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JESUS' 'I AM' SAYINGS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
A key to understanding the Christ-event

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DEDICATION

To the loving memory of my dearest uncle, Fr. Peter Kuupine, O.F.M Conv.
who taught me that it is always possible to be happy since the Good Lord is in
control!

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this Thesis is my original work achieved through my personal readings, scientific method and critical reflection. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been quoted in full and acknowledged.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

May all praise, glory, honour and thanksgiving be to the Most High God for all His beautiful gifts to humanity! Daddy Lord, I cannot thank you enough!

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
Cf.	Confer, compare
Cor	Corinthians
DJG	Green, J.B. – McKnight, S. – Marshall, I.H., ed., <i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> , InterVarsity Press 1992.
e.g.	exempli gratia; for example
Eph	Ephesians
Ex	Exodus
Ez,Ezek	Ezekiel
Gen	Genesis
Gr	Greek
Heb	Hebrews
Is, Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	The Gospel According to John
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	The Gospel According to Luke
Mk	The Gospel According to Mark
Mt, Matt	The Gospel According to Matthew
NIDOTTE	VanGemeren, W.A., ed., <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , vol.4, Zondervan Publishing House Grand Rapids 1997.
NBD	Douglas, J.D., - al, ed., <i>The New Bible Dictionary</i> , Grand Rapids 1962.
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Pr, Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalm
Rev	Revelation
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Wis	Wisdom

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Motivation for the study

Throughout the Gospel of John, the author appears to attach a lot of importance to the use of the statement “I AM” such that it begs the attention of any critical reader. In several instances Jesus describes himself with certain images by means of “I am”: e.g. “bread of life” Jn 6:35.51, “light of the world” 8:12; “door of the sheep” 10:7 etc. the very fact that the statement often provokes some peculiar reaction from his hearers draws our attention to it. For instance in Jn 18:6 the soldiers who went to arrest Jesus in the Kidron valley, draw back and fall to the ground when Jesus pronounces the words “I am he”. Again Jesus tells the Jews, “Before Abraham was, I am” in Jn 8:58 and immediately they pick up stones to stone him. When all these instances are put together it seems clear that the Johannine author is saying something more than meets the eye. This is what has motivated me and I now undertake to examine what the scholars are saying with regard to these statements. We want to argue that the Johannine author’s use of these ‘I am’ sayings constitute a hermeneutic key to this Gospel. In addition to my personal reflection, I hope to come up with something worth the effort.

Method, structure and content of the study

In this study it is our aim to explore these statements for their meaning, the message the evangelist wishes to convey by them and their role in the entire fourth

Gospel. I see these statements as being at the heart of the Gospel and may therefore be a key to rereading or understanding the Christ-Event. We hope to do this through library research (Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries and Bible works 9), internet research and my personal reflection.

To give the work a uniform outlook, it will be divided into three chapters. Each chapter begins with a short introduction and ends with a conclusion. In the first chapter we shall deal with the introductory matters concerning the use of the statements. This will be limited to a general overview of the use of the statements in John's Gospel, their background and the context in which they are used. We will also look at the parallel uses of the statements especially in the book of Exodus and in the prophet Isaiah. We will assess the historical value of these sayings.

Having done this we would have set the stage for a detailed analysis of some selected texts. This will be done in chapter II. In this regard priority will be given to the identifiable sets of I AM statements that seem to have different emphasis and meanings. This detailed analysis is aimed at earning us the message of the evangelist as well as the social situation in which they were made.

Chapter III will pick up from there and consider the theological discussion that the message of the claim engenders. Thus consideration will be given to such important or key issues of the Christ-event as the pre-existence of Christ, the incarnation; the ministry of Jesus Christ; his passion, death and resurrection; and finally the new creation/the eschatological age. When this is done, we will be in a position to suggest a Christian response to the Christ-event. An introduction and conclusion will begin and end each chapter respectively. A general conclusion will end our discussion.

Chapter I

Introductory Matters

1 Introduction

Going through the Gospel according to St John, any careful reader cannot fail to notice an insistent use of the phrase 'I AM', not only for the frequency of its occurrence but also for its peculiarity. The very fact that the statement often provokes some kind of reaction from the audience draws our attention to it. Such reactions, to say the least, would suggest that the Johannine author is saying something more than what meets the eye. Thus our task at this stage involves looking at the frequency of its occurrence; how it is used; the context of its usage; the possible sources and backgrounds of the phrase, and finally its historicity. This will serve as initial but essential step in our investigation.

1.1 Occurrences of 'I AM' in the Gospel

The first occurrence of the phrase is on the lips of John the Baptist as he bears witness to Jesus Christ as the "One coming" after him (John 1:20.23.26.27.30.31; 3:28).¹ That is;

¹C. MORRISON, *An Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*, 288.

*John 1:20 He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."*²

1:23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said."

On the lips of Jesus, however, which is our concern, we encounter it for the first time in chapter 4 (4:26).

*4:26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you **am he**."*³

Henceforth it appears more regularly until its last occurrence in 18:8.

All in all, the *ego* is found 134 times in John as against 29 occurrences in Mt., 17 in Mark, and 23 in Luke.⁴ However it must be said from the onset that it is not every occurrence of the *egōeimi* in John that we are going to consider. We shall limit our research to those occurrences attributed directly to Jesus. Of these we shall further narrow down to 14. We think the theological import of these instances alone will be able to give us a fair understanding of the Johannine theology of the *ego eimi*. Therefore we shall give consideration to the *ego eimi* as used in the following instances: 6:35.48, 8:12; 9:5; 10:7.9; 10:14; 15:1.5; 11:25; 14:6; 4:26; 6:20; 8:24.28.58; 18:5.6.8 and especially those used in the absolute sense which include: 4:26; 6:20; 8:24.28.58; 18:5-6. With regard to their occurrences B. Witherington puts it bluntly that "it is immediately evident that these sayings are not evenly distributed in the Gospel. They do not begin until the Gospel is a fourth over (the crucial Galilee miracle story), and they end in the middle of the farewell discourses."⁵

² This and all other biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the RSV, Catholic Edition.

³ The emphases are mine.

⁴ J.H. BERNARD, *Gospel According to John*, 157.

⁵ B. WITHERINGTON, III *John's Wisdom*, 157.

1.2 The Johannine use of “I AM”

As pointed out earlier, “I am” translated in Greek as *egōeimi* features much more frequently in the Gospel of John than in any of the New Testament writings. Our present task is to see if the Johannine author always gives to the expression the same meaning wherever he uses it. In other words does the phrase always have the same semantic import in every sentence? In this connection R. Brown says; “The Gr. *egōeimi*, ‘I am,’ can be simply a phrase of common speech, equivalent to ‘It is I’ or ‘I am the one.’ However, it also has had a solemn and sacral use in the OT, the New Testament, Gnosticism, and pagan Greek religious writings.”⁶

A lot of studies have been done already regarding the Johannine use of ‘I am’. The first was by E. Schweizer, who having made a thorough study of the different uses of ‘I am’ in various cultures⁷, came up with two categories of usages; instances in which *ego eimi* is accompanied by a predicate, and instances in which it is without.⁸ Since his work, many other critical studies have identified with the two main categorizations. In the first case where the *egōeimi* is predicated by an image we have seven examples in John’s Gospel;

6:35 “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; [...]’” and 6:51 ‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven; [...]’; 8:12; 9:5: “I am the light of the world.”; 10:7.9: “I am the [sheep] gate.”; 10:11.14: “I am the good shepherd”; 11:25: “I am the resurrection and the life”; 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”, and 15:1.5: “I am the [true] vine.” In the second category

⁶ R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 117. Also M. VELLANICKAL, *Studies in the Gospel of John*, 158 “The phrase ‘I AM’ (in Greek ‘ego eimi’) as such is simply a phrase of common speech equivalent to “It is I” or “I am the one.” However, it has a religious significance in the biblical literature as also in other religious writings.”

⁷Cf. D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 13.

⁸Cf. J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 243.

where it is not predicated, R. Brown divides them into two: (1) The absolute use in which there is no predicate.⁹ For example:

8:24: “Unless you come to believe that I AM, you will surely die in your sins.”

8:28: “when you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.”

8:58: “Before Abraham even came into existence, I AM.”

13:19: “When it does happen, you may believe that I AM.”¹⁰

He argues that there is a natural tendency to feel that these statements are incomplete as the Jews demonstrate it by their question in 8:25 “well, then, who are you?” Nevertheless, “since this usage goes far beyond ordinary parlance, all recognize that the absolute *egōeimi* has a special revelatory function in John.”¹¹

(2) There are *egōeimi* statements where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed. For instance in 6:20 when the disciples in the boat are terrified at the sight of someone coming towards them on the water, Jesus assures them, “*Egōeimi*; do not be afraid.” Brown contends that the expression in this case may simply mean, “It is I, that is, someone whom you know, and not a supernatural being or a ghost.” Again in 18:5 Jesus’ *ego eimi* in response to the question of the soldiers may be understood as “I am he.”¹²

Notwithstanding the lucidity of this further division made by R. Brown, D.M. Ball makes a critical observation: “A satisfactory definition of which among this second category of ‘I am’ sayings should be regarded as absolute (i.e. which ‘I am’ sayings stand alone with no further explanation of who or what Jesus is claiming to be) is hard to obtain.”¹³ The situation is even more complicated when we realize that R. Bultmann, even before R. Brown, had

⁹ Cf. R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 117.

¹⁰ The translations are Brown’s.

¹¹ R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 118.

¹² Cf. R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 118.

¹³ D.M. BALL, ‘*I Am*’ in *John’s Gospel*, 14 also 162-68.

divided them into four; that of presentation formula responding to the question ‘who are you?’; qualification formula responding to ‘what are you?’; the identification formula in which the speaker identifies himself with another person and finally the recognition formula which responds to the question ‘who is the one who...’.¹⁴

As evident there is no agreement among the experts. However, it is safe for us to say that these categorizations would usually not go beyond either an *egōeimi* predicated by an image, or that not predicated by an image (even if a predicate is implied).

1.3 The ‘I AM’ phrases in context

It would probably be more profitable to discuss the ‘I Am’ sayings in their context. However, this task has already been successfully carried out by Mark Ball when he did the literary studies of these sayings in his all-important work, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*. Moreover, this aspect will come up again, though briefly, in our exegesis of the selected texts.

It is good to recall what we said earlier on in our discussion on the occurrences of the sayings, that they are not evenly distributed in the Gospel. They begin when the Gospel is a fourth over and they end in the middle of the farewell discourses.¹⁵ Witherington III puts it as follows:

the seven “I am” sayings bind together the public ministry and the private teaching of Jesus into a thematic unity, making clear that these two divisions of the Gospel ultimately go back to the same creative mind of the Beloved Disciple. They begin to appear at the crucial juncture when Jesus starts to reveal very openly who he is, both to the public and to the disciples in Galilee. These sayings make clear that a major, if not the major, function of both ministry narration and farewell discourses is to reveal clearly who Jesus is and what he bestows on those who receive him. In other

¹⁴ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, *Studies in the Gospel of John*, 158.

¹⁵ Cf. J.H. BERNARD, *Gospel According to John*, 157.

words they show the Christological and soteriological character of this whole Gospel.¹⁶

In addition to this, what should not escape any critical reader is that the ‘I am’ sayings must be seen as tying in with the other Christological titles: “the Word (1:14), the Christ (1:17), the Lamb of God (1.29), the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1.33), the king of Israel (1.49) and the Son of Man (1.51)”.¹⁷ The writer uses the “I am” sayings to develop the character of Jesus “albeit in accordance with the titles already revealed.”¹⁸

1.4 Possible sources and backgrounds of the phrase

The phrase surely has an origin. Scholars are however divided as far as its origin is concerned. Whereas some would jettison a consistent theological theme exposed by the author, some are of the opinion that John echoes religious titles from other sources.¹⁹ They, nevertheless, would point out that the solution to this problem is tied up with the cultural milieu which formed the primary background of the Gospel.

Furthermore, it is also useful to distinguish between ‘sources’ and ‘backgrounds’ in this discussion. P.B. Harner distinguishes the sources from the backgrounds of the Johannine use of the absolute *egō ēimi*. “The first refers to writings or terminology from which John’s use of an absolute *ego ēimi* could have been derived. The second refers more generally to those currents of thought in relation to which his use of this phrase may be seen more clearly, even if it was not derived from them.”²⁰ He soon proceeds to outline the limitations that such distinction brings to light. First, there is need to recognize the fact that “we may not be in the position today to know exactly what sources

¹⁶B. WITHERINGTON, III *John’s Wisdom*, 158.

¹⁷D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 151.

¹⁸D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 151.

¹⁹J.B. GREEN – S. MCKNIGHT – I.H. MARSHALL, “‘I AM’ Sayings”, 354-356.

²⁰P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

or backgrounds John himself had in mind, although we may try to delineate and define those that seem most likely.”²¹ Secondly it should also be said in uncertain terms that “we are not necessarily dealing with a process of unilinear development and influence, for one source may have influenced another.”²² It is with these thoughts in mind that we must explore the possible sources and backgrounds of the *egōeimi* in John.

1.4.1 Extra-Biblical Parallels

There is no doubt that *egōeimi* enjoyed a widespread use among the religions of the ANE.²³ For instance parallels have been found in the magic formulas of Isis, the opening tract of the Hermetica (Poimandres) and Mandaean texts. In each case, however, it seems clear that either the predicate is supplied or the form is used for self-identification. P. Perkins remarks that the cult of the popular Egyptian goddess Isis, for instance, included lists of ‘I am’ pronouncements in which the goddess identified herself with all manifestations of divinity and indicated that she was responsible for the blessings of culture.

Here is an example:

I am Isis, the mistress of every land,
And I was taught by Hermes
And with Hermes I devised writing,
I gave and ordained laws for men,
Which no one can change.
I am the eldest daughter of kronos.
I am the wife of Osiris²⁴

The ‘I am’ statement was also popular with Gnosticism as evident in the versions of Gnostic myths of the origins of this lower world, which are usually based on Genesis.²⁵ The god of this world, according to the Gnostic tradition, ignorant and malevolent, sometimes displays his ignorance of the divine world

²¹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

²²P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

²³ Cf. R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 117.

²⁴P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 103.

²⁵Cf. P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 103.

by proclaiming himself the only god. We find this boast in the following: “But he was impious in his ignorance, which was in him, for he said, ‘I am God and there is no other God beside me’ – for he was ignorant of his strength [i.e., the light he had received from his mother], the place from which he came [CG II 11, 18-23, Cp. Is 43:10].”²⁶

The Gnostics apparently composed Isis-style aretalogies in which the heavenly figure identifies herself with a paradoxical list of attributes. Thus the heavenly “Eve” pronounces the following aretalogy:

I am pent of my mother;
I am the mother.
I am the virgin;
I am the pregnant one.
I am the physician;
I am the consoler of those in labor [= midwife].
My husband begat me,
And I am his mother,
And he is my father and lord [CG II 162, 7-12].²⁷

With these paradoxical aretalogies the Gnostic revealer is demonstrated as superior to the contradictions of the universe.²⁸

From such considerations, P. Perkins gives us three types of Gnostic use of ‘I am’ sayings:

1. The monotheistic claim of 2 Isaiah becomes the boast of an arrogant god who does not even know the source of his power. This perversion of OT occurs only in Gnostic sources.
2. The revealer uses ‘I am’ predications to identify herself to those she summons to their true home.
3. The universality of aretalogy is expanded to include paradox and contradiction to stress the universality of the Gnostic revealer. The paradoxical type is found only in Gnostic sources. The Gnostic evidence shows clearly that a newly emerging religious group could appropriate Jewish and pagan models at different points in the same story.²⁹

However, Perkins does not fail to notice the difference between the Gnostic and the Johannine usages. John uses the Second-Isaiah type of ‘I am’ sayings positively. Besides, John’s list of ‘I am’ sayings shows none of the

²⁶P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 104.

²⁷P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 104.

²⁸Cf. P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 105.

²⁹P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 105.

contradictory and antithetical character of the Gnostic aretologies.³⁰ He is convinced that the absolute 'I am' is uniquely Johannine and in fact he states:

It seems to be derived from 2 Isaiah, and represents a claim that Jesus is identical with the Father, as John stated in 5:18. In John, that identity is the central reason for hostility against Jesus. It is the culmination of John's Christology and is without parallel in surrounding religious traditions.³¹

With Harner we can say that "the following texts have been examined, however, for the possible use of the absolute 'I am': the Hermetica; the writings of Philo; the Sibylline oracles; the New Testament apocryphal writings, including those from Nag Hammadi; and various gnostic writings, including the Pistis Sophia and the Mandaean literature."³² In all these, "there is no clear, unambiguous use of the phrase 'I am' in an absolute sense."³³ What is made clear from these studies is that 'I am' statements in which the 'I am' is followed by a predicate are very common. So if the absolute 'I am', so prominent in John, has no parallels in the milieu examined above, we should look elsewhere.

1.4.2 Biblical Parallels

a) Ex 3:14-15

First and foremost the Septuagint³⁴ displays abundant examples of it with predicates.³⁵ Some examples: Gen 28:13: "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham

³⁰ Cf. P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 105.

³¹ P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St John*, 106.

³² P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 27.

³³ P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 28. Also 29-30 "This examination of various Hellenistic texts supports the view that we cannot look to the Hellenistic religious milieu as the source for an absolute use of *ego eimi* in the Fourth Gospel. None of the documents that the present writer has examined reflects any acquaintance with this type of phrase. The Hellenistic writers, both Christian and non-Christian, used the phrase "I am" with a predicate very frequently. If they had also used the absolute "I am" then we would have to consider the possibility that John drew the phrase from them or from earlier writings or traditions of a similar type. [...] Yet the evidence at present provides no basis for any of these suppositions. We must look elsewhere for the source of an absolute use of *ego eimi* in the Fourth Gospel."

³⁴ The Septuagint is commonly denoted by LXX. It is a Greek translation of the Old Testament purported to have been translated by 72 elders within 72 days in Alexandria for the Greek speaking Jews. Cf. J.N. BIRDSALL, "Text and Version", 156.

³⁵ Cf. J.B. GREEN, - S. MCKNIGHT, - I.H. MARSHALL, ed., "I AM" Sayings', 354-356.

your father and the God of Isaac”; Ex 15:26: “for I am the LORD, your healer”; Ps 35:3 “I am your deliverance.” This is seen as a “form of God’s self-disclosure when he employs a metaphor to depict himself: “The Lord appeared to Abraham and said ... ‘I am El Shaddai [God all-powerful]’” (Gen 17:1).³⁶ In affirmation of that exclusive relationship between God and Israel, the prophets put the formula, “I am the LORD and there is no other” (Is 45:18; Hos13:4) on the lips of God.

These instances are not the only use of *egōeimiin* in the OT. The majority of scholars say the most important OT background is Exodus 3. In Ex 3:6 God introduces himself to Moses on Mount Sinai with the words, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” This, however, could not satisfy the curiosity of Moses who further inquired the name of God (Ex 3:14-15). In response, God gave what has come down to us as the most puzzling statement in all of the OT.³⁷ It is not clear if the ‘name’ God gave is actually a name or a title. It reads $\square ehyeh \square ašer \square ehyeh$; a formula that has been variously translated. The most common is, “I AM WHO I AM” (NIV).³⁸ This translation is based on the consideration that $\square ehyeh \square ašer \square ehyeh$ consists of the repeated form of the verb “to be” (*hyh*, earlier form *hwy*) in the first person singular plus the relative particle.”³⁹ In this light some scholars contend that this response is a refusal to give the divine name, since knowing the name gives some control over the one named: in effect, “I am who I am, and it is not your business to know my name.”⁴⁰ On the contrary for some others this “is a counsel of despair and stands at odds with God’s regularly giving a name when

³⁶J.B. GREEN, – S. MCKNIGHT, - I.H.MARSHALL, ed., “‘I AM’ Sayings’, 354-356.

