the correlation which I am identifying.

Ammonius of Alexandria

Ammonius, Presbyter of Alexandria, is a little-known figure who includes reference to the speaker of John 3:31-36 in his commentary on John. The source for his work is found in the *Patrologia Graeca*, which identifies him as a presbyter in Alexandria in the mid-sixth century.[81] His commentary on John speaks of the Baptist who confesses that he "himself [is] from the earth and speaks from the earth" and that he himself is small and his teachings low. This lowly teaching is juxtaposed with Christ's, which comes from the Father above. Ammonius explains that the Baptist speaks as a man and Christ speaks as "the same God and man."[82] The purpose of the citation is to compare the authorities and baptisms of the Baptist and of Christ. In this way, the identity of the speaker is important because the Baptist is describing his own ministry as lowly in comparison to Jesus'.

The christological focus of the section is relatively clear as well:

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[81] PG 85:1361ff. Details of his life are unknown.

[82] PG 85:1415.

> For evidence that it has a manifestation and a sign. The Son, the One sent from the Father, is the presence of the Father in the flesh. Because the Father himself dwells in the Son and does not hide his own nature from him. The Son proceeded from the Father according to his own substance.[83]

For Ammonius, the reason that Jesus' teaching is superior to the Baptists is because Christ shares his essence with the Father in heaven. As a matter of comparison, then, the focus of the passage is on the identity of Christ and the source of his authority. While Ammonius is unclear as to the attribution of 3:16-21, he is clear that 31-36 is the Baptist and the focus of the passage is on the identity of Jesus as belonging to the same substance as the Father.

Conclusions from
The Early Christian Era

These centuries of Christian writers and, indeed, dozens of texts, have demonstrated several themes which shed light on the overarching question: Who is speaking in John 3? First, the authors of the early Christian era consistently attribute the passages in John 3 to the characters in the story, either Jesus or the Baptist. A few authors dissent from this identification and suggest that the Evangelist is speaking in either or both passages. The second theme is the correlation between the speaker identified and the theological focus of the passage. Without fail, the authors who explicitly identify the Evangelist as the speaker connect the passage to the crucifixion. Conversely, those who identify the characters in the story—Jesus or John the Baptist—consistently connect the passage with the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the function of the Christ on earth, or the relationship between the Father and Son. The testimony which the Baptist describes is Jesus' own testimony regarding his relationship with the Father. At this point in the chronology of Christian interpretation on John 3, no author connects the Evangelist as the speaker with a focus other than the crucifixion.

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[83] PG 85:1415.

CHAPTER 3

PRE-MODERN INTERPRETATION: THE MEDIEVAL ERA

> The one who believes in him is not judged. The one who does not believe has already been judged, because that one has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:18).

Loosely defined, the medieval era contains the indistinct centuries which separate classical antiquity and the modern era. Within Christendom, the medieval era begins with the fall of the Western Roman Empire to invaders and ends with the start of the Reformation or, more broadly, the Renaissance. This period marks a significant development of theological treatises and debates, building upon the councils and creeds of the previous era. The medieval era also includes several debates within the Christian Church which shaped the theological claims and clarified beliefs. In the previous era, these debates typically ended with one side becoming the accepted dogma and the other(s) becoming labeled as a heresy. In the medieval time, these debates typically—although not always—remained the discussion of two opposing views *within the Church*.

Paulovkin's work formed the framework of Chapter 2, but because he discusses only the Patristic era, he does not discuss any of the following texts. The source for almost all the medieval texts comes from Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. Because of the volume of data, it is impossible to discuss each relevant text at length. Instead, the appendix at the end of this project will include as much data as possible, acknowledging that an exhaustive study of this magnitude is impossible for a project of this length. As with the previous chapter, Chapter 3 will proceed roughly chronologically.

The Seventh and Eighth Centuries

For much of the seventh and eighth centuries, the consensus continues that was

established in the previous chapter: Jesus is the speaker in 3:16-21 and either Jesus or the Baptist is the speaker in 3:31-36. The identification of these speakers is tied variously to the identity of Christ, the judgment of humanity, or the original sin which causes that judgment. The two instances in which 3:16-21 is connected to the voice of the Evangelist in these centuries also connect the passage explicitly to the crucifixion.

Isidore of Seville (c.560-636)

Isidore, Archbishop of Seville, wrote extensively, offering his *Etymologiae* as an attempt at organizing the world's knowledge. He also wrote several treatises and commentaries, but only a single text is directly relevant to the current project. In his *Book on the Order of Creation*, Isidore describes those believers who have secret transgressions which follow behind them. He states that "the Lord, he says, 'Whoever believes in the Son has already been judged,'" and goes on to argue that those of faith recognize that they did not merit grace or baptism (*Ord. creat*. 12.2).[1] Those who fail to recognize the grace of their faith are subject to the judgment. Isidore goes on to cite John 3:3 and Psalm 1:5, using both to argue that the wicked will not rise in the judgment. The clear referent for John 3:18 is Jesus, 'the Lord.' Isidore uses this verse as an explanation for those who claim faith but maintain hidden sins. Those people will not face the judgment to come because, according to Jesus, they have already been judged. Therefore, the focus that Isidore draws from 3:18 is on the judgment already executed against nonbelievers, and this focus on the judgment correlates to the identity of the speaker as Jesus himself.

Ildefonsus (c.607-667)

Ildefonsus, bishop of Toledo, offers a concise connection between an explicit speaker's identity and the focus on original sin of humanity:

[1] Quoted from PL83:945.

> Those who recognize the truth say, 'I was conceived in iniquities, and in sin did my mother give birth,' and in fact, the original punishment was death, until the redemption of the Son of God, the Son of the ancient wrath which was earned by the first man. In the words of the Lord, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.' Notice that the anger does not come, but he said it remains. The disobedience is new, but the transgression is from old (*Cog. bapt*. 20).[2]

Ildefonsus places the words of John 3:36 in the mouth of Jesus himself, and uses the verse as the basis for his argument for the original sin of humanity. His focus on the wrath *remaining* explicates the connection between the Johannine reference and the Psalm of David. Although Ildefonsus mentions the 'redemption of the Son of God,' the reference is not explicitly connected to the crucifixion. Instead, the purpose of the citation appears to be to argue that all people are under the wrath of God until they come to faith in Christ. In this sense, the passage is interested in judgment from or belief in Christ and the words of John 3:36 are placed in the mouth of Jesus himself.

Venerable Bede (c.672-735)

Saint Bede, the Venerable, had a lasting impact on English Christianity, offering the first history of the English church, along with a trove of other biblical and historical works. Bede leaves homilies, commentaries, and tractates which identify a speaker in John 3. In each instance, Bede identifies Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21 and the Baptist as the speaker in 3:31-36. For this reason, his works will be discussed collectively in order to identify the theological focus in his texts which correlate to the identification of the speakers in each passage.

John the Baptist, the precursor, is responsible for defining the difference between the blessings bestowed upon Christ himself and those bestowed upon Christ's followers. Bede describes that, "While the Holy Spirit is indeed in all participants, and all are products of the Holy Spirit and of the heavenly grace, [Jesus] was full of grace and truth and, as the precursor says about him, 'Not by measure does God give the spirit, for

[2] Quoted from PL96:120.

the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'"(*Tabernaculo* 2.9).[3] Bede cites John 3:35 as evidence about the unique blessings given to the Son: he receives the Holy Spirit without measure. Not only is the Baptist responsible for explaining the unique position of the Son, he also adds his testimony to that of Christ himself. Bede describes Jesus as saying, 'He that sent me is true, and what I hear from Him I speak to the world.' And again, 'But I have called you friends, because you recall that whatever I have heard from my Father, I told you.' *Of which John the Baptist says,* 'The one who came from heaven is over all, and what he saw and heard he testifies'"(*Comm. Hab.*)[4] Bede connects the words of Christ in 8:26 and 15:15 with the words of the Baptist in 3:31 in order to argue that Christ's teachings represent the words of the Father. According to Bede, when the Baptist says that Jesus "testifies" to what he has seen and heard, the Baptist is describing the teachings which Jesus received from the Father and shared with his discipled. Thus, the "testimony" which the Baptist discusses in 3:31-36 is not the testimony that the Son of God died on the Cross but, for Bede, the testimony that what Jesus taught was the very words of God. Bede connects 3:31-36 to the Baptist in both passages and in both instances, he is describing the earthly ministry of the Christ. Bede does not connect either passage with the crucifixion or the testimony concerning it.

In the first of his many collected homilies, Bede connects Jesus' incarnation with the display of God's love to the world, stating that "[Jesus] explains the reason of his incarnation, for he says, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life'"(*Hexaem.* 1.1).[5] In addition to this explicit correlation between the words of Jesus and the incarnation, Bede also uses this passage from John 3 to discuss the disobedience of those

[3] Quoted from PL91:449.

[4] Quoted from PL91:1237.

[5] Quoted from PL94:14.

who do not believe in the Son of God: "But as the Lord says, 'Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so his works are not exposed.' And those outside obtain such an end and its darkness. Those who are pleased with the wrongs that they have done" (*Comm. Prov*. 1.1)[6] And again, "Concerning sin indeed, because they do not believe in [Jesus]. Concerning unbelief especially, because faith is the source of all virtues. His position is strengthened when they persist in disobedience, as the Lord himself frightfully attests, 'Whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God'" (*Hexaem*. 2.6).[7] In both instances, the words of the Lord in 3:20 and 3:18 serve as the argument against those who reject the Son of God. Because, as Bede argues, faith is the source of all virtue, those who do not have faith are incapable of maintaining virtue. Instead, they love the darkness and hide their evil works. The focus in both passages is anthropological, describing the sin of humanity and their inability to do good apart from faith in the Son. Because of this, both passages are concerned with the judgment of those who reject Christ, and both passages correlate that judgment to the words of Jesus in 3:16-21.

Alcuin of York (d.804)

Flaccus Albinus Alcuinus, Alcuin is placed at this point in the discussion because of his close connection to Bede. Both were English writers who contributed to the church and Alcuin appears to have been trained by a pupil of Bede's. It is fitting, then, that Alcuin follows in the pattern of Bede and consistently attributes 3:16-21 to Jesus and 3:31-36 to the Baptist. In the single instance where Alcuin attributes a passage from John 3 to the Evangelist, he explicitly connects that verse with the crucifixion, thus corroborating the larger argument of this dissertation. In the instances where the

[6] Quoted from PL91:947.

[7] Quoted from PL94:160.

characters in John 3 are considered the speakers, Alcuin is consistently focused on the dual humanity/divinity of Christ or the good works necessary for believers to display their faith in the Son. These consistent ideas will be discussed first, followed by an examination of Alcuin's single text which discusses the Evangelist and the crucifixion.

Concerning the dual natured Christ, both human and divine, Alcuin says,

> If you do not believe the testimonies of the Holy Fathers, believe the Son of God himself who witnesses in the Gospel, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' Is just anyone given for the salvation of the world? Him alone who…had blood-shedding red clothes, who is like all of us apart from the law of sin… not in the glory of the deity, in which he is by all means similar to the Father unlike every creature; but in mere humanity, in which he became like all of us, except the law of sin (*Adv. Felic*. 7.1.15).[8]

The speaker of John 3:16 is Jesus, who witnesses about the Father's love for the world. Alcuin argues that the testimony of the Fathers agrees with this testimony of Jesus and discusses how the Son was "given for the salvation of the world." Given the reference to "salvation of the world" as well as the "blood-shedding red clothes," it is easy to infer a reference to the crucifixion. However, the point Alcuin is making is concerned with the type of person capable of saving the world. The blood-shedding aspect of Christ is one of the qualities of his person; it is not the focus of the passage. Instead, Alcuin is focused on the essence of Christ as human and divine. It is only through his dual nature that Christ can be the salvation of the world, and it is in his capacity as divine and human that God sends him as a display of God's love. While Alcuin might refer to the crucifixion, the focus of this text is on the identity of Christ as divine and human, and the words of 3:16 are attributed to Christ himself.

In a further discussion concerning the full divinity of Christ, Alcuin quotes John the Baptist:

> Because it is hard to understand and is upsetting to the faith to say that the soul of Christ is not full of deity in himself, to grow in knowledge, John the Baptist says,

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[8] Quoted from PL101:139. Alcuin makes similar arguments later in *Adv. Felic*. and in a letter. See PL101:194, 240.

> ‘To Christ individually and without measure is the Spirit given generously,’ he said, ‘he gives the spirit of God without measure.’ To men, the spirit is measured, but only to the Son is it given without measure, because all the fullness of the Godhead lives in him (*Fide. sanct*. 2.11).[9]

In his discussion on the holy faith, Alcuin addresses the concern that Christ is said to have “grown in knowledge and stature, and favor with the Lord.” Alcuin argues that this passage does not mean that Christ is not full of deity in himself and, to support his argument, he quotes John 3:34. The words are attributes to the Baptist himself, and the correlated focus is on the full divinity of Christ.[10]

The final relevant passage from Alcuin switches from the initial attribution of 3:16 to Jesus to an attribution of the same verse to the Evangelist. Mirroring the switch in attribution, the focus of this passage also switches from the divinity/humanity of Christ to the crucifixion:

> The only begotten Son of God suffered and was buried, and on the third day resurrected, while he was in the form of a servant and not in the eternal glory of the Godhead…But such is the unity of the person, the Lord of Glory who was crucified, the only begotten who was given to the passion, as the Evangelist says, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.’ And with John, the blessed Paul says… ‘Who his own son not sparing but delivered him for us all’ (*Incarn. Christi* 6).[11]

This passage from *On the Incarnation of Christ* includes reference to both the crucifixion and the divine nature of Christ. Alcuin discusses the ‘eternal glory of the Godhead’ exhibited in Christ and the unity of divinity and humanity found within Christ. But this passage is focused on the crucifixion. Not only does Alcuin connect John 3:16 to Romans 8:32 and its explicit reference to the sacrifice of Christ, Alcuin is focusing on the manner in which Christ went to the cross. He discusses the divine and human nature of Christ *in order to claim that Christ’s humanity went to the cross.* Therefore, Alcuin correlates the Evangelist’s words in 3:16 to the crucifixion of Christ.

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[9] Quoted from PL101:30.

[10] Alcuin also quotes 3:34 in *Adv. Felic*. 7. PL101:140-141. He attributes the verse again to the Baptist but does not include enough contextual matter to merit a detailed examination.

[11] Quoted from PL101:274.

Autpert Ambrose (c.730-784)

Although Autpert wrote extensive commentaries on various books of the Bible, his only relevant text for the current discussion comes from his biography, *Lives of Saints Paldo, Tuto, and Vaso.* In the prologue to his work, Autpert discusses the way Christ died for the salvation of the world. Even in his discussion of Christ's sacrifice, however, it seems that he is making a specific point about the nature of Christ's humanity:

> That the only begotten Son of God would die for us on the basis of the flesh, to prevent the death of the soul beyond reigning in us, as Adam lost for us, in Christ we receive. Hence it is written: 'When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem and adopt those who were under the law.' But the great love he has for us, no words can explain. For he, the Son of God, said, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son.' Here again, Paul says, 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And again said, 'Being in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself in the form of a servant, in the human likeness, found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (*Vita, Prologue*).[12]

The larger context of Autpert's passage is certainly on the crucifixion: he mentions Christ's sacrifice both before and after his biblical quotations. However, it appears that the biblical quotations which Autpert presents are not used to substantiate his claim about the crucifixion, but to describe *the humanity of Jesus* as he was crucified. Even in his reference to Paul, Autpert is focused on the love of God and the form of Christ's humanity. Therefore, the point of all four biblical quotations is not that Christ died on the cross but, rather, that Christ came *as a human being*. Even if the passage is about the crucifixion, Autpert sees the love of God displayed not in the fact that Christ went to the cross, but in the fact that Christ went to the cross *as a human being.* This passage is certainly one of the more ambiguous ones examined thus far, and little weight should be given to it either way. It appears that Autpert attributes the passage to Jesus and correlates it to the humanity of Christ displayed in both his incarnation and crucifixion.

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[12] Quoted from PL89:1321.

Paul the Deacon, Winfridus (c.720-799)

Winfridus offers an example of another connection between John 3:18 and Psalm 1:5—the other coming from Isidore of Seville. In addition to these two passages, Winfridus includes reference to Matthew 25:

> The Psalms say, 'Do not resurrect the wicked in judgment,' and the Lord says, 'Those who do not believe have already been judged.' God will order those who are judged and believe, which is described, 'I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. Then the king will say to those on his right hand 'Come, you who are blessed by my father, we prepared for you a kingdom from the foundation of the world'' (*Hom*. 73).[13]

Although the reference to resurrection indicates acknowledgement of the salvation offered through Christ's sacrifice, the focus of the passage is clearly the juxtaposition of the judgment against those who do not believe in Jesus and those who believe but are still judged. The reason that some who believe are still judged, according to Winfridus, is that some who profess belief do not do the good works of the Lord. The idea of the good works of those who believe ties in to the claim in 3:21, that those who love the light show their works to be done "in God." As with other authors before and after him, Winfridus is concerned with the judgment of believers who do not do good works, as well as the judgment of unbelievers who are already under the wrath of God and are not resurrected in the judgment. In all of this, Winfridus correlates the focus on judgment to the words of Jesus in 3:18 and suggests a theological connection between Psalm 1, Matt 25, and John 3.

Paulinus II, of Aquileia (c.726-804)

The final passage of this section comes from Paulinus II, the Patriarch of Aquileia. In his book *Against Felix*, Paulinus attributes 3:16 to the Evangelist, saying, "Jesus, 'who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all sins. The Father did not spare him, but delivered him for us.' Hence John the Evangelist testifies, saying:

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[13] Quoted from PL95:1216.

'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for the salvation of the world'" (*C. Felic.* 53).[14] The passage is clear in its attribution of 3:16 to the Evangelist. Less clear is Paulinus' focus throughout the passage. He references the "redemption from sins," the fact that the Father "did not spare him" but that Jesus was, instead, "delivered for us." These references from Titus 2:14 and Romans 8:32 indicate a focus on the crucifixion as the event in which the Father "delivered" Christ instead of sparing him. The passage does not indicate that God expresses his love through giving his son in the incarnation but, rather, that he does so by offering Christ *as a sacrifice on the cross*. Again, the identification of John the Evangelist as the speaker in John 3 correlates to a focus on the crucifixion of Christ. Both Paulinus and Alcuin attribute the passage to the Evangelist, and both uphold the consistent correlation described throughout.

The Ninth Century

The ninth century is marked by two significant events that shaped the century and, in some ways, Christian history. The first event was the coronation of Charlemagne as the Emperor of the Romans in 800 CE. Charlemagne united much of western Europe and spread Christianity—typically through forced conversion—across his Carolingian Empire. Charlemagne developed relationship with Popes Leo and Adrian and, although contentious at times, was favored over the Byzantine rulers in the east. This tension concerning the Papal preference for the Roman emperor added to the tensions which eventually culminated in the Great Schism of 1054. The second significant event concerned a predestination debate centered around Grottschalk of Orbais and Hincmar, the Archbishop of Reims. Several authors below are involved, directly or tangentially, to the debate concerning Grottschalk's claims of double predestination. Although a lengthy discussion of the events surrounding this debate is beyond the scope of this project,

[14] Quoted from PL99:410.

several texts which identify a speaker for John 3 are written in the context of the debate on predestination. Therefore, the relevant historical background will be discussed when necessary. Prior to that debate, several authors in the ninth century identify speakers in John 3, and they uniformly correlate the identity of the speaker to the theological foci identified above.

Charlemagne (748-814)

Charlemagne himself did not provide evidence for the speakers in John 3, but he did publish several letters of correspondence between himself and the Pope. One such letter, written by Adrian 1, addresses the unique status of the Lord compared to the adopted relationship between Christians and God. Adrian writes that the same one who said, "God can raise up children of Abraham out of these stones" also said, "The Father loves the Son, and he has given everything into his hand" (*Ep. Adriani* 83).[15] He goes on to ask, rhetorically, "Does the Father not love Paul… Does He not love John?" Quoting Matthew 3:9, Adrian identifies the speaker of John 3:35 as the Baptist. The purpose of his quotation from 3:35 is to address the concern that God does not love Christians if he does not give everything into their hands, thus the rhetorical questions concerning the love God shows toward Paul or John. Adrian uses this opportunity and, indeed, the quote from 3:35 to argue that Jesus had a unique status as the Son of God. While Paul and John were adopted by the Father, Jesus was always the only begotten Son and, therefore, it is fitting that he receives all things from the Fathers hand. In this letter, Adrian attributes 3:35 to the Baptist and uses it to argue for the unique relationship between the Father and Son.

Benedict of Aniane (c.747-821)

Benedict repeatedly references John 3:35-36 in discussions regarding the

[15] Quoted from PL98:380.

judgment of those who do not accept the Son of God, the clearest example of which is in the following passage:

> First, fear of judgment comes from the commandment of the Lord, because he said, 'Those who do not believe in the Son shall not have life; but the wrath of God remains upon him.' Those who want to attain eternal life, the commandment is this, 'The first and greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and with all your soul. Accordingly, you shall love your neighbor as yourself' (*Cod. reg*. 23).[16]

The verse, attributed to Jesus himself, refers to the wrath of God remaining on those who do not love God according to Jesus' commandment in Matt 22:37-40. Here, belief in the Son, and attaining eternal life, do not hinge upon belief that Jesus was crucified but, rather, those who obey the commandments Jesus gave while he carried out his earthly ministry. Elsewhere, Benedict consistently attributes this passage to Jesus and uses it to discuss belief, original sin, and the diagnosis of sin in unbelievers.[17] In each instance, Benedict is focused not on the crucifixion, but on the teachings of Jesus and the eternal benefit in obeying those teachings. He nowhere argues that the 'belief in the Son' necessary to have life is belief that the Son died on the cross.

Theodulf of Orleans (c.750-821)

Theodulf offers an interpretation of John 3:34 which raises issues for the correlation identified above between the identity of the speaker as the Evangelist and the focus on the crucifixion:

> The Spirit of the Lord rested on Mary, 'because in [Jesus] God was pleased that all fullness of the godhead dwell bodily.' Not by parts, as in the rest of the saints—which to some is given the word of wisdom, to others the word of knowledge, some grace, the virtues, and so on, which each is given according to the measure—but to the fullest. Hence the apostle says, 'Not to the measure does the Father give the spirit,' and the prophet [Isaiah], 'Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my elect in which I am well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he will bring forth

[16] Quoted from PL103:512.

[17] See *Cod. reg* 122 and *Concordia Regularum.* PL103:982,1379.

judgment to the nations' (*Ord. bapt.* 17).[18]

Theodulf goes on to compare the testimony of Isaiah to that of the Baptist, when he said that he "saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and remained upon [Jesus] (John 1:32)." All the testimony cited by Theodulf—all of the scriptures referenced—indicate the focus on the fullness of Spirit which dwelled upon the Christ. The author attributes 3:34 to 'the apostle' and, given his reference to 'the prophet' as Isaiah and, elsewhere, 'the apostle' as Paul, it seems that Theodulf does in fact have the Evangelist in mind. He references the Baptist before and after his citation of 3:34 but does not name him here. Taken together, it seems that Theodulf attributes 3:34 to the Evangelist and the focus of the passage is on the unique status of Christ. There is no reference of the crucifixion, which would be expected if the correlation established above was followed.

The larger context of this passage in Theodulf's work is the discussion of baptism and, specifically, the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The author is comparing the John's baptism, that of Jesus, and that of the Holy Spirit. He refers to events throughout the book of Acts in which people who believe in Jesus as the Christ as subsequently baptized in the Holy Spirit. The reason that Theodulf references the fullness with which Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit is because he is comparing the filling of Christ with the gifts received by the believers in Acts. The fullness in Christ is compared to the measure given to those baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers—which is the ultimate point of Theodulf's work—only comes after Christ has ascended into heaven and breathed out his Holy Spirit to his Church. Although the author nowhere references the crucifixion, he seems to have the ascended Christ in mind as an assumed fact which is subsequent to all discussion on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. While Theodulf goes against the correlation established above with regard to 3:31-36, the correlation found in 3:16-21 remains, thus far, consistent.

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[18] Quoted from PL105:237.

Jonas of Orleans (c.760-843)

Theodulf was accused of treason and removed from his position as Bishop of Orleans. Jonas was given the position as the immediate successor of Theodulf. It is, perhaps, ironic that Jonas becomes the Bishop of Orleans and, in his single text identifying the speaker in John 3:31-36, he contradicts Theodulf's attribution and restores the correlation observed thus far. Like Ildefonsus before him, Jonas of Orleans focuses on the words, "the wrath of God remains on him," as an argument for the original sin of humanity:

> Concerning wrath Job says, 'Man is born of woman, and life is short and full of anger.' And about wrath the Lord Jesus Christ says, 'Whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life; but whoever does not believe in the Son does not have life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.' Wrath is not said to come, but it remains. This means that every person is born with it (*Instit. laic.* 1).[19]

Both the speaker and focus of the passage is clear: Jonas attributes 3:36 to Jesus and uses it as an argument for the original sin on every person. Elsewhere in *De Institutione,* Jonas attributes 3:18 also to Jesus, referring to the mystery of faith and how believers come into the faith.[20]

Angelomus of Luxeuil (d.895 CE)

Angelomus was a biblical commentator who worked primarily on the Old Testament. His single reference to the speaker in John 3 correlates the Evangelist and the crucifixion. Perhaps intentionally, Angelomus reflects the same attribution that his influencer Alcuin made. Both authors connect John 3:16 to the Evangelist and use it to describe the demonstration of the Father's love through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Angelomus says that

> "[The Father] is our mercy, because he demonstrated his compassion by sending his only begotten Son, so his blood might redeem us, according to what the Apostle

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[19] Quoted from PL106:125.

[20] See *Instit. laic.*18. PL106:272. In addition to Jonas, Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel attributes John 3:16-18 to Jesus. See PL102:297,649. Neither passage on 3:16-18 adds to the project at hand.

> says, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' For our sins, during the passion he says, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (*Enarrat. Reg.* 1.1).[21]

The meaning and attribution are clear: The Apostle—in this case John the Evangelist—sees the cross of Christ as the ultimate display of God's love. In interpreting 3:16, Angelomus sees the words "he gave his…Son" to indicate that God gave Jesus *on the cross*. Other authors interpret the same words to mean that God gave Jesus *to earth as a human*, but Angelomus is specifically concerned with the redemption through blood as the demonstration of God's compassion for humanity.

Haimo, Bishop of Halberstadt (d.853)

In his Exposition on the Apocalypse of John, Haimo discusses the words spoken by Christ to the church at Laodicia. In discussing the three roles within the church—Priests, soldiers, and farmers—he says,

> These three are called 'loved,' according to what the Apostle says, 'Who loved us, and washed us from our sins,' and the Lord himself, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' Moreover, it is said that some were spit out, the reprobate, who at the same time were mingling with the good, like the chaff mixed with the grains. They are noxious food in the presence of the saints; hence it is necessary to eject them from the body of Christ. These, of course, are the heretics (*Enarrat. Apoc. 1)*.[22]

Haimo's purpose in this passage is twofold. First, he is arguing that all Christians are loved by the Father: priests, soldiers, and farmers. Second, he is arguing that there are those who profess belief in Christ but are heretics who will be spit out of the church. Haimo does not indicate either way the manner in which God demonstrates his love. While the context indicates the separation of believers and non-believers, it is unclear if this happens through Christ's unique identity as the Son or through the crucifixion. Perhaps it is telling that, in quoting Revelation 1:5, Haimo omits the final phrase of the verse: "Who loved us and washed us from our sins *in his own blood*. Haimo possibly felt

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[21] Quoted from PL115:252.

[22] Quoted from PL117:953.

that the additional words did not contribute to his argument. This omission, however, does imply that Haimo has something other than the blood of Christ as the demonstration of God's love. The passage clearly attributes 3:16 to Jesus but, unfortunately, the context makes the theological focus unclear.

In his *Miscellanies*, Haimo attributes 3:18 to Jesus himself and focuses again on heretics and apostates who will be rejected in the final judgment. He cites Matthew 25, "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat" etc., before stating that the rejection of apostates is "another of those mysteries of the Christian faith of which he says, 'Whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God'" (*Misc*. 3.17).[23] Although Haimo attributes the verse simply to "him," given the previous quotation from Matthew and the specific attribution of that passage to Jesus, there is no other explanation for the second attribution: Haimo sees Jesus as speaking 3:18 in reference to the judgment of apostates. The reference to Matthew 25 further reflects a trend seen elsewhere throughout this history of interpretation: the relationship between good works and the judgment of believers. Authors have frequently attributed the words of John 3 to Jesus or the Baptist in discussions related to those who profess belief in the Son of God without expressing the good deeds which are required of believers.

