

A Christological-Theological Study into the Exclusivism of the Salvation Concept
in John 14:6

Florensia Theograsia, S. Si. Teol (Indonesia)

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Acknowledgement and Dedication

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968* and any approved embargo.

Florensia Theograsia

Abstract

The thesis presented here is that the text of John 14:6—“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’”—cannot be read in an exclusivist manner. While this thesis may initially seem paradoxical, the argument presented here is that while the content may initially seem to be exclusivist when read in light of later historical developments, its form and original context indicate the necessity of an alternative meaning. John 14:6 is part of Jesus’ speech at the Last Supper, as presented in the Gospel of John, but this account of the Last Supper takes place at a confluence between two traditions: the Jewish practice of the Passover and the first shoots of a new tradition that would come to be identified as Christianity. The reality of such an intersection means that the text itself must be read in terms of at least these two traditions, Judaism and Christianity. To develop this argument, I undertake a careful analysis of the development of the Passover tradition (Chapter 1) and then an equally careful analysis of John 14:6 in light of the Johannine context (Chapter 2). The final chapter concerns the confluence of these two streams and the implications for understanding John 14:6. The conclusion considers the implications for multi-faith societies such as Indonesia and the potential implications for further scholarly research.

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Synopsis

This thesis argues that the text of John 14:6 arises at the intersection between the Jewish and Christian traditions, specifically in terms of the Passover Haggadah as it was appropriated and transformed in the Gospel of John. Thus, the apparently exclusivist nature of the text—“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’”—arises in a dual faith situation. This means that the text opens out to more than one faith tradition.

My work starts with a clear description of the reasons behind the in-depth investigation of John 14:6, in reaction to the claim that the text declares Christianity to be the only way to heaven. This is particularly important in a multi-religious context such as exists in Indonesia. To investigate whether or not the claim is plausible, I conduct the study using the method of exegesis. I introduce the term “context-contamination,” which refers to the practice of eisegesis, the negation of exegesis. This study contributes to both scholarly and theological fields. The finding determines whether or not readers of the text can still justify the claim mentioned above. This rather conservative method reveals how plausibly to read John 14:6.

To achieve a careful examination of the text, I engage with existing Johannine scholarship and also Hebrew and Hebrew Bible scholarship. Going deeper into the Passover and its traditions, I investigate Halakha as a preliminary understanding of the Passover Haggadah. I show that Halakha as a written source of Passover does not imitate Haggadah, particularly the Passover Haggadah. The Passover Haggadah outlines the “must” and “must not” in the tradition of the festival of Passover. The festival itself has been established since the Old Testament; however, the Haggadah emerged to somehow internalize and restructure the celebration within the Jewish tradition and culture. Scholars such as Moskowitz (2010) have found similarities between Hebrew Bible texts and the Passover Haggadah. I use the

Haggadah as a window of comparison with the texts in the Fourth Gospel, as there are gaps in Johannine scholarship in regard to my research question. It is apparent that there has not been sufficient investigation of the texts conducted by grouping the keywords and using the exegesis methodology.

To start the investigation, I carefully examine the context of the Fourth Gospel.¹ I establish John the son of Zebedee as the author of the gospel. He composed his written testimony of Jesus Christ around 100 C.E. (Common Era), a time of hardship for the Jewish people, especially for the followers of Jesus. My exegesis of the text is based on the rearrangement of the gospel by Haenchen (1980), Hoare (1944), and Howard (1943), particularly with regard to the order of the Passover meal.

The investigation then progresses to a discussion of how the festival of Passover is acknowledged by the New Testament. I investigate how the Passover meal is structured, using two main sources, Mishnah Pesachim 10 and the Haggadah, and conclude that there are fifteen steps in the order of the Passover meal (or the Passover Seder). I also acknowledge the debate around whether or not the Last Supper as mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels was a Passover meal, and establish that the meal Jesus had with his disciples, as described in the Synoptics, was indeed a Passover meal. The Synoptics provide a clear description of some of the listed steps in the order of the Passover meal, for example *kadesh*, *urchatz*, *yachatz*, *hallel*, *nirtzah*, and *maggid*, and there are also similarities between *Mah Nishtanah* (the four

¹ See Burkett (2004) for further reading.

questions) in the Haggadah and the Fourth Gospel. These similarities reveal that the meal Jesus had with his disciples, described in the Fourth Gospel, was a Passover meal.