³⁷Cf. W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., “Yahweh”, 1295.

³⁸Cf. W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., “Yahweh”, 1295.

³⁹W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., “Yahweh”, 1295.

⁴⁰W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., “Yahweh”, 1296.

appearing to Israel's ancestors (Gen 35:11; Exod 3:6)."⁴¹ According to them the fact that "Yahweh" is immediately used in apposition to the God of your fathers in vv. 15-16, suggests a more positive meaning.⁴²

Other translations could be: "I will be what (who) I will be"; "I will cause to be what I will cause to be"; "I will be who I am/I am who I will be". The latter translation appeals to scholars who think it is the best option since, in essence, the statement means; "I will be God for you." This makes clear to us that "the force of the name is not simply that God is or that God is present, but that God will be faithfully God for them in the history that is to follow (see vv.16-17)."⁴³

At this point we have to see the reason why some scholars would identify Ex 3:14-15 as the source or background of the *egōeimi* in John and also why some reject it. P.B. Harner gives us the salient points of K. Zickendraht whose view is that the *egōeimi* of the Fourth Gospel was derived from the 'I am' of Ex 3:14-15. First of all, the "rabbinical exegesis interpreted the threefold I AM of Ex 3:14 as a reference to God's past, present, and future existence, with the meaning 'I was and I still am and I will be in the future.'"⁴⁴ K. Zickendraht sees "the same pattern of thought in the NT passages such as Revelation 1:4,8, which refer to God as the one 'who is and who was and who is to come (*ho on kai ho en kai ho erchomenos*)."⁴⁵ He "then attempts to find the same pattern in the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18),"⁴⁶ in which the words "was," "who is" and "who is coming" are used. It is "on this basis that he argues that the

⁴¹ W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., "Yahweh", 1296.

⁴² Cf. W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., "Yahweh", 1296. We should also note that Van Gemeren seems to identify Yahweh with "I am" thus he argues that the 6800 uses of Yahweh in the OT cannot be regarded as testimony to God's refusal, 1296.

⁴³ W.A. VAN GEMEREN, ed., "Yahweh", 1296.

⁴⁴ P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 16.

⁴⁵ P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 16.

⁴⁶ P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 16.

prologue conceals within itself the sacred divine name, the *Tetragrammaton*.”⁴⁷ His conclusion is that “the words *egōeimi* elsewhere in the Gospel are to be understood as an allusion to this name. That is, by pronouncing these words, Jesus was revealing and virtually identifying himself with the *Tetragrammaton* YHWH of Ex 3:14-15.”⁴⁸ On the same vein is R. Schnackenburg, “Ex 3:14 is clearly behind the words of Jesus in 8:58.”⁴⁹

Now, should one consider the above a very good case put up by K. Zickendraht, we must not fail to listen to what P.B. Harner has against that position. In rejecting the ‘I AM’ of Ex 3:14 as a direct source for the absolute use of *egōeimi* in the Fourth Gospel, he finds support from J. Richter who says it “functions as a theological definition or etymology of the name.”⁵⁰ If this is true, that would make K. Zickendraht’s conclusion farfetched. He would, however, concede that we cannot “entirely exclude the ‘I AM’ of Exodus 3:14 as part of the more general background for the Johannine usage of *egōeimi*.”⁵¹

b) The “□anihu” of Second Isaiah

P.B. Harner reports that “the phrase □*anihu* occurs six times in Isaiah 40-55. Literally this seems to mean ‘I (am) He,’ and it is regularly translated in the Septuagint as *egōeimi*, ‘I am’. A longer variant of the phrase, *anokianokihu*, also occurs twice in these chapters, with the meaning “I, I (am) He.”⁵² This is rendered in the Septuagint as *egōeimiegōeimi*. These primary data are quite complex in their linguistic context nevertheless what is of interest to us is that the □*anihu* is often translated in the Septuagint as *egōeimi*.⁵³

⁴⁷P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 16.

⁴⁸P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 16.

⁴⁹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, II, 84.

⁵⁰J. RICHTER, “Ani hu und Ego eimi: Die Offenbrungsformellch bin es in der biblischen Welt und Umwelt” (diss. Erlangen, 1956), pp. 36-38 as cited by P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 17.

⁵¹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 17.

⁵²P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

⁵³Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 6.

With this P.B. Harner could further distinguish six important characteristics of this phrase as Second Isaiah uses it in various settings:

- 1) It is always spoken by Yahweh, never by anyone else.
- 2) It signifies that Yahweh alone is God.
- 3) It presents Yahweh as Lord of history, and therefore as redeemer of Israel.
- 4) It presents Yahweh as creator of the world, as well as lord of history.
- 5) It points to a reality that Israel perceives, in faith, within the context of its witness and service of Yahweh.
- 6) It is closely related to other expressions of divine self-prediction, especially the phrase “I am Yahweh” (ani YHWH).⁵⁴

From these analyses he does not leave us in any doubt as to what his position is: The □*anihu* or *anokianokihu* is the most probable background of the Johannine absolute *egōēimi*.⁵⁵ It is J. Richter who suggests that the □*anihu* of the OT is a divine revelation formula. In his study “of the use of ‘I am’ in the OT, he argues that the ‘profane’ (i.e., the human) usage, which is limited to identification and emphatic self-statement, and the ‘divine’ usage of □*anihu* are parallel in form.”⁵⁶ He distinguishes the peculiarities of the divine revelation formula and comes to the conclusion “that □*anihu* is a code-word of absolute monotheism and thus it becomes ‘by its breadth and all-embracing significance the sum of all God’s statements about himself.’ By reasoning that □γ□ □□μιν the New Testament does indeed point back to □*anihu* in the OT, he maintains that Jesus speaks as God.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, Zimmermann adds his voice to J. Richter’s. He examines the OT use of the term ‘□ani YHWH’ “which he regards as the Revelation Formula of the Old Testament.”⁵⁸ Seeking to link that formula with the *egōēimi* of Jesus, he finds that “the LXX translation of Isaiah where the absolute □γ□

⁵⁴P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 7.

⁵⁵ Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 60.

⁵⁶D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 33.

⁵⁷D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 33.

⁵⁸D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 34.

□□μ becomes the translation of □ *anihu*”⁵⁹ comes in handy. He again connects this with the formula *ani YHWH*: “The LXX of Isa. 45.18 shows an even clearer link between the formula *ani YHWH* and the □γ□ □□μ of the NT since the □ *aniYhwh* there is translated with an absolute □γ□ □□μ.”⁶⁰

C. H. Dodd would not be outdone. It is also his opinion “that □ *anihu* lies behind Jesus’ claim ἐγὼ □ ἀλόπεμψας με.”⁶¹ R. Schnackenburg on his part considers

Is 43:10-11, not just verbally (‘that you may know and believe and understand that I am He’), but also in meaning and content, form the background to 8:24, 28. In John Jesus is arguing with the unbelieving Jews, who ought not only to believe for their own salvation, but also ought simply to recognize that Jesus’ claim (‘I am He’) is justified, just as in the Second Isaiah passage God is engaged in a legal dispute with the peoples of the world and is trying to convince Israel: ‘I am God, and besides me there is no saviour’.⁶²

From the above analysis of various scholarly views, it is evident that many support the view that the □ *anihu* of Deutero-Isaiah is the background of the absolute *egōeimi* in John. With reference to what we pointed out earlier when we embarked on our search for the possible source and background, we can only say the □ *anihu* of Deutero-Isaiah probably forms part of the background (as in the case of the *egōeimi* of Ex 3:14) of the Johannine use of the absolute *egōeimi*. We could not say that with certainty since we may not be able to put a finger on *the* source and/or background of the *egōeimi* in the Gospel of John.

⁵⁹D.M. BALL, *I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 34.

⁶⁰D.M. BALL, *I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 34; R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, “Zimmermann begins his study of the Old Testament formulas with a treatment of the passages containing the statement, “I am Yahweh,” or “I am God,” for the absolute use of “I am” is a variant of this statement. In Hebrew the statement contains simply the pronoun “I” (ani) and the predicate “Yahweh” or “God” (el; Elohim), without a connecting verb LXX uses ego kyrios, ego theos, but sometimes supplies the connecting verb eimi.” 121.

⁶¹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, II, 82.

⁶²R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, II, 84.

c) The Synoptic and other New Testament Parallels

Our search for the possible sources and background of the ‘I am’ sayings in John’s Gospel would be incomplete and leave much to be desired if it did not incorporate the synoptic tradition and other New Testament parallels. As stated earlier on our interest does not capture every instance of ‘I am’ usage but only those that are attributed to Jesus. Thus our purpose in this section is to find out if the ‘I am’ is a purely Johannine invention or a phenomenon embedded in the earlier Christian tradition of which he might have made use.

Firstly, in the Synoptic Gospels, except for once in Mt 24:5, the expression *egōeimi* with an explicit predicate is never attributed to Jesus.⁶³ In this exception Jesus is warning his disciples about the end of the present age: “for many will come in my name, saying ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” P.B. Harner observes that Jesus is here making reference “to the claims of false messiahs rather than making a direct statement about himself.”⁶⁴ Since “it is uncertain whether the passage implies that he would make the same statement under similar circumstances [...], this exception to the general synoptic usage may be more apparent than real.”⁶⁵ This means with regard to the Johannine use of ‘I am’ with predicate, there is not much to compare in the synoptic tradition. Hence we turn to focus on the ‘I am’ without a predicate.

P.B. Harner identifies eight occurrences of the predicateless *egōeimi* in the synoptic Gospels but he excludes two of these, Mt 26:22,25, from further consideration for the reasons that, “in each case, someone other than Jesus is the speaker, and a predicate is clearly understood.”⁶⁶ As “in John 9:9 these *egōeimi* passages represent the everyday usage of the phrase.”⁶⁷ The other six

⁶³ Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 30.

⁶⁴ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 30.

⁶⁵ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 30.

⁶⁶ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 31.

⁶⁷ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 31.

occurrences are all attributed to Jesus and can be grouped into three according to the situation represented: “1) in Mark 13:6 par. Luke 21:8 (and Matthew 24:5, [...]), Jesus refers to false messiahs; 2) in Mark 14:62 and Luke 22:70, Jesus replies to the high priest or the Jewish leaders at his trial; 3) in Mark 6:50 par. Matthew 14:27, Jesus addresses his disciples as he walks on the water.”⁶⁸ Having studied these with the aim to finding out if the *egōeimi* is being used in an absolute sense or simply as the everyday expression, meaning “I am he” or “it is I.” he comes to this conclusion:

Our study of the predicateless ego eimi in synoptic tradition indicates that the phrase probably had an absolute meaning in Mark 6:50, possibly so in Mark 13:6, but probably not in Mark 14:62. The data do not allow a more definite conclusion than this, since in each case the phrase makes good sense in terms of everyday usage. In any event, it is clear that Matthew and Luke had little interest in an absolute use of ego eimi. Matthew supplies a predicate in Mark 13:6 and omits the phrase entirely in Mark 14:62. Luke regards it as an everyday expression in Mark 14:62 and omits the whole story of Jesus walking on the water. Among the synoptics it is primarily Mark, or the tradition that he uses, that shows this limited interest in the absolute ego eimi.⁶⁹

R. Brown too thinks that John’s absolute use of ‘I am’ “may be an elaboration of a use of “I am” attributed to Jesus in the synoptic tradition as well. Once again, rather than creating from nothing, Johannine theology may have capitalized on a valid theme of the early tradition.”⁷⁰ With reference to his own categorization of the ‘I am’ in John, as we saw above, he now concedes that “there are no explicit synoptic parallels”⁷¹ to the third class, that is the ‘I am’ sayings with predicate, of John’s ‘I am’ sayings, “but this class is [...], a possible variation of the synoptic parabolic theme.”⁷²

That this might be an earlier Christian tradition is also attested by R. Schnackenburg. With reference to Mark 13:6, he argues that the *egōeimi* “must

⁶⁸P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 31.

⁶⁹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 35-36.

⁷⁰R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 125.

⁷¹R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 125.

⁷²R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 125.

be a primitive Christian gloss, an editorial expansion, though this shows at least one thing, namely that even before John the primitive church could use the formula to sum up Jesus' claim."⁷³

A glance at the other New Testament writings besides the Gospels shows no explicit usage of the absolute *egōeimi*. On the other hand the *egōeimi* with predicate is quite frequently attributed to Jesus. However, in the absence of contrary views, we may take this footnote statement of P.B. Harner as somehow indicative of the general opinion that:

outside the four gospels, the phrase *ego eimi* with an expressed predicate is attributed several times to Jesus (Acts 9:5, 22:8, 26:15; Rev. 1:17, 2:23, 22:16). Because it is the risen Lord who is represented as speaking here, these passages must be regarded as a different type of material that cannot be compared directly with the usage of the gospels.⁷⁴

This makes sense if R. Schnackenburg's view is anything to go by, which is "that there are no occurrences of $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ in the appearances of the risen Christ, even in John,"⁷⁵ making "it very improbable that the sayings of the risen Christ were the source for this revelatory discourse."⁷⁶

1.5 The Historicity of the Phrase

In our discussion on the New Testament parallels of the Johannine 'I am', we saw some scholars who assert that the phrase certainly goes back to the early Christian tradition of which John possibly made use. For instance R. Brown and R. Schnackenburg attest to this. The question is whether the phrase can, by implication be attributed to the historical Jesus. In other words, did Jesus really use the phrase or it was put on his lips by the early Christian

⁷³R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, 87.

⁷⁴P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 30 footnote No 59.

⁷⁵R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, 86.

⁷⁶R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St John*, 86.

tradition and for that matter John? If Jesus himself used the phrase then he “would have been the ultimate source from which John derived the phrase.”⁷⁷

R. Brown seems to give it a “distinct possibility”,⁷⁸ although not a certainty, that Jesus did make this kind of statements. This flows partly from his understanding of how the Gospel of John was composed.⁷⁹ He asserts that “no better candidate for authorship has been found than John, Son of Zebedee, one of the twelve.”⁸⁰ If this were the case it would indicate “a body of traditional material pertaining to the words and works of Jesus – material similar to what has gone into the synoptic Gospels, but material whose origins were independent of the synoptic tradition.”⁸¹ Again “if John, Son of Zebedee, is the source of the Johannine tradition, we might expect that his closeness as an eyewitness would mark his personal tradition with characteristics different from those of the official tradition (which would have lost some of its intimate eyewitness details in being preached by many different individuals).”⁸² This material was however, later “developed, written down and edited by John’s disciples.”⁸³ This is certainly a case for the historical value of the Gospel but it does not follow “that the *egōeimi* necessarily belonged to the first stage of eyewitness tradition.”⁸⁴ This is what confirms our opening statement that R. Brown gives it “a distinct possibility” without asserting its certainty.

Having thus pointed out the limitation in R. Brown’s approach, P.B. Harner posits that “the absolute *ego eimi* probably represents an early Christian attempt to formulate and depict the significance of Jesus, especially in terms of

⁷⁷P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 63.

⁷⁸P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 63.

⁷⁹Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 63.

⁸⁰R. BROWN, *New Testament Essays*, 196.

⁸¹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, XXXIV.

⁸²R. BROWN, *New Testament Essays*, 198.

⁸³P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 63.

⁸⁴P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 63.

his relationship to the Father.”⁸⁵ He finds the reasons for his conclusion as tying in with some factors concerning the ministry of Jesus as it is related in the synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. In the synoptics, “Jesus makes very few direct references to himself and hardly ever uses the ‘I am’ type of statement, absolutely or with a predicate. He is concerned instead to proclaim the imminence of God’s Kingdom and to demonstrate that in some ways this Kingdom is already partially present.”⁸⁶ However, within this framework is inserted “a certain implicit claim to authority.”⁸⁷ For instance his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners demonstrates God’s invitation to the kingdom, even the lowly and despised (Mark 2:15-17).⁸⁸ “He addresses God in the intimate, familial term *Abba*, “Father,” an expression that the Jews themselves evidently did not use in this way (Mark 14:36).”⁸⁹ Hence actions and words such as these strongly suggest Jesus’ “positive understanding of his own role in helping to inaugurate God’s kingdom.”⁹⁰ The problem, as P.B. Harner sees it, “is to relate this implicit claim to authority reflected in the synoptic accounts of Jesus’ ministry with the explicit assertions about himself that he is represented as making in the Fourth Gospel.”⁹¹

Also, in view of the possibility that Jesus spoke differently on different occasions, sometimes focusing on the coming of God’s kingdom, and at other times talked openly about himself, P.B. Harner argues that R. Brown is probably thinking in such “terms when he suggests that the Fourth Gospel may contain certain eyewitness details of Jesus’ ministry that were not taken up in the

⁸⁵ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁸⁶ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁸⁷ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁸⁸ Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁸⁹ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁹⁰ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁹¹ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

synoptic tradition.”⁹² The difficulty in such a view would be “the assumption that such an important part of Jesus’ proclamation would hardly be represented at all in the synoptic Gospels.”⁹³ One would expect that “if Jesus spoke explicitly about his own nature, his own understanding of his role, and his relationship to God,”⁹⁴ his followers “would have regarded these sayings as too important to omit from any account of Jesus’ ministry, since they would represent Jesus’ own explanation of the significance of his life and work.”⁹⁵

If we consider the above positions to be opposed to each other, then there is a third position we would say is even diametrically opposed to both. This latter position is the approach of J. Redford. He indicates in his book, *Bad, Mad or God?* that Jesus’ claim in John 10:30 “I and the Father are one” is a claim to divinity.⁹⁶ By this expression it is implicitly clear that “Jesus is joining the Father as *yhwehad*, sharing in the oneness of YHWH. This would be a form of idolatry and so certainly blasphemous.”⁹⁷ Jesus’ hearers certainly take it that way, and want to stone him. Thus “there seems no reason, therefore, apart from dogmatic prejudice against the historical Jesus having a high Christology himself, why ‘I and the Father are one’ should not go back to the historical Jesus, *together with the reaction of the hearers of Jesus that he was committing blasphemy by saying those words.*”⁹⁸ He thinks this is made even more evident by means of the ‘I am’ sayings and so he does not mince words in his conclusion:

The answer is simple and clear. Not only is Jesus Son in his own eyes but fully God as Son. We saw at the close of the last chapter that Jesus’ claim to be one with his Father is a claim to divinity and that historically it is authenticated by being

⁹²P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁹³P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁹⁴P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁹⁵P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 64-65.

⁹⁶Cf. J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 247-49.

⁹⁷J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 249 and 261.

⁹⁸J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 261.

discontinuous both with Judaism before Christ, which never identified a living human being as one with YHWH, and with the primitive church's Christology, which did not use this formulation in developing its doctrine about Christ. This is even more evident regarding the absolute I AM sayings in the Fourth Gospel. No Old Testament figure was identified as the anihu of Deutero-Isaiah in the history of Judaism; nor did the primitive church describe Jesus that way. The I AM sayings are therefore authenticated historically by the principle of double discontinuity.⁹⁹

So if R. Brown gives the historicity of the *egōeimi* only a possibility that P. B. Harner seems to deny, J. Redford gives it an all-out thumbs up! The latter would find company in E. Stauffer and J. Richter who also see the absolute *egōeimi* as going back to Jesus himself.¹⁰⁰ However, we should not lose sight of the good arguments put up by those who either give it a mere possibility or deny it altogether as well as the fact that those who assert its historical authenticity do not argue that every context in which it occurs is necessarily authentic.

