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**The Idea Of Unity In John: A Reception Historical Study
Of Johannine Passages On Unity And Abiding In Jesus**

By

Anthony Oluyomi Taiye Fadairo

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The Department of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

The dissertation 'The idea of Unity in John: A reception historical study of Johannine passages on unity' as the title suggests is a critical historical study of the reception of the Johannine passages on unity and abiding in Jesus. It is my intention in these pages to assess the reading of some of the passages in John that dwell on unity and abiding in Jesus by modern scholars, early church fathers and the Protestant reformers of the 16th century. I have chosen the periods when unity was of great urgency for the church and only the major scholars at these periods. The modern scholars whose works will be focused on are Bultmann, Schnackenburg, Brown and Barrett; the fathers whose commentaries are examined are John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo; while the protestant reformers that will be considered are Martin Luther, a first generation reformer and John Calvin, a second-generation reformer.

The thesis shows that despite the diversity of readings emanating from the different periods in the history of the reading of the texts and passages on unity, the scholars at each of the periods have much more in common than is generally imagined. All the scholars at the three periods under consideration were close readers of the texts, with the modern scholars only being more systematic and more disciplined than the fathers and the reformers, who were more polemical in their attempt to argue their doctrinal point of view. The thesis also shows that the various readers address the issue of how the text speaks to their particular generation and how the various scholars look to the texts to provide a theological basis for unity.

Having said that, the thesis also shows the areas where the various scholars differ. The thesis points out that there is a great divide in the scholars' understanding of the nature of unity in the text, those who are prayed for to be in unity. All the readers sought unity, but the kinds of unities they sought differs at the various periods. The fathers spoke about unity that is more inclusive, the reformers talked about unity of those who hold particular faith, doctrine of the scripture, while the present day scholars are more sensitive in their discussion about the nature of unity in the gospel. The various scholars also differ on their reading of what it means to abide in Jesus, who believers are. They are also divided on the question of unity of believers and the faith of the world and on the question of the nature of grace in unity and abiding in Jesus.

The thesis also brought into focus what is interesting about the different interpretations at the various periods. It shows, to a greater degree than one would imagine, that the reading of the texts in the earlier periods serve as a point of departure for the later period. It points out how far the earlier readings of the texts influence the modern reading of the text, and to what extent modern scholars stand in a tradition of the readings from the last two Millennia. It shows that at various periods, the readers enter into dialogue with the texts in which they bring their own experiences and interest to bear in the construction of the meaning of the texts for them. It also shows how they attempt to fill in the gaps and resolve some of the ambiguities in the text. The thesis also will show that none of the interpretations at various periods is short of circumstantial influences such as the interpreters' circumstance, studies and the religious institution to which he is attached and most especially the concerns of the church.

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Abbreviations

Ioh. Com.	In Evangelium Secundum Iohannem Commentarius
Tract. in Joh.	Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus
W.	D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe
Homilia.	Sancti Joannis Chrysostomi, In Joannem Homilia

INTRODUCTION

‘The prayer of Jesus for unity has never been more widely quoted and read than today’.¹ These words, spoken about thirty-five years ago are even truer today than they were then. And just as Cranny said, this is due not only to the fact the world population or that of the believers is more extensive than ever, but rather because of the ever widening interest and concern for the unity of believers.² The concern for the unity of believers has come about through many events of history; a point in view is the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to the Holy Father Pope John Paul II in October 2000. The question is, could a passage like Jn.17: 20-23 be one of the stimulating factors for the various efforts of men like Pope John Paul II and various Christian leaders? Brown opines that Jn.17: 21-23 has been used frequently in ecumenical discussions with the presumption that it refers to Church unity.³ But, is it true that the unity being sought through all these human endeavours is the same as the concept of unity found in John? Does the Johannine idea of unity point the way for contemporary ecumenical endeavours?⁴ Are those who give pride of place to passages like Jn.17: 20-23 in ecumenical gatherings, for example the ‘Christian Association of Nigeria’⁵ which has the oft quoted words ‘may they all be one’ (Jn.17: 21) as its motto, right in doing so? One of the aims of this inquiry is to find out if the idea of unity in John and most especially Jn.17: 20-23 corresponds to the concept of unity now being promoted in contemporary Christian circles.

Purpose of the historical inquiry

The dissertation is an inquiry into the history of the reception of some of the Johannine passages on unity and abiding in Jesus. I intend to present the different interpretations that have come out of the reading of the texts, to show that the meaning is not just being read straight out of the texts, rather, that there is an ongoing dialogue between the texts and the readers, where the readers fill in the gaps and resolve the ambiguities in the text. I also intend to show in the thesis the responses that the reading of the texts have elicited in the various readers,⁶ how the various readers try to make sense of the

¹ Cranny, 1965, p5

² Cranny, 1965, p5

³ Brown, 1970, p775

⁴ Schnackenburg, 1982, p194

⁵ The body under whose umbrella all the different Christian denominations gather

⁶ Davies, 1990, p 578

texts. This will thereby establish the fact that the reading of these texts, just like the reading of any biblical text, cannot just be considered a neutral activity, and that those who read it participate in the development of the effective history of these texts.⁷ I also intend to show in the thesis how it is possible for people to approach a text, with their own biases and how the readers' membership of a particular religious institution can predispose a scholar to one interpretation rather than another.⁸ I will as well endeavour to highlight the theological implication of the reading of the text because as Riches suggests, 'any interpretation of such texts that does not pay due attention to their theological sense will be inadequate.'⁹ This is particularly true of Jn.17: 20-23, given its use within the church today. But having said that I also intend to show through the inquiry that it is possible for two interpreters from opposing camps to agree on interpretation of certain texts while disagreeing on others. And likewise to show how it is possible for two men who belong to the same camp, i.e., religious institution, to agree most time to disagree on the interpretation of certain texts. This shows that being in the same religious institutions does not guarantee agreement on the interpretation of all texts, rather, more often than not, our backgrounds influence our interpretations. It also shows that the biblical text resembles a source, where new water emerges from the same place, and not a reservoir or a cistern, with a fixed amount of water in that can be clearly measured.¹⁰

Methodology

In order to achieve the set objectives, I intend to use modern commentators to present the very recent history of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus. Some of the modern commentators that will feature prominently in this inquiry are Rudolf Bultmann, Raymond Brown, Rudolf Schnackenburg and Charles Kingsley Barrett, scholars who have distinguished themselves in the study of John. The history of the reading of the texts in the early period of the church will be presented through the eyes of John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo, two prominent scholars from the Eastern and the Western churches. I will use Martin Luther and John Calvin, two prominent protestant reformers, to present the reading of the texts in the reformation period. This of course will be rather different from the usual discussion, which would attempt to

⁷ Jeanrond, 1990, p284

⁸ Davies, 1990, p579

⁹ Riches, 1990, p450

¹⁰ Luz, 1994, p19

evaluate their different readings of the text and to move towards an agreed meaning of the text. I intend to use these scholars to identify some of the major points of difficulties in the interpretation of the texts. I will present areas of agreements and disagreement and will also highlight passages that are problematic in the reading of the various texts and show how the scholars are trying to grapple with it. More often than not I would highlight salient questions raised by the reading of the texts and indicate the answers presented by the commentators.

Limit of the inquiry

It is expedient to point out from the outset that the areas of major concern in the thesis are some of the questions which have engaged commentators working on Jn.17: 20-23, but I will not be restricted to this alone. I will look at other related texts in the fourth gospel that have to do with the notion of unity and abiding in John. Some of these other texts are Jn.6, most especially verses 51-58 and Jn.15: 1-17. The thesis is divided into six unequal chapters. Chapter one focuses on the history of the reception of the Jn.17: 20-23 by modern scholars. This leads to the reading of other Johannine passages on unity and abiding in Jesus. Chapter two focuses on modern scholars' reading of passages in Jn.6, which dwell on unity and abiding in Jesus. The third chapter dwells on the interpretations of passages in Jn.15 that dwell on unity and abiding by modern scholars.

Chapter four explores the reading of the various Johannine passages on unity and abiding in Jesus in the patristic period by two prominent church fathers, John Chrysostom and Augustine. The chapter focuses most especially on the situation of the church in the late 4th and early 5th century, on the situation in life of the two great church fathers, most especially on the various controversies that they had, that influenced their interpretation of the texts. This leads to looking at their interpretation of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus.

The fifth chapter dwells on the situation of the church in the 16th century and substantially on the situation in life of Luther, a first generation reformer and Calvin, a second-generation reformer. The chapter also focuses on their studies and the controversies that they were involved with, which influenced their interpretations. I end this chapter by bringing out Luther's and Calvin's interpretation of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus. Finally, the last chapter, the conclusion, is the summary of the whole thesis.

I would be glad if this inquiry is able to stimulate interest and create an awareness regarding the hurdles that need to be crossed in employing such texts like Jn.17: 20-23 in promoting the idea of Christian unity.

CHAPTER ONE

Modern Scholars on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus

As earlier stated, the modern scholars who will be focused on mainly in this inquiry are Rudolf Bultmann, Rudolf Schnackenburg, Raymond Brown and Charles Kingsley Barrett.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) a distinguished German scholar was a son of a German Lutheran Pastor. He is reckoned as one of the leading theologians and New Testament scholars of the twentieth century.¹¹ He studied in the universities of Tübingen, Berlin and Marburg, and from 1921 until his retirement in 1951 held a chair in Marburg.¹² Though the great German liberal theologians and the Biblical scholars of the outgoing nineteenth century: Harnack, Hermann, Jülicher (1857-1938) and Weiss taught Bultmann, his writing was marked by his break with liberal theology and biblical scholarship.¹³ Bultmann was influenced by Martin Heidegger an existential philosopher,¹⁴ whose '*Being and Time*' (1927) was the most persistent philosophical influence on his theology.¹⁵ Fergusson states that Heidegger's description of the historicity of human being (Dasein) shapes the categories in which Bultmann interprets the New Testament.¹⁶ This is a theology of the New Testament reflected in his commentaries, one of which was Bultmann's commentary on the fourth Gospel *The Gospel of John* (1941 [ET 1972]). This commentary, which blends the historical, theological and devotional themes, has often been regarded as his masterpiece.¹⁷ Bultmann's theology and New Testament interpretation constitute an impressive weaving together of various themes. Riches believes that Bultmann's major achievement was to have woven together a thoroughly historical reading of the fourth gospel with a theological interpretation of rare originality.¹⁸ In Bultmann's interpretations he combines existential interpretation, Lutheran doctrine and radical biblical criticism in a way that

¹¹ McKim, 1998, p449

¹² McKim, 1998, p449

¹³ Riches, 1993, p56

¹⁴ Riches, 1993, p56

¹⁵ McKim, 1998, p451-452

¹⁶ McKim, 1998, p452

¹⁷ McKim, 1998, p453-454

¹⁸ Riches, 1993, p175

distinguished him as one of the leading figures in twentieth century theology.¹⁹ Though a Lutheran, he became the prophet of a radical Lutheranism.²⁰

Raymond Brown (1928-1998) an Augustinian Priest, was Auburn Distinguished Professor of Biblical studies at Union Theological Seminary, New York. He studied in Catholic Universities both in America and in the Gregorian University in Rome, and held SSL from the Pontifical Biblical commission in Rome (1963). He traveled and lectured in Asia, Australia, Europe and South America. He was very much involved and committed to the Ecumenical moment. He was the first Roman Catholic ever to address the faith and order conference of the World Council of Churches in Montreal, Canada (1963). He was also a member of the National commission for theological discussions between the Lutheran churches of the United States and the Roman Catholic Church (1965-1974).²¹ Pope Paul VI named him as consultor for the Vatican Secretariat for Christian unity (1968-1973).²² His work was devoted in a significant way to exegetical treatment of books or key portions of the books of the Bible, and one of such is the two volume commentary on the Gospel According to John, which formed a milestone in North American English language commentary writing.²³ Soards states that Brown in his work sought to advance the understanding, the impact and the appreciation of critical biblical studies to issues in the life of the Church.²⁴ Brown is famous for the quality of his scholarship and the crucial role he played in bringing Roman Catholicism into the ecumenical work of biblical studies.²⁵

Charles Kingsley Barrett (b.1917), an outstanding British New Testament scholar of the 2nd half of the 19th century is a son of a Methodist minister, who served as a Methodist minister in Darlington, lectured at Durham University from 1945 and later became a Professor of Divinity in 1958.²⁶ Barrett is associated with the tradition of a historical reading of the New Testament, an eclectic reading of the text in the context of whatever historical evidence is relevant and making use of whatever methods are appropriate to the task. For Barrett, methods are contingent

¹⁹ McKim, 1998, p454

²⁰ Riches, 1993, p81

²¹ McKim, 1998, p562

²² McKim, 1998, p563

²³ McKim, 1998, p563

²⁴ McKim, 1998, p 566

²⁵ McKim, 1998, p 568

²⁶ McKim, 1998, p 427

and influenced by the nature of the task at hand.²⁷ He is a committed Methodist, though not in a narrow sense. He is said to have supported such ecumenical agencies as the Bible society,²⁸ nevertheless, the tradition of Methodism run deeply in his life. Evidence of this is in his publications relating the New Testament to church issues of the time, such as Anglican-Methodist relations, the nature of ministerial authority, church, ministry and the sacraments, and what Methodists should believe about righteousness and justification. Reformation motifs lie close to the surface here.²⁹ Barrett read Barth's theology and Rudolf Bultmann's New Testament theology, and is one of the few English New Testament scholars making positive and yet critical use of the work of Bultmann.³⁰ Barrett's commentary on John constitutes his most significant work. This work has two major English language editions (1955, 1978) and a German edition in 1990.³¹ Barrett's work on John grew out of the careful linguistic and historical analysis of the text, in the tradition of earlier great British New Testament scholarship. And he is one of the Johannine scholars who recognized the paradoxical nature of Johannine thought.³²

Rudolf Schnackenburg (b.1914) a Catholic Priest is Professor Emeritus of New Testament University of Würzburg and an internationally recognized biblical scholar³³. Schnackenburg is one of the German scholars who worked on John, and his three volumes commentary on John *The Gospel According to St John* because of its balanced, critical and scholarly character, ranks among the finest in biblical commentaries. Raymond Brown states that his commentary may well be the best full-scale commentary on a book of the New Testament written by an European Roman Catholic.³⁴ Schnackenburg's commentary in its original German edition is titled 'Das Johannesevangelium' published in 1971 by Herder in Freiburg.

²⁷ McKim, 1998, p 428

²⁸ McKim, 1998, p 428

²⁹ McKim, 1998, p 428

³⁰ McKim, 1998, p 428

³¹ McKim, 1998, p 429

³² McKim, 1998, p 429

³³ The comment is from the inner front flap of Schnackenburg 1995.

³⁴ This is a comment on the outer back flap of Schnackenburg 1992.

Unity of believers Jn.17: 20-23

What is Jn.17?

The main pericope that we are making inquiries into Jn.17: 20-23, ‘the prayer of Jesus for unity’ is found in chapter 17 of the fourth gospel. This chapter is commonly referred to as the high priestly prayer of Jesus,³⁵ and it is located in the last part of the section of the fourth gospel commonly referred to as the last discourses. But the questions that this assertion generates are, how far it is true that the pericope is a prayer? Is Jn.17 originally part of the fourth gospel? Is it part of the section in the fourth gospel called the ‘last discourses’? What is the literary genre of Jn.17? The answers to these questions are very relevant to the thesis in hand. If one can establish the genre of Jn.17 and its position in relation to the fourth gospel and the last discourse, then it becomes easier to find the place of Jn.17: 20-23, the main pericope, in the gospel of John.

The literary Genre of Jn.17

This chapter is part of the last discourse, which literary genre is said to be that of a farewell speech. Bultmann suggests that the prayer of Jesus here is an example of a type found in Gnostic literature, spoken by the messenger on his departure from the world.³⁶ Brown states that it is a farewell speech and the climax and the concluding part of the last discourse which resembles other farewell speeches where the speaker closes with prayer for his children or for the people he is leaving behind.³⁷ He points out that the book of Deuteronomy is particularly instructive, most especially two canticles in Deuteronomy 32 and 33 in which Moses turned from the people to address heaven and bless the tribes for the future.³⁸ Brown also suggests that, just as with Moses, when Jesus turned to heaven and addressed the Father, what he said concerned the future of his disciples.³⁹ Käsemann points out that in the composition of Jn.17 the evangelist used a literary device common in world literature, one employed by Judaism

³⁵ Morris, 1995, p634

³⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p487-89 He stated that since David Chytraeus (1531-1600), who described the prayer as *praecatio summi sacerdotis*, it has normally been called the ‘high-priestly prayer’; ZNTW 24 (1925) 130f; in addition also Joh. B. 236-239; C.Herm.1, 29-32, and the Manichaean text T II D 173a2 (Reitzenst, J.E.R. 37).

³⁷ Brown, 1970, p744

³⁸ Brown, 1970, p744-745

³⁹ Brown, 1970, p745

as well as by the New Testament writers.⁴⁰ Käsemann calls the whole Jn.17 the testament of Jesus, a secret instruction of Jesus to the disciples, which can only be heard and understood by them.⁴¹ Barrett opines that it is a farewell speech; he argues that farewell discourses often end with a prayer in which the person taking his departure commends his friends, or children to God.⁴²

All the scholars seem to agree that Jn.17 is a farewell speech even though they differ on the origin of the farewell speech. While Bultmann linked it to the Gnostics, Brown and Käsemann were of the view that it has a Jewish and New Testament background. But having said that, one still needs to contend with the question of literary genre of Jn.17: 20-23. What is the source of Jn.17?

Source of Jn.17

One of the problematic aspects of Jn.17 is its source. Opinions are divided on the question of the source of Jn.17 between those who see it as original and those who think that it was not originally part of the last discourses. One of the eminent scholars who holds the view that it was not originally part of the last discourses is Brown. He suggests that it was neither part of the last discourse in the first edition of the gospel where Jn.14: 31 was followed directly by Jn.18: 1, nor part of the independently formed discourse that now stands as Jn.15 and 16.⁴³ If it was not part of the original composition then how did it come about? Brown suggests that it seems to have been an independent composition with similarity in poetic quality, careful structure and theme that the redactor added at the time that he added Jn.15 and 16, which might have come from the same circle within the Johannine Church that produced the prologue.⁴⁴ Schnackenburg expresses a similar view but not with the same confidence. He confesses that it is difficult to say whether the prayer was written incidentally or additionally by the Evangelist and then elaborated by a final editor or editors.⁴⁵ He suggests that it is more probable that it was composed by the Evangelist's pupils who composed the discourse in chapter 15 and 16, or that it was a carefully considered

⁴⁰ Käsemann, 1968, p5 He points out that this is the device of the farewell speech of a dying man substantial examples of which are Paul's farewell speech to elders of Ephesus in Miletus (Act20), and Jesus' instruction to the disciples in Mark13.

⁴¹ Käsemann, 1968, p4-6, He contends that the chapter is not a testament in the sense of a last will and bequest, but rather in the sense of a final declaration of the will of the one whose proper place is with the Father in heaven and whose word is meant to be heard on earth.

⁴² Barrett, 1978, p499

⁴³ Brown, 1970, p745

⁴⁴ Brown, 1970, p745

⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, 1982, p168

prayer composed by an outstanding member of the Johannine circle in the spirit of the Evangelist himself.⁴⁶ Bultmann does not share much of the problem that some scholars have about the origin of Jn.17. He is of the opinion that a text from the 'revelation discourses' forms the basis of the prayer, but he also points out that there are number of additions to these by the Evangelist, in which he commentates on the text and expands it.⁴⁷ What this would mean is that Jn.17 was not an interpretation of the original revelation discourses.

Thus there are divergent opinions on the question of the source of Jn.17. While some scholars are of the view that it was original, others disagree. For Brown it was the work of a redactor, Schnackenburg believes that it might have been written by the evangelist and then edited by one of the evangelist's pupils, while Bultmann held the view that its source is the revelation discourse with certain additions by the evangelist. But is Jn.17: 20-23 part of Jn.17, originally from the Evangelist?

The place of 17: 20-23 in Jn.17

Just like the question regarding the origin of Jn.17 the answer to the question with regard to the place of Jn.17: 20-23 in the fourth gospel and most especially Jn.17 does not come easily. There are varied opinions even from those who agreed that Jn.17, the chapter in which this verses are embedded, is original. Schnackenburg states that in view of the abrupt transition from Jn.17: 21-22, together with other considerations many exegetes have concluded that Jn.17: 20-21 were an addition by a second author.⁴⁸ But he admits that contrary opinion is found in R. Brown, B. Lindars and L. Morris.

Thus, the various scholars who have addressed the question of the relationship of Jn17: 20-23 to Jn.17 differ in their views, while some are of the view that it was originally part of Jn.17 others are of the view that it was an addition probably by a second author. The presence of the divergent views on the origin Jn.17 and the relation of Jn.17: 20-23 to Jn.17 no doubt has its effect and implication on the reading and interpretation of the text. This is an indication of how Jn.17: 20-23, the main Johannine passage on unity and abiding in Jesus, would be interpreted. If there is no agreement on the origin and relation of Jn.17: 20-23 to Jn.17, it would be near impossibility to have a common

⁴⁶ Schnackenburg, 1982, p168

⁴⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p489

⁴⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p189 He gave insight into the six main reasons proposed to show that Jn.17: 20-23 is an addition.

view on its interpretation. Hopefully we discover this in consequent pages.

Having dealt with the question of the place of Jn.17: 20-23 in the fourth gospel and Jn.17, what needs to be looked at is what kind of writing it is?

John 17: 20-23 a prayer for unity

Among other things, Jn.17: 20-23 is called the prayer for unity, an idea that comes easily from the general name given to Jn.17. Brown is one of the scholars that affirm that Jn.17: 20-23 is prayer. He argues that it is a prayer because it has many of the characteristics of Jesus' prayer: looking up to heaven, Jesus use of 'Father' as in the Lord's prayer.⁴⁹ But he points out that it is a special one, different from the last prayer of Jesus uttered after the Last Supper just before Jesus was taken prisoner (Mk.14: 34-36), a human prayer that cannot be granted. He contends that the Johannine prayer is a divine and timeless prayer, which is as much a revelation as it is an intercession, one said aloud before the disciples, precisely so that they may share in the union of Jesus and the Father (Jn.17: 21-23).⁵⁰ Brown states that in the passage the Johannine Jesus speaks in the familiar accents of his earthly career, but reinterpreted so that what he says is always a living message.⁵¹ Bultmann affirms that it is an example of a type found in Gnostic literature spoken by the messenger on his departure from the world.⁵² Barrett states that the use of the name *πάτερ* for God is very frequent in John and it is the most natural for use in a prayer ascribed to Jesus (Jn.17: 1), Holy Father (Jn.17: 11).⁵³ The gesture that was described after what has been said is one of supplication or prayer. The raising of the eyes to heaven is often interpreted, as turning to the heavenly being and this is a posture of request. Morris asserts that lifting up the eyes to heaven was the accepted posture for prayer (Jn.11: 41; Ps.123: 1; Mk.7: 34).⁵⁴ This justifies the reference to the chapter as 'the prayer of Jesus'.

Despite the fact that most scholars who have read the passage concede that it is a prayer, there are still some voices of dissent. Haenchen points out that in his reading, the text refers only to a 'speaking' (*εἰπεῖν*) not to a 'praying' (*προσεύχεσθαι*) even

⁴⁹ Brown, 1971, p747

⁵⁰ Brown, 1971, p748

⁵¹ Brown, 1971, p748

⁵² Bultmann, 1971, p489

⁵³ Barrett, 1996, 501

⁵⁴ Morris, 1995, p635 He also states that it is a mark of recognition of personal unworthiness when the tax collector in the parable would not lift up his eyes to heaven, (Lk.18: 13). He further points out that the worshiper might prostrate himself in prayer, presumably when he wished to adopt an especially lowly place in earnest petition. Our Lord he states did this in Gethsemane (Matt.26: 39)

though Jn.17 has been designated ‘ the high priestly prayer’ since David Chytraeus.⁵⁵ He argues that though the passage is conceived as real prayer, it is nevertheless also intended for the reader, as are other literary farewell discourses (e.g. the Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs).⁵⁶

Thus, while most of the major scholars see Jn.17: 20-23 as a prayer, they differ on the kind of prayer it is.

The prayer at the ‘hour of Jesus’

The prayer for unity came at the concluding part of the chapter where the Johannine Jesus said ‘the hour has come’ (Jn.17: 1). One can ask what hour is being referred to? Is it the hour of death, since what he is delivering is his farewell speech, or is the hour that has come the time of his glorification, the time for his going away?

Bultmann suggests that the hour being referred to here is Jesus’ hour of going away. He states that in Jn.12: 23, this ὥρα had been described as the hour of his δοξασθῆναι but it is here described as the hour of Jesus’ μεταβῆναι ἐκ τοῦ κόμου τοῦτου.⁵⁷ This hour, he argues, is not the end, but rather the consummation of Jesus’ work, the eschatological hour, which marks the turning point of the ages,⁵⁸ the point when the past and the future are bound together so that the latter gives meaning to the former.⁵⁹ This is the time when the earthly ministry draws to an end, when that of the believers has to start, when those he had called to himself would start the work of giving his words to those who would come to believe in him through their words (Jn.17: 20). Barrett states that the hour, which has now arrived, is the hour of the Son’s glory, which is equally the hour of his death.⁶⁰ He opines that the gospel as a whole moves towards this point, from which John sees the possibility of the Christian faith and the Christian church emerge.⁶¹ What this means is that a new era is about to begin. But is it possible that this is the era when the unity of believers would be put to the test and therefore the reason for the prayer for unity? Schnackenburg asserts that the Evangelist mentioned the hour of Jesus, which has come, in order to provide a reason for Jesus’ request to the Father. He opines that this is the ‘hour’ towards which Jesus’ activity is

⁵⁵ Haenchen, 1984, p 150

⁵⁶ Haenchen, 1984, p 150

⁵⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p487

⁵⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p490, He states that Δόξα is the attribute of the eschatological revelation of the Messiah and of the time of Salvation (Mk.8: 38; 13: 26; Mt.19: 28; 25: 31; Rom.8: 18; 1Thess.2: 12 etc).

⁵⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p493

⁶⁰ Barrett, 1978, p501

⁶¹ Barrett, 1978, p501

moving, the hour of his crucifixion and glorification and passing over to the Father (Jn13: 1).⁶² MacGregor states that Jesus prays for the unity of these new believers ‘may they all be one’ (cf. Act.4: 32; Eph.4: 3), because the extension of the Church may well endanger its unity.⁶³

Hence, while most of the major scholars agreed that Jesus said the prayer in Jn.17: 20-23 at his hour, they differ on their understanding of Jesus’ hour. While scholars like Bultmann opine that the hour of Jesus is the hour of going away, others like Barrett and Schnackenburg were of the view that the hour of Jesus is the hour of his glory, which is equal to the hour of his death. What one gets from this is that the prayer was said at the hour of Jesus and was directed at those who would continue to hear his voice after this hour. But who are those who must continue to hear the word of Jesus given at his hour? Who are those who would come to believe in Jesus through the words of those who already heard his words at the hour?