John 14:6 falls on the Passover ritual of *maggid*. The text contains deep Christological values and views. Jesus transformed the historical aspects of the celebration of Passover into Christological ones. The text provides information, encouragement, and an invitation from Jesus to his followers, particularly his eleven disciples, to become one with him and the father; as in departing to the father.

Introduction

The topic of this thesis is “A Christological-theological study of the exclusivism of the salvation concept in John 14:6.” In this introduction, I describe the reason for finding the topic a crucial issue that needs to be resolved and the method I use to resolve the issue. I have also included a synopsis of the chapters to aid clear understanding and expectation.

Background

In many situations, the Bible remains deeply influential. It is often considered to be the source of moral values and standards (seen as the “Holy Book”). The Bible has a deep and strong influence on people’s lives, especially Christians’ lives. The Bible in this context is a book seemingly without any attachments to culture, translation, scholarship, or interpretation. It is the book Christians value the highest. However, the Bible is also recognized as the most edited document in Western civilization, or even in world literature (Kloppenborg & Newman, 1951/2012). The Bible is studied, edited, translated, and interpreted (Wegner, 1999, p. 464). Interpreting the Bible is the way Christians utilize it. When it comes to interpreting the Bible, simplicity is rare and complexity is common.

My specific interest is triggered by the emphasis many Christians put on John 14:6 as one of the sources shaping the faith. The text reads: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’.” There are many translations of this verse, but for scholarly work, I make use of the English translation of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible. This work does not observe or include any other (English) translations. I also work with the established *The Greek New Testament*, which carries on the Nestle-Aland tradition (Aland et al., 1993).

Many Christians interpret the text in an exclusivist way. They believe that Jesus Christ declares the superiority of Christianity through John 14:6. Therefore, they establish themselves as the followers of the right (as in justified) religion. Religions other than Christianity are wrong by default. Many Christians paraphrase the verse into “Jesus said that He is the only way to heaven. One cannot be saved and thus go to heaven through any religion other than Christianity.”

I regard this kind of interpretation problematic, particularly in the context of a multi-faith or multi-religious society. Indonesia is one such context and the particular instance I use in this study. There are six legal religions in Indonesia, with Christianity in a minority compared to the other four religions (Roman Catholic Christianity is separated from Protestant Christianity). The dynamics of a society with such diversity constantly changes. One of those dynamics is the conflict between religions. In this research, I take into consideration the conflicts that occur specifically between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia. I do not look at these conflicts from the perspective of Peace Studies or Religious Studies; I do not study the history of these conflicts. Instead, my focus is on the way a particular biblical text has been deployed in such conflicts. Or, rather, the initial motivation for my research—which concerns careful exegetical work on the text itself—arises from and is posed by such conflicts.

The paraphrasing of John 14:6, that Christianity is the only true religion, has created exclusivism among Christians. Christians believe they are the justified people, with the result that many of them see Christianity as the only religion that can be justified before God. Others are by definition wrong. There is no salvation to be gained from religions other than Christianity. Such a belief is crucial when it is being echoed widely and vociferously in a country such as Indonesia. Significantly, one of the main ideological, social, and cultural

features of Indonesia is the existence of God. It may be the God of Islam, or of Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity, or the Bodhisattvas of Buddhism, or even—although by significant extension—the role of Confucius in Confucianism. Thus, religion is a compelling notion for the country. The Christian belief in the justification of Christians compared with those of other religions, in particular when compared with the majority religion of Islam, is one cause of (and also a response to) conflict.

Such phenomena show how the context of the readers and interpreters significantly contributes to the interpretation of the text. As a minority, Christians in Indonesia utilize the biblical text to its maximum potential to meet their needs. On my reading of the text of John 14:6, the question arose: if the text does not say the same thing as is believed by Christians, what does the text actually say? More detailed questions are raised in later chapters; however, the primary research question is, what does the text plausibly mean?