1.6 Conclusion

This exploration has been interesting so far. Nevertheless we have only succeeded in laying the foundation on which we are to build. It should be indicated by now that our foundation certainly has not taken care of all the possible problems one could raise as far as introductory matters are concerned. We have however provided reasonable responses to most of the initial questions that we could imagine such as the frequency of the phrase, its use by John, the possible source and background, the context of the phrase as well as its historical authenticity. This initial investigation, minor as it may appear, is essential to what will follow. Our inquiry would simply be incomplete without them, just to say the least. In the next chapter we will be doing a detailed analysis of the selected texts.

⁹⁹J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 264.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. P. B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 36.

Chapter II

Analysis of Selected Texts

2 Introduction

We are now going to do a detailed analysis of some selected 'I am' sayings dwelling heavily on those that have overtones of an absolute sense. Therefore the texts to consider are John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24.28.58; 13:19 and 18:5.6.8. We will also do a brief survey of those 'I am' sayings that are predicated with one image or another. Our purpose is to dig deep into the treasure of meaning that can possibly be behind the Johannine use of the phrase.

2.1 Exegesis of John 4:26

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

This 'I am' saying is made in the context of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman as he makes his way back to Galilee from Judea (4:1-42). Jesus is here depicted as engaging in a conversation with the woman with an implicit aim of leading her to faith. The means he employs is a gradual self-revelation. The effectiveness of this means is seen in the growth of the woman's perception of Jesus.

She first sees him as ‘a Jew’ (v.9); a ‘sir’ (vv. 11.15); someone possibly greater than Jacob (v.12); then ‘a prophet’ (v.19) and finally ‘possibly the Christ’ (v.29).¹⁰¹

The statement in v. 26 appears the climax of Jesus’ gradual self-revelation to the woman. He “makes a claim about his identity”¹⁰² in response to the woman’s expressed hope in the coming messiah. There are several nuances in interpreting this statement or claim. P.B. Harner says “the words ‘he who is speaking to you’ do not belong to the predicate, as it might appear at first glance. That would give the meaningless translation, ‘I am he who is speaking to you.’ These words must be understood as standing in apposition with the subject, *egō*.”¹⁰³ Besides, “it is probable also that a predicate noun is to be understood from the preceding verse. In this sense, therefore, the meaning is ‘I who am speaking to you am he,’ that is, the Messiah or Christ just mentioned. To this extent we can interpret the passage with a reasonable degree of certainty.”¹⁰⁴

However, should one consider the possibility that the Johannine author may have intended this *egōeimi* in the absolute sense¹⁰⁵, we realize the above explanation would not suffice. L. Morris says “the use of the emphatic pronoun in this expression is in the style of deity (see on 8:58). There is no ‘he’ in the Greek. Jesus says, ‘I that speak to thee, I am.’”¹⁰⁶ To buttress his point he cites the comment of Hoskyns: “Jesus is more than either Jew or Samaritan had comprehended in the word ‘Christ’. He is the answer of God to the sin of the world.”¹⁰⁷ M. Ball asks why the *egōeimi* in 4:26 is framed so strangely when it could have been simply rendered

¹⁰¹ Cf. R. BROWN, *The Gospel of John, I-XII*, 170; Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel of John*, I, 420; Cf. D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 62 and 179; Cf. M. C. TENNEY, *John: the Gospel of Belief*, 95-6.

¹⁰² D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 179.

¹⁰³ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 46.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 273.

¹⁰⁷ L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 273.

“□γ□ □□μίο χριστος (cf. 1.20)?”¹⁰⁸ The answer probably lies “in John’s use of background material, for the words of 4.26 are almost a direct parallel to words in Isa. 52.6:

John 4.26: λέγει α□τ□ό □ησους□γ□ □□μ*ι*, ό λαλωνσοί

Isa. 52:6δι□τουτογνωσεται ό

λαόςμουτ□□νομά, μου□ντ□□μέ□□κεν□□τι□γ□ □□μ*ι* α□τ□ς □

λαλωνπάρειμ¹⁰⁹

M. Ball, following E. Stauffer’s opinion contends that the *egōeimi* in 4:26 should be understood in the absolute sense.¹¹⁰ M. Ball is supported by P.B. Harner who says:

The most cogent argument is the third, in which Stauffer draws attention to the close similarity between John 4:26 and Isaiah 52:6. The latter reads literally, ‘I am He, who is speaking’ (Hebrew anihuhamedabber). This is rendered in the Septuagint as *ego eimi autos ho lalon*, which is very similar to the words *ego eimi ho lalonsoi* in John 4:26. The close similarity between these two verses suggests that the *ego eimi* of John 4:26 may be understood in relation to the *anihu* of Second Isaiah.¹¹¹

For M. Ball, not only the words *egōeimi* but also “the phrase which accompanies them point to these words in Isaiah.”¹¹² Thus “the phrasing of Jesus’ words itself may say more than that he is messiah. It may point the reader back to these words in Isaiah, even if the Samaritan woman herself would not have seen such implications in Jesus’ words.”¹¹³

If this is the case: then Jesus’ claim to messiahship should be interpreted not only in the context of a debate with the Samaritan woman, but also in the context of Isaiah 52. In Isaiah the LORD had said that in *that day* the people would *know* that it

¹⁰⁸D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 179.

¹⁰⁹D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 179. (The emphasis are his)

¹¹⁰Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 46.

¹¹¹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 46-7.

¹¹²D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 179.

¹¹³D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 179.

is he who speaks. Now, when the woman says that she *knows* that messiah is coming (4.25), Jesus claims to be the one who speaks. By Jesus' 'I am' saying the woman is given the opportunity of becoming one of the people who know that it is Jesus who is the one who speaks that day. When Jesus says 'I am he who speaks,' he thus takes the words of Yahweh and applies them to himself.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, if the above is anything to go by, "then it would mean that this verse operates on two levels."¹¹⁵ On the first level Jesus claims to be the messiah the woman speaks about. On the second level:

Jesus' words make him out to be the fulfilment of the Lord's promise that the people would know his name, and also know that it is he who speaks. Jesus' identity as messiah is therefore an identity which includes an identification with Yahweh. Thus the verbal analogy of Jesus' words with the words of Yahweh in Isaiah calls for a radical reinterpretation of the first 'surface' level of meaning in Jesus' words.¹¹⁶

M. Ball further identifies "two levels of irony at work in Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman in v.10. On the first level, [...] the Samaritan woman is the victim of the irony, for she does not know that Jesus really is the messiah."¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the "readers who do not correctly understand the 'clue' within the text which points to a deeper understanding of Jesus' words become the victims. They do not know that the reason Jesus can offer living water is his close identification with God and not only the fact that he is messiah."¹¹⁸

When all the above factors are woven together, it becomes easier to understand why Jesus in this case is willing to admit "his messiahship prior to the

¹¹⁴D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 179-80.

¹¹⁵D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 180.

¹¹⁶D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 180.

¹¹⁷D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 180-1.

¹¹⁸D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 181.

trial”¹¹⁹ as opposed to the synoptic Gospels where he hides his identity. R. Brown has this to say:

It is interesting that Jesus, who does not give unqualified acceptance to the title of Messiah when it is offered to him by Jews, accepts it from a Samaritan. Perhaps the answer lies in the royal nationalistic connotations the term had in Judaism, while the Samaritan Taheb (although not devoid of nationalistic overtones) had more the aspect of a teacher and lawgiver.¹²⁰

2.2 Exegesis of 6:20

But he said to them, “it is I; do not be afraid.”

These words of Jesus to his terrified disciples in the boat are usually placed in the context of chapter 6 which is seen as a unit. One of the reasons for seeing this chapter as a unit is the function that the ‘I am’ sayings play in that narrative.¹²¹ M. Ball makes this remark:

For just as bread is the theme which links the feeding of the five thousand to Jesus’ discourse, so ἄρτος ἰσχυροῦ functions as a link between the incident on the lake and the discourse. Though different from those ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus’ discourse on the bread of life, the ἄρτος ἰσχυροῦ of 6.20 provides the verbal link between the two episodes. The theme of bread in the first part of the chapter (ἄρτος, vv. 5, 7, 9, 11, 13) and the words ἰσχυροῦ in the second part (v.20) are combined as a single phrase in the third (ἰσχυροῦ ἄρτος, vv. 35,41,48, 51). The words which identify Jesus to the disciples on the lake therefore show that this same Jesus is also the God-sent nourishment of the world. Consequently the words ἰσχυροῦ are part of an intricate structure in which John introduces a theme and returns to it later in order to develop its meaning further. The full content of what is meant by the words ἰσχυροῦ in John 6 cannot be determined until its last occurrence in 6.51.¹²²

Simply put, we have to look for the content of 6:20 within the context of the entire chapter. In the immediate context in which it occurs, there is no doubt that Jesus is simply identifying himself to his terrified disciples in the boat. “The function of the ἰσχυροῦ saying here is one of reassurance, and so is inextricably linked with the command not to fear. On this level Jesus’ saying is a recognition

¹¹⁹L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 273.

¹²⁰R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 173; cf. L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 273; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John I*, 441.

¹²¹Cf. D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 70.

¹²²D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 70.

formula, making known to the disciples that it is he, their friend, whom they know.”¹²³ E.A. Abbott comments similarly: “in the walking on the waters it is usual to assume that 6:20 $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ means ‘I am [indeed that which I appear to be],’ ‘I am [my very self],’ or, according to our English idiom, ‘It is I.’ This would accord with what is stated in the parallel Mark-Matthew, namely, that the disciples ‘thought they saw a phantasm.’ In opposition to this, Christ might naturally be supposed to say ‘I am [not a phantasm but] I [myself].”¹²⁴ Nevertheless it seems there is more at stake here than M. Ball has just pointed out. For R. Brown the statement in 6:20 is “a borderline case where one cannot be certain if a divine formula is meant.”¹²⁵

An indication that the *egō eimi* of 6:20 is far more than a recognition formula has already been hinted at in the citation above of M. Ball when he says, “though different from those ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus’ discourse on the bread of life, the $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ of 6.20 provides a verbal link between the two episodes”¹²⁶ that is the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the lake. The theme of the bread of life and the *ego eimi* of v. 20 “are combined in a single phrase [...] $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota \acute{\omicron} \acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ”¹²⁷. Thus “the words which identify Jesus to the disciples on the lake therefore show that this same Jesus is the God-sent nourishment of the world.”¹²⁸ This position is reinforced by M. Ball by pitching 6:20 against its closest Old Testament parallels, where “the command not to fear may be associated with the assurance of the LORD.”¹²⁹ He points out that: “the verb ‘to fear’ ($\phi\omicron\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$) is preceded by the negative word of command $\mu\grave{\eta}$ 80 times in the LXX. Of the 66 occurrences in the Old Testament (not including the Apocrypha), 36 occur in the mouth of God or of an

¹²³D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 181.

¹²⁴E.A. ABBOTT, *Johannine Grammar*, 182.

¹²⁵R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 252.

¹²⁶D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 70.

¹²⁷D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 70.

¹²⁸D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 70.

¹²⁹D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 181.

angel; in a further twelve, the reason given not to fear is the presence of God.”¹³⁰ He considers “most striking”¹³¹ those occurrences where “the command not to fear is accompanied by the words $\square\gamma\square\square\square\mu\iota$ ”¹³² and these are usually found on the lips of God e.g. (Gen 26:24; 46:3; Jer 1:18; 17; 42:11; 46:28). That this command occurs frequently on the lips of God however, “may not in itself indicate to the reader of John’s Gospel that Jesus’ words on the lake are anything more than a simple reassurance that the disciples need not be afraid.”¹³³ Nevertheless, the reader who is “familiar with the Old Testament would find Jesus’ simple words on the lake to be pregnant with meaning.”¹³⁴ This is in view of the fact that “the occurrences of the phrase in the Old Testament cited above are accompanied by the words $\square\gamma\square\square\square\mu\iota$ in the LXX, and the instances in Jeremiah occur in the context of deliverance.”¹³⁵

Moreover, “since none of the $\square\gamma\square\square\square\mu\iota$ sayings cited above can be regarded as absolute sayings,”¹³⁶ for which reason close proximity can be contested, M. Ball adds Isaiah 43. Here Israel is constantly urged not to fear for the Lord is with her. The greatest significance is given to the similarity between John 6:20 and Isa 43.5:

John 6:20 $\square\gamma\square\square\square\mu\iota\square\square\sigma\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$

Isa. 43.5 $\mu\iota\square\square\sigma\beta\omicron\square\square\tau\mu\epsilon\tau\square\sigma\omicron\square\square\square\mu\iota$ ¹³⁷

According to the prophet Isaiah:

The command of the Lord for Israel not to fear is accompanied in both Isaiah and Jeremiah by the idea that he is savior. It is also in this capacity that Jesus comes to the disciples on the lake and commands them not to fear. Thus it can be said that in uttering Ἐγώεἰμι Jesus identifies himself with the performance of the properly

¹³⁰D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 181-2.

¹³¹D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³²D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³³D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³⁴D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³⁵D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³⁶D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 182.

¹³⁷D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 183 (emphasis his).

divine action of dominating a chaotic sea and rescuing people from its distress. Thus the ἐγώεἰμι identifies Jesus as the one acting on behalf of Yahweh in this situation.¹³⁸

According to M. Ball it is not merely the words *egōeimi* but “the combination of these words with the command not to fear, as well as the miraculous context of the saying, that point to the words of Yahweh, the savior of Israel.”¹³⁹

Furthermore we also notice that this is the only *egōeimi* without a predicate in John’s Gospel that is also paralleled in the synoptic tradition. “Jesus’ words in John 6:20 are the same as in Mark 6:50 and Matthew 14:27, except that the synoptic parallels have an additional word of reassurance at the beginning: ‘take heart, *egōeimi*, do not be afraid.’”¹⁴⁰ For R. Brown:

since this expression occurs in both the synoptic and Johannine forms of the story, it may be considered as belonging to the primitive form of the tradition. But the fourth evangelist has taken the expression, neutral in itself [...], and made it a leitmotiv of the Gospel as that form of the divine name which the Father has given to Jesus and by which he identifies himself. [...] In John the special emphasis on ego eimi in the rest of the Gospel does seem to orient this story more precisely, that is, the majesty of Jesus is that he can bear the divine name.¹⁴¹

We may conclude with M. Ball that:

it seems better therefore to allow for the possibility that the words here have a double meaning. On one level they identify Jesus to the disciples in a purely human way. At the same time their formulation points to a deeper meaning. Jesus identifies himself with the saving acts and words of Yahweh and so this saying too speaks of Jesus’ identity, an identity that involves intimate identification with the words and deeds of God (cf. 4.34; 5.36). When Jesus calls out to his disciples, ἐγώεἰμι μη φοβησθε, he speaks not just as their friend but also speaks the words of the Lord. The Old Testament background to Jesus’ assertion gives a theological explanation for his ability to walk on the water. It is because of his intimate identification with God that he is able to draw near on the sea and to declare ‘It is I: do not be afraid.’ Unless the reader sees both levels to Jesus’ words, he/she may become the victim of irony, recognizing that it is Jesus who walks on the water, but failing to recognize who Jesus really is.¹⁴²

¹³⁸D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 183.

¹³⁹D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 184.

¹⁴⁰P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 47.

¹⁴¹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 254-5.

¹⁴²D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 185.

2.3 Exegesis of John 8:24.28.58

John 8:12-59 in which the three 'I am' sayings are found is usually seen as having the same context with the previous chapter 7. That is, the Feast of Tabernacles remains the background to the discourse in this section.¹⁴³ R. Brown points out that "the theme of light (8:12) fits into the Tabernacles motifs. Moreover, there is a certain unity between 7 and 8 (without the story of the adulteress) since 7 begins with the theme of Jesus going up to the feast of Tabernacles in secret (*en krypto*: 7:10) and 8 ends with the theme of Jesus' hiding himself (*kryptein*)."¹⁴⁴ "As a means of separating the theological context of the individual phases of the discourse"¹⁴⁵, R. Schnackenburg makes the following division of the text:

1. Jesus the Light of the world. Dispute with the unbelievers: his knowledge and their ignorance (8:12-20);
2. Jesus' origin from above and their origin from below (8:21-29);
3. Jesus' freedom and their bondage (8:30-36).
4. Descent from Abraham and descent from the devil (8:37-47)
5. Jesus' union with God and precedence over Abraham (8:48-59).¹⁴⁶

Following this division we realize that the first two 'I am' sayings that is 8:24.28 are found in the context of the discussion over "Jesus' origin from above and their origin from below (8:21-29)." The last 'I am' saying is in the context of the discussion on "Jesus' union with God and precedence over Abraham (8:48-59)." Notwithstanding the division, 8:12-59 can be seen as a literary unit. In the words of

¹⁴³ Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 187; Also Cf. L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 435.

¹⁴⁴ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 342.

¹⁴⁵ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 188.

¹⁴⁶ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 188; D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, "Jn 8.12-59 can be divided into three main sections. Each begins with Jesus speaking to his opponents. Πάλιν οὖν... ἐλάλησεν (v. 12); εἶπεν οὖν παλιν (v. 21); ἐλεγεν οὖν (v. 31). Each section also closes with a narrative comment. The first concludes by stating that Jesus' words had been spoken in the temple and that he had not been arrested because his hour had not yet come (v. 21); the second with the statement that many believed because of Jesus' words (v. 30); and the final section with the comment that Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple (v. 59)." 80-1.

M. Ball “the words $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ (certainly form an inclusio to the section and so confirm that it is to be regarded as a literary unit.”¹⁴⁷

2.3.1 Exegesis of 8:24

*“I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins
unless you believe that **I am he.**”*

From the onset in v12 we realize that the presentation of a revelatory discourse is similar to the one in 7:37-38.¹⁴⁸ In 7:37-38 he presents himself as the source or spring of living water to which he invites all the thirsty. Here (8:12) he “reveals himself as the light of the world, and promises anyone who follows him the light of life.”¹⁴⁹ The invitation in both cases “has the same structure, but the preceding self-predication ($\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ (+ metaphor) gives it the full form of the soteriological saying of the revealer”¹⁵⁰. We may infer from this that the Johannine author is building on a revelatory discourse by the ‘I am’ sayings in vv. 24; 28 and 58. The attack on Jesus in v.13 by the Pharisees can be seen as directed towards his claim, “which emerges from his discourse, most notably from the theophany formula $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ ([...]) vv.24, 28, 58)”.¹⁵¹

Again we notice a widening gap between Jesus and his opponents. He invites them to the light of life but they constantly show their unwillingness to accept him.

¹⁴⁷D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 81; “As well as forming an inclusio, Jesus’ claims made by means of $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ are central to the debate with the Jews. The first $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ (v. 12) sets out a claim of Jesus. The second (v. 18) concerns the validity of Jesus’ testimony and his right to make such a claim. The third (v. 24) and the fourth (v. 28) create an ambiguity concerning Jesus’ identity (cf. v. 25). The final $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ removes that ambiguity in such a way as to anger Jesus’ hearers and conclude the debate (v. 59). it is surely significant that a claim involving $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ both begins (v. 12) and ends (v. 58) a debate concerning Jesus’ identity and authority and that claims involving $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ (vv. 18, 24, 28) also form an essential part of the development of this debate.” 82.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 189; and R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 343.

¹⁴⁹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 189.

¹⁵⁰R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 189.

¹⁵¹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 192.