Those to whom the prayer of Jesus is directed Jn.17: 20

The question of who Jesus’ prayer is directed to at face value looks simple enough, but it is not so in reality. Jesus said ‘I pray not only for these, but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me’ (Jn.17: 20). Who are these who would come to believe in Jesus? The current opinion on this question is divided. Bultmann believes that though the prayer is for the community, the world is nevertheless included in the intercession. He contends that this is true in so far as the prayer for the community means praying that the world over which God’s love effective in the Son reaches out may be won over through it (Jn.17: 21, 23).⁶⁴ Brown states that the people prayed for here are future Christians who believe in Jesus, committed to him in love, who appreciate who Jesus is, those who believe that Jesus bears the divine name, Christ and Son of God (Jn.20: 31). These, he points out, have come to faith through the word of Jesus’ disciples and this call is extended to Gentiles (‘Other sheep...that do not belong to this fold’; ‘the dispersed children of God’), as well as the Jews.⁶⁵ More will be said about this when we begin to consider the question of unity of believers and the fate of the world. Barrett is of the view that those prayed

⁶² Schnackenburg, 1982, p170

⁶³ MacGregor, 1965, p321

⁶⁴ Bultmann, 1971, p500

⁶⁵ Brown, 1971, p774 In John there is a divine selection, but this is not on an ethnic basis, Jesus calls those whose deeds are done in God (Jn.3: 2), and his word heard by those who are the sheep of Jesus’ flock (Jn.10: 3)

for are those gathered with Jesus at supper and those who would join the church after Jesus' resurrection till the end of time (Jn.20: 29).⁶⁶

Consequently, major scholars express divergent views on the question of those prayed for by the Johannine Jesus. While some, like Brown, believe it is for believers with extension to gentiles and even Jews, scholars like Bultmann believe that it is not just for the community. But the question we need to address next is why this prayer?

Purpose of the unity of Believers

The answers to the question about the purpose for the prayer for the unity of believers can be found in the last two ἵνα clauses in Jn.17: 21, 23. But having said this, the last two ἵνα clauses in Jn.17: 21 need to be closely looked at. Do the two ἵνα clauses give the purpose of the prayer? Or is it that the second ἵνα clause gives the purpose of the first? This is one of the areas of the passage that is problematic, and there is need to highlight it, even if briefly. The reason for this is because the understanding of the meaning of the ἵνα clauses affects the way one interprets the text.

The problem of the presence of ἵνα clauses in Jn.17: 21, 23

In this passage alone in two verses 21 and 23 we have three ἵνα clauses following after each other. While some readers find this problematic others do not. Brown states that each of the four lines consists of three ἵνα clauses with a καθὼς clause separating the first and the second ἵνα clauses.⁶⁷ He suggests that the first and the second ἵνα clauses involve the oneness of the believers, while the third involves the effect on the world. But he insists that the second ἵνα clause does not merely repeat the first but develops the notion of unity, while the καθὼς clause in each block holds up for the believers the model of the unity of Jesus and the Father.⁶⁸ Schnackenburg is one of the scholars who acknowledge that the passage is complex. He asserts that Jn.17: 21 and 23 are not the only places in John where we have such an occurrence; this he states, is also found in Jn.13: 34. But, unlike Brown, he suggests that the second ἵνα can best be understood as a repetition and clarification of the first ἵνα clause with an intervening causal clause (in accordance with the fact that').⁶⁹ He notes that the accumulation of ἵνα clauses is

⁶⁶ Barrett, 1978, p511

⁶⁷ Brown, 1970, p769

⁶⁸ Brown, 1970, p769

⁶⁹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p171

particularly striking and not easy to define in their relationship with one another. He states that a more careful analysis of the text reveals more problems.⁷⁰

Having said that, one can now look at what some of the ἵνα clauses stand for in Jn.17: 21. The starting point is the first ἵνα clauses ‘May they all be one, just as Father, you are in me and I am in you’ (Jn.17: 21). Does this just speak about the notion of unity of believers, or is it a comparison of unity of believers with that of the Father and Jesus? Is the divine union put forward as the model for that of the believers?

Divine union a model for unity of believers Jn.17: 21

Most of the major modern scholars who have treated Jn.17: 21, are of the view that in the passage, the Johannine Jesus put forward the divine union existing between him and the Father as a model for the union of believers. Bultmann states that the statement tells us that the unity of Jesus’ own is to be of the same kind as that between the Father and the Son. “Just as the Son’s being is a being for the Father, and vice-versa, so the being of the individual believers must be a being for each other-in the bond of ἀγάπη”⁷¹ Bultmann also contends that the union of believers has the unity of Father and Son as its basis. Schnackenburg states that the unity of believers, ‘is to be a unity of the kind that exists between the Father and Jesus himself, a community with the Father and the Son and an inclusion in the unity of God and Jesus.’⁷² He contends that the union between Jesus and the Father is the fundamental model for the union of believers and at the same time, the basis for making the unity of believers possible in their lives.⁷³ Brown asserts that the heavenly unity is both model and source of the unity of believers.⁷⁴ But can the union of believers ever be the same as that of Jesus and the Father? Morris argues that Jesus’ prayer that the disciple may be one ‘in’ the Father and the Son, just as the Father and the Son are ‘in’ one another, does not mean that the unity between the Father and the Son is the same as that between believers and God. He points out that rather, it means that there is an analogy.⁷⁵ He points out that the Son is in the Father, the two are one (10: 30) and yet are distinct. So in measure it is with believers. They are to be in the Father and the Son without losing their identity.⁷⁶ Barrett asserts that the unity of the church is strictly analogous to the unity of the

⁷⁰ Schnackenburg, 1982, p188-189

⁷¹ Bultmann, 1971, p513

⁷² Schnackenburg, 1982, p188

⁷³ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

⁷⁴ Brown, 1971, p769

⁷⁵ This same idea is found in an elaborate way in Schnackenburg, (Schnackenburg 1992, p102)

Father and the Son. He points out that just as the Father and Son are one then remain distinct, the believers are to be one in themselves, and to be one in the Father and the Son, distinct from God, yet abiding in God, and themselves the sphere of God's activity (Jn.14: 12).⁷⁷

Thus, most scholars agree that the model put up by the Johannine Jesus for the unity of believers is that of Jesus and the Father, the difference only comes from their understanding of how it works out. Bultmann, Schnackenburg and Brown see the divine unity as both model and basis of possibility of unity of believers, while scholars like Barrett and Morris caution on over-emphasis of the similarity between the divine union and that of the believers.

Having said that, one needs to now examine the nature of unity in Jn.17: 20-23.

The nature of unity in Jn.17: 20-23

One of the areas where scholars divide on the reading of Jn.17 is very obvious is the question of the nature of unity in Jn.17: 20-23. Bultmann states that the unity spoken about here is not founded on natural or purely historical data and cannot be manufactured by organization, institutions or dogma.⁷⁸ He argues that it is invisible because it is not a worldly, but rather an eschatological phenomenon, which is only comprehensible to faith.⁷⁹ He argues that it is not one of human brotherly concord.

For it is unthinkable that that could be the final goal of Jesus' revelatory work or the *raison d'être* of the eschatological community, however certain one may be that the concord of the ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν is to be a mark of the community (Jn.13: 35).⁸⁰

The unity here, he suggests, stands for the radical 'other-worldly' orientation of the community, that binds all individual believers and every empirical association of faith into a supra worldly unity, across and beyond all differences of a natural, humankind⁸¹. He points out that the unity here must not be thought of as unity of organization, but rather it is a unity in the tradition of word and of faith.⁸² For him the most important thing in the unity prayed for is the 'word'. If the community remains faithful to the word unity becomes more realistic. Schnackenburg contends that any explanation that

⁷⁶ Morris, 1995, p649

⁷⁷ Barrett, 1978, p512

⁷⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p513

⁷⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p513-514 The community, states Bultmann is united in that it no longer belongs to the world but is totally oriented on the revelation event that takes place in Jesus.

⁸⁰ Bultmann, 1971, p517

⁸¹ Bultmann, 1971, p517

⁸² Bultmann, 1971, p512- 513 He argues that it is not personal sympathies or common aims that constitute the unity, rather it is the word that is alive in them all and that gives the community its

points simply to external harmony, reunion or 'horizontal oneness', is inadequate.⁸³ He argues that union of believers is based on God himself and his love; it penetrates believers 'from above' and also impels them to be one in brotherly love.⁸⁴ It is quite obvious that Schnackenburg sees the unity here closely tied to reciprocal love. Brown states that John insisted that unity has its origin in divine action, and that any approach that places the essence of unity in the solidarity of human endeavours would not be right. He argues that the key to unity lies within God's power, for the oneness of the believers flows from Jesus' giving them the glory that the Father has given to him and therefore unity comes down from the Father and Son to the believers.⁸⁵ The ideas expressed by Brown are very close to Bultmann's, but he seems to part slightly from Bultmann in saying that this does not imply passivity on the part of the believers even though their action is not the primary source of unity.⁸⁶ Brown insists that unity implies both a horizontal and vertical dimension and is not reducible to a mystical relationship with God, and not simply human fellowship or the harmonious interaction of Christians and it goes beyond the unity envisaged in the Pauline imagery of the body of Christ.⁸⁷ Brown states that it is an organic unity, which is more than moral and spiritual union, in the sense that it has to be visible enough to challenge the world to believe in Jesus (Jn.17: 21,23). He contends that in light of Jn.10: 16 with its stress on one sheepfold and one shepherd, unity involves community. He points out that in the *Mashal* of the vine and branches, which has the same last discourse context as Jn.17, the notion of unity with Jesus involves community (Jn.15: 5-6).⁸⁸ Brown also argues that it is not impossible that the Johannine 'ἓν' 'one' literally translates the concept of 'Yahad' and that the evidence of the Dead Sea scrolls strengthens the impression that John is presupposing a Christian community.⁸⁹ Thus, for Brown, unity is something divine, from above, but with equal human participation from below.

Thus, there are divergent views on the question of the nature of unity in Jn.17: 20-23. Some scholars, like Bultmann, believe that the Johannine union is more of an invisible

foundation. He points out that each member represents the demand and gift of the word over against his fellow believer, in that he is for him.

⁸³ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

⁸⁴ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

⁸⁵ Brown, 1970, p776 Brown gives a good overview of the different ways the unity in the passage has been read in history. He points out that there are many theories, but he tries to point out the features that seems clear in John's statement about unity.

⁸⁶ Brown, 1970, p776

⁸⁷ Brown, 1970, p776

⁸⁸ Brown, 1970, p776, He states that the *koinonia* or 'communion' of 1Jn.1: 3, 6,7 may be an expression of the idea of oneness found in the Gospel.

⁸⁹ Brown, 1970, p777

union, an eschatological phenomenon, one only comprehensible to faith. Other scholars like Schnackenburg and Brown are of the view that even though it is not mainly an external harmony, it equally embraces external union, brotherly love, and must be visible enough for the world to see and believe that Jesus is the true emissary of the Father. In light of this, one can ask what is the relation in the prayer of the unity of believers and the fate of the world, which comes from the presence of the third ἵνα clause ‘so that the world may believe it was you who sent me’ (Jn.17: 21). Having stated that the Johannine Jesus prayed for the unity of his own, can it be said that he also prayed for the world?

Jn.17: 21 a prayer for the world?

Though the question whether the Johannine Jesus prayed for the world sounds strange, the varied opinions emanating from the major scholars’ reading show that it is a valid question to ask. Most of the scholars who read the passage are of the view that the third ἵνα clause, ‘so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me’ (Jn.17: 21), is not part of the prayer, but rather, the goal of the prayer. Therefore, Jesus did not pray directly for the world. One exception is J.C. Earwaker, who believes that the third ἵνα clause ‘so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me’ (Jn.17: 21) is part of the prayer.⁹⁰ Among the scholars who believe that Jesus did not pray directly for the world are Bultmann and Brown. Bultmann believes that the third ἵνα clause is not related to ‘I pray’ rather it supplies the goal, purpose of the indwelling mentioned in the second ἵνα clause.⁹¹ Brown supports this view, which he claims, fits better with the rest of Johannine theology, where Jesus does not pray directly for the world. He argues that the unity and indwelling visible among Jesus’ followers challenges the world to believe in Jesus’ mission, and thus the world is included in Jesus’ prayer indirectly.⁹² This sounds unconvincing; it is one of the complex areas in the passage. There does not seem to be any one saying that Jesus did not pray for the world, rather the closest opinion to this is that he did not pray directly for the world. Having said this, one needs to look at another question closely related to the one just addressed. What is the connection between the unity of believers and the fate of the world? Is the unity of believers just a challenge to the world or is it to lead the world into faith in Jesus, the Sent one of God? The various views aired on this question are quite interesting to read.

⁹⁰ Brown, 1971, p769, (J.C. Earwaker, ET 75 (1963-64) 316-317.

⁹¹ Bultmann, 1971, p514

Unity of believers and the fate of the world Jn.17: 21

The question about the connection between the unity of believers and the fate of the world is still another of the questions that comes from the reading of the third ἵνα clause ‘so that the world may believe it was you who sent me’ (Jn.17: 21). Scholarly opinions vary on what it means for the world to believe in Jesus. But these opinions can be streamlined into two main views. The first of these, is that, the unity of believers would lead to faith in the world, while the other is that rather than unity of believers leading to faith in Jesus by the world, it would only be a means of challenge to the world. Bultmann is one of the main proponents of the first opinion. According to him, the purpose and result of the unity of believers is ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας.⁹² He argues that if there is such an eschatological community in the cosmos, in history, then there is always the possibility of faith for the world.⁹⁴ Bultmann alleges that this is the reason why the prayer for the community is at the same time an intercession for the world, in which the community has been set its task.⁹⁵ Barrett contends that the Church’s unity in word and faith means that the world is challenged to decide between faith and unbelief and what seems to be implied here is that the κόσμος as a whole will believe, and therefore be saved.⁹⁶ But he points out that if one contrasts this with Jn.16: 33, one would see that John retains the customary New Testament tension between universalism and the predestination of an elected remnant. He consequently argues that the inevitable human imperfection of the Church means an imperfect faith on the part of the world, which means that the Church and the world alike remain under the judgement and mercy of God.⁹⁷ Schnackenburg believes that the unity of all believers is to lead the unbelieving world to faith in Jesus as the one sent by God. He insists that what points to this is the last ἵνα clause (Jn.17: 21), which he contends is the real final clause

In its existence in union with God and its brotherly love, the community bears witness among the world of men who are still far from God, but towards whom God’s love is directed (Jn.3: 16) and to whom Christ’s work of salvation applies (Jn.3: 17; 17: 2).⁹⁸

In arguing in this way he envisages the question of Jesus saying ‘I do not pray for the

⁹² Brown, 1970, p770

⁹³ Bultmann, 1971, p514

⁹⁴ Bultmann, 1971, p514

⁹⁵ Bultmann, 1971, p514

⁹⁶ Barrett, 1978, p512

⁹⁷ Barrett, 1978, p512

⁹⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

world' (Jn.17: 9). There is no doubt about it that the statement of the Johannine Jesus in Jn.17: 9 seems to contradict what is in Jn.17: 21. This is an evidence of the paradoxical nature of the Johannine writings.

Schnackenburg just like some other scholars who advocated that Jesus is not praying for the world, recognizes the tension inherent between Jn.17: 21 and Jn.17: 9 in which Jesus refuses to pray for the world. He states that the tension can hardly be explained away by saying that the world is only seen in a situation of crisis.⁹⁹ Schnackenburg opines that the desire to win men over to faith and salvation is intended to be taken seriously, but points out that it is, however, different when Jesus looks at the community that has accepted his word and at the same time remembers the world that has rejected it.¹⁰⁰ He further states that "the missionary concern of the Johannine community which does not cease to exist, despite the community's separation from the world and the dualistic conception of the 'world' (Jn.15: 18, 20; 17: 9), is announced in the desire to bring the world of men to faith in the one sent by God."¹⁰¹ Talbert contends that the unity of believers is aimed at leading the world to faith in Jesus and it has evangelical goals.¹⁰² Moloney claims that the unity among believers is not an end in itself; rather it is so that the world may believe that Jesus is the Sent one from the Father.¹⁰³ Smith states that the community's witness to the world may seem futile, in that the world rejects Jesus, kills him, and persecutes his followers. But he argues that even if this severe hostility and alienation gives rise to the Gospel's sharp dualism, it does not override the purpose of God for the world in Jesus' mission.¹⁰⁴ What this translates to be is that the world is still part of God's plan.

Brown is the embodiment of the main opposing view on the question of unity of believers and the fate of the world. He argues that the statement 'thus the world may believe that you sent me and thus the world may come to know that you sent me'

⁹⁹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

¹⁰⁰ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

¹⁰¹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p191

¹⁰² Talbert, 1992, p228 Talbert states that this unity is spiritual in that it has a spiritual root (participation in the fellowship of the Father and the Son Jn.17: 21); it is visible insofar as it can be witnessed by the world and lead the world to faith in Jesus. Biblical faith regards human disunity as having a spiritual root. (Gen. 1, the story of the tower Babel, implies that the human pride lies behind human inability to communicate; Eph.6: 12 says that it is the principalities and power that resist God's saving actions designed to bring unity to the human community). If it has a spiritual root, then it has a spiritual cure (participation in the fellowship of the Father and the Son after having believed in Jesus. He opines that the gift of the Holy Spirit enables Babel to be reversed (Act.2). In Eph.6: 10-20, it is spiritual warfare that enables the Church to resist division).

¹⁰³ Moloney, 1998, p475 What this means is that Jesus prays for the oneness of the Father, himself and the disciples. He points out that Jesus' loving his own is not for their comfort and encouragement. It inevitably leads into a mission, matching his mission (Jn.17: 17-19): to make God known (Jn.17: 23b; 17: 3).

(Jn.17: 21, 23) does not mean that the world will accept Jesus. He insists that, rather, the Christian believers will offer to the world the same type of challenges that Jesus offered, a challenge to recognize God in Jesus, a challenge that will be the occasion of self condemnation, for the world will turn away.¹⁰⁵ Brown opines that to give another meaning to this statement would bring it into conflict with other statements of the Johannine Jesus about the world (Jn.16: 33; 17: 9).¹⁰⁶ I believe that this may be right, but it could as well not be.

Thus, the different views aired on the question whether Jesus prayed for the world or not and those on the connection between union of believers and the fate of the world are very contentious. Most of the major scholars believe that Jesus prayed for the world indirectly; some others believe that he prayed directly for the world, whereas there are some others who believe that he did not pray for the world. The different positions seem Johannine. One would not be wrong in light of Jn.17: 21 to claim that Jesus prayed for the world, on the other hand, one would not be right in light of Jn.17: 9 to argue that he prayed for the world. Even some of those who contest the view that Jesus did not pray for the world know that it is not an easy position to hold in light of other Johannine passages, even though they try very hard to argue round it. At the same time those who held the view that Jesus did not pray for the world are aware that their position is not airtight.

On the question of the union of believers and the fate of the world, some scholars like Bultmann, who believes that union of believers presents an opportunity for faith in Jesus by the world and Barrett, who is of the view that church union presents a challenge to the world, see the possibility of faith on the part of the world if believers are in unity. A scholar like Brown believes that the union of believers would only serve as a challenge to the world, which would turn away. Whereas other scholars like Schnackenburg, Morris, Talbert and Moloney believe that union of believers will lead to faith in Jesus by the world.

Therefore, there is no common agreement on the interpretation on the passage regarding the unity of believers and the fate of the world. But can this dilemma be resolved? Do we have an answer for this in the text itself, do the other things said by the Johannine Jesus throw light on this, for example the idea of the glory given in

¹⁰⁴ Smith, 1999, p317

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 1970, p779 Jesus presented a challenge because he claimed to be one with the Father, a revelation of God's glory, now the Christians are part of the divine unity 'that they may be one in us' (Jn.17: 21) and because they have been given the glory and thereby present the same challenge as Jesus did.

Jn.17: 22?

The glory given, Jn.17: 22

Jesus said 'I have given them the glory you gave to me' (Jn.17: 22). Why is the glory given? One sees the complexity of interpretation of Johannine texts in the different readings of the passage Jn.17: 22. Bultmann sees Jn.17: 22 as providing fresh motivation for the prayer for the unity of the community, and he describes this unity as the purpose and fulfilment of Jesus' work of revelation, which finds its fulfilment in the existence of a unified community.¹⁰⁷ For Bultmann, the glory given is the work the Father assigned to Jesus, which is the same as revealing God's name (Jn.17: 6), which God has given him (Jn.17: 11) and imparting to them the words of God which he had received from God (Jn.17: 8).¹⁰⁸ In light of the above, Bultmann suggests that Jesus giving them his δόξα means that after his departure, the believers are to represent him in the world and continue his work, his δόξα and through so doing, perpetuate in the world his history as an eschatological event.¹⁰⁹ Schnackenburg sees the statement 'I have given them the glory you gave to me' (Jn.17: 22) among a series of statements in which Jesus refers to what he has done for the disciples in the discourse. Some of these are 'he has kept them in the Father's name (Jn.17: 12); he has given them the word of the Father (Jn.17: 4); He has sent them into the world (Jn.17: 18), and he has sanctified himself for them (Jn.17: 19).¹¹⁰ Schnackenburg argues that the statement is on reflection the culmination and the summary of what Jesus 'has given' to the disciples whom he leaves behind in the world and sends out into the world, reinforced by the reference to the δόξα that the Father has given to him.¹¹¹ Schnackenburg opines that 'δόξα here must point to the fullness of divine life, which is directed towards 'glory,' in an anticipatory language that already makes present what will only be fully realized in the heavenly or future world'.¹¹² He further states that the more powerfully the reality of that divine life is present in the believers, the more fully unity is achieved among them.¹¹³ He argues that the language also shows that this fulfilment is intended in the

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 1970, p770

¹⁰⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p514-515

¹⁰⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p515

¹⁰⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p516

¹¹⁰ Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

¹¹¹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

¹¹² Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

¹¹³ Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

text, the disciples are to become 'perfect ones' 17: 23.¹¹⁴ Jesus gives the gift of δόξα, in order for unity to be attained and unity is the mark of divine being and so Schnackenburg argues that this is the reason why it is added here 'as we are one', which acts as a reinforcement.¹¹⁵

Consequently, the scholars who dwell on the question of the meaning of glory and the purpose of the giving of the glory differ in their understanding. While Bultmann sees glory as the work the Father assigned Jesus and the purpose for it being given is for Jesus' disciple to share in his mission and continue it in the world, Schnackenburg perceives glory as what Jesus has done for his disciples. He believes that this was given in order for Jesus' disciples to be in unity. There is no denying the fact that the explanations given regarding the glory given throw more light on the question of the unity of believers and the fate of the world. But the question about the meaning of the statement 'with me in them and you in me' (Jn.17: 23) that followed this in the passage still remained unanswered. How is Jesus in them? How is the Father in Jesus? These and some other questions regarding the idea of 'being in' will be considered in the second part of the inquiry.

There is no doubt that the idea of Jesus being in the believer is not yet exhausted and the full meaning cannot be captured in Jn.17. To have the fuller understanding one needs to have a look at the other passages in the fourth gospel and in other Johannine writings. This is some of what will be considered in the following chapters.

¹¹⁴ Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

¹¹⁵ Schnackenburg, 1982, p192

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEME OF UNITY AND ABIDING IN JN. 6

One of the passages in the fourth gospel where one finds the ‘idea of union and abiding in Jesus’ is Jn.6: 51-58, particularly in Jn.6: 56. Though the main theme in Jn.6 is, ‘Jesus the bread of life’, it dwells at the same time substantially on the idea of abiding in Jesus. In the following I will be looking at the reading of Jn.6: 56, its relation to the whole chapter, and its place in relation to the fourth gospel. The point of departure will be the problems inherent in the reading of Jn.6: 56, the verse where we come across the immanence formula, ‘abiding in Jesus’. The first of the problems of the passage is the seeming shift in emphasis from coming to the bread of life and believing in Jesus to eating the flesh, drinking the blood of Jesus and dwelling in him. This seeming shift in emphasis in the chapter is a pointer to the direction the interpretation of the passage would take.

In Jn.6, Jesus uses different terms and phrases in pointing to what brings about eternal life. He said, those who have eternal life are those who see the Son and believe in him (Jn.6: 40, 47), those drawn by the Father (Jn.6: 44, 6:37), but in Jn.6: 51-58 there seems to be a change of emphasis and the introduction of certain new ideas. ‘Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life’ (Jn.6: 54); ‘whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me’ Jn.6: 56. Anyone who has been following closely the Johannine thought until Jn.6: 51 with regard to what it means to come to Jesus as bread of life would easily notice the change of emphasis.

Another problem of Jn.6 is the presence of Jn.6: 56 in the same chapter with Jn.6: 63. This hinges on the differences found between Jn.6: 35-50 the section on the bread of life and Jn.6: 51-58, suggested by a displacement of theme and theological perspective, difference in ideas, and in language between Jn.6: 35-50 and Jn.6: 51-58. All the above suggests the need to have a closer look at the problems associated with the reading of this passage. The first problem to be considered is the problem of change of emphasis in the Johannine thought in Jn.6: 51-58.

Jn.6: 51-58 a change in Johannine thought?

One sees from a close reading of Jn.6: 51-58 that commentators have a radical reading of this passage. Bultmann believes that the arguments and structure of Jn.6: 27-59 create great difficulties.¹¹⁶ He points out that Jn.6: 51b –58b form a marked contrast to the previous course of the discussion presumably Jn.6: 35-51a. He suggests that Jn.6: 51-58 is strange in comparison to the Johannine thought in general and specifically to his eschatology.¹¹⁷ He contends that the terminology of Jn.6: 51b-58 is taken from quite a different circle of ideas from that of Jn.6: 27-51a, and so the need to draw the conclusion that Jn.6: 51b-58 is not originally Johannine, but rather, an insertion by an ecclesiastical editor.¹¹⁸ He points out that the editor added the reference to the Eucharist in Jn.6 just as he added the reference to baptism, when he felt the lack of any reference to it Jn.3.¹¹⁹ Bultmann believes that the Evangelist adopts a critical position with regards to cultic sacramental piety as can be seen in Jn.13.¹²⁰ He believes that there was a need to restore the original order, even if it cannot be done with certainty.¹²¹ He wants to do this because he believes that this would help make the Johannine position on the passage clearer. Bultmann gives his own order to some of the verses in the chapter vv27, 34, 35, 30-33, 47-51a, 41-46, 36-40.¹²² He believes that the rearrangement of the chapter that brings in the change of emphasis was the work of the editor, which is quite different from the Johannine view (Jn.3: 18f; 5: 24f; 11: 25f).¹²³

One finds a similar opinion close to Bultmann in some other scholars, but most of these would not go all the way as did Bultmann. Some of these believe that Jn.6: 51-58 is the work of an editor, without denying that it was originally Johannine.

¹¹⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p218

¹¹⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p218-219

¹¹⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p219 Bultmann gives an insight into the various positions and the variant arguments with regards to the contentious verses. He contends that vv51-58 is part of another source. This view he argues is found in A Andersen. Merx and V. Dobschütz., Carpenter see 51-56 as an interpolation, some like Wellhausen see vv51-59 as a later addition. He also points out that there are some scholars who defend the originality of vv51b-58b. Those in this category are J. Schweizer, Ernst Lohmeyer, Edward Schweizer, J. Jeremias, Dodd and Barr. There are also other scholars like Wik and Lagr who believe that the Evangelist in vv51b-58b has placed saying of Jesus at this point which Jesus had spoken to the disciples in private on another occasion. Another view is one that is found in J.Schneider who was of the view that Jn.6: 27-29 is original, a composition of three different meditations, which were created at different times.