Rabanus Maurus (c.780-856)

It is at this point in the chronology that the predestination debate takes center stage. Although Rabanus was not directly involved in the debate, he trained Walafrid Strabo, Lupus Servatus, and Gottschalk of Orbais, all of whom played a role in the debate. Rabanus himself was trained by Alcuin (who, as stated above, was a disciple of a pupil of the Venerable Bede's) and was a friend of Haimo. Thus, the authors appear to

[23] Quoted from PL118:942.

be rather connected and, in some ways, aware of each other's writings. In the following pages, several authors will repeat almost the exact arguments of others, particularly as it pertains to the identification of the speaker in John 3 and the correlated theological focus.

Twice Rabanus attributes portions of 3:31-36 to the Baptist. In his *Commentary on Judges and Ruth* as well as his *Commentary on 4 Kings*, John, presumably the Baptist, is speaking when he claims that "I must become less, and he must become more" and, at the same time, that "the one who is from above is above all" and that "the one God sent speaks the words of God" (*Comm. Ruth*. 12; *Comm. 4 Reg.* 3.4).[24] Elsewhere, Rabanus attributes verses to "the Apostle John," so it seems that here Rabanus has the Baptist in mind. The point of these passages is to describe the unique status of Jesus as above humanity and in a special relationship with the Father. Rabanus concludes that the Baptist in no way intends to usurp Christ because of Christ's dignity and privilege, because the Baptist could not assure Israel that his adherence to the old covenant could bring them salvation. Similarly, Rabanus argues that Christ received a unique filling of the Spirit of God which displayed itself in his unparalleled wisdom.

Still discussing John 3:31-36, Rabanus describes the Lord thus:

> Born in the flesh, [he] visited the world between the sick and the powerful, between sinners and the righteous, among the people of God…[and that] the Gospel itself remembers him saying, 'But he who sent me is true, and I tell you what I hear from him.' And again, 'But you, I have called friends, because I have told you all things, whatever I have heard from my Father, so you might remember.' Of whom John the Baptist says, 'He that comes from heaven is above all, and what he saw and heard, this he testifies' (*Cant. Habac*).[25]

The importance of this passage is that in it, Rabanus seems to connect the testimony of the Baptist directly to the testimony of Jesus. Because the Baptist indicates that Jesus testifies "what he saw and heard from heaven," and Rabanus equates this to Jesus saying "I have told you all things," Rabanus is clearly indicating that the testimony in 3:35 is the

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[24] Quoted from PL108:1218 and 109:132.

[25] Quoted from PL112:1113.

testimony *of Jesus' teachings*. The testimony at hand is not the testimony that Jesus died and was raised from the dead for the sins of the world. Rather, the testimony is that Jesus taught his disciples about eternal life through relationship with him and with the Father. As for John 3:16-21, Rabanus repeatedly identifies Jesus as the speaker and connects the passage to the judgment of unbelievers and the universal acceptance of all ethnicities into the Kingdom of God. In his *Exposition on Romans*, Rabanus relates 3:18 to Acts 10 and the gentile Cornelius (*Exp. Rom*. 1.2,).[26] At the same time, he relates the passage to previous sins committed by others, arguing that murder, adultery, or bearing false witness do not disqualify someone from believing in the only begotten Son of God. Elsewhere, Rabanus attributes both Luke 11:52 and John 3:18 to Jesus in the context of judgment, and again he cites 3:18 as Jesus teaching about judgment (*Exp. Prov*. 1.1, *Enarrat. epp. Pauli* 9.2).[27] Finally, Rabanus explicitly connected 3:16 to Jesus only once, but does so in a context which makes the theological focus unclear (*Comm. Matt*. 1.1).[28] Across the board, Rabanus identifies Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21 and the Baptist as the speaker in 3:31-36. In each instance where he does have a clear theological focus, that focus is on the unique identity of the Son or the judgment of those who do not believe. In no instance is Rabanus discussing the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus when he attributes an ambiguous passage in John 3 to a character in the story.

Walafrid Strabo (c.808-849) and
Lupus Servatus (c.805-862)

Walafrid and Servatus are placed in the same section here for two reasons. First, they both studied under Rabanus—and alongside Gottschalk—and were friends in the abbey. Second, they each only contribute a single text to the relevant discussion.

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[26] Quoted from PL111:1316

[27] Quoted from PL111:686 and 112:28.

[28] Quoted from PL107:744.

Although both writers offered support to Gottschalk during the predestination debate, those specific passages do not offer insight into the identification of the speakers in John 3.

Walafrid cites John 3:18 in his *Book on the Psalms*. Psalm 102:10 says that "because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down" and Walafrid compares this anger of the Lord to the words of Jesus in 3:18: "Hence the Lord says, 'the wrath of God remains upon those who do not believe.' He did not say it will come, but it remains, because it is not removed. He was born into it" (*Lib. Psalm 101*).[29] Walafrid here makes the same argument as Ildelfonsus and Jonas of Orleans before him; the original sin of humanity is inherited at birth and that Jesus claims that this sin means that the wrath of God is presently on all who do not believe in the Son of God.

In *De tribus quaestionibus*, Servatus attributes 3:18 to Jesus and focuses specifically on judgment. He cites both Job 14 and Psalm 1 which reads, "Do not resurrect the wicked in judgment." And compares this claim with the Lord saying in the Gospel, "whoever does not believe has already been judged." The connection between John 3:18 and Psalm 1:5 was seen already in the discussion of Paul the Deacon. In both cases, the author attributes 3:18 to Jesus and uses it in a discussion on the judgment of nonbelievers.

Gottschalk of Orbais (c.808-867)

Gottschalk was certainly at the center of the predestination debate. He sought to have his writings approved and, when they were rejected and called heretical, he sought support from his friends. The friends who wrote in support of him included Servatus above, as well as Prudentius and Remigius, discussed below. Gottschalk's primary opponent was the Archbishop of Reims, Hincmar. Much of Gottschalk's work

[29] Quoted from PL113:1012.

centered on his argument for double predestination: the claim that the reprobate are also elected by God unto damnation. In his *Confession,* Gottschalk writes about the reprobate that

> their own future evil merits predestination in the same way that [Jesus'] death earned eternal salvation for those judged righteous, for thus said the Lord himself in his Gospel, 'The Prince of this world has already been judged…. Their destination is the judgment of eternal fire.' And the Truth says, 'Whoever does not believe has already been judged,' that is, already condemned. He says, 'Judgment has not yet appeared, but he has already made a decision.' And John the Baptist explains it thus, 'His testimony no one has received…' (*Conf. monach.*).[30]

In this single passage, Gottschalk attributes 3:18 to Jesus and 3:32 to the Baptist. In both verses, the focus is on the judgment of the reprobate. The 'testimony' which the Baptist describes is the testimony preached by Jesus, denial of which results in the condemnation of those already judged by the Lord. Although Gottschalk mentioned that the death of Jesus earned eternal salvation, this point is certainly not the focus of the passage. That point is used merely as an example upon which to compare the predestined condemnation of the reprobate based on their future sins. So, even though he mentioned the sacrifice of Christ, the passage focuses on the judgment of nonbelievers and it attributes both ambiguous passages in John 3 to the characters in the story.

Prudentius, Bishop of Troyes (d.861)

Prudentius came to the aid of Gottschalk and defended him against the accusations of Hincmar. In this capacity, Prudentius twice attributes 3:18 to Jesus and, in both instances, uses the passage to discuss the judgment of unbelievers. In his *Letter to Hincmar and Pardul*, Prudentius discusses the two judgments of the Lord: "One hidden, the other clear. It seems to me that the Lord said, 'Who believe in me passes from death of life, then the judgment comes.' This is the obvious judgment… 'But whoever does not believe,' He says, 'has already been judged.' That is, the secret judgment prepared before

[30] Quoted from PL121:347-48.

the obvious one" (*Ep. Hinc.* 7).[31] And again, in his *Letter on Predestination*, Prudentius cites Matthew 25 and Psalm 1, concluding with citations of John 3:18 as well as Romans 2:12 (*Praed. C. Scot.* 1.11).[32] The reference to Matthew 25 is identical to that used by Haimo above, and Psalm 1 is referenced in a similar way to Servatus above. In both instances, Prudentius attributes 3:18 to Jesus explicitly and uses his words to explain the predestined judgment of unbelievers.

Remigius of Lyon (d.875)

Along with Prudentius, Remigius wrote in support of Gottschalk. Most of the passages below are related directly to this end. He consistently identifies Jesus as the speaker in John 3:16-21 and, with one exception, uses the passage to focus on the judgment of nonbelievers. In the last passage discussed below, it appears that Remigius is focused on the crucifixion. However, as I will show below, he uses 3:16 as words spoken by Jesus *from the cross*. Before that text is discussed, it will be helpful to examine the other, more clearly focused texts.

Remigius seems to argue that God is responsible for those who are condemned for their sins. He quotes that "God works in you to will and to work according to his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) and immediately follows that reference by saying, "God fulfilled what the Lord says, 'But he who does the truth comes to the light, to show that his works are carried out in God.' And the person is faithful to him, as the prophet said, 'Oh Lord, you will give us peace, for all your works are worked in us'" (*Trib. ep. liber.* 23).[33] Through his combination of citations, Remigius is arguing that the good works accomplished by believers are actually worked out by God and that they are intended to

[31] Quoted from PL115:988.

[32] See PL115, 1163

[33] Quoted from PL121:1026.

bring those who do them into salvation. This passage is certainly an argument in support of predestination, if not double predestination. Elsewhere, he cites John 10:26, 8:47, and 3:18 all as the words of Jesus, and uses them to discuss the judgment of those outside of the fold (*Trib. ep. liber. 15*).[34] This second reference is a clear argument for double predestination and in both cases, Remigius is attributing the passage to Jesus himself.

The obvious contention against double predestination is the biblical claim that Paul argues that "God wants all to be saved." If God does want all to be saved, it would appear contrary to that goal to predestine some for damnation. Remigius responds to this critique saying, "So if, in their impiety, Christ died for them, he exhibited the goodness of his passion, but the wicked in their own impiety are condemned by his just judgment. As he said, 'he who does not believe has already been condemned'" (*Trib. ep. liber.* 28).[35] As with the passage of Prudentius above, although Remigius mentioned the death of Christ the obvious focus is on the judgment which took place prior to the crucifixion. The sacrifice of Christ is used as a fact which undergirds Remigius' current focus: that the reprobate earn their condemnation through rejecting the Son, even if their condemnation was judged prior to the formation of the world.

The final relevant text from Remigius is perhaps a false attribution. Nonetheless, it is worth discussing because it correlates the words of Jesus in 3:16 to the crucifixion:

> The angel teaches us saying, 'You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' Indeed, and the Lord himself, *in the gallows of the lifted up cross*, bears witness saying, 'And as Moses lifted the serpent in the desert, so the Son of Man must also be lifted up, to everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,' where he immediately adds, 'for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son (*Trib. ep. liber.* 14).[36]

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[34] See PL121:1013.

[35] Quoted from PL121:1035.

[36] Quoted from PL121:1011, emphasis added.

The passage clearly attributed 3:15-16 to Jesus and is clearly discussing the gallows, the cross, and the serpent lifted up in the desert. However, notice the timing of the words spoken by Christ. The author here indicates that the Lord bears witness and speaks 3:15-16 *while he is in the gallows of the lifted-up cross*. As with Pope Leo the Great, above, Remigius is here placing the words of 3:16 into the mouth of Jesus on the cross. In this context, it is fitting that the text is emphasizing the crucifixion because the crucifixion is happening as Jesus speaks! The reason for the correlation between the words of the Evangelist and the crucifixion is because the Evangelist has a post-resurrection understanding of the Lord's ministry. This understanding would, of course, acknowledge the crucifixion throughout, including in 3:16-21. However, if Jesus is teaching Nicodemus in 3:16-21 and he is speaking those words, it makes less sense for him to be focusing on his crucifixion. Finally, if Jesus is speaking 3:16-21 not to Nicodemus but from the cross, it makes perfect sense for him to be describing God's love displayed through the crucifixion.

Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims (806-882)

Although Hincmar was the most prominent opponent of Gottschalk's, he only engages with the ambiguous speakers in John 3 once. In his text *On the Predestination of God*, Hincmar is addressing a similar problem to those raised above: If God desires all to be saved, why is everyone not saved? His response is to quote "the Truth in John's Gospel" which says, "'This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light because their deeds were evil'" (*Praed. lib. arb.* 24).[37] It seems that "the Truth" being quoted is the words of Jesus, although this is not certain. His argument is that, although Christ died for the sins of all, some people love the darkness and reject the invitation of Christ to come into the light. Because their deeds

[37] Quoted from PL125:214-215.

are evil, they reject the truth and remain under the wrath of God. This does not contradict, for Hincmar, the claim of Paul that God wishes all to be saved. The argumentation is quite similar to those above who support double predestination, but Hincmar does not go so far as to say that those who continue in their evil deeds do so because the Lord intends them to. He suggests that those who reject Christ do so of their own will or, at least, of their own desire to continue in their evil deeds. It appears, then, that Hincmar's single reference to the speaker in John 3 attributes 3:19 to Jesus and that the focus is on the judgment of unbelievers.

The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Remigius of Auxerre (c.841-908)

Remigius of Auxerre, not to be confused with the Remigius from Lyon, trained under Servatus and is thus the last author connected, at least tangentially, to the predestination debate which dominated the second half of the ninth century. Remigius lived into the tenth century and is the only author from that century which contributes to the present discussion. In his *Commentary on the Psalms,* Remigius crafts a metaphor comparing the music created by David to the body which Christ put on in the incarnation: "This is the kind of melodious organ and unique body which the Lord our Savior put on, because like its deeper sounds, so its glorious formation in the heavens celebrates, as he Himself says in the Gospel, 'The one who comes from above is above all, and what he saw and heard, this he testifies'"(*Enarrat. Psalm* 1.P)[38] Although aspects of the metaphor are likely lost in translation, Remigius seems to be describing the resonance which beautiful music makes in heaven. This musicality in heaven is compared to the beauty of Christ's body, his taking on flesh in the incarnation, as a harmony of human and divine. For Remigius, Christ himself says the words of John 3:31, and the testimony

[38] Quoted from PL131:138.

which he "saw and heard" is that he, Jesus, is the harmonious Son of God who has come from heaven.

Pope Leo IX (1002-1054)

Leo IX discusses the comparative testimonies of the one "from above" and the one "from the earth." In his comparison, he seems to be arguing for the superiority of the testimony of the Pope over against the testimony of the Emperor:

> But we insist on having a testimony more important than that of Constantine, as the Evangelist John says, 'The one from the earth speaks from the earth, and we hardly receive testimony from a man, because we are content with the testimony of the one who came from Heaven…' '…You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the power of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (*Ep. decreta* 100.15).[39]

Because Peter is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, his word is the word which comes from heaven. Ultimately, Leo is arguing for the superior role of the Church within Christendom compared to the lesser role of the Empire. In the passage, Leo attributes 3:31 to the Evangelist, and the focus is clearly on the comparison of the testimonies which come from earth and from heaven. He is not discussing the crucifixion, but he is not discussing Jesus either. In this example, the one "from the earth" is Constantine, not John the Baptist; the one "from above" is Peter, not Jesus. Although Leo identifies a speaker, he is significantly changing the context in which the words of 3:31 are used. Because of this, the specific example from Leo does not hold weight for the present argument.

Cardinal Humbert (c.1000-1061) and Geoffrey of Verdome (c.1070-1132)

Humbert and Geoffrey each offer a single text which attributes 3:17-18 to Jesus himself. In his discussion about simony and, specifically, the story of Simon

[39] Quoted from PL143:755.

attempting to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from Paul, Humbert writes, "The unbeliever is without neither sin nor impiety, such as the wicked Jews and pagans, of whom the Lord in the Gospel says, 'He who does not believe has already been judged, as prince of this world has already been judged.' Therefore, according to the Psalmist, 'Do not resurrect the wicked in judgment'" (*Adv. simoniac* 2.2).[40] Humbert references Psalm 1:5 in relation to John 3:18, as several authors have already done in my research thus far. 3:18 is clearly the words of Jesus and the focus is on the judgment carried out against the wicked.

In much the same way, Geoffrey says that,

> Elsewhere it is said, 'For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.' This is of course to be entirely believed, for he speaks only the truth. Truly the Son of God is not sent into the world from the Father to judge the world. He came into the world so that the world through him would be saved, if the world wanted it…. And because of their own accord, not by the will of Christ, the unbeliever is no doubt judged, when Christ says, "he who does not believe has already been judged' (*Serm.* 6).[41]

Geoffrey cites 3:17-18 and seems to attribute both passages to Jesus himself. Although the first citation only uses a pronoun, the same speaker "speaks only the truth" and the quotation is followed with 3:18 which is explicitly tied to Jesus. It is therefore highly likely that Geoffrey imagines Jesus to be speaking in both verses. As with previous authors, the identity of the speaker as Jesus is tied to the judgment of the world as a function of Christ's coming to earth.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

Anselm provides the last text of this century which discusses the speaker in 3:16-21. In his *Dialogue on Truth,* Anselm constructs a dialogue between a teacher and his students on the truth being revealed through good deals. The teacher says, "You

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[40] Quoted from PL143:1059.

[41] Quoted from PL 157:261.

understand well, but the truth is also revealed by action, as the Lord said, 'Because those who do evil hate the light, and he who does the truth comes to the light'" (*Di. verit.* 5).[42] The student understands and, when asked to clarify what he understands this to mean, the student describes that, "Unless I am wrong, for the same reason we know the other truths, the action is also the contemplation of heavenly things" (5). Both characters in the dialogue seem to understand that "the Lord" is speaking in 3:20-21. The point of this passage is that good deeds are required in the process of coming to the light. For the student, those good works include contemplating on heavenly things which, it appears, are based on the teachings of Jesus during his ministry. Both characters, then, are focused on truth as a virtue and the Christian life. They are discussing neither the crucifixion nor the identity of Christ as the Son of God. The point seems to be much more anthropological in nature.

Peter Damian (c.1007-1073) and Theophylact (c.1050-c.1108)

Both Peter Damian and Theophylact attribute portions of 3:31-36 to the characters in the story, thus it seemed fitting to discuss both authors' texts at the same time. Peter Damian clearly states that the Baptist is speaking in 3:34-35 and, in the same passage, records that the Baptist says, "We have received from his fullness," a reference to John 1:16-18 (*Serm*. 25).[43] He ends this thought with a quote from the Baptist recognizing that he is unworthy to untie the sandals of the Christ. The number of quotes from the Baptist indicates that Peter Damian did indeed have the Baptist in mind while quoting 3:34-35. The focus of his passage is the categorical difference between those from heaven and those from the earth. The only part of Peter's argument which is unclear is whether the comparison is between the Baptist and Christ, or between the

[42] Quoted from PL158:472-473.

[43] Quoted from PL144:644-645.

opponents and the Baptist. The Baptist is the focus, but it is unclear if Peter Damian is arguing that the Baptist is from earth or from heaven.

Theophylact's passage on 3:31-36 is quite similar in focus to Peter Damian's. He also focuses on the idea that God gives the spirit to Christ without measure and that he alone is sent from above and it, therefore, above all (*Enarrat. Ev. Jo.* 3).[44] Unlike Peter, Theophylact seems to argue that the Baptist is identifying himself as the one "from the earth" and that he intends to humble himself before the superior teaching of Christ. Although the precursor's ministry is successful, he is merely getting ready for the divine ministry to come. In both Theophylact and Peter Damian's passages, the words of 3:31-36 are attributed to the Baptist and are used to focus on the unique status of Christ as the one sent from God who teaches the truth from above.

The Twelfth Century

The twelfth century continues the trends established above, although with greater numbers. Of the twenty authors who explicitly identify a speaker for John 3, eighteen attribute the passages to characters in the story—either Jesus or the Baptist—and use the passage to discuss the character of Christ, the judgment on nonbelievers, or other christological aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry. A single author, Bernard of Clairvaux, attributes 3:16-21 to the Evangelist and explicitly connects the verse to the crucifixion itself. The correlation established in 3:31-36 is less exact, as four authors in this century attribute the words to the Evangelist, and three of them are focused on the divinity of Christ and not on the crucifixion, as the trend established above would suggest. The sheer volume of data for this century requires that authors be grouped and discussed based on their similar argumentation.

[44] Quoted from PG 123:1222.

Ivo of Chartres (c.1040-1115) and
Rupert of Deutz (c.1080-1129)

In his *Decretum*, Ivo details the trinitarian belief he upholds, saying "do not doubt the only Son of God, that is one person of the trinity, who alone is the Son of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, also one person of the Trinity, not to the exclusion of the Father but at the same time, the Father and the Son with the Spirit" (*Decretum* 1.10).[45] He goes on to identify the only begotten Son as the speaker of John 3:16, which correlates the specific focus on the divinity of Jesus to the words of Jesus spoken in John 3. In quite a similar way, Rupert describes how "the only begotten himself, a divine son, to his Son you need the just interchange…" and goes on again to identify Jesus as the speaker in 3:16 (*Comm. Gen.* 3.12, 6:30).[46] He concludes this argument by demonstrating that giving Jesus was not a lessening of love, but an increase in it. The mercy, righteousness, and truth of God are on full display in the person of Christ. Although Rupert does go on to mention the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, it is important to note that Rupert's point is that the attributes of God are on display in Christ.

Rupert also identifies the Baptist as the speaker in 3:31-36. He describes how

> the apostle says, 'But these things all work in one and the same spirit, distributing to each as he wills.' In accordance with a similar measure, for there is one alone who has without measure 'every good and perfect gift,' he is the one about whom John the Baptist says, 'for God gives the spirit without measure. The Father has given all things into his hand,' while we 'have all received from his fullness'" (*Comm. Reg*. 3.16).[47]

As with previous authors, Rupert is using the words of 3:34-35 to describe the unique blessing of the Holy Spirit issued to Christ. Rupert ties this passage to 1:16-18 in which

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[45] Quoted from PL161:69.

[46] Quoted from PL167:298,428-29. Rupert also identifies Jesus as speaking in John 3:16-21 in his *Comm. Jo.* 14.11, quoted in PL169:707. Bruno of Segni identifies Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21 but does not offer conclusive contextual evidence to identify the specific purpose of the passage. See *Hom*. 140, PL165:854, and *Sentent*. 3.2, PL165:944.

[47] Quoted from PL167:1160. Also see Rupert's *Comm. Gen*. 8.42, PL167:530 and his *Comm. Apoc*. 1.1, PL169:838,930,1164. Rupert's *Commentary on Genesis* includes the word [evangelista] following his identification of the Baptist as speaking, but it is unclear if that addition was made by Rupert, a later editor, or Migne.

"we have all received from his fullness" and interprets that "fullness" to indicate Jesus' fullness of the Holy Spirit. The referent here and in Rupert's other writings clearly identify the Baptist is speaking, and the focus is on the unique blessing of Jesus and his unique relationship with the Father.

Hugh of St. Victor (c.1096-1141)

Along with Zacharias Chrysopolitanus (d.1155 CE) and Hildebert, Archbishop of Tours (c.1055-1133), Hugh of St. Victor identifies the speaker in 3:34 as the Evangelist while correlating that verse to the divinity of Christ. Thus, these passages run contrary to the correlation established above. All three are still worth examining in order to determine exactly what the authors are arguing and how they interpret the verse attributed to the Evangelist. First, Hugh argues,

> The Apostle says that 'in him dwells the fullness of divinity,' and Ambrose, 'Whatever the Son has of God is by nature, and whatever the Son has of man by grace.' Likewise, the Lord, speaking about himself, said, 'I have been given all power in heaven.' If the Lord has unlimited power, he is almighty. If almighty, he is God. Likewise, John the Apostle says of him that 'he received spirit not by measure,' according to those who deny that the person assumed was God (*Quaest*. 19).[48]

Hildebert's passage in *Tractatus Theologicus* is quite similar, and some argue that it is the work of Hugh which has been misattributed to Hildebert. Nonetheless, the passage argues that the human nature of Christ was given the spirit without measure while the divine nature did not receive but gave the spirit. Quoting 3:34, Hildebert attributes the passage to the Evangelist and specifically discusses the dual nature of Christ (*Tract. Theo*. 13).[49] Zacharias Chrysopolitanus does the same thing, with the added goal of explaining Luke's reference to Jesus growing in stature and in favor with God and men

[48] Quoted from PL175:436.

[49] See PL171:1101.

(*Conc. Ev*. 12).[50] How can Jesus grow in favor with God if he is the Son of God? Zacharias argues that it is the human nature of Christ which gained God's favor, just as Hildebert and Hugh argued that the human nature of Christ received the fullness of the spirit.

In these three passages, the clear emphasis is on the human nature of Christ which needed to grow in favor, needed the gift of the spirit, and needed to be given all power in heaven. None of these authors relate the given passage to the crucifixion, as the correlation established above would assume. While this contradiction to the overall argument of the project is unavoidable, the difficulties inherent are lessened by further discussion of the circumstances surrounding these texts. First, Zacharias relies heavily on Alcuin and indeed, cites him immediately following his discussion on the full divinity of Christ. His wording is similar to that of Alcuin and, although Alcuin identifies the Baptist as the speaker, Zacharias is making the same point in the passage. Given that Zacharias' text is a gospel harmony and follows the theological focus of Alcuin, he is not likely making a theological point by correlating the theological focus to a different speaker than that of Alcuin. Second, given the similarities in the text of *Tractatus Theologicus*, even in the given passage, it appears that the work is that of Hugh of St. Victor. Therefore, the same author—Hugh—identifies the Evangelist as the speaker. So, while it appears that three authors are at odds with the common correlation established over the previous thousand years, Zacharias is merely referencing a previous author and Hildebert is not likely the author of *Tractatus* at all. Only one author is added to the discussion as a contrary voice, and only in relation to 3:34. On 3:16, Hugh supports the common correlation by identifying Jesus as the speaker and focusing on the earthly teachings of Jesus, particularly as they relate to faith and baptism.[51]

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[50] Quoted from PL186:89.

[51] See *Dogmatics* 5.5, Accepting Baptism. PL176:131. Also see PL176:600, wherein Hugh

Three Peters

Peters Abelard (c.1079-1142), the Venerable (c.1092-1156), and Lombard (c.1096-1160) all discuss portions of 3:16-21, attribute the verse(s) to Jesus and use them to discuss faith, judgment, or the incarnation. While the specific points of each passage vary, none of them discuss the crucifixion at all and, instead, discuss the earthly ministry and teachings of Jesus. Abelard frequently attributes 3:18 to "the truth," but he also identifies scriptural references if they are written by Paul or others. It seems clear that, for Abelard, "the truth" is Jesus himself, not the mere truth of scripture generally. In each of his four passages which relate 3:18,20 to Jesus, he is discussing ethics and works as they relate to faith and judgment (*Ethica*. 14; *Comm. Rom.* 1.2, 5).[52]

Peter the Venerable specifically ties 3:17 to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, saying "The Lord came first with mercy, with meekness. The Savior, the Redeemer, the Liberator. As he said to Nicodemus, 'For God did not send his son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him'" (*Serm.* 1).[53] The Venerable is clearer in his attribution of the passage to Jesus and, again, clearer in the specific context of the passage. Jesus is speaking of the initial coming of the Lord with meekness and salvation. While the Venerable speaks of the first coming of Christ, Lombard speaks of the second coming in which Psalm 1:5, John 3:18, and Romans 2:12 are employed to describe the condemnation already judged against unbelievers (*Comm. Psalm* 1).[54] Lombard draws upon the connections made by authors before him to draw the totality of scripture against those who reject Jesus. The reference to 3:18 is Jesus speaking on the second coming as he discusses judgment with Nicodemus.[55] All three

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attributes 3:18 to Jesus while discussing the future judgment.

[52] See PL178:656,811,951,959.

[53] Quoted from PL189:963.

[54] Quoted from PL191:65.

[55] PL192:1111,1313 also attribute 3:16-17 to Jesus while discussing the future judgment, and although both passages are collected under the name of Lombard, they are attributed to the writings of

Peters, then, extend the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus into 3:21 and use the verses to discuss the future judgment taught by Christ.