I believe that a strong faith must come from knowledge, which makes it an examined faith. If the text of John 14:6 is used to justify their faith, I suggest a better way to make such a justification is to conduct a careful biblical exegesis of the text instead of repeating the same unexamined beliefs; in other words, to read and interpret the text in light of its current context. Other methods of reading biblical texts have the potential to cause conflict, as described previously. Therefore, my approach is not to engage in direct analysis of the conflicts mentioned above, but to focus on one of the underlying issues: the understanding of John 14:6. My approach, which I will explain in a moment, is to engage in rigorous exegesis, analyzing the text as carefully as possible to determine its original, or at least most plausible, meaning. My hope is that such an approach will assist in some way to diminish the

misunderstanding of the text in the Indonesian religious context and even in the broader context of multi-religious communities.²

Methodological Statement

I begin with what some would regard as the most challenging feature of my approach: the need to avoid “context-contamination.” By this I mean that one’s current context should not contaminate the interpretation of a biblical text. For some, this approach may seem somewhat out of fashion, especially in light of the advocacy of “contextual analysis” (see e.g., Dietrich, 2002; Nyiawung, 2013; Phillips, 2000; Zamfir, 2017). In short, I would like to return to an insistence of *exegesis* rather than *eisegesis* (Davis, 2000).³ I will have more to say on this old and valuable distinction below, but my point here is that context-contamination entails a form of eisegesis. Some may immediately object: is not my invocation of the Indonesian context a form of eisegesis or context-contamination? Does not my question in relation to John 14:6 arise from interfaith conflicts in Indonesia? Is not my search for an answer determined as well? In answering these questions, I need to distinguish three senses of the term “context.”

The first is the literary context of a biblical text, which is the wider context of a text in relation to other literature. This includes the biblical texts, as well as other relevant texts of the time of the biblical text. This sense of context is perfectly valid and indeed important in any exercise of biblical exegesis. Thus, to examine John 14:6, I have to examine the literary

² See Harris (2006) for further reading.

³ See Smit (2015) for further reading.

context of this text. This will involve investigating the whole of John 14 to ascertain the setting of time and of place, and the people involved throughout the passage. I also need to look into the wider context by investigating chapters 13 and chapter 15, since chapter 14 is a continuation of chapter 13 and a prelude to chapter 15. However, besides investigating the texts in the Fourth Gospel, I have also analyzed other books in the Bible that have connections with the events in John 14. For example, after investigating chapters 15, 14, 13, and 12, I found that the main event was the festival of Passover. Therefore, I investigated the Book of Exodus to gain an understanding of the origin of the festival. The Book of Exodus, particularly chapter 12, is a part of the literary context of John 14:6. Further, my research also entailed investigating the development of the Passover celebration in extra-biblical texts such as the Wisdom of Solomon, Jubilees, Philo, Flavius Josephus, and—most importantly—Midrash Pesachim 10. Such is the literary context of the biblical text, which is vital for exegesis.

The second meaning of context concerns the historical context of the original text. Obviously, historical context is related to literary context. Different texts arise from different historical contexts. For instance, the background to the composition of chapter 14 of John is different to that of chapter 12 of Exodus, although both chapters have the same theme—the celebration of the festival of Passover. The authors of the two books were not the same person. The books were written in different ages and generations. Thus, the background to the writing of Exodus and the Fourth Gospel are not identical. The same can be said for texts such as Midrash Pesachim 10.

The third type of context is the one I see as highly problematic, leading to context-contamination. This is the context of the interpreters and readers of the text in terms of social, cultural, economic, and political realities. When a 2020 reader reads an ancient text, there is

the potential for the reader to read the text in light of what is happening in 2020. More to the point, the risk is that the context of 2020 becomes determinative for the meaning of the text, pushing into the background or even ignoring the literary and historical contexts of the text, as described above. Let me return to the Indonesian context. Being a minority group in a somewhat hostile community, Christian Indonesians were looking for a justification to create the feeling of superiority and courage to maintain their stability within the multi-religious community in Indonesia. To strengthen their position, they have come to use John 14:6 to claim that Christianity is superior to other religions. The text is read with the understanding that salvation comes only through being a Christian; if one is not a Christian, one would not be “saved.” Regardless of whether or not the text can justify such a belief, the readers have brought the current context to the text and interpreted the text in this light.