¹¹⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p220

¹²⁰ Bultmann, 1971, p220

¹²¹ Bultmann, 1971, p221

¹²² Bultmann, 1971, p236

¹²³ Bultmann, 1971, p236

Jn.6: 51-58, a rearranged Johannine work

In Brown one finds some of the ideas proposed by Bultmann, but he does not go all the way with him. He believes that in view of available evidence, Jn.6: 51-58 is genuinely Johannine without ruling out the possibility that it was added at a late stage of the editing of Jn.6.¹²⁴ Brown disagrees with Bultmann's theory that an ecclesiastical redactor added these verses to correct the chapter by introducing a non-Johannine sacramental theme that would make the discourse more acceptable to the Church at large. Brown believes that there is evidence that these verses contain genuine traditional material (Eucharistic formula) and they represent true Johannine thought, neither contrary to it, nor a correction of it.¹²⁵ This means that Brown supports the view that John is pro-sacramental. He believes that secondary Eucharistic undertones are present in the multiplication, the transitional verses (Jn.6: 22-24) introduction to the discourse, and the body of the discourse (Jn.6: 35-50).¹²⁶ He also argues that even if Jn.6: 51-58 is not part of the chapter, Jn.6 would still be Eucharistic. Brown insists that even if these verses were a later addition, it would not have been to introduce a eucharistic theme, rather it would have been to bring out more clearly the eucharistic elements that were already there.¹²⁷ But he agrees that Jn.6: 51-58 has a different provenance from the rest of the chapter, and what led him to this conclusion is that while the eucharistic element is primary in Jn.6: 51-58, it is secondary in the rest of the chapter. He therefore suggests that what is here are two different forms of a discourse on the bread of life, which are both Johannine but stemming from different stages of the Johannine preaching.¹²⁸ If the two are from different stages of Johannine preaching, what stages are these?

Brown suggests that Jn.6: 51-58 was not originally with Jn.6: 35-50, which is not primarily eucharistic. He contends that it is impossible that the crowd or even the disciples could have understood the word of Jn.6: 51-58, which refers exclusively to the Eucharist. These he argues were out of place anywhere during the ministry of Jesus except at the Last Supper.¹²⁹ Brown believes that the backbone of verses 51-58 is made up of material from the Johannine narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, which

¹²⁴ Brown, 1966, p285-286

¹²⁵ Brown, 1966, p286

¹²⁶ Brown, 1966, p286

¹²⁷ Brown, 1966, p286

¹²⁸ Brown, 1966, 286

¹²⁹ Brown, 1966, p286-287

was originally located in the Last Supper scene and that this material has been recast into a duplicate of the bread of Life Discourse.¹³⁰ He therefore suggests that this is the reason for the absence of an account of the institution in Jn.13. He believes that Jn.6: 51 is closely similar to an institutional formula and therefore suggests that the reference to the Eucharist in Jn.6: 51-58 would have been understandable at the Last Supper.¹³¹ If one agrees with Brown on this, one then would be able to link Jn.6: 56 with Jn.17: 21-23 because of the presence of the immanence formula in both. One would also be able to argue that the two belong to the same genre i.e., last discourse of the Johannine Jesus.

Brown points out that Jn.6: 35-50 and 51-58 are two different forms of the discourse on the bread of life, both Johannine in the sense that they are made up of sayings passed down in the Johannine tradition.¹³² He opines that Jn.6: 35-50 represents a far more primitive, sapiential form of the discourse and its secondary eucharistic undertones stem from a Christian rethinking of the topic. Brown suggests that the original discourse stresses the necessity of belief in Jesus, while the form in Jn.6: 51-58 stresses the necessity of eating and drinking the eucharistic flesh and blood and represents a more radical rethinking of the discourse in which the eucharistic theme has become primary.¹³³ If this is the case, when did the two forms of the discourse come together?

Brown alleges that Jn.6: 51-58 was added to 35-50 at a fairly late stage in the editing of the fourth gospel, probably in the final redaction and that the juxtaposition of the sapiential and the sacramental themes is as old as Christianity itself.¹³⁴ He argues that the two forms of the Bread of life discourse represent a juxtaposition of Jesus' twofold presence to believers in the preached word and in the sacrament of the Eucharist.¹³⁵ Brown suggests that the blending of the themes in Jn.6 with material from the Last Supper by the final redactor with the intention of spelling out the eucharistic undertones already implicit in the chapter led to what we have in Jn.6: 51-58. And it is what is responsible for the change of emphasis from faith in Jesus to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus in order to be in him, and to attain eternal life in and through him. In his words, "where the original discourse stressed the necessity of belief in Jesus, the new discourse stresses the necessity of eating and the drinking of the

¹³⁰ Brown, 1966, 287

¹³¹ Brown, 1966, 287

¹³² Brown, 1966, p290

¹³³ Brown, 1966, p290

¹³⁴ Brown, 1966, p290

eucharistic flesh and blood.”¹³⁶

Thus, for Brown, Jn.6: 51-58 is Johannine but does not originally belong to the section of the fourth gospel in which it is now located. This is what makes the difference between him and Bultmann.

But having said that, there are still some scholars who hold a different opinion from that of both Brown and Bultmann. These disagree with the suggestion that Jn.6: 51-58 is redactional, editorial and not originally Johannine. These scholars believe that Jn.6: 51-58 in which the idea of abiding is found is originally Johannine and belongs to the position where we have it.

Jn.6: 51-58, an original Johannine text

Barrett believes that Jn.6: 51-58 is originally Johannine and not the work of the redactors. He contends that John is not in any crude sense anti-sacramental; rather, he does appear to be critical of sacramental tendencies prevailing in his day, and tries to lay such stress on the fundamental sacramental fact of the incarnation that the partial expressions of this fact, Baptism and the Eucharist are relegated to a subordinate place.¹³⁷ Another argument that Barrett put forward against the view that Jn.6: 51-58 is from a different source from Jn.6: 35-50 is that sacramental interpretation of the bread of life is not found in Jn.6: 51-58 alone. He insists that there are sacramental elements in some of the verses accepted as Johannine (Jn.6: 35-50).¹³⁸ Barrett contends that Jn.6: 51-58 is Johannine and disagrees with the suggestion that the insertion of the inconsistent clauses was the work of an ecclesiastical redactor who intends to harmonize the gospel with the futurist eschatology and sacramentalism current in his time.¹³⁹ Though Barrett concurs with Brown’s suggestion that the clauses referred to can be excised without damage to the text, he insisted that this is not true of all the future references in the gospel as a whole.¹⁴⁰ He contends that ‘it seems that it was John’s intention to retain just enough futurist eschatology to make it clear that the

¹³⁵ Brown, 1966, p290

¹³⁶ Brown, 1966, p287-290 (Brown also points out that there are suggestions that the reason for the change of emphasis was that the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the passage was the Christian Passover, the eucharistic meal of the community. He states that in the Church this gave rise to the present form of Jn.6. The scene of ch.6 (multiplication of loaves, the mention of the manna in the introduction to the Bread of Life Discourse), and the original form of the discourse in 35-50, set in Passover, would have made an admirably suited reading for such a Christian Passover service.

¹³⁷ Barrett, 1978, 284

¹³⁸ Barrett, 1978, p283

¹³⁹ Barrett, 1978, p283

¹⁴⁰ Barrett, 1978, p283

believer never becomes independent of God's saving activity'.¹⁴¹ Another scholar who holds a view similar to that of Barrett is Schnackenburg.

Schnackenburg acknowledges a change of tune in Jn.6: 52-59 and that there are marked differences between the ideas and language of 51-58, the eucharistic section and that of the metaphor Jn.6: 35-50. But he is of the conviction that the language is Johannine, and that the verses contain enough peculiarities of Johannine style to rule out suggestions that they come from a different hand.¹⁴² He attributes the change in tune to the literary problem in the chapter, which has a lengthy history. He insists that 'attempts at critical surgery on the grand composition of John 6' or 'the highly controversial 'eucharistic' verses (51c, 53-58) and their relation to the main part of the discourse with its symbolic and personal understanding of the bread of life' 'are undesirable.'¹⁴³ He believes that Jn.6: 51-58 is the central element and the theological climax of Jn.6.¹⁴⁴

In Schnackenburg one finds the synthesis of the various arguments regarding the question of the eucharistic elements found in Jn.6: 51-58. He states that even though these verses contain sacramental elements they do not contradict Johannine thought.¹⁴⁵ He argues that in John, 'faith as the only requirement for salvation on the part of man (Jn.6: 29) does not exclude a call for the reception of the Eucharist, and if it is not mentioned in the eucharistic section, it is nevertheless presupposed.'¹⁴⁶ As did Barrett, Schnackenburg argues that the emphatic shift of the evangelist's eschatology into the present must be recognized, but it cannot be shown that this results in a deliberate rejection of future eschatological events.

It is impossible to restrict the evangelist's purpose to singularly proving to the unbelieving Judaism that Jesus is Messiah, Son of God and he can hardly be said to lack an interest in matters within the Church which are of various kinds.¹⁴⁷

He opines that even though there are arguments in favour of the hypothesis of an author other than the evangelist, the Johannine authorship of the section can be defended, since the section is not alien to Johannine thought.¹⁴⁸ Schnackenburg believes that it is probable that the evangelist is attacking a Gnostic or Docetic group within his community, who rejected the reception of the Eucharist.¹⁴⁹ He points out

¹⁴¹ Barrett, 1978, p283

¹⁴² Schnackenburg, 1980, p 12

¹⁴³ Schnackenburg, 1980, p 12

¹⁴⁴ Schnackenburg, 1980, p30

¹⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, 1980, p59

¹⁴⁶ Schnackenburg, 1980, p59

¹⁴⁷ Schnackenburg, 1980, p59

¹⁴⁸ Schnackenburg 1980, p59

¹⁴⁹ Schnackenburg 1980, p59

that “this may be responsible for the presence of the sharp wording with a negative conditional sentence, making participation in the Eucharist an essential condition for possession of eternal life.”¹⁵⁰ Schnackenburg also points out the change could be attributed to a change of audience, who in the particular passage has changed from unbelieving Judaism in the metaphorical discourse to the heretical group within the Church.¹⁵¹ This may well suggest that what we have in this passage is an interpretation of the original text by an editor or redactor who is a member of the Johannine community. This supports the view that the reading of the text is influenced by the situation of the reader.

Schnackenburg opines that though the evangelist rarely talked about future eschatology, he need not put his whole emphasis on ‘present eschatology’. He argues that a direct confrontation with the Gnostics could have turned the evangelist’s mind to the end event, unless one is to suppose that he totally rejects the common primitive Christianity belief in future eschatology.¹⁵²

Schnackenburg finds clear links connecting the eucharistic section (Jn.6: 51c-58) with the metaphorical (Jn.6: 30-50). He believes that the eating of the Eucharistic bread is the final acting out of the eating mentioned in the text of Jn.6: 31; he also argues that while the primary allusion in Jn.6: 51–58 is to the Eucharist, it nevertheless also refers back to the metaphor.¹⁵³ Schnackenburg suggests that linking the two sections is a very skilful piece of work if they stem from the editor, but he argues that the skilful connection would rather have been easier to account for if the whole section were the work of one author.¹⁵⁴

Hence, there is no agreement on the cause of the change of emphasis from faith in Jesus to the necessity of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. There is also no clear agreement on John’s attitude to the sacrament. While some scholars like Bultmann believe that he is anti-sacramental, which makes it impossible to attribute Jn.6: 51-58 with its eucharistic character to him, some others like Brown, Schnackenburg and Barrett think otherwise. These believe that the sacramental element found in Jn.6: 51-58 is Johannine, brought in at the appropriate time into the appropriate place for a purpose. One also sees that there is no agreement about how

¹⁵⁰ Schnackenburg, 1980, p61 (Cf Ignatius of Antioch’s remark about his Docetist opponents: ‘they keep away from the Eucharist and prayer because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins’, (Smyrn.7: 1). Schnackenburg points out that as far as he knows, this passage has scarcely been noticed. Schnackenburg, 1978, p454

¹⁵¹ Schnackenburg, 1980, p61

¹⁵² Schnackenburg, 1980, p62

¹⁵³ Schnackenburg, 1980, p65

Jn.6: 51-58 came about and how it managed to get to where it is presently located. While some scholars like Bultmann believe that the location of Jn.6: 51-58 is problematic, a redactional gloss, some other scholars like Brown hold the view that it is originally Johannine, but not originally located in its present place; these believe that it is rather relocated here by an editor, a later development of the Evangelist's thought. Whereas some other scholars like Barrett and Schnackenburg are of the opinion that Jn.6: 51-58 not a work of a redactor or that of an editor; they believe that it is originally Johannine and that it fits properly where it is now located and has always been located in Jn.6.

One also discovers that even among those who believe that it was Johannine, there is no common agreement on the location and why we have Jn.6: 51-58 in the same chapter with Jn.6: 35-50. This brings to mind the other problem in the reading of the pericope. The question of the presence of Jn.6: 51-58 in the same chapter with Jn.6: 63. The question of the positioning of Jn.6: 51-58 in Jn.6 and most especially in between Jn.6: 35-51b and Jn.6: 60-70 still needs to be looked at. It would not be right just to gloss over it.

Jn.6: 51c-58 vis-à-vis Jn.6: 63

In the pericope Jn.6: 51-58, the appropriation of Jesus' flesh and blood is put forward as necessary for the attainment of eternal life, and as a necessity for abiding in Jesus, but surprisingly in the following verses, we have a seemingly contradictory statement to the preceding one. 'It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life' (Jn.6: 63). Did the author of Jn.6: 63 place it there to cool the offence, remove the scandal caused by the eucharistic doctrine in Jn.6: 51c-58? Is it possible that Jn.6: 51c-58 and Jn.6: 63 came from two different authors? Does what we have in Jn.6: 60-70 and most especially 63 refer to Jn.6: 51-58. These are some of the questions that one needs to consider in order to be able to grapple with what is problematic in Jn.6 and to understand the ways Jn.6: 56 is read.

In as much as one cannot go into all the details of the debate, it is worthwhile to touch on it, even if briefly. The first thing to be considered is the problem of reconciling Jn.6: 51-58 and Jn.6: 63 which leads to finding out what the statement 'it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer' means.

¹⁵⁴ Schnackenburg, 1980, p65

The spirit that gives life: the problematic of Jn.51-58 and Jn.6: 63

One problem of reading of Jn.6 is how to maintain the balance between Jn.6: 51-58, where we have the idea of eating Jesus' flesh as means of life and Jn.6: 63 where it is said that the flesh has nothing to offer. Different opinions are current on the question of the placing of Jn.6: 51c-58 in Jn.6 in the light of the idea communicated in Jn.6: 63.

Bornkamm advocates that Jn.6: 51-58 and Jn.6: 63 do not belong together. Brown points out that Bornkamm is of the view that Jn.6: 60-71 refers not to 51-58, but rather to Jn.6: 35-50.¹⁵⁵ Brown took a different approach. He contends that there is no single reference to refusing to eat his flesh or to drink his blood in Jn.6: 60-71. He therefore argues that Jn.6: 63, did not refer to the eucharistic flesh, rather, the reference is to flesh as it is spoken about in Jn.3: 6, namely the natural principle in man which cannot give eternal life.¹⁵⁶ He points out that in some other New Testament passages we have a contrast between flesh and spirit (Rom.7: 4; Gal.5: 16; 6: 8; Matt.16: 17).¹⁵⁷ Brown in the light of the above, states that if flesh in Jn.6: 63 has nothing to do with the Eucharist, neither then does the emphasis on the Spirit have anything to do with a spiritual interpretation of Jesus in the Eucharist. What Brown's interpretation here shows, is that the way one reads a passage affects the way another is interpreted. Brown separates the origin of Jn.6: 51-58 from that of the bread of life discourse and through this breaks the connection with Jn.6: 63. In so doing, he was able to interpret Jn.6: 63 without connecting it to Jn.6: 56 or its reference to the Eucharist. He suggests that in Jn.6: 63, what is present is Jesus affirming once more that man cannot gain life on his own.¹⁵⁸ Bultmann suggests that in placing Jn.6: 60-71 after 51-59, the editor understood 51b-58 in terms of 60f as a σκληρὸς λόγος and σκάνδαλον.

For the editor, the σκάνδαλον consisted in the fact that the historical Jesus, while he was still alive, had referred to his flesh and blood as food, which was of course unintelligible to his hearers.¹⁵⁹

Barrett points out that John is writing with the completed work of Jesus (Jn.7: 39) in mind, including his ascension and the gift of the Spirit. He argues that one would only be able to understand the words of Jesus if one takes it from this standpoint or else the

¹⁵⁵ Brown, 1966, p299 (Bornkamm, G 'Die Eucharistische Rede im Johannes Evangelium' ZNW 47, (1956), p161-169)

¹⁵⁶ Brown, 1966, p300

¹⁵⁷ Brown, 1966, p300

¹⁵⁸ Brown, 1966, p300

¹⁵⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p237

words of Jesus in Jn.6: 51-58 would lead only to cannibalism.¹⁶⁰ Barrett argues that it is necessary that Jesus himself should be understood as the bearer of the Holy Spirit (Jn.1: 32f) otherwise his flesh and blood would lose all meaning.¹⁶¹ Regarding to the question on the statement ‘the flesh has nothing to offer’ (Jn.6: 63), Barrett argues that these words ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν are related to the statement about the σὰρξ of the Son of Man in Jn.6: 53. But at the same time he suggests that it would be wrong to suppose that it belongs to this context only.¹⁶² What this means is that Jn.6: 51-58 and Jn.6: 63 belong together. Barrett argues in line with Guilding, that it is part of the truth that explicit reference to the inadequacy of the flesh as such was needed with the reference in Jn.6: 70f to Judas’ defection, to make clear that faith is essential in the Eucharist.¹⁶³ He also points out as did Martyn before him, that

It is equally true that John rejects the notion that the Eucharist as a rite is in itself capable of solving the problem caused by the separation of Jesus from his disciples.¹⁶⁴

With regard to the meaning of the ‘word’ ῥῆματα (Jn.6: 63), Barrett states that the life-giving words of Jesus are the words (ῥῆματα) of God (Isa.40: 6ff. 1Pet. 1.24f.).¹⁶⁵ He argues that even if it is possible that the Eucharist forms part of the background of John’s thought, it does not mean that the ῥῆματα are the Eucharistic words, rather, the thought is that the words are what men consume.¹⁶⁶ Barrett points out that ῥῆματα need not refer exclusively to words of the preceding discourse, rather all the words of the incarnate Jesus may be meant; for John does not forget that Jesus himself is the creative word of God. (Jn.1: 1).¹⁶⁷ He therefore suggests that the message being passed on here is that ‘the Johannine Jesus supersedes Torah as the source of life. His visible flesh and his audible words (ῥῆματα) bear witness to the Spirit and the word through which he becomes revelation and salvation.’¹⁶⁸ Lindars believes that it is only when the phrase ‘the Spirit that gives life’ is properly understood that the reference to the flesh can be interpreted correctly.¹⁶⁹

By contrast to the spirit, flesh here is the earthly part of man, man as he is by nature, his

¹⁶⁰ Barrett, 1978, p304

¹⁶¹ Barrett, 1978, p304

¹⁶² Barrett, 1978, p304

¹⁶³ Barrett, 1978, p304

¹⁶⁴ Barrett, 1978, p304 There is no revelation apart from the spirit and the word, and no reception of revelation apart from the initiative of God himself (Jn.6: 44)

¹⁶⁵ Barrett, 1978, p305

¹⁶⁶ Barrett, 1978, p305 (Jer.15: 16; Ezek.2: 8-3: 3; Rev.10: 9ff, L.A III, 172f, where Philo, interpreting the Manna says that what the Israelites ate was τὸ ἑαυτοῦ (sc. του θεοῦ) ῥῆμα καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον)

¹⁶⁷ Barrett, 1978, p305

¹⁶⁸ Barrett, 1978, p 305

¹⁶⁹ Lindars, 1972, p273

intellect remaining un-illuminated by the revelation of God, for in the composition of man, it is the spirit that gives life, and the flesh is of no avail.¹⁷⁰

He suggests, as did Barrett, that ‘the words are spirit and life’ refers simply to the preceding discourse or preferably to the teaching of Jesus as a whole, for all Jesus’ teachings belong to the category of spiritual things that can only be received by those enlightened by the Spirit.¹⁷¹

Schnackenburg believes that Jn.6: 63 is inserted as an explanation and formulated as a general principle, indicated by the absence of a conjunction. He opines that this statement has given rise to a variety of interpretations, and is to be taken as referring to the person of Jesus, to his words and to men’s capacity for understanding.¹⁷² He maintains that the most natural sense after the mention of the Son of Man in Jn.6: 62, is to refer it to Jesus himself. He argues that if it is taken in this sense, it would then mean that Jesus’ earthly mode of existence (σάρξ), cannot fulfil the promise he has previously made, which he believes is objectionable.¹⁷³ Schnackenburg argues that Jesus could not say that his flesh was of no avail, because from his incarnation (Jn.1: 14) to its sacrifice in death (Jn.6: 51c), it acquires a great importance ‘for the life of the world’ and so cannot be so totally discounted.¹⁷⁴ He contends that the saying about the flesh is related to that about the πνεῦμα, and if taken in this sense would mean that the flesh taken by itself is of no avail for giving life; he believes that the previous sentence gives an indication of this.¹⁷⁵ Schnackenburg alleges that the dominant idea is what enables the Son of man to transmit life, which is the Spirit, which the Son of man only possesses and controls in his glorification (Jn.7: 39).¹⁷⁶ He thereby concludes that what we have in this passage is the Johannine Jesus talking about what is possible in his earthly and heavenly roles.¹⁷⁷ Schnackenburg suggests that this applies the more if Jn.6: 62-63 is not treated primarily as a reply to the Jews’ shock in 6: 52.¹⁷⁸ He believes that the ‘hard saying’ 6: 60 covers everything that Jesus has previously said, and the murmuring 6: 61 points back to 6: 41. He is convinced that if Jesus’ explanation concerned only 6: 52ff, the contrast with the statement about the Eucharistic σάρξ

¹⁷⁰ Lindars, 1972, p273

¹⁷¹ Lindars, 1972, p273

¹⁷² Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷³ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷⁴ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷⁵ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷⁶ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷⁷ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁷⁸ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

would be sharper.¹⁷⁹ Schnackenburg also suggests that the sentence in Jn.6: 63 cannot be used to minimize the import of the eucharistic verses, as though the only important thing was to accept the Revealer's words. He also maintains that still less can it, with 62-63, be used as an explanation of the statement about the Eucharist, treated as applying specifically to the words of institution. He contends that receiving Jesus' words in faith does not by itself produce life (this would be a magical view of the word of God), but has to be followed up in obedience (Jn.3: 36b) and love (Jn.14: 15, 23; also 14: 21; 15: 10; 1Jn.2: 3ff; 5: 2-3).¹⁸⁰ He points out that what we have in Jn.6: 63b 'the words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life' is not a direct continuation of 63a but is connected to it by association. He suggests that what the statement refers to is the whole of what Jesus just said (λέλαληκα Jn.8: 20), which the disciples described as hard, 6: 60.¹⁸¹

Thus, it is not easy to read Jn.6: 51-58 in light of Jn.6: 63 most especially if one believes that the two belong to the same chapter and follow after each other. There does not seem to be a consistent interpretation even among the scholars that believe that Jn.6: 51-58 is right where it is. Whereas for those who hold the view that Jn.6: 51-58 is a later insertion, it is easier to interpret Jn.6: 51-58 even with the presence of Jn.6: 63.

There is no doubt that the interpretation of the main verse Jn.6: 56, where we find the idea of abiding in Jesus would be affected by the way the main pericope in which it is embedded is read. It would be interesting to see how Jn.6: 56 has been read and how far its interpretation has been influenced by the reading of Jn.6: 51-58.

Jn.6: 56: Abiding in Jesus through faith?

The Johannine Jesus said 'whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person' How has this statement been read? Bultmann opines that Jn.6: 56 brings out the idea of the sacramental union, which finally clears the thought of Jn.6: 53f: Whoever eats Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood in the Lord's supper is united with him in a mysterious way, and this is why he has life in him.¹⁸² Bultmann contends that the formula employed to describe the union 'he in me and I in him' is the Johannine

¹⁷⁹ Schnackenburg, 1980, p72

¹⁸⁰ Schnackenburg, 1980, p73 (A Schlatter, ad hoc. Jesus' words become spirit and life because 'his' obedient love gives his flesh and blood to the world that it may have life. Only a Gnostic could call thought and teaching divorced from action Spirit and life)

¹⁸¹ Schnackenburg, 1980, p73

¹⁸² Bultmann, 1971, p236

formula, which elsewhere is used to describe the relation of faith to the Revealer.¹⁸³ Bultmann sees a shift from ‘faith in’ to ‘eat the flesh and drink the blood.’ Marrow finds a connection between ‘believe’ in Jn.6: 47 and ‘eat the flesh and drink the blood’ in Jn.6: 63, which led to what we have in Jn.6: 56. In his opinion both are not a once and for all act, but rather an act reiterated throughout the life of the believer in this world.¹⁸⁴ He argues that ‘abides in me’ is a constant clinging to the Revealer whom the Father sent into the world, the daily living out of his (Jesus’) revelation, which makes the constant preaching of the word in the community of believers indispensable.¹⁸⁵ The impression conveyed by Marrow’s assertion is that to abide is to live according to Jesus’ words. We have a close idea to this in Morris.

For Morris eating and drinking are the means of bringing eternal life (Jn.6: 54), and they are absolutely unqualified. He argues that no one is going to argue seriously that the one thing necessary for eternal life is to receive Holy Communion. He believes that to take this view is to interpose a bodily act between the soul of man and salvation for the only things without which we cannot be saved are repentance and faith.¹⁸⁶ He contends that it is better to think of the words ‘to eat Jesus’ body and to drink his blood’ as meaning first and foremost the appropriation of Jesus.¹⁸⁷ He argues that the words ‘eat my body’ and ‘drink my blood’ are cryptic allusions to the atoning death that Jesus would die, together with a challenge to enter the closest and most intimate relation with him.¹⁸⁸ In Morris we find a further explanation of what it means to eat. He argues that the word for ‘eats’ in Jn.6: 54 as in Jn.6: 56 is different from that used previously.¹⁸⁹ The eating here, he states, applies to somewhat noisy feeding (like

¹⁸³ Bultmann, 1971, p236

¹⁸⁴ Marrow, 1995, p98

¹⁸⁵ Marrow, 1995, p98-99

¹⁸⁶ Morris, 1995, p333,

¹⁸⁷ Morris, 1995, p333, he made reference to Strachan, who suggested that ‘Whilst the Evangelist in vv. 52-57 is using sacramental language, the emphasis and intention of his thinking is to reassert his main central theme in the gospel, that only through faith in the risen Christ, once an historical personality, is life obtained’ or again, ‘The primary reference of flesh and blood is not the sacrament, but the demand for faith in a Christ, who became ‘flesh and blood, i.e. truly man.’ He further contends that McClymont sees a reference to the sacrificial death of Jesus, and adds: ‘To go further than this, however, and apply the passages exclusively to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is not warranted by anything in the discourse or its circumstances, though it is quite true that in the Lord’s Supper we have the symbolic representation of the eating and drinking which is here described.’ {If this is the case why can one then not ascribe it to the Eucharist?}

¹⁸⁸ Morris, 1995, p335 He states that this is to be interpreted in the light of Jn.6: 47. He further states that for Westcott, “To ‘eat’ and to ‘drink’ is to take to oneself by a voluntary act that which is external to oneself, and then to assimilate it and make it part of oneself. It is, as it were, faith regarded in its converse action. Faith throws the believer upon and into its object; this spiritual eating and drinking brings the object of faith into the believer”. The Midrash on Eccl.2: 24d, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink...” says, “All the reference to eating and drinking in this Book signify Torah and good deeds” (Soncino edn., p.71; so also on Eccl.8: 15).