Baldwin, Herve, and Gerhoh

Baldwin of Forde (1125-1190), Herve de Bourg-Dieu (c.1080-1150), and Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093-1169) individually identify the Baptist as the speaker in 3:34-36 and correlate that passage to the divinity of Christ or the original sin of humanity. Baldwin quotes Jesus twice, saying, "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine" (John 17:10) and "The Father loves the Son and shows him all things" (John 5:20). Interposed between these quotations, Baldwin cites the Baptist as saying, "The Father loves the Son and has given all into his hand" (*Tract*. 15).[56] Baldwin is connecting the testimony of the Baptist to the one taught by Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry: The Father and the Son share all that they have with each other.

Herve de Bourg-Dieu describes the "fury over all unbelievers" and how "in this world we are all under the wrath of God" according to Paul. He then says "'For the one who disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him,' as John the Baptist speaks" (*Comm. Isa.* 5.34).[57] Herve uses 3:36 to discuss the wrath held over all unbelievers and identifies the Baptist as teaching this principle during the lifetime of Jesus himself. The idea of original sin, then, was not developed following the resurrection. Instead, it was taught by both the Baptist and Jesus.

In yet another way, Gerhoh describes Jesus as the perfect gift saying, "He is the one about whom John the Baptist says, 'God gives the spirit by measure. To him all things are given into his hands by the Father, but we all received from his fullness'"

Magister Bandinus and Hugo Rothomagensis, respectively.

[56] Quoted from PL204:549.

[57] Quoted from PL181:322.

(*Comm. Psalm* 38, 41).[58] The combination quote by Gerhoh echoes those seen in previous centuries and argues that Christ alone has a unique relationship with the Father which enables him to receive the full blessing of the Spirit. In contrast, the rest of humanity receives only a measured portion of the spirit. Although Baldwin, Herve, and Gerhoh use 3:34-36 for slightly different ends, they all attribute the passage to the Baptist and use it to argue for the things taught by Christ during his lifetime and testified to by the Baptist concerning the Christ. The focus is not on the crucifixion but on the teachings of Jesus.

Alain de Lille (c.1128-1202) and Gottfried of Admont (d.1165)

Alain and Gottfried represent the other authors of this century who identify John 3:16-21 as the words of Jesus and tie those words to a discussion on Christ's earthly ministry. Alain, along with Adam of Dryburgh (c.1140-1212), uses the passage to discuss the positive promises of the savior who created the world and gave it to humanity (*Fide cath.* 1.6).[59] Adam describes 3:16 as "the sweet promise of our savior" and Alain argues against those who would encourage abstinence from foods which God created by referencing God's love for the world (*Praemonstr. serm.* 4).[60] In both cases, the authors connect the words of Jesus in 3:16 to the demonstration of God's love via the incarnation and life of Jesus.

Meanwhile, Gottfried, along with Eckebert (d.1184), Aelred of Rievaulx (d.1167), and Richard of St. Victor (d.1173), identify Jesus as speaking in 3:17 and 3:20 to discuss the future judgment coming to all unbelievers. Gottfried discusses those who continue to do evil and says, "This is how we understand the Lord elsewhere saying,

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[58] Quoted from PL193:1502. Gerhoh also attributes 3:19 to Jesus in another combination quote, placing 3:19 in the first person in Jesus' mouth. See PL193:1401.

[59] Quoted from PL210:314.

[60] Quoted from PL198:470.

'Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, that their works would be exposed.' Everyone who does evil, every perverted thoughts or devil or the flesh… all this hates the light and does not come to it, lest it be exposed" (*Hom*. 58).[61] Eckebert accuses his opponents that "every work of yours is done in darkness" and cites 3:20 as the reason for their lack of good deeds (*Serm*. 2).[62] Eckebert uses the words of Jesus to argue that when his opponents do not preach the gospel "over the high mountains," they demonstrate that they hate the light. Aelred and Richard both use 3:17 as examples of the combined justice and mercy of the Lord. Aelred discusses the "strange work of mercy" which reveals the need for the pure divinity of Jesus which is "foreign to us" (*Serm*. 12).[63] Richard similarly identifies the predetermined judgment of Christ against unbelievers as the indication that nonbelievers will not be raised again to face the judgment (*Tract. jud. pot.).*[64] In all of these instances, whether the author focuses on the future judgment, the mercy demonstrated in Christ, or the condemnation already passed against unbelievers, each of these authors correlates the words of Jesus in 3:16-21 to the teachings Jesus shared while on earth. None of them connect these passages—in the words of Jesus—to the crucifixion.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Martin of Leon (1130-1203)

Bernard and Martin helpfully round out the examination of this century because they each demonstrate the correlation between the identity of the speaker as the Evangelist and the focus on the crucifixion. Although both authors identify Jesus as the speaker elsewhere, Bernard attributes 3:16 and Martin attributes 3:36 to the Evangelist.

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[61] Quoted from PL174:926.

[62] Quoted from PL195:20.

[63] Quoted from PL195:282.

[64] Quoted from PL196:1177.

Indeed, Bernard attributes 3:16 to the Evangelist in *On Loving God* while still attributing the words of 3:17 to Jesus in his *Sermon on the Lord's Epiphany.* First, Bernard connects the promise that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" to the words of Paul, "Who his own Son he spared not, but delivered him for us" (Rom 8:32). The words of the Evangelist and those of Paul combine to indicate that Bernard identifies the demonstration of God's love for the world as the act of sacrificing Jesus on the cross. This understanding is made clear by Bernard's claim that "God loved his enemies and freed them" (*Dilig. Deo* 1).[65] Meanwhile, Bernard discusses the "sweet word of the Counselor" which allows him to "approach boldly, with confidence and supplication" (*Epiph. Domini* 1).[66] Those words which allow him to do so are the words of 3:17, spoken by the Counselor, which indicate that Jesus did not come to judge the world but to save it. While these passages appear first to contradict each other in Bernard's understanding of the text, that appearance is based on the false assumption that the author must consistently identify the same speaker throughout his corpus. Instead, Bernard correlates the words of Jesus to the earthly teachings he delivered while correlating the words of the Evangelist to the crucifixion itself.

Martin consistently identifies Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21, attributing the words to him at least three times.[67] However, Martin attributes the words of 3:36 to the Evangelist:

> From then the wrath which remained upon him is removed from him who believes in Christ, but on him who does not believe it remains. Thus, said John the Evangelist, 'He who believes in the Son of God has eternal life, but whoever does not believe has not life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.' Then later, by a priest who confesses the sins, he is delivered from the eternal wrath…cleansed from

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[65] Quoted from PL182:975.

[66] Quoted from PL183:144.

[67] Sermon 2, quoted in PL208:54-55, *On the Ascension of the Lord*, quoted in PL208:1182, and *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, quoted in PL209:354.

the stain of sin and from the debt of eternal punishment… (*Serm.* 23).[68]

The discussion above is focused on the eternal wrath which is cleansed from those who believe in the Son of God. However, the larger context of Martin's work focuses on the laws of the Old Testament, the sacrificial system, and the priesthood. That larger focus is brought into the present passage when Martin discusses the "cleansing" from the "stain of sin," which echo the themes present throughout the discussion on the sacrificial system. So, while Martin does not explicitly identify the crucifixion as the focus of this passage, he is still discussing the sacrifice of Christ as it relates to the sacrificial animals described in the Old Testament.

The authors throughout the twelfth century—with the one exception of Hugh of St. Victor—confirm the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the passage. As seen in previous centuries, the rare authors who do not demonstrate this correlation do so in discussion of John 3:31-36. In those examples, the authors instead attribute the words to the Evangelist and discuss the divinity of Christ, the pouring out of the spirit in the end times, or the testimony of Jesus' life and teachings. Not a single author in the twelve centuries discussed thus far has offered a passage which contradicts the established correlation for John 3:16-21. Consistently, the authors either (1) attribute the words to Jesus and discuss his earthly ministry and teachings, or (2) attribute the words to the Evangelist and discuss the crucifixion and sacrifice of Christ.

Concluding the Medieval Era

This discussion on the medieval era included forty-nine authors and eighty-five passages which attribute the words in John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 to a specific speaker. Throughout this era, authors often—fifty-three times for 3:16-21 and twenty-six times for 3:31-36—identify the character in the story as the speaker of the passage. Only eight texts connect the words of John 3:16-21 to the Evangelist and, while some authors in this

[68] Quoted from PL208:332.

period correlate 3:31-36 with a focus other than the crucifixion, no text connects the words of 3:16-21 with the Evangelist without also connecting them to the crucifixion. It seems, then, that throughout the medieval era the consensus was that when John 3 says that "God gave his only Son," it is referring primarily to the incarnation of Christ. When authors interpret 3:16 as the words of the Evangelist—who is writing after the crucifixion/resurrection—God "gives his only Son" to die on the cross. These findings are consistent with those presented in the early Christian era and, although they offer slightly more variety, demonstrate a preponderance of evidence which suggests that authors were aware that if the words of John 3 are attributed to speakers in the passage, they are not primarily focusing on the crucifixion. As the next chapter discusses the commentary on John in the Reformation era, these same correlations will continue to thrive.[69] However, in the same way that the medieval era demonstrated a wider variety of change in the interpretations of John 3, the Reformation ear will demonstrate wider variety still over that of the medieval era.

[69] Two thirteenth-century authors demonstrate a development in the interpretation of John's Gospel: Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Bonaventure (1221-1274). In his *Commentary on John* 3.6, Aquinas switches between identifying the Evangelist and the Baptist as the speaker in 3:31-36. The words of the Baptist are those written by the Evangelist and so, it seems, Aquinas uses both names interchangeably. In quite a similar move, Bonaventure uses Jesus' and the Evangelist's names as the speaker for 3:16-21 quite interchangeably in the same passage of his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. It is still worth noting, however, that when Bonaventure does attribute the words to the Evangelist, he immediately quotes Rom 8:32 and refers to God "delivering his Son" and "not sparing" him on the cross. While the words may be attributed to Jesus or the Evangelist, Bonaventure still upholds the correlation between the speaker and the theological focus.

CHAPTER 4

PRE-MODERN INTERPRETATION: THE REFORMATION ERA

For from his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16).

In the advent of the Reformation and, indeed, moving into the late Renaissance era, several aspects of the current investigation changed. First, scholars became increasingly aware of the Evangelist's role in presenting the story in John 3. While they would not go so far as to say that the Evangelist invented the story, they acknowledged his work in presenting specific themes for a specific purpose. Second, the development and widespread use of the printing press emphasized the role of the *written* Gospels. This technological development impacted both (1) the sheer volume of material which discusses John 3 in detail and (2) the focus of authors on *writing* over against *speaking/hearing* the texts. Pre-Reformation scholars were by no means living in an "oral culture," but the widespread use of the printing press points to the new emphasis on the written word. The final cultural change which occurred during this period and impacts the current discussion perhaps goes without saying: The Reformation itself called into question the norms of Christian dogma and forced scholars to seek answers in the Greek and Latin classics.

These cultural changes correlate directly to changes within the history of interpretation of John 3. As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, most Christian writings up until the Reformation understood the characters to be the speakers in the ambiguous passages of John 3. Most, but not all, authors correlate the speaker in 3:31-36 to the testimonial focus of the passage: either (1) the Baptist is speaking concerning the excellency of Christ in both character and nature, or (2) the Evangelist is testifying about the death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit of Christ. Additionally, all the texts

examined correlate the speaker of John 3:16-21 to a specific focus: either (1) Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus about the incarnation and purpose of the Christ, or (2) the Evangelist John is speaking to his audience about the crucifixion. In the Reformation, these norms gradually disappear. By the early modern era, no correlation remains between the identified speaker in the passage and the author's theological focus. This chapter will demonstrate the decline of the correlation as well as the increase in those who identify the Evangelist as speaking in both 3:16-21 and 3:31-36.

The Reformation Era

The following authors reformed the ways in which scholars approached the Bible and, for the present purposes, the Gospel of John. While not all these authors are considered part of the "Protestant Reformation" proper, they were all involved either as precursors, participants, or respondents to the movement. The Reformation era introduces several authors who focus on the role of the Evangelist and who attribute 3:16-21 to him. To put the numbers in perspective: only eight texts attribute 3:16-21 to the Evangelist in the fourteen centuries prior to Erasmus, but three texts do so within the first half of the sixteenth century. Although more authors in this period identify the Evangelist as the speaker, the correlation between speaker and theological focus remains consistent. With few exceptions, authors in the Reformation era continue to connect the words of the characters in the texts with the focus on the identity and excellency of Christ, while those who connect the words to the Evangelist focus instead on the crucifixion.

Erasmus (1466-1536)

Erasmus demonstrates an awareness of the ambiguity of these Johannine passages which was rivaled only by Origen before him. Erasmus acknowledges the dispute concerning the speaker in John 1:16-18—as Origen did—as well as in John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. Indeed, several modern commentaries on John 3 cite Erasmus as the first

author to identify the Evangelist as the speaker for these passages, which the previous chapters have demonstrated to be inaccurate.[1] As with Origen, examination of Erasmus' understanding of John 1:16-18 will provide a helpful framework to understand what he says about John 3:16-21.

Erasmus begins his discussion on John 1:16-18 by quoting Chrysostom, who says, "since John says of him, 'Of his fullness we have all received,' and again, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire'" (*Hom. Jo.* 75).[2] According to Erasmus, Chrysostom understands the words of 1:16 to be spoken by the Baptist because the Baptist is clearly the one who said that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire. Erasmus disagrees, saying, "That does not mean I agree with the error of Chrysostom when he, in his homily, attributes these words, 'From his fullness we have all received, grace for grace,' to the Baptist. But the Evangelist is the person referred to."[3] Erasmus goes on to argue that, while the testimony described is that of the Baptist, the words, "fullness we have all received" is not the precursor but the disciple. This identification sets the tone for his discussion of the words in 3:16ff. Erasmus is aware that the identity of the speaker is in question and, more importantly, is aware that the correct interpretation of the speaker is important for a correct interpretation of the passage.

Regarding 3:16-21, Erasmus is oft credited as the first to question the "traditional" interpretation that Jesus is speaking. Paulovkin identifies this trend of

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[1] Scholars that identify Erasmus as the first to see the Evangelist speaking in 3:16 include the following: Mark Edwards, *John through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 49; Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1885), 100; August Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1859), 122–23; William Milligan and William Fiddian Moulton, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 69; Edwin Wilbur Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1893), 63.

[2] Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: The Gospels*, ed. Anne Reeve (London: Duckworth Publishing, 1986), 227. Erasmus' *Annotations* are currently unavailable in English; translations of this work are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[3] Erasmus, 227.

modern commentators and laments that "none of these modern commentators has noted the hesitation with which Erasmus did so, which may suggest that he was less certain about the speaker than is commonly assumed."[4] Because Paulovkin aims to convince the reader that no ancient authors identified the Evangelist as the speaker and, therefore, modern readers should not either, he understandably calls into question Erasmus' view on the speaker in John 3. Paulovkin's evidence for his claim comes from Erasmus' words, "Our Lord Jesus had planted seeds of such mysteries in Nicodemus' heart," which follow his summary of 3:16-21. Finally, Paulovkin cites Erasmus' *Controversies*, where Erasmus writes that, "when John and Paul call Christ the only begotten Son of God…" with a citation of John 3:18 for the claim that John called Christ the only begotten. This attribution is certainly weak, in that it could easily be argued that Erasmus is merely citing the source of the words, not necessarily the speaker in the passage. Therefore, it remains necessary to examine Erasmus' words in his *Annotations* in order to determine what he means by attributing the words of 3:16ff to the Evangelist.

Following his citation of John 3:16, Erasmus writes,

> This could be seen as the words of the Evangelist, because it is not followed by Nicodemus departing and responding that these things are wonderous. This is similar to that which I indicated in the first chapter: 'From his fullness we have all received.' It is not unlike the case which Paul seems to have had in Galatians 2, where a conversation which begins with Peter is not resolved, but I interpret that it continues with the Galatians.[5]

Several aspects of this paragraph indicate that Erasmus is confident in his identification of the speaker as the Evangelist. First, he compares this passage to his argument on John 1:16-18, discussed above. So, in the same way that the speaker is disputed in John 1, Erasmus understands that the speaker is here disputed. Second, Erasmus compares this

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[4] Jeremy S. Paulovkin, "Patristic Reception of the Speakers in John 3" (MA thesis, Florida International University, 2015), 371. Paulovkin cites Erasmus' *Paraphrase on John* 7.521-525; *Annotations on the New Testament*, John 3:16, John 3:34; *Hyperaspistes II* 92, 239.

[5] Erasmus, *Annotations*, 234.

passage to Galatians 2 in which Paul begins to quote a conversation he has with Peter and, without including a change in character, begins to address not Peter but the Galatians themselves (Gal 2:14ff).

Following this trend, Erasmus also calls into question the traditional reading of John 3:31-36. After a discussion on the meaning of 3:34 and God giving the spirit without measure, Erasmus adds the following parenthetical statement, "This seems to be what the Evangelist added to the message about John, for it is not an end to what happened with his disciples."[6] Again, Erasmus explicitly attributes this verse to the Evangelist and offers a reasoning for why he believes it is the Evangelist. Where previous authors might attribute the words to the Evangelist, Erasmus is the first to offer a defense for his position. Erasmus argues that the discussion of the gift of the spirit without measure does not offer a conclusion to the discussion the Baptist has with his disciples. Thus, Erasmus' interpretation of the passage requires that the Evangelist be the speaker for 3:34 and, presumably, the rest of 3:31-36.

Thus, Erasmus was neither (1) the first to identify the Evangelist as the speaker, nor (2) more or less certain in his identification of the speaker as other authors discussed thus far. What does make Erasmus unique, however, is that he demonstrates an awareness of the ambiguity which has not been addressed by any author before him. While Origen acknowledges the difficulties found in John 1:16-18, he does not address the same contention concerning the speakers in John 3. For this reason, Erasmus represents a significant development in the discussion. As a final note on Erasmus, his work does not offer a clear theological focus which correlates to the identified speaker. Whereas previous works have attempted to discern the meaning of the passages, Erasmus instead is answering specific questions. In the first instance, he is specifically discussing the speaker in John 3:16 and not necessarily the meaning of the passage. He does not

[6] Erasmus, 235.

address what the Evangelist *means* when he says that God gave his son, only that *the Evangelist* said it.

Luther (1483-1546)

Perhaps as an ironic contrast to Erasmus, Luther demonstrates the traditional view of both 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. On 3:34, Luther says, "Saint John is referring to Christ, whom he preaches about and says, 'the one whom God has sent, he speaks God's word.' The law of Moses was given and the prophets were sent in order to point to Christ" (*WA* 193.35-42). For Luther, "Saint John" is the Baptist, as evidenced by his reference to the "preaching" concerning Christ. The purpose of the passage is on the clear identity of Christ as the Son of God and, specifically, the one pointed to in the Old Testament. Elsewhere, Luther pointedly says that "This is what John the Baptist says" regarding 3:36.[7] Although no further information is given, it seems that Luther was consistent in his identification of the Baptist as speaking in 3:31-36. He is equally consistent in using these passages to discuss the identity or excellency of Christ.

In his *Sermon on Pentecost Monday*, Luther summarizes the story recorded in 3:16-21. Although he says, "When John writes…" and that "this is another of the true Gospel lessons, such as John is accustomed to write; for he writes in a way to make him alone worthy of the name of an Evangelist," Luther clearly attributes the passage to Jesus himself. He repeatedly says that 3:16-21 is "a sermon of Jesus" to Nicodemus and that each verse is spoken by him.[8] Throughout this discussion, Luther is focused on Jesus' teaching that the Father loves the world and sent Jesus to represent the Father to all people.

Luther twice uses the words of Jesus in 3:16-21 to make a theological

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[7] John Nicholas Lenker, *Luther's Church Postil*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Luther Press, 1907), 367.

[8] Lenker, 3:341–42.

argument. In his work, *The Papacy at Rome*, Luther bases his understanding of the human heart on the words of Christ, "He that does evil, fears the light" and that "He that does truth, comes to the light."[9] Luther argues, based on the words he attributes to Christ, that the evil conscious "cannot bear the light" and that the truth is "an enemy to darkness." While he is focused on the anthropological argument of Christ, Luther understands these words to be the teaching of Christ during his earthly ministry. In a similar way, Luther attributes the words of 3:16-18 to Christ while arguing that "no one on earth can escape this judgment" (*Serm. ascens.* 56).[10] The message which sinners must hear, according to Luther, is that "those who believe in this Lord and Savior shall not be condemned because of their sins, but shall, because of him, have forgiveness of sins and life eternal" and says of those who reject this message, "This judgment of condemnation remains upon him because of his disbelieving, imputing all sins to him, which cannot be forgiven. Thus, he increases his sin and makes his condemnation the stronger; in attrition to all other sins, he also despises Christ by not believing in him."[11] In this passage, Luther is arguing that belief in Christ refers to the belief that Christ-followers will not be condemned if they place their faith in him. The crucifixion and resurrection are not mentioned. Eternal life and forgiveness of sins are promised to those who "believe in this Lord and Savior." Luther likely has belief in the death and resurrection of Christ in mind when he talks about placing one's faith in Christ, but it is not the focus of the current passage. It remains consistent that the author attributes 3:16-18 to Jesus and focuses on the teachings of Jesus concerning human nature and condemnation.

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[9] Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs and Adolph Spaeth (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1915), 390.

[10] Lenker, *Luther's Church Postil*, 3:233.

[11] Lenker, 3:233.

**Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c.1455-1536)
and John Major (1467-1550)**

Two authors who connect 3:16-21 explicitly with the crucifixion are both unclear in their attribution of the passage to a speaker. For d'Étaples, Jesus was "lifted up to save the whole world in the faith" and follows this by saying, "Following the words of the Lord, John continues, adding [John 3:16-18a]" (*Comm. Ev.* 513). The author seems to indicate that John is adding his own words to the words of Jesus, which would indicate that Jesus stops speaking at verse 15 and John begins at verse 16. However, it is also possible that d'Étaples is simply indicating that Jesus is speaking, and John continues to record those words *of Jesus*.[12] While this interpretation is possible, it is more likely that d'Étaples is here indicating a shift from one speaker to the other and goes on to explain in lofty terms the co-equal and consubstantial status of the Son with the Father and how the Son subsequently relegated himself, became mortal and died on behalf of humanity. While d'Étaples does discuss the incarnation, he still appears to connect the "lifting up" of the Son with the crucifixion and not merely the exaltation of his character.

John Major separates his discussion on 3:1-12 from that of 3:13-21 which indicates, on some level, the recognition of a change in topic. Major first makes a point of saying that God did not send a servant, adopted child, or one of many children. Instead, God sent his only begotten Son and "gave him generously to the very end which is the blood-stained death in the judgment against us. He was dishonored and endured death on our behalf," Major says (Exp. Ev. 3). Major connects the "giving" of the Son specifically to the crucifixion. He follows this connection with a reference to Psalm 1:5, "They shall not rise again in judgment," which has been used repeatedly in the past to connect 3:16-21, the Evangelist, and the crucifixion event. In the present passage, however, Major never identifies the speaker for verses 16-21. Two aspects of the following passages, however, indicate that Major might have assumed that Jesus was the

[12] The exact words d'Étaples uses, "Quod ex verbis domini, subdit Iohannes, dicens."

speaker.

First, Major seems to summarize the passage previously discussed and places much of the claims in verses 16-21 in the second person saying, "you cannot live fully" and "you cannot catch the wind." These words are directed to Nicodemus, so Major seems to place the summary of verses 16-21 in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus and not, as would be expected, in the commentary of the Evangelist. Second, the end of his discussion on John 3 describes the rhetorical move of introducing a positive, appealing invitation and following it with threats and fear. Major indicates that both Jesus and the Baptist offer eternal life as an encouragement which is juxtaposed to the fear of torment. Christ, Major says, ended his sermon with Nicodemus in this fashion in the same way that the Baptist does at the end of verse 36: "Smoothness at first with an invitation to believe and after, threats and terror" (Exp. Ev. 3). This description is certainly not conclusive, however. Major does not indicate if "the sermon with Nicodemus about faithlessness" ends in verse 15 or 21. The evidence is not overwhelming enough to identify John Major as the first author to directly connect Jesus' words in John 3:16 with the crucifixion, but he certainly comes closer to that correlation than any author before him. Major and d'Etaples are both comfortable remaining in the ambiguity offered by John 3.

Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin offers a full commentary on the Gospel of John, and variably attributes the words of chapter 3 to Jesus, God, and the Evangelist. On verse 16, Calvin says that "Christ reveals the first clause" and that "Christ's words mean nothing else when he declares God's love to be the basis of our salvation" other than "faith in Christ brings life to everyone, and Christ brought life because the Heavenly Father loves the human race and wishes that they should not perish."[13] Again, Calvin says, "It is clear that Christ

[13] John Calvin, *John*, ed. J.I. Packer and Alistar McGrath, The Crossway Classic

spoke like this in order to stop people from thinking about themselves, in favor of looking to God's mercy alone."[14] Calvin does not acknowledge the dispute concerning the speakers as Erasmus did, but he does clearly and repeatedly attribute the words to Jesus. However, in the same paragraph, he also attributes the words to the Evangelist:

> The Evangelist does not say that God was moved to deliver us because he saw something in us which deserved such an excellent blessing; rather, he ascribes the glory of our deliverance entirely to his love. This is clearer from what follows; for he adds that God 'gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' So, it follows that until Christ set about rescuing the lost, everyone was destined for eternal destruction. Paul also declares this by pointing out the order in which the events happens: 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8)."[15]

It is noteworthy that the instance in which Calvin identifies the Evangelist as the speaker in 3:16-21, he simultaneously switches his focus from the incarnation to the crucifixion. This focus on the crucifixion is confirmed by his reference to Paul in Romans 5:8, which has been frequently tied to John 3 by authors of the past. Following his discussion of the purpose of God in sending Christ to the cross, Calvin eventually switches back to identifying Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21. He concludes this section discussing misinterpretations of the passage and arguing that "all this is widely removed from *Christ's* meaning, for he intended simply to say that those who act sincerely desire nothing more earnestly than light, that their works may be tried."[16] This reference to those who want their work to be seen in the light and, therefore, in the sight of God, attributes the words of 3:21 to Christ himself and, indeed, Calvin reiterates that attribution as part of his understanding of the text.

Calvin demonstrates another example wherein the author identifies both the character in the story as well as the Evangelist as the speaker at various times. While

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Commentaries (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 76.

[14] Calvin, 76.

[15] Calvin, 76.

[16] Calvin, 78.

doing so, he correlates the speaker with a specific theological focus in line with those of the past. At the same time, however, Calvin's work signals a step forward in the discussion concerning the text. While he consistently attributes 3:31-36 to the Baptist, he interchangeably refers to Jesus, God, and the Evangelist as the source of the words in 3:16-21. While others switch attribution in different passages or texts, Calvin switches attribution in a singular examination of the text. This switch indicates that Calvin understood the Evangelist to be at work even in the words of Christ or, possibly, that the Evangelist was presenting the story in a way to forward his own theological goals. Either way, Calvin's readiness to switch back and forth between the attribution of speaker indicates a shift in the larger discussion which will, eventually, culminate in the modern era's heavy focus on the words of the Evangelist.[17]

Menno Simons (1496-1561)

The final author who indicates a shift in the history of interpretation is Menno Simons, whose followers eventually became known as Mennonites. Menno appears to contradict the overall correlation established through fifteen centuries of Christian history: Jesus speaks the words of 3:16 in reference to his own crucifixion. In his *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, Menno writes a refutation of Roman Catholicism in which he discusses, among other things, the Lord's Supper. He begins by stating that, "To come to a proper, profitable, and Christian understanding of the holy Lord's supper, what it is, for whom it was given, why and wherefore, four things in particular should be observed and considered carefully"(*Foundation* 2.A).[18] The second thing he observes is that "there is no greater proof of love than to die for another." In his explanation of this

[17] Calvin seems to separate verses 19-21 from 16-18, so it is possible that he understands some verses to be the reflection of the Evangelist and, in 19-21, those words return to the sermon of Jesus to Nicodemus.

[18] Translation from Dutch provided by Menno Simon, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simon*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 144.

observation, Menno describes the birth, life, and death of Christ through which he "reconciled us unto His Heavenly Father." He goes on to attribute 3:16 to the mouth of Jesus, saying, "As He Himself says…." As those before him, Menno makes the point that God did not send an angel, a patriarch, or a prophet, but sent "the brightness of His glory" in the form of sinful flesh.