Thus from v. 21 Jesus repeats the warning he had already issued in 7:33-34.¹⁵² By rejecting Jesus, the light of life, “they are moving towards death and damnation. The threat of death assumes the word of revelation in 8:12: only the person who follows Jesus, the light of the world, will escape from the realm of darkness and death.”¹⁵³ It is in this light that the terms ‘sin’ and ‘die’ are clarified. “Sin is walking in darkness, in the domain of death, and ‘die’ means to be finally subject to this realm.”¹⁵⁴ Their sin (singular) is unbelief that is “the deliberate refusal to follow the bringer of salvation. This is the real sin because through it a human being who, as a result of his sins (plural, v. 24), is in the sphere of non-salvation rejects the one possibility of salvation offered to him by God in his merciful love (cf. 3:16-18).”¹⁵⁵ The Johannine author sees “an unbreakable link between human sinfulness and unbelief (cf. 3:19-21). It is a vicious circle (cf. 8:44-47), which man, through faith, not only must break out of, but can break out of.”¹⁵⁶ Thus in this verse 24 the author has Jesus repeat his warning but also indicates the way out for them. The way out is faith in whom he claims to be: ‘I am’.

It is undoubtedly significant that here, “the meaning of *egōeimi* is explicitly presented as an object of faith.”¹⁵⁷ Apprehending “this meaning is a matter of the utmost importance, for otherwise men will have no hope of receiving life and forgiveness of sins.”¹⁵⁸ “These aspects of the meaning of *egōeimi* indicate that the phrase is used here in the same solemn and decisive sense as in 13:19 that is, as a self-contained expression signifying the unity of the son and the Father.”¹⁵⁹ That

¹⁵²Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 197.

¹⁵³R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 197.

¹⁵⁴Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 197.

¹⁵⁵R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 197-8.

¹⁵⁶R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 198.

¹⁵⁷P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

¹⁵⁸P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

¹⁵⁹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 43; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, “The man who introduces himself with this formula is saying something important and

would mean that “the *egōeimi* in 8:24 is intended to be understood as complete and meaningful in itself.”¹⁶⁰ However, that a double meaning is also intended cannot be denied: “when Jesus speaks the words *egōeimi*, the Jews evidently understood it to mean ‘I am the one.’ They mentally supply a predicate. But since they are uncertain exactly what this predicate should be, they ask, ‘who are you?’ (v. 25).”¹⁶¹

We can press our discussion on with reference to an observation made by M. Ball. Since we are not sure what it means to believe ‘that I am’ in order to avoid the coming death in sins,¹⁶² he observes that “a discussion of the background material must address the question of whether the phrase $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ can itself be the content of belief (or even a title) that would be understood by the implied reader as a way to escape from death in their sins.”¹⁶³ We have pointed out with P.B. Harner earlier in this work that a definite background or source of the Johannine ‘I am’ sayings cannot be identified. Nevertheless it is still valid to compare and contrast the available material, as M. Ball does, if we are to arrive at a point close to the Johannine author’s intention in using the ‘I am’ sayings.

In this light F.J. Moloney simplifies the matter as follows:

the LXX, and especially LXX Deutero-Isaiah, uses the expression *ego eimi* to insist that YHWH is revealed as the unique God of Israel over against all other claimants (cf. LXX Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 45:18; 46:4; 48:12). Using the same formula Jesus reveals his unique claim to be the presence of the divine in the human story. If “the Jews” believe that Jesus is the revelation of the Father they will bridge the gulf between “below” and “above” that is leading them to death in their sins.¹⁶⁴

R. Schnackenburg also thinks that the *egōeimi* of John’s Gospel derives:

unprecedented about his ‘I’. it is clear that here an existing, preformed, phrase is being used, as again before the disciples in 13:19.” 199.

¹⁶⁰P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

¹⁶¹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

¹⁶² Cf. D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 90.

¹⁶³D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 90.

¹⁶⁴F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 270-1.

from the language of God in the Old Testament. In this formula, which can vary in details ('I Yahweh', 'I God', 'It is I', etc.), Yahweh indicates his uniqueness, exalted position, might and superiority, in short, his unique divine nature and activity, above all in his guidance of his chosen people towards salvation. It is the Old Testament revelation formula which the Johannine Jesus, as the revealer of the New Testament, claims for himself. In him, he is saying, God is present to reveal his eschatological salvation and offer it to men. The formula came into the fourth evangelist's language through the Septuagint, and John may have introduced it first in the address to the disciples at the christophany at the walking on the lake (6:20).¹⁶⁵

M. Ball analysis of the use of *anihu* in Isaiah which he thinks "is suggestive for the use of ἄγωμαι in Jesus' mouth."¹⁶⁶ He makes this intriguing observation:

The Isaianic context speaks of Yahweh as the only savior because he is the only God. Anihu speaks of the exclusive divinity of Yahweh as is confirmed by the repetition of the phrase in Isa. 43.13: 'I am God, and also henceforth I am he...' Thus the Johannine Jesus takes words which, in the context of Isaiah, expressed the exclusive claim of Yahweh to be the Savior of Israel. The clause 'to know and believe that I am' thus carries with it an exclusive soteriological function which explain why Jesus can say that those who do not 'believe that I am' will die in their sins (8.24). In John Jesus has been given this exclusive soteriological function that in Isaiah was reserved for God alone (cf. Jn 3.17; 4.42; 10.9). Jesus can use the words ἄγωμαι for himself in this way, because of his close identification with the Father; he does nothing on his own authority but speaks only as the Father has taught him (8.24).¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, the following verses 25 and 26 are not easy to reconcile with the one before that is v24. "It is unlikely that the Jews perceived the full implications of Jesus' words. But they caught enough to discern that Jesus was making a large claim and the outrageousness of this claim (as it seemed to them) caused them to explode into the question 'who are you?'"¹⁶⁸ Jesus' answer to their question is not certain. With reference to the "context and the phrasing of the Greek,"¹⁶⁹ Schnackenburg thinks "it should probably be translated 'why do I talk to

¹⁶⁵R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 199-200.

¹⁶⁶D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 190.

¹⁶⁷D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 190.

¹⁶⁸L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 448; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, "The emphatic *σὺ* implies rejection, even a challenge: 'why do you give yourself such airs?'" 200.

¹⁶⁹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 200.

you at all?’ or ‘And I still talk to you!’¹⁷⁰ Jesus may have realized the uselessness in seeking to further convince men who had already rejected his claim. This “translation is linguistically not only possible but also, as the Greek Fathers’ interpretation shows, indicated.”¹⁷¹

Whatever else can be said about vv. 25.26, their essence lies in their contribution to the “discussion of Christ’s Person and of His relation to the Father. There is a strong affirmation of the unity between them, and a reference to Christ’s death. This concept of the death on the cross of one who was one with the Father is the great central thought of this Gospel.”¹⁷² V. 27 is quite odd since it occurs “in a context in which Jesus has been speaking so emphatically about himself.”¹⁷³ It seems to indicate “a widening of the rift between Jesus and the Jews. They do not even understand that in everything he says Jesus appeals to the Father. For them the Father is an unknown God (cf. 8:19) – how can they understand Jesus?”¹⁷⁴

2.3.2 Exegesis of 8:28

So Jesus said, “when you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing of my own authority but speaks thus as the Father taught me...”

Since the prejudice of his listeners has precluded them from understanding him, “Jesus makes a statement which refers to the future (γνωσεσθε).”¹⁷⁵ They will come to knowledge of who he is at the time the son of man is lifted up. What is

¹⁷⁰R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 200.

¹⁷¹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 200; “The accusative τηνάρχην, on this interpretation, is used adverbially with the meaning ‘at all’ (Greek Fathers: όλως). The ότι can be understood as a generalizing relative pronoun (= ό τι) giving a (slightly Irish flavoured) question ‘what is it at all that I am saying to you?’ PsClemtom 6:11 has a direct question: τί και τηνάρχην διαλεγομαι; [...]. The kai, as often in questions, fits this meaning very well.” 201; cf. L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 448-9.

¹⁷²L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 448.

¹⁷³R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 201.

¹⁷⁴R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 201.

¹⁷⁵R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 202.

immediately evident is that “the content of this knowledge is phrased in exactly the same way as in v. 24 ἐγώεἰμι and there is a clear connection between the two verses: what they do not believe now, even though it is their only chance of escaping death, they will realize then.”¹⁷⁶ This *egōeimi* can be seen to be absolute or complete in itself. “After the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus, men will realize who he is by perceiving his unity with the Father. This unity is a present reality, [...] but it is a unity that men will be able to perceive only after the glorification of Jesus.”¹⁷⁷ Some scholars however, think the ‘son of man’ in the preceding clause can be supplied as the predicate.¹⁷⁸ R. Schnackenburg rejects this interpretation for the reasons that:

On purely linguistic grounds it is possible to supply ‘the Son of man’ after ὁ υἱοῦ ἀνθρώπου from the previous clause, but this interpretation should be rejected for the following reasons: (1) It would obscure the connection with v. 24, and v. 28 must be a deliberate echo of that. (2) Jesus never says directly, ‘I am the Son of man’. In 9:35-37 this self-testimony is implied, but the ὁ υἱοῦ ἀνθρώπου is avoided. Perhaps John too preserves the knowledge that Jesus only used the title ‘Son of man’ in the third person. (3) The title ‘Son of man’ is associated with a particular complex of ideas, especially ‘exaltation’ and ‘glorification’ (cf. vol. 1, pp. 530ff), and is introduced here in the wake of the word ὑψοῦσθαι. The statement of the main clause stands on its own.¹⁷⁹

8:28 also talks about the ‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man. “Elsewhere in John, the ‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man has a twofold reference to crucifixion and exaltation to heaven [...]. The same *double entendre* appears here.”¹⁸⁰ L. Morris also sees the possibility of a double meaning in the use of the phrase: “Jesus was ‘lifted’ on the cross, and He was also exalted in a deeper sense, for His greatest glory consists in His accepting the shame and the humiliation of the cross in order that

¹⁷⁶R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 202.

¹⁷⁷P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 44.

¹⁷⁸Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 44; cf. D. BURKETT, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, 159; cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 202; B. WITHERINGTON II, *John’s Wisdom*, talks about “the divine son of man referred to in Dan 7, who is the representative of both God and God’s people.” 175.

¹⁷⁹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John II*, 202.

¹⁸⁰D. BURKETT, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, 159; also cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 38.

thereby He might bring salvation to sinful men.”¹⁸¹ This cannot be realized before the crucifixion. Besides “the enthronement of the son of the Man in heavenly glory is his vindication by God, through which all people will eventually know the truth of his claim, ‘I am’.”¹⁸² “There is a revelatory aspect of the cross, and after the crucifixion those who reflect on it will be in a position to appreciate that Jesus is indeed more than man.”¹⁸³

Finally, it is inconceivable to notice the close connection between v. 24 and v. 28 without realizing the close relationship between “believing that” and “knowing that” both connected to *egō eimi*. By believing in Jesus one enters in a close relationship with him, and experience him more and more. So he ends up knowing better and better who he is.

2.3.3 Exegesis of 8:58

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Scholars have no doubt that the use of *ego eimi* in this instance is in the absolute sense.¹⁸⁴ “The context here furnishes no predicate that can be understood with the phrase, and the *egō eimi* must be regarded as complete and meaningful in itself.”¹⁸⁵ This absolute ‘I am’ saying “comes as the climax of a discussion about Jesus’ identity and is the answer to earlier questions on this subject: ‘Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?’ (8:53; cf. 4:12); and; ‘who is it that you claim to be?’ (v. 53). The issue of Jesus’ identity also lies behind the question that prompts this climactic ‘I am’ saying (v. 57).”¹⁸⁶ This climactic statement is preceded by a solemn declaration; “ἀμην ἀμην λέγουσιν. Such an introduction stresses the

¹⁸¹L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 452.

¹⁸²D. BURKETT, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, 159.

¹⁸³L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 452.

¹⁸⁴Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 37; and R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 360.

¹⁸⁵P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 39.

¹⁸⁶R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 195.

importance of Jesus' claim: *πριν Ἀβρααμ γενεσθαι ἐγώεἰμι.*¹⁸⁷ R. Brown says "some Western evidence, including Bezae, omits the verb (*ginesthai*) and has simply: 'Before Abraham I am.'¹⁸⁸ What is noteworthy, however, is that "in this verse the distinction is obvious between *ginesthai*, which is used of mortals, and the divine use of *einai*, 'to be,' in the form 'I AM.'¹⁸⁹ "Not only does the one verb express coming into existence while the other expresses existence itself, but the change in tense is evocative. Immediately 'there is a contrast between the created and the uncreated, and the temporal and the eternal'.¹⁹⁰ R. Brown highlights this distinction with reference to the Prologue as well as the Psalms: "the Word *was*, but through him all things *came into being*. In the OT the same distinction is found in the address to Yahweh in Ps XC 2: 'Before the mountains *came into being* ... from age to age you *are*.'¹⁹¹

Curiously M. Ball points out that "the construction of Jesus' statement itself shows that his claim is not simply to pre-existence; for that, Jesus could have claimed that he was (*ἦμην*, imperfect of *εἶμι*), or even came into existence (*ἐγενομην*) before Abraham. The reaction of the Jews emphasizes the significance of such a phrase to the reader."¹⁹² With this assertion in v. 58 "no clearer implication of divinity is found in the Gospel tradition, and the 'Jews' recognize this implication."¹⁹³ His audience might have had Lev. 24 in mind. "Leviticus xxiv 16 had commanded: 'He who blasphemes *the name* of the Lord shall be put to death; all

¹⁸⁷D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 91; L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, "His 'verily, verily' marks this out as an important and emphatic statement." 473.

¹⁸⁸R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 360.

¹⁸⁹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 360; cf. D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 92; cf. L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 473.

¹⁹⁰D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 92.

¹⁹¹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 360.

¹⁹²D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 92.

¹⁹³R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 367.

the congregation shall stone him.”¹⁹⁴ However, R. Brown also asserts that “we are not certain what the legal definition of blasphemy was in Jesus’ time; but in John’s account the use of the divine name represented by *egōeimi* seems to be sufficient, for the Jews seek to carry out the command of Leviticus.”¹⁹⁵

2.4 Exegesis of 13:19

I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

As in the previous instance of *egōeimi* in 8:58, here too the phrase is used in an absolute sense. P.B. Harner stresses this point as to leaving nothing wanting: “we should note too that the *egōeimi* here must be regarded as complete in itself. It cannot be an abbreviated form of the longer expression, *egōeimi* with a predicate, since the context offers no predicate that can be supplied. The phrase here is a distinct, self-contained form of expression that is meaningful in itself.”¹⁹⁶

Being without a predicate, the meaning of the *egōeimi* in this context is no easy task to discover. M. Ball indicates the division among scholars who are basically in two camps. Whereas some scholars such as Beasley-Murray “regards vv.18-19 as ‘a vague announcement of the impending betrayal of Jesus’”¹⁹⁷ others see v.19 “in the light of 8.28.”¹⁹⁸ M. Ball himself argues for 8.28 shedding light on 13.19 but does not lose sight of the basic differences in the two texts:

¹⁹⁴R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 367.

¹⁹⁵R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 367.

¹⁹⁶P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 38; cf. D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel, 117; R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, “some would supply an implicit predicate, ‘the Messiah’ because of the rabbinical understanding of Ps xli [...]. However, the connection of the psalm with the Davidic Messiah is not hinted at by John, and we should probably interpret this as an absolute *ego eimi* (vol.29, p.533) on the analogy of other passages like John viii 58 where there is nothing to suggest “Messiah” as predicate.” 555.

¹⁹⁷D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel, 117.

¹⁹⁸D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel, 118.

In 8.28 Jesus' opponents are told that when he is lifted up, then they will know that ἐγώεἰμι; while in 13.19 the disciples are told that when Jesus' prediction (particularly about his betrayal) occurs it is so they will believe that ἐγώεἰμι. There is a distinction between the function of the 'I am' which will be revealed to Jesus' opponents when he is on the cross and that of the 'I am' which will be revealed to his disciples when his words come true. The former 'I am' has overtones of judgment (cf. 8.24); the latter encouragement to belief. Although the form of these two sayings is similar and the content of what ἐγώεἰμι means may be the same, their function is different.¹⁹⁹

The previous v.18 announces the betrayal that would be in accord with the scriptures. Then the verse under discussion (v.19) in which the *egōeimi* occurs gives us the reason the betrayal is being announced in advance: "that, when Jesus' words are fulfilled, faith will result rather than disbelief."²⁰⁰ So the *egōeimi* is the "object of belief. It is not self-evident, John implies, but is disclosed to faith and appropriated in faith."²⁰¹ We also see the *egōeimi* being the object of either "believing" (as in 8.24) or "knowing" (as in 8.28). P. B. Harner says "John makes no sharp distinction, however, between 'knowing' and 'believing,' and this respect this verse may be regarded as parallel to the others."²⁰² With this he could compare "the use of *egōeimi* as the object of the verbs 'believe' or 'know'" with "Yahweh's words in Isaiah 43:10, 'that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he [Septuagint *egōeimi*]."²⁰³ He then draws this conclusion: "By using the phrase in this way John underlines its solemn nature as an authoritative statement that only Jesus can make and only those who believe in him can understand."

D. A. Carson adds his voice to explain why Jesus makes this statement: "although he is about to be betrayed, Jesus is not a hapless victim. Even the treachery of Judas can only serve the redemptive purposes of the mission on which Jesus has been sent. [...]. In the event, the disciples found it desperately difficult to

¹⁹⁹D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 118.

²⁰⁰D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 112.

²⁰¹P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 37.

²⁰²P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 37.

²⁰³P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 37; cf. D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 199.

come to terms with the cross; they would have found it impossible without this preparation, preparation that recurs in the next chapters (e.g. 14:29).”²⁰⁴

The preceding v. 20 is also informative as P.B. Harnerrighly points out. It indicates that the disciples:

Will realize that to receive Jesus is to receive the Father who sent him, and with this realization they will grasp the meaning of Jesus’ statement, *ego eimi*. In receiving one they receive the other, because the two are one within this dynamic context of the mission of service that the disciples are to undertake after Jesus’ departure. Here we have a key to understanding another aspect of John’s of the absolute *ego eimi*. It indicates the unity of the Father and the Son, a unity that only Jesus can speak of during his lifetime but which others will be able to perceive in faith after his glorification and within the context of the continuing mission of his followers. In these ways John qualifies very carefully his reference to the unity of the Son with the Father. It is only within this specific context, he indicates, that such a unity can properly be expressed and understood.²⁰⁵

2.5 Exegesis of 18:5.6.8

They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.”

*Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.*v.5

When he said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. v.6

*Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go.”*v.8

If we agree with M. Ball that “18.1-11 forms a unit, though it is closely connected with the trial of Jesus that follows (vv.12-27,)”²⁰⁶ then we must pursue the meaning of the *egōeimi* statements within this context though without detaching it completely from the rest of its larger context. “Immediately before Jesus’ arrest, he has prayed for his glorification in his final hour (17.1, 4, 5) as well as for the protection of the disciples from evil (17.15). This chapter is therefore set in the context of the fulfilment of Jesus’ hour.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 471.

²⁰⁵P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 39.

²⁰⁶D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 137.

²⁰⁷D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 137.