¹⁸⁹ Morris, 1995, p335 The tense is different too and the present tense, ὁ τρώγων points to a continuing

‘munch’ or ‘crunch’), and in this context stresses the actuality of the partaking of Christ. He opines that there are suggestions that point to a literal feeding and therefore to the sacrament, he acknowledges that what can be observed here is that there is a symbolic element in the ‘eating’ which should be understood as receiving Christ.¹⁹⁰ He states that the close

connection between fellowship with Christ and the activity of eating the flesh and drinking the blood is stressed in Jn.6: 56; Jesus he suggests gives what is almost a definition of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. “Anyone who so eats and drinks ‘remains’. Morris argues that the tense is continuous, which denotes more than fleeting contact in Jesus; he states that there is the closest possible relationship so that the eater is in Jesus and Jesus is in the eater.¹⁹¹ He argues that this reminds us that the believer enters no temporary state, but rather a permanent one, with fellowship with Jesus as the predominant note.¹⁹² The idea communicated here by Morris finds expression in some scholars who commented on this same passage before he did, though there are certain differences of opinion. One of these scholars is Barrett.

Abiding in Jesus through eating his flesh and drinking his blood Jn.6: 56

Barrett, just as did Bultmann, sees the statement in Jn.6: 56 as the ground for the statement ‘my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink’ (Jn.6: 53). He states that Jn.6: 56 means that the flesh and the blood of Jesus are truly food and drink to those who receive them because by means of them a complete and reciprocal indwelling of Jesus and the believer is attained’.¹⁹³ Barrett points out that μένειν is one of John’s most important words; the Father abides in the Son 14: 10, the Spirit abides upon Jesus (1: 32f); believers abide in Christ and he in them (Jn.6: 56; 15: 4). For Barrett,

There are variations of the same thought: the word of Jesus abides in Christians and they in it (Jn.5: 38; 8: 31; 15: 7); Christ abides in the love of God and the disciples must abide in the love of Christ (Jn.15: 9f). What it means is that the being of Jesus is completely determined by God, the being of the disciples by Jesus.¹⁹⁴

What this would mean is that Jesus determines the being of the believers through the

appropriation. Indeed, Ryle sees the whole point of the verb in this. He cites Leigh, that the word does not mean a continuance of eating, as brute beast will eat all day, and some part of the night and adds, “our Lord meant that the habit of continually feeding on Him all day long by faith. He did not mean the occasional eating of material food in an ordinance”. (But the question is does this exclude the eating of the material bread that symbolises his body? I do not think so).

¹⁹⁰ Morris, 1995, p336

¹⁹¹ Morris, 1995, p336

¹⁹² Morris, 1995, p336

¹⁹³ Barrett, 1978, p299

¹⁹⁴ Barrett, 1978, p299-300

believers' reception of the body and blood of Jesus and through Jesus being in them. A similar opinion is found in Schnackenburg.

Schnackenburg states that through the meal, Jesus unites himself directly with the participants.¹⁹⁵ He states that the word used in the Greek for 'eat', τρώγειν, does not have to be understood in an extreme realistic sense (chew); at most it could have been used in Jn.6: 54-59 to prevent any attempt at dilution.¹⁹⁶ The evangelist, he suggests, may also be influenced by a desire to distinguish the symbolic eating of heavenly bread

(φαγεῖν ἐκ 51b), from real sacramental eating;¹⁹⁷ φαγεῖν in 53, he states, is to be explained as a repetition from 52.¹⁹⁸ Schnackenburg maintains that even though receiving the Eucharist brings about an intimate connection with Jesus and the communicant remains in Jesus and Jesus in him, it is not the eating and drinking itself which is important, rather what is, is the personal union with Jesus which it bring about.¹⁹⁹ Schnackenburg points out that in this verse we find for the first time in the fourth gospel an 'immanence formula,' expressing in a characteristic way the unsurpassably close union between believers and Jesus.²⁰⁰ Schnackenburg states that the sacramental meal, ο τρώγων is the only way of achieving full union with the divine bearer of life, and that the eucharistic food and drink (Jn.6: 53-55) bring about union with the Son of God who became flesh and gave his flesh up to death (Jn.6: 51c).²⁰¹

Brown compares Jn.6: 56 with Jn.6: 54. He points out that both verses show that to have eternal life is to be in close communion with Jesus; which is a question of the believer's remaining (μένειν) in Jesus and Jesus' remaining in the believer.²⁰² He also suggests that in this verse, the μένειν is applied not to the food but to the life it produces and nourishes and that communion with Jesus is really a participation in the intimate communion that exists between the Father and the Son.²⁰³

¹⁹⁵ Schnackenburg, 1980, p 62

¹⁹⁶ Schnackenburg, 1980, p62 (Bauer, Wörterbuch, p1641, s. v)

¹⁹⁷ Schnackenburg, 1980, p62, (J.J. O'Rourke, CBQ25 (1963), P126-128)

¹⁹⁸ Schnackenburg, 1980, p62

¹⁹⁹ Schnackenburg, 1980, p63

²⁰⁰ Schnackenburg, 1980, p63-64 He states that the immanence formula also occurs in other contexts, which include the description of the union of the Son with the Father (Jn.10: 38; 14: 10-11), the fruitful union of the disciples with Jesus (vine and branches; Jn15: 4-10), and the union of believers with the Father and the Son, which enables them to be united among themselves (Jn17: 21-23).

²⁰¹ Schnackenburg, 1980, p64

²⁰² Brown, 1966, p292

²⁰³ Brown, 1966, p292

Moloney, just as Borgen did,²⁰⁴ suggests that Jn.6: 56 is the continued *midrashic* explanation of Jn.6: 31, in his words ‘through the bloody death of Jesus, the believers will come to a mutuality in which they live in Jesus and Jesus lives in them’.²⁰⁵ This mutual indwelling flows from the union existing between the Father and the Son and is similar to the union that Jesus mentioned in Jn.17: 20-23. In both cases, the union of Jesus and the believers comes through ‘being in’. One observes from the passage that Jesus no longer speaks of “belief in” (Jn.3: 12, 15, 18,36), but of “the one who eats me,” (Jn.6: 56) which is similar to what we have in Jn.15: 4ff.

Conclusion

Thus, the different readings that come from the scholars that dwell on Jn.6 show the problematic nature of the text, the most obvious of which was the shift in emphasis from faith in Jesus, to eating the flesh of Jesus in order to abide in him. Most of the scholars seem to recognize the change of emphasis in Jn.6: 56 from ‘abide in Jesus through faith’ to ‘abide in him though eating his flesh and drinking his blood’. But they differ on what was responsible for the change in emphasis. Scholars like Bultmann are of the view that the insertion of Jn.6: 51-58, a non-Johannine sacramental theme by an ecclesiastical editor, was responsible for this. Other scholars like Brown, Schnackenburg and Barrett are of the view that the sacramental aspect of the Chapter, 51-58 is Johannine, even though they differ on when these verses were inserted. While Brown alleges that it was inserted at the later stage of editing of Jn.6, Barrett and Schnackenburg held the view that it was originally Johannine and not the work of the redactor.

There does not seem to be a consensus from the scholars on the meaning of abiding in Jesus through eating of his flesh and drinking his blood (Jn.6: 56). There is also no clear-cut view on the mode of abiding in Jesus. While some of the scholars believe that the mode of receiving Jesus is to come to him to believe in him, some others are of the opinion that the mode of receiving Jesus is participating in the Eucharist. The divergent views from these various Johannine scholars can be streamlined into about two major positions. Bultmann, Morris and Marrow represent the first of these. These scholars are of the view that the formula employed in describing the union in Jn.6: 56 ‘he in me and

²⁰⁴ Barrett, 1978, p284, states that Borgen drew out parallels between Jn.6 and Philonic and midrashic exegesis of the miracle of the manna.

²⁰⁵ Moloney, 1998, p222

I in him' is the same as the formula employed by the Johannine Jesus in describing the relation of faith to him (Jesus) (Jn.6: 47). What this means is that the union that is described in Jn.6: 56 is a union of faith and the eating of the body and blood of Jesus is just symbolic. Bultmann the leading protagonist of this position points out that Jn.6: 63, the verse in which the Johannine Jesus said 'the flesh has nothing to offer', is a good support for their position. On the other hand, scholars like Schnackenburg, Brown, Moloney and even Barrett are of the opinion that abiding in Jesus is much more than just abiding in him through faith. They believe that it also involves eating and drinking the eucharistic body and blood of Jesus which brings about intimate union between the believers and Jesus. There is no doubt about it that there is tension and paradoxes in Jn.6 just like some other Johannine passages, which lead to different readings and varying interpretations of the text, which is an indication of the rich potential for meaning of the Johannine text.

CHAPTER THREE

UNION THROUGH ABIDING IN JESUS THE TRUE VINE JN. 15

The idea of abiding in Jesus discussed in Jn.6: 54 seems to be resumed in Jn.15. This concept comes out sharply in Jn.15: 4 ‘Remain in me as I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me.’ Though we are given a vivid notion of abiding in the chapter, the use of the imagery of the vine and branches, a strong and complex metaphor by the Johannine Jesus in describing his relationship with believers, has generated several critical questions for the interpretation of the text. This in turn has created inherent difficulties for readers.

In the following, I intend to look at the way Jn.15: has been read in order to show the ambiguities and richness, potency of meaning inherent in the text brought about by certain new concepts, and metaphors introduced into the chapter. I hope to look at the various attempts by scholars to grapple with the difficulties created by the new idea on the nature of abiding presented in Jn.15.

The issues and critical questions in Jn.15

The main topic in Jn.15 is the union of Jesus and the believers, a relationship compared with that of the vine and the branches, ‘Remain in me as I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself unless it remains part of the vine’ (Jn.15: 4). The language employed here in the description of the relationship between Jesus and believers is metaphorical and the attempt to unravel it leads to certain questions: What does it mean to remain in Jesus? Is it a mystical relationship, metaphysical, interpersonal, communion with Jesus? The metaphor used is strange and has the potency for a lot of meaning and at the same time can lead to misinterpretations. We shall look at how different scholars have interpreted the relationship between Jesus and the believers. Apart from the language used in Jn.15: 4, there are some other metaphorical expressions used in the other verses in the chapter in the attempt to describe further what the ‘Jesus and believers’ relationship is. These also need to be looked at to see if they might shed more light on the idea of ‘abiding in’ that we have in Jn.15: 4.

One of the new metaphors used relating to abiding that has generated critical questions in the minds of scholars is Jesus being the vine and his Father the ‘vinedresser’ (Jn.15:

1). In this, the Father's position in the association between Jesus, the vine and his own, the branches is made clear. The Father is the vinedresser, whose role is cutting away of every branch that is not fruit bearing and the pruning of fruit bearing ones. Closely related to this, are some new ideas introduced into the chapter, that of the throwing away to be left to wither of branches that do not remain in Jesus (Jn.15: 6). 'Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt' (Jn.15: 6). Where does this idea come from and what does thrown away and withering mean?

Another strange metaphor used here that creates a problem of interpretation is the believers being cleansed 'You are clean already by means of the words that I have spoken to you' (Jn.15: 3). Is this in any way related to the washing of the feet (Jn.13: 5, 10, 11)? Who are those referred to as clean, is it all believers? What are the people been addressed cleansed from; it is sin or something else?

One other new idea in Jn.15 concerns believers remaining in Jesus' words. Closely connected with this is the assurance that the prayer of those who remain in Jesus would be answered: 'if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it' (Jn.15: 7). What are the words of Jesus being referred to here? The Johannine Jesus also says 'It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples' (Jn.15: 8). What comes first, is it bearing fruit or being a disciple? What does it mean to be a disciple?

One also observes that there seems to be an interchange: 'remain in my Love' for 'remain in me' (Jn.15: 9). This in turn is connected to Jesus' commandment 'If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love' (Jn.15: 10) and closely connected to this is what Jesus said about his commandments: 'this is my commandment: love one another' (Jn15: 12). Is remaining in Jesus the same as remaining in his love? How does the new injunction relate to ethical behaviour, life for others?

What I will do now is to take and examine the various issues and critical questions that are inherent in the reading of the text. The various answers to these questions produce a variety of meanings in the reading of the text. We will see this in the following, when we bring out the major interpretations and understandings of the imagery used in the text. This will clearly show the rich potential for meaning (Sinnpotential) inherent in Jn.15.

Apart from the issues mentioned above already, I also intend to have a brief look at certain literary questions concerning Jn.15, which are equally important for our inquiry. The first of these is the relation of Jn.15 to the farewell discourses. Is Jn.15 originally

part of the last discourse?

Jn.15 and the last discourse

The Johannine Jesus' saying 'Come now let us go' (Jn.14: 31) leads the reader to expect that the farewell discourse has come to an end, so naturally the introduction of a new section in Jn.15, raises questions: Why Jn.15 when Jn.14 is supposed to have ended the section? Is it part of that section or an addition?

The answers to the above questions vary. For some scholars it is an addition to the Gospel, while others believe it is original. Schnackenburg holds the view that Jn.15 is the work of an editor, who used some of the materials left by the evangelist.²⁰⁶ He sees it as a kind of rereading, an interpretation of the original farewell discourse, meant to serve as its continuation,²⁰⁷ and transferred and applied to the sphere of the community.²⁰⁸ He believes that Jn.15: 4 continues the idea in Jn.14: 20.²⁰⁹ Bultmann holds a similar opinion. He suggests that Jn.15: 1-17 is a commentary on Jn.13: 34f, which explains what love is (καθὸς ἡγάπησα ὑμᾶς) and shows that faith and love form a unity.²¹⁰

Brown put forward an argument for displacement concerning Jn.15. He alleges that in comparison to some other last discourse passages, without mention of Jesus' imminent departure and some other characteristics of the last supper, Jn.15: 1-6 belong to another context.²¹¹ What this would mean is that the passage was transposed from another place in the fourth gospel to its present position. Lindars alleges that Jn.15 is a supplementary discourse composed through putting together a variety of Johannine homiletic pieces in order to take further the exposition of Jn.13: 31-38.²¹²

Barrett's opinion differs from those earlier expressed. He suggests that in light of the problem caused by Jn.14: 31, 'Jn.14 and 15-16 can be regarded as a alternative version of the last discourse (standing in immediate connection with the supper described in

²⁰⁶ Schnackenburg, 1982, p90 He opines that the editor inserted it in order to admonish and strengthen the community in its existing situation with words used by the Jesus who has already departed.

²⁰⁷ Schnackenburg, 1982, p94-95

²⁰⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p95 In Schnackenburg's estimation, Jn.15 does not just talk about unity, but, in it, John admonishes the believers to make their unity with Jesus fruitful, so that they may be able to endure the hostility of the world.

²⁰⁹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p95

²¹⁰ Bultmann, 1971, p529

²¹¹ Brown, 1970, p666 Brown opines when the figure of vine and branches was brought into the Last Discourse, it was supplied with a paraenetic development and application. This development, now found in 7-17, was formed by combining some imagery drawn from the figure of vine and branches with saying and theme traditional in the Johannine Last Discourse material

²¹² Lindars 1972, p486

Jn.13 and taking place in the context of the supper).²¹³

Barrett sees a distinction between Jn.15 and the preceding chapters. He contends that unlike the previous chapter, Jn.14, the theme in Jn.15 is abiding in and no longer coming to Jesus.²¹⁴ He points out that Jn.15 is all about the union of believers with Jesus, initiated and sealed by Jesus' death and completed by the believers' responsive love and obedience and is the essence of Christianity.²¹⁵

Thus, the different opinions expressed on the position of Jn.15 in relation to the last discourse show that scholars differ on the understanding of the purpose of the chapter and the reason why the chapter was inserted where it now stands. Though most of the scholars maintain that it is an insertion by an editor or editors, they all proffer their own reasons for the insertion. For Bultmann and Lindars, the insertion is to serve as a commentary on Jn.13. Lindars claims that Jn.15 is a supplementary discourse, whereas Schnackenburg holds that it is the continuation of the farewell discourse as applied to the life of the community. For scholars like Barrett, it is a new development, an alternative version of the last discourse that is distinct from it. Yet, Brown alleges that Jn.15 and other last discourses do not belong together.

There is no doubt that their views would affect the way they interpret the chapter. Can the same be said of the way various scholars address the issue of where the image of the vine is from? The main image used in Jn.15 is that of vine, a eucharistic element. Is the use of the image influenced by the Christian liturgy, the Eucharist?

Jn.15: A metaphor with eucharistic overtones?

The use of the imagery of the vine, a symbol of the Eucharist in the text by the Johannine Jesus brought about the question whether Jn.15 has eucharistic overtones. The answer to this question varies from one scholar to the other. While I cannot exhaust all the arguments presented, I will highlight even if briefly the scholars' division on the issue.

Bultmann is of the contention that Jn.15 does not draw attention to the vine concerning its fruit or to the wine that it bestows.²¹⁶ For him the question of its connection to the Eucharist does not arise. Bultmann believes that the image of the vine drives from the mythological Tree of Life. In this myth, the shoots are fused with vital power and

²¹³Barrett, 1978, p470

²¹⁴ Barrett, 1978, p470

²¹⁵ Barrett, 1978, p470

²¹⁶Bultmann, 1971, p530

receive their power to grow and bear fruit from the Tree of Life, whereas cut off from this tree, they wither away.²¹⁷ Is this the same with the image in Jn.15? Bultmann argues that there is a difference here from the saying about the water and bread of life, for

The Revealer is not contrasted with the mundane means of life as the bestower of that life that has been hoped for in vain by those means; for while the hope for life is a dream in the myth, it is a reality here.²¹⁸

Barrett alleges that in Jn.15, John accepts the more remote allusions afforded by the image of the vine, just as he introduces eucharistic references into the discourse of the bread of life.²¹⁹ His assumption that Jn.15 was originally planned to follow immediately upon the supper without the interruption of Jn.14 strengthened his belief.²²⁰ Barrett is convinced that this is in line with the synoptic narratives that portray the fruit of the vine as the means by which the disciples are made sharers in the sacrificial death of Jesus and an anticipation of the life of the age to come. Union with Jesus (and contact thereby with the other world) forms the basis and theme of the whole of Jn.15.²²¹ Behler in line with Braun opines that Jn.15: 1-17 was spoken before 14 and in close connection with the institution of the Holy Eucharist. He states that Jesus has just changed wine, the fruit of the vine, into his precious blood when he told his disciple: 'I am the true vine.'²²² He claims that the word 'fruit' appears eight times, 'charity' four times, 'remain' eleven times and that all these are connected with the Eucharistic discourse in Jn.6: 27-56.²²³

Brown believes that it is possible that the vine is intended as a symbol of the Eucharistic union, for 'it is likely that the *Mashal* of the vine and branches has Eucharistic overtones, even though the relation is primarily one of love (and faith) and only secondarily eucharistic.'²²⁴ Lindars suggests that it is possible that it is a sustained metaphor based on the eucharistic words of Jesus (Mk.14: 25; Lk.22: 18), for 'it is communion in the 'one cup', which lays upon the disciples the obligation of mutual love,' (Jn.13: 34f).²²⁵ How did Lindars come to this conclusion? While the scholars have suggested that the image of the vine derives from the mythological Tree of life, (Bultmann), or from the biblical image of the vine as a symbol for Israel, Lindars

²¹⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p530

²¹⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p530

²¹⁹ Barrett, 1978, p470

²²⁰ Barrett, 1978, p472

²²¹ Barrett, 1978, p473

²²² Behler, 1960-65, p135

²²³ Behler, 1960-65, p135

²²⁴ Brown, 1970, p673

believes that its occurrence here is sufficiently accounted for by the eucharistic benediction over the wine at the Last Supper.²²⁶

Thus, all the scholars differ in their opinion on the question of whence the image of the vine is derived. While scholars like Bultmann believe that the image of the vine derives from the mythological Tree of Life, some others believe that it is from the biblical image of the vine as a symbol for Israel. Whereas some scholars like Brown, Barrett, Lindars are convinced that the image of the vine has to do with the Eucharist, and has eucharistic overtones. Even among the scholars that believe that Jn.15 has eucharistic overtones, one notices divergent views. Barrett maintains that John accepts the remote allusion of vine and Eucharist; he believes that the believers become sharers in the sacrificial death of Jesus and the anticipation of life of the age to come through the fruit of the vine. Brown could only accept the possibility of the vine as a symbol of eucharistic union on a secondary level, whereas for Barrett and Lindars the eucharistic overtone is very strong. They accept the possibility of the metaphor being based on the eucharistic words of Jesus and they find support for their views in the synoptic Gospels.

Having touched briefly on the literary critical questions generated by Jn.15, we now turn to the substantive interpretation of the chapter to see how Jn.15 is being read, how the modern scholars grapple with the interpretation of the metaphors of vine and branches. This is to see, if it could shed more light on the potential senses of the passage and the variety of legitimate readings of what it means to abide in Jesus. The first aspect to be considered is the metaphor of fruit bearing and not fruit bearing.

Bearing and not bearing fruit Jn.15

Though the main focus is on what it means to abide in Jesus, the true vine (Jn.15: 1), the passage also reflects on its contrast, what it might be and under what circumstances believers might cease to be one with him. The understandings of these are as important as understanding what it means to abide. In the passage we are told of the role of the Father in the relationship between Jesus and the believers; He is the vine dresser who cuts away every branch that bears no fruit and who prunes every branch that does bear fruit and makes it bear more (Jn.15: 2). This new idea introduces both the repercussions and gains that accrue from bearing fruit and not bearing fruit, situations

²²⁵ Lindars, 1972, p487

²²⁶ Lindars, 1972, p488

brought about through 'abiding in Jesus' or 'not abiding in Jesus,' the true vine. The repercussion in light of Jn.15: 2 is that the Father, the 'vinedresser,' cuts away the branch that does not bear fruit (Jn.15: 2) and prunes the ones that are fruit bearing and makes them bear even more. What are the branches that are fruit bearing and what are the branches that are not fruit bearing?

The unfruitful branch Jn.15: 2

In the description of his relationship with the believers, the branches, the Johannine Jesus left us in no doubt that there are branches 'in me' that are not fruit bearing. He also mentioned the implication of unfruitfulness. 'Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away' (Jn.15: 2). What are unfruitful branches, what does it mean for them to be cut away?

The opinions of the scholars on the question of what unfruitful branches are vary. Most of the scholars who dwell on the interpretation of this verse see its connection with Jn.15: 6. Most of them believe that Jn.15: 6 is the development, elaboration of the metaphor 'he cuts away' (Jn.15: 2), which is the repercussion of the failure to bear fruit. 'Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt' (Jn.15: 6). The use of a stronger metaphor equally generates more questions. Is there any connection between fire here and hell fire, eternal damnation?

Brown suggests that in Jn.15: 2, there is the recognition of two basic things; one that there are branches on the vine (figuratively 'in me') that do not bear fruit and second, that even the fruit bearing branches need pruning.²²⁷ For Brown, a branch that does not bear fruit is not simply a living unproductive branch, but a dead branch.²²⁸ He alleges that John does not make the distinction between the life that comes from Christ and the translation of that life into virtue, for in Johannine thought,

Love and keeping the commandments are so much a part of the life coming from faith that one who does not behave in a virtuous manner does not have life at all, for Life is a committed life.²²⁹

To buttress his point, Brown maintains that in Johannine dualism, there is not much room for an intermediate stage: There are only living and dead branches (Jer.5: 10,

²²⁷ Brown, 1970, p675

²²⁸ Brown, 1970, p675

²²⁹ Brown, 1970, p675

Jn.13: 2, 27, 30, Judas' situation, a different idea from that of Matthew (Matt.3: 8).²³⁰ Brown points out that in this passage John is talking about Christians who have already been converted and are in Jesus but now dead.²³¹ He suggests that in the atmosphere of the Last Supper Judas may be thought of as a branch that did not bear fruit, and in the atmosphere of the evangelist's own time, the 'antichrists' of 1Jn.2: 18-19 were thought of as branches in Jesus that did not bear fruit.²³² Brown, speaking about the fate of the cut-off branches, insists that it is not beyond the range of Johannine thought to suggest that those falling away from Jesus are to be punished by fire (Jn.5: 29; Mk.24: 41; 3: 10). On the other suggestion, regarding 'casting out' as referring to excommunication from Christian community, Brown believes that it is not easy to prove this, but he cautions that one should not lose sight of 1Jn.2: 19.²³³

Bultmann is of the opinion that the discourse does not call for decision; the listeners are already believers, cannot be called to believe, rather, they are exhorted to abide.²³⁴ Bultmann believes that the relationship between believers and Jesus in Johannine thought is described as a mutual knowledge; different from rational theoretical knowledge in which the things known are separated from the knower as the objective percept is separated from the percipient. He believes that the mutual knowledge here denotes an inward realization in which, that which he knows, namely God, determines the knower's whole existence.²³⁵ Bultmann sees the mutual knowledge of believers and Jesus as a relationship in which the partners are by nature bound together. This is a kind of knowledge that grows and bears fruit as an existential disposition in the observance of the commandments (1Jn.2: 3, 5) and in *ἀγαπῆ* (Jn.13: 34f; 14: 21ff; 15: 12, 17; 1Jn.4: 7f).²³⁶ This convinces Bultmann that the prime concern in Jn.15 is the description of the life of faith as a growing vital activity.²³⁷ He suggests that the cutting away (Jn.15: 2), and the cutting off of shoots that bear no fruit (Jn.15: 6), means that its connection with Jesus (vine, Tree of Life) is done with; for one who ceases to believe is cut off from life and abandoned to death (Jn.15: 6).²³⁸ Bultmann maintains that the text tells us that whoever is not loyal will be destroyed, separated from the trunk that

²³⁰ Brown, 1970, p675

²³¹ Brown, 1970, p675

²³² Brown, 1970, p675-676

²³³ Brown, 1970, p679

²³⁴ Bultmann, 1971, p531

²³⁵ Bultmann, 1971, p380-381

²³⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p381

²³⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p533

²³⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p533 Bultmann, states that in the Mandaean literature, 'to be cut off' is a frequent expression, used to denote separation from the world of life and light. The evil are to be 'cut off', and the pious not.

translates the life.²³⁹ On the question about the connection between the idea in Jn.15: 6 and eternal damnation and hell fire, Bultmann argues that βληθη̃ναι ἐξω does not imply ecclesiastical excommunication, nor the burning refer to the fire of hell (Mk.9: 43, 47; Matt.25: 41). He argues that it refers to being separated from the trunk that transmits the life.²⁴⁰ This once again is a reflection of the camp to which Bultmann belongs. He is one of the chief protagonists of the Lutheran position. Bultmann's view exemplifies the Lutheran position, which is very much opposed to the Roman church's view on church organization, power to excommunicate dissidents, of which Luther was a victim. There is support for this opinion in Marrow who believes that there is no reference in Jn.15: 6 either to 'excommunication' or to hell's punishment. Marrow points out that the evangelist is not doing more than elaborating the initial metaphor in Jn.15: 2, underscoring the inevitable catastrophe of the refusal to believe in him: death, definitive and irrevocable.²⁴¹

Barrett suggests that unfruitful branches can be twofold; they could refer to unbelieving Jews (Matt.21: 41; Rom.11: 17, Matt.15: 13) but Barrett contends that ἐμῶν shows that John's primary thought was of apostate Christians.²⁴² He is of the opinion that an unfaithful Christian suffers the fate of an unfruitful branch.²⁴³

Schnackenburg points out that there is no allusion in Jn.15: 2 to Judas, and for him the branches that do not bear fruit are the members of the community who apostatize.²⁴⁴ On the question of what it means to be cut away, he suggests that cutting away means separation from the community (1Jn.2: 19).²⁴⁵ He claims that Jn.15: 6 gives an illustration of the judgement that the believer who separates himself from Jesus gets (Jn.3: 18).²⁴⁶ This view epitomizes the Catholic position, the church's power to excommunicate. How does a believer become separated from Jesus? Schnackenburg believes that it must have come about through a 'sin to death' (1Jn.5: 16).²⁴⁷ Talbert has a similar opinion. He alleges that the separation from Jesus is probably the sin unto death mentioned in 1Jn.5: 16-17.²⁴⁸ On the question of the connection of cutting away with hell fire, Schnackenburg argues that although fire is frequently a symbol of

²³⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p538

²⁴⁰ Bultmann, 1971, p538

²⁴¹ Marrow, 1995, p273

²⁴² Barrett, 1978, p473

²⁴³ Barrett, 1978, p475

²⁴⁴ Schnackenburg, 1982, p98

²⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, 1982, p98

²⁴⁶ Schnackenburg, 1982, p101

²⁴⁷ Schnackenburg 1982, p101 Schnackenburg confesses that he does not have an idea of what the community would have regarded as 'sin to death'

²⁴⁸ Talbert, 1992, 213

judgement and punishment, it does not point to hell and its fire in this passage (as in Matt. 13: 40-42).