Several aspects of this passage are clear, and several are ambiguous. First, Menno clearly attributes the words of 3:16 to Jesus; nowhere does he mention the Evangelist speaking or shaping the story. Second, it is clear that he references the crucifixion, stating that "by his bitter death and precious blood" Christ reconciled believers to the Father. What is less clear, however, is whether the crucifixion is the focus of Menno's overall discussion and whether this correlation between focus and speaker breaks with the correlations established in the past. First, Menno discusses the incarnation generally in the bulk of this passage. In this sense, the crucifixion is the logical conclusion of the incarnation and therefore included in the discussion. Additionally, Menno describes the love of God being demonstrated in the "sending" of his Son, not in the sacrifice specifically. It seems that, for Menno, the "giving" and the "sending" of Christ are one and the same thing. Therefore, when Christ says that God "gave" his only Son, Menno interprets that to mean "gave him in the incarnation." It is likely, then, that Menno had the incarnation in mind for the immediate passage and that he mentions the crucifixion because (1) it is part of the larger discussion on the Lord's Supper, and (2) it is the necessary conclusion of the incarnation.

Finally, it should be noted that previous authors have placed the words of 3:16 in the mouth of Jesus outside of the context of his conversation with Nicodemus: namely, Remigius of Lyon. Whereas Remigius has Jesus speaking of God's love while he is on the cross, Menno has Jesus speaking these words from the dinner table the night he was betrayed. This point emphasizes that, although the lines between speaker and focus are becoming more blurred, they still retain some boundaries during the beginning of the

Reformation Era.

Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563)
Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and
Caspar Cruciger, The Elder (1504-1548)

The rest of the authors discussed in this subsection follow the traditional interpretations of the ambiguous passages in John 3. To varying degrees, they each identify the character in the story as the speaker and use the passage cited to focus on an aspect of Christ's character, excellency, or teachings. While it is still vital to the history of interpretation to demonstrate the continuing trends established over the centuries, these authors are grouped together to eliminate repetitive statements concerning their interpretations. Musculus, Bucer, and Cruciger attribute the words of 3:16-17 to Jesus and focus on his teachings on faith and justification or, simply, the love of God. Musculus interprets 3:16 as Christ teaching that God loves all of humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike (*Divi Jo. Ev.* 60).[19] However, "this mystery was hidden from Nicodemus," according to Musculus, "and thus it is certain that this statement of Christ seemed very odd to him" (*Divi Jo. Ev.* 60). He is also keen on using the context of Christ's conversation with Nicodemus to interpret the words Christ speaks: "That statement [3:21] must not be made broader than it was employed by Christ. It was employed only for this reason: to show what reason, above all else, the scribes and Pharisees were hatefully persecuting the light of truth" (*Divi Jo. Ev.* 65). The words of 3:21, attributed to Christ, cannot be used more broadly than they were intended by Christ in his conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus.

Martin Bucer addresses the apparent contradiction between "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world" (3:17) with, "Jesus said, 'For

[19] Musculus also attributes 3:31 and 3:36 to the Baptist, explaining how John's baptism can be "from the earth" if Jesus says that his baptism is "from heaven." He also explains that John was trying to aim his disciples toward belief in Christ and accepting eternal life when he explains the excellency and character of Christ to them in 3:31-36. See *Divi Jo. Ev.* 68.

judgment I have come into this world'" (9:39). Bucer says that "this does not contradict what he says below [John 9]. This statement indicates why he came to many people. But the earlier statement in John 3 indicates the chief reason why he came to the world" (*Enarrat. Ev. Jo.* 3:17).[20] Jesus is clearly the speaker in John 9 and, because Bucer attributes both phrases to the same speaker, 3:17 must also be Christ. He appears to alleviate this tension by acknowledging the mercy offered by the first coming of Christ to the world and his function to separate those who hate the light.

Cruciger describes 3:16 as "part of the sermon" spoken by Christ "concerning faith and justification" (*Ev. Jo.* 3:16).[21] He describes how "Christ has by now preached clearly enough concerning faith and justification, but he drives home a second time the same statement, adding a brief mention of the cause of justification. 'For God so loved the world.' This part of the sermon exceeds human comprehension even more than what came before." For Cruciger, 3:16-21 is included in the sermon Christ preaches to Nicodemus, and the focus is the love of God demonstrated in offering justification to those who believe in the Son. Later in his commentary, Cruciger also confirms that the Baptist speaks through the end of 3:36, testifying to the nature and character of the Christ and explaining that "those who receive his testimony" are those "who assent to the voice of Christ, testify, are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and receive a strong awareness so that they know for sure that God is truthful" (*Ev. Jo.* 3:33).[22] The testimony concerning Christ is not that he died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Rather, it is obeying the words of Christ and being filled with the Spirit.

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[20] Translation from Craig S. Farmer, ed., *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 4, John 1-12* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 105.

[21] Translation from Farmer, 103–4.

[22] Translation from Farmer, 116.

Johannes Brenz (1499-1570)
Melanchthon (1497-1560)
Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531)
And Benedictus Aretius (1505-1574)

These four authors consistently attribute the words of 3:31-36 to the Baptist and cite the passage in discussions regarding the excellencies of Christ and his testimony concerning eternal life. In his comments on 3:35-36, Brenz says that "this exceptional sermon of the Baptist about Christ should be repeated over and over again in the depths of one's soul. For it exhibits Christ and explains everything as clearly as possible so that we might know what great goods and treasure we possess through faith" (*D. Jo. Ev.* 3:31-36).[23] As others before him, Brenz indicates that 3:31-36 is a sermon of sorts from the mouth of the Baptist. Brenz considers this sermon to be a clear representation of what Christ means to the believer's life.

Melanchthon is slightly less clear, attributing the words of 3:36 to "John" in his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession.* He describes how Paul calls "eternal life a gift because it is given by the righteousness presented for Christ's sake" and that because believers are children of God, "As John says, 3:36, 'He that believes on the Son has everlasting life'" (*Apology* 3.235). Melanchthon only calls the speaker "John," but it is helpful to examine his attribution of other texts to the same "John" in other passages in his *Apology*. In article 4, he describes how John testified, saying "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (*Apology* 4.103) and in article 5, "John" says that the regenerate "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance" (*Apology* 5.140). Finally, article 7 says, "John has compared the Church to a threshing floor on which wheat and chaff are heaped together" (*Apology* 7.1). These references in Matthew 3:8,12 and John 1:29 are all uncontested words of John the Baptist. Because Melanchthon does not use the moniker "the Baptist" elsewhere, it is likely that he attributes the words of 3:36 to

[23] Brenz also attributes 3:16,19 to Christ, and even places the words of 3:19 in the first person as Jesus speaking directly to Nicodemus.

John, the Baptist. The focus of the passage attributed to the Baptist, then, is the unmerited gift of eternal life.

Oecolampadius, a German reformer who changed his name to mean "house-light," describes the purpose of 3:34 at length: "It is as if he is saying, 'it would certainly be the height of foolishness if you want to turn to me; I am hardly a little spring, a drop of water really, leaving behind the fullest sea. Go to the fountain, not to the cisterns that we read about in Jeremiah.' Everything was aimed at turning his disciples from him to Christ" (*Annot. Jo*. 70).[24] If the purpose of the passage is to turn disciples away from himself and toward the Christ, the speaker is necessarily the Baptist.

Finally, Aretius comments on 3:31 that "in what follows, he sets forth several arguments which describe the excellence of Christ . . .. First of all, the original condition, 'he that comes from above is above all.' He has already said Christ is from above, he is, then, above all. It should not be surprising that he assumes the right to teach and baptize" (*Comm. Ev.* 160). Aretius argues that, because John has already claimed that "he is from above," Christ is above all. The implication, then, is that the Baptist is the speaker of the initial claim and the subsequent words in 3:31-36. The purpose of the passage is to "describe the excellence of Christ" and does not describe the crucifixion. The testimony and excellency of Christ are displayed in his life and teachings.

Zwingli (1484-1531)

Zwingli has earned a section of his own and, indeed, the conclusion of the Reformation era discussion, because he represents a Reformation author who continued to identify Jesus as the speaker in 3:16-21 *and* 3:31-36. Although he switches attribution of the latter passage between the Baptist and Jesus, he demonstrates that the attribution of the passage to Jesus—an attribution which was common in the earlier centuries of this

[24] Translation from Farmer, *John 1-12*, 117.

history of interpretation—is still considered a viable interpretation through the Reformation. Several times, Zwingli attributes verses 31-36 to the Baptist, explaining in his discussion *On Baptism* that the Baptist was very much an evangelist and Christian and that his sermon in verses 31-36 represents the proper understanding of baptism over against the anabaptists (*On Baptism* 95).[25] Elsewhere, Zwingli uses the words of the Baptist in John 3 to dispute with those who consider themselves to be "the one whom God has sent" and who "speaks the words of God" (*The Preaching Office)*.[26] He contradicts their claim by pointing out that the words of the Baptist are first a reference to Christ and not to people of his own time. The difference, he says, is that "it is not one and the same thing to speak of God and to be sent as an apostle or Bishop."

Twice in *The Defense of the Reformed Faith,* Zwingli explicitly attributes the words of 3:31-36 to Christ:

> First of all, Christ says in John 3:31-33, 'Whoever is of the earth, belongs to the earth and speaks of the earth; whoever comes from heaven is above everything and what he has seen and heard he witnesses to, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever accepts his testimony has sealed or confirmed that God is truthful.' In short, note from these words that the one who comes from heaven, is above everything. But since earthly persons talk of earthly things how can one who is earthly receive what is heavenly? Or how could one verify or judge it? Thus, he says that no one accepts his testimony even though he does not speak or testify to anything accept what is sure, which is what he has seen and heard (*Defense* 1).[27]

Zwingli's interpretation of the passage is reliant upon his interpretation of Jesus as the speaker. He says that no one accepts Christ's testimony even though he has seen and heard and testifies only to what is true. It is possible, he says, for some earthly people to receive what is heavenly, but only through following Christ. Elsewhere, Zwingli writes,

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[25] G. W. Bromiley, trans., *Zwingli and Bullinger*, The Library of Christian Classics 24 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 165–66.

[26] Huldrych Zwingli, *In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral and Eucharistic Writings*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin, vol. 2, Huldrych Zwingli Writings (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1984), 181.

[27] Huldrych Zwingli, *The Defense of the Reformed Faith*, trans. E. J. Furcha, vol. 1, Huldrych Zwingli Writings (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1984), 8.

"Christ teaches this too in John 3:36, 'But one who does not believe the Son, shall not see life, and the wrath of God shall remain upon him,'" and again, "In John 3:36 Christ says, 'Whoever does not believe the Son, will not see life and the wrath of God shall be upon him'" (*Defense* 55).[28] In each instance, Zwingli focuses on the importance of belief in Christ as the only way to receive that which is heavenly, namely, the teachings of Christ. Belief in him will merit understanding of what is heavenly and, thus, merit eternal life. Zwingli's contribution to the discussion is not that he identifies the Evangelist as speaking or that he breaks with the established correlation between speaker and theological focus. Instead, Zwingli demonstrates that the idea that Jesus is speaking in verses 31-36—a common view in both the early and medieval eras—is not dismissed out of hand in the Reformation Era. In the Early and Medieval periods, 30 percent of the texts which discuss 3:31-36 attribute the words to Jesus, and in the Reformation period another 11 percent do so.

Early Modern Era

The following authors are separated into a different subsection not necessarily because of their chronological order but, instead, because of their relative distance from the Reformation proper. These authors are not writing in the contexts of heated debates or seeking large reforms of church dogma. They appear merely to be reading the text and seeking interpretation. I have classified this section as "Early Modern," which is perhaps slightly early to earn this designation. However, these authors demonstrate a drastic shift in biblical interpretive methodology even over their Reformation counterparts. The clearest example of this interpretive shift is that the correlation between speaker and theological focus of the passages in John 3 is wholly destroyed in these author's works. Most frequently, these authors will attribute the words of 3:16-21 to Jesus himself, place

[28] Zwingli, 1:330.

it in the context of his conversation with Nicodemus, and still use the passage to discuss the crucifixion sacrifice of Christ. The explicit and repeated interpretation is markedly different from those which came before and, thus, these authors serve as a fitting conclusion to the Reformation era and introduction to the modern era.

Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603)
Matthew Poole (1624-1679)
John Lightfoot (1602-1675)
John Tillotson (1630-1694)

These four authors represent the "traditional" interpretation of John 3 in terms of both the identification of the speaker and the theological focus correlated therein. The fact that the traditional interpretation survives into the early modern—and indeed, the modern eras of biblical scholarship—is a testament to the overwhelming majority of authors throughout the history of interpretation who hold to this view. Cartwright's *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels* includes a section devoted to John 3 and, in it, Cartwright separates the sections after verses 12, 21, and 30 (*Harm. Ev. Comm.* 145ff). This separation indicates, if nothing else, the idea that a shift in thought is taking place. If Cartwright does imagine another speaker coming into the picture at v13, however, he offers no clues to indicate that idea. He does offer clues which indicate that the Baptist is speaking in the concluding passage of John 3 (*Harm. Ev. Comm.* 152). He describes at length how Christ's doctrine is superior to that of the Baptist and that the teachings of Christ are joined or added to those of the Baptist. These teachings are not contradictory, though. For Cartwright, the testimony of John's life is the same as the testimony Christ taught. Although Christ's is better, they both testify to the same truths. This indicates that the testimony described in verses 31-36—about which he is commenting during this discussion—is the testimony of the Baptist.

Poole similarly argues that the Baptist's testimony is inferior to that of Christ: "Another great difference which the Baptist teaches his disciples to put between his testimony and Christ's is that he, and so all other ministers of the gospel, testify by

revelation; Christ testifies not by revelation but from his own personal knowledge, what he himself has seen and heard from his Father" (*Comm. Joh.* 3:31-36).[29] The words of 3:32, then, are those of the Baptist explaining that Christ is the one "from above" whose testimony is based on what he has seen and heard. Poole also appears to indicate that Jesus is speaking in 3:16, when he compares Christ's use of the word "world" with that of the Evangelist in 1 John 2:2 (*Comm. Joh.* 3:16).[30] He indicates that "Christ uses the term 'world' in this verse . . . to take down the pride of the Jews, who dreamed that the Messiah came only for the benefit of the seed of Abraham." By comparing the words of Christ with those of the Evangelist, Poole indicates that Christ—and not the Evangelist—is speaking verse 16 and teaching that God sent his son to demonstrate his love for the entire world, both Jew and Gentile.

Lightfoot makes much the same point: "Nicodemus very readily understood the word in this common sense, when Christ says, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his Son.' And he was very well perceived that Christ contradicted in these his words, their common and uncharitable error, which held that the Messiah should be a redeemer only to Israel" (*Harmony* 14).[31] Again, the point of the passage attributed to Jesus is that God loves the world and demonstrates his love by sending his son for both Jews and Gentiles. Lightfoot elsewhere identifies the dispute regarding the speaker in 3:16 and argues for a continuation of Jesus' speech based on the shared themes between 3:16-21 and 3:1-15 (*Four Evangelists* 3:16).[32]

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[29] Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum*, vol. 4, Evangelia & Acta Apostolorum, 1686, 1186.

[30] Poole, 4:1183.

[31] John Lightfoot, "The Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the New Testament: The Harmony and Order of the Four Evangelists," in *The Works of the Reverend and Learned John Lightfoot*, vol. 1 (London, 1684), 214.

[32] John Lightfoot, "The Harmony of the Four Evangelist, Part 3," in *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Lightfoot*, ed. John Rogers Pitman, vol. 5 (London: J. F. Dove, 1822), 55.

Finally, Tillotson describes how "At the sixteenth verse of this chapter [John 3] our Savior declares to Nicodemus . . . the great love and goodness of God to mankind in sending him into the world, to be the savior of it" (*Sermon* 189).[33] He goes on to describe how Christ "represents himself and his doctrine" in this text as a light which comes into the world to reveal our sinful and miserable condition. As long as people do not "make the most preposterous choice, preferring darkness before light," they will be accepted upon their "discovery of God's love and goodness to mankind" (*Sermon* 189).[34] In each instance above, these four authors have identified the character in the story as the speaker and correlated that speaker to a focus on the life, excellency, and teachings of Christ. The rest of this section discusses those authors which disregard the established correlation and connect the words of Christ directly to the crucifixion.

Daniel Dyke (d.1614)

Dyke discusses the context of 3:16-21 and the argument against the idea that Christ gave himself willingly upon the cross. He says that "Christ is given of his Father unto death for us: And because what the Father does, the same also does the Son, therefore Christ gives himself also" (*Histories* John 3:16).[35] He goes on to describe how verse 14 details that "the Christ must be lifted up" and die on the cross. Dyke poses the question, "Why must he" die on the cross? The answer, which Dyke attributes directly to Christ, is "the love of God to the world." Christ directly connects the love of God to the world with his own death on the cross. It appears that, for Dyke, God demonstrates his love by "giving" his son on the cross. The discussion is not focused on "giving" the

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[33] John Tillotson, "Sermon 189: The Excellency and Universality of the Christian Revelation, with the Sin and Danger of Rejecting It.," in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, ed. Ralph Barker, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (London, 1722), 586.

[34] Tillotson, 586.

[35] Daniel Dyke, "Six Evangelical Histories," in *The Works of the Late Faithful Servant of God, Daniel Dyke*, ed. Jer. Dyke, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (London: Augustine Mathewes, 1633), 165.

Son to earth in the incarnation. Dyke does allow for a slight shift in the context and seems to indicate that in verse 16 Jesus is now speaking to the audience of the Gospel and not necessarily only to Nicodemus. However, this recontextualization does not place the words on Jesus' lips from the cross or the last supper, as other authors have demonstrated previously. Instead, Dyke sees Jesus speaking to the audience *during* his conversation with Nicodemus and, therefore, predicting his eminent death on the cross. The explicit connection between the identity of the speaker and the focus on the crucifixion, particularly as it pertains to 3:16-21, is without precedent.[36]

Cornelius a Lapide (1567-1637)

Lapide, who wrote an extensive commentary which includes work on John, discusses the same opposition to the claims Jesus presents in John 3. He calls his reader to "observe that every word of Christ in this sentence [John 3:16] has a great and special emphasis, in order to magnify to the utmost the love of God" (*The Great Commentary* John 3).[37] Lapide imagines that Nicodemus will object to the claim that Jesus is the Son of God because the cross demonstrates God's abandonment of his Son. Lapide says of verse 16,

> This is said by way of anticipation, lest Nicodemus should object, 'If you are the Son of God, how will God suffer you to be suspended and exalted upon the cross?' Christ meets this by implying that God will permit it in order to show forth His burning love to men, which was typified by the serpent of brass" (*The Great Commentary* John 3).[38]

Lapide understands verse 16 to be Jesus' answer to an anticipated objection, so the speaker is clearly Jesus himself. The context is within the conversation with Nicodemus,

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[36] Dyke describes verses 31-36 as "the second part of John's speech" and focuses on the excellency of Christ. This description falls in line with the traditional interpretation of this passage. See Dyke, 243.

[37] Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius à Lapide*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1908), 113.

[38] Lapide, 5:113.

for Jesus is answering what he supposes will be Nicodemus' own objection. The focus of the passage is on the crucifixion: God's love is demonstrated through the cross, typified by the serpent and suffered by the Son.

William Burkitt (1650-1703)

Burkitt offers his *Expository Notes with Practical Observations* which discusses not only the purpose of Christ's incarnation, but also the greatness of the gift which God gives to the world. He describes how "He gave his only begotten Son" means that God "delivered him out of his own bosom and everlasting embraces" even though he was "the dearest person to him in the world, even his own Son" (*Expository Notes* John 3:16).[39] He goes on to describe how "he gave him for sinners; that he gave him for a world of sinners; that he gave him up to become a man for sinners; that he gave him up to become a miserable man for sinners; that he gave him up to be a sacrifice for the sin of sinners."[40] If there is any doubt whether Burkitt here is focused on the crucifixion or the incarnation generally, he goes on to state that "faith consists in the assent of the understanding that Jesus is the Savior of the world" and "accepting the merit of his blood."[41] So, faith in Jesus is not only the recognition that he is the Son of God or that obedience to him results in eternal life. Faith in Jesus, for Burkitt, is the acceptance of the merit of his blood. This entire discussion takes place in the notes on verses 16-21, including Burkitt's claim that the purpose of Christ's coming into the world was specifically to meet this end. The focus is on the crucifixion of Christ and the merit obtained by those who believe in and accept his sacrificial blood, and Jesus himself explains this in 3:16-21.

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[39] William Burkitt, *Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: J.R. and C. Childs, 1832), 451–52.

[40] Burkitt, 1:452.

[41] Burkitt, 1:452.

William Beveridge (1637-1708)

Yet again, Beveridge understands verses 16ff as Jesus' response to an unasked question from Nicodemus: "And lest this should seem strange to Nicodemus, our Lord here gives him the reason of it, drawn from God's infinite love and goodness to mankind, in sending His Son into the world for that very end: 'For God,' says He, 'so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'" (*Serm.* 14).[42] Beveridge follows this clear attribution to Jesus with a discussion of how he was given to earth "to be born of a woman," "to converse with men," "to exert his infinite power," and "instruct them in all things necessary for them to believe." Although this indicates that his focus is on the incarnation generally, he concludes this by saying, "And yet this is not all either, 'For God so loved the world,' that when he had thus *given* His only begotten Son to be made flesh, and dwell some time among us; He afterwards *gave* him to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world." For Beveridge, God gives his son *both* in the incarnation and on the cross. His overall emphasis, as indicated by the title of his sermon, is on the salvation of humanity which is only accomplished through the crucifixion. Therefore, although he does have the incarnation clearly in mind, the focus of the passage is on the crucifixion itself, and the words attributed to Jesus correlate to this theological focus. Jesus himself alleviates Nicodemus' confusion by describing the love of God displayed in him.

Adam Contzen (1571-1635)

Contzen offers a unique interpretation of the passage at hand by describing verse 13 as an interpolation of the Evangelist into the sermon of Jesus. He cites verse 13 and asks what connection this verse has with verses 1-12. He answers, "The Evangelist briefly mentions what has been done and sows the foundational seeds of the discussion

[42] William Beveridge, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge*, vol. 1 (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1842), 248ff. Sermon 14 is titled, "The Love of God in Man's Salvation."

with inferences and leaves out the deductions" (*Comm. quat. Ev.* 263 Q1). Contzen goes on to say that "He instructs Nicodemus with a figure from the Old Testament to predict his own passion" and that "In order to remove Nicodemus' admiration, the Son of God volunteered to exalt the love of God for the world. That is, those that he loves, and even unto death on the cross" (*Comm. quat. Ev.* 265). It appears that, in Contzen's understanding, verse 14 returns to the words of Jesus explaining his own crucifixion with an analogy from the Old Testament. He repeatedly places the rest of the context, except for verse 13, in the mouth of Jesus as an explanation or prediction concerning the crucifixion. According to Contzen, only verse 13 is the words of the Evangelist, and they serve as an explanation to the audience to clarify what Jesus is saying *to Nicodemus*. What is clear about this interpretation is that Jesus is predicting his own crucifixion and that God demonstrates his love for the world through the crucifixion of Jesus.

Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699)

Another unique interpretation also breaks with the traditional correlation established above, but this passage does so by correlating the words of the Evangelist with the focus on unbelief. Every other author discussed thus far has connected the words of the Evangelist in 3:16-21 with a focus on the crucifixion. Instead, Stillingfleet explains:

> It might be presently objected, that if this were God's intention, the world would not have received so little benefit by it. But according to the terms of salvation proposed by the gospel, so few will have advantage by it, therefore the Evangelist adds that if men did perish they must thank themselves for it: 'For this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil' (*Serm.* 31).[43]

Stillingfleet is discussing the atonement and the question of God's efficacy if his sacrifice of his Son does not merit salvation for the whole world. His argument is that, according

[43] Edward Stillingfleet, *The Works of That Eminent and Most Learned Prelate, Dr. Edw. Stillingfleet*, ed. Richard Bentley, vol. 1 (London: J. Hepstinstall, 1710), 495.

to the Evangelist in 3:19, those who reject Christ do so because of their own love of the darkness. The problem is not a lack of efficacy on the part of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Even though the conversation involves the crucifixion, the reason the crucifixion itself is included is because the focus of the passage is on faith and why some people choose not to believe the gospel message. The crucifixion is not the focus of the passage, even though it is clearly attributed to the Evangelist.

Concluding the Reformation Era

Between the advent of the printing press, the revolution that was the Reformation itself, and the increasing movement toward the Enlightenment, this period introduces authors who push the bounds of the traditional interpretations of John 3. First, authors place an increased emphasis on the role of the Evangelist. Several authors attribute the words of 3:16-21 to the Evangelist in the span of only a few years. Additionally, even those who identify the characters in John 3 as the speakers still have an increased awareness of the way the Evangelist crafts and presents the narrative. Erasmus, Faber, and Calvin explicitly identify the Evangelist as the speaker of John 3:16 and in each instance, the focus of their interpretation is on the crucifixion of Christ.

The second boundary pushed by the authors of this period is the correlation between speaker and theological focus. From the earliest commentaries on John's Gospel until the seventeenth century, every author who understands 3:16-21 as the words of Jesus focuses on his earthly ministry. Indeed, the few authors who do identify the Evangelist as the speaker for 3:16 correlate that passage only and explicitly to the crucifixion. This consistent correlation, established over a millennium and a half of Christian interpretation, falls apart. Six different authors in the seventeenth century attribute the words to Jesus and focus on the crucifixion or, in the case of Stillingfleet, the words of the Evangelist correlate to a focus on unbelief. Not only does the correlation fall apart, but the suddenness with which authors abandon that correlation is surprising.

The drastic shift is perhaps a precursor of what will happen within biblical scholarship in the modern era: sudden improvements in methodology and technology result in drastic changes in interpretive method and, thus, in the way that scholars approach and understand the ambiguous passages of John 3.

CHAPTER 5

MODERN INTERPRETATION: A LACK OF CONSENSUS

> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the Son of Man in the same way must be lifted up (John 3:14).

The turn of the modern era brought with it the development of Historical-Critical methods for biblical scholarship as well as an increase in the sheer volume of work dedicated to interpreting the Bible. Scholars have offered myriad interpretations of John 3 over the last three centuries, so a chronological survey akin to those of the previous three chapters will be unmanageable. Instead, this chapter will proceed by categorizing the interpretations offered in the modern era into three overarching theories: Continued Speech, Reflection, and Blended Theology. Although a summary of these theories was given at the introductory chapter, the focus of this chapter is to examine the methodology employed by those who arrive at each of the theories. I will demonstrate that each theory has scholars who support and refute it by using strikingly similar methods.

This chapter will serve as the conclusion of part one and will concretize the need for a new way forward to interpret John 3. Because part one is focused on the history of interpretation, this chapter will likewise focus on the *history* of modern interpretations. The goal is not, in this chapter, to incorporate current scholarship on the issue but, instead, to lay out the origin and development of each modern theory regarding the speakers in John 3. Part two will bring current scholarship into the picture to discuss how the history of part one can bring new light to the current conversation.

Continued Speech Theory

Proponents of this theory come from both conservative and liberal sides of the theological spectrum. Using vastly different methods, both groups arrive at the conclusion that verses 16-21 belong properly to Jesus and that verses 31-36 belong either to the Baptist as a continuation of his conversation in 22-30 or, often, that they belong to Jesus himself as a continuation of the speech in verses 16-21. Both groups attribute the words to characters in the story. Even when a scholar discusses the role of the Evangelist in shaping the narrative, the words appear to be the words of the character and not of the narrator in the story. The continued speech theory is further divided into a "traditional" position and a "rearrangement" theory.

Traditional Position

The traditional position simply claims that the speakers in the story continue to speak until the narrator identifies another speaker. While many scholars throughout history have identified the same speakers, only in the modern era does the theory require a defense. Traditionalists have to defend their position from two different sides. First, they must contend that the passages in question are not the reflections of the Evangelist added on to the end of the narratives. Second, they must contend that the order in which the text appears now is the order in which it was intended to be received. In other words, they must argue against both the rearrangement theory and the reflection theory, discussed below. The arguments employed come in several forms which I have categorized into four groups. Scholars argue that (1) the use of *gar* in verse 16 is too abrupt a transition to identify a new speaker, (2) that the term *monogenes* is not out of character for Jesus to use, (3) that there are unmistakable similarities between the themes presented in 3:16-21 and 3:31-36, and (4) that the testimony of the Baptist is necessary to prove Jesus' claims about himself.