We also notice with M. Ball that:

the action of vv.1-9 can be seen to centre around Jesus' self-declaration in vv. 5,6 and 8. The scene dramatically focuses on the encounter between Jesus and Judas. Jesus commands the action in v.1. Judas commands the action in vv. 2 and 3. Jesus takes over again in verse 4. Jesus declares himself in v. 5 at which Judas' presence is reemphasized before Jesus' self-declaration is reiterated by the narrator (v. 6) and then repeated by Jesus himself (v. 8).²⁰⁸

Stretching the analyses to include vv.10-11, we see that “there are two major characters who dictate the action, Jesus and Judas; two minor characters, who are caught up in the action, Peter and Malchus; and two groups, the disciples and the ‘band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees’ (v.3).”²⁰⁹

That John probably had a double meaning in mind in his use of *egōēimi* in 18:5, 6 and 8 cannot be doubted. It is found on the lips of Jesus in response to the soldiers and officers who are seeking ‘Jesus of Nazareth’. P.B. Harner says that;

In one sense it is obvious that a predicate is to be supplied. Jesus declares, ‘I am he,’ the Jesus of Nazareth whom they are seeking.²¹⁰ In verse 6, however, John indicates that the phrase is also intended in an absolute sense. Here he relates that when Jesus said *egōēimi*, the soldiers and officers ‘drew back and fell to the ground’ (v.6). In this way John wishes to express his belief that such an attitude of awe and reverence is the only fitting response to Jesus’ words, *egōēimi*. At this point the phrase clearly implies more than the everyday meaning of self-identification.²¹¹

Besides P.B. Harner sees the preceding explanatory comment to v.8, “this was to fulfil the words which he had spoken, ‘of those whom you gave to me I lost not one’” as indicative of the absolute sense of *egōēimi*. “In this way John connects the words *egōēimi* with the belief that in Jesus men find deliverance and receive life

²⁰⁸D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 138.

²⁰⁹D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 139.

²¹⁰Cf. D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, “seldom are commentators so unanimous as to the fact on one level these words of Jesus must be taken as a simple self-identification.” 141.

²¹¹P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 45; D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, “The narrator’s repetition of *ἐγώ εἰμι* and the reaction of the onlookers to those words urges the reader to look for a double-meaning to the phrase ‘I am’. For, while it is clear that Jesus’ words must be taken as self-identification, such a use in itself cannot explain the captors’ peculiar reaction.” 142.

itself. This belief is the positive counterpart to the thought of 8:24 that men will die in their sins unless they believe Jesus' statement *egōeimi*. John reinforces this connection in 18:14 by reminding the reader of Caiaphas' statement that 'it was expedient that one man should die for the people' (cf. 11:49-52)."²¹²

Jesus is presented as knowing what would happen to him. By this the author insists that "Jesus offers up his life in obedience to his Father, not as a pathetic martyr buffeted by the ill winds of a cruel fate. In full knowledge of what was to befall him, Jesus *went out* (of the enclosed olive grove, apparently) and asked his question."²¹³ By asking the question, "the initiative passes to Jesus".²¹⁴ Jesus' life would not be taken away from him, rather he lays it down of his own accord (10:18). "Jesus had given Judas permission to leave the Last Supper to betray him (xiii 27); now he will permit Judas and his forces to arrest him."²¹⁵ That Jesus is fully in control of the situation is further indicated by the reaction of his would-be arresters who 'drew back and fell to the ground' (v.6).²¹⁶

Moreover, further nuances could be seen in the question 'whom do you seek?' R. Brown observes that "Jesus asks of the forces led by the renegade disciple a question similar to that which he had posed to his first disciples ('what are you looking for?' [I 38]). Those disciples had followed him looking for life: Judas' party has come looking for Jesus' death."²¹⁷ One could say even at this moment Jesus was still offering his opponents the opportunity to choose life.

Finally, M. Ball thinks the comment "Judas, who betrayed him was standing with them" (v. 5) inserted in the scene "when Jesus declared himself through the

²¹²P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 45; Cf. D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 143.

²¹³D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 577-8.

²¹⁴R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John, III*, 223.

²¹⁵R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 818.

²¹⁶D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 140.

²¹⁷R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 818.

words ἐγώεἰμι must surely point the reader back to Jesus' prediction of his betrayal in which he stated 'I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that 'ἐγώεἰμι' (13:19)."²¹⁸ Therefore the reference to 13.19 "shows that now is the time that Jesus' words there are to be fulfilled. As such this scene should lead the disciples to belief."²¹⁹

2.6 A Brief Survey of the 'I am' Sayings with Predicate

Since the task we are undertaking is to examine how the Johannine author's use of the 'I am' sayings help our understanding of the Christ-event, it is only appropriate that we also examine what Jesus claims for himself by means of the ἐγώεἰμι with predicate, however, briefly. We believe this survey will throw some light when we look at the implications of ἐγώεἰμι on the Christ-event in chapter III. In this light we will look at Christ as the bread of life; the light of the world; the Good Shepherd; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the True vine.

2.6.1 *The Bread of Life (6:35.48.51)*

In the discourse on the bread of life in John 6, Jesus three times declares himself the bread of life (6:35.48.51). Jesus feeds about 5000 men with five barley loaves and two fish; and walks on the water across the sea to Capernaum. In an ensuing dialogue with those who come looking for him, he makes a claim about himself being the living bread that comes down from heaven which men may eat and not die. He does this by means of the *egōeimi*. Bread had such a depth of symbolism that its use here cannot be glossed over. The multiplication of bread and

²¹⁸D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 143.

²¹⁹D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 143; Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 224.

feeding of the multitudes was “certainly a prophetic sign of the transformation which could take place once the spirit had poured forth his gift of love upon mankind.”²²⁰ Bread was “not only a symbol of the good things of creation”²²¹ but much more. “The scriptures had used bread as a symbol of God’s revelation to man.”²²² Among the prophets, Amos takes the pride of place. He had “warned Israel that a time would come when men would starve not only for material bread but for the word of God, for God would have ceased to address this people who obstinately refused to believe (Am 8:11).”²²³ Moreover “Personified Wisdom often compares her teaching to nourishing and pleasant-tasting bread (e.g., Pr 9:5).”²²⁴

In similar vein “the gospel tradition presented Jesus as the Good Shepherd not primarily because he had given them food for their stomachs, but because as a teacher he broke the bread of God’s word for the multitudes.”²²⁵ For instance “in the account of Mk 6:30ff. Jesus has compassion on the crowds, who are like sheep without a shepherd. He first feeds them with God’s word (v. 34), and only afterwards feeds them with material bread. It is the word of revelation that is really the ‘staff of life’.”²²⁶ And so it is written that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Dt 8:3)”²²⁷

In this discourse however, the Johannine author takes this symbolism a step further. Not only is Jesus “the giver of bread (i.e., a teacher of divine revelation), but he is himself the Bread; he is himself the Revelation.”²²⁸ What is made clear here by means of *egōeimi* predicated by “the bread of life” is that “Jesus is mediator between

²²⁰ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²¹ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²² J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²³ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²⁴ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²⁵ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²⁶ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²⁷ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

²²⁸ J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 112.

God and man, not simply as a ‘go-between’ who comes from God to man as the bearer of revelation or as the dispenser of gifts. Jesus *is* the meeting place between God and man. The revelation which he brings about God is not a message external to himself. He *is* the revelation.”²²⁹

Furthermore, the context shows that the purpose of this declaration is that Jesus’ hearers may believe and have eternal life and so not die, though some have not yet believed. The term ‘eternal life’ occurs twice in v. 40 and 47 in the same passage though literally translated means “the life of the age-to-come”²³⁰, their contexts cannot be said to be the same. Whereas the first is placed in the eschatological perspective (“those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life because he will ‘raise them up at the last day’ (vv. 39, 40; repeated again in v.54)”²³¹: the second is placed in the context of a realized eschatology. “Eternal life” is no longer described in terms of the traditional eschatology. He now says: “He who believes *has* eternal life” (v. 47). There is no mention now of the resurrection on the last day as the entrance into eternal life. Instead Jesus contrasts the believer who will *never* die (and who for that reason cannot be the subject of a resurrection) with the fathers of Israel who ate the manna but nevertheless died (vv.49-50).”²³²

In view of the seeming contradiction between realized and future eschatology, J.C. Plastaras suggests that with reference to the present context, “the evangelist seems to be saying that a faith-acceptance of Jesus as the revelation of Father is more than the pledge of a future resurrection which will bring the believer

²²⁹J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 120.

²³⁰J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 121.

²³¹J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 121.

²³²J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 122.

into eternal life. The believer already shares the life possessed by the Son and has entered into the life of the age-to-come.”²³³

2.6.2 *The Light of the world (8:12; 9:5)*

While doing the exegesis on 8:24.28.58 we pointed out, in passing, that the symbol of light which opens the discourse in 8:12 ties in with the Feast of Tabernacles. During the feast “lampstands were set up in the court of women.”²³⁴ “Every time John uses the light symbol he does so in the context of its opposite, hostility and rejection. In that respect he differs from the OT, where light, that is, the time of peace and salvation, follows the period of darkness and captivity (cf. Is 42:6, 49:6, 51:4).”²³⁵ Contrary to the Essenes’ dualistic use of the symbol for designating their members “as sons of light and those outside as sons of darkness”²³⁶, the Johannine author individualizes the symbol in a way “closer to what would result if one read Is 42:6 as referring to an individual rather than the whole nation.”²³⁷ If anything can be asserted as being typical of this Gospel, it is the taking of OT images that were usually applicable to the whole people and applying them to Jesus. This is what he does here. “The OT metaphor in Is 42:6 speaks of Yahweh’s salvation as dawning like a light and Israel as a light to the nations. John has localized that light in Jesus.”²³⁸

In this connection F.J. Moloney observes that a “further background for Jesus’ words comes from the identification of the Torah as the light that was to be given to the world in Jewish wisdom traditions (Cf. Wis 18:4; see also Ps 119:105;

²³³J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 121.

²³⁴P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 97; also Cf. A.J. KELLY – F.J. MOLONEY, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John*, 183; F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, “The announcement, ‘I am the light of the world’ (8:12a) was done ‘within the context of a feast in which the Temple became the light of Jerusalem.’”, 266.

²³⁵P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 97.

²³⁶P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 97.

²³⁷P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 97.

²³⁸P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 98.

Prov 6:23; Sir 24:27; Bar 4:2).”²³⁹ The context makes Jesus’ claim unambiguous: “what the law once was to Israel, Jesus is now to the world. [...] Jesus is the revealing and judging presence of God.”²⁴⁰ Thus in v. 12 we have laid out a “Christological affirmation” and “its consequences”: “on the one hand Jesus perfects the liturgy of Tabernacles (v.12a); on the other his revelation of light brings judgment (v. 12b). The acceptance or refusal of Jesus’ revelation of the Father is at the heart of every discussion that follows.”²⁴¹ Jesus’ origin and destiny guarantees his ability to witness to himself without being subject to the traditional conventional norms. To do so would constitute an error.²⁴² Moreover the “presence of light calls for decision, as the light of Jesus brings a double possibility. One can remain in the darkness or walk in the light of life by following Jesus (v. 12b; cf. 1:11-12; 3:19).”²⁴³

In 9:5 Jesus “reaffirms what he claimed in 8:12: he is the light of the world”²⁴⁴. The context here is clear that Jesus is including his disciples in his work: “We must work the works of the one who sent me” (v. 4a). Jesus does this to ensure that “the presence of light in the world, as the Father continues to be revealed, will not be limited to the historical life of Jesus; it will continue in the presence of Jesus in his associates, the disciples.”²⁴⁵

2.6.3 *The Sheep gate and Good Shepherd (10:7.9.14)*

Within the shepherd discourse 10:1-21 Jesus insistently makes a claim about himself by means of *ego eimi* predicated with an image. He claims to be ‘the gate of

²³⁹F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 266.

²⁴⁰F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 266.

²⁴¹F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 266.

²⁴²Cf. F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 266.

²⁴³F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 266.

²⁴⁴F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 292.

²⁴⁵F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 292.

the sheep' v. 7 and 'the gate' v. 9; and 'the good shepherd' (vv. 11 and 14). There is divided opinion among scholars as to whether there is only one or two parables in 1-6.²⁴⁶ M. Ball talks of one parable: "verses 1-6 introduce the new theme of sheep, shepherds and associated images by means of a parable (παροιμία, v. 6). Verses 7-18 explain and expand upon the parable."²⁴⁷ In the exposition of this parable, "Jesus makes a fourfold claim through the words ἐγώεἰμι. Twice he claims to be the door (vv.7, 9) and twice the Good Shepherd (vv.11, 14)."²⁴⁸

What exactly is Jesus claiming for himself by means of these images? We may argue with R. Brown as against R. Bultmann that certain OT images are most likely being alluded to here.²⁴⁹ R. Brown points out that:

Because the patriarchal civilization and that of Israel until well after the conquest of Palestine was largely pastoral, the imagery of shepherding is frequent in the Bible. Even when agriculture became dominant in Israel, these remained a nostalgia for the pastoral. Yahweh might be pictured as the tender of the vine and the planter of the seed, but He remained more familiarly the shepherd of the flock (Gen xlix 24; Pss xxiii, lxxviii 52-53). The Patriarchs, Moses, and David were all shepherds, and so "shepherd" became a figurative term for the rulers of God's people, a usage common throughout the ancient Near East. Impious kings were scathingly denounced as wicked shepherds (1 Kings xxii 17; Jer x 21, xxiii 1-2). In particular, Ezek xxxiv is important background for John x. There God denounces the shepherds or rulers who have not cared for the flock (His people) and have plundered it, neglecting the weak, the sick, and the straying. [...] God promises that He will take His flock away from these wicked shepherds, and He himself will become their shepherd. [...] Obviously, much of what Jesus says about shepherding both in John and the synoptics reflects Ezek xxxiv; in particular, Matt xviii 12-13= Ezek xxxiv 16; Matt xxv 32-33 = Ezek xxxiv 20.²⁵⁰

For R. Brown "Ezekiel's portrait of God (or the Messiah) as the ideal shepherd, in contrast to the wicked shepherds who plunder the flock and allow the

²⁴⁶ Cf. P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 115.

²⁴⁷ D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 94.

²⁴⁸ D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 94.

²⁴⁹ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 397.

²⁵⁰ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 397; This is notwithstanding Bultmann's contention that "despite these similarities, [...] many features in the Johannine picture of the shepherd and the flock cannot be explained from the OT. In John, Jesus is not a kingly shepherd as is the shepherd of OT symbolism; there is stress on the gate, on the thieves and bandits – figures not found in the OT pastoral symbolism; and finally the OT puts no stress on the knowledge which the shepherd has of the flock." 397; cf. also P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 115-7.

sheep to be lost, served as the model for Jesus' portrait of himself as the ideal shepherd, in contrast to the Pharisees, who are thieves who rob the sheep and hirelings who allow the sheep to be scattered."²⁵¹ "By the words $\alpha\gamma\alpha\mu\iota\alpha$ in John 10, Jesus identifies himself with the role which God would accomplish as the promised Good Shepherd."²⁵² Brown's insistence on this point cannot be overemphasized: "the conceptual similarities between Ezekiel's shepherd imagery and that of John are so close that Jesus' parable seems deliberately to allude to the ideas in Ezekiel. By claiming to be the Good Shepherd and by his care for the sheep, Jesus does the work that God promised he would do in Ezekiel."²⁵³ From the above it stands to reason that this door/shepherd imagery has several Christological interpretations. First of all, "Jesus as the gate (vv. 7f) implies that 'no one can approach the sheep except through Jesus. Anyone else who claimed to bring revelation would be a thief and robber. The sheep should not listen to him."²⁵⁴ With regards "to the relationship between the sheep and the gate (vv. 9f), Jesus proclaims that those who pass through him will find pasture – a common metaphor for salvation (cf. Ez 34:12-15). 'Have life to the full' (v.10) clearly designates Jesus as the one who brings the life that is to be characteristic of the new age."²⁵⁵ Moreover:

The introduction of the image of the Good Shepherd links Jesus with the tradition of a messianic shepherd of the people of God. However, from the very first use of the image in his self-revelation Jesus also introduces his uniqueness: 'the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (v.11b). This self-gift of the shepherd unto death for his sheep has no parallel in the Jewish texts that speak of the messianic shepherd.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 398; Also cf. D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 224-7.

²⁵²D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 225.

²⁵³D.M. BALL, 'I Am' in *John's Gospel*, 226.

²⁵⁴P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 116.

²⁵⁵P. PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 116.

²⁵⁶F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 304; cf. R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 398.

2.6.4 *The Resurrection and the Life (11:25)*

In response to Martha's expressed traditional faith that her brother Lazarus will rise again at the last day, Jesus again makes a strong claim to be the resurrection and the life²⁵⁷: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

To begin with, R. Brown observes that the phrase "and the life" is "omitted in P⁴⁵, some OL, OS^{sin}, and sometimes in Origen and Cyprian. Omission is really harder to explain than addition, unless the mention of resurrection alone in v. 24 would have had some influence. On the other, however, the phrase does fit in logically with the flow of ideas"²⁵⁸. D. A. Carson observes that with regard to *ego eimi* with predicate, "Jesus has repeatedly mentioned resurrection on the last day (5:21, 25-29; 6:39-40). In this he has been in line with mainstream Judaism. But these references have also insisted that he alone, under the express sanction of the Father, would raise the dead on the last day. The same truth is now repeated in the pithy claim, *I am the resurrection and the life.*"²⁵⁹

"In this context the 'I am' of Jesus' answer has a particularly powerful and authoritative ring. As far as resurrection is concerned, Martha does not need to look to the future; it is close to her, present in the person of Jesus."²⁶⁰ In words similar to those of D.A. Carson, R. Schnackenburg points out that "the saying of the Revealer, which impressively presents one of the fundamental ideas of the fourth gospel, has the same structure as all these 'I am' sayings of Jesus; there is therefore no need

²⁵⁷ Cf. R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 425.

²⁵⁸ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 424-5; Cf. F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 338; and R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 331.

²⁵⁹ D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 412.

²⁶⁰ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 330; cf. R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 434.

either for the $\epsilon\upsilon\gamma\omega$, to be made a predicate or for particular emphasis to be placed on $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$ (as present).”²⁶¹ This force of this claim rests on the fact that Jesus bears witness to himself “as the one who has been given and fully possesses (5:26) the power which belongs to God alone to ‘give life’ (cf. 5:21), a power which has been demonstrated beyond doubt by the other great signs performed on the sick (cf. 4:50-53 with the triple $\zeta\eta/|\lambda$), but which receives its highest expression in this raising of a dead man.”²⁶²

Attempts at understanding vv. 25-26 has given scholars a lot to think about. R. Brown gives us an idea of what it has been like.²⁶³ He thinks the most satisfactory exegesis is that of C.H. Dodd:

There are two principal ideas. First, Jesus says, “I am the resurrection.” This is the direct answer to Martha’s profession in 24 and (without excluding the final resurrection) tells her of the present realization of what she expects on the last day. This statement is commented on in the second and third lines of 25. Jesus is the resurrection in the sense that whoever believes in him, though he may go to the grave, shall come to eternal life. “Life” in 25c is that life from above which is begotten through the spirit, and it conquers physical death. Second, Jesus says, “I am the life.” This statement is commented on in v.26. Whoever receives the gift of life through belief in Jesus will never die a spiritual death, for this life is eternal life.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 330.

²⁶²R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 330.

²⁶³R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, “26. *everyone who is alive*. Does this refer to physical life or to spiritual life? Bultmann, Lagrange, and Hoskyns think that v. 26 refers to physical life, and they understand the comparison between vss. 25 and 26 thus; 25: Belief, despite physical death, will lead to eternal life. 26: Physical life combined with belief will not be subject to death. Bernard and others maintain that v. 26 refers to spiritual or eternal life. The comparison would then be; 25: The believer, if he dies physically, will live spiritually. 26: The believer who is alive spiritually will never die spiritually. One argument for this view is that one article governs the two participles “living and believing” in vs. 26, an indication that they are both on the same plane. Moreover, the verb “to live” is related to *zoe*, “life” the term which is John’s standard word for eternal life. It seems, then, that this second view is the more convincing of the two. The life in both v. 25 and 26 is spiritual or eternal life; death in 25 is physical, while death in 26 is spiritual. The same twofold use of death is found 6:49-50.” 425.