Such ideas of judgement do not occur again in the Johannine community, for that community, it was punishment enough to be separated from Christ and God and therefore exposed to 'withering' and death.²⁴⁹

Thus, the scholars who have interpreted the passages that dwell on the question of unfruitful branches and the fate of believers offer divergent views. On the question regarding the meaning of branches 'in me' that bear fruit, while some scholars like Schnackenburg see those being referred to as unfruitful branches as community members who apostatize, scholars like Barrett, believe that this could either refer to Jews or apostate Christians. Whereas a scholar like Brown claims that this may either refer to Judas, or the antichrist, Bultmann sees unfruitful branches as un-loyal believers.

One also sees the potency for meaning in the reading of what it means to be 'cut away' and the connection of this to hell fire. While Schnackenburg believes strongly that it means excommunication from the community, and Brown maintains that the idea of excommunication cannot be ruled out entirely, other scholars, such as Bultmann and Marrow believe that it does not infer ecclesiastical excommunication.

With regards to the connection between throwing of branches on fire and it being burnt and hell fire, while scholars like Bultmann, Marrow and Schnackenburg, believe Jn.15: 6 does not refer to hell fire, some others like Brown believe that the idea of hell fire is not beyond Johannine thought. These views show once more the difficulties and the potency of meaning inherent in the text.

The fruit bearing branches Jn.15: 2

Apart from talking about the branches that are not fruit bearing, Jesus spoke about fruit bearing branches and the gain that accrues to these. 'Every branch in me that does bear fruit he prunes and makes it bear even more' (Jn.15: 2). The modern scholars equally paid attention to the question of what it means to be fruit bearing, the question of the metaphor of pruning, trimming clean of the fruit bearing branches.

Barrett opines that bearing fruit is living the life of a Christian disciple (Jn.15: 5, 8), most especially the practice of mutual love (Jn.15: 2).²⁵⁰ Brown claims that bearing

²⁴⁹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p101 He suggests that the possibility is there that the members of the community are thinking here of their fellow members who have left them.

²⁵⁰ Barrett, 1978, p474

fruit is symbolic of possessing divine life, growth in divine life and in union with Jesus.²⁵¹ He maintains that this also has to do with communication of life to others and with apostolic ministry (Jn.5: 16; 4: 35-38).²⁵² He points out that trimming clean the branches so that they bear more fruit involves others, a growth in love, which binds the believers to Jesus and spreads life to the other, which has relation to other flocks that need to be brought into the sheepfold.²⁵³ In line with Van den Bussche, Brown argues that

It may be false to think that the Johannine writer would have been aware of a distinction between a Christian's internal vitality and his apostolic activity directed towards others, for he would not have thought of the 'life' of the Christian as something bent in upon itself in an unproductive seclusion.²⁵⁴

Schnackenburg states that bearing fruit has reference to winning over believers, which comes about through close union with Jesus, bearing witness to the community life, through faith and love.²⁵⁵ Bultmann maintains that "relationship with God means the destruction of human security; it does not provide enjoyment of peace of mind, or a state of contemplation, but rather, demands movement, growth; its law is καρπον φερειν"²⁵⁶. He asserts that the nature of the fruit-bearing is every demonstration of vitality of faith, to which reciprocal love above all belongs (Jn.15: 9-17).²⁵⁷ He alleges that the main concern here is the description of the life of faith as a growing, vital activity.²⁵⁸ Bultmann maintains that the statement 'every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more' (Jn.15: 2), tells us that no believer can rest content in the knowledge of having borne fruit, and rely on what he has achieved. "What is demanded is not a limited demonstrable achievement, for 'enough is never enough,' and the reason why God, as the vinedresser 'purifies' the fruit-bearing tendril, that it may bear more fruit."²⁵⁹

On the question of how God carries out the purification, Bultmann contends that "God takes care that the believer can never give himself over to rest; he continually demands something new from him and continually gives him new strength."²⁶⁰

²⁵¹ Brown, 1970, p676

²⁵² Brown, 1970, p676

²⁵³ Brown, 1970, p676

²⁵⁴ Brown, 1970, p676 (Van den Bussche, H., 'La vigne et ses fruits (Jean 15, 1-8),' BVC 26 (1959) p108

²⁵⁵ Brown, 1970, p676

²⁵⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p532

²⁵⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p532-533

²⁵⁸ Bultmann, 1971, p533

²⁵⁹ Bultmann, 1971, p533

²⁶⁰ Bultmann, 1971, p533 He claims that the purity is to be understood in terms of the vine imagery; it is the preparation for bearing fruit and there is no reference here to cultic purity. The purity does not stand for the church's disciplinary action, however much it may be able to undertake the task of καθαριειν in

Schnackenburg is of the view that the pruning or cleaning of the branches of useless growths is reminiscent of purification and trials undergone by the disciples.²⁶¹

The scholars who have interpreted the passages that dwell on the question of what it means to be fruit-bearing differ in their interpretations. On the question of what bearing fruit is, Barrett believes it is living the life of the Christian disciple, Brown sees it as communication of life to others, apostolic ministry, while Bultmann asserts that the nature of fruit-bearing is every demonstration of vitality of faith, to which reciprocal love belongs.

Having discussed the notion of fruit bearing with its advantages and the idea of non-fruit bearing branches and the repercussion therein, what I want to focus on is another close idea, the metaphor of 'clean disciples'.

The clean disciples Jn.15: 3

The Johannine Jesus after talking about the repercussion of barrenness, the cutting away and the advantage of fruit-bearing pruning by the Father, gave a word of assurance 'You are clean already by means of the word that I have spoken to you' (Jn.15: 3). There seems to be a contradiction between Jn.15: 3 and Jn.15: 2. If the believers are already clean, why does God the 'vinedresser' (Jn.15: 2) need to prune them? What does 'you are clean already' mean? Does this mean that they are clean and cannot sin, since they are in him? How come that the listeners are clean already? Is it through the word or through the sacrament? Some of these questions will be addressed. Most of the scholars who have dealt with Jn.15 paid attention to the question of the meaning of the phrase 'you are clean already' (Jn.15: 3). Moloney opines that "you are already made clean" (*katharoi este* Jn.15: 3a) suggests that the disciples at the table are fruitful branches, united to the vine and pruned by having heard the word of the Sent One of the Father.²⁶² He states that the pruning process is already in place because the disciples have heard and accepted the words of Jesus (Jn.13: 10). He cautions though, that one must not take for granted the life-giving bond with the vine. In his words, 'The prophecies of the betrayal of Judas and the denials of Peter (Jn.13: 2, 11,18-20, 36-38) have shown that 'the life of union is begun but not perfected''.²⁶³ Moloney in line with Morris suggests that it is not enough for disciples to be with Jesus and to have received

certain circumstances. He points out that Loisy is against this view: the καθαίρειν takes place *à travers les épreuves de la vie, par l'action de l'esprit et la pratique de la charité.*

²⁶¹ Schnackenburg 1982, p98

²⁶² Moloney, 1998, p420

his word; they must abide in him and he in them (Jn.15: 4).²⁶⁴

Brown suggests that it is possible that ‘you are clean already’ (Jn.15: 3) is meant to be a consolation to the already fearful disciples (Jn.14: 1, 7).²⁶⁵ In line with Borig, he contends that ‘being clean’ refers primarily to being clean not from sin but from all that prevents fruit bearing.²⁶⁶ He believes that the editor might have wished to recall Jesus’ words at the foot washing, ‘And now you men are clean,’ (Jn.13: 10). In line with this, Brown argues that while the disciples were cleansed through Jesus’ parabolic action foreshadowing his death in Jn.13: 10, in Jn.15: 3, it is the word of Jesus that cleanses the disciples.²⁶⁷ Brown alleges that the Johannine writer in light of some of the questions attributed to the disciples, which show their imperfection, does not think of the disciples at the Last Supper as already fully united to Jesus and abundantly bearing fruit.²⁶⁸ He insists that this situation could only take place at ‘the hour,’ when the Paraclete has been given to the disciple, when the work of Jesus’ word is brought to fruition.²⁶⁹

On the question of how the disciples are made clean and how they came to be in need of cleansing, Brown argues that both Jesus’ words and the parabolic action of foot washing cleansed the disciples. “There is no dichotomy in the mind of the Johannine writer between Baptism and the working of the word of Jesus through the Paraclete”.²⁷⁰ Brown states that the disciples to whom the *marshal* was addressed would have become fruitful branches in Jesus through Baptism, begotten from above and clean according to the symbolism of Jn.13: 10, (foot washing).²⁷¹ He suggests that, in order for these to bear more fruit, it was necessary that Jesus’ commandment of love gradually express itself more and more in their lives.²⁷² What this would mean is that at a point before the baptism, the disciples were not clean, and could not be fruit-bearing and so in need of cleansing and at the baptism became cleansed. Do they remain permanently clean? Brown alleges that in Johannine thought, ‘being made clean’ is not static nor a goal in itself, rather it imposes a responsibility. “If the disciples are made clean, they must respond and live out this state by remaining in Jesus (Jn.15: 4).”²⁷³ Brown contends that

²⁶³ Moloney, 1998, p420, he refers to Westcott, Gospel, p216.

²⁶⁴ Moloney, 1998, p420

²⁶⁵ Brown, 1970, p676

²⁶⁶ Brown, 1970, p676-677 (Borig, R., *Der wahre Weinstock*, Munich: Kösel, 1967, p42)

²⁶⁷ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁶⁸ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁶⁹ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁷⁰ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁷¹ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁷² Brown, 1970, p677

²⁷³ Brown, 1970, p677

Jn.15: 3 though an insertion provides a transition to 4-5.²⁷⁴

Bultmann acknowledges the fact that what we have in Jn.15: 3 in light of Jn.15: 2 can easily be misunderstood, but claims that the possibility of misunderstanding the comforting assurance in Jn.15: 3 is eliminated by the phrase ‘through the words I have spoken to you’ (Jn.15: 3),

The believer is not referred to himself or the point he has already reached, to his ‘conversion’ or his achievement. The reason for his purity lies outside himself; not of course, in ecclesiastical institutions or means of salvation, but in the Revealer’s word and in that alone.²⁷⁵

Bultmann admits that although the believer is given certainty of salvation: ‘you are already clean’ (Jn.15: 3), it is given in such a way that the believer’s attention is directed to the ‘word’

If, anxious about his faith, he were to look at himself, to see whether he were living in the movement demanded of him, precisely in that kind of reflection he would be standing still. If he is in true motion, then he has no time for reflection. Whoever remains in motion by looking at the word, has certainty.²⁷⁶

Schnackenburg suggests that the word καθαίρει in this verse means that the disciples have already been made clean by the word which Jesus has spoken to them, in the sense that God the vinedresser, does not need to clean or purify the disciples. He argues that they are clean already and can therefore bear abundant fruit, so long as they abide in Christ.²⁷⁷ What is this word?

Schnackenburg argues that the word λελάληκα refers to Jesus’ revelatory discourse (λόγος), which contains life and spirit (Jn.6: 63) and cleanses those who have received it into themselves in faith (Jn.5: 24; 6: 63; 8: 31, 51; 14: 23; 17: 17).²⁷⁸ A similar idea is found in Barrett. Barrett insists that “It would be wrong (in John’s view) to suppose that men are morally and spiritually cleansed by a formula as by the dipping in water, called baptism”.²⁷⁹ He is convinced that it is the speaking and acting Christ who cleanses, but the meaning of his action is revealed by his active word.²⁸⁰

In line with Barrett, Lindars insists that what does the pruning is the teaching of Jesus (Jn.17: 14; 5: 38; 8: 37).²⁸¹ Brown is convinced that in Johannine thought, the cleansing

²⁷⁴ Brown, 1970, p677

²⁷⁵ Bultmann, 1971, p534

²⁷⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p534

²⁷⁷ Schnackenburg, 1982, p98

²⁷⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p98 Schnackenburg states that Augustine finds a connection between what is expressed here and early Christian theology of baptism (Eph.5: 26; Heb.10: 22; 1Pet.1: 23; James 1: 18)

²⁷⁹ Barrett, 1978, p474

²⁸⁰ Barrett, 1978, p474

²⁸¹ Lindars, 1972, p488-489

comes through the word and the sacrament, two elements that are not contradictory.²⁸² Thus, one perceives two main divides on the question of the interpretation of how the cleansing takes place. The first is that of scholars like Bultmann, Barrett who hold the view that the cleansing comes about through the word of Jesus. (These are scholars whose tradition lays stress on the ‘word.’) One then is not surprised to note that the other main opinion is that of scholars like Schnackenburg and Brown, two catholic scholars who in line with their Church tradition uphold the importance of the word and sacrament as the two main ingredients relating to faith. These scholars are of the view that the cleansing comes about through both the words of Jesus and the sacrament. This shows once again that scholarly interpretations are not devoid of influence from the tradition to which the individual scholar belongs, and that the presence of different metaphors in the text allows for divergent interpretations.

Having said that, I will have a closer look at what the Johannine Jesus said about the ‘word’.

Jesus’ words in the believers Jn.15: 7

The Johannine Jesus in Jn.15: 17, introduces another angle to the relationship that should be between him and the disciples. ‘If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it’ (Jn.15: 7). Up till now the discussion was about Jesus remaining in the disciples and the disciples remaining in Jesus (Jn.15: 4), but here in Jn.15: 7, there is a change of tone from Jesus remaining in the believers to Jesus’ words remaining in the disciples. There is no doubt that there are ambiguities in the text regarding the use of *λόγος* in connection with Jesus. Jesus is the word who was in the beginning (Jn.1: 1) the word who was God (Jn.1: 1), the word who became flesh (Jn.1: 14).

Brown states that the word, ‘logos’ here, means Jesus’ whole teaching (Jn.5: 38) “His word you do not have abiding [*menein*] in your hearts, because you do not believe the one He sent” (1Jn.2: 24). “If what you have heard in the beginning abides in your hearts, then you will abide in the Son and [in] the Father.”²⁸³

Sanders opines that ‘my words stay in you’ is another way of saying ‘you keep my words’ (Jn.14: 15, 21, 23, 24), adopted possibly for the sake of the allusion to the fact

²⁸² Brown, 1970, p677

²⁸³ Brown, 1970, p660

that Jesus himself is the Logos, even though ‘words’ here is ῥήματα²⁸⁴

What is obvious from this is that for one to abide in Jesus, his word must abide in him, and this would mean that the person must keep all Jesus’ teachings. What are the teachings of Jesus? Barrett asserts that ῥήματα here are probably the specific sayings and precepts of Jesus (Jn.15: 10), which must remain in the mind and heart of believers.²⁸⁵

It is obvious that there are ambiguities in the text connected with the use of ‘word’ regarding Jesus which in turn led to divergent interpretations of the meaning of the term ‘word’ as we have it in Jn.15. Brown held the view that it is the entire teachings of Jesus. For Barrett, it is specific sayings and precepts of Jesus, while Schnackenburg is of the opinion that it refers to Jesus’ revelatory discourse, the λόγος which contains life and spirit.

Having said that about the words of Jesus, what needs to be looked at is how the Johannine Jesus’ words ‘you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it’ (Jn.15: 7) have been read? What are the requests that will be granted?

Believers’ requests that will be granted Jn.15: 7

Bultmann states that what we have in Jn.15: 7 is further promise that the prayer of believers will be granted. What is the content of this prayer? Is it just any request by believers? Bultmann states that the content of this prayer that would be heard is that Jesus remains in the believer and he remains in Jesus.²⁸⁶ For Schnackenburg what we have in Jn.15: 7 is

A promise and an assurance conditional on the believer keeping to the admonition ‘Abide in me’ (Jn.14: 10-13), an assurance that applies particularly to the believer because the believer will, on the basis of his union with Jesus, ask for what will make Jesus’ work fruitful (Jn.14: 13).²⁸⁷

In addition to this, Schnackenburg alleges that, “it is from the situation of immanence (abiding in Christ) that the gift of prayer that is certain to be heard comes”.²⁸⁸ What this means is that the prayer that would be answered is one in line with Jesus’ work that comes through abiding in Jesus.

Lindars believes that the verse is concerned with prayer in connection with the

²⁸⁴ Sanders, 1968, p338

²⁸⁵ Barrett, 1978, p475

²⁸⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p538-539

²⁸⁷ Schnackenburg, 1982, p101-102

²⁸⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p102

disciples' mission.²⁸⁹ Brown states that the requests of those who remain in Jesus will be in harmony with what Jesus wants and will be granted by the Father.²⁹⁰ On the question of what these requests are, he maintains that what they will request involves the growth of Christian life, bearing fruit and becoming disciples.²⁹¹ What this means is that the request that will be granted is one in line with the will of Jesus.

Barrett asserts that what we have in Jn.15: 7 is the assurance that the prayer of believers cannot fail, but rather it would always be answered since believers ask for nothing contrary to the will of God.²⁹²

Thus, the divergent views expressed by various scholars who dwell on the question of the meaning of the words of Jesus and that of the nature of the prayer show once again the richness of meaning in the text. The various opinions expressed by scholars who dwell on the question of what the words of Jesus mean show that there are ambiguities in the text regarding the use of the word *λόγος* in connection with Jesus. The views of the modern scholars can easily be classified into two categories. The first of these is found in scholars like Brown who maintains that the word *λόγος* is Jesus' whole teachings, while the second main view is found in scholars like Barrett who is of the opinion that these are specific sayings and precepts of Jesus.

On the question of the meaning of the request that will always be answered, scholars' views are even more divergent. Bultmann believes that the request that will be heard is one that Jesus remains in the believers and he remains in Jesus; for Schnackenburg, the request that will be granted is one that asks for what would make Jesus' work fruitful. For Brown, the request involves growth of Christian life, bearing fruit and becoming disciples, a request that is in line with the will of Jesus. A close idea to Brown's is found in scholars like Barrett, who is of the view that the request is any that is not contrary to the will of God.

Having said this, what needs to be looked at is Jn.15: 4, the main verse in which we have the concept of 'abide in' in Jn.15, where the Johannine Jesus gave further explanation on what it means to abide in him.

²⁸⁹ Lindars, 1972, p489

²⁹⁰ Brown, 1970, p679

²⁹¹ Brown, 1970, p680

²⁹² Barrett, 1978, p475

Jn.15: 4 ‘Remain in me, as I in you’

The Johannine Jesus after giving his disciples the assuring words that they are already cleansed, went on to speak about the way they, the ‘branches,’ can continue to ‘bear fruit’, the necessity of abiding for fruit bearing, ‘μείνατε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν’ (Jn.15: 4). This seems to be one of the most important statements in the pericope, the heart of the matter, the verse towards which the previous verses were moving, and on which the next verses are developed. But what kind of statement is ‘Remain in me, as I in you’? Is it a statement of fact, a request, or an imperative?

Bultmann opines that while Jn.15: 2 and 3 describe the nature of the believer’s association with Jesus in the indicative mood, the discourse adopts the imperative mood in Jn.15: 4. ‘Abide in me.’²⁹³ Schnackenburg believes that what we have here is an admonition, ‘a call’ ‘abide in me,’ an application of an appellative manner of the figurative discourse to the disciples.²⁹⁴ Schnackenburg points out that in order to understand what ‘remain in me, as I in you’ means, the καθὼς clause that follows the main clause is to be taken into consideration.²⁹⁵ He alleges that in the main clause, the believers are admonished to abide in Jesus in order to bear fruit, while ‘and I in you’ is an assurance directed towards believers bearing fruit (Jn.15: 2).²⁹⁶ He states that this makes it clear to the disciples that they cannot bear fruit on their own, not from their merit, but from their abiding in Jesus, a promise that is not self-contained.²⁹⁷ Schnackenburg points out that in this statement, the believers are not addressed ‘moralistically, but are referred to the ground for fruitful activity, which is their unity with Jesus, in which they must continue’ (Jn.8: 31).²⁹⁸ He reckons that bearing fruit has reference to winning over believers, and this comes about through close union with Jesus, bearing witness to the community life through faith and love.²⁹⁹ Schnackenburg insists that despite the impression from certain parts of the fourth gospel that salvation can be individualistic i.e., the call of each individual to make a decision regarding faith, the community of faith formed by Jesus is always present.

Thus, Schnackenburg realizes the presence of the concept of individualistic soteriology in the text but believes that the main emphasis does not lie in this. Schnackenburg is

²⁹³ Bultmann, 1971, p534

²⁹⁴ Schnackenburg 1982, p99

²⁹⁵ Schnackenburg 1982, 99

²⁹⁶ Schnackenburg, 1982, p99

²⁹⁷ Schnackenburg, 1982, p99

²⁹⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p99

convinced that 'Johannine Christianity is no different from the rest of early Christianity that believed that Christian existence could not be a reality outside or without a community (1Jn.2: 19f, 4: 4f; 2 Jn.1; 3Jn.9).'³⁰⁰ To buttress his point, Schnackenburg argues that the Johannine image of the shepherd and the flock does not just focus on the relationship between the shepherd and the individual sheep, rather it includes God's flock entrusted to the shepherd.³⁰¹

Thus, for Schnackenburg, the idea of union in Jn.15 is not just individualistic, but rather communal, a union sought in the community. (Anyone who holds such a view would not find it difficult or rather would be keen in promoting the idea of union of believers).

Bultmann maintains that 'μεινότε' implies a demand for loyalty. But what kind of loyalty are we talking about here? Bultmann opines that,

This loyalty is not steadfastness to a cause, in the sense of standing up for something, not a question of a loyalty between persons, in which what is given and what is demanded are always equally shared by both sides, rather it is the relationship of faith.³⁰²

Bultmann thereby concludes that it is persistence in the life of faith, loyal steadfastness to the cause only in the sense of always allowing oneself to be encompassed, of allowing oneself to receive.³⁰³ Bultmann further states that

The loyalty that is demanded is not primarily a continued 'being for', but 'a being from', not 'the holding of a position', but an 'allowing oneself to be held', μένειν means holding on loyally to the decision once taken, which is done only by continually going through it again.³⁰⁴

What kind of relationship is this? Bultmann suggests that the relationship can be a reciprocal one. 'Abiding in' and 'fruit bearing' are closely interwoven, he insists, for there is no 'abiding in him,' ('being held') without 'fruit bearing' nor is there any 'fruit bearing' without 'abiding in him' (allowing oneself to be held).³⁰⁵

Thus, Bultmann believes that the idea of union in Jn.15 is more of an individual union, a 'one to one' relationship between Jesus and the individual believer. A scholar like Bultmann would not be as keen as Schnackenburg in promoting the idea of unity of believers. There is no doubt that there is precedence in history for this. While Schnackenburg is from a Roman Catholic background, Bultmann has more of the Lutheran background.

²⁹⁹ Schnackenburg 1982, p100

³⁰⁰ Schnackenburg, 1982, p209

³⁰¹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p211

³⁰² Bultmann, 1971, p535

³⁰³ Bultmann, 1971, p535 He claims that μένειν is not identical with the ὑπομονή that is demanded elsewhere in the New Testament, though the μένειν of faith includes ὑπομονή

³⁰⁴ Bultmann, 1978, p536

³⁰⁵ Bultmann, 1971, p536

With regard to the second part of the statement, 'καὶ ἔν ὑμῖν' (Jn.15: 4), Bultmann argues that

This does not mean that Jesus continues to be present in the Christian Church and culture in the sense of being present within the history of the world and the history of ideas. They speak of the promise that he will always remain the ground and origin of the possibility of life.³⁰⁶

Barrett states that 'μείναι ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἔν ὑμῖν' is the basic thought of the chapter. He contends that it can be taken in three ways (a) καὶ introduces a comparison, 'abide in me, as I abide in you,' (b) καὶ introduces the apodosis of a conditional sentence, the protasis of which is expressed by an imperative, 'if you abide in me, I will abide in you'. (c) we should take the two balanced clauses very closely together 'let there be mutual abiding.'³⁰⁷

Barrett in line with Bultmann asserts that 'Μένειν means holding on loyally to the decision ~~the~~ once taken, which is only possible by continually going through it again.'³⁰⁸ He also went along Bultmann's line in his interpretation of the second part of the statement. Barrett maintains that

The words καὶ ἔν ὑμῖν do not say that Jesus continues to be present in the Christian church and culture in the sense of being present within the history of the world and the history of ideas, but rather they speak of the promise that he will always remain the ground and origin of the possibility of life.³⁰⁹

For Barrett, the present continuous tenses are more suitable to the context.

Brown suggests that there are various possible ways of translating the idea in the statement 'if you remain in me, I shall remain in you'; 'Remain in me and I in you', but he insists that the various translations are not really exclusive; nevertheless, he opts for the last translation.³¹⁰ He argues that

'Abide in me, and I in you', is not just a comparison between the action of Jesus and that of the believers, and neither is one part of the command the causal condition of the other one, rather one cannot exist without the other, the two are part of a whole for there is only one personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples.³¹¹

On the question of the meaning of 'remain in me and I in you', Brown maintains that it means that if a believer remains in Jesus in faith, Jesus remains in him through love and faithfulness.³¹² Despite the fact that Brown is a promoter of communal union, he could not deny the concept of individual union found in the Johannine text. Brown

³⁰⁶ Bultmann, 1971, p536

³⁰⁷ Barrett, 1978, p474

³⁰⁸ Barrett, 1978, p474 (Bultmann, 1971, p536)

³⁰⁹ Barrett, 1978, p474 (Bultmann, 1971, p536)

³¹⁰ Brown, 1970, p661

³¹¹ Brown, 1970, p678

³¹² Brown, 1970, p678

alleges that there is insistence in Jn.15: 4 and 5 that in order to bear fruit, one must remain in Jesus; ‘all those who remain in Jesus bear fruit and only those.’³¹³ He also claims that in this verse more than any other, the leitmotif of the Johannine thought on the total dependence of the Christian upon Jesus is eloquently expressed.³¹⁴ Thus for Brown, in the union of Jesus and the believer, the believer is the ‘junior’, ‘second’ partner.