As mentioned earlier, I realize I am challenging a whole development in biblical criticism, one which began as “reader-response” criticism⁴ and developed into what today is called “contextual interpretation.” However, I regard this development as risky, since it leads again and again to context-contamination, which has the potential to diminish the original (at least the most probable) meaning, message, and interpretation of a text. Now I return to the question that some readers may ask: considering that the main topic for research arises as a response to certain problems in Indonesia, how do I avoid the problem of context-contamination in light of this reality? The answer is actually straightforward: the question may arise from this situation, but my answer—through careful research—is not determined

⁴ “The meaning of a text is not at all fixed, but emerges, with the help of the reader, ever anew in the act of reading” (Körtner, 2016, p. 2).

by it (see further Baker, 1980; Hassenfeld, 2016). Indeed, it is precisely through my focus on rigorous, scientific exegesis that my answer may potentially have even more of an impact than if I were to claim to some form of “contextual analysis.”

In order to explain, a methodological statement is needed. I deploy an old and well-tried method of biblical interpretation, exegesis, which is the opposite of eisegesis. Eisegesis brings a particular context or assumption into the interpretation of a text such as the Bible. In other words, one’s answer is a foregone conclusion and one seeks justification for this answer in the biblical text. Eisegesis is commonly used to refer to the practice of pre-critical commentators of the Bible, who were anxious to find the doctrinal system to which they already adhered propounded in scripture and who therefore resorted to various devices, including a kind of strained exegesis, to show that the scripture (in this case, a particular text or verse) supported their position (Barton, 1990). There is no intention to bring the meaning out of the text in eisegesis. In contrast, according to Mafico (2015), exegesis is the re-examination of texts that people have long taken for granted based on church tradition. As Werner (1962) noted:

The church’s mission is to bear constant witness to the message of Christ, preaching it to all nations and to every age in its own language, and in its own patterns of thought. The risk is imposing a meaning based on today’s language, today’s patterns of thoughts, today’s “atmosphere.”

In other words, one needs to be constantly vigilant against eisegesis, or “reading into” the text. By contrast, exegesis—as the word itself suggests—is a “leading out” of meaning from the text, a drawing out of the text’s meaning. Exegesis includes investigation of the literary and historical contexts of the text, as well as careful examination of the text itself, and

eisegesis is a process whereby the interpretative context influences and interferes with the task of exegesis. Exegesis—my approach—is the antithesis of eisegesis.

I would like to elaborate on what such exegesis entails in this study. Hayes and Holladay (2007) identified seven kinds of biblical exegesis: textual criticism, historical criticism, grammatical criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, and redaction criticism. I would like to reduce this number to five: philological criticism (which includes grammatical, textual, and literary criticism), form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and historical criticism. Hayes and Holladay also introduced newer methods of interpretation such as structuralism and canonical criticism, which became gradually more popular among biblical critics from the 1970s onwards, and they also discussed how computer technology could contribute to biblical work. Even in light of these newer developments, Hayes and Holladay insisted in the core need for exegesis, with which I agree.

Recent works have come with new approaches such as psychological biblical criticism (Aarde, 2015), which, in my observation, overlap some of Hayes and Holladay's attempts to produce a scientific approach to biblical hermeneutics. Similar to my intention of investigating the original meaning of biblical texts, Aarde also analyzed the transformation of communication in formats that differ from the original form of biblical texts and their interpretation. Ten years earlier, Kim (2005) established a new approach to biblical criticism, which she called spiritual interpretation. However, I would not consider taking Kim's spiritual approach, as she tried to bridge the gap between the biblical texts and today's context through spiritual interpretation. She answered the needs of today's context by using biblical texts as she believes that literary and historical criticism do not reach as high a spiritual level as the Bible. I am not against the approach itself. However, instead of making the spiritual approach the base of literary and historical criticism as Kim does, I do it the

other way round. If any spiritual value lies within the biblical texts, it should come from careful literary and historical analysis of the texts. I should also say that I am wary of “postcolonial” criticism, which has become popular in some areas of biblical interpretation (see e.g., Sugirtharajah, 2001, 2002). This wariness may seem a little strange for some since I come from a country that was once colonized by the Dutch, but I see this effort to make the “postcolonial” context determinative of biblical interpretation a version of context-contamination.