²⁶⁴R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 434; see also J.R. MICHAELS, *John*, “The form of Jesus’ reply (vv.25-26) resemble that of several other of his ‘I am’ pronouncements, in which the ‘I am’ with its predicate is followed by an invitation or promise, introduced by a relative or conditional clause or a participle (cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:9). In this instance there are two predicates (I am the resurrection and [I am] the life, v. 25a) and two invitation/promises (he who believes in me will live, even though he dies, v. 25b; whoever lives and believes in me will never die, v. 26a). The first of

With this we may conclude with R. Brown that, “as usual with the ‘I am’ statements which have a predicate, the predicates ‘resurrection’ and ‘life’ describe what Jesus is *in relation to men* – they are what Jesus offers to men.”²⁶⁵ The Johannine author is not here joining the two concepts for the first time. This has already been seen in 6:40 and 54 where “the aspect of resurrection that was emphasized was one of final eschatology; in 5:24-25 it was one of realized eschatology.”²⁶⁶

2.6.5 *The Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6)*

It seems that Jesus overestimated or was a little too confident in his disciples and so he supposed that they knew the way to where he was going. If he got it wrong somebody had to draw his attention to it and Thomas did: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” In reply Jesus declares: “I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.”

R. Schnackenburg thinks that “Jesus’ answer sounds like an extremely important revelation, a unique statement that has lost none of its sovereign power even now. The revelatory formula $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ is what gives the statement its majestic sound [...], but this impression is strengthened by the three predicates.”²⁶⁷ When we were dealing with Jesus’ answer to Martha in 11:25, we realized that a second predicate is joined to the first by *kai*, “but this is the only text in which a third predicate, also linked by *kai*, occurs.”²⁶⁸ So according to R. Schnackenburg, “despite the parataxis, it is clear that the emphasis is placed entirely on the statement: ‘I am the way.’ This is obvious from the context: $\epsilon\gamma\omega\epsilon\iota\mu\iota$ is a repetition

these relative clauses (participles in Greek) explains ‘I am the resurrection’; the second explains ‘I am the life’.” 202.

²⁶⁵R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 434.

²⁶⁶R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 434.

²⁶⁷R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 64.

²⁶⁸R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 64.

of the key-word in v.4 and is confirmed as the only focal point by v.6b (δι□□μου/).”²⁶⁹

So if the emphasis is placed primarily on the first predicate, that is ‘the way’, what was Jesus communicating? In other words what is the content of his claim? R. Brown says that:

In saying ‘I am THE WAY,’ Jesus is not primarily presenting himself as a moral guide, nor as a leader for his disciples to follow (as in Heb 2:10, 6:20). The emphasis here is different from that of 16:13 where the Paraclete/Spirit is said to guide the disciples along the way of all truth. Rather Jesus is presenting himself as the only avenue of salvation, in the manner of 10:9: “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.” This is so because Jesus is THE TRUTH (aletheia), the only revelation of the Father who is the goal of the journey.²⁷⁰

C.H. Dodd clarifies even further:

Through question and answer it is explained (to put it shortly) that the journey Christ is undertaking (in dying) is the journey to the Father, and Christ Himself (Christ crucified) is the way on which the disciples must travel to the same goal. Christ is the way to the Father; that is to say, He mediates the knowledge of God, or the vision of God; to see Him is to see the Father, since He is one with the Father by mutual indwelling, and His words and deeds are those of the Father.²⁷¹

R. Schnackenburg considers the concept ‘the way’:

In itself an unusual metaphor to apply to a person, but its meaning is made clearer by the additional statement that ‘the truth’ and ‘the life’ are also incorporated into that person. It almost sounds like a justification, but it is really a clarification: ‘I am the way, that is, the truth and the life’ for everyone who wants to reach that goal. In other words, by revealing the truth that leads to life and mediating that true life to one who accepts and realizes that truth in faith, Jesus takes everyone who believes in him to the goal of his existence, that is, ‘to the Father’; in this manner, he becomes the ‘way’.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 64; D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, “The second half of this verse shows that the entire verse must be taken as the answer to Thomas’ question. This means that *way* gains a little emphasis over *truth* and *life*. This is not to say that v.6a should be interpreted as a Semitism, the first now governing the other two (‘I am the way of truth and life’, and hence ‘I am the true and living way’); the three terms are syntactically co-ordinate, and Greek has other ways of expressing subordination.” 491.

²⁷⁰ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 630.

²⁷¹ C.H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 404.

²⁷² R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 64-5.

Furthermore, the other predicates affirm the first. “In calling himself the truth, Jesus is not giving an ontological definition in terms of transcendentals but is describing himself in terms of his mission to men”²⁷³. This being the case, R. Brown says “I am the truth” is to be interpreted in light of xviii 37: “the reason I have come into the world is to testify to the truth.”²⁷⁴ However he agrees with De la Potterie’s insistence “that the Johannine formula does more than tell us what Jesus does: it tells us what Jesus *is* in relation to men. Furthermore, it reflects what Jesus is *in himself*; the whole Johannine emphasis on ‘the real’ (*alēthinōs*: the real bread, the real vine) would be in vain if what Jesus is in relation to men was not a true indication of what he is in himself.”²⁷⁵

Similarly, Jesus is also the life. This description must also be seen “in terms of his mission to men: ‘I came that they may have life and have it to the full’ (10:10). The destination of the way is life with the Father; this life the Father has given to the Son (v 26), and the Son alone can give it to men who believe in him (10:28).”²⁷⁶ Thus “the gift of natural life to Lazarus was a sign of the eternal realities behind Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection and the life (10:25-26): ‘everyone who is alive and believes in me shall never die at all.’”²⁷⁷

From all the above follows a logical conclusion that R. Brown points out:

If Jesus is the way because he is the truth and the life, “truth” and “life” are not simply coordinate: life comes through the truth. Those who believe in Jesus as the incarnate revelation of the Father (and that is what “truth” means) receive the gift of life, so that the words of Jesus are the source of life: ‘the words that I have spoken to you are both spirit and life’ (6:63); ‘the man who hears my word and has faith in Him who sent me possesses eternal life’ (v. 24). The use of the definite article before the three nouns in v. 6 implies that Jesus is the only way to the Father.²⁷⁸

²⁷³R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 630.

²⁷⁴R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 630.

²⁷⁵R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 630.

²⁷⁶R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 630-1.

²⁷⁷R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 631.

²⁷⁸R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI, 631.

2.6.6 *The True Vine (15.1.5)*

“As in each previous examples, the key pronouncement, occurs twice: **I am the true vine** (v.1) and **I am the vine** (v.5). But unlike the previous examples, the pronouncements here add a second identification to each of the ‘I am’ formulas (**my Father is the gardener**, v.1; **you are the branches**, v.5).”²⁷⁹ By these pronouncements “Jesus identifies himself in relation to the Father in verses 1-4, and in relation to the disciples in verses 5-8.”²⁸⁰ Ben Witherington points out that “while the other ‘I am’ sayings may be said to focus on coming to Jesus, this one speaks to those who have come and thus the focus is on remaining or ‘abiding,’ a word that occurs ten times in vv.4-10, as well as on bearing fruit, making clear the basic theme of this section.”²⁸¹

Moreover, ‘the image of the True Vine’, according to M. Ball concerns not only “Jesus’ relationship with his disciples” but also:

The consequences of that relationship in their lives. Although it is implied that the vine gives life (for without it the branches wither, v.6), the emphasis in this ‘parable’ is on fruit bearing. Those branches that do not bear fruit are ‘cast’ out (v.6). It is only then that they wither and are burned. Jesus as the vine offers the disciples the ability to live a fruitful life which is in turn explained in terms of loving each other. The emphasis of this ‘I am’ saying is on Jesus as the one who enables the disciples to glorify the Father by bearing fruit (v.8) and not on the fact that he gives life. His role as life-giver is emphasized elsewhere (cf. 6.35-58; 10.9; 11.25; 14.6).²⁸²

What is stressed in v.5 is that “the roles of Christ and of His followers are not to be confused. But there is a mutual indwelling and this is the condition of fruitfulness. The man who so abides in Christ and has Christ abide in him keeps on

²⁷⁹J.R. MICHAELS, *John*, 270. (emphasis his)

²⁸⁰J.R. MICHAELS, *John*, 270.

²⁸¹BEN WITHERINGTON, III, *John’s Wisdom*, 255.

²⁸²D.M. BALL, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, 135-6; L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, “The allegory of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result, not of human achievement, but of abiding in Christ. There is a stern side to this. Branches which are not fruitful are purged out. Jesus is not simply issuing some comforting advice. He is outlining the difficult, but important way of service.” 668.

bearing fruit in quantity. And the verse concludes with an emphatic declaration of human helplessness apart from Christ.”²⁸³ This truth complements Paul’s in Phil 4:13, “I can do all things in him that strengthens me.”

Furthermore, a theological background may throw light on all this. “The OT prophets used images of vines and vineyards to describe Israel.”²⁸⁴ The nation of Israel is often seen in terms of a lovely vine or vineyard tended by God himself but unfortunately fails to produce fruit “(e.g., Is 5:1-7, 27:2-6, Jer 2:21, Ez 15:1-6, 19:10-14, Ps 80:8-15). Some NT parables (Mk 12:1-11 parr.) pick up this imagery.”²⁸⁵ In transferring such images, normally applied to Israel, to Jesus, the Johannine author probably had Ps 80 in mind, “where God is asked to restore his vine, Israel, which had been devastated by her enemies (vv. 14-16), and then to strengthen his chosen one, the Son of Man (vv. 17-18).”²⁸⁶

It is worthwhile noting that “early Christianity associated the vine with the Eucharist (e.g., Mk 14:25, Did 9:4). John 12:24 connects bearing fruit with Jesus’ death. John 15:13 links the vine image to the death of Jesus (cp. 6:51), and language about ‘remaining’ in Jesus is part of the Eucharistic teaching in 6:56.”²⁸⁷ Furthermore “Sirach 24:17-21 compares wisdom to the vine that people eat. Thus the original setting of the discourse – or of at least the first half of it – may have been Eucharistic.”²⁸⁸

²⁸³L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 671.

²⁸⁴J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 171.

²⁸⁵J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 171.

²⁸⁶J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 171-2.

²⁸⁷J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 172.

²⁸⁸J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 172; L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, rejects this opinion that identifies the vine with the eucharist as is seen in his footnote comment: “A surprising number of commentators see in the vine a reference to the eucharist. This seems to me far-fetched. A vine is not wine, let alone the wine of the eucharist. And if it were there is nothing in the passage to compare to the bread. But the biggest objection is the subject matter of the whole section. Jesus is clearly talking about the life of the Christian and his relationship to his God, not about a liturgical observance.” Footnote 1, 668.

In which way then is Jesus the “True” vine? “The use of the adjective “true,” placed emphatically at the end of the affirmation, contains a hint of polemic. Israel has been described as a vine [...] but if Jesus is the *true* vine, what can be said of the vine that is Israel?”²⁸⁹ In examining the theological background to the use of this image, R. Schnackenburg says that “after having already identified the vine of Israel with the Messiah, there is no need to look further. This step can be more easily explained in the light of the Johannine theology with its Christological emphasis.”²⁹⁰ However it seems it is D.A. Carson who does justice to the question:

Most remarkable is the fact that whenever historic Israel is referred to under this figure it is the vine’s failure to produce good fruit that is emphasized, along with the corresponding threat of God’s judgment on the nation. Now, in contrast to such failure, Jesus claims, ‘I am the true vine’, i.e. the one to whom Israel pointed, the one that brings forth good fruit. Jesus has already, in principle, superseded the temple, the Jewish feasts, Moses, various holy sites; here he supersedes Israel as the very locus of the people of God.²⁹¹

2.7 Conclusion

Our exegetical analysis brought out certain important elements of the Johannine thought embedded in the ‘I am’ sayings. By its use Jesus identifies himself as the coming Messiah. But his messiahship differs from the Jewish understanding that is a Messiah of royal nationalistic connotations. This came out clearly in the exegesis on John 4:26. Jesus takes the words of Yahweh and applies them to himself. His majesty is clearly shown to lie in the fact that he can bear the divine name.

The author also indicates that the greatest sin is unbelief in whom Jesus claims to be, ‘I am’. The only way out of dying in sin is to belief in the one Jesus claims to be. *Egōeimi* equally lies at the heart of the discussion of the unity between

²⁸⁹F.J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, 419.

²⁹⁰R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, III, 107.

²⁹¹D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 513.

Christ and his Father. By means of it the Johannine author leaves no doubt as to what he thinks of Jesus Christ: He is divine. For instance with the assertion in 8:58 there is no clearer implication of divinity to be found in the Gospel tradition. Jesus is not only the teacher of divine revelation, he is that revelation. He is the meeting place between God and man and the revelation he brings from God is not a message external to himself. He is the only way to the Father and in him all find eternal life and the resurrection. One comes to the Father, to life through knowing the truth and adhering to it. That truth that must be accepted in faith is Jesus Christ.

We will be exploring the implications of these elements and those not captured in this conclusion but clearly indicated in the exegesis on the Christ-Event in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Implications of the 'I am' sayings for the understanding of the Christ-event

3 Introduction

Our discussion thus far has been focused on solely on the Johannine usage of the 'I am' sayings, their meaning and effects in the entire Johannine perspective. In this third chapter, we are going to tackle directly our theses statement: how the Johannine usage of the 'I am' sayings contribute to our understanding of the Christ-event. We acknowledge that there are several elements in this fourth Gospel that can be cited as keys to understanding the Johannine portrait of Jesus Christ. The Johannine author's use of *egōeimi*, however, is no little contribution to that effect. We shall look at what constitutes the Christ-event and the contributions of *ego eimi* to interpreting it. When we have done this, we will suggest a Christian response to this event in accord with the Johannine portrait. If we succeed in doing that, then, we will be in a position not only to draw a conclusion to this chapter but also a general conclusion to this work. We may also be in a position to suggest other aspects of the Johannine use of 'I am' that needs further studies.

3.1 The Christ-event

If there is one thing that has come out clearly in our discussion thus far it is the fact that *egōeimi* sayings are a tool that the Johannine author uses to bring out what he thinks of the person of Christ and his role in salvation history. We agree with M. Ball that the ‘I am’ sayings “reflect a constant portrait of Jesus”.²⁹² The use of *egōeimi* helps to make Christ the dominant character whereas the other characters serve as ‘foil’ to him.²⁹³ Its use again plays an important role in Johannine irony. In this M. Ball agrees with R. O’Day that “irony can form the locus of revelation for the reader of the Gospel, the *how* of revelation is as significant as the *what*.”²⁹⁴

In the exegetical part we have accepted M. Ball’s suggestion that “the ‘I am’ sayings without images refer more to Jesus’ identity itself, while the ‘I am’ sayings with an image refer more to his identity as it relates to his role among humanity.”²⁹⁵ Our research being certainly Christological, we cannot turn a blind eye to the inner unity of the Johannine Christology. R. Schnackenburg underlines this unity as he warns the reader against any approach that jeopardizes it:

In spite of persistent tensions, we cannot do without the unity of Johannine Christology. For at the center stands the figure of Jesus Christ, who guarantees the meaningfulness of the Gospel of John. If we cannot succeed in bringing the various narrative explanations, the diverse titles and kinds of statements together in a unified whole, then the whole Gospel falls apart. If one distinguishes only the various Christologies – the one who is sent, the Son, the eschatological Moses-like prophet, the Son of Man, and so on – the view woven into an overall presentation becomes unexplainable and enigmatic.²⁹⁶

Against this background we should stress that the Johannine author offers us a key, (the ‘I am’ sayings) to the understanding of the Christ-event. This key, however, must be seen in its relations with the other keys as indicated above by R.

²⁹²D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 255.

²⁹³D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 255.

²⁹⁴D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 256.

²⁹⁵D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 257; Cf. R. BROWN, “The Ego Eimi (“I AM”) Passages in the Fourth Gospel”, 119-120.

²⁹⁶R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Jesus in the Gospels*, I, 245.

Schnackenburg. The 'I am' sayings should never be taken in isolation since it is only within the entire Johannine perspective that we grasp their meaning as well as their unique contribution to the whole. R. Schnackenburg observes this kind of unified view in the words of W. Loader: "the Father send and authorizes the Son, who knows the Father, comes from the Father, makes the Father known, brings light and life and truth, returns to the Father, is exalted and glorified, and ascends; who sends the disciples and sends the Spirit in order to make possible a greater understanding, and equips them for mission in order to build up the community of faith."²⁹⁷ W. Loader's words summarize quite well what is referred to as the Christ event. An excellent interpreter of the Christ-event is St Paul. "In Paul's view man can be understood only in terms of the Christ-event (see Rom 7:24-8:2)."²⁹⁸ A similar thing may be said about the Johannine author. However as far as he is concerned, the Christ-event is centered on the passion, death, burial, resurrection, heavenly exaltation and intercession. In addition to these, the Johannine author considers equally important the birth, life and ministry of Jesus. Thus in this study, the Christ-event consists the person of Jesus and those events in which he was involved. We will therefore concentrate on such events as the incarnation, ministry of Jesus, passion, death and resurrection and eschatology. But since it is impossible to talk about incarnation without the pre-existence that will be our starting point.

3.1.1 *The Pre-existence*

In our exegetical analysis of *egōeimi* in 8:58 we indicated that this assertion leaves "no clearer implication of divinity in the Gospel tradition"²⁹⁹. It is also the clearest Johannine assertion that the Jesus Christ of Nazareth of the first century

²⁹⁷R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Jesus in the Gospels*, 245;

²⁹⁸J.A. FITZMYER, *Pauline Theology*, 17.

²⁹⁹R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 367.

Palestine pre-existed as it were his own earthly existence. Let us begin this discussion with an observation by L. Sabourin.

For John the pre-existence of Christ is an indisputable fact. It is affirmed in the Prologue and also in the testimony of John the Baptist: “After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me” (1:30). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus clearly affirms his own pre-existence: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). [...] A statement like Jn 8:58 does not come as a surprise in John, for whom Christ’s pre-existence, both as Logos and as Son, is a possessed revealed truth. In contrast to John the Baptist, who could only say “he was before me” (Jn 1:15, 30), “Jesus speaks in the present, which places him in God’s existence beyond time, in his eternal present.”³⁰⁰

However, L. Sabourin also argues that:

Although the *ego eimi* sayings make sense only when uttered by one having divine status, their immediate purpose is not to define Christ as a divine person in two natures, divine and human. Other texts in John (mainly 1:1, 18; 20:28) and in the New Testament expressly declare that Jesus is God (see Ch. 8, under Rm 9:5 and Ch. 9 under Tt 2:13). It is not doubtful that in 1Jn 5:20 “this is the true God and eternal” refers to Jesus Christ, and not to God, of whom it has twice been said in the preceding sentence that he is “true”.³⁰¹

For L. Sabourin, as it is for R. Schnackenburg, “the Johannine *ego eimi* sayings are completely and utterly expressions of John’s Christology and doctrine of salvation.”³⁰² He says:

More than the ‘Son, Son of Man, Son of God’ titles, also important in a different way, they make the saving character of Jesus’ mission visible in striking images and symbols. Their predicates – life, bread, light, door, shepherd, way, truth, vine – are all concerned with the meaning Jesus’ person and work have for those who accept him and his message: “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (10:10).³⁰³

³⁰⁰L. SABOURIN, *Christology*, 56; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 223.