Morris believes that it is conceivable that ‘abide in me, as I in you’ (Jn.15: 4) could be an imperative that Jesus directs to himself with the meaning, ‘You must abide in me and I must abide in you’, without excluding the possibility of it being a promise, ‘Abide in me, and I will abide in you.’ But he insists that it is more probably a command rather than a promise.³¹⁵ He maintains that this would mean that Jesus means the disciples should live such lives that he will continue to live in them.³¹⁶ He argues that the two ‘abiding’ cannot be separated, and so asserts that ‘to abide in Jesus is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian, which includes both the production of Christian character and the winning of others to follow Christ.’³¹⁷ Morris equally suggests that ‘abiding in’ also includes everything that results from vital union with Christ.³¹⁸

Lindars opines that the expression ‘Abide in me, and I in you’ is a classic expression of mutual indwelling, an imperative, which denotes moral union.³¹⁹ But he argues that the imperative cannot be extended to ‘and I in you,’ which must then be equivalent to saying ‘As I am in you’ because the branch has not moral power to abide in the vine.³²⁰ Hence, despite the fact that most of the scholars believe that Jn.15: 4 is the centre of the chapter, they are divided in their views on the kind of statement Jn.15: 4 is, and they have divergent opinions on the nature of the union expressed in the text. On the

³¹³ Brown, 1970, p678

³¹⁴ Brown, 1970, p678 Brown asserts that the last line of Jn.17: 5 ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ has played an important role in the history of the theological discussion of grace. He alleges that Augustine used it in his anti-Pelagius controversy. The passage he also pointed out was cited in 418 by the council of Carthage (DB 227), against Pelagius, and in 529 by the Council of Orange (DB 377) against the semi-Pelagians who defended man’s natural power to do good works that were in some sense deserving of grace. The text also came up at the council of Trent (DB 1546) in the argument of Rome against the Reformers, defending the meritorious quality of work done in union with Christ. In the final analysis, Brown states that while these theological debates go beyond the meaning clearly envisaged by the Johannine writer, we can see how the theology of grace and merit is an attempt to systematize insights provided by John. Brown suggests that further reading on this is found in Leal, J., ‘*Sine me nihil potestis facere*’ (Joh.15, 5)’ in *XII Semana Bíblica Española* (Madrid, 1952), pp.483-98

³¹⁵ Morris, 1995, p595

³¹⁶ Morris, 1995, p595

³¹⁷ Morris, 1995, p595

³¹⁸ Morris, 1995, p595

³¹⁹ Lindars, 1972, p489

³²⁰ Lindars, 1972, p489

way they address the question of what kind of statement Jn.15: 4 is, one discovers that while some scholars like Bultmann and Lindars are of the view that it is nothing other than an imperative, some others like Schnackenburg see it as an admonition. Whereas other scholars like Brown and Morris are open to the possibility of the statement either being an imperative or a promise, despite supporting the view that it is more of a command than a promise. Yet some other scholars like Barrett believe that it can be taken in three ways. Scholarly opinions also differ on the nature of the believers' association with Jesus. For Bultmann it is reciprocal union, Barrett calls it mutual union, for Lindars it is a moral union. Yet, Schnackenburg sees it as communal union. Another area where one finds diversity of reading is the scholars' interpretation of the meaning of *Μένειν*. While some scholars like Bultmann and Barrett believe that *Μένειν* is persistence in life of faith, loyal steadfastness to a decision once taken, allowing oneself to be held, Schnackenburg and Talbert hold the view that union with Jesus is a ground for fruitful bearing, winning over believers, with emphasis on communal witness. Yet scholars like Brown hold the view that it is a union that comes about through love and faithfulness, a total dependence of believers upon Jesus, while Morris believes that abiding in Jesus is a necessary prerequisite for fruitfulness. The implication of this is that for scholars like Bultmann, what matters is the word symbolized by the branch's association with the trunk that translates life. If the individual relationship with Jesus is all right and if the believer is loyal, his salvation is assured. Whereas for scholars like Schnackenburg, and Brown and Tabert who laid emphasis on the importance of community, the emphasis would always be on the communal nature of salvation, on communal eschatology. Such scholars would be more in support of promotion of ecumenical endeavours, for organic institutional unity. Once again the scholars who dwell on the text did not disappoint. Their divergent views show once again the ambiguities and the richness of the text for meaning. What I want to look at now is the connection between bearing fruit and the Father's glory and the notion of being a disciple, an idea closely related to the idea of bearing fruit.

Bearing fruit and the Father's glory Jn.15: 8

The Johannine Jesus said 'It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples' (Jn.15: 8). Some of the questions that come from the reading of Jn.15: 8 are: what has the Father's glory to do with the idea of bearing fruit?

The scholars that dwell on the question of the connection between the Father's glory

and bearing fruit express different views. Bultmann suggests that the Father's glorification takes place in the believers' bearing fruits and in their being Jesus' disciples. He reckons that the Son's glorification is the same as the Father's and he therefore argues that Jesus' glorification that seems to separate him from his own is equally what unites him with them.³²¹ Bultmann insists that the union of believers with Jesus is achieved in their discipleship. He believes this is the connection with Jn.13: 3.³²²

Barrett claims that although in Johannine thought it is the Son who is glorified, certain passages show that the Father is glorified in the Son, through the Son's obedience and perfect accomplishment of his work (Jn.12: 28; 13: 31; 14: 13; 17: 4).³²³ He finds in this verse a close idea of seeing the glorification of the Father through the obedience and work of the believers. And he asserts that bearing fruit glorifies the Father and leads to the believers being Jesus' disciples.³²⁴

Schnackenburg opines that Jesus is only intent on the glorification of the Father, which he did both while on earth (Jn.13: 31f; 14: 13; 17: 1) and will continue to do after his return to the Father through the disciples he left here on earth (Jn.17: 10).³²⁵ A similar opinion is found in Brown. He states that the Father was glorified in the mission of the Son, and now the Father is glorified in that mission by the Son's disciples and this glorification comes about through the believers sharing in the life of Jesus (Jn.17: 22).³²⁶

Thus the scholars that dwell on the question of the connection between glorification and bearing fruit express the view that the believers bearing fruits has to do with the father's glorification, but they differ on their understanding of glorification. While scholars like Bultmann and Barrett were categorical in saying that the Father's glory and that of Jesus are the same, scholars like Brown and Schnackenburg were not as categorical; they only talked about the Father's glory, which is brought about through Jesus' and the believers' mission. This brings us to the question of the connection between bearing fruit and being a disciple. Are they the same? Does one come before the other?

³²¹ Bultmann, 1971, p539

³²² Bultmann, 1971, p539

³²³ Barrett, 1978, p475

³²⁴ Barrett, 1978, p475

³²⁵ Schnackenburg, 1982, p102

³²⁶ Brown, 1970, p680

Bearing fruit and being a disciple Jn.15: 8

Bultmann opines that *μαθητής εἶναι* is interchangeable with *μένειν ἐν*.³²⁷ Brown states that fruit bearing and becoming a disciple are not two separate things and are inseparable. In his words “Becoming my disciples involves love of Jesus (Jn.15: 9-10) and love of another (Jn.15: 12-17).”³²⁸ He also alleges that bearing much fruit and becoming or being a disciple is the same as being in, remaining in Jesus.³²⁹

Barrett contends that they are separable, one before the other. In his words

John seems to think of fruit bearing as the outward and visible sign of being a disciple. Cf. 13: 35, where mutual love is the sign of discipleship, and v.12 where the same thought is resumed.³³⁰

While other scholars have suggested that bearing fruit and being a disciple are inseparable (Bultmann and Brown), or separable (Barrett), Schnackenburg believes that what we have in this verse is that believers show by bearing much fruit that they are disciples. He maintains that true discipleship consists in abiding in Jesus’ word (Jn.8: 31), expressed in the new commandment to love one another.³³¹ He points out that in John,

All believers were called disciples of Christ (Jn.6: 60), but what is most important is that believers should become true disciples by bearing fruit and above all through brotherly love (Jn.13: 35) or to show that they are such disciples (*γενήσεθε*). It is only then that Jesus will accept them as his disciples (*ἐμοί* in the dative, *ethicus* or *commodi*) who are dear to him and who really serve him (Jn.12: 26).³³²

What Schnackenburg’s assertion is about is that being a disciple comes after being a ‘fruit bearing’ believer.

From the divergent views expressed by scholars on the question of bearing fruit and being a disciple one easily identifies two main positions. The first is held by scholars like Bultmann and Brown, who are of the view that bearing fruit and being a disciple are inseparable, while the other main view is that found in scholars like Barrett and Schnackenburg who believe that bearing fruit and being a disciple are two different things. Barrett holds the view that fruit bearing is the outward and visible sign of being

³²⁷ Bultmann, 1971, p539

³²⁸ Brown, 1970, p680 Brown states that the love of the disciples for his fellow Christian must be so great that he is willing to lay down his life (Jn.15: 13). He point out that Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110) exemplified the Johannine notion of becoming a disciple of Jesus when on the road to martyrdom he exclaimed, ‘Now I am beginning to be a disciple’ (Romans v 3).

³²⁹ Brown, 1970, p663

³³⁰ Barrett, 1978, p475

³³¹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p102

³³² Schnackenburg, 1982, p102-103

a disciple; Schnackenburg believes that believers become true disciples by bearing fruit most especially through brotherly love.

Abiding in the love of Jesus Jn.15: 9

From talking about the idea of bearing fruit and being a disciple, the Johannine Jesus moved into another area and made an addition to what he said earlier ‘remain in my love’ (Jn.15: 9). The question is what does it mean to abide in the love of Jesus? Is it the same as abiding in Jesus? In the earlier part of the thesis we asked the same question regarding the word of Jesus. It is equally necessary to see how the idea of abiding in Jesus’ love is understood and interpreted.

Scholarly opinion on the interpretation of what it means to abide in the love of Jesus comes in varied ways. For Bultmann, abiding in Jesus’ love means that believers have to continue in the love they have received in the state of being loved and the believer’s ‘existence is to be based completely ‘on Jesus’ service’ as the foot washing had already made clear symbolically.’³³³ He further points out that

To continue in the love they have received, however, is not to enjoy the peace of mind that comes from a self-sufficient assurance of salvation, nor is it indulgence in devotions or ecstasy. It is only real in that movement that consists in bearing fruit; it takes place in keeping the commandments (v. 10).³³⁴

Brown states that ‘remain in my love’ puts a demand on the disciples to respond to Jesus’ love for them, just as ‘remain in me’ puts a demand on them to respond to Jesus cleansing them by his word’.³³⁵

Barrett suggests that ‘remain in my love’ is a summons to the disciples to enter into and so to abide in the love of Jesus.³³⁶ He points out that Jn.15: 10 gives what it means to abide in the love of Jesus, keeping Jesus’ commandment, which is done through love and obedience, for him the two are mutually dependent.³³⁷

Schnackenburg believes that the admonition, ‘abide in my love’ is a call for the believers to show that they are Jesus’ disciples.³³⁸ He also suggests that in this verse, the bearing of fruit is revealed at the deepest level as love.³³⁹ He opines that the admonition to abide in Jesus’ love gives depth to the admonition ‘Abide in me.’³⁴⁰ One

³³³ Bultmann, 1971, p540

³³⁴ Bultmann, 1971, p541

³³⁵ Brown, 1970, p681

³³⁶ Barrett, 1978, p476

³³⁷ Barrett, 1978, p476

³³⁸ Schnackenburg, 1982, p103

³³⁹ Schnackenburg, 1982, p103

³⁴⁰ Schnackenburg, 1982, p103

can ask, how is faith, abide in, and love related?

Bultmann maintains that a call to faith, a call to abide, is the same as a call to love and that both inseparably go hand in hand, a unity.³⁴¹ For Bultmann 'Faith is not authentic unless it is steadfast, and enables one to decide beforehand the way all future action is to go'.³⁴² The importance of this is that remaining in Jesus and in his love enables the believer to be in unity with Jesus and by implication, in unity with fellow believers.

Thus, the opinions of scholars vary in the reading of what it means to abide in the love of Jesus. For Bultmann it means that believers have to continue in the love they have received in the state of being loved. For Brown, it is a demand on the disciples to respond to Jesus' love, Barrett sees it as a summons to keep Jesus' commandment, whereas for Schnackenburg, it is an admonition to believers to show that they are Jesus' disciples.

Abiding through loving one another Jn.15: 12

The Johannine Jesus gave his disciples one commandment, 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn.15: 12, 17; 13: 34; 1Jn.3: 23). What this then translates to is that to abide in Jesus, believers must love one another. Jesus points out to his hearers that he remains in the love of the Father because he keeps the Father's commandments (Jn.15: 10) and he expects the same relationship between him and those who want to remain in him. The Johannine Jesus also brought into focus the fact that the relationship between him and the disciples must be patterned after that of the Father and himself. This is because it can only work if it is based on that of Jesus and the Father, 'just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love' (Jn.15: 10). This is similar to what we have in Jn.17: 21 when Jesus told those for whom he prayed that their union must be patterned after that of the Father and himself. What this still shows is that keeping Jesus' commandments is an indication of abiding in him.

Bultmann states that there is one commandment, the commandment of love, when the being of Jesus for the believers becomes the authoritative law of their life.³⁴³ He claims that the content of the commandment is brotherly love, unconditional being for one's neighbour.³⁴⁴ Schnackenburg believes that the commandment is brotherly, mutual love

³⁴¹ Bultmann, 1971, p476

³⁴² Bultmann, 1971, p547 He claims that, the summons to abide in Jesus and in his love is Jesus' last will and testament

³⁴³ Bultmann, 1971, p542

³⁴⁴ Bultmann, 1971, p542

(Jn.15: 12, 17).³⁴⁵ Barrett asserts that the commandment of Jesus is service of love that every Christian owes to fellow Christians.³⁴⁶

One sees the potency of meaning in the text in the views expressed by various scholars on their reading of what they understand Jesus' commandment to mean. While Bultmann holds the view that it is unconditional being for one's neighbour, Schnackenburg asserts that it is brotherly mutual love, whereas Barrett sees it as service of love from one Christian to another. All these show once again the ambiguity and richness of the text for meaning. The various scholarly views point to the potency of meaning inherent in all text, which Jn.15 is not an exception.

³⁴⁵ Schnackenburg, 1982, p103

³⁴⁶ Barrett, 1978, p476

Conclusion

We have looked at the leading scholars from various traditions on the discussion of the Johannine texts on unity. One thing that has been clearly shown is that the use of the historical critical method in no way guarantees a single and agreed interpretation of a given text. In part this is because of the use of complex metaphors, ambiguities and gaps in the text; in part because all interpreters in engaging with the text inevitably enter into dialogue with the text in which they bring their own experience and interest to bear in the construction of the meaning of the texts for them.

There is no doubt that Jn.15 dwells substantially on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus, using the complex metaphor of the vine and its branches, their cleansing, pruning, bearing fruit. This metaphor was in turn explored by the various scholars who read it in light of their own theological preferences. For example the question of the repercussion of unfruitfulness: while some scholars like Brown and Schnackenburg, two Catholic scholars, were able to see its connection with excommunication from the Ecclesial community, Bultmann could not, for it does not suit his theological preference. Bultmann a Lutheran and dialectical theologian is influenced by the Lutheran theology, Barrett a Methodist Protestant interprets the text according to his training, while Brown and Schnackenburg, Catholic theologians in their reading of the text reflect their own theological background. Thus, interpretations are influenced by the scholars' backgrounds. But then one still discovers that being in the same denomination does not guarantee the same interpretation. Brown and Schnackenburg, though both Catholic scholars, express divergent views on the interpretations of some of the verses in Jn.15. What this shows is that apart from the theological background, the individual knowledge also influences interpretation; each scholar brings his personality into the reading of the text.

Thus one may ask, why is it that such different theologies can be supported by the same text? One of the answers for this is that the biblical text resembles a source, where new water emerges from the same place, and not a reservoir or a cistern, with a fixed amount of water in that it can be clearly measured.³⁴⁷ Is there also a sense in which Jn.15 lends itself to this variety of interpretation, not just because it employs a rich metaphor but because of its sectarian position: a small voluntarist group with a

³⁴⁷ Luz, 1994, p19

strong sense of group identity, fiercely committed to living out a particular understanding of the Gospel? There is, that is to say, both a strong sense of personal choice, commitment, importance of maintaining unity of belief (1Jn.) and a strong sense of group cohesion. Scholars from traditions with very different Ecclesiologies will tend to emphasize different aspects of John's theology.

What I intend to do now is to see how far as readers modern scholars have been influenced by and indebted to the whole history of the reading of the texts, how far modern interpreters are influenced by the major interpreters. It is also to see to what extent they stand in a tradition of readings from the last two Millennia. To do this we will look at representative figures at various periods of the life of the church. The two major periods that will be concentrated upon are the early period of the church, the late 4th and early 5th century, focusing mainly on Chrysostom and Augustine. The second major period that will be viewed is the reformation period, the 16th century and the scholars whose readings of the texts would be concentrated upon are Martin Luther, a first generation reformer and John Calvin, a second-generation reformer.

The second thing I want to do is to see and show what the similarities are between the ancient readers, the fathers of the church, the reformation commentators and modern historical commentators. This is to see and say that all have much in common, in the sense that they all have to grapple with some difficulties in the text, are engaged in dialogue with the text. It will also show that their own experiences and the concerns of their time to a greater or lesser degree influenced all the commentators.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FATHERS AND THE IDEA OF UNITY AND ABIDING IN JOHN

Dissension among believers has been a source of great concern at various periods in the life of the church, when the corporate unity of the church has been threatened and undermined. One such period was the late 4th and early 5th century. At this particular period the church was very conscious of the fact that disunity would make the church unsuitable as the sole religion of the empire and would undermine the church's objective of providing unity for the empire. Christianity had been the ideological factor unifying the Empire since Constantine,³⁴⁸ with little interruption during the reign of Emperor Julian.

At various times the question is how does the church contribute to the world order? This question was very dominant in the 4th and 5th century. The concern at that period was how to overcome Christian disunity: how could the church assist in holding together a very diverse empire? Whereas in the 2nd century diversity had been an accepted phenomenon in many parts of the church,³⁴⁹ now, if Christianity was to fulfill the role of the religion of the Empire it had to assemble a unified body of teaching. These teachings are often carried out through preaching and exposition of the biblical text most especially the ones that dwell on unity.

In the following, I intend to look at the history of the reception of Jn.15 and Jn.17 in the patristic period. The two chapters are some of the texts in the fourth gospel that dwell substantially on the idea of unity and abiding. I intend to use John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo, two prominent patristic commentators to present the history of reception of these texts at this period, and to see how they responded to the challenge of the church's new official position.

In as much as one would have loved to have a broader look at the history of reception of Jn.17: 20-23 and Jn.15 and examine other patristic commentaries on these, limitation of space would not allow this. That apart, I believe that the two distinguished scholars that I have chosen, Chrysostom and Augustine can adequately represent the two major schools of thought at the patristic period.

John Chrysostom (347- 407), is the most distinguished theologian and scholar

³⁴⁸ Lietzmann, 1950, p273

³⁴⁹ Bauer, 1971, p131-132

produced by the Antiochene Church. He started studies of scriptures early in life. He learnt from Diodore of Tarsus an intense focus on scripture and the orientation towards exegesis of the Antiochene School,³⁵⁰ of which his writings are the best representative.³⁵¹ According to Palladius, Chrysostom during two years spent as a hermit in a cave memorised the entire New Testament, an endeavour that laid the groundwork for his later vocation as a biblical commentator and a preacher.³⁵² As a priest in Antioch between 386 and 398, he delivered a large bulk of the corpus of his exegetical homilies,³⁵³ part of which are his eighty-eight homilies. The eighty-eight homilies comprising of the Gospel of St. John were preached at Antioch about 390.³⁵⁴ Chrysostom is acknowledged to be the most prominent personality among the Antiochenes from a literary point of view for the effectiveness and the power of his oratory.³⁵⁵ It was in tribute to his great oratorical powers, that he received the name, Chrysostom, 'golden mouth'.³⁵⁶ Chrysostom's homilies have a pastoral setting. He preached on Sundays and on the many feast days that already dotted the liturgical Calendar in the 4th century, but during Lent and other seasons he sometimes preached daily. All his homilies have the edification of a church audience as their chief purpose, and they were all written in Greek.³⁵⁷ Chrysostom's exegesis, though not predominantly apologetic, at times is much influenced by contemporary dogmatic and ecclesiastical struggles. He does not shy away from rebuking and refuting heretical interpretations (Marcionite, Arian, Manichean) along the way.³⁵⁸ But of all the homilies of John Chrysostom, these are the most controversial in tone. He used them as a means to anticipate and refute the arguments of the Arians and other heretics who denied the divinity of Christ.

Chrysostom's homilies on John are recorded in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus completus: Series Graeca PGL[XVII- XVIII]*, and *Sancti Joannis Chrysostomi, Tou en hagiois patros h em on Ioannou tou Chrysostomou ta heuriskomena panta, Opera Omnia quae extant, vel quae ejus nomine circumferuntur, Tomus, Octavus, ed., Parisiis, Apud Gaume Fratres, M.DCCC. XXXVI*. An English translation is found in *Nicene and the Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)* series, which revised the *Oxford Fathers*

³⁵⁰ McKim, 1998, p29

³⁵¹ McKim, 1998, p31

³⁵² McKim, 1998, p29

³⁵³ McKim, 1998, p29

³⁵⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p VII

³⁵⁵ Simonetti, 1994, p74

³⁵⁶ McKim, 1998, p29

³⁵⁷ McKim, 1998, p30

³⁵⁸ McKim, 1998, p33

of the Church translations. A more contemporary English translation of the eighty-eight homilies on the Gospel According to John by Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin, is found in 'The Fathers of the Church' (FC) series.

Augustine of Hippo (354- 430) on the other hand, is Chrysostom's counterpart in the West, who stands as the model for the Western Church. Augustine's commentary on John was part of his preached interpretations.³⁵⁹ Starting from about 396, Augustine preached at least twice a week or sometimes more, and his commentary on John (*Tractatus in Euangelium Ioannis*) derived from a series of 124 sermons (*tractatus*), some preached, others only written, dating from different periods in his Episcopal career.³⁶⁰ Augustine unlike Origen of Alexandria and other leading exegetes in the Greek-speaking Churches of antiquity had not been immersed in the Bible from childhood within a tradition of Christian community. But beginning with Ambrose, who opened to Augustine a first personal access to scripture, he dedicated time and energy into the study of scriptures.³⁶¹ He was convinced that in the rhetorical culture of late antiquity, the written revelation of God in the Bible called for an equally written commentary.³⁶² Augustine's homilies and speeches of which his commentaries on John were part, were freely directed to fellow citizens of all ages and social conditions through which he could focus on their existential needs in the name of God's written commandment.³⁶³

Augustine as a commentator had some principles, and the first among these was to limit the textual basis of biblical studies to the Latin translations of the Septuagint and to the Septuagint itself.³⁶⁴ His second principle was that the scripture must be read as it was received in the Church. ' Interpretation, for him was exercised in conformity with the rule of faith and in view of promoting the distinctive values of church experience'³⁶⁵. His full commentary on the fourth gospel is extant and his interpretation of the bible harmonizes well with most traditional patristic exegesis.³⁶⁶

Augustine's commentary on John's gospel is found in Willems, R., edited, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Iohannnis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV.CCL 36* (1954). A more contemporary English translation of *St. Augustine Tractates on Gospel of John* by John W. Rettig, (1994) is found in The Fathers of the Church (FC) series.

³⁵⁹ McKim, 1998, p24

³⁶⁰ McKim, 1998, p24

³⁶¹ McKim, 1998, p25-26

³⁶² McKim, 1998, p26

³⁶³ McKim, 1998, p26

³⁶⁴ McKim, 1998, p26

³⁶⁵ McKim, 1998, p27

Augustine is in a class of his own, and he cannot be classified in a specific school of exegesis, like those of Alexandria or Antioch, nor can he be readily compared with the Latin interpreters like Ambrose of Milan, for he transcends their ranks by his unique creativity.³⁶⁷

In the following, I intend to see if Augustine's interpretation, the Western reading of the text, corresponds to that of the great Antiochene Father, Chrysostom, the Eastern interpretation of the text and if and how they differed. I hope to point out in this inquiry what influenced the reading of the text during the Patristic period. One of the questions that would feature in the analysis, do they have a common source of influence, audience and circumstance? Another of the questions that would be raised through this enquiry is: does the idea of unity and abiding hold much interest for John Chrysostom and his listeners, members of the Church in Antioch to which most of his homilies were directed? Chrysostom's expositions of scripture always have in mind and specifically address a congregation of the faithful whom he seeks to confront with the meaning of the written word and so to spur them to action.³⁶⁸ Is unity and abiding in Jesus of much concern for Augustine? Did he need to address issues concerning unity and the need to abide in Jesus at his own time?

To a certain extent, at the time these Fathers interpreted the text, the church found itself in a new situation where it had to give a sense of direction to the Empire. Augustine and Chrysostom, two church leaders, Bishops at Carthage, Hippo and Antioch and Constantinople at one time or the other had the burden of formulating the idea of union that would unite the Empire. These fathers did this through various methods and most especially through their commentaries and other controversial writings.

At the end of the inquiry, I would like to show how far the patristic interpretation of the text has influenced modern reading of the text. I will also want to show that the interpreters' concerns vary from time to time and from place to place. Different aspects of the text were emphasized at different times. The concerns of the Patristic period are different from the concerns at the reformation period and the concern at this modern time is different from that of the reformation period. These different concerns are reflected also in the various interpretations of the varying periods.

Some of the other things that I will be interested in bringing out are the ways the Fathers interpreted the metaphors of Jesus being the vine and his Father the

³⁶⁶ McKim, 1998,p27

³⁶⁷ McKim, 1998, p27

³⁶⁸ McKim, 1998, p29

vinedresser, who cuts away unfruitful branches and prunes the fruitful one. The Patristic understanding of the Father's role in the notion of abiding in Jesus will also be considered. I will also present their understanding of what cutting away and pruning mean and how they interpreted the idea of bearing fruit.

Another of the metaphors used in Jn.15 is that of the believers being cleansed 'You are clean already by means of the words that I have spoken to you' (Jn.15: 3). I hope to show how the Fathers interpreted the new metaphor in Jn.15: 3

The main topic in Jn.15 is the union of Jesus and the believers. This relationship is compared to that of the vine and the branches. 'Remain in me as I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself unless it remains part of the vine' (Jn.15: 4). The language employed here in the description of the relationship between Jesus and believer is metaphorical; I intend to see how the fathers attempted unravelling the metaphorical sayings. Some of what I intend to explore is what they have to say about what it means to be clean, what it means to remain in Jesus, how they see the relationship between Jesus the true Vine, and the branches, the believers.

Some other questions that will be explored are: what understanding of unity did the fathers put across? What role did the sacrament play in the unity of believers? What kind of Ecclesiology does the unity in the text point to? What is the relationship of Jesus and the believers? What is the role of Jesus and that of the believers in the union that is expected? This would lead to the question of grace, God's assistance, and work, the human contribution towards bringing about the union that is prayed for. I would like to show how the fathers reflect these various elements in the interpretation of the texts. This in turn will show that the interpretations of the fathers and their understanding of the idea of unity were influenced by their situation.

The starting point will be the description of the situation of Chrysostom and Augustine, which include the situation in life of the church at the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century. It also includes the various challenges that the two fathers faced and how they responded to these. This history will give us the idea of what influenced the fathers' writing; which in turn may give one a better understanding of their interpretations.