Too abrupt a transition. The most common defense of this position is also

the simplest: the text does not indicate that a shift in speaker takes place. Paul Julian describes it thus, "In the absence of the mention of a change of speaker in 3:31, it is only logical that the same interlocutor [the Baptist] continues, just as in the case of 3:13-21, where these words are intended by the evangelist that the reader hears them from the mouth of Jesus and, hence, mentions no change of speaker."[1] While *gar* is too abrupt a transition to introduce a new speaker in verse 16, scholars also argue that Jesus' thought in verses 13-15 is not completed until the end of verse 21. In other words, the love of the Father presented in verse 16 is necessary in order to understand the incarnation and redemption mentioned in the previous verses.[2] Finally, some scholars argue that *gar* indicates too close a connection to what precedes it that a shift in speaker is impossible.[3]

Monogenes, the "only-begotten." *Monogenes* is rarely used in the New Testament. Luke uses the term three times, none of which refer to Jesus. The Gospel of John, Hebrews, and 1 John all use the term in reference to Jesus. In the Johannine corpus, *monogenes* appears in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. John's use of this term causes some scholars to argue that John, and not Jesus, applies the term to the Son of God.[4] Godet acknowledges the argument that, because the Evangelist uses this term in his prologue and in his Epistle, the term should be attributed to John, but he dismisses this argument because Jesus, he claims, was conscious of his own unique relation to

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[1] Paul Julian, Jesus and Nicodemus: A Literary and Narrative Exegesis of Jn. 2,23-3,36, European University Studies 23 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 29.

[2] Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John with an Historical and Critical Introduction*, trans. Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 395. Godet describes verses 13-15 as the "increasing exaltations" presented to Nicodemus and that verse 16 is "the highest principle from which these unheard gifts flow." Godet also argues that "for" is insufficient to mark a passing of teaching from Jesus to the disciple and that the author must have "marked much more distinctly" a transition.

[3] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1893), 63.

[4] For example, see Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, trans. Thomas Brown and John Gill, Clark's Foreign Theological Library 16 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1849), 3:396.

God.[5] Indeed, Godet concludes that the Evangelist could not have rendered the term otherwise.[6] Other terms and themes found in verses 16-21 are attributed to Jesus in the synoptics. According to Edwin Wilbur Rice, "the thought of condemnation and judgment is in accord with what the synoptics report Jesus as saying. The phrase 'only begotten' and the contrast of light and darkness did not originate with the evangelist, but are from Jesus."[7]

Motifs in 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. Scholars often use the similarities between 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 as evidence that the story originally existed as a separate narrative, usually conceived of as the reflections of the Evangelist, which was rearranged when added to the Johannine story. Most scholars will acknowledge these similarities, but the traditionalists do not attempt to make more sense of the text through rearrangement. Instead, the goal of the traditional position is to interpret the text as it has been received through the centuries. As C.H. Dodd describes his method,

> I conceive it to be the duty of an interpreter at least to see what can be done with the document as it has come down to us before attempting to improve upon it. . .. I shall assume as a provisional working hypothesis that the present order is not fortuitous, but deliberately devised by somebody—even if he were only a scribe doing his best—and that the person in question (whether the author or another) had some design in mind, and was not necessarily irresponsible or unintelligent.[8]

A slightly different argument in favor of the present order of the text comes from Dorothy Lee, who argues that rearranging verses 31-36 would remove an important literary sequence. In her understanding, "verses 22-30 are best seen as an insertion into

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[5] Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 394.

[6] Godet argues that the LXX translation for Ps 25:16, 35:17, and Prov 4:3 evidence the use of the term outside of Johannine literature enough to attribute it to Jesus.

[7] Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 63. Rice concludes that "the weight of scholarship and of argument seems to be in favor of regarding these are words of Jesus, and that his discourse continues to the end of verse 21."

[8] C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 290.

the discourse of Jesus, with verses 31-36 as the conclusion to the narrative."[9] The concluding remarks in John 3 are thus attributed to Jesus without the need to rearrange the text. Instead, Lee identifies verses 11-21 and its resumption in verses 31-36 as a framework surrounding the testimony of John the Baptist.

The testimony of the Baptist. Multiple scholars contend that verses 31-36 must be part of the continued speech of a character—whether Jesus or the Baptist—in order for the remainder of John 3 to make sense. Godet argues that the transitional phrase in verse 30 connects "I must decrease" with the words that preceded it and "he must increase" with the words which follow it.[10] Julian and Harris both point to the importance of verses 31-36 as the words of the Baptist because the *testimony* is being highlighted at this point, and that the Baptist must appear again as a witness to Jesus because "only a testimony of two witnesses is valid and binding."[11]

The traditional theory uses grammatical, theological, and narrative-driven arguments in order to defend their interpretation of the text. For them, John 3 is best interpreted when the ambiguous passages are both understood as the words of the characters in the narrative. Although the dialogical form drops out in verse 16 and verse 31, the lack of a transition is a strong indicator that no change in speaker has taken place. Likewise, those who hold to the traditional theory do not find the thematic connections between 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 enough of a reason to attribute both passages to an unmentioned narrator. Finally, this position rejects the attempt to rearrange the text in order to argue for a continued speech theory.

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[9] Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, JSNT 95 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 42.

[10] Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 410.

[11] Julian, *Jesus and Nicodemus: A Literary and Narrative Exegesis of Jn. 2,23-3,36*, 711:29; Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 60.

Rearrangement Theory

The notion of rearranging the passages of John's Gospel in order to produce the most logically consistent text was pervasive throughout the twentieth century but has since fallen out of fashion. While some scholars today still claim that some passages—3:16-21 and 3:31-36, for instance—existed before the writing of the Gospel and were appropriated and separated by the Gospel's editor, most have abandoned such an endeavor. The main criticism against this theory is perhaps best expressed by Francis Moloney: "While most of the reconstructed texts which these scholars produce read very logically, any suggestion of this nature is highly speculative, as Schnackenburg admits, and the variety of the suggestions . . . is a clear indication of the subjective nature of this speculation."[12] Despite the criticism of the theory and its lack of popularity in current scholarship, the theory still offers insight into the present conversation. Specifically, this theory highlights the thematic and linguistic connections between passages within John 3. While scholars no longer rearrange texts in order to place these connections near each other, the rearrangement theory best demonstrates those connections for modern scholarship. I have divided this category into two large groups: those who rearrange the verses found within chapter 3 and those who move verses outside of chapter three altogether.

Chapter three rearranged. The main rearrangement within chapter 3 is in an effort to connect verses 16:21 with verses 31:36. Bultmann argues that 3:31-36 "cannot be understood if it is taken as having been spoken by [the Baptist]" and that those verses originally came after verse 21.[13] By moving 3:31-36, Bultmann presents a consistency in Jesus' self-revelation as "the coming of the Revealer." In 3:1-8, the Revealer explains

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[12] Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 42.

[13] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1971), 131.

the new birth, in 3:9-21, he explains the crisis of the world, and in 3:31-36 he explains those who witness the revealer. Bultmann then relegates the words of 3:22-30 to a separate testimony of the Baptist which follows the Revealer's testimony concerning himself. In a similar move, J.G. Gourbillon argues that 3:31-36 is best seen as a continuation of the "commentary of the Evangelist on the words of Jesus" found in 3:16-21 and thus places that passage directly after verse 21.[14] While Bultmann and Gourbillon arrange chapter three identically—3:1-21, 31-36, 22-30—they disagree concerning the speaker of verses 16-21 and verses 31-36.

Another area of disagreement, even within the group of those who rearrange the text but keep everything within chapter 3, concerns where verses 31-36 are best placed within Jesus' speech. J. H. Michael argues that these words originally went between verses 13 and 14, claiming that verse 36 is "a most appropriate introduction" to the material presented in verses 14-21.[15] Michael's connection is no doubt based upon the need to believe in the Son to have eternal life which is found in both verses 36 and 16. Indeed, Michael represents this theory and its widespread acceptance during his time when he says,

> The theory that the text of the Fourth Gospel has become disarranged seems to commend itself to most students; and seeing that one of the most unmistakable of the dislocations has to do with chapter 3, one's hesitation to suggest a further re-arrangement of the text of that chapter is not as pronounced as otherwise it might have been.[16]

Intratextual rearrangement. The other argument concerning the rearrangement of texts involves bringing in verses from outside of chapter 3 or, in many cases, moving passages from chapter 3 to elsewhere in the Gospel. Scholars offer several

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[14] J. G. Gourbillon, "La Parabole du Serpent d'Airain et La 'Lacune' du Chapitre III de l'Evangile selon S. Jean," *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942), 214.

[15] J. Hugh Michael, "The Arrangement of the Text in the Third Chapter of John," *ExpTimes* 37, no. 9 (1926): 429.

[16] Michael, 428.

reasons for rearranging the text so heavily. First, some cite thematic connections—similar to those cited above by other rearrangement theorists—between the passages in John 3 and those found in John 12. T. Cottam follows J. Hugh Michael in placing verses 3:31-36 after verse 13, but he argues that 3:14-21 would be better placed following 12:50.[17] Cottam's rearrangement of chapter 12—12:20-36a, 12:44-50, 3:14-21, 12:36b-43—ties together the themes of lifting up, glorification, and judgment. In this instance, the text explicitly states that Jesus is speaking for verses 14-21 and indicates that God's "sending" of the Son from verse 16 is a clear reference to the crucifixion. Cottam is not alone in identifying the connection to chapter 12 and rearranging the text accordingly. H.G.C. Macgregor, Lagrange, F. Warburton Lewis, and Greville P. Lewis all argue for similar arrangements of chapters 3 and 12, but disagree as to the specific flow of those passages.[18]

Other scholars rearrange the text in still more creative ways. Mendner places chapter 3 within chapter 7, and John Bligh places it within chapter 9.[19] Schnackenburg takes another approach and argues that 3:13-21 and 3:31-36 should be removed from the narrative aspect of the Gospel altogether.[20] He believes that these passages make up a "kerygmatic addition" which predated the writing of the Gospel. This allows Schnackenburg to argue against Bultmann's claim that the entire passage was spoken by Jesus. Instead, Schnackenburg places the words in the Evangelist's mouth from a post-resurrection perspective because he pushes the belief in the post-resurrection Jesus back

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[17] T. Cottam, "Some Displacements in the Fourth Gospel," *ExpTimes* 38, no. 2 (1926): 91.

[18] G. H. C. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John*, MNTC (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933); Marie-Joseph LaGrange, *Evangile Selon Saint Jean*, Etudes Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1927); Lewis F. Warburton, "The Arrangement of the Texts in the Third Chapter of St. John," *ExpTimes* 38, no. 2 (1926): 92–93; Greville P. Lewis, "Dislocations in the Fourth Gospel: The Temple Cleansing, and the Visit of Nicodemus," *ExpTimes* 44, no. 5 (1933): 228–30.

[19] Siegfried Mendner, "Nikodemus," *JBL* 77, no. 4 (December 1958); John Bligh, "Four Studies in St John, 2: Nicodemus," *The Heythrop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1967): 40–51.

[20] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1, HTCNT (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 1:360.

into the later Christian generation.[21] These arguments demonstrate the wide range of interpretive results which arise from quite similar methodologies. The primary takeaway for the purposes of this project is the emphasis on similar themes which arise within John 3 and, indeed, in other sections including John's prologue and John 12. While current scholarship avoids mass rearrangement of the text, these similar themes lead many to conclude that the texts are best interpreted as the theological reflections of the Evangelist.

Reflection Theory

The idea that verses 16-21 and 31-36 are the theological reflections of the Evangelist first arrived in modern scholarship in the nineteenth century and remains the most common theory within Johannine scholarship today.[22] The Reflection Theory first raised questions as to the legitimacy of the Continued Speech Theory, and did so citing Erasmus as their own forerunner. Indeed, Tholuck (1859), Hovey (1885), and Milligan and Moulton (1883) credit Erasmus as the first to attribute both passages to the Evangelist.[23] The Reflection Theory is an attempt to address the interpretive difficulties found in John 3 without rearranging the text. These difficulties include the shift in style and tense, the Johannine terminology which appears out of place in the words of Jesus/the Baptist, and the Post-Resurrection viewpoint which seems to place the speaker after the lives of Jesus and the Baptist temporally.

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

[22] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 136–40; D. Moody Smith, *John*, Abington New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 102,106.

[23] August Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Smith, English & Company, 1859), 122; Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1885), 100; William Milligan and William Fiddian Moulton, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 69. As discussed above, Erasmus was not the first to argue for this interpretation, but modern histories of interpretation rarely go further back than Erasmus with regard to these passages.

Shift in Style and Tense

Shift to third person. John 3:12 contains the last usage of the first-person in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. From this point on, the discussion surrounds "the Son of Man" or simply, "the Son." This initial shift in person causes some scholars to identify verse 13 as the beginning of the Evangelist's reflections.[24] However, the use of "the Son of Man" in verses 13-14 causes most scholars to attribute those words to Jesus because "Son of Man" is an expression used frequently by Jesus throughout the Synoptics.[25] Beginning in verse 16, the text only refers to "the Son" in the third-person and, according to this theory, this indicates a shift in perspective and therefore, a shift in speaker. A similar argument is made for the concluding verses. Verse 30 marks the last time the Baptist uses the first-person and he no longer identifies himself in terms like "the friend of the bridegroom" (3:29). From this point forward, the text speaks of those who "come from above" or are "of the earth," but these terms are up for interpretation as to which category the Baptist falls.

Dialogue. An obvious consequence of shifting away from the first-person is the dissolved dialogue into a lengthy monologue. To be clear: John's Gospel attributes lengthy monologues to Jesus throughout in a way that the Synoptics do not. The argument here is not that a monologue is uncharacteristic for Jesus but, instead, that the monologue does not fit into the narrative context which immediately precedes it. Neither

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[24] Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, 3:393. Although Olshausen attributes vv. 14-15 to Jesus, he describes it as one of "those few discourses of Jesus in which he speaks as it were prophetically of his expiatory death." Because these discourses are so few, other scholars use the same criteria to argue that vv. 13-15 belong to the Evangelist. For example, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 104.

[25] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 228; Smith, *John*, 93; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 94; Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 150.

3:16-21 nor 3:31-36 adequately concludes the narrative of verses 1-15 or verses 22-30.[26]

Aorist tense. The shift in tense—discussed primarily concerning verses 16-21—indicates a passage of time between verse 15 and verse 16. John 3:14 seems to indicate that the Son of Man must be lifted up *at a future time* whereas verse 16 says that God gave his Son, an act *which has already taken place*. Interpreting the "giving" of the Son as a reference to the crucifixion, scholars argue that verse 16 is written from a viewpoint looking back at the crucifixion.[27] Belief and judgment are still considered present realities because they impact the contemporary audience of the Gospel, but the act of "giving" and being "sent" are, according to this theory, past events.[28] Although this is a grammatical argument, it leads quite well to the theological argument which arises from it: verses 16-21 and 31-36 appear to be written from a post-resurrection viewpoint.

Post-Resurrection Viewpoint

One of the main components of this interpretive theory is also one that has been evidenced in previous eras of this history of interpretation: the identity of the speaker correlates to the theological focus of the author. In the present case, scholars interpret 3:16 as a reference to the crucifixion and, as a result, identify the Evangelist as the speaker for the verse and those that follow. While the direction of causation can be argued, modern scholars use the focus on the crucifixion as a reason to argue against Jesus as the speaker for the passage. Craig Koester, discussing the distinctions between

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[26] Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, 3:396.

[27] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library 22 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 84–85.

[28] Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, 3:396; Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 170. Rainbow goes on to discuss the "pervasive" motif of God having 'sent' the Son as a reference to the incarnation.

past and present within John's Gospel, describes how the conversation with Nicodemus "is initially set during Jesus' ministry but moves seamlessly into commentary on Jesus' significance from a post-resurrection perspective, when the Son of Man has not only descended from heaven but has again ascended to heaven."[29] While Koester does not tie this discussion into the identity of the speaker, he does relate the words of the Evangelist with a post-resurrection focus on the crucifixion in the passage at hand. In a similar way, verses 31-36 seem to contradict aspects of the Baptist's dialogue from the preceding verses and, scholars argue, they reflect the more "developed" theology of a post-resurrection Johannine community rather than that of the Baptist.

Looking back on the Baptist. D. Moody Smith indicates that verses 31-36 seem to undermine the generally positive image of the Baptist presented up to this point in John's Gospel.[30] In the Prologue, the Baptist is *ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ Θεοῦ,* a man sent from God. But if the Baptist is considered the speaker in verses 31-36, then he is also presented as *ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς*, the one from the earth. This shift seems to downplay his significance and, indeed, discredit his role as the forerunner, friend of the bridegroom, and the second witness to the truth of Jesus' claims. To address these concerns, the reflection theory posits that the Evangelist uses the term to refer to unbelievers generally rather than to the Baptist specifically. Similarly, they argue that the Evangelist is trying to distinguish the role of the Baptist from that of Jesus' disciples: the Baptist is of the old age and Christians are members of the Kingdom of God.[31] Indeed, John Phillips describes that in verses 31-36, "we now have the reflections by the aged apostle on these events associated with the earliest beginnings of the new movement of which he is the

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[29] Craig R. Koester, ed., *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: A Christological Spectrum*, Library of New Testament Studies 589 (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 8.

[30] Smith, *John*, 106.

[31] Smith, 106; Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 128.

last surviving eyewitness."[32] In this sense, then, the Evangelist is presenting *himself* as the second witness to the truth of Jesus and those who carry the gospel message as those who "come from above." Indeed, Tholuck describes how, particularly in verses 35-36, the ideas are "too specifically of John's (the Evangelist) type of Christianity."[33] This again reflects the idea that the theology held by the later Johannine community was more developed than that of the Baptist and that only from a post-resurrection perspective can someone understand that the Father has given all things to the Son (verse 35) or that the Son gives eternal life (verse 36).

Looking back on Jesus. Scholars have made similar arguments regarding the supposed reflections found in verses 16-21: these theologically rich statements can only be made by someone looking back on Jesus' life from a post-resurrection standpoint. Paul Rainbow describes how the Evangelist looks back on the crucifixion and "consistently sees in it the superlative act of God's love for the world," citing John 3:16 as the principal example.[34] The clear interpretation is that God's act of "giving" the Son implies that Christ is given *on the cross*. Both Morris and Smith indicate that 3:16-21 are both spoken by the Evangelist and referring to the crucifixion.[35] Morris assumes that verse 16 regards the crucifixion as a past event, and Smith connects John 3:16 to Romans 5:8 which emphasizes the death of Christ as the act of God "giving" the Son. This connection to Romans 5:8 was prevalent throughout the history of interpretation and remains a pervasive argument in Johannine scholarship. Lagrange uses the view of the crucifixion as the primary reason for distinguishing verse 15 as the words of Jesus and

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[32] John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 80.

[33] Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 128.

[34] Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 220. He also includes 13:1, 34; 15:9, 12; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10; Apoc 1:5.

[35] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 228; Smith, *John*, 98–99.

verse 16 as those of the Evangelist. For him, the reflections found in verses 16-21 are inspired by the conversation with Nicodemus, but they understand the death of Jesus as a fact which has already taken place.[36] Finally, Beasley-Murray describes 3:16 as "the gospel in a nutshell" and as a "profound theological utterance" which "looks back on the life of Jesus in its totality and declares the purpose of it all."[37] The benefit of understanding 3:16-21 as a retrospective on Jesus' life is that it explains the highly developed theology—and indeed, Christology—which scholars do not often attribute to Jesus' own time.

Johannine Terminology

The final key argument for interpreting verses 16-21 and 31-36 as the reflections of the Evangelist is the same argument which causes many current scholars to attribute both passages to the same speaker: the passages use similar terminology which is elsewhere attributed to John the Evangelist.[38] Jerome Neyrey describes how, "If scholars do not agree on the speaker of 3:31-36, they strongly agree that there is a decided link between materials in 3:1-21 and 3:31-36."[39] The argument that these passages are connected is next combined with the argument that verses 31-36 are, in the words of Tholuck, indubitably the Evangelist's reflections.[40] These arguments combine to necessitate the conclusion that both 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 are spoken by the Evangelist because the latter is clearly spoken by the Evangelist and the former must have the same

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[36] LaGrange, *Evangile Selon Saint Jean*, 86.

[37] G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 39.

[38] Craig S Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 581; Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*. Keener describes 3:31-36 as "consummate Johannine Christology" which brings together "more diverse Johannine themes than even the prologue." Blomberg describes 3:16-21 as "virtually nothing but a collage of major Johannine motifs."

[39] Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, NCC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

[40] Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 122–23.

speaker as the latter.[41] Before any evaluation of such an argument can be made, the individual terms and themes which John employs in these passages must speak for themselves.

From above, born again. A common argument regarding the Johannine themes in John 3 discusses the meaning of *ἄνωθεν*. In 3:3, Jesus says that one must be born *ἄνωθεν* and Nicodemus incorrectly interprets this to mean to be born a second time. But verse 31 uses *ἄνωθεν* to describe the one who is above all and who is contrasted against the one "of the earth." Lee argues that this term helps to hold all of chapter 3 together by connecting the ideas in verses 31-36 back to those introduced in verse 3.[42] In a similar move, Neyrey argues for a "decided link" between 3:1-21 and 3:31-36 based, in part, on the use of *ἄνωθεν* which "Nicodemus misunderstood as 'again,'" and which is later used as a description of Jesus.[43] In addition to John's focus on language of "from above" and "from below" is the spatial language of ascent or "lifting up," *ὑψόω*. This term also has an ambiguous meaning which leads to misunderstanding. Scholars are split as to whether the "lifting up of the Son of Man" refers to the glorification of Jesus generally or the crucifixion of Jesus specifically. G. Nicholson argues that "the word is used primarily to speak of Jesus being lifted up to the Father," whereas M. Meye Thompson argues that "glorification entails death" and that "exaltation implies the cross."[44] Plastaras argues that the particularly Johannine feature of this term is that of the

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[41] Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSup 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 75. Webb says that it is "too speculative" to consider vv. 31-36 as the words of the Evangelist because it "so closely resembles" the speech of Jesus in 3:1-21. His argument seems to work backward from that described above: the passages being connected changes his understanding of the speaker in verses 31-36 whereas others see the connection as shaping their understanding of vv. 16-21.

[42] Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, 38.

[43] Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 87.

[44] Godfrey Carruthers Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema*, SBL Dissertation Series 63 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 143; Marianne Meye Thompson, *The*

glorification or ascent of the Son of Man, which appears nowhere else in the New Testament.[45] The idea of the Son being "lifted up" is found in 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32, 34 and, according to Colin G. Kruse, each use of *ὑψόω* alludes to Jesus' crucifixion.[46] Because both *ὑψόω* and *ἄνωθεν* are spatially oriented, have double meanings, and appear in multiple places in John's Gospel, scholars conclude that these terms should rightly be attributed to the Evangelist. Even in instances like 3:3 here the words are explicitly attributed to Jesus, scholars will argue that the Johannine themes are placed on the lips of Jesus.

Eternal life or judgment. The idea of "life" or "eternal life" is found throughout the Fourth Gospel and is particularly concentrated within the first twelve chapters. This concentration leads Kruse to conclude that "the theme of eternal life is intimately related to the signs of Jesus, and so to the very purpose of the Gospel."[47] In John's Gospel, life is contained within the Word (1:4, 6:35) and given to those who believe in the Son (3:15-16, 36). Eternal life becomes a spring within a believer (4:36) and functions was a light (8:12) which will keep the believer within the flock (10:28, 12:25) because the Father's commandment is eternal life (12:50). Indeed, the entire Gospel has the theme of life as its bookends (1:4, 20:31) and it appears to be the primary purpose of Christ's descent into humanity and revelation of God's love for the world. The corollary to eternal life is judgment and the term *κρίνω* appears as frequently and in many of the same passages as the term ζωή. Judgment has already occurred for those

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Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 96.

[45] James C. Plastaras, *The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology*, Contemporary Theology Series (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1972), 94. The traditional language, Plastaras argues, described the Son of Man descending on the clouds, not ascending to be with the Father.

[46] Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 112.

[47] Kruse, 4:113.

who reject the Son (3:17-18) and the Son judges accurately (5:30, 8:15-16). The purpose of the Son is to bring life, not judgment (12:47-48), but judgment is a necessary result of the revelation of the Son (16:11). Indeed, Jervell Jacob goes so far as to say that, "In John's Gospel, to give life and to judge are two sides of the same coin."[48] Judgment is a driving idea in the first twelve chapters of John and chapters 3 and 12 both include juxtapositions on life versus judgment.

Sending the Son. This final theme is equally as important and as pervasive as the first two: The Son is sent by the Father to be his representative on earth. John's use of "Son" language is multifaceted and it will be helpful to separate the components of the phrase. First, what does John mean by referring to Jesus as "the Son?" In other places in John and, indeed, other Gospel accounts, Jesus is called both the "Son of Man" and the "Son of God." But John identifies Jesus as simply "The Son." Paul Rainbow sees in this moniker a distinction from the Father but also a distinction from the other "children of God." He describes how "John is happy to describe Jesus as the 'Son' (huios) of God" but he "designates believers never as God's 'sons' (huioi) but rather as God's 'children' (tekna)."[49] This simple terminology identified Jesus as both the unique Son of the Father as well as the one who is still distinct from the Father. The second aspect of this phrase is the idea of "sending". Proponents of the Reflection theory advocate that verse 17 and verse 34 both refer to Jesus. He is both the Son "sent into the world" from verse 17 as well as the "one whom God has sent" from verse 34. This "one whom God has sent" is in contrast to "a man sent from God" from the Prologue. Jesus is not a man sent from God but, rather, the "only Son, who came from the Father" (3:14). Again, this theme is found in the Prologue, chapter 3, and chapter 12, wherein Jesus describes how those who

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[48] Jacob Jervell, *Jesus in the Gospel of John*, trans. Harry T. Cleven (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 24.

[49] Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 160.

do reject him also reject "the one who sent" him (12:44).

Christology. Taken together, these three primary themes reflect the elevated Christology found throughout John's Gospel. The description of the "only Son" as distinct from the "children of God" is a clear christological statement. By "sending the Son," God makes his favor toward Jesus known. The mission of Christ is to bring eternal life and judgment; thus, those themes further define the characteristics of the Christ. The spatial distinctions between those who come "from above" and those who are "of the earth" continue to distinguish Jesus from those around him, including the Baptist. Indeed, the fact that these themes are found in concentrated passages throughout John 1—12 further evidences the argument that John's purpose in his "Book of Signs" is to identify Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Taken together, the similar terminology and high Christology found throughout John's Gospel are taken as evidence of the Evangelist's unique perspective on the meaning of Jesus' life.

Blended Theology Theory

The blended theology theory holds that the speaker shifts from Jesus/the Baptist to the narrator at some point but that, ultimately, it is impossible to identify a clear break. Theorists point to the myriad attempts to splice together disparate verses in order to produce a "coherent" train of thought, and they remain critical that any such attempt is purely speculation.[50] Ultimately, those that argue for a blended theology suggest that not only is it impossible to determine the identity of the speaker but also that it is unimportant for the interpretation of the passage. Some authors are content to say that the conversation "gradually trails off into a series of christological reflections" while

[50] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, vol. 25A, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), Excursus 3. Borchert is equally dismissive of those who rearrange verses (using Bultmann as the exemplar) as well as those on the more conservative end who use "red letters" to distinguish the words of Jesus.

other authors explicitly state that "Jesus' speech to Nicodemus and the reflections of the narrator under the inspiration of the Spirit are so closely intertwined that it is neither possible nor necessary to distinguish them."[51] Ridderbos makes a similar argument: "From all this it may be inferred that what is said in chapter 3 about Jesus in the third person is intended by the Evangelist to be understood *materially* as the words of Jesus, but the boundaries between Jesus' self-testimony and the Evangelist's witness to Jesus seem to be indefinite, at least in this chapter."[52]

The general agnosticism with regard to the identity of the speakers makes this theory both widely attested and difficult to discuss in detail. The theory is marked by an absence of argument to defend it. Because the speaker's identity is irrelevant, those that hold this theory tend not to defend it at length. Indeed, Plastaras argues that the question concerning the identity of the speakers is "really an artificial one" because there is never a clear division between the words of Jesus and the theology which represents the Johannine community.[53] The point of this theory is not to undermine the historicity of Jesus' words but, rather, to emphasize the authority of the narrator and the purpose of John's Gospel.[54] To claim that the words of Jesus pass imperceptibly into the words of the narrator simply indicates that the narrator is presenting Jesus in a specific way and using specific terms which John thinks both represent Jesus' own words and reflect his own theology.[55] For those who believe that the words of John are inspired by the Spirit,

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[51] C. J. Cadoux, "The Johannine Account of the Early Ministry of Jesus," *JTS* 20, no. 80 (July 1919): 316; J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 58.