To return to the core task of exegesis. Since these approaches are well known in biblical criticism, I will not outline their details at great length. Instead, I make the following observations in light of my own emphases. First, while I affirm the importance of older historical-critical approaches, I am interested in what are called literary approaches, but only in terms of the way they contribute to exegesis (Culpeper, 1983; du Rand, 1985; Koester, 1995; Moloney, 1993/1996/1998; Stibbe, 1992, 1993; Wuellner, 1991). The important features, as indicated by Attridge (2002), concern the literary dynamics of the gospel, analyzing how the symbolic language works, and how it affects the characters, the plot, and the meaning of particular texts. Segovia (1998) called it literary-rhetorical analysis, observing that:

Its focus would be on the present text of the Gospel as both an artistic whole, with unified literary structure and development, and a rhetorical whole, with unified strategic concerns and aims. Such an approach would analyze the Gospel as a world unto itself, as it were, in terms of its narrative features and rhetorical aims—in effect, not only the what-and-how of the message but also its wherefore, that is, the concerns and goals behind the given deployment of the what-and-how. (p. 183)

Second, moving from a historical-critical approaches to a literary approaches can present some difficulties, as Hylen (2013) indicated:

Historical-critical scholarship prepared readers to view the text as a window into the historical situation of the author (and/or editors) who produced it. Because this way of viewing John is well developed and dominates many scholarly readings, shifting to a literary approach to character presents a series of hurdles. (p. 97)

To simplify all these terms of biblical criticism, historical criticism is used as the umbrella for all these approaches.⁵ For this, it is important to acknowledge the recognition of this approach in biblical interpretation development. I would like to start with Hahn and Wiker (2013), who considered that scholars need to dig deeper into what is recognized as historical criticism, which is to reformulate the political power that lies behind the biblical texts. I completely agree with this argument and approach. However, in my observation, political power is not the only aspect that creates a particular historical context. Aspects such as who the author was, what their intentions were, and the timeline of the context could also be a part of it. East (2017), who analyzed the approach well, noted the deficiencies of historical criticism in biblical interpretation, but at the same time also explained why the approach can be put to good use. East acknowledged the existence of context-contamination when he wrote, “biblical scholarship, whose governing methodology is historical criticism, supplies the ‘meaning’ of scriptural texts, and the church’s varied reading practices come along afterward, receive that ‘meaning’, and either ‘apply’ it to new contexts or derive ‘significance’ from it” (East, 2017, pp. 17–18). These investigations into the origins and

⁵ See Legaspi (2014) for further reading.

assumptions of historical criticism are necessary since they help to avoid context-contamination even in this approach. At the same time, the method has developed into a mature and sophisticated approach that is a must for any serious biblical analysis.

In my approach, a significant factor to take into account is that the New Testament is couched in the language, myths, and thought forms of the age in which it was written (Bultmann, 1971; Barrett, 1982; Brown, 1997; Cameron, 1991; Dodd, 1953; Werner, 1962). Therefore, I take a critical-theological approach to identify the initial thought-world of John 14:6, which I define as the “original” or “most plausible” meaning. This is to avoid being overly influenced by the different contexts of Christian understanding. For instance, as Venter (1992) observed, at the time of the Church “Fathers,” interpretation and its application depended on the personal circumstances and preconceived objectives of each interpreter. Thus, John 14:6 was used to elucidate controversial problems of their time.

In this light, I would like to address the concept of “intentional fallacy” in regard to my definition of the “original” or “most plausible” meaning. There have been debates around this issue for a while, starting in 1939 when C. S. Lewis proposed “the personal heresy” (Lewis & Tillyard, 1939), which was then followed by Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “The Intentional Fallacy” in 1946 (also in 1958 repeating the previous thesis; see also Hirsch, 1967). The anti-intentionalist position of Wimsatt and Beardsley distinguished between “the meaning of the work itself” and “the meaning that the author intended to express in the work.” Words and phrases in a literary work can acquire meanings they did not originally have, as those words and phrases acquire new meanings as time goes by. Indeed, a text that someone has created can have a meaning that its author was not aware of, and therefore, can have a meaning that was not intended (Dickie & Wilson, 1995). While the debate raged into the 1990s, with intentionalists on one side (Carroll, 1992; Grice, 1989; Tolhurst, 1979; Walton, 1989) and the

anti-intentionalists on the other (Dickie & Wilson, 1995; Lyas, 1992), there are two possible responses for someone—like myself—who seeks to defend a form of intentionalism.