The Sitz im Leben of the interpretations of Augustine and Chrysostom

To ask if the situation of the church influenced the interpretation of the text by Chrysostom and Augustine would be idle. I believe strongly that one of the things that influence the way one interprets the text is one's circumstance. Chase points out that the history of doctrine cannot be rightly understood apart from the history of interpretation.³⁶⁹ I would want to show that the same could be said of Augustine and Chrysostom. Just like modern scholars, they were both children of their own circumstances. In Augustine's case, the events in the church of Carthage in Africa and in that of Chrysostom, the events in the church of Antioch and Constantinople.

The situation of the life of the Church at the time they commented on the text is very much reflected in their work, in their preaching more than any other thing. This would be seen in the following.

I intend to highlight the situation of life just before and during the period when Augustine and Chrysostom commented on the Johannine texts that dwell on the unity and abiding in Jesus. This will show how the church, the favoured religion at this point in time lived under some external pressure from the Jews and from some pagans. It will also show how the church had to contend even more with internal problems, Judaizers, schismatic and heretical Christians. These problems relate to doctrine and practice. At that time they undermined and threatened the church's unity and corporate existence. I will also show how this problem of disunity was of great concern to these fathers, how it affected the fabric of their life (in the case of Chrysostom his death). I hope to show how these concerns were reflected in all that they did and said, and how it left its mark on the way they preached and interpreted the word.

The situation in Antioch and Africa

The situation of the church in the fourth century was similar in most places, Antioch and Africa with some slight particularities from place to place. In both Antioch and in Carthage, at the time of Chrysostom and Augustine, Christianity was the main religion. Under Constantine Christianity became the recognized religion of the empire.³⁷⁰ But there were reverses notably under Julian. At the time of Julian the church lost its status as the favoured state religion; some of the privileges it enjoyed before this time were

³⁶⁹ Chase, 1887, pVIII

³⁷⁰ Chase, 1887, p9

cut off; in fact the church became persecuted.³⁷¹ By Chrysostom's time the long war with paganism was drawing to a close. The church outwardly at this point was conqueror, but the victory was not won without loss. 'If the church killed paganism, some of the poison of paganism entered into her own veins.'³⁷² (The church knows what it means to be conquered, to be in a minority. This is a situation that the church would not want to contemplate, one that could come about if the church were divided). Chase gives a vivid description of the population in Antioch at this time. He states that Antioch was made up of pagans, Jews, heretics and inconsistent Christians; every vice which characterized an age of disintegration was intensified. He maintains that such were the people to whom Chrysostom preached either in the 'Great Church' or in the 'Church of the Apostles.'³⁷³ Mayer and Allen allege that Antioch was a city of religious pluralism, Christians, 'pagans' and Jews mingled in relatively large numbers, while Christianity itself offered a number of alternative versions and factions.³⁷⁴ At this same point in her history, the church because of her new found status tried to recruit into her fold pagans. These at this point were still trying to make up their mind about which religion to embrace at the time when their former religion was going into oblivion, when it was in fact outlawed.

John Chrysostom and the Jews

The situation in which Chrysostom found himself in Antioch has some similarities with that in which the Johannine disciples found themselves in the first century among the Jews. Just like the members of the Johannine community, the Antiochene Christian church had to define itself against the Jews. Judaism was the second biggest religion in Antioch. In fact after the break down of paganism as the state religion, the adherents of this religion found themselves caught between joining the church and associating with Judaism. Aside of this, the Antiochene church was in constant fear of losing some of the new converts to Judaism, a religion that seems to be much more attractive to these pagans because of the solemnity of its rituals. A prominent one of these was the Jewish 'ritual bath.' Chrysostom said that the Jews of Antioch practised ritual bathing. He also admits that the Jewish ritual baths are 'more solemn than . . . ordinary baths.'³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ Lietzmann, 1950, 273-275

³⁷² Chase, 1887, p15

³⁷³ Chase, 1887, p16

³⁷⁴ Mayer and Allen, 2000, p12-13

³⁷⁵ Wilken 1983, p65 (Catech.ad Illum 1.2; 49.225-26)

The situation created by the presence of Judaism was precarious. The Christians and most especially the leaders like Chrysostom were never comfortable with such a situation. This led them to utilize any available opportunity to undermine the reputation of the Jews. This is reflected more often than not in their homilies and commentaries. Chrysostom for instance stated that ‘even though the Jewish bath ritual is more solemn, such baths are inferior to Christian baptism.’³⁷⁶ Wilken suggests that the matter was of great concern to Chrysostom, and troubled him. Wilken states that Chrysostom made mention of the Jewish baths several times in other homilies; it occurs in a series of baptismal homilies delivered to men and women who were about to be baptized.³⁷⁷ There is no doubt that some of these men and women must have wondered whether Christian baptism was as efficacious as the Jewish bath.³⁷⁸

Wilken suggests that ‘by the end of the fourth century, Jews had been living in Antioch for over six hundred years, sharing the city’s good fortunes, suffering through its wars, its earthquakes, its economic woes . . . and yet in all these they stood apart’.³⁷⁹ They belonged to an ancient venerable people, whose customs were an object of curiosity and whose way of life was a source of wonder and admiration. Of them, Chrysostom has this to say, ‘many people have a high regard for the Jews and think that their present way of life is holy.’³⁸⁰ Wilken opines that it was this community of Jews that attracted the Christians of Antioch.³⁸¹

This shows that the situation in which Chrysostom found himself was that of tension from within his own church, with which he had to contend.

Wendy and Allen opine that Chrysostom believed that the Jews of his days were more difficult to deal with than the ones before them.³⁸² One wonders in such a situation how Chrysostom would not have felt the impact of the threat of the presence of the Jews. There is no doubt from the words expressed by Chrysostom that the Jews were a threat to Christianity, and posed an indirect threat to its internal unity. One would not be too much surprised in the light of this, to know that Chrysostom used any and every opportunity that presented itself to disparage and criticize the Jews. No wonder Wilken calls Chrysostom a hostile critic of Jews.³⁸³ Jewish customs and religious rites had a powerful impact on Christians living close by, even when they caused inconvenience.

³⁷⁶ Wilken, 1983, p65 (Catech.ad Illum 1.2; 49.225-26)

³⁷⁷ Wilken, 1983, p65

³⁷⁸ Wilken, 1983, p65

³⁷⁹ Wilken, 1983, p65

³⁸⁰ Wilken, 1983, p65 (Jud.1: 3; 847)

³⁸¹ Wilken, 1983, p65

³⁸² Mayer and Allen, 2000, p161

Some Christians due to the attraction joined with the Jews to celebrate Jewish festivals and adopted Jewish customs.³⁸⁴ This was a grave threat to the unity of the church. Wilken states that in the fall of 386, Chrysostom, already put on the defensive by the taunts of the Arians, now saw the precarious unity of his followers threatened by the allure of Jewish rites.³⁸⁵ We have a reflection of this in Chrysostom's own words: "Many who belong to us and say that they believe in our teaching attend their festivals, and even share in their celebrations and join in their fasts"³⁸⁶

Wilken also gave insight into the nature of the struggle with which Chrysostom had to contend. He states that he had an external struggle with Jews and an internal one with Judaizing Christians; Chrysostom would often challenge the Judaizing Christians

If you admire the Jewish way of life, what do you have in common with us? If the Jewish rites are holy and venerable our way of life must be false.³⁸⁷

Thus, Chrysostom believed that the presence of Judaism was a threat to the unity of the faith. According to Wilken, the Judaizing Christians disquieted other Christians, for by observing Jewish law and claiming that Christianity had an abiding relation to Judaism, they threatened the claims of orthodox Christianity.³⁸⁸

Another of the problems that Chrysostom faced was that some of the practices of the Judaizers that were divisive. An example of this was the celebration of Easter according to the Jewish calendar.³⁸⁹ Chrysostom attempted to heal the malady through his homilies. In his words, "The obstinacy of those who wish to keep the 'Pasch' early forces us to devote our whole sermon today to healing their malady."³⁹⁰

Consequently, the Christians at the time of Chrysostom were on the defensive against the Jews. Christianity had at the 4th century in Antioch to define itself over and against Judaism. Chrysostom was not overwhelmed but met the challenge of the presence of Judaism. Wilken opined that many Christian leaders, in the face of the Jews' competition, did what they thought was necessary to take care of the attrition in Christian ranks due to the presence of strong Jewish community. John Chrysostom met the Judaizers face to face, from pulpit, armed solely with his voice and the skills of a rhetor.³⁹¹

³⁸³ Wilken, 1983, p66

³⁸⁴ Wilken, 1983, p67

³⁸⁵ Wilken, 1983, p67

³⁸⁶ Wilken, 1983, p67 (Jud.1: 1; 844)

³⁸⁷ Wilken, 1983, p68 (Jud.1: 6; 852)

³⁸⁸ Wilken, 1983, p68

³⁸⁹ Wilken, 1983, p76

³⁹⁰ Wilken, 1983, p76, (Jud. 3: 1; 861)

³⁹¹ Wilken, 1983, p94

The problem of the presence of Judaism during the time of Chrysostom was only second in line to Arianism.

Chrysostom and the problem of Arianism

The Arians were another group with whom Chrysostom had to contend. Chase asserts that despite the fact that Catholicism had deprived Arianism of political power, Arianism lived as a potent religious influence both at Antioch and Constantinople.³⁹² The Arians accused the Church of making Jesus, a man, equal to God. Chrysostom accused the Arians of denying the divinity of Christ just as the Jews did.³⁹³ He was convinced that there was a similarity at the doctrinal level between Arianism and Judaism.³⁹⁴ One then would not be surprised if one sometimes cannot easily figure out the group of people towards whom he directs some of the accusations in his commentary. He had to battle against more than one force. For example when in his commentary he dwelt on the consubstantiality of Jesus, he could either mean it as a refutation of the Jews or the Arians. The two sets of people he had to deal with seem to have certain things in common.

It has to be said that, like Judaism, Arianism was a big problem to Chrysostom. Chase points out that Chrysostom's homilies show the gravity of the danger.³⁹⁵ He alleges that in this situation, the Bible became perforce the manual of the controversialist in the hands of Chrysostom.³⁹⁶ Thus Chase suggests that Chrysostom used the text to suit the needs of the church at this particular time. The need of the church in the light of the above was to counteract the undermining of the unity of the church by division and dissent. The cause of this was the propagation of different sets of doctrines.

Chase opines that it would not be difficult to point out many ways in which this crisis through which the Church and the world were passing in Chrysostom's time resembles the anxieties of our own generation.³⁹⁷ He even suggests that the views about the Bible that the great teachers of Antioch held were not the same as those which they had approved themselves a century before.³⁹⁸ The diversity of their interpretation of the biblical text demonstrates the richness of its potential for meaning.

³⁹² Chase, 1887, p15

³⁹³ Wilken, 1983, p75

³⁹⁴ Wilken, 1983, p75

³⁹⁵ Chase, 1887, p15

³⁹⁶ Chase, 1887, p15

³⁹⁷ Chase, 1887, pVIII

³⁹⁸ Chase, 1887, pVIII

Chrysostom: The biblical commentator

Chase is of the view that there is a breadth about Chrysostom's biblical work, the freedom of one who was not pledged to support a favourite doctrine from every passage of every book.³⁹⁹ Apart from suggesting that Chrysostom was ascetic Chase opines that 'no man ever more powerfully brought religious teaching to bear upon the common life of men.'⁴⁰⁰ This is because of his conviction that men need to be taught, and the belief that those who are taught have the capability of carrying out what the word tells them. Chase also gives us an insight into Chrysostom's commentaries.

No commentator ever spoke or wrote more profoundly influenced by the need of his own generation. Penetrated by love of scripture, Chrysostom like Luther felt the words of the bible to be 'living creature with hands and feet'.⁴⁰¹

Chrysostom did not just interpret the word, but taught with it. He was driven by the conviction that his audience were ignorant men and women, who needed to be taught. He was called the great teacher. Chase states that Theodoret proudly called him 'the great teacher of the world.'⁴⁰² Chase also suggests that

Chrysostom was a preacher, interpreter of scripture whose point of view is that of the scholarly pastor rather than of the accurate, conscientious commentator. Hence the peculiar importance of the associations of time and place.⁴⁰³

Chrysostom's interpretation was determined by time and place, which confirms the fact that circumstances influenced the interpretation of the text by Chrysostom.

It is noteworthy that at this period according to Chase, the long struggle with Arianism left its mark on the systems of exegesis prevailing in the Church.⁴⁰⁴ In the heat of the Arian controversy, the Arians always appealed to the scripture, 'the only and powerful tool in their hands'.⁴⁰⁵ One then would not be surprised if the preachers and commentators like Augustine and Chrysostom confronted with these heretics, equally resolved to fighting back through the same appeal to the scripture.⁴⁰⁶

Apart from the controversy with the Arians, Chrysostom's problem with the civil authorities also influenced his commentaries. Chrysostom and his Christian followers

³⁹⁹ Chase, 1887, p18

⁴⁰⁰ Chase, 1887, p18

⁴⁰¹ Chase, 1887, p18

⁴⁰² Chase, 1887, p22

⁴⁰³ Chase, 1887, p14

⁴⁰⁴ Chase, 1887, p9

⁴⁰⁵ Chase, 1887, p9

⁴⁰⁶ This is the reason why Chrysostom felt it was essential to treat more exhaustively the portion of the gospel that particularly concern the doctrine of Christ. Apart from that exegesis of this type was especially timely since this fundamental teaching was then widely and persistently held in question.

fell out of favour with Theodosius, the reigning Emperor about the year 387. The Emperor accused him of instigating the people through his preaching to overturning of the imperial statues, a situation that was not viewed kindly. The expected reaction of the Emperor was well known to Chrysostom and his followers. Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen opined that Chrysostom's sermons reflect the fear, which permeated the city and the behaviour of the citizens of Antioch as they anxiously awaited the decision of the emperor.⁴⁰⁷ There is no ^{evidence} that the future events were reflected in Chrysostom's interpretation of the text. He spoke about the trial that was to come, that the Christians would have to endure, which he himself indeed experienced. Some of this indeed took place after the writing of his commentary on John. Chrysostom was exiled in June 404 and such he continued till his death three years later.⁴⁰⁸ This is quite significant and supports the suggestion that events and the circumstance of interpreters influence interpretations.

Augustine and the Church in Africa

The situation of life of the Church in which Augustine operated is similar to that of the Eastern Church where Chrysostom was found. At this time, the Catholic Church enjoyed Imperial support. The main religion, just as it was in the East, was Christianity, with its different factions; there was constant change of allegiance by the Imperial power from one faction to another, depending on what suited the imperial power. There was also the question of what to do with the 'new' Christians, former pagans: there was the need for discipline, and moral teaching. At this time, the church that had previously suffered persecution found itself in a new position. There was the question about what to do with Christians who had compromised the faith during the persecution, apostates. While the rigorist Donatists thought that there was no place for such in the church of 'martyrs', Augustine had a different idea. This was the situation in which Augustine found himself.

Augustine and the Donatists

At one point the Catholic Church enjoyed full support against other factions, most especially Donatism. This was not always guaranteed. It always depended on the mood of the Imperial power. Brown alleges that the Roman government was in support of the

⁴⁰⁷ Mayer and Allen, 2000, p7

⁴⁰⁸ Chase, 1887, p17

Catholic Church in Africa before 409-410, but lost interest by 410 and withdrew from the Catholic Church. In consequence, the campaign to repress Donatism foundered. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo who was fully preoccupied with the Donatist's schism in 410-411,⁴⁰⁹ became a marked man.⁴¹⁰ (Thus Augustine's position was not just a fight for the survival of the faith, it was also a struggle for 'dear life').

At this point, the law against heresy was suspended. The Emperor called for a collatio. The Catholic church was happy about it. By now the Catholic Church had come to contain too many half-convinced converts from Donatism.⁴¹¹ This is similar to the situation in the Church of Antioch. There was the need to convince those who were in their group but who were still looking outside. They believed that such men needed to be persuaded. And it is not impossible that this was the reason the Fathers devoted lots of time to any verses that had anything to offer as a refutation of the opinion of the heretical and schismatic group.

One of the problems at the time of Augustine was that the Donatists thought of themselves as the authentic Christian church.⁴¹² Brown points out that Constantine had ruled a century earlier in favour of the party of Caecilian as the Catholic Church.⁴¹³ He asserts that at this collatio the Donatists were told by Marcillinus in his judgement that they had no case; 'Let falsehood, once detected, bow its neck to truth made manifest.'⁴¹⁴ That seems to be one of the problems solved.

Augustine penned the homily in 416 five years after the defeat of the Donatists. Brown suggests that in Augustine's writings and sermons, from 405 to 409, and after 411, one can catch glimpses of a great church driven underground.⁴¹⁵ He also suggests that Augustine believed in the doctrine of predestination

Seeing that God, by a hidden, though just, disposition, has predestined some to the ultimate penalty (of Hellfire)...Donatists should burn in the flames of Hell for their sacrilegious dissension.⁴¹⁶

It can be said that the suppression of the Donatists was not the end of Augustine's worries, rather a little respite before another one began. Just as he was having a little break from the Donatists he became suddenly preoccupied with another Christian group whose views were opposed to his, the Pelagians.

⁴⁰⁹ Brown, 1967, p340

⁴¹⁰ Brown, 1967, p330

⁴¹¹ Brown, 1967, p331

⁴¹² Brown, 1967, p331

⁴¹³ Brown, 1967, p333

⁴¹⁴ Brown, 1967, p334 (Coll. Carthage. Sententia Cognitoris (P.LI.XI, 1418-1420, 1419A)

⁴¹⁵ Brown, 1967, p335

⁴¹⁶ Brown, 1967, p335-336 (Ep.204, 2)

Brown states that just as the Donatist controversy was on the wane, Augustine was faced with the Pelagian controversy and was increasingly impatient of resistance in Africa.⁴¹⁷ He asserts that Augustine this time around was well prepared, ‘for long experience of violence had hardened him and he was a hard victor.’⁴¹⁸ Did this affect his commentary? He could not let the opportunity pass without airing his opposition against the Donatists and Pelagians; in fact he was very much concerned with anything that might lead to division in the church.

Division in the church a cause for concern

The different controversies were breaking the Church and this was obvious even to the civil leaders. They saw the need to restore unity. At the time of Augustine, Emperor Honorius as a price for the African loyalty granted the African Bishops their demand of resolute imposition of a Catholic ‘unity’ throughout the province.⁴¹⁹

Augustine believes in upholding old rites, non-tolerance of pagans, heresy and immorality in the new Christian Empire.⁴²⁰ Augustine was not a totally happy man, he encountered lots of problems in Carthage and the different forces that he had to battle with frustrated him. Out of frustration Augustine returned from Carthage to Hippo to get back to his books. He made a resolution: “I have resolved to devote my time entirely, if the Lord will, to the labour of studies pertaining to ecclesiastical learning . . . be of some service even to future generations.”⁴²¹ Part of what he penned was the interpretation of the Johannine text. This contains some of the reflections of the experiences that he had with the Donatists and most especially with the Pelagians.

Augustine and the Pelagian controversy

Pelagius compared to Augustine was a perfectionist. He would not tolerate the liberal stand of Augustine. His view of the nature of the church was also different from that of Augustine, as is understandable. Pelagius was a monk who did not have much to do with the bigger church, one who did not need to confront the daily situation of the church, as did Augustine who had a large congregation to deal with. His situation differed from that of Augustine who needed to pull the church together, a church leader

⁴¹⁷ Brown, 1967, p335

⁴¹⁸ Brown, 1967, p335

⁴¹⁹ Brown, 1967, p336

⁴²⁰ Brown, 1967, p336

⁴²¹ Brown, 1967, p338 (Ep. 151, 13)

who was responsible for maintaining unity and keeping the flock together at the most trying period.

Augustine did not have the luxury that Pelagius had. Augustine was conditioned by the need of the church, the need of maintaining the unity of 'faith'. He was able to tolerate 'good and the bad men'. He did not preach perfectionism and did not make a demand for this as obligatory for acceptance into the church. Baptism and profession of faith would do. Brown suggests that Augustine laid emphasis on baptism as the only way to salvation. He further opines that, "Augustine was an advocate of moral tolerance, a person who could find room for a whole spectrum of human failings within the exclusive fold of the Catholic Church."⁴²²

He points out that Pelagius was not as tolerant. He was a person who was recorded to have said: 'since perfection is possible for man, it is obligatory.'⁴²³ Pelagius never doubted for a moment that perfection was obligatory; "His God was, above all, a God who commanded unquestioning obedience. He has made men to execute his commands; and He would condemn to hell fire anyone who failed to perform a single one of them."⁴²⁴

The perfect and imperfect church

Augustine and Pelagius were two men who had different ideas about the nature of the church in the late 4th and early 5th century. They also differ in their vision of the church. Both saw the needs of the church differently. Pelagius intended to reform the Church at a serious age. He appealed to a universal theme, the need of the individual to define himself, and to feel free to create his own values in the midst of the conventional, second-rate life of the society.⁴²⁵ This was a perfectionist view of the church. It was such a belief with which Augustine had to contend. But was Augustine against perfectionism? If he was not, why did he oppose perfectionism? Was it not because it did not suit the church at that particular time? Or was it the case that he was opposed to perfectionism in order to fill the church, to attract more members through his liberal attitude and thereby create a 'church of saints and sinners'?

⁴²² Brown, 1967, p350 (de spiritu et littera, xxviii, 48)

⁴²³ Brown, 1967, p342 (E. Portalie, A guide to the thought of St Augustine, [transl. Bastian] 1960, p188)

⁴²⁴ Brown, 1967, p342, (de gest. Pel.iii, 9 and 11)

⁴²⁵ Brown, 1967, p346

Augustine's Church of saints and sinners

Augustine had concern for the church at this turbulent period. He saw the need for the church to take root and bring all men in. Jesus prays that all may be one, the whole world (good and bad alike) becoming the sheepfold of Christ. Pelagians had a contrary opinion. They believed that they could achieve a church 'without spot or blemish.'⁴²⁶ Augustine was convinced that the claim by the Pelagians continued the assertion of the Donatists that only they belonged to just such a church.⁴²⁷ Augustine was opposed to these two and was not ready to tolerate the coteries of 'perfect' Christians that sprung up in Sicily and elsewhere under Pelagian influence.⁴²⁸ The Pelagian idea was an austere reforming ideal. For the Pelagians,

Man had no excuse for his own sins, nor for the evils around him. If human nature was essentially free and well created, and not dogged by some mysterious inner weakness, the reason for the general misery of men must be somehow external to their true selves; it must lie, in part, in the constricting force of the social habits of a pagan past. Such habit could be reformed.⁴²⁹

Unlike Pelagius, Augustine was ready to embrace struggling humanity, pagans who were yet to be perfect who want to come into the fold. Pelagians placed the weight of complete freedom on the individual: "he was responsible for his every action, every sin, therefore could only be a deliberate act of contempt for God."⁴³⁰ Whereas Augustine was less sure that a fallen human nature could bear so great a weight:

Many sins are committed through pride, but not all happen proudly . . . they happen so often by ignorance, by human weakness; many are committed by men weeping and groaning in their distress The Catholic Church existed to redeem a helpless humanity; and once the essential grace was given, he could accept with ease in his congregation the slow and erratic process of healing.⁴³¹

That sums up Augustine's attitude and the way he believed the church should move forward at that period of her history. This is also reflected in the way he interpreted the text. But how did Augustine develop this attitude? Brown suggests that Augustine's problem was that of incorporation of the pagan population into the church; for Augustine, the Pelagian optimistic view on human nature seemed to blur the distinction between the Catholic Church and the good pagans.⁴³² Brown alleges that

⁴²⁶ Brown, 1967, p348

⁴²⁷ Brown, 1967, p348 (v. esp. de gest. Pel. Xii, 27-28; cf. *Ep.* 185, ix, 38, for a natural importation, into an anti-Donatist letter, of anti-Pelagian arguments)

⁴²⁸ Brown, 1967, p348 (*Ep.* 157, iv, 40)

⁴²⁹ Brown, 1967, p349

⁴³⁰ Brown, 1967, p350 (Pelagius, ad Dem.9, (P.L. xxx, 25B), and in de nat. et gratia xxix, 33)

⁴³¹ Brown, 1967, p350 (de nat. et gratia, lxviii, 82.)

⁴³² Brown, 1967, p350

Augustine was convinced that the Pelagians held the optimistic view on human nature only in order to establish an icy Puritanism as the sole law of the Christian community.⁴³³

Augustine's theology differs from that of Pelagius in his sense of the relationship of man with God. Augustine compared his relationship to God to that of a baby to its mother's breast, utterly dependent, intimately involved in all the good and evil that might come from the only source of life.⁴³⁴ Pelagius on the other hand advocated a theology of '*emancipaus a deo.*' He compared his own relationship with God to that of son and father.

To be a son was to become an entirely separate person, no longer dependent on one's father, but capable of following out by one's own power, the good deeds that he had commanded.⁴³⁵

One new thing that one gets from Brown is that throughout the course of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine was able to expound in packed churches his alternative to the idea of Christian life that Pelagius had advocated in letters to selected individuals.⁴³⁶ Brown alleges that Augustine's concern was the inner tensions of the individual.⁴³⁷

One other area where one gets the idea of the situation that might have influenced Augustine's interpretation is his writings against the Pelagians most especially his writing against the Pelagian doctrine of grace.

Augustine and the doctrine of grace

Augustine accused the Pelagians of upholding the view that God's grace and assistance are not given for single acts, but consist in (the general gift of) free will, or in the law and the doctrine (of scripture).⁴³⁸ (Phil.2: 12 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling'). Augustine condemned Pelagius' opinion that grace is only in the possibility of doing good not in the volition and actions. God does not help us to will or act, but helps us to the possibility of willing and acting.⁴³⁹ 'For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure' (Phil.2: 13)⁴⁴⁰ For Augustine,

God does not share with the human agent the praise which comes in the processes of will and action, in such wise that man either so wills as to have God also inspiring his volition with the

⁴³³ Brown, 1967, p350 Brown suggests that this is clearly seen by E. Potalié, A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine, pp188-189

⁴³⁴ Brown, 1967, p352 (Conf. IV, I, 1)

⁴³⁵ Brown, 1967, p352 (Ps. Jerome, *Ep.* 32,3, (P.L. xxx, 247D)

⁴³⁶ Brown, 1967, p365

⁴³⁷ Brown, 1967, p350

⁴³⁸ Dods, MDCCCLXXIV, p4

⁴³⁹ Dods, MDCCCLXXIV, p7

⁴⁴⁰ Dods, MDCCCLXXIV, p7

ardour of love, or so works as to have God also co-operating with him.⁴⁴¹

There is no doubt that one of the main differences between Augustine and the Pelagians is the understanding of the doctrine of grace. This is the reason why one is not surprised that in most of Augustine's interpretations, every available opportunity is utilized in propagating his view on the doctrine of grace.

Having considered the historical situation of Chrysostom and Augustine, what needs to be done now is to see how they interpreted the texts in the fourth gospel that dwell on unity. The starting point will be their interpretation of Jn.15, the passage in which the Johannine Jesus described his relationship with his own as that of vine and branches.

The fathers on Jn.15

The two fathers Chrysostom and Augustine dwelt substantially on Jn.15. Both agreed that the passage talked about the union of believers with Jesus and themselves. Chrysostom sees the words in Jn.15 as parables meant as instructions and he opines that what was spoken were teachings of great import.⁴⁴² It is so important that the disciples have to take it seriously. In his words 'It is not possible for anyone to have life if he does not pay attention to Christ's words.'⁴⁴³ The words of Jesus for him are very important and are the source of life.