³⁰¹L. SABOURIN, *Christology*, 155-156.

³⁰²L. SABOURIN, *Christology*, 88.

³⁰³L. SABOURIN, *Christology*, 155; With R. Schnackenburg we argue that with the Johannine use of images, symbols, and metaphors such as life, light, bread of heaven, living bread, living water, shepherd, door/way, and vine; it is apparent that the thing that connects them all together is the idea of the life that Christ gives. 246-7; thus “with metaphorical speech, [...], attention is always directed toward the figure of Jesus, the revealer and bringer of life from God. To this extent everything is Christocentric and at the same time theocentric. Jesus presents himself with divine, majestic speech: “I am he” (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19), often linked with symbolic words. This symbolic, metaphorical mode of expression leads to the salvific significance of the incarnate Logos who appeared on earth. All symbolic words must be investigated with regard to their tradition-historical origin and their Johannine sense. Not until the various Christological modes of expression are illuminated [...] can we draw conclusions for Johannine Christology.” 247.

If this is anything to go by then we have the problem of identifying the nature of this pre-existence which is undoubtedly asserted in 8:58. G. O'Collins expresses well the essence of this pre-existence: "Pre-existence means rather that Christ *personally* belongs to an order of being other than the created, temporal one. His personal divine existence transcends temporal (and spatial) categories; it might be better expressed as trans-existence, meta-existence, or, quite simply, eternal existence."³⁰⁴ But in order not to give the impression of removing Jesus Christ from time he makes a very important clarification that "eternity transcends time but without being apart from it; eternity and time should be considered together. Through the attribute of eternity God is present immediately and powerfully to all times."³⁰⁵

"The New Testament doctrines of Christ's personal pre-existence and incarnation remain unique and unparalleled in religious beliefs up to the first century AD."³⁰⁶ We assert with O'Collins against Dunn's claim "that it is only in John's Gospel and letters that we unambiguously find Christ's pre-existence as son of God and Logos."³⁰⁷ This is in view of the evidence against Dunn's position. His opponents point out that:

The 'sending' language of Romans 8:3 and Galatians 4:4 may not be fully clear. But, 2Corinthians 8:9 and Philippians 2:6-8 suggest a pre-existent, divine state, contrasted with Christ's 'subsequent', humble, human existence. Being 'in the form of God', Christ took on human form and did not exploit the right to be recognized for what he was. Colossians 1:15-17 presents Christ as being, like pre-existent Wisdom, the very agent of creation. It seem reasonable to conclude that Paul thought of the Son as coming into the world from the Father and as having been active in the creation of the world (see 1 Cor. 8:6).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴G. O'COLLINS, *Christology*, 249.

³⁰⁵G. O'COLLINS, *Christology*, 250.

³⁰⁶G. O'COLLINS, *Christology*, 250.

³⁰⁷G. O'COLLINS, *Christology*, 250.

³⁰⁸G. O'COLLINS, *Christology*, 250-251.

O'Collins is not alone in this. In his book *The Origins of Christian Faith*, T. Callan has given as various developments of the belief in the pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus.³⁰⁹ He lists the following sources: Reflection on his present exalted status; interpretation of Old Testament passages, which originally spoke about God, as applying to him; the influence of Hellenistic culture, especially by means of the nuances imparted to the titles Lord and Son of God; and the identification of Jesus with the figure of wisdom personified in the Old Testament, and with other comparable figures.³¹⁰ He argues that “the earliest expression of belief in the pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus is probably Phil 2:6-11.”³¹¹ And he adds,

This passage is probably an early hymn or creed which Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians. It describes the career of Jesus as beginning in the exalted state of being in the form (morphe) of God and equal (isa) to God (v6). Then Jesus emptied himself, having taken the form of a slave, being in the likeness of human beings (v 7). He then humbled himself and suffered crucifixion (v 8). Therefore God exalted him, making him the object of universal acclaim (vv 9-11).³¹²

Thus for T. Callan, “this seems to be a complete statement of belief in the pre-existence of Jesus. Jesus began as a heavenly being; he emptied himself, entering into the human sphere; and in his death and resurrection he returned to his beginning point.”³¹³ He would also point to 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 4:8-10 and Heb. 1:2-3 as other early expressions of belief in the pre-existence of Jesus.³¹⁴

It can be amply demonstrated that a similar trend is not lacking with the Johannine author, who is unmistakably one of the foremost theologian of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ. T. Callan expresses this idea as follows:

³⁰⁹Cf. T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 81-93.

³¹⁰T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 81-93.

³¹¹T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 88.

³¹²T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 81-93.

³¹³T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 88.

³¹⁴T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 89-90.

John expresses the preexistence and incarnation of Jesus in 12:39-41, where Isa 6:10 is understood as referring to the preexistent Jesus, and in 1:1-18, where Jesus is interpreted in terms of the figure of wisdom. The preexistence and incarnation of Jesus is also expressed in many other ways in the gospel of John. For example, in 17:5, 24, Jesus says that he shared glory with the Father before the world was made. In 8:56-58 Jesus says that he existed before the time of Abraham. John refers to Jesus as the Son of man who has descended from heaven, as the light that has come into the world, and as having come from above, or from heaven, or from God. Most commonly of all John refers to Jesus as having been sent by God.³¹⁵

In view of the aforesaid, we stress that the Johannine use of *ego eimi* sayings connected with Christ's preexistence should not be overlooked in view of other expressions to the same effect. The *egōeimi* has its own force and unique significance that can never be overemphasized. By them the Johannine author does not leave us in any form of doubt: Jesus is God among us! (cf. 1:14). He makes this known in the prologue but with the 'I am' sayings this claim is made so explicit as to admit no ambiguity.

3.1.2 *The Incarnation*

The Johannine author, as seen above, clearly indicates that the man Jesus of Nazareth, the pre-existed Christ, spent his human existence in Palestine of the first century. It is also undoubted that his pre-existence cannot be simply equated with how every human being pre-exists in the mind of God before they are biologically born (as in Jer 1:5). We also noted that by means of the *egōeimi*, Jesus makes a claim to divinity. By it he reinforces his claim of oneness with the Father; the one sent from above; the Messiah or Christ that Israel had been waiting for. How then are we supposed to understand that event by which the divine became human? In other words how does the *egōeimi* help our understanding of the incarnation?

Almost at the beginning of his very important work, *Bad, Mad or God?* John Redford stresses the centrality of the incarnation to the Christian faith: "The most

³¹⁵T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 90.

distinctive Christian doctrine is that a Jewish male called Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in the Roman Province of Syria, in the present-day Israel or Palestine, and who was crucified by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate sometime between 26 and 36 AD, was none other than God the Son Incarnate come to bring a final message of salvation to the human race.”³¹⁶ For J. Redford continues,

This is not only the most clearly distinctive doctrine of Christianity, together with the parallel and implicit faith that God is in nature Father, Son and Spirit, Jesus of Nazareth being truly the “Second person of the blessed Trinity”. It is also the most astounding thought possible, that the creator of the universe should for any reason wish to become a creature in his own creation, and share human life as a baby, as a growing boy, and as an adult man, even accepting a criminal’s death.³¹⁷

In the same work he further indicates the difficulties surrounding the question of the incarnation especially among the questers for the historical Jesus. Albert Schweitzer, for instance had asserted against the doctrine of the incarnation that: “This dogma had to be shattered before men could once more go out in quest of the historical Jesus, before they could even grasp the thought of his existence. That the historic Jesus is something different from the Jesus Christ of the doctrine of the Two Natures seems to us now self-evident.”³¹⁸ Strauss on his part, made attempts at demythologizing the incarnation, seeing it as the “fundamental myth.”³¹⁹ Maurice Casey crowns it all with the view “that belief in Jesus as incarnate and divine will lead to ‘official Christianity’ being less and less credible.”³²⁰ We want to argue here with J. Redford that as far as the Johannine author is concerned Jesus clearly makes incarnational claims for himself and a means he employs is the “I am” sayings.

First of all, J. Redford agrees with Lightfoot that the verses of the Prologue “give the key to the understanding of this Gospel, and make clear how the evangelist

³¹⁶J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 13.

³¹⁷J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 13.

³¹⁸J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 39 and 233.

³¹⁹J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 233.

³²⁰J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 234.

wishes his readers to approach his presentation of the Lord's work and Person; and equally the rest of the book will throw light on the contents of these verses."³²¹ In this light Redford argues that:

the key to such understanding is the story told by the Fourth Evangelist which develops the central theme of the Prologue, namely that in the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Logos, who was (ēn) with God and who was (ēn) God, reveals himself in the present tense of the verb to be, I AM, egōeimi. Because, after all, the infinite God was, and is now, and shall be. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come (ho on kai ho en kai ho erchomenos), the Almighty [Revelation 1:8]. That, John now tells us in his Gospel, has become flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.³²²

At this point we have to ask what purpose the incarnation was meant to serve. The answer is probably well captured in these words of T. Callan:

For John the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus (1:14) is salvific because it alone makes God accessible to human beings. Three times John says that no one has ever seen God, indicating the limit on human access to God. But such access to God is necessary for human beings to have life, in the fullest sense. Therefore God sent the Word into the world, incarnate in Jesus, in order to make God known. As it says in 1:18, "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."³²³

In other words, Jesus, who has always existed (8:58), took up human nature that all may see him and believe in order to avoid death (8:24). He is the way, the truth and the life that humanity badly needs (14:6). Being the only way, truth and life, he is the bridge to the life which he is and gives.

However, it should be clear that "for all this emphasis on the divinity of the Son, John's Christology is not Docetism; i.e., it does not reduce the humanity of Jesus to a feigned appearance."³²⁴ If by the use of the 'I am' sayings, among others, the Johannine author "concentrates on the glory, or divine presence, revealed in

³²¹J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 238.

³²²J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 238-239.

³²³T. CALLAN, *The Origins of Christian Faith*, 90-91.

³²⁴J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 36.

Jesus,³²⁵ we can equally assert his unequivocal affirmation; “And the Word became flesh” (1:14). That is to say that if by the ‘I am’ sayings the Johannine author makes explicit Jesus’ preexistence and divine origin, we only need to look at them against the entire Gospel to realize an equal stress on his incarnation. It is by reason of his preexistence and oneness with his Father that we can speak of his incarnation. However it is in his incarnated form/existence that he is God made manifest; the revelation of the Father in his person.

E. Schillebeeckx concludes his discussion of the “seven ‘I am’” sayings with predicates as follows:

Jesus is not the Father, but he is the eschatological revelation of God who has sent him for that purpose. He speaks from his own experience (3.11, 31f.: 8.26; 12.49); therefore he is the only access to the Father (14.6). To believe in him is to participate in the salvation, the life, that he has received from the Father: he has come that we might have life, and have it abundantly (10:10), because he himself is this abundance (1.16; 5.25f. 6.57). He is what he gives, says John finally; to put it in modern terms: he is the primal sacrament of God. [...] all are convinced that Jesus reveals God in human form, in other words, that Jesus is the sacrament of God; he is God’s gift to this earthly world (3:16; 6.32). However, the Gospel of John makes this fact present in the Johannine community, in which baptism and Eucharist carry on the historical Jesus in terms of Christ Jesus present and at work in the community.³²⁶

This all has very significant implication for the believer. As M. K. Hopkins puts it:

Remembering the Chalcedonian declaration that Christ is consubstantial with us, we can say with confidence: The Incarnation is a demonstration that humanity is the one created nature left open-ended and flexible, capable of stretching indefinitely so as to be able to accommodate a magnitude the size of the eternal personality of the Word of God. This open-endedness, then, is that capacity which permits the Word to continue to be totally God’s Son in the flesh, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Another name for this capacity is freedom – correctly understood.³²⁷

We can see in the incarnation the unfathomable wisdom of God: besides the risk of being misunderstood by humanity without the incarnation, there is probably

³²⁵J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 36.

³²⁶E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ*, 396-397.

³²⁷M. K. HOPKINS, “Jesus in Contemporary Thought”, 1806-1810.

no better way God could have been present to humanity. Since humanity lives in a sacramental realm, God chose for us the best sacrament which is His own incarnate son.

3.1.3 *The Ministry of Jesus*

In the 'I am' statement that describes Jesus as the bread of life, we may also grasp what the Johannine author thinks about the ministry of Jesus. L. Morris gives us this insight:

In the miracle of the feeding John has made it clear that Jesus is able to supply people's physical needs in miraculous fashion, and in the discourse that follows he shows that Jesus does more than that. Deep down, people have an intense spiritual hunger. John is making clear that Jesus satisfies that hunger, and further that that hunger can be satisfied in him alone. So he turns people's attention away from their concentration on the manna that was given of old, and points out that the God who keeps on supplying the needs of his people is still at work. In that Jesus himself is the bread of life, he is the bringer of life to the spiritually dead.³²⁸

We see other variations of this saying such as: "I AM the bread that came down from heaven" (6:41); "I AM the living bread who (or which) came down from heaven" (6:51) and "I AM the bread of life" (6:48).³²⁹ We may infer from these variations the presuppositions of Jesus' preexistence and his incarnation. Jesus is able to give eternal life because of his oneness with the Father. He pre-existed with his Father (8:58) and has now come down (6:41) so that those who believe in whom he claims to be ('I AM') may not die but have life to the full (10:10).

Closely related to the 'I am' the bread is the statement "I am the light." Already in the Prologue, the Johannine author explicitly stated that life was in the

³²⁸ L. MORRIS, *Jesus is the Christ*, 110; "The definite article with "bread" ('the bread,' not 'a bread' or simply 'bread') is perhaps unexpected because predicate nouns usually do not take the article. [...] 'When the article occurs with the subject (or the subject is a personal pronoun or proper name) and predicate, both are definite, treated as identical, one and the same, and interchangeable.' The identity is important. If there were no article we could understand that there were others who could claim to be 'bread of life': Jesus would be 'a bread of life', one among others. The article means that Jesus, and Jesus only, is the bread of life. A similar comment should be made about the equivalent article in each of the other 'I AM' sayings." 110.

³²⁹Cf. L. MORRIS, *Jesus is the Christ*, 110.

Word, “and the life was the light of men” (1:4).³³⁰ What is implicit herein is the “thought that Jesus is the only light and that people must respond to the coming of the light by giving him a welcome and believing in him. Apart from that they are lost eternally. That Jesus is the light of this whole world and that people’s eternal destiny depends on their reaction to him tells us something very important about Jesus.”³³¹

It indicates that whatever Jesus taught and the signs he performed were revelatory and with the propensity to ignite faith in him. In this connection B. O. McDermott rightly points out:

The Jesus of the Johannine ministry is fully aware that he is the descending and ascending Son of Man, sent by the Father to do his will by revealing the Father’s glory. He is Wisdom itself, possessing all the qualities ascribed to her, for example, preexistence and the ability to expose humankind and its evil deeds as well as to offer blessing to those who are willing to receive it; also, like Wisdom, he comes from God and returns to God. Jesus does not simply give saving knowledge symbolized by food and drink, but is himself true bread and wine, and the water which will take away all thirst. Jesus is Wisdom and greater than Wisdom. As the Son he enjoys a unique union with the Father, a union which he opens to those who believe in him.³³²

The interplay that exists between Jesus’ words and deeds is brought to light by those scholars who stress the link between his signs and the ‘I am’ sayings with predicate. The Johannine author has seven signs performed by Jesus: “the wedding at Cana (2:1-11), the healing of the official’s son (the “second sign”; 4:46-53), the healing of the paralytic (5:2-9), the multiplication of the loaves (6:1-13; “when the people saw the sign ...,” 6:14), the walking on the water (6:16-21), the healing of the man born blind (9:1-12), and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:17-44).”³³³ It is the application of Aristotelian categories of form and matter in

³³⁰L. MORRIS, *Jesus is the Christ*, 112.

³³¹L. MORRIS, *Jesus is the Christ*, 113.

³³²B. O. McDERMOTT, *Word Become Flesh*, 74.

³³³L.T. JOHNSON, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 482-3.

sacramental theology³³⁴ that has made it possible for scholars to link the signs with the images of the ‘I am’ sayings. This is made explicit in the work of L.T. Johnson: “Their matter is water (Cana, the pool, the walking), bread (the multiplication), light (the blind man), and life (the official’s son, Lazarus). Their form is given by Jesus’ words that explicate the meaning of the actions. He is the “living water” (4:10), the “bread of life” (11:25).” It is in this light that L.T. Johnson can assert that “the signs point to Jesus and he points to the presence of God in the world.”³³⁵

If this is anything to go by, then what should be made explicit is that one of the effective tools in the hands of the Johannine author in conveying this message is his use of the ‘I am’ sayings in both its absolute and predicated senses. By declaring himself the truth, the Johannine author stresses the utter reliability of Jesus. The teachings that he ascribes to Jesus are all true and, therefore, reliable. Moreover “in this Gospel truth is a quality of deeds as well as of speech (3:21), so that we should conclude that Jesus’ whole manner of life expresses what is true. He speaks the truth and his deeds accord with that truth.”³³⁶ R. Bultmann captures it well: “Truth is not the teaching about God transmitted by Jesus but is God’s very reality revealing itself – occurring! – in Jesus.”³³⁷

3.1.4 *The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus*

A fact that must be stressed at this point has been outlined by M.R. Tripole:

So far as we can see, the entire New Testament was written in the light of the resurrection fact. To all its writer, Jesus is the central figure of history, and they understand and interpret his career in the light of his Resurrection. The post-resurrection understanding of Jesus by the early Christian community, therefore, constituted a guiding influence upon all the accounts of the pre-resurrection life of Jesus. For the New Testament writers, the resurrection is not something that is

³³⁴L.T. JOHNSON, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 483.

³³⁵L.T. JOHNSON, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 483.

³³⁶L. MORRIS, *Jesus is the Christ*, 119.

³³⁷R. BULTMANN, *Theology of the New Testament*, II, 19.

possible, likely, or probable; it is the “rock-bottom-fact” upon which their whole faith is built.³³⁸

The Johannine author cannot be said to be an exception. As M.R. Tripole also indicated: “the proclamation of Jesus’ death was unquestionably a part of the earliest preaching of Christians. In other words, there seems never to have been a time when Christianity had not made the proclamation of Jesus’ death an essential part of its preaching and teaching.”³³⁹ Thus the death of Jesus had such a central role that it would have been unimaginable had the Johannine author not captured it. He had his own interpretation of that death.

To begin with, our analysis clearly indicated that the ‘lifting up’ connected with the *egōeimi* in 8:28 bespeaks the death of Jesus. This “‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man has a twofold reference to crucifixion and exaltation to heaven”.³⁴⁰ His crucifixion and exaltation are simultaneous events; it is precisely in his being lifted up on the cross that he received his glory as L. Morris rightly puts it: “His greatest glory consists in His accepting the shame and the humiliation of the cross in order that thereby He might bring salvation to sinful men.”³⁴¹ “After the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus, men will realize who he is by perceiving his unity with the Father. This unity is a present reality, [...] but it is a unity that men will be able to perceive only after the glorification of Jesus.”³⁴² At Calvary “there is a revelatory aspect of the cross, and after the crucifixion those who reflect on it will be in a position to appreciate that Jesus is indeed more than man.”³⁴³

Moreover the clause “to know and believe that I am” which we identified in the *egōeimi* usage of 8:24 and 28 according to M. Ball, “carries with it an exclusive

³³⁸ M.R. TRIPOLE, *The Jesus Event and Our Response*, 61-62.