The first is to reassert the importance of the author's intention. The author's intention remains an important part of the text's meaning, which is why I devote attention to identifying the author of the Gospel of John (see below). Therefore, I need philological criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism—encapsulated in the term historical criticism—to approach and support my intentionalist interpretation. The reader of the texts needs to know the context of the author in his time. A second and related approach is to defend a notion on the intentionality of the text. As Brett (2000) noted, the term “intention” embodies three senses that are not always distinguished: an explicit communicative intention; an implied or indirect communicative intention; and a motive (pp. 11–15). Brett went on to observe:

Initially, we may take the first two together, and distinguish a communicative intention (what an author or editor is trying to say) from a motive (why it is being said). The motives behind a communicative act may be complex, contradictory, and even unconscious, never coming to expression in language at all. This domain is the focus of psychoanalytical criticism. At the level of language, on the other hand, an author's intention may be relatively explicit in the text or it may be only implied—something which must be inferred from the often unstated circumstances of utterance. These unstated circumstances may include literary allusions and the like, but also non-linguistic features of the communicative context. (Brett, 2000, p. 12)

This is a sophisticated approach, which recognizes that the search for an ancient author's motive is fraught with difficulties. At the same time, Brett sought to defend the idea of textual intention, where one investigates the explicit and implicit features of a text to determine what it seeks to say:

The important point here is that an interpretation of communicative intention need not restrict itself to the explicit communicative features embedded in a text but may need to encompass the unspoken features of a reconstructed historical situation, or at least those features of the situation which may be relevant to an author's purpose. (Brett, 2000, pp. 12–13).

It is in this light that I seek to investigate the role of the Passover celebration in the text of the Gospel of John. This will require a careful analysis of the development of the Passover tradition, especially in first century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) texts running from the Wisdom of Solomon to Midrash Pesachim 10, so as to determine the implicit features of a reconstructed historical situation that led to the way the Last Supper as presented in the Gospel of John.

Finally, my approach may be defined as “critical-theological.” I understand a “critical” approach as one that seeks to discern (*kritikos*) different possible meanings. Therefore, I not only read and grasp the text in a literary sense but also question any possible issues related to the text and the context of the text. This approach is enabled by the five dimensions identified earlier (philological, form, tradition, redaction, and historical criticism). A “theological” approach does not mean that the Gospel of John is presented as truth (Redman, 2013). Instead, I see it as a “questionable truth” that must be examined through careful critical analysis.

The Context of John 14:6

In this section, I address the questions of authorship and the historical context of the Gospel of John. In the past 20 years there have been no new theories on the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The existing or recent Johannine scholars only circulate theses where the author could be John the son of Zebedee or someone else who chose to be recognized as the

beloved disciple with no name ever mentioned (Brown, 1979).⁶ After presenting a series of difficulties regarding the identification of the beloved disciple with John the son of Zebedee, Perkins (1978) admitted that “scholars today give quite a different answer to the question about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel” than they did in the past, one that, nevertheless, recognizes in the gospel “a witness to the legitimate development of apostolic faith.” In this study, I take a traditional approach and identify John the son of Zebedee as the author of the Fourth Gospel. Parker (1962) provided adequate historical information on this character. He identified John the son of Zebedee as an active missionary, who had 14 years of experience in introducing and expanding the faith in Jesus Christ. This particular character of John leads, according to Parker, to reasonably trustworthy testimonies of Jesus Christ. I suspect John the son of Zebedee does not have the same political interests that John the Baptist could potentially have. John the Baptist was a leader, as was Jesus (John 1:25, 4:1). John the Baptist’s disciples decided to follow him no longer, but to follow Jesus. That is not the case with John the son of Zebedee who was chosen by Jesus. I find it interesting that there is no record in the Fourth Gospel of how Jesus encountered John the son of Zebedee. After calling Phillip and Nathanael to be his disciples, Jesus is shown attending the wedding at Cana with his disciples, and no calling events occur afterwards. However, Luke 5:1–11 explicitly explains how the process of the calling of John went. John was called to become a disciple at the same time as his brother, James. The Zebedee brothers were called at the same time as Simon Peter. In my judgement, Luke shows in chapter 5 that the calling event was meant to be for Simon Peter, the fisherman who was amazed at the large catch of fish. James and John