[52] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 149. Emphasis original.

[53] Plastaras, *Witness of John*, 88.

[54] Jacob Bryan Born, "Literary Features in the Gospel of John: An Analysis of John 3:1-21," *Direction* 17, no. 2 (1988); Borchert, *John 1-11*, 25A: Excursus 3. Born suggests that the result of this blending is "a greater willingness in the reader to listen to the particular message." Borchert similarly argues that the result is leading the audience to believe in Jesus and experience life.

[55] Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: Chapters 1-6*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 204.

the attempt to distinguish between Jesus and John is an attempt to find a distinction without a difference.[56]

Conclusions to Chapter 5

This chapter demonstrates both the wide range of interpretations offered in contemporary scholarship as well as the interpretive impasse created by a lack of consensus. Additionally, modern scholarship has thoroughly disrupted the correlation identified throughout the first sixteen hundred years of scholarship on John 3: modern scholarship demonstrates no correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus attributed to the passage. Scholars may focus on the incarnation or the crucifixion while attributing the passages to characters in the story or to the narrator or, indeed, to both. The long-established tendency to favor identifying the speakers as the characters in the passage has also been replaced by a tendency to view the passages as the voice of the narrator.

Perhaps most important for the purposes of this dissertation is the lack of consensus even among those scholars who use the same methods or come from similar ideological backgrounds. Conservative scholars approach the text with a linguistic examination of the terms John uses and arrive at differing conclusions. On the one hand, Leon Morris and D. A. Carson conclude that the words of 3:16-21 are that of the Evangelist. But on the other hand, Francis Moloney argues that Jesus' words continue until verse 21.[57] On the more liberal end of the scholastic spectrum, scholars have approached the text with literary or redactional methods to argue both that Jesus spoke the entirety of 3:16-21, 31:36 and that his sermon was later coopted by the Evangelist or that the same passage existed as a free-standing speech by the Evangelist which was

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[56] Michaels, *John*, 58.

[57] Francis J Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J Harrington, vol. 4, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 100ff.

placed in chapter 3 by a later editor.

An examination of the terminology yields little concrete results. Scholars continue to debate the meaning of *ὕψωσεν* (lift up), *μονογενῆ* (only-begotten), and *ἄνωθεν* (again, from above) and the various definitions of these terms yield vastly different interpretations of the passage. Does "lifting up" refer to the exaltation of Jesus as the Son of God, or does it specifically refer to the crucifixion? At this early point in John's Gospel, is it possible that it refers to both?[58] Is "only-begotten" an exclusively Johannine terminology which thus proves that 3:16 belongs to the Evangelist or, perhaps, is it a term Jesus would have used to describe himself during his own lifetime?[59] Finally, who is in mind when the text describes the one "from above" or the one "of the earth"? Is the message of the Baptist relegated to all other words "of the earth" which are rejected? Are the words of Jesus "from above" and, if so, why does he say they are rejected when the Baptist's disciples clearly indicate that members of their sect are leaving to follow Jesus? Perhaps the most important terminological discrepancy has to do with the key text, John 3:16. When God 'gives" his only Son, does this "giving" refer to the revelation of Christ in Jesus as the Son of God, or does it refer to God sacrificing his Son as an offering for sin? Indeed, nothing could be more central to the overall argument of John's Gospel and yet, contemporary scholarship fails even here to offer a conclusive interpretation of the passage. The purpose of part one of this dissertation was to lay out the history of interpretation and present the lack of consensus within modern scholarship as to the answer to these questions. Part two will present a fresh understanding of the speakers in John 3 by incorporating the voices of the past into the present discussion, focusing on the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the passage

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[58] Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 143; Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 96.

[59] Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: The Translation of John 3.16 in the Revised Standard Version," *JBL* 74, no. 4 (1953): 217; Gerard Pendrick, "Monogenes," *NTS* 41 (1995): 587, 595.

PART 2

INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 6

READING THEOLOGICALLY: THE PURPOSE OF JOHN 3

> But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31).

Part one of this project, chapters 2—5, demonstrated the importance of identifying the speakers in John 3, the lack of consensus about those identities within modern scholarship, and the depth of insight offered by pre-modern interpreters of the passage. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 examined pre-modern periods in which authors attributes either John 3:16-21 or 3:31-36 to a speaker and 85 percent of the 180 texts discussed identified the characters in the story as the continued speaker.[1] This reading—that the characters in the narrative are speaking—is perhaps the more natural reading because there is no internal indication of a shift in speaker. Only 25 texts identified the narrator as the speaker in one or both passages. Additionally, this history of interpretation demonstrated a consistent correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the author. In most instances, authors attribute a text to the character in the story while they connect the passage to a discussion on the incarnation, the identity or works of Christ, or the testimony regarding that identity. Conversely, those few authors who identify the narrator as the speaker connect these passages from John 3 to the crucifixion. Only 12 of the 175 texts examined break from this correlation and, of those 12, 7 are from the early modern era. The remaining 5 are all concerned with the words of 3:31-36 and they attribute the words to the narrator but focus instead on the

[1] See Table A1 for a complete table of texts examined.

divinity of Christ.[2] No text of the 180 examined connected the words of 3:16-21 with the crucifixion without also attributing them to the Evangelist.[3]

The reason for this correlation, as demonstrated by the commentaries offered by authors throughout history, is based on the belief that Jesus would not be referencing his own crucifixion during this conversation with Nicodemus. Although Jesus discusses the serpent being "lifted up" in the desert, many authors interpret this passage as a reference to the exaltation of Christ as the Son of God and not, as modern interpreters assume, as a reference to the crucifixion.[4] While the audience is aware that Jesus is speaking on two levels—the exaltation and the crucifixion—the context of the dialogue with Nicodemus indicates that the focus is on exaltation *primarily*. If, however, the Evangelist is speaking the words of 3:16-21 from a post-resurrection viewpoint, then the primary focus on the crucifixion is fitting. As in other places where the Evangelist explains Jesus' life from a post-resurrection standpoint, 3:16-21 is read as an explanation of Jesus' teachings to Nicodemus, and 3:31-36 is read as an explanation of Jesus' superiority over the Baptist.

The history of interpretation helps in one additional way: it identifies key passages in the Bible which are connected to the passages in question in John 3. While I am not arguing for a canonical reading methodology, the fact that these passages are used repeatedly throughout the history of interpretation lends credence to the idea that they can offer some interpretive insight. Romans 5:8-10 and 8:32 reference the death of the Son

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[2] Of the 5 references which break the correlation, three of them—Hildebert, Victor of St. Hugh, and Zacharias Chrysopolitanus—are either references to each other or incorrect attributions of the same work.

[3] As discussed above, some texts place the words of John 3:16-21 outside of the context of the conversation with Nicodemus. In these instances, the words of Jesus referring to his crucifixion are spoken either during the Last Supper or during the crucifixion itself. Because of this shift in context, they did not directly contradict the correlation established throughout part one.

[4] Some interpret the "lifting up" to mean the return to the Father. The return is not explicitly connected with the crucifixion and ascension, though.

explicitly and the reconciliation made between humanity and God. These passages are popular throughout the history of interpretation because they describe how God "gave" his own Son and "did not spare him," both terms referencing the crucifixion. Authors cite these passages often while connecting John 3:16-21 with the words of the Evangelist and a discussion of the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus. In these instances, the author uses other biblical texts to interpret the "giving" of the Son in John 3:16 as a "giving unto death." Similarly, Matthew 25 and Psalm 1:5 are cited in discussions concerning the judgment and what that judgment entails. Because judgment is a common theme in John 3, these passages are commonly used to help interpret Jesus' teachings in John 3 regarding the judgment of sinners. Finally, 1 John 4 is a particularly appealing reference because it is attributed to the same author as the Gospel of John. John makes his focus explicit when he describes that God demonstrates his love for humanity by sending Jesus "as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Historically, authors have used this clarification to interpret John 3 in the same way: The Evangelist is describing the crucifixion as the principle display of God's love. These passages—particularly that of 1 John—continue to play a role in the interpretive task in modern Johannine scholarship on John 3.

Chapter 5 discusses how the modern era shattered the trends established throughout sixteen centuries of interpretation on John 3. Authors no longer tend to identify the characters in the story as the speakers, nor do they correlate the identity of the speaker with the theological focus of their scholarship. Scholars identify John 3 as "the theological battleground of the ages" and argue—rightly—that the controlling concern of John's Gospel is Christology.[5] Even though they agree on the importance of John 3, there is no consensus as to the christological focus of this key chapter in John's

[5] John B. Cowden, *St. John's Christ: The Basis of Religious Unity* (Cincinnati: F. L. Rowe, 1939), 28; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 15.

Gospel. Contemporary biblical interpretations have yielded inconsistent results which leads many scholars to abandon the question altogether in favor of an agnostic position. Because chapter 5 is concerned with the history of modern interpretation, I divided these interpretations into three large headings: continued speech, reflection, and blended theology. The continued speech theory argues that the characters in the story speak throughout chapter 3 and the reflection theory argues the opposite—that the Evangelist offers his own theological reflections following the conversations of Jesus and the Baptist. The blended theology theory takes a middle road which claims that all the words of Jesus are really the words of the Evangelist and that, because of the Evangelist's editorial hand, the identity of the speaker is not only unknowable but also unimportant.

Part one considered the commentaries and scholarship as primary sources; the focus was placed on what other authors have said. Part two shifts to a discussion on secondary sources; the focus now being placed on current scholarship as it relates to John 3. The purpose of the current chapter is to locate John 3 thematically within John's Book of Signs and indeed in the overall purpose of the Gospel. The logic goes as follows: 1) The history of interpretation suggests a correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the interpreted passage and 2) the identity of the speaker is ambiguous, therefore 3) the theological focus of the passage must help determine the identity of the speaker. This chapter will argue that the purpose of John's Gospel is accomplished through an intentional, overarching narrative in which chapters 1—12 reveal the identity of the Son of God, chapter 12 marks the rejection of that identity, and chapters 13—20 shift focus toward the crucifixion. Within this larger narrative arc, the various stories within the Book of Signs point toward the singular claim that Jesus is the Christ, the representative of the Father to the world. After demonstrating the purpose of John's Gospel, the narrative arc which supports that purpose, and the singular goal of the Book of Signs, this chapter will conclude that John 3 is likewise intended to point to Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God.

Purpose and Audience of the Fourth Gospel

The purpose of John's Gospel is inexorably linked to the audience intended by its author. The two major theories in contemporary biblical scholarship argue either that 1) John was written for a group of Christians, called the Johannine Community, possibly for the purpose of affirming their faith during a conflict with the local Synagogue or 2) John was written for non-Christians for the purposes of evangelism. Those that hold the latter view debate which group of nonbelievers is in mind; their theories range from the Samaritans to Jewish non-Christians to Gentile pagans. Before this chapter can examine the rhetoric and purpose of John's Gospel, and how that purpose is advanced in the Book of Signs, attention must first be given to the arguments surrounding the intended audience.

John's Gospel as a Missionary Document

For much of Christian history, John's Gospel was considered to be a missionary document intended to convince Jewish people that Jesus is their Messiah. The Gospel account is filled with references to the Jewish Scriptures, festivals, and religious rites. In this reading, the purpose of John's Gospel—that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God—is written with Jewish people in mind so that those who are awaiting the Christ may realize that Jesus is him. Additionally, the Gospel intends to further define what the role of the Christ is: not only is Jesus the promised Messiah, but he is also the incarnate Son of God.

The idea that John was written as a missionary document for Jews is not without problem. The narrator takes time to explain Jewish rites, to translate Hebrew terms, and to (re)interpret Jewish Scriptures. Additionally, the underlying attitude toward the Jews through John's Gospel appears hostile: Jesus calls Jews "children of the Devil (8:44)," and refers to Jewish Scriptures as "your Law" (8:17, 10:34) which places Jesus outside the Judaism of his time. If John's Gospel was written with the intent to convince

Jews that Jesus is the Christ, these rhetorical moves do not advance the goal.[6] These issues forced some scholars to offer alternative understandings of John's intended audience.

One modern solution to this apparent issue comes from Adele Reinhartz' book, *Cast out of the Covenant*.[7] Reinhartz suggests that the Gospel is intended to generate belief in Gentile pagans who are familiar with Judaism to some degree. In her reading, the Jews are cast as a villain against whom both Christians and gentiles can unite. Indeed, this suggestion makes John's Gospel simultaneously more of a missionary document and at the same time, more anti-Jewish. As a missionary document, Reinhartz imagines a scene in which John's Gospel is recited or performed in a busy marketplace so that passing Gentiles will hear the message. As an anti-Jewish text, this proposition uses "the Jews" as a rhetorical enemy. While other readings suggest that John's seemingly anti-Jewish passages are merely "inter-Jewish bickering," Reinhartz' suggestion leans far more toward a full-on anti-Jewish Gospel.

The Johannine Community in Conflict

Johannine scholars struggled with the apparent anti-Semitism of John's Gospel following the Shoah in World War II. Recognizing the history of Christian anti-Semitism and the language from John's Gospel which was used to vilify modern Jews, scholars hoped to offer an interpretation of John's Gospel which would, at minimum, alleviate the tension of Jewish identity within the Gospel. One such effort came in the idea that John's Gospel was written by and for Christians as an internal document used to establish and affirm their Christian identity outside of Judaism.

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[6] For examples of scholarship which addresses the rhetoric against the Jews in John's Gospel, see R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Terence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in The New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University, 2010).

[7] Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018).

The idea that the Fourth Gospel was written as an insular document for a group of Jewish Christ-followers came to the fore of Johannine scholarship in 1968 with J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel.*[8] Martyn's key argument is that the fourth Gospel was written in the context of a community which was expelled from their local synagogue because of their faith in Jesus. Martyn examines passages in John which predict that Jesus' followers will be αποσυναγωγος (expelled from the synagogue) in order to present the entire Johannine narrative on two levels. On the first level, Jesus is in conflict with the Jewish leaders of his own time; on the second level, John's own community is in conflict with the Jews of their local synagogue. Following Martyn's work, much of Johannine scholarship in the last decades has suggested that the fourth Gospel reveals critical information about a specific group of Jewish Christians in the first century.

Expanding on Martyn's work, Raymond Brown reconstructed the entire community around which the Fourth Gospel was written in his 1979 work *The Community of the Beloved Disciple.*[9] Brown goes on to identify layers of composition within the Fourth Gospel which point to a declining relationship between John's community and the synagogue Jews. Scholars have since moved away from the attempt to label individual passages—or, indeed, verses—as belonging to one layer of composition or another. The most pervasive argument began with R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, in which Culpepper argues for a literary reading of John's Gospel as it has come down to us in history. This approach acknowledges the complex history behind John's composition, but argues that the only artifact available for examination is the Gospel as it stands and, therefore, Johannine scholars should approach

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[8] For the purposes of this project, I will use the third edition of Martyn's work. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

[9] Raymond Brown E, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

it as a literary whole.

My understanding of the audience of John's Gospel falls into this last category. I do not envision the intended audience to be an insular group of Jewish Christians, nor do I imagine the Gospel being preached in crowded marketplaces. Instead, I find it most likely that John's Gospel was written with a variety of audiences in mind. It intends both to affirm the faith of those who already follow Jesus as well as to convince nonbelievers that Jesus is the Christ. The purpose statement of John 20:30-31 supports this double meaning, as it can intend both continuing faith and establish faith.[10] The purpose, then, is to present clear proofs that Jesus is the Son of God. The narrator hopes that these proofs will both affirm and establish faith, and the central goal does not prioritize one over the other.

John's Gospel: Narrative and Rhetoric

While much debate surrounds the interpretation of John's Gospel, there remains almost universal consensus regarding its general structure. The text is usually split into four sections: a prologue (1:1-18), a "Book of Signs" (1:19-12:50), a "Book of Glory/the Passion" (13:1-20:29/31), and an epilogue (chapter 21, although 20:30-31 is included in some arguments).[11] The prologue introduces several key concepts which recur throughout the Gospel: the divine origins of the Word, life, light/darkness, witness, the world, belief, and the children of God. The Book of Signs develops these themes throughout the narrative of Jesus' three-year ministry.[12] The Book of Glory focuses on

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[10] Indeed, one common theme in John's Gospel is intentional double-meaning. Born again/above, beginning/continuing faith, and exaltation/crucifixion are just some examples.

[11] Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19–21.

[12] Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, xc–xcii; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 1-12*, vol. 1, Anchor Bible Series 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), cxxxviii–ix; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 289.

the last week of Jesus' life and includes the final instructions for Jesus' disciples followed by the story of his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.[13] The Epilogue summarizes key points made throughout the Gospel and includes the stated purpose of the Gospel: "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The details of what this statement means are still debated, but most agree that the Gospel is aiming to achieve the goal stated here.[14] Therefore, the concluding purpose statement will be the starting place for this discussion on the narrative arc.[15]

John's Narrative Arc

The Fourth Gospel has historically been interpreted as an evangelistic Gospel aimed specifically at nonbelieving Jews. This interpretation fell out of favor in the modern era, but is beginning to make a resurgence particularly among conservative scholars.[16] A comparison of John 20:31 to 1 John 5:13 helps clarify the evangelical nature of John's Gospel: "I have written these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life, all who believe in the name of the Son of God, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God."[17] The intended audience of 1 John appears to have "eternal life" already through their belief in the name of the Son of God, whereas

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[13] Some identify a fourth section of John's Gospel by separating 18:1-20:31 into a Passion narrative while 13:1-17:26 is a teaching narrative for Jesus' disciples. See C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 11.

[14] Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, lxxxii. Beasley-Murray offers a summary of the interpretations of this verse, most of which center around the textual variant between ινα πιστευσητε or ἱνα πιστευητε. Carson concludes that both variants can be interpreted as "initial faith" and "continuing in faith" so that the discussion is ultimately moot. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Eerdmans, 1990), 75.

[15] For a full discussion on the reason John wrote his Gospel, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35–37.

[16] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 90–92; C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A&C Black, 1981), 136–37; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 855–57.

[17] Carson offers this comparison in Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 75.

the audience of John's Gospel are described in less certain terms. Even still, the Gospel intends to offer life to all who believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," whether those are already believing, unbelieving, or a mixed audience. Specifically, John 20:30-31 claims that the signs chosen to be recorded in the Gospel are chosen in order to cultivate belief in the audience. The signs, then, are seen as the key vehicle through which the identity of Jesus is revealed and the gift of God—eternal life—is offered.[18]

The signs serve as a signal to the audience pointing toward the chief theme of John's Gospel: Christology. Scholars consistently point to John's "high" Christology as *the* defining characteristic of his Gospel, particularly when compared to the Synoptics.[19] All other themes gain their significance only through their relationship to Christ: The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ, God is described primarily as the Father, the disciples are sheep of the shepherd, and the miracles Jesus performs are not mere feats of power but point to Jesus' divine identity.[20] The purpose statement of John's Gospel clarifies the connection between the signs Jesus performed and the goal of revealing his identity. Life, the ultimate goal of relationship with God, is achieved through belief in his Son. Belief is defined in terms of Christology and, specifically, the identity Jesus claims for himself. In other words, belief is placed in *who Jesus is* and not so much in *what Jesus does*.[21] Those who follow Jesus because of his acts but fail to see past them to

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[18] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 328.

[19] Barrett, *St John*, 56–82; Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 185–201; Robert W. Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979); Jörg Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, BMSSEC (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 347–76; Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); James C. Plastaras, *The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology*, Contemporary Theology Series (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1972); Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

[20] Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, lxxxi. Beasley-Murray argues that "all other theological concerns . . . are aspects of the one great theme, and all are viewed in light of the dualism that characterizes the Christology."

[21] Borchert, *John 1-11*, 25A:31. Borchert says that "*genuine life* is identified for the reader as the goal of human existence. The attaining of that goal, moreover, is proclaimed to be achieved through the process of believing in the reality and nature of *who Jesus is*, both as the long-anticipated Messiah (Christ)

understand his divine identity will ultimately fall away (John 6:60-71, 12:37). This connection is further substantiated by the observation that the word *σημεῖα* is never paired with *ἀκουειν*, which Köstenberger uses to conclude that "a 'sign' is something Jesus *does*, not merely something he says, and it is something people can *see*, not merely hear."[22] Life-generating belief comes from *seeing* the signs and looking past them to see *Jesus* for who he is.

In addition to signs, another theme which bolsters the governing focus on Christology is the sensory perception of Jesus' identity. Köstenberger points to "seeing" the signs and not merely "hearing" them, but John's Gospel goes even further in describing the sensory functions required of believers. The focus throughout the Gospel is on sight and indicates that belief is tied to seeing Jesus and his signs. Following the resurrection, Mary Magdalene proclaims that she "has seen the Lord" and when Jesus appeared to the disciples, he "showed them his hands" as a proof that he was crucified and raised (20:18, 20). Other signals in John's Gospel indicate that the necessity of "seeing" for belief is no longer a requirement for John's audience. Jesus tells Thomas, "You have believed because you have seen me; blessed are those who have believed without having seen" (20:29). This shift from sight to hearing is also indicated in chapter 12, where John quotes Isaiah 6:10 as the reason for why the people "could not believe" (12:39-40). In his quotation, John references the inability to see and understand, but does not mention the inability to hear even though it was originally included in Isaiah's declaration.[23] Jesus concludes chapter 12 by proclaiming that "if anyone hears" his

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and as the actual human embodiment of the Godhead on earth."

[22] Köstenberger, *John*, 326.

[23] Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 64 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Craig A. Evans, "The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John," *Novum Testamentum* 24, no. 2 (1982): 124–38; Craig A. Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94, no. 3 (1982): 415–18; Daniel J. Brendsel, "Isaiah Saw His Glory: The Use of Isaiah 52-53 in John 12" (PhD diss., Wheaton University, 2013).

words they will not be judged and that everything he said "is just what the Father has told me to say" (12:47, 50). Therefore, the pivotal chapter in John's Gospel not only indicates a shift in focus from the signs of Jesus to the passion, but it also marks a shift away from *seeing* Jesus' actions toward *hearing* the testimony regarding Jesus.

The Book of Signs

Within the "Book of Signs," the twin themes of "seeing" and "signs" support the overarching theme of Christology. The following pages will demonstrate the connections between seeing the signs of Jesus and believing in his name. For John, belief in Jesus during his lifetime is tied to *seeing* the signs that Jesus performed. But, a superior form of belief is generated through *hearing* the testimony regarding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. John employs this connection as a way to reassure his own audience that their faith is in no way inferior because they were not firsthand witnesses to Jesus' signs. Instead, by hearing the testimony of John recorded in the Gospel, John's audience can *hear* and *believe*.

This connection between sight and belief is evident even in the prologue which introduces not only the Book of Signs, but the entire Gospel. The testimony is that "we have *seen* his glory" and that "no one has ever *seen* God" but that Jesus "has made him known (1:14, 18). The Baptist's first interaction with Jesus indicates that he "*saw* Jesus coming toward him" and said "*Behold*!" (1:29) and that he "*saw* the spirit descend" and remain upon Christ (1:32). Jesus' first words in John ask the question, "What are you seeking?" and his first command is for the disciples to "come and you will see" (1:38-39). Jesus' conversation with Nathanael at the conclusion of chapter 1 describes how Jesus *saw* him under the fig tree and that Nathanael will "see greater things than these" which include "you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." If the first chapter intends to lay out the main themes of the book, *seeing* is the primary term used for interactions with Jesus.

John 2 discusses the first sign: turning water into wine at Cana. This sign is associated with neither seeing nor hearing but, instead, *taste*.[24] Nevertheless, the sign generated belief in Jesus through the physical sensory perception of the miracle. Following the cleansing of the temple, the narrator offers an aside which describes how "when therefore he was raised out from death, the disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:22). This reference connects hearing with belief, but the crucial distinction is that this belief only occurs after the resurrection. Both the reference to Jesus' death and the subsequent belief upon hearing Jesus' words are offered as narrative asides to the audience and not as an interaction with those in Jesus' own time. This distinction is important because it maintains the focus on sight prior to the crucifixion and hearing after the resurrection and ascension. Following her interaction with Jesus, the Samaritan Woman returns to her town and proclaims, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did" (4:29) and John records that "many Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony" (4:39). Jesus stayed in Samaria and more came to believe in him not because of what they heard from the woman, but what they themselves saw from Jesus (4:42). It seems that their belief, based on personal interaction with Jesus, is an improvement over the belief based on hearing the Samaritan Woman.

John subtly undermines sight as an avenue to faith, as he says to the official that "unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (4:48), and Jesus' claim is proven true when the official believed after seeing that his son was healed upon Jesus' word. Those who began to follow Jesus in large numbers did so "because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick" (6:2) and following the miraculous feeding, they "saw the sign that he had done" (6:14) which generated further belief in him. Again,

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[24] For more detail regarding John's sensory engagement, including reference to smell and taste, see Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

John shows criticism for this form of belief when Jesus answers this crowd, "you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." The episode of the Man Born Blind further clarifies this distinction between seeing and hearing. The Man's belief is tied to seeing Jesus and the miracle he performed (9:37-38) and this belief is juxtaposed with the Pharisees' claim of sight. Indeed, the Man criticizes the Pharisees for hearing of Jesus' sign and not believing (9:27) while the Pharisees opt instead for following the testimony heard by Moses (9:29).

Jesus claims that his sheep "hear his voice" and follow him (10:27), and encourages the Jews to "believe the works" which he is doing before them (10:38). Even John's disciples came to believe Jesus because of the signs he performed and because "everything that John said about [Jesus] was true" (10:41-42). Indeed, in the climactic sign of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, belief is connected to "seeing the glory of God" (11:40). Just as the first sign was connected to taste, the last sign is connected to smell (11:39, 12:3), completing the engagement of the senses in the Book of Signs. This sign, which initiated the plot to kill Jesus, marks the end of Jesus' public ministry that engaged the senses and generated belief. Throughout the Book of Signs, focus is placed on sight as the primary means of belief and, although it is often undercut by the prospect of hearing, the object of one's vision is often the signs themselves. The crowd that comes to Jesus in his final week came "not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus" as proof of the sign. Quite literally, they came in order to see the sign, the living Lazarus. The sad conclusion to the Book is that "though [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they did not believe him" (12:37).

Conclusions

Within the context of the Book of Signs and, indeed, the Gospel of John as a whole, John 3 supports the narrative goal of generating belief in Jesus' identity as the Son of God. As part of the overarching strategy of John's Gospel, John 3 continues to

identify Jesus as the Christ and works to further define what that title means. John 3 suggests that Jesus is pre-existent (verse 13), that he is the light come into the world (verse 19), and that he comes from above (verse 31). While these ideas are found throughout John's Gospel, the author develops them within chapter 3 which furthers the ultimate goal of the Gospel. The conclusion that the dialogues in chapter 3 must be focused first on Christ's incarnation is thus preferable to the alternative and, given the connection between the speaker of the passage and the theological focus found therein, it is equally preferable to identify Jesus as the speaker in John 3.

Identifying Jesus as the speaker in both ambiguous passages of John 3 is tenable historically and, more importantly, can help recover a christological focus on the incarnation in John 3 where contemporary scholarship tends to focus only on the crucifixion. Therefore, chapter 7 of this dissertation will offer an exegesis of John 3 based on the idea that Jesus speaking in both 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. As the capstone chapter, chapter 7 will both argue *for* reading Jesus as the speaker as well as addressing arguments *against* Jesus as speaker and incarnation as the focus of the chapter.

CHAPTER 7

WHO SAYS THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD? JESUS AS THE SPEAKER IN JOHN 3

Those who receive his testimony have set their seal that God is true (John 3:33).

To achieve the purpose of cultivating faith within his audience, John spends the first half of his Gospel demonstrating proofs that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God who came as a representative to the world. John must have intended for chapter 3 to serve the same purpose and add to his overall argument that Jesus is the Christ. In this sense, John 3 neither repeats the same information as the rest of the Book of Signs, nor does it offer information which does not support John's argument. Instead, John uses chapter three to add new proofs to his claim. In this chapter, I offer a fresh reading of John 3 in light of the underlying focus on the identity of Jesus found throughout the Book of Signs. By understanding both ambiguous passages as the words of Jesus, I suggest that John 3 is focused on the incarnation and, therefore, it offers new insight into the character of the Father displayed through Christ (3:16-21) and a comparison of responses to this revelation from God (3:31-36).