Unity through abiding in Jesus the true vine Jn.15: 1

The Johannine Jesus said that he is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. This may suggest that the one who does the work of taking care of the branches is the Father, which may suggest that Jesus cannot do it or is not the one that brings about the union of the branches and the vine. Chrysostom states that this statement does not mean that Jesus himself needs assistance. He claims that Jesus states that the vine or the root does not profit by the care of the vinedresser rather it is the branches that do.⁴⁴⁴ Chrysostom argues that Jesus made mention of the root in no other connection than that they might learn that nothing can be done without his power and that they must be united to him in faith as the branch is to the vine.⁴⁴⁵ 'Every branch in me that bears no fruit the Father will take away' (Jn.15: 2). Chrysostom maintains that Jesus here is referring by

⁴⁴¹ Dods, MDCCCLXXIV, p8

⁴⁴² Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p316 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁴³ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p316 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁴⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p317 (Homilia LXXVI)

implication to conduct, to show that it is not possible to be in him without works.⁴⁴⁶ Thus for Chrysostom, work, the human effort, is as important as grace. To abide in Jesus, the individual believer has to make his own contribution.

Augustine asserts that Jesus calls himself the vine and his disciples the branches because he is the head of the Church and his disciples its members.⁴⁴⁷ This suggests that the unity that is being talked about here has to do with the church. It is the union of the head and the members. Augustine gave an insight into his understanding of Jesus, the head of the church, being the true vine (Jn.15: 1). “Jesus is called the true vine through metaphor and not through proper designation, in the same way as he is called a sheep, a Lamb, a Lion, a Rock, a cornerstone and other things of this sort, which are rather themselves true things from which are drawn these metaphors, not proper designations.”⁴⁴⁸ He argues that Jesus is the true vine in the sense that he is not the strange vine that turned into bitterness, the one expected to produce grapes but which produced thorns (Jer.2: 21).⁴⁴⁹ (It is not impossible that Augustine here is comparing Jesus to some men who are expected to bear fruit but who are not doing so). What suggests this is what he says next. He alleges that Jesus used the metaphor Vine and vinedresser in the parable in order to make a distinction between the Father and himself. In his words “Surely the cultivation and the vine are not one thing; the Father is greater than I (Jn.14: 28)”.⁴⁵⁰ But he also suggests that Jesus himself too is the vinedresser in the light of his saying ‘the Father, and I we are one thing (Jn.10: 30).’⁴⁵¹ Augustine turned polemical here. The idea he communicates here is that Jesus the second person of the Trinity is distinct from but equal with the Father, the first of the Trinity.

Thus, in the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus, the Father, Jesus and the believers have their different parts to play.

Pruning of the fruitful branches Jn.15: 2

After talking about the role of the Father in the believers abiding in Jesus, the Johannine Jesus said ‘And every branch that bears fruit he will cleanse,’ Chrysostom opines that this means that the fruit-bearing branches will be given the benefit of much

⁴⁴⁵ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p317 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁴⁶ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p317 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁴⁷ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p115 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 1.1)

⁴⁴⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p115 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 1.2)

⁴⁴⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p115 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 1.2)

⁴⁵⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p115 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 1.2)

care. He argues that what this means is that while Jesus was sufficient to himself, his disciples were in need of much assistance from the vinedresser, even if they were of very excellent virtue. He contends that this was the reason why Jesus said ‘The one that bears fruit he will cleanse.’⁴⁵²

Chrysostom also remarked that the branches without fruit couldn’t be in the vine, while those that are fruit-bearing are rendered more fruitful.⁴⁵³ One finds that Chrysostom made a very significant observation when he states that the idea of pruning here envisaged the persecution, trial of the believers that was about to descend on them. In his words “the trial is what prunes and makes branches more fruitful, and trials make believers stronger.”⁴⁵⁴ (This trial is related to his own trial.⁴⁵⁵ He gave this homily in 390 A.D). Thus for Chrysostom, the idea in Jn.15 looks beyond the present and has to do with the future, the time the believers live in the world when Jesus would be gone. He was able to relate and identify his church situation to that of the Johannine community.

Human contribution to unity

One of the elements that come from the interpretations of the Fathers on the text is the role of the believers in their union with Jesus. It is often asked if union with Jesus, or the union of believers is the work of God alone, or if the individual believers have anything to contribute at all. The Fathers have something to say about this. On the question of the role of the branches in the ‘vine-vinedresser-branches’ relationship, Augustine states that although the branches do not give growth, they nevertheless afford some assistance. He states that what makes this possible is the vine, for these do not render this assistance on their own ‘for without me’ he says ‘you can do nothing.’⁴⁵⁶ What one sees here is Augustine saying that men have something to do with unity and abiding in Jesus. But still he insists that even the little effort cannot be possible without the help of Jesus, God. In the union of Jesus and the believers and in their union with themselves, the main person that makes it possible is Jesus. Augustine once again stresses the importance of grace. No doubt the battle against the Pelagians concerning the doctrine of grace comes into focus.

⁴⁵¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p115 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 1.2)

⁴⁵² Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p317 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁵³ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p317 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁵⁴ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p317-318 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁵⁵ Baur, 1960, 267

⁴⁵⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p116 (Tract. in Joh. LXXX, 2.1)

Thus, for Chrysostom and Augustine, Christians have a role to play in bringing about the union of Jesus and the believers and that of believers with one another. The difference between them is that Augustine unlike Chrysostom believes that no matter how little the human effort is, it is not possible without the help of God.

The Cleansed disciples Jn.15: 3

The Johannine Jesus after talking about the disciples being pruned (Jn.15: 2) said ‘you are all clean already’ (Jn.15: 3). This seems contradictory, but the fathers were able to smooth out the seeming contradiction in the text though they did so differently. Chrysostom suggests that Jesus said ‘you are clean already, by the means of the word that I have spoken to you’ in order to prevent the disciples raising any question on the underlying meaning of Jn.15: 2, in order not to cast them into a state of anxiety. He points out that what we have here is a word of assurance, which he believes shows how Jesus the true vine takes care of his disciples.⁴⁵⁷

Augustine states that what this statement means is that the disciples are clean, and yet in need of cleaning.⁴⁵⁸ He argues that the branches could not have borne fruit if they were not clean, yet everyone who bears fruit the cultivator trims clean that he may bring forth even more fruit. “He bears fruit because he is clean; and that he may bring it forth even more, he is still more trimmed clean. For who in this life is so clean that he does not need to be more and more cleansed?”⁴⁵⁹

Hence, Augustine points out that there is no end to getting grace. It is necessary always and God gives it constantly, for the Christian life is not static. Grace must constantly support the Christian. While Chrysostom believes that the cleaning and making perfect is possible, something that can be achieved, Augustine believed that it is something that must be constantly renewed. Grace must be given every time.

One may ask from what are these cleansed? Though Augustine was not categorical about from what the disciples are cleansed, what he said seems to point to the fact that part of what they are cleansed from is sin.

For here, if we say that we do not have sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all iniquity’ (1Jn.1: 8-9). Let him indeed cleanse the clean, that is, the fruitful that they may be as much more fruitful as they are cleaner.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p318 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁵⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p116 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 2.2)

⁴⁵⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p117 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 2.3)

⁴⁶⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p117 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 2.3)

This position seems to suit Augustine in light of his controversy with the Donatists, perfectionists. Augustine needed to take this stand to support his position and belief that the church is not just that of the saints who are already perfect. Rather, it is a church of both saints, the perfect ones, and of sinners, those who are still struggling, those who are constantly in need of forgiveness and the grace of God, which comes about through the words and sacraments.

The Sacraments and Unity of believers Jn.15: 3

In talking about the cleansing of the believers the Johannine Jesus said ‘you are cleansed by means of the words that I have spoken to you’ (Jn.15: 3). There was no mention of any sacrament, but in their reading of this text the fathers saw it differently. They were able to see the sacramental aspect, even when it does not seem to be obvious. Augustine maintains that what does the cleansing is baptism and the word, even though Jesus did not say “You are clean by the reason of the baptism by which you are washed’, but instead ‘by the reason of the word that I have spoken.” The reason for this is because in the water the word also cleansed, “take away the word and what is the water except water?”⁴⁶¹ He claims that the power of the water comes from the word: “Whence is this power of water of such magnitude that it touches the body and yet washes clean the heart, except from the word effecting it, not because it is said, but because it is believed?”⁴⁶² Faith comes first before the sacrament is administered to one who wants to come into fellowship with Jesus and other believers. Augustine believes that to come into unity one first has to open up oneself to God in faith. If one expresses faith then one is accepted. Thus for Augustine one of the essential things that brings one into union with Jesus is baptism. This is also found in Chrysostom. Baptism is the gateway into abiding in Jesus. This is the reason why Chrysostom did everything to condemn anything that plays down the importance of baptism or stands in competition against it, for example the Jewish ritual bath.

Though the two held that baptism is necessary, they differ in certain ways. While Augustine believed that professing the faith is sufficient, Chrysostom believed that the word must be vigorously taught.

⁴⁶¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p117 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 3. 1)

⁴⁶² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p117. (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 3. 2) While Augustine does not present a clearly defined sacramental doctrine, the elements of such are found in his works, passages such as this suggest the foundation upon which later sacramental doctrine, especially the concept *ex opere operato* as opposed to *ex opere operantis* was based.

Having said that about the word and the sacrament, one asks what does this word mean for these two fathers?

The word of faith

Augustine argues that the word spoken about here is the word of faith.

This is the word of faith that we preach, says the Apostle for if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him up from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart we believe to justice. But with the mouth profession of faith is made to salvation (Rom.10: 8-10).⁴⁶³

There is no doubt about where Augustine's emphasis lies, 'the word of faith.' In his words, "The cleansing, therefore would in no way at all be attributed to the flowing and streaming substance unless it were added, in the power of the word."⁴⁶⁴ The word is very important. Augustine contends that Jesus' words abide in believers when they do what he taught and love what he promised. He suggested the way this ought to be. "But when his words abide in one's memory and are not found in one's life, the branch is not reckoned as in the vine because it does not draw life from the root."⁴⁶⁵

One sees that Augustine gave much consideration to the meaning of the word of Jesus abiding in the believers. In his words,

And those who retain his commandments in memory, that they may do them' (Ps102: 18) for many retain them in memory that they may despise them, or even deride and attack them. The words of Christ do not abide in these men who in a way barely touch him, (and) do not take firm hold of him. And therefore (these words) will not be a benefit for those men, but a witness (against them). And because (the words) are in them in such a way that they do not abide in them, for this reason (those men) are held fast by them so that they may be judged in accordance with them.⁴⁶⁶

This is linking a corporate and individual sense of union.

Chrysostom and Augustine did not just interpret the text but they also used the text to propagate doctrines. They brought out the polemical sense of the meaning of the text. The two fathers interpreted the text when the Arian controversy was still raging. Some of what they said in their interpretation of the role of Jesus in the relationship between Jesus and the believers constituted a direct attack on the Arians' position. The Arians held that Jesus was man and not God, not of the same nature with the Father. The

⁴⁶³ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p118 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 3. 3)

⁴⁶⁴ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p118 (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 3. 3) He states that this word of faith has so much power in the Church of God that through the very one who believes, offers, blesses, immerses, it cleanses even the tiny infant, not yet having the capacity with its heart to believe to justice and with its mouth to make a profession of faith to salvation. All this is done through the word of which the Lord says: Now you are clean by the reason of the word that I have spoken to you (Augustine, Tractate 80, 1994, p119) (Tract. in Joh.LXXX, 3. 3)

⁴⁶⁵ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p123 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 4. 3)

fathers in their interpretations show that Jesus just as the Father is equally the vinedresser, though distinct in his person from the Father, yet is of the same nature with God and therefore is God. This is an introduction of the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus in Jn.15.

In his reading of the text, Augustine attacked the position of the Pelagians who held a different idea of grace from his. The doctrine of grace that Augustine proposed suited the church of his time. The church was in the forefront of looking for a kind of unity that will embrace all the empire. The idea proposed by Augustine suits his 'own kind of church, the 'church of saints and sinner,' one in constant need of grace. In Augustine's interpretation of Jn.15, one finds propagation of the doctrine of Baptism and that of the power of the word. This shows the richness of the text for meaning. More of this element is found in the interpretation of Jn.15: 4.

Abide in me and I in you Jn.15: 4

This is the central verse of the chapter to which all the ones before, Jn.15: 1-3, lead and upon which the other ones Jn.15: 5-10 seem to be developed. In his treatment of this verse, Chrysostom dwells on the kind of statement 'abide in me and I in you' is. Even though he did not say this explicitly, for Chrysostom, this statement is an imperative. What suggests this is the way he interprets the statement 'abide in me' (Jn.15: 4). He points out that when Jesus said 'abide in me,' he meant that the disciples have a part to play and must do their part. In his word 'and now you must do your part in this.'⁴⁶⁷ Thus, Chrysostom acknowledges that according to Jesus, the disciples need to co-operate with him in order to bear fruit. Still he argues that what this statement shows is that Jesus urges the disciples to co-operate with him, not because he had need of their co-operation. On the contrary, it was to benefit them that he urged this.⁴⁶⁸

Chrysostom argues that this is the reason why Jesus added the other part of the statement 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, so neither can he who does not abide in me.'(Jn15: 4) Chrysostom argues that the reason why Jesus said this is in order to forestall a situation when fear would estrange the disciples from him.

Thus, lest they become estranged from him because of their fearfulness, he bolstered up their souls that were being unnerved by fear, and bound them closely to himself, and held out to them fair hope for the future.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p123 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 4. 3)

⁴⁶⁷Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p318 (Homilia LXXXVI)

⁴⁶⁸ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p318 (Homilia LXXXVI)

⁴⁶⁹Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p318 (Homilia LXXXVI)

Chrysostom sees in Jn.15: 2 the idea of future reward and punishment. He states that Jesus urges on his own from both motives, while in Jn.15: 4, he particularly stresses the need of their co-operation.⁴⁷⁰ This shows one that Chrysostom believes that believers have an essential role to play in the work of unity and abiding in Jesus.

Augustine states that when Jesus said 'Abide in me and I in you', he does not mean that they abide in him in such a way as He in them.⁴⁷¹ Augustine takes Jn.15: 4 as descriptive. This is what makes the difference between the two fathers. While Chrysostom believes that what we have here is an imperative, Augustine believes that it is descriptive. Chrysostom believes that whatever is commanded is not beyond man to carry out once the proper instruction has being given. Whereas Augustine believes that it is just a description, a possibility. In his own church he felt the need to be gentle on the crowd, while Chrysostom believed that one needed more firmness.

Augustine believed that it is a moral exhortation, which is to the benefit of the believer. He alleges that either when Jesus abides in the believers or when they abide in Jesus the beneficiaries are the disciples. Each way he states is beneficial not to Jesus, the vine, but to them, the branches.

For indeed the branches are in the vine in such a way that they do not supply (anything) to the vine but receive from it the means whereby they live; at the same time the vine is in the branches in such a way that it furnishes life-giving nourishment to them; it does not take (anything) from them⁴⁷²

Thus, for Augustine, the branches abiding in the vine or the vine abiding in the branches is for the benefit of the branches. On the other hand, the branch that does not abide becomes unfruitful.

Unfruitful branches Jn.15: 4

The Johannine Jesus gave the reason why the branches should remain in the vine, and specified the repercussion of not doing so. 'Remain in me, as I in you, as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains part of the vine' (Jn.15: 4). He also goes on to talk about the cutting off, the repercussion of not abiding. Augustine states that when a branch has been cut off, another can sprout from the living root, whereas the ones that have been cut off cannot live without the root.⁴⁷³ Augustine sees in the statement

⁴⁷⁰ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, 318 (Homilia LXXXVI)

⁴⁷¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p120 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 1.1)

⁴⁷² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p120 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 1.1)

⁴⁷³ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p120 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 1. 1)

‘As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me’ (Jn.15: 4) a grand commendation of grace. He argues that what this suggests is that it is directed at those (Pelagians) who are pleasing to themselves and not considering God as necessary for them for doing good works.⁴⁷⁴ Thus Augustine believed that this statement envisaged what happened even at his own time. This when men such as Pelagius would come out with doctrines that would suggest that grace is not necessary for doing good work.

Here we see Augustine using the text as a polemic directed at a particular set of people, those who reject the necessity of grace for good works. What makes this very obvious is the use of the 3rd person plural

Do they not resist this truth, men corrupted in mind, reprobates concerning faith, (2Tim.3: 8) who respond and speak iniquity, ‘we have it from God that we are men, but from our own selves that we are just.’⁴⁷⁵

Augustine was highly critical of those he attacked in his interpretation of the text and he was passionate about it. He continues

For he who supposes that he has any fruit of himself is not in the vine, he who is not in the vine is not in Christ. He who is not in Christ is not a Christian. Those are the depths of your drowning deep (in the sea).⁴⁷⁶

Thus for Augustine, those who are outside the church, not in union with the church, are not just non-Christians, but those who reject the doctrine of grace, as believed by the Catholic church.

Though Augustine was interpreting the text, he was preoccupied with the controversies that were raging at that time and had this at the back of his mind. Through his interpretation of the text, he propagates the doctrine of grace and at the same time attacks those who do not agree with his own view on this. This shows once again that interpretations can be influenced by the interpreter’s circumstance and theological background. This also points to the polemical nature of the interpretations of some of the Fathers of the Church. This points to us once again that the kind of interpretation found in Augustine is a ‘doctrinal sermon’. Though Augustine is reckoned to exclude polemic from his popular preaching, this seems not to be applicable to these discourses. At the time of his exposition of the text he had much controversy with the Donatists, the Arian heresy that was thought to be dead was also beginning to show symptoms of life. Apart from these, he also had before him the heresy of the Pelagians

⁴⁷⁴ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p120 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 2. 1)

⁴⁷⁵ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p121 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 2. 2)

⁴⁷⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p121 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 2. 2)

to contend with. Of all these, the uppermost is the Pelagian controversy⁴⁷⁷.

Unity without grace Jn.15: 5

The Johannine Jesus said ‘Without me you can do nothing’ (Jn.15: 5). This is still part of the repercussions of not abiding in Jesus. This statement is one of those on which the Fathers dwell substantially. The Fathers differ on the way they interpreted the concept of the repercussion of not abiding in Jesus. In his interpretation of the importance of pruning, Chrysostom remarks that it is possible for a branch to bear fruit even if it is not pruned, if it abides in the root. The only difference that would be between this and another one that abides in the vine and is pruned is that the one not pruned does not bear as much fruit as it ought. He also makes a comparison between the branch that abides and that does not. He points out that the branch that does not abide in the root bears no fruit at all.⁴⁷⁸ Augustine argues that Jesus said ‘Without me you can do nothing’ (Jn.15: 5) so that no one might think that a branch can bear at least some little fruit of itself. He opines that Jesus did not say ‘for without me you can do a little’ but ‘you can do nothing’ whether a little, therefore, or much, it cannot be done without him ‘without whom nothing can be done.’⁴⁷⁹ Augustine sees in this passage a teaching on grace. He alleges that what this means is that no one can live without the grace of God. He maintains that what suggests this is the word, which says “if anyone does not abide in me, he will be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into fire and he burns.”⁴⁸⁰

Chrysostom dwells on the consequence of not abiding in Jesus. He states that the loss [for him who does not abide in the vine] is great: even the inability to do anything. ‘Without me you can do nothing’ (Jn.15: 5).⁴⁸¹ He also argues that the repercussion of not abiding is more that the inability of the disciple not to do anything, for

He shall be cast outside,’ He said, no longer enjoying the cultivation of the vinedresser, ‘and will wither.’ That is, if he did possess any part of the root, he is dispossessed of it; if he had any grace, he is stripped of it and is bereft of all help and life from that source.⁴⁸²

Chrysostom points out that the final step is that he will be cast into the fire.⁴⁸³ Surprisingly, he did not go into the argument about the kind of fire that is being talked

⁴⁷⁷ Parker, MDCCCXLVIII, p VI

⁴⁷⁸ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992,p318-319 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁷⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p121 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 3. 1)

⁴⁸⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p122 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXI, 3. 2)

⁴⁸¹ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p319 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁸²Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p319 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁸³ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p319 (Homilia LXXVI)

about.

One of the new ideas that comes from Chrysostom's interpretation of the text is that the branches that would burn are those who were conspiring against Jesus.⁴⁸⁴ This sounds at least strange. One may ask where this idea comes from or what suggests this to him? What seems to be obvious here is that Chrysostom sees the passage as a polemic directed to the disciples with the opponents of Jesus in mind. This seems obvious from Chrysostom's assertion, 'Well, then after dispelling the fear that they felt toward His opponents, and after showing them that they themselves would be unconquerable, he declared'⁴⁸⁵

A statement like the one above gives one the opportunity to see how Chrysostom's mind works. This naturally would take the minds of his hearers to Jesus himself; the people who conspired against and accused Jesus were the Jews. Chrysostom sees his situation as similar to that of Jesus and his first disciples. The seeming opponents at his time, in his own situation are Jews and pagans, those who are not in the fold. Those who would burn are opponents of those who are in the fold.

Thus for Chrysostom, there is no room for others; you are either for Jesus or against him, inside the church or outside it. You are either in Jesus, pruned or not pruned or without him. Augustine's opinion differs from that of Chrysostom. He believes that it is not possible for one to bear any fruit at all no matter how little without pruning, that is without grace.

Unity and Glory Jn.15: 8

The Johannine Jesus said to his own 'It is the glory of my Father that you bear much fruit and be my disciples' (Jn.15: 8). How do the fathers read this statement? Chrysostom declares that what this statement means is that it is he who bears fruit who is Jesus' disciple.⁴⁸⁶ He added that the meaning of 'In this is my Father glorified' is that the Father rejoices when the disciples abide in Jesus, and when they bear fruit.⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, those who bear fruit can be in union with Jesus and therefore with the others.

Thus for Augustine, God is honoured and glorified through the believers bearing much fruit, which makes the believers disciples of Jesus. But he insists that believers should

⁴⁸⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p319 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁸⁵ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p319 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁸⁶ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p320 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁸⁷ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p320 (Homilia LXXVI)

not attribute this to their own glory, as though they have this from their own selves 'for his grace belongs to him and therefore in this lies, not our glory, but his.'⁴⁸⁸ In the interpretation of this verse, Augustine continues his propagation of the doctrine of grace.

Thus the two believe that those who bear fruit are the true disciples. The difference is the insistence by Augustine that the ability to bear fruit should be attributed to grace.

Unity through remaining in the love of Jesus Jn.15: 9

The Johannine Jesus said 'I have loved you just as the Father has loved me, remain in my love' Augustine states that the love being referred to here is the love of Jesus for his own and not the love of his own for Jesus.⁴⁸⁹ He alleges that 'abide in my love' is nothing other than 'abide in my grace'⁴⁹⁰; everything for Augustine is grace. He sees grace in everything and any good that is accomplished is only possible through grace. To abide one must be graced, filled. To have the desired unity, the grace of God is necessary. This is reflected in what he said about keeping Jesus' commandments

He contends that when Jesus said 'if you keep my commandments, you abide in my love,' Jesus means that the believers do not first keep the commandment in order that Jesus may love them, but rather that if Jesus was not to love the believers, they cannot keep his commandments.⁴⁹¹ He calls this grace: 'This is the grace that is accessible to the humble, but hidden from the proud.'⁴⁹² Thus for Augustine grace comes before anything, not action before grace. To abide one needs grace, and to continue to abide more grace is needed. This also shows that Augustine's attention is directed toward certain errors, probably again an allusion to the Pelagians.

Chrysostom asserts that Jesus made this statement in order to hearten his disciples, and the reason for this is in order not to cause them to be downcast.⁴⁹³ Chrysostom suggests that abiding in Jesus' words is something that the disciples have control over, and asserts that the way they abide in Jesus' love is by keeping his commandments.⁴⁹⁴ Chrysostom also sees Jesus using the statement here in asserting his authority. In his words, He did not say; 'Abide in the love of the Father,' but, 'in my love.'⁴⁹⁵ He also

⁴⁸⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p124 (Tract. in Joh. LXXXII, 1.2)

⁴⁸⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p126 (Tract. in Joh. LXXXII, 3. 1)

⁴⁹⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p126 (Tract. in Joh. LXXXII, 3. 2)

⁴⁹¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p126-127 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXII, 3. 2)

⁴⁹² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p127 (Tract. in Joh.LXXXII, 3. 2)

⁴⁹³ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p320 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁹⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p320 (Homilia LXXVI)

⁴⁹⁵ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p320 (Homilia LXXVI)

suggests that Jesus used the passage to get two messages across to his (fearful) disciples that he was about to leave. The first is that they were not being abandoned, rather that He, Jesus remains as closely united to them as the branch is to the vine. The second message Jesus gets across according to him is that virtue could be lost if the disciples should slacken in their practice of it.⁴⁹⁶ He maintains that the reason for this is lest the disciples become lazy through overconfidence. Chrysostom also opines that Jesus means that if the disciples abide in his love, the evils that they fear will lack power to harm them in proportion to their love.⁴⁹⁷ He further opines that love is a great and invisible force and not something expressed in words, it ought to be manifested in deed. He suggests the way that this could be done: remaining Jesus' friends, loving Jesus for the believers' own advantage, cherishing their friends.⁴⁹⁸

The opinion expressed by Chrysostom is different from that of Augustine. While Augustine believes that by one's power one cannot abide in Jesus' word, keep the commandment, Chrysostom believes that believers have control over this. The reason for this is because he believes that if humans are taught to do good, they have the capability and ability to do so. This is the reason why he taught his own in season and out of season. This is the reason why he got the appellation 'The great teacher.'

Thus, the Fathers of the Church being among the first readers, interpreters of the Johannine text made their own mark on its interpretation. The fathers at their own time and in their own circumstance addressed themselves to the question in the text that was relevant to their situation. This is quite different from our own situation, which does not take away from the fact that they, just as the modern scholars, struggled with some of the metaphors inherent in the text. The Fathers explored these metaphors to serve their purpose. They used these to make the text understandable to their audience. They also tried to find the meaning in the text and their interpretations just as those of modern scholars show the potency for meaning in the text.

The fathers like modern scholars recognize the paradoxes in Johannine text, but they also explored this and tried to find ways round it in order to harmonize it. The Fathers believed that there is no contradiction in the text. There is always a way to explain any seeming contradiction. They believe that even in the seemingly contradictory verses there are messages for those who are interested in listening to the word of faith.

One of the features of their interpretations is that it is polemical. They found

⁴⁹⁶ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p321 (Homilia LXXXVI)

⁴⁹⁷ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p321 (Homilia LXXXVI)

⁴⁹⁸ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p321 (Homilia LXXXVI)

themselves in a situation when the Church had to face a lot of controversies and so the interpretation of the word was a way of teaching, encouraging and attacking the 'enemies', so to say. The interpretations of the Fathers reflected their different situations. Augustine, for instance, in Carthage and Hippo, had to address the problem of Arianism that was a threat to the unity of the church. Arians opposed the Christology held by the Catholic Church, those who believed in the Divinity of Jesus. In his interpretation of the texts Augustine put forward the doctrine of the consubstantiality of Jesus. Jesus, he states, just like the Father is equally the vinedresser. We find this also in Chrysostom. Just like Augustine, he had to pay attention to the problem of Arianism, a source of concern for those who were keen on working for the unity of the church and the empire.

Apart from the problem of Arianism, the fathers had other problems. Augustine had to address the problem of the presence of Donatists through his