⁶ See Grant (1937) and Kysar (1975) for further reading.

happened to be there and witnessed the same thing, which led to them becoming followers of Jesus. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, provides a different story plot in regard to the calling of Simon Peter. John writes that Simon was brought to Jesus by Andrew, his brother, who is not present in Luke's calling narrative. While the account in Luke shows that Simon Peter was not alone when Jesus arrived, Luke does not include Andrew, as we find in John's calling narrative. Another difference is that the name Peter was given by Jesus, but this is not the case in Luke.

In my observation, John the son of Zebedee is a disinterested character, who has done what he should have done if the original intention was to follow Jesus. His focus is not on himself but in Jesus. The Fourth Gospel states that its purpose is to show that Jesus is the son of God (John 20:31). Despite various interpretations of John 20:31, John stated literally why he wrote the gospel (Carson, 1987, p. 639). Instead of a mere historical character as described by the Synoptic Gospels, Sturdevant (2014) suggested that John intends to exhibit the mysteriousness of Jesus due to his heavenly origins and "to inspire people to re-evaluate their presuppositions about Jesus' identity and mission" (p. 24). Carson (1987) is open to the idea that there is an evangelistic aspect to John in writing the gospel and building the character of the Johannine Jesus.

The final writing of the gospel was completed between the earliest possible date of 75 C.E. and the latest possible date of 110 C.E. (Brown, 1992). Edwards (2015) suggested that the Fourth Gospel went through two or three stages (or editions) before reaching its final form around 90 C.E. to 110 C.E. An Egyptian papyrus fragment suggests that the Fourth Gospel was known in Egypt by 100 C.E. (O'Day, 1995). Aland and Aland (1995) argued that the front of the Rylands Library Papyrus 52 contains parts of seven lines from John 18:31–33

in Greek, and the back contains parts of seven lines from verses 37–38. These theories are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Summary of the Theories Regarding the Date of the Gospel of John