³³⁹ M.R. TRIPOLE, *The Jesus Event and Our Response*, 144.

³⁴⁰ D. BURKETT, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, 159.

³⁴¹ L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 452.

³⁴² P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I AM’ of the Fourth Gospel*, 44.

³⁴³ L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, 452.

soteriological function which explain why Jesus can say that those who do not ‘believe that I am’ will die in their sins (8:24).”³⁴⁴ The Johannine author gives Jesus “this exclusive soteriological function that in Isaiah was reserved for God alone”³⁴⁵.

Again, with the ‘I am’ saying in 13:19 we notice a Jesus who is well aware of his impending death and announces his betrayal in advance. The purpose of this advance announcement is “that, when Jesus’ words are fulfilled, faith will result rather than disbelief.”³⁴⁶ That is, “although he is about to be betrayed, Jesus is not a hapless victim. Even the treachery of Judas can only serve the redemptive purposes of the mission on which Jesus has been sent.”³⁴⁷ D. A. Carson thinks this announcement was necessary: “in the event, the disciples would have found it impossible without this preparation”.³⁴⁸

Furthermore, we find Jesus’ awareness of his impending death being carried on with ‘I am’ sayings in 8:5.6.8. With the ‘I am’ sayings as an able weapon, the Johannine author insists that “Jesus offers up his life in obedience to his Father, not as a pathetic martyr buffeted by the ill winds of cruel fate. In full knowledge of what was to befall him, Jesus *went out* (of the enclosed olive grove, apparently) and asked his question.”³⁴⁹ Jesus’ life would not be taken away from him, rather he lays it down of his own accord (10:18). One also recalls that the Johannine author has had Jesus insist that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (12:24). Thus Jesus lays down his life in order to pick it up again with dividends, the salvation of humanity.

³⁴⁴D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 190.

³⁴⁵D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 190.

³⁴⁶D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 112.

³⁴⁷D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 471.

³⁴⁸D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 471.

³⁴⁹D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, 577-578.

Additionally, “The whole of Jesus’ life was a *revelation* of God as the Father of Jesus.”³⁵⁰ His suffering, death and resurrection was no exception. Surely the cross has a pride of place:

When we think about the “how” of revelation in the Fourth Gospel, we are finally brought, as the Gospel narrative itself is, to the cross. The cross, this particular and decisive way that Jesus makes God known, confronts us in ways that make all former assumptions and categories obsolete. This is true throughout the New Testament (see the classic statement in 1 Cor. 1:18-25) but is perhaps nowhere more acutely obvious than in the Johannine narrative treatments of Jesus’ passion.³⁵¹

We may argue with O’Day that what the Johannine narrative shows, for purposes of this discussion, by means of *egōeimi* “is a ruler with all the accoutrements of power, with the authority to take away life, who stands powerless in the face of true power, authority and life.”³⁵² In view of our earlier discussion on the ‘I am’ sayings in 8:28 and 14:6, we also held the view that:

The trial narrative does what the cross does, it calls into question all the accepted categories of power, of death, and of truth. Pilate’s question, “what is truth?” is not a question that can be answered by categories of dogma, encounter, or propositions that exist independently of this Gospel narrative. Jesus has already answered the question of truth, and the reader of the Gospel knows this (14:6). The locus of revealed truth lies in Jesus, a Jesus the Fourth Gospel has been at pains to make available to the reader. Like the crowd of 6:25-35, Pilate does not know the “truth” when he is looking at “him.”³⁵³

When we call to mind Jesus’ claim to be “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), then we make sense of what E. Schillebeeckx asserts:

In the presence of Jesus, death is no longer death. Jesus is life, even for the dead. He is the giver of life (see 5.21, 26;4.50-53), above all of inner, divine life; but physical life, resurrection, is the visible sign of that. For the life became *sarx* or man (see John 1.14 and I John 1.1-3). He who believes that Jesus is life could know from that very fact that Lazarus would be raised to life at the appearing of Jesus – in John’s narrative this is not something that becomes clear only from the coming resurrection

³⁵⁰E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ*, 412.

³⁵¹G.R. O’DAY, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, 111.

³⁵²G.R. O’DAY, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, 112; However, his power is shown in an unexpected way since “power is perfected through the gentleness of non-violence (see Jn. 18:6).”M.K. HOPKINS, “Preaching the Christ-event Today”, 1811-15.

³⁵³G.R. O’DAY, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, 112-113.

of Jesus. But at the same time this resurrection of Lazarus is a ‘work’ of God in Jesus, a sign of Jesus’ coming resurrection.³⁵⁴

Jesus’ resurrection certainly inaugurates and anticipates the eschatological age. It is also a promise of the believer’s own resurrection. Jesus will raise up all believers so that where he is they too may be. But it is even much more: Jesus is the *eschaton*, thus everything connected with him is truly eschatological.

In the end we may say that the Johannine author presents a Jesus who understood his passion and death as a sacrifice which he freely undertook in obedience to his Father’s will. Jesus was not the victim of circumstances, a tragic hero, but clearly in control of the situation. No wonder his would-be arresters ‘drew back and fell to the ground’ when he appropriates to himself the divine revelatory formula, ‘I AM’. Even the Roman authority, represented by the soldiers tremble and fall in front of the brief manifestation of Jesus’ divinity.

3.1.5 *The Eschatology of the ‘I am’ sayings*

A look at our analysis of 4:26 indicates that when Jesus applies the words of Yahweh, ‘I am he who speaks’ to himself, he makes himself “out to be the fulfilment of the LORD’S promise that the people would know his name, and also know that it is he who speaks.”³⁵⁵ This effectively assures the Samaritan woman and the readers that the messianic age is already here; the Christ whom the woman was waiting for has already come, but his presence calls for a radical change of understanding. He is not the Christ of the Jewish “royal nationalistic connotations”³⁵⁶ but the Christ who gives living water to the thirsty ones and inaugurates the age in which all believers would be able to offer prayers to the Father in spirit and truth.

³⁵⁴ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ*, 394.

³⁵⁵ D.M. BALL, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, 180.

³⁵⁶ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 173.

There is also no doubt that the eschatological age implies the presence of God among his people. The presence of God is such a reassuring phenomenon that any kind of fear is immediately put to flight. Our examination of the Old Testament background of *egōeimi* especially on the lips of God in connection with the command not to fear, as we have seen, throws light on our understanding of its use on the lips of Jesus in 6:20. Just as the reason not to fear in the Old Testament is the presence of God or His angel, so the reason the disciples should not fear is the presence of Jesus; for he is who he claims to be with the formula, 'I AM'. Furthermore, "the command of the LORD for Israel not to fear is accompanied in both Isaiah and Jeremiah by the idea that he is savior."³⁵⁷ Since the *egōeimi* on the lips of Jesus in 6:20 also occurs in the context of deliverance from fear, the salvific presence of Yahweh is unquestionable. This is also affirmed by the synoptic parallels (Mark 6:50 and Matthew 14:27).

The final and entire manifestation of Jesus is already found in his earthly ministry as J.C. Plastaras affirms:

For John, the revelation of Jesus as glorious Son of Man does not have to await some dramatic event in the near or distant future. The entire earthly ministry has been, in at least an inchoate way, a revelation of the divine glory clearly present in Jesus. The resurrection has for John no other meaning than the full manifestation and communication of his glory to the disciples. When Jesus promises to "manifest" himself (14:21), the reference is to a manifestation of his resurrection presence rather than to any future parousia-event.³⁵⁸

If the traditional view of the eschatological age was a time when death will be overcome and the dead resurrect (1 The 4:14-17; 1 Cor. 15:12ff.),³⁵⁹ the Johannine author affirms this event as a present reality: an event that has *already* taken place for those who believe. We saw that the Johannine author interprets the

³⁵⁷D.M. BALL, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, 183.

³⁵⁸J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 40.

³⁵⁹J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 40.

life of the age-to-come with the term “eternal life”. This came out clearly in our analysis of 11:25. As the resurrection and the life, those who believe in Jesus already have “eternal life” right now even if they die physically. “In the Johannine perspective, the believer has already been *reborn* into a new existence where death can no longer touch him. The resurrection from the dead and the manifestation of Jesus as the glorious Son of Man are a present reality perceptible only by the vision of faith. They are not to be awaited as an external event of the future.”³⁶⁰

Besides, the Johannine author sees the final judgment as a present reality. He “presents the entire ministry of Jesus (both the earthly ministry and the ongoing ministry of the risen Christ in his church) as one great scene of trial and judgment.”³⁶¹ A reference to our analysis of on 8:24 will clarify this point. We noticed that in 7:37-38 Jesus presents himself as the source of living water to whom all the thirsty are invited. Also in 8:12 he “reveals himself as the light of the world, and promises anyone who follows him the light of life.”³⁶² With that generous invitation also goes a warning against the consequences of rejection. By rejecting Jesus, the light of life, his hearers court their own death. Thus we come to the climax of such warnings in 8:24: unless they believe that Jesus is who he claims to be, death is inevitable. Thus by means of *egōeimi* we are presented with a Jesus whose presence calls the individual to make a decision; either to accept him and so live (3:16) or reject him and die in sins. This is a present reality that cannot be postponed indefinitely.

³⁶⁰J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 40.

³⁶¹J.C. PLASTARAS, *The Witness of John*, 40.

³⁶²R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 189.

3.2 A Christian Response to the Christ-event

In 20:31 the Johannine author clearly stated the purpose of his Gospel: “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Nevertheless, R. Brown points out that “commentators on John have suggested many motives that may have prompted the writing of the Gospel.”³⁶³ He then cautions us “against exaggerating the need for finding specific aims in the Gospel.”³⁶⁴ This is because “if John is based on historical tradition and genuine theological insight, then one of the principal reasons for writing the Gospel may have been to preserve this tradition and genuine insight.”³⁶⁵ However this caution gives rise to the question of “immediate aims which may have guided the choice of the material and the orientation the author gave to it.”³⁶⁶ The result is that “many have found an apologetic or a missionary motif in the Fourth Gospel. The proposed groups to whom the argumentation may have been directed include the sectarians of John the Baptist, ‘the Jews,’ and various heretical, Gnostic, or Docetic groups. Other scholars stress that John was written to confirm Christians in their faith.”³⁶⁷

The phraseology of the Johannine purpose also leaves us in ambiguity as to whether the Gospel was to confirm the faith of those who were already Christians or those who would come to believe later. Without going into all the details we can argue that the Johannine purpose also extends to us in this age who appropriate the scriptures and profess faith in Jesus Christ. It is only on this ground that we can suggest a Christian response to the Christ-event as made available to us through our

³⁶³ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, LXVII.

³⁶⁴ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, LXVII.

³⁶⁵ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, LXVII.

³⁶⁶ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, LXVII.

³⁶⁷ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, LXVII.

study of the Johannine use of *egōeimi*. Also from the Johannine perspective we have to say that this response is not demanded only of Christians but of all humanity since Jesus is the only way to the Father and no one comes to the Father but through him (14:6).

Our enquiry into 8:24 revealed that the meaning of *egōeimi* is an object of faith. It is in believing in its meaning that one comes to life.³⁶⁸ One either believes in Jesus and live or reject him and dies in sin. The greatest sin is unbelief.³⁶⁹ But elsewhere we gather that even this faith is the initiative of the Father who draws people to the Son (6:44.65). Thus faith is a gift of God to humanity. However this does not admit of passivity, since the gift must be accepted by the individual. The possibility of accepting or refusing the gift of faith does not destroy human freedom but rather upholds it. Hence the proper Christian response should be an acceptance of Christ, the gift par excellence.

Jesus, as we have seen, is “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), and whoever sees this light sees the one who sent him (12:45). This has implications for the believer, well expressed by L.T. Johnson:

The light brings with it judgment (3:19). Before its coming, there was neither light nor darkness, only reality; but when the light shines, then for the first time there is a choice – people can tell light from darkness. The choice they make between them is also the judgment they bring on themselves. Those who claim to see without this light are proved blind (9:39-41). But those who see by this light (9:35-38) also live by the life it brings: “In him was life and the life was the light of men” (1:4).³⁷⁰

Following from this we may say it is also the intention of the Johannine author to stress that no one comes to Jesus and remains the same. Jesus is the light of the world and as the life of men he gives them power to become children of God (1:12). Thus it follows that the purpose of the Christ-event was the transformation of

³⁶⁸ Cf. P.B. HARNER, *The 'I AM' of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

³⁶⁹ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, II, 197-8.

³⁷⁰ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 486-7.

humanity into the children of God. It goes without saying that all who accept Christ necessarily accept a process of transformation.

Finally that Jesus is the truth means that he is the source of every kind of knowledge we need. It is in him that we find all truths: the truth about God; about humanity and indeed the whole universe. Any search for truth that does not turn to Christ is a tiring and fruitless endeavor. In short the Christ-event is the light that illumines the human situation; we can never understand life without Christ. We also notice that Jesus attained his glorification precisely in his being lifted up on the cross. The Johannine Christ is one who accepted suffering, transforming it into the source of salvation to humanity. It follows that the proper Christian response to suffering should be a trustful attitude that looks to Christ, the life of men. Before Christ suffering and death lose their power³⁷¹ as he is the resurrection and the life.

3.3 Conclusion

In this final chapter we have seen how the Johannine *ego eimi* sayings contribute to our understanding of the Christ-event. The Christ-event is co-extensive with salvation history: the pre-existent Christ who was with the Father at the creation of the universe, came and dwelt among humanity and made our access to the Father possible. His entire life manifested the glory of God among men. This is so important that anything that contributes to our understanding of it should not be neglected. Moreover our accessibility to the Father that has been made possible by the Christ-event demands an active response from us. We must believe in Christ and this is a decision on which our salvation depends. The *egōeimi* in the Gospel of John

³⁷¹ Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ*, 394.

is therefore a very important key to understanding Johannine Christology. Neglecting it is depriving ourselves a central hermeneutic key to this Gospel.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Johannine author uses the *egōeimisayingsin* in two main ways: in an absolute sense as is in the case in 8:58 and 13:19, and in a predicated sense that always has some form of imagery as its object. There are also cases in which it is difficult to determine if a predicate is implied. Nevertheless, even if a predicate can be proven to be implied in such cases, that would not disturb this categorization of the *egōeimiin* in the fourth gospel into the absolute and predicated forms. The two forms are however inseparably connected to each other. Their purpose is to lay bare the identity and role of Jesus. As M. Ball has pointed out, the absolute form is more connected to Jesus' identity whereas the predicated form brings out his role. Jesus' person and role are inseparable. It is knowing and believing in him and his role that one comes to life.³⁷²

We have to acknowledge that, "Even to the casual reader Jesus appears in the fourth gospel as a revealer. The object of this revelation is not merely the identity of his own person, but also the person of the Father who sent him, and their mutual relationship."³⁷³ This can be said to be a major stress of the fourth gospel as against the synoptic gospels where "the theme of revelation is concerned primarily with the

³⁷² Cf. A. MAGNANTE, "Jesus Christ: the Stumbling Block Yesterday and Today", 2.

³⁷³ J. T. FORESTELL, *The Word of the Cross*, 17.

mystery of the kingdom of God.”³⁷⁴ Understanding or knowing Jesus’ person and role implies the understanding of the Christ-event. Since the ‘I am’ sayings contribute in no small way to making this possible, it follows that it is one of the most important tools in the Fourth Gospel.

We found the frequency with which the ‘I am’ sayings occur in this Gospel together with the importance the author attaches to them as almost irreconcilable with their near absence in the synoptic Gospels (except in Mk 6:50). P.B. Harner questions “the assumption that such an important part of Jesus’ proclamation would hardly be represented at all in the synoptic Gospels.”³⁷⁵ With him we acknowledge that one would expect that “if Jesus spoke explicitly about his own nature, his own understanding of his role, and his relationship to God,” then his followers “would have regarded these sayings as too important to omit from any account of Jesus’ ministry, since they would represent Jesus’ own explanation of the significance of his life and work.”³⁷⁶ Notwithstanding this challenge, the majority of scholars are ready to assert that the phrase certainly goes to the early Christian tradition of which the Johannine author possibly made use. J. Redford on his part stresses the authenticity of the phrase. The charge of blasphemy as well as the reaction of Jesus’ hearers upon his pronouncement of *egōeimican* only be understood if Jesus made a claim to divinity. Besides since no figure of the OT in all the history of Judaism ever appropriated this formula and not even the primitive church ever described Jesus that way, J. Redford concludes that “the I AM sayings are therefore authenticated historically by the principle of double discontinuity.”³⁷⁷ We may say that the force and import of the sayings are so typical of the sort of statements often attributed to

³⁷⁴ J. T. FORESTELL, *The Word of the Cross*, 17.

³⁷⁵ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I Am of the Fourth Gospel?’*, 64.

³⁷⁶ P.B. HARNER, *The ‘I Am of the Fourth Gospel?’*, 64.

³⁷⁷ J. REDFORD, *Bad, Mad or God?*, 264.

Jesus that a denial of their authenticity would be more cumbersome to assert than otherwise.

Furthermore, we realized that by means of *egōeimi*, the Johannine author outlines the entire reality and purpose of Jesus Christ. Jesus undertakes a double movement; a downward and upward movements. He is sent by and from the Father and returns to the Father. The purpose of the descending, movement (through the incarnation) is the revelation of the Father for the reconciliation of humanity to God (as St. Paul also observes in 2 Cor 5:19). He attained this purpose in his person (since he is that Revelation, the Truth, the Way, the resurrection and the Life without whom no man can have access to the Father); by what he said and did and especially in his being lifted up on the cross, in which he draws all men to himself (cf. Jn 12:32). Having attained this purpose he ascended to the Father that the Holy Spirit may come and sustain this life-giving revelation in his church. We identified this event as the Christ-event. The 'I am' sayings bring out this inseparability: Jesus is one with the Father, preexisted his earthly existence (8:58), the basis for asserting the incarnation; in his incarnated form he revealed the Father and carried out the redemptive plan (by words and deeds hence present the eschatological age). He willingly laid down his life of his own accord and by that attained glory and the Father's will. With that also comes the Father's definitive intervention in salvation history; the eschatological age inaugurated, present today and yet awaiting a final consummation. In other words the preexistence is the foundation for the incarnation, and the incarnation is in turn the foundation for eschatology. Everything else falls within this connecting line.

Again, the Johannine use of the 'I am' sayings is important not only because they contribute greatly to the shaping of Johannine theology but also for the demand

they make of readers and of all who profess faith in Jesus Christ. They indicate that every encounter with Jesus involves an existential choice which cannot be postponed indefinitely. One either decides for Jesus and by so doing come to life or against him and die but it is not possible to sit on the fence. This makes the Johannine Jesus a challenge through and through.

This work may be pointing to this crucial observation; that Johannine theology would probably be incomplete without its judicious use of the 'I am' sayings. That is to say if we eliminate them from the Gospel, we will still have a good portrait of Jesus but probably not the kind that the Johannine author would want us to have. This is arguable but we want to stress that the purpose of this research was not to stress the importance of seeing these sayings as a hermeneutic key over against others but for their unique contribution to our understanding of the Christ-event. Perhaps another study should aim directly at the relationship between the Johannine use of *egōeimi* as a hermeneutic key and other possible hermeneutic keys to Johannine theology such as the Logos and the Son of man.

Moreover, we are also aware that this work can hardly be said to constitute an exhaustive exposition of how the *egōeimi* in the Fourth Gospel forms a key to interpreting the Christ-event. The present author makes no such claim but that we may not totally disregard the *egōeimias* an interpretive key without having to face squarely the challenge posed above.

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