It is, perhaps, more accurate to say that I am *recovering* a reading of John 3 and introducing its relevance into contemporary scholarship. As demonstrated above, authors throughout history have been comfortable with the ambiguity of John 3 and allowed the text to have multiple foci simultaneously. Indeed, several authors demonstrated their comfort with interpreting the ambiguous passages as belonging to different people at different times. Instead of categorizing and deconstructing the ambiguity, pre-modern authors mined the ambiguity for a depth of meaning.[1] The

[1] I am thankful to Alicia Myers, who read an earlier draft of this work and employed the

modern era sought to clarify this ambiguity in all aspects of John's Gospel, current scholarship is adjusting what was an overcorrection. As I will discuss below, current scholarship has shifted against to accept the ambiguity of John's meanings in several areas. I am suggesting that the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of John 3 should, also, be given room within this ambiguity in order to offer additional meaning to the phrase, "God gave his only Son."

Nicodemus, Jesus, and John the Baptist

As the discussion turns to focus specifically on the narrative in John 3, the main theme of Christology continues to take precedence and is supplemented by references to sight and signs. Although John 3 contains no miracles labeled as "signs" by the narrator, the chapter comes between the Wedding at Cana (2:1-12) as well as the demand for a sign (2:18-22) and the Samaritan Woman (4:1-45) and the Official's Healed Son (4:46-54). Chapter 3, which includes Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus and the Baptist's conversation with his disciples, combines with the episode with the Samaritan Woman to demonstrate the various people groups which are seeking and questioning Jesus—Pharisees/Jewish Leaders, common followers of Judaism, and Samaritans. Additionally, Nicodemus visits Jesus after "many people saw his signs" (2:23) and confesses himself that "no one can perform the signs [Jesus does]" apart from God. The rhetorical strength of this organization is powerful: Jesus begins performing signs which point to his identity as the Son of God, and all of the peoples in the area begin to seek further information regarding these signs. Belief is tied to the signs performed and *seeing* the signs. Nicodemus' first statement claims that Jesus comes from God *because of the signs* and Jesus' response includes the goal of *seeing* the kingdom of God (3:2-3).[2] John

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metaphor of "mining the ambiguity."

[2] Only in 3:3, 5 does John include the term "the Kingdom of God." 3:3 references "seeing" while 3:5 references "entering" the Kingdom of God. It appears that John uses "seeing" and "entering" in

3:32 references "what [the one from above] has seen and heard" and connects this action with testimony. The implication is that the one from above sees and hears clearly and can thus relate the "words of God" accurately while those "from the earth" do not see or hear clearly and are therefore unreliable.

With this framework in mind, particularly as it pertains to the larger motifs and purposes of John's Gospel, I will offer a recovered reading of John 3 in which Jesus is the speaker in both 3:16-21 *and* 3:31-36. By recovering voices from the past and incorporating their interpretations into my present reading, I will present a reading of John 3 which gives space to the incarnation in a text which has, in modern scholarship, been focused almost exclusively on the crucifixion. This section will argue in the affirmative—that Jesus is the speaker—from the exegesis of John 3 and the overall purpose of John. The next section will argue in the negative, addressing critiques which arise from identifying Jesus as the speaker.

The True Teacher

The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus is filled with ambiguity and misunderstanding.[3] Scholars dispute the basics of Nicodemus' character and relationship to Jesus.[4] On the one hand, Nicodemus' coming *at night* (3:2) might signal to the

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much the same way.

[3] R. Alan Culpepper, "Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 251. Culpepper outlines the past four decades of scholarship which focus on ambiguity as the distinguishing characteristic of the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Nicodemus. He cites Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 635; Terence L. Donaldson, "Nicodemus: A Figure of Ambiguity in a Gospel of Certainty," *Consensus*, no. 24 (1998): 121–24; Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Jean Marie Sevrin, "The Nicodemus Enigma: The Characterization and Function of an Ambiguous Actor of the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium*, ed. Reimund Bieringer (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001), 357–69; Gabi Renz, "Nicodemus: An Ambiguous Disciple? A Narrative Sensitive Investigation," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 255–81; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*; Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

[4] Miroslav Volf, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (April 2005): 207. Volf argues that John intentionally lets Nicodemus blur boundaries between 'in' and

audience that he will not likely understand what Jesus has to say and, indeed, Nicodemus fades from the conversation without any profession of faith. On the other hand, Nicodemus comes *to Jesus*, perhaps indicating that he is coming to the light, which is the goal stated in 3:21.[5] Additionally, he begins his interaction with Jesus not with a question, but the simple acknowledgement that Jesus must come from God because of the signs he performs (3:2). Bassler is correct to note that Nicodemus' claim concerning Jesus is "at least as substantive" as Philip's profession that Jesus is "him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (John 1:45).[6] Jesus' initial response to Nicodemus connects the "signs" which Nicodemus references to "seeing" the kingdom of God and the requisite birth ἄνωθεν (3:3), which serves as another indicator of the connection between signs and belief.[7] Here, Jesus clearly means "from above" or "from heaven" but Nicodemus misinterprets this term as being born "again."[8] In perhaps an ironic move, the Evangelist shows Nicodemus overreacting to his misinterpretation and asking Jesus if a person can come out of the womb a second time (3:4).[9] This move is similar to chapter 2 where characters misunderstand Jesus' reference to destroying "this temple" or in chapter 8 where the Jews ask if Jesus will kill himself "so they cannot follow."[10] In these instances, the audience understands Jesus' meaning in a way that the

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'out' which indicates that John does not operate in a strict black-and-white mindset.

[5] Thompson, *John*, 78.

[6] Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 637. Bassler points out that Nicodemus' profession goes beyond those of Andrew, Nathanael, or Philip, in that Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus has come from God.

[7] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 151. Bennema recognizes this connection, but adds that "in his conversation with Jesus it becomes clear that Nicodemus's 'belief' was deficient not because it was based on signs but because he was thinking 'from below.'"

[8] Michael R. Whitenton, *Configuring Nicodemus: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Complex Characterization*, vol. 549, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 103. Whitenton sees this misunderstanding as somewhat intentional and casts Nicodemus as a "dissembler."

[9] Jason S. Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 162 (Boston: Brill, 2015), 95. Sturdevant points out the difference not only between characters' responses to Jesus, but also in the way Jesus approaches different characters.

[10] Colleen M. Conway, "Speaking Through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth

characters do not.

Jesus asks Nicodemus how the "teacher of Israel" could misunderstand these things and, in doing so, implies that Jesus is the true teacher (3:10). Indeed, at this point the conversation shifts from first-person singular to plural, indicating not only that Jesus is the true teacher over Nicodemus, but that Jesus' followers are true teachers over those Nicodemus represents. Scholars debate the specific identity of the group Nicodemus represents, whether it is those with the same faith stance,[11] the "secret believers" from 2:23-25 and 12:42-43,[12] those who base their faith on the signs,[13] or as "the world" generally or "the Pharisees" specifically.[14] The reason the testimony of Jesus and his followers is true is because it is based on the witness of the Son of Man who "descended from Heaven" (3:13). Jesus' testimony, then, is "from above" and therefore reliable. Nicodemus' faith appears to fall short, though it is not clear if this is due to a lock of faith, a lack of understanding, or some other reason.[15] Nicodemus is not given a chance to respond to Jesus' teaching after it devolves into a monologue, so the reader is forced to clarify the ambiguity themselves.[16]

I have discussed at length the importance of sight and belief throughout John,

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Gospel," *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 3 (July 2002): 325. Conway highlights that these other characters should be considered ambiguous and not just Nicodemus, as Bassler suggests.

[11] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 151.

[12] Nicolas Farelly, "An Unexpected Ally: Nicodemus's Role within the Plot of the Fourth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 34, no. 1 (2013): 36–38.

[13] Koester, *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: A Christological Spectrum*, 35.

[14] Raimo Hakola, "The Burden of Ambiguity: Nicodemus and the Social Identity of the Johannine Christians," *New Testament Studies* 55, no. 4 (October 2009): 450.

[15] Chris Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief and Graeco-Roman Devotion: Reshaping Devotion for John's Graeco-Roman Audience*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 528 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 43–44.

[16] Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John*, 35. Koester likewise argues that Nicodemus represents those who have signs-based faith, but that he does not represent true disciples: Koester, *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: A Christological Spectrum*, 35. Whitenton similarly argues that the human mind has a cognitive compulsion to resolve ambiguity: Whitenton, *Configuring Nicodemus*, 549:80.

and in 3:14-15 the reason behind this focus comes to light: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that all who believe in him might have eternal life." Although John does not here use a term for sight, the reference to Moses lifting up the serpent in the desert supplies the sensory reference. In Numbers 21, Moses makes the bronze serpent and all who *look at* the serpent are granted life. In the same way, those who *look at* the Son of Man will be granted life. More will be said on the meaning of the Son of Man being "lifted up," but the implication here is that those who "believe" in Jesus (3:15) do so because they *truly see Jesus*.

The Gift of God

The critical text for this section and, indeed, for this entire project, is John 3:16, "In this way God loved the world: he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The parallels between 3:16 and 3:14-15 offer a firm starting place for interpretation. The Son of Man is now identified as God's *Υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ,* his only son. Belief in him grants eternal life in both verses, with verse 16 offering the additional information about not perishing. But what of the mechanism through which belief generates eternal life? In verses 14-15, looking upon the serpent demonstrates one's belief and brings about life. In verse 16 the mechanism is described as the "giving" of God's son out of his great love for the world. Given that the action of belief and the receipt of eternal life are the same in both verses, so too must the mechanism which generates belief be the same. Therefore, Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness offers an interpretative lens through which to understand what it means that God "gave" his son.

The serpent in the wilderness was crafted by Moses to represent the affliction befalling Israel. They were bitten by serpents, and only by looking upon a serpent could they be healed and "granted life." Moses' act of "lifting up" the serpent was an attempt to elevate the object so people could look upon it. By looking upon it, the Israelites

demonstrate their trust in God to cure their affliction. In John 3:16, the Son is the object upon which people must gaze, and God is the one who "gives" this object to the people. The "lifting up" of the Son is the act through which people can gaze upon him, and this act is described in verse 16 as "giving" the Son to the world. The reach is extended as is the gift received: the serpent grants Israel life while the Son grants the whole world life *eternal*. Belief in the Son is effective because the Son *represents the affliction of the world*: the flesh.

Although God did not "craft" the Son as Moses crafted the serpent, the flesh which the Son took on was a representation of all human flesh. As the prologue indicates, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, as the only son from the father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Indeed, the prologue displays several of the same themes: the necessity of seeing, the only Son, and the incarnation. The juxtaposition of these two stories—the serpent in the desert and the giving of the Son—helps answer key questions regarding the speaker of John 3:16ff. I have already posited that, according to John, eternal life is attained by *seeing* the Son and believing in him. John 3:16 indicates that seeing the Son is made possible through God's giving him, which he was compelled to do out of his great love for the world. It can be assumed, then, that the Son was given to the world, and that by giving him God intended for the world to be able to *see* and *believe* in the Son. The way in which humanity sees the Son is by the very fact that the Word became flesh, enabling some to *see his glory*. Beutler offers clarifying thoughts on the subject:

> In place of the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man comes the 'gift' of the Son. This gift is the result of God's love for the world…. What does this 'gift' of the Son consist of? One could think of the giving up of the Son in his death on the cross, but then one would expect the term *paredoken*. Thus 'gift' of the Son might mean his being sent to men (sic).[17]

[17] Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ed. Michael Tait (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 97. Beutler argues that "the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness prefigures the lifting up of the Son of Man who is to bring eternal life to all who believe in him" and connects these ideas with Daniel 7:14 (the Son of Man) and Isaiah 42-56 (the Suffering Servant). For Beutler, the ascension of

The question remains: are these the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus, or those of the narrator speaking to his audience? The history of interpretation throughout part one of this project has demonstrated the consistent correlation between the speaker of the passage and the theological focus. If, as I posit above, the theological focus is on the incarnation, the correlation suggests that Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus. Jesus, the serpent in the wilderness, is being lifted up so that the world may see and believe in him. Indeed, it is through the incarnation that Jesus is able to display his glory fully and, in doing so, represent the Father to humanity. If Jesus is considered to be the speaker, Nicodemus hears both the type—Moses and the serpent—and the antitype—God giving his only Son.[18] With both of these interpretive keys, Nicodemus is meant to understand first that Jesus is speaking of himself when describing the Son of Man and the Son of the Father and, second, that Jesus sent by the Father as a divine representative, descended from heaven and lifted up for the world. Indeed, if Jesus has already indicated that he descended from heaven (3:13), it is not untenable to posit that Jesus is communicating his own pre-existence by describing himself to Nicodemus as the only Son sent from the Father. Modern scholarship has focused on the crucifixion as the "unmistakable reference" in 3:14-16, but I suggest that, while crucifixion is certainly in the mind of the audience, on the story level the focus is on the incarnation.[19] Because of this story-level focus, I suggest that current scholarship should include space for *both* the crucifixion and the incarnation, particularly because the story-level indicates that Jesus has the

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the Son of Man is part of the "heavenly things" which Jesus criticizes Nicodemus for being unable to comprehend.

[18] Pryor, *Evangelist of the Covenant People*, 19–20. Pryor argues that Jesus claims "his exaltation as Son of Man will be the anti-type of the serpent in the wilderness and the means of life to all who believe."

[19] Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 77. Brant concludes that "one is born again by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection" in her commentary on 3:14-16. Thompson similarly argues that Jesus being lifted up is a clear reference to the crucifixion: Thompson, *John*, 84. She argues that God's "giving" of the Son is used elsewhere in the NT—Romans 8, Gal 1—2, Eph 5, 1 Tim, Titus—as the traditional language to point to Jesus' death.

incarnation in mind as the "gift" of God and the display of God's love. Loader makes a similar argument concerning the meaning of "lifting up" in 3:14:

> While a possible allusion to Jesus' death as expiatory or vicarious in 3:14 should not be ruled out—given that one might read 3:16 as alluding to his death—this is by no means clear, especially in light of the other references to seeing the Son of Man in the future, nor is this the only way of reading the text. Nor should it be, given the other broader occurrences of seeing: seeing Jesus' future glory (17:24), seeing God (1:18; 6:46; and in Jesus 14:17; cf. also 5:19), seeing the Son's glory (1:14; 2:11; cf. "come and see!" 1:39).[20]

A Trustworthy Testimony

John 3 reiterates the claim that eternal life is generated through belief in the Son in verses 15, 16, 18, 33, 36. But what does "belief in the Son" mean in this chapter? Or, to ask the question differently, what is Jesus asking Nicodemus to believe concerning him? Nicodemus already recognizes that the signs are "from God" but his faith still seems deficient. The answers to the specifics of what Jesus is calling Nicodemus to believe are found in verses 31-36. Without these interpretive verses, the conversation with Nicodemus would be left hanging without a clear object of belief for Nicodemus. As Myers argues: "the testimony in 3:31-36 is tied directly to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus with the use of ἄνωθεν."[21] Although Myers concludes that these words belong to the Baptist, the point remains that the words are intimately connected to those of 3:1-21.[22] This suggestion—that the Baptist is speaking—is well attested throughout the history of interpretation.

At first glance, 3:36 appears to offer a description of belief in the Son as

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[20] William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 243. Loader sees the use of "lifting up" as enabling the author to simultaneously describe two realities: "the reality of the crucifixion and the reality of Jesus' return through this even to exalted glory." While he leaves room for Christological themes other than the crucifixion within 3:14-16, he focuses instead on the return to glory and not, as I posit, on the incarnation of the Son.

[21] Alicia D. Myers, "Jesus the Son of God in John's Gospel: The Life-Making Logos," in *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John: A Christological Spectrum*, ed. Craig R. Koester, Library of New Testament Studies 589 (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 150.

[22] Thompson, *John*, 93–94. Thompson connects the words of both passages as well, but argues that both are the narrator's remarks contrasting the ministries of Jesus and John.

obedience. However, obedience to the Son could also be obedience to the command to believe. In other words, it is unclear if belief generates obedience or if obedience generates belief. Without further clues as to the causative direction between belief and obedience, we must look elsewhere for answers. The answer is found, instead, in the notion of *his testimony*. The Son bears witness to what he has *seen and heard* (verse 32) and belief in the Son is equated to "receiving his testimony" (verse 33). Verses 35 and 36 make clear that the one who comes "from above" and who testifies to what he has "seen and heard" is none other than the Son who is "loved by the Father" and "grants eternal life" (3:35-36). John 3:31-36 reflects many of the same ideas concerning Jesus that are found in John 3:1-21. Jesus comes "from above" and "from heaven" (3:31), and this claim addresses the initial confusion of Nicodemus that one must be "born again." Jesus originally tells Nicodemus that he does not receive Jesus' testimony, but now Jesus' testimony is accepted by "no one" (3:32). Jesus, sent from God, utters the words of God and testifies that God is true (3:33-34) and further explains the witness concerning what Jesus knows, sees, and testifies to (3.11-12). Verses 3:31-36 further indicate that Jesus is accurately reflecting the things he knows through his heavenly descent and his relationship with the Father. Belief in the Son, then, is belief that his testimony is true regarding himself. In other words, believing that Jesus "is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:21).

The idea that Jesus is speaking in 3:31-36 is not without precedent. In all of the eras examined in part one, including the modern era, several authors have attributed these words to Jesus himself. Indeed, a third of the earliest interpreters of John 3 attributed verses 31-36 to Jesus, including Clement, Augustine, and Athanasius. In the modern era, the efforts to retrieve an "original" text led many scholars to place verses 31-36 adjacent to 3:1-21 and, in doing so, indicated that Jesus was responsible for speaking in both passages. Their arguments were based on the examination of the language and terminology employed, as discussed above, but the readiness to move verses around has

faded within New Testament scholarship. I am not arguing for a resurgence of the desire to rearrange the verses but, instead, that John has inserted a testimony from John the Baptist (3:22-30) in the middle of a monologue from Jesus. John uses this literary move elsewhere, and in John 1 he does so with the Baptist himself. The supposed hymn describing the pre-existent Word is interrupted by the Baptist in verses 6-8 only to be picked up again in verses 9-14. Again in 1:15 the Baptist's testimony is described, but verses 16-18 drop back into the voice of the narrator without indication of a shift in thought. Debate surrounds the identity of the speaker in 1:16-18 from the earliest interpretation of the passage, but the language here reflects nothing attributed to the Baptist elsewhere.

The rhetorical purpose of the literary move in John 3 is similar to the purpose in John 1. The testimony of the Baptist is added to that of the speaker. In John 1, the Baptist is introduced as one who "bears witness" concerning the Word and the light, and his testimony is connected to that of the narrator who "saw his glory' (1:14) and who received "grace upon grace" (1:16). In chapter 3, the Baptist testifies similar things about himself—he is not the Christ, he bears witness to the Christ—but in this instance, his testimony is connected to that of Jesus himself. John 3:32 claims that "no one receives [Jesus] testimony," but follows that immediately with "whoever receives his testimony." This apparent contradiction simply demonstrates the importance of the Baptist's position as one who does receive Jesus' testimony. Jesus sees and hears the truth from the Father in heaven and descends to earth in order to testify to those things. In response, the Baptist "sets his seal to this, that God is true" and bears witness concerning Jesus' own testimony. By connecting verses 31-36 back to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, the author is juxtaposing the responses of Nicodemus and the Baptist to the claims of Jesus regarding his relationship with the Father and his apparent pre-existence. While some scholars focus on comparing the Nicodemus and Jesus in verses 1-21 or the Baptist and

Jesus in verses 22-36,[23] I suggest instead that all of chapter 3 is built around a comparison of Nicodemus and the Baptist in *their responses to Jesus' testimony*.

To recap the positive argument for interpreting Jesus as the speaker in both passages, the data obtained from the history of interpretation and the exegesis found within modern scholarship are crucial. The logic of incorporating this data into the argument is as follows:

Given that:

1) The History of Interpretation suggests a correlation between a focus on the incarnation and Jesus as the speaker

2) Most scholars agree that the focus of John 1—12 is on the signs which point to Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God.

3) Scholars also agree that 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 are certainly linked, given their linguistic and thematic similarities.

I must conclude that:

4) John 3 focuses primarily on the incarnation.

5) The focus on incarnation indicates that Jesus is speaking in 3:16-21.

6) If Jesus is speaking in 3:16-21, the linguistic and thematic similarities indicate that he is also speaking in 3:31-36.

What of the Crucifixion?

The primary, and understandable, objection to this entire argument is that John 3:14ff is a clear reference to the crucifixion.[24] The "lifting up of the Son of Man" foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ, they argue, and therefore 3:16 indicates that God "gives" his Son on the cross in order to grant eternal life through his sacrifice. As I have

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[23] For example, Bennema compares all three men who are called rabbi: Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 282. Whitenton juxtaposes Nicodemus and Jesus and concludes that the issue at hand for Nicodemus is "love versus hate, acceptance versus refusal, not understanding versus misunderstanding": Whitenton, *Configuring Nicodemus*, 549:103. Brant suggests that 3:31-36 are the continuing words of the Baptist to his disciples, encouraging them to accept Jesus' authority because they accept the 'lesser' authority of the Baptist: Brant, *John*, 79.

[24] Brant, *John*, 77; Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 84; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 216.

stated above, I am not diminishing the importance of the crucifixion in John's Gospel, nor am I arguing that John does not understand the crucifixion as a sin offering. My argument is that in John 3 the focus of the discussion is primarily on the incarnation. While current scholarship has been focused on the crucifixion as the topic of John 3:1-21, I suggest that the History of Interpretation encourages modern readers to give space to the incarnation as a primary—or indeed, *the* primary—focus of John 3. While the crucifixion is in the background and, indeed, is probably in the minds of the audience, the immediate topic of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is the incarnation of the Son of Man who descended from heaven in order to testify to what he has seen and heard. In this section, I will defend this position by addressing objections. First, if Jesus is speaking throughout the passage, what does he mean by having "faith in" him? Second, what is John 3:31-36 referring to when it cites the testimony concerning Jesus, if not belief in his death and resurrection? Finally, if the primary focus is on the incarnation and not the crucifixion, what does the reference to the Son of Man being lifted up mean?

What of Faith in the Son?

John frequently prescribes belief "in" Jesus, using the phrase *πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν* (3:16) and similar constructions. He consistently uses the preposition *εἰς* where other New Testament authors use *ἐπὶ* or ἐν to render the same "faith in Jesus/him."[25] This system of belief is focused on believing *in*- as opposed to believing *that*- Jesus. The difference in these systems is best seen in comparing John's type of belief with that of Paul. As Robert Cook compares their respective theologies, he identifies Paul's theology as "a theology of the passion of our Lord and thus focuses on His death" while John's

[25] Paul uses *ἐπὶ* in Rom 4:5, 24; 9:33; 10:11. Matthew uses *ἐπὶ* in 27:42, and Mark uses ἐν in 1:15 but *ἐπὶ* in 9:42. Comparatively, John uses *εἰς* throughout: 1:12; 2:11, 23; 3:16, 18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:35, 36; 10:42; 11:25, 45, 48; 12:11, 37, 42, 44,46; 14:1, 12; 16:9. He uses ἐν once in 3:15, but that could be because the preposition is describing eternal life and not belief (i.e., "those who believe have eternal life in him."

theology is one "of the incarnation and focuses on the revelation of God in Christ."[26] This identification is certainly true of John, as seen in the discussion above, and it plays out in their understanding of belief. Paul prescribes belief *that* Jesus died (1 Thess 4:14) and *that* he was raised from the dead (Rom 10:9). The distinction here is one of emphasis: certainly, Paul accepts the incarnation and John accepts the resurrection. But each author is *focused* on a different aspect of Christ's life and work.

I have argued that John's primary focus in chapter 3 is not the crucifixion and that the incarnational focus indicates that Jesus is speaking when he claims that "whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." On the story level, Jesus is telling Nicodemus that God has already displayed his love for humanity through sending his Son and that Nicodemus must believe in the Son in order to receive life. While the audience is expected to know that Jesus will go to the cross, they are also expected to realize that Nicodemus does not share their knowledge.

The argument that the narrator is here speaking falls short in two ways. First, the call to belief is found in both verse 15 and 16, and verse 15 cannot be separated grammatically from verses 13-14. The title "Son of Man" is used almost exclusively by Jesus about himself, so verses 13-14 are reasonably attributed to Jesus in most modern commentaries. Even if verse 16 is attributed to the narrator, verse 15 still records Jesus calling for Nicodemus to believe which results in the same necessity of an incarnational focus. The second problem is that if the narrator is speaking in verse 16ff, this theological commentary does not offer a reflection which relates to what comes immediately before it. In other words, Jesus testifies in 3:1-15 that he bears witness to what he knows and has seen and he suggests that Nicodemus does not believe. Jesus cannot here be judging Nicodemus for failing to believe in an event that has not yet occurred. If Jesus is insisting that Nicodemus believe *in* his claims to be the Christ, the

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[26] Cook, *The Theology of John*, 69.

narrator offers no clarification by intruding in the dialogue and changing the requirements of belief.

Another important note is that John is not calling for belief *in* the incarnation per se. He is calling for belief *in* Jesus that what he says about himself is true. Jesus describes himself as pre-existent and as having a unique relationship with the father, but Nicodemus is not called on to believe *that* Jesus is the incarnate word of God. Instead, he is called to believe *in* Jesus; to demonstrate trust in him and "set his seal that God is true" (3:33). This call to believe in Jesus is the same call made to John's audience in 20:31. Although John uses ὅτι as the preposition following belief, the audience is called to believe *that* Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The audience is not called to believe in certain works Jesus accomplished but, rather, that Jesus was who he said he was.

What of the Baptist' Testimony?

Several issues arise when discussing the meaning of 3:31-36 with regard to the identity of the speaker. If the speaker changes, the identity of the one "from above" and the one "of the earth" can change. For example, if the Baptist is understood to be speaking, he identifies Jesus as the one "from above," but he is not likely to identify himself as "of the earth" because he has received the testimony of Jesus.[27] Instead, if Jesus is taken as the speaker in both ambiguous passages, the comparison of the one "from above" and "from the earth" is perhaps best understood as a comparison of the Baptist and Nicodemus. Indeed, identifying Jesus as the speaker is preferable over the Baptist for other reasons. First, the Baptist nowhere else identifies Jesus as "the Son." Second, the claim that "no one receives his testimony" is contradicted by the Baptist's recognition in verses 25-30. Finally, the Baptist never calls God "the Father," as that designation appears to begin in the New Testament with Jesus. Of the three options for

[27] Contra Thompson, *John*, 93. Thompson concludes that the Baptist is "one from the Earth" and that the narrator is comparing Jesus and the Baptist.

the speaker—the Baptist, the Evangelist, or Jesus—the Baptist seems least likely even though there is no marked shift in speaker.[28]

The next interpretation is that the Evangelist is offering a theological commentary on verses 22-30, or indeed on all of chapter 3, in the final verses of the chapter. The primary reason for this argument is the stylistic and thematic connections to verses 16-21. However, the scholars who rearrange this passage and locate it apart from the narrative of the Baptist in verses 22-30 do so for good reason. As Smith describes it, the main reason for this transposition is "because if left here it seems to contradict the generally positive role assigned John in the Gospel."[29] If the Evangelist is taken as the speaker and the passage remains in its present location, the one "from above" is Jesus and the one "from the earth" is the Baptist. Some argue that one of the goals of John's Gospel as a whole is to convince the Baptist's disciples to begin following the Way and that the Gospel thus presents the Baptist as insufficient for true revelation. While it is true that the Gospel paints Jesus' revelation as categorically different—his comes from his experiences in heaven—the Baptist is still considered "sent from God," a Johannine designation of high importance. If the Evangelist is taken as the speaker, not only is the Baptist considered "from the earth," but he is also included as part of those who do not receive Jesus' testimony. Again, this contradicts the presentation of the Baptist elsewhere and, particularly, that which came directly before in verses 22-30. The negative portrait of the Baptist is alleviated by moving verses 31-36 to follow after verses 16-21 so that the one "of the earth" is Nicodemus instead of the Baptist, but current

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[28] Martin Rese, "Johannes 3,22-36: Der Taufende Jesus Und Das Letzte Zeugnis Johannes Des Täufers," in *Studies in the Gospel of Jon and Its Christology: Festschrift Gilbert van Belle*, ed. Joseph Verheyden et al., Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 265 (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2014), 89–98; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1971), 131–32. Bultmann claims that vv. 31-36 cannot be interpreted if they are understood to be the words of the Baptist, and suggests moving the passage elsewhere.

[29] D. Moody Smith, *John*, Abington New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 106.

scholarship avoids this large-scale rearrangement of texts.