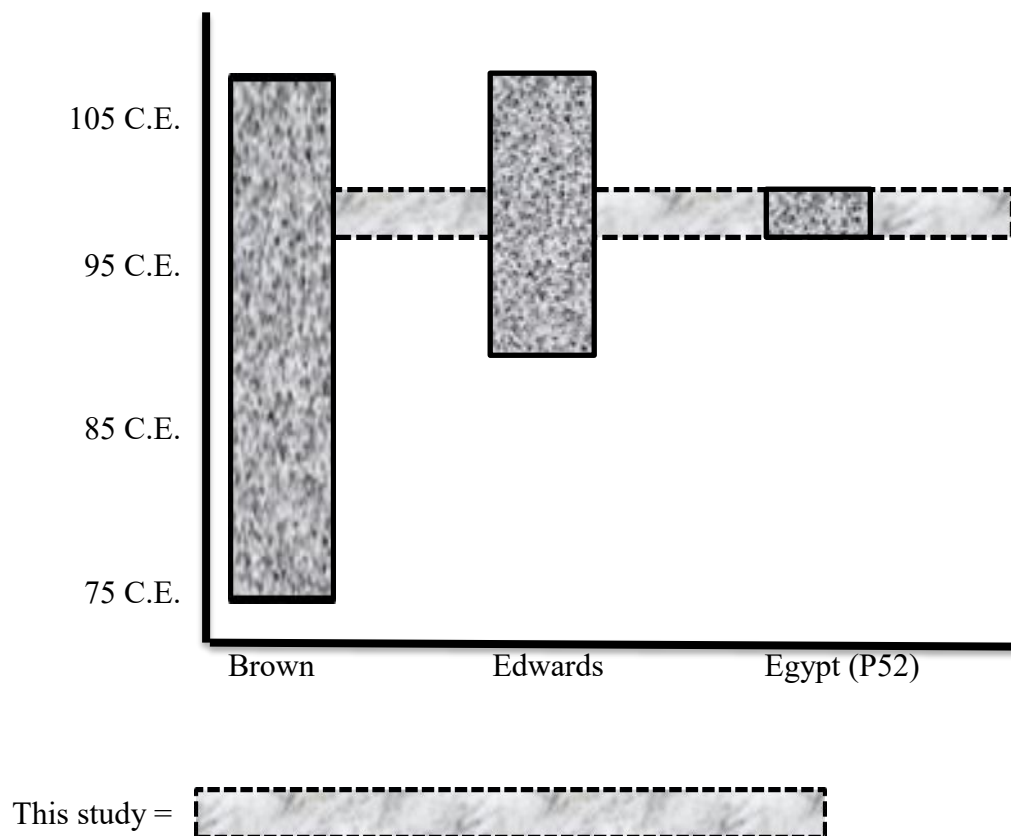


Figure 1 shows that if there were to be a consensus, it would be agreed that the Fourth Gospel was finally written around 100 C.E. This position assumes that the Fourth Gospel was written later than 70 C.E. Many consider that the Fourth Gospel was influenced by the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Mark was written in approximately 70 C.E. and the Gospel of Luke was based substantially on Mark's. Therefore, the Fourth Gospel should have been finished after 70 C.E., which makes 100 C.E. fit into this calculation. Roberts (1935), who published work on the original transcription and translation

of Papyrus P52, estimated the date to be approximately 100 C.E. (Nongbri, 2005). Thus, I begin this study based on the premise that the Fourth Gospel was composed in approximately 100 C.E. Having this starting point is significant due to its effects on interpretation. Events that occurred during 100 C.E. determine the context of the interpreted texts. Events prior to and after that year would also have significant implications for this study.

Based on the work of Armstrong (1996) and Sicker (2001), the dismantlement period of the Fourth Gospel falls during the early Roman period. The political atmosphere during the time the gospel was compiled and written was not conducive to its composition due to the many anti-imperialist struggles—inevitably violent—against Roman imperialism and colonization. The Fourth Gospel was composed and written as Jerusalem (which automatically refers to Jewish Christians) fell and rose again in the background. Ephesus, in comparison, seems to have been less affected by these wars, probably due to its location, which was more than 900 kilometers away from Jerusalem. One would therefore assume that it was a more secure place to compose or write the Fourth Gospel (although one fact to be taken into account is that Romans dominated the population in Ephesus and John would probably have had to compose the gospel in secret). Ephesus in Asia Minor or Anatolia was one of the first places where Christianity spread. Therefore, many Christians populated the area and its surroundings (Brewster, 1993).

The Fourth Gospel also has some relation to apocalyptic literature. Carey (2016) observed that in some respects we may characterize all the books in the New Testament as apocalyptic literature, since they arise in a time of crisis, conflict, and social and economic devastation. To identify the apocalyptic values within the literature, Carey (2016) suggested examining the visions, heavenly intermediaries, pseudonymity, *ex eventu* prophecy, and symbolic language, as well as its core theological concepts, among them an alternative reality

in its temporal and spatial dimensions, dualism, and determinism (Davies, 2017). For example, John 14:3 contains an apocalyptic frame. The phrase “I will come again (πάντα ἔρχομαι)” contains an intense apocalyptic value. Jesus Christ as the life, the eternal life, is also evidently apocalyptic, or at least eschatological.⁷

By way of conclusion, as should be clear by now, many of my assumptions are quite traditional and even conservative. I take John the son of Zebedee to be the author of the Gospel of John. I seek to deploy the well-tried method of exegesis, attempting as far as possible to avoid the trap of eisegesis. To do so, I make use of careful biblical analysis, including the text’s literary and historical context, to determine the author’s and the text’s intention, even where this intention may be textually implicit, as identified by Brett (2000, pp. 11–15). I seek to deploy all of the tools developed from historical-critical analysis, a tried and true approach to biblical texts. Part of the reason—paradoxically—is that such assumptions arise from my background, but this background does not determine the analysis I undertake, nor does it determine my answers. The reason being that I approach the text from a resolutely exegetical method. However, on one important issue I differ markedly from this generally conservative position. My thesis is that John 14:6 is not an exclusivist text. This conclusion, as the following analysis seeks to show, arises from the method of biblical analysis I undertake—exegesis.

⁷ See Burrows (1930) for further reading.