The question remains, if the Baptist and the Evangelist are dismissed and Jesus is considered to be the speaker, what is the "testimony" described in verse 32-33? If Jesus is picking back up in his monologue to Nicodemus, he is then proclaiming that he is *currently* bearing witness to what he has seen and heard and that his testimony *is currently* being rejected. This testimony can hardly be referring to the crucifixion. Instead, as with verses 16-21, the focus is on the incarnation and, thus, the testimony refers to the claims Jesus makes about himself and about the Father. This testimony is based on "what he has seen and heard" (3:32) which refers back to verse 11, "we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony." The arrangement of chapter 3 is such that the faith of Nicodemus and the Baptist are juxtaposed. Jesus presents his witness to both characters, and his concluding remarks in verses 31-36 suggest that Nicodemus does not accept the testimony while the Baptist does. By interpreting Jesus as the speaker, the position of the Baptist remains elevated, and the theological focus on the incarnation is consistent with the rest of John 1—12.

Must Not the Son of Man Be Lifted Up?

The key verse which scholars use to build the argument that the text is describing the crucifixion comes in 3:14, "so too must the Son of Man be lifted up." Olshausen describes this as one of "those few discourses of Jesus in which he speaks as it were prophetically of his expiatory death" and Lewis assumes the text is referring to the crucifixion to the point where he rearranges the entire chapter in order to have what he considers a crucifixion reference appearing after chapter 12.[30] Michaels and I. J. Du

[30] Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels*, trans. Thomas Brown and John Gill, vol. 3, Clark's Foreign Theological Library 16 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1849), 3:393; Lewis, "Dislocations in the Fourth Gospel."

Plessis both argue from verses 14-16 that God expresses his love for the world through giving his Son on the cross and that, in Johannine language, "sending" refers to incarnation while "giving" refers to crucifixion.[31] Kruse claims that each of the five uses of "to lift up" in John's Gospel refers to crucifixion, and Thompson argues that even if the argument that "to lift up" means "to lift up to the Father," the implication is still that Jesus is lifted up to the Father through the cross.[32]

Although a reference to the crucifixion might be the casual interpretation for a modern audience, the question at hand in this work is focused on the reception of John's original audience and, if Jesus is the speaker, the reception of Nicodemus himself. As with the misunderstanding regarding "born again/from above," the audience might be aware that the "lifting up" is functioning with two meanings. This awareness would be particularly true for those who have heard the Gospel presented before and recall that the "lifting up" recurs in chapter 12 and connects explicitly with the crucifixion. However, the audience is also aware that Nicodemus *is not meant to think of sacrifice*, let alone crucifixion. As described above, the obvious analogy between the serpent being lifted up and the Son of Man being lifted up is that the Son of Man represents the affliction, and that seeing him brings about healing/life. Kruse argues that all five uses of "to lift up" refer to the crucifixion, but that claim is not easily defended. The first two references are both found in 3:14, where both the serpent and the Son of Man are lifted up. In the first instance, the serpent is clearly not crucified; it was not a living serpent that was killed. Given that 3:14 uses the term twice as two different entities are "lifted up," and the first is clearly not crucified, the analogy suggests that the second is not describing crucifixion

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[31] Michaels, *John*, 59; I. J. Du Plessis, "Christ as the 'Only Begotten,'" *Neotestamentica*, vol 2 The Christ of John: Essays on the Christology of the Fourth Gospel, 1968, 25. Du Plessis indicates that Jesus gives the gift of his life "so that we can heave *real life*."

[32] Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 96; Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 4:112.

either.

The next use of "to lift up" occurs in 8:28, "Therefore Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am, and that I do nothing of myself, but I speak as the Father has taught me." The meaning of "lifting up" here is also debated. While "the Jews" ask themselves if Jesus will kill himself (8:22), the other references to any type of death in the passage come from Jesus himself. He compels the audience to believe that he is the Son of God or they will die in their sins. The passage is focused on belief, the identity of Jesus as the Son sent from the Father, and the repercussions of disbelief, and these are all the same themes found in chapter 3. The only missing element is that of "sight" which is implied through the lifting up of the Son. At this point in the Gospel, the only other reference to lifting up the Son indicates looking upon him to be healed. The natural reading of 8:28, then, is that Jesus is still pleading for them to believe in him, and he claims that when they "lift him up" and look upon him for who he truly is, they will know that he is the Son of God.

The final references to being "lifted up" come in 12:32 and 12:34. At this point, the narrator explicitly connects Jesus being "lifted up from the earth" with his crucifixion, saying "[Jesus] said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die" (12:33). This text is often used as a definitive argument that "to lift up" refers to the cross throughout John's Gospel. But if that is the case, why does the narrator wait until chapter 12 to explain the meaning of the term to his audience? He explains the meaning here because until this point *lifting up simply means to exalt and behold*. Only in chapter 12, at the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry and when he has been rejected by the people, does Jesus—and the narrator—indicate that the exaltation will come through the crucifixion. It is at this point in the Gospel that the narrator explains that Jesus' audience *could not* believe because they have been blinded by God and unable to see or understand Jesus (12:39-40). After quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, John again connects sight with belief by claiming that Isaiah *saw* Jesus' glory and spoke of him. In perhaps a subtle indication of

the mechanism of belief which is now available to his own audience, John omits reference to "hearing" in his quotation of Isaiah 6, implying that while sight and understanding have been rendered ineffective, perhaps hearing will remain intact. As mentioned above, this shift from seeing to hearing takes the fore in Jesus' interaction with Thomas, who only believes after seeing Jesus' wounds. By focusing on sight in chapters 1—12 and shifting toward hearing in 12—21, John indicates that his audience is in no way at a disadvantage because they rely on hearing the testimony recorded in John's Gospel instead of seeing Jesus firsthand.

The Son of Man must be lifted up. This phrase—foundational to the argument that verses 16ff refer to the crucifixion—is a call to behold Jesus and see him for who he really is. He is the Son of Man who descended from heaven to testify to what he has seen there (3:13). He is the Son who sets his disciples free and obeys all the Father teaches him (8:28, 32). And he is the one whose glory Isaiah sees in his heavenly vision and who draws all people to himself through his own light (12:32, 38-40).

Conclusions

The interpretation that Jesus is the speaker in both ambiguous passages opens up space for the incarnation to become the central focus of John 3. While modern scholarship has focused on the crucifixion, I suggest that a more robust reading of the text comes forth when incarnation is incorporated into the meaning of Jesus' words. For John, the display of God's love for the world is not found only in the crucified Messiah, but also in the incarnate Son. Indeed, this refocused reading clarifies a point often overlooked in contemporary Christianity: the crucifixion is not the end in itself. The crucifixion of the messiah was a means to the ultimate end which is relationship with the Father. If modern readings of the text focus only on the crucifixion it is possible to overlook that simple fact. Indeed, this priority is found in John's purpose statement: the reason for the Gospel is not that people believe that Jesus died on the cross. John hopes

for more than the recognition of the historical fact of the crucifixion. Instead, John seeks to convince his audience that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believers might have life in Jesus' name. While John would certainly agree that the crucifixion was the vehicle through which this belief and life might be acquired, it is merely the vehicle. The chief end for John is that his Gospel would lift up Jesus, exalting him as the Son of God who displays God's love in his very person.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

> In this way God loved the world: he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The thesis of this dissertation claims that both ambiguous passages in John 3 are best understood as the words of Jesus and that, through this understanding, we can recover a reading of John 3 which focuses on the incarnation as the chief display of God's love. I presented this argument in two steps. First, I recovered and catalogued hundreds of voices which contribute to the discussion and suggest a correlation between the theological focus of the passage and the identity of the speaker. Second, I argued that John 3 best supports the overarching purpose and rhetorical strategy of John's Gospel if it is understood to be focused on the incarnational identity of Jesus.

In part one, I explored the various interpretations of John 3 presented throughout Christian history. This exploration revealed, first, that the dominant theory held through the ages is that the characters in the story are speaking in both ambiguous passages. Most authors attribute 3:16-21 to Jesus himself, and most attribute 3:31-36 either to John the Baptist or to Jesus. Contrary to what modern scholars claim, several authors prior to Erasmus identify the Evangelist as speaking in one or both passages. While these instances are few—only 14 percent of the passages examined—these identifications of the Evangelist point to the second theme brought out by the history of interpretation: the correlation between the identity of the speaker and the theological focus of the passage. Without exception, the authors who identify the Evangelist as speaking in 3:16-21 always connect the Evangelist's words with a focus on the crucifixion. The vast majority of those who identify the characters in the story as speakers do so while focusing on some aspect of Jesus' incarnation: his identity as the

divine Son of God, his ministry on earth, or his function as the representative of the Father.

In part two, I reexamined John's Gospel and incorporated the data found in part one. While modern scholars are split on who is speaking and, indeed, on the best way to answer the question at all, the voices outside the modern era suggest an interpretive way forward. The stated purpose of John's Gospel is to cultivate belief in his audience and, to this end, John 3 adds further clarification to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. By recognizing that John 3 is focused *primarily* on the incarnation, the reader is pointed to the love of God demonstrated in Jesus' incarnational presence. While the audience—both ancient and modern—is certainly aware of the importance of the crucifixion, the reading I have presented gives space to the incarnation as the theological focus of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Similarly, belief in Jesus entails belief not only that he died and was raised from the dead, but belief that Jesus is the Son of God who grants access to the Father.

The conclusion of this dissertation, then, is that the history of interpretation offers the interpretive tools needed in order to identify Jesus as the speaker in both 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. Read in this light, John 3 records Jesus' teaching that he is the incarnate Son of God, sent to earth as a display of God's great love for the world and that, by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, people can come into the light of a relationship with Jesus' Father. By sending his Son, God reveals his own character in a way that Moses could not through the Law. Moses testified to what he saw and heard, but his testimony was still of the earth. Jesus, having descended from heaven (3:13), can testify to the realities he experienced in heaven.

The scope of this dissertation is particularly focused, but I think there are two areas of further research worth pursuing. First, the history of interpretation (part one) can always be improved upon and expanded. This is particularly true for texts outside of the Greek or Latin traditions of Christianity. Additionally, entire monographs could be

written on the medieval and Reformation eras and their interpretations of John 3, with specific focus on the debates of the time which influenced the interpretations of John 3. In the medieval era, debates around Predestination seem to have had an influence on the identity of the speakers in John 3, and much more could be written on the debate between Grottschalk of Orbais and Hincmar, the Archbishop of Reims. The Reformation era shaped the theological discussions and biblical interpretations, but more can be said about the increased awareness of the role of the author in biblical texts.

John 3 contains two of the only passages in the New Testament in which the speaker is not clearly identified, so the application of this dissertation on other aspects of New Testament interpretation is limited. That being said, this dissertation has indicated the importance of recognizing who is speaking throughout John's Gospel. This importance has been applied to other Gospel texts, most notably Mark, through Performance Criticism.[1] An area of further research which would benefit Johannine scholarship would be to apply the methods of Performance Criticism to John's Gospel, particularly in the Book of Signs, in an effort to examine how a first-century audience would have received the Gospel.

This project benefits Johannine scholarship by contributing to the debate concerning the ambiguous passages in John 3. Perhaps more importantly, however, this dissertation calls attention to the importance of the incarnation for Christian living. Christians have typically—and rightly—focused on the crucifixion as the momentous display of God's love. This project sheds light on the ways in which the incarnation is in itself a display of God's great love for the world and that believers are called to believe that Jesus is who he says he is. While belief in the crucifixion and acceptance of Jesus'

[1] For examples of how performance criticism is used to interpret Mark, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus in Context: Power, People, & Performance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley, eds., *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Peter S. Perry, "Biblical Performance Criticism: Survey and Prospects," *Religions* 10, no. 2 (February 2019): 117; Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).

forgiveness of sins is critical for a believer, it is also crucial for Christians to recognize the glory of God displayed through Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. As Jesus says, "God loved the world in this way: he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

APPENDIX 1

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 3

Key:

I = Focus on Incarnation

X = Focus on Crucifixion

C = Character (Jesus/The Baptist)

E = Evangelist

* = Caveat

Table A1. Pre-Modern Texts

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
1	Irenaeus	*Haer*. 5.27	3:18-21	C	—
2	Clement	*Paed*. 1.6	3:36	C	—
3	Clement	*Strom*. 4.26	3:18	C	—
4	Origen	*Comm*. Jo. 10.28	3:18	C	—
5	Cyprian	*Test*. 2.27	3:36	C	—
6	Hippolytus	*Fr. Ps*. 1.6	3:31	C	—
7	Tertullian	*Prax*. 21	3:16-17	C	—
8	—	*Tract. Bapt*.	3:16	C	—
9	Victorinus	*Comm. Apoc.*	3:34-35	C	—
10	Chrysostom	*Hom. 1 Cor.* 15:35-36	3:17	C	—
11	Chrysostom	*Hom. Jo*. 1:9	3:20	C	—
12	Chrysostom	*Hom. Jo.* 28	3:17	C	—
13	Chrysostom	*Hom. Eph.* 4:17-19	3:20	C	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
14	Chrysostom	*Hom. Gal.* 1:1-3;	3:16	—	E
15	Chrysostom	*Hom. Gal.* 2:1-2	3:16	—	E
16	Augustine	*Enchir*. 33	3:36	C	—
17	Augustine	*Pecc. merit*. 1.59	3:1-21	C	—
18	Augustine	*Pecc. merit*. 1.62	3:16:21	C	—
19	Augustine	*Serm*. 292.4	3:31	C	—
20	Augustine	*Tract. Ev. Jo*. 87.15.17	3:17	C	—
21	Augustine	*Ep*. 193	3:18	C	—
22	Augustine	*Ep*. 205	3:36	C	—
23	Augustine	*C. Jul* 6.24.79	3:36	C	—
24	Hilary	*Hom. Ps*. 1	3:18-19	C	—
25	Athanasius	*Ep. Aeg. Lib*. 1	3:16	—	E
26	Athanasius	*C. Ar*. 2.60	3:17	—	E
27	Athanasius	*C. Ar*. 3.10	3:35	C	—
28	Gregory of Nyssa	*C. Eun*. 10.2	3:36	C	—
29	Ambrose	*Paen.* 1.11	3:16	C	—
30	Zeno	*Tract*. 21	3:18	C	—
31	Leo	*Serm. Leo* 58	3:16	—	C*
32	Maximus of Turin	*Serm. Max* 59a	3:17	—	E
33	Jerome	*Lucif*. 7	3:31	C	—
34	Jerome	*Comm. Ps*. 1	3:16	C	—
35	Theodoret	*Eran*. 3	3:16	—	E
36	Theodoret	*Pron*. 10.12-13	3:17	—	E
37	Theodoret	*Expl. Isa*. 2.448-456	3:16	C	—
38	Philo of Carpasia	*Comm. Song*	3:16	C	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
39	Theodore	*Comm. Jo. Theo*. 34	3:16	C	—
40	Theodore	*Comm. Jo. Theo*. 39	3:31	C	—
41	Severian	*Hom. On the Phrase* 2	3:31	C	—
42	Severian	*Hom. On the Holy Spirit* 6	3:34-35	C	—
43	Quodvultdeus	*Hom. creed* 11.3	3:18	C	—
44	Quodvultdeus	*Liber prom*. 1.12.19	3:18	C	—
45	Prosper of Aquitaine	*Voc. omni. gent.* 1.9	3:31-32	C	—
46	—	*Skeireins*	3:31-32	C	—
47	Fortunatianus	*Comm. Mt.* 13:31-32	3:31	—	E
48	John Cassian	*C. Nestor* 4.4	3:17	C	—
49	Ammonius	*Comm. Jo*. 3:31-36	3:31	C	—
50	Gregory the Great	*Hom*. 5	3:31	C	—
51	Didymus	*Comm. Zech*. 12.8	3:16	C	—
52	Cyril	*Comm. Jo*. 3:16-36	3:16-17	C	—
53	Isidore	*Ord. creat*. 12.2	3:18	C	—
54	Ildefonsus	*Cog. bapt*.	3:36	C	—
55	Venerable Bede	*Tabernaculo* 2.9	3:35	C	—
56	Venerable Bede	*Comm. Prov*. 1.1	3:20	C	—
57	Venerable Bede	*Comm. Hab*.	3:31	C	—
58	Venerable Bede	*Hexaem*. 1.1	3:16	C	—
59	Venerable Bede	*Hexaem*. 2.6	3:18	C	—
60	Autpert	*Prologue*	3:16	C	—
61	Paul, Winfridus	*Hom*. 73	3:18	C	—
62	Paulinus II	*C. Felic*. 53	3:16	—	E

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
63	Alcuin	*Comm. Jo.* 6.37	3:18	C	—
64	Alcuin	*Fide. sanct*. 2.11	3:34	C	—
65	Alcuin	*Adv. Felic*. 7.1	3:16,34	C	—
66	Alcuin	*Ep. Alb*. 6	3:16	C	—
67	Alcuin	*Incarn. Christi* 6	3:16	—	E
68	Charlemagne	*Ep. Adriani* 8	3:35	C	—
69	Benedict of Aniane	*Cod. reg*. 39	3:36	C	—
70	Benedict of Aniane	*Cod. reg*. 122	3:36	C	—
71	Benedict of Aniane	*Conc. reg*. 77	3:36	C	—
72	Theodulf	*Ord. bapt*. 17	3:34	E*	—
73	Jonas	*Instit. laic*. 1	3:36	C	—
74	Jonas	*Instit. laic.* 18	3:18	C	—
75	Smaragdus	*Ep. Ev. Jo.* 16	3:16-18	C	—
76	Angelomus	*Enarrat. Reg*. 1.1	3:16	—	E
77	Haimo	*Enarrat. Apoc*. 1.1	3:16	C	—
78	Haimo	*Misc*. 3.17	3:18	C	—
79	Rabanus Maurus	*Comm. Matt*. 1.1	3:16	C	—
80	Rabanus Maurus	*Comm. Ruth*. 12	3:29-31	C	—
81	Rabanus Maurus	*Comm. 4 Reg.* 3.4	3:34	C	—
82	Rabanus Maurus	*Cant. Habac.*	3:31-32	C	—
83	Rabanus Maurus	*Exp. Prov*. 1.1	3:18	C	—
84	Rabanus Maurus	*Exp. Rom*. 1.2	3:18	C	—
85	Rabanus Maurus	*Enarrat. epp. Pauli* 9.2	3:18	C	—
86	Walafrid	*Lib. Psalm* 101	3:36	C	—
87	Servatus	*Trib. quaest.*	3:18	C	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
88	Gottschalk	*Conf. monach.*	3:18,32	C	—
89	Prudentius	*Ep. Hinc*. 7	3:18	C	—
90	Prudentius	*Praed. C. Scot.* 1.11	3:18	C	—
91	Remigius of Lyon	*Trib. ep. liber.* 14	3:16	—	C*
92	Remigius of Lyon	*Trib. ep. liber*. 15	3:18	C	—
93	Remigius of Lyon	*Trib. ep. liber.* 23	3:21	C	—
94	Remigius of Lyon	*Trib. ep. liber*. 28	3:18	C	—
95	Hincmar	*Praed. lib. arb.* 24	3:19	C	—
96	Remigius of Auxerre	*Enarrat. Psalm* 1.P	3:31	C	—
97	Leo IX	*Ep. decreta* 100.15	3:31	E*	—
98	Humbert	*Adv. simoniac* 2.2	3:18	C	—
99	Geoffrey of Verdome	*Serm*. 6	3:17	C	—
100	Anselm	*Di. verit.* 5	3:20-21	C	—
101	Peter Damian	*Serm*. 25	3:34-35	C	—
102	Theophylact	*Enarrat. Ev. Jo*. 3	3:31	C	—
103	Ivo of Chartres	*Decretum* 1.10	3:16	C	—
104	Bruno of Segni	*Hom*. 140	3:20	C	—
105	Bruno of Segni	*Sentent*. 3.2	3:17	C	—
106	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Gen.* 3.12	3:20	C	—
107	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Gen*. 6.30	3:16	C	—
108	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Gen*. 8.42	3:35	C	—
109	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Reg*. 3.16	3:35	C	—
110	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Jo.* 14.11	3:16	C	—
111	Rupert of Deutz	*Comm. Apoc*. 1.1	3:31-33	C	—
112	Zacharias Chrysopolitanus	*Conc. Ev*. 12	3:34	E	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
113	Hildebert	*Tract. Theo*. 13	3:34	E	—
114	Hugh of St. Victor	*Quaest*. 19	3:34	E	—
115	Hugh of St. Victor	*Dogm*. 5.5	3:16	C	—
116	Peter Abelard	*Ethica*. 14	3:18	C	—
117	Peter Abelard	*Comm. Rom.* 1.2	3:18	C	—
118	Peter Abelard	*Comm. Rom*. 5	3:18,20	C	—
119	Peter the Venerable	*Serm*. 1	3:17	C	—
120	Peter Lombard	*Comm. Psalm* 1	3:18	C	—
121	Baldwin of Forde	*Tract*. 15	3:35	C	—
122	Herve de Bourg-Dieu	*Comm. Isa.* 5.34	3:36	C	—
123	Gerhoh of Reichersberg	*Comm. Psalm* 38	3:19	C	—
124	Gerhoh of Reichersberg	*Comm. Psalm* 41	3:34	C	—
125	Eckebert	*Serm*. 2	3:20	C	—
126	Aelred of Rievaulx	*Serm*. 12	3:17	C	—
127	Richard of St. Victor	*Tract. jud. pot.*	3:17	C	—
128	Adam of Dryburgh	*Praemonstr. serm.* 4	3:16	C	—
129	Alain de Lille	*Fide cath.* 1.6	3:16	C	—
130	Gottfried of Admont	*Hom*. 58	3:20	C	—
131	Bernard of Clairvaux	*Dilig. Deo* 1	3:16	—	E
132	Bernard of Clairvaux	*Epiph. Domini* 1	3:17	C	—
133	Martin of Leon	*Serm*. 2	3:20-21	C	—
134	Martin of Leon	*Serm*. 23	3:36	—	E
135	Martin of Leon	*Serm*. 30	3:18	C	—
136	Martin of Leon	*Exp. Apoc.* 9.17	3:19	C	—
137	Aquinas	*Comm. Jo.* 7.6	3:16-21	C	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
138	Aquinas	*Comm. Jo*. 7.6	3:31-36	C	—
139	Aquinas	*Comm. Jo*. 3.6	3:31-36	C	—
140	Bonaventure	*Post. Jo.*	3:16-21	C	—
141	Bonaventure	*Post. Jo.*	3:17	—	E
142	Erasmus	*Annot. Jo*. 1:16	1:16	—	—
143	Erasmus	*Annot. Jo.* 3:16	3:16	—	E
144	Erasmus	*Annot. Jo.* 3:34	3:34	—	E
145	Luther	*WA* 193.35-42	3:34	C	—
146	Luther	*Serm. Pent.*	3:16-21	C	—
147	Luther	*Pap. Rome*	3:20	C	—
148	Luther	*Serm. ascens.* 56	3:16-18	C	—
149	d'Étaples	*Comm. quat. Ev.* 513	3:16-18	—	E
150	John Major	*Exp. Ev*. 3	3:1-36	—	E
151	Calvin	*Comm. Jo.* 3:13-21	3:16	—	E
152	Calvin	*Comm. Jo*. 3:13-21	3:16	C	—
153	Calvin	*Comm. Jo*. 3:29-36	3:31-36	C	—
154	Menno Simons	*Foundation* 2.A	3:16	C	—
155	Musculus	*Divi Jo. Ev.* 3:31	3:31	C	—
156	Musculus	*Divi Jo. Ev.* 3:36	3:36	C	—
157	Musculus	*Divi Jo. Ev.* 3:16	3:16	C	—
158	Musculus	*Divi Jo. Ev.* 3:21	3:21	C	—
159	Bucer	*Enarrat. Ev. Jo.* 3:17	3:17	C	—
160	Cruciger the Elder	*Comm. Jo.* 3:16-21	3:16	C	—
161	Cruciger the Elder	*Comm. Jo*. 3:31-36	3:31,33	C	—
162	Johannes Brenz	*D. Jo. Ev.* 3:16-21	3:16	C	—

Table A1, continued

#	*Author*	*Text*	*Passage*	*I*	*X*
163	Johannes Brenz	*D. Jo. Ev.* 3:31-36	3:31-36	C	—
164	Melanchthon	*Apology* 3.235	3:36	C	—
165	Oecolampadius	*Annot. Jo.* 70	3:34	C	—
166	Benedictus Aretius	*Comm. Ev.* 160	3:31-36	C	—
167	Zwingli	*On Baptism* 95	3:36	C	—
168	Zwingli	*The Preaching Office*	3:34	C	—
169	Zwingli	*Defense* 57	3:16	C	—
170	Zwingli	*Defense* 57	3:31-33	C	—
171	Zwingli	*Defense* 55	3:36	C	—
172	Thomas Cartwright	*Harm. Ev. Comm.*	3:31-36	C	—
173	Matthew Poole	*Comm. Joh. 1186*	3:31-36	C	—
174	Matthew Poole	*Comm. Joh. 1183*	3:16	C	—
175	John Lightfoot	*Harmony* 14	3:16-21	C	—
176	John Tillotson	*Serm.* 189	3:16-21	C	—
177	Daniel Dyke	*Histories John 3:16*	3:16	—	C
178	Daniel Dyke	*Histories John 3:31*	3:31	C	—
179	Cornelius A Lapide	*The Great Commentary*	3:16	—	C
180	William Burkitt	*Expository Notes*	3:16-21	—	C
181	William Beveridge	*Serm.* 14	3:16	—	C
182	Adam Contzen	*Comm. quat. Ev.*	3:15-21	—	C
183	Edward Stillingfleet	*Serm.* 31	3:17	E	—

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ABSTRACT

WHO SAYS THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD?
A HISTORICAL ARGUMENT TO
IDENTIFY THE AMBIGUOUS
SPEAKERS IN JOHN 3

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
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This dissertation examines and catalogues the history of interpretation of the ambiguous speakers in John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36. The history of interpretation leads to the conclusion that the passages are best understood as spoken by Jesus, not the Evangelist. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and the disagreement within modern scholarship regarding the speakers.

Part one contains the history of interpretation proper. Chapter 2 investigates the early Christian era including the second through sixth centuries. Authors throughout this period tend to identify Jesus as speaking in 3:16-21 and Jesus or the Baptist as speaking in 3:31-36. Few identify the Evangelist as speaking in one or both passages. In addition to this common interpretation, authors also correlate the identity of the speaker to a christological focus: Jesus/the Baptist is speaking when the focus is on the incarnation and the Evangelist is speaking when the focus is on the crucifixion.

Chapter 3 covers the medieval era and demonstrates a continuation of the findings from the previous period. Although slightly more authors identify the Evangelist as speaking, the correlation between speaker and christological focus remains in most cases. The exceptions are relegated to 3:31-36; no authors break the correlation with regard to 3:16-21.

Chapter 4 discusses the Reformation era and the new focus on the role of the

Evangelist. Although these authors stress the importance of the Evangelist's hand at work, the vast majority still attribute the words of both passages to either Jesus or the Baptist. Again, those that attribute the words to the Evangelist himself do so while discussing the crucifixion. Even in the Reformation era, authors still interpret 3:31-36 as the words of Jesus, although this phenomenon has become far less frequent. At the end of chapter 4, the early modern era comes into focus and shatters the established correlation. Several authors within a small time period attribute the words of 3:16-21 to Jesus while discussing the crucifixion.

Chapter 5 explores the modern discussion on these ambiguous speakers and demonstrates that scholars agree very little as to the identity of the speaker in either passage. Using various methods and coming from various ideological backgrounds, scholars arrive at similar conclusions. Conversely, scholars coming from the same backgrounds or applying the same methods might arrive at vastly different conclusions. For this reason, the connection between the theological focus and the identity of the speakers is of utmost importance.

Part two argues that both passages in John 3 should be attributes to Jesus in order to make the best sense of the theological focus of the chapter. Chapter 6 places John 3 within the larger context of the Book of Signs and the Gospel of John as a whole. By examining John's larger rhetorical strategy, it becomes clear that John 3 is best understood as focused on the incarnation of the Christ and the testimony regarding Jesus' self-revelation.

Chapter 7 offers a reinterpretation of John 3 with Jesus as the speaker. It examines both positive arguments for this reading as well as the negative arguments against it, and concludes that this reading best explains that God demonstrates his love for the world through giving his Son *in the incarnation*. Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation with a recapitulation of the arguments and a brief discussion on areas of further study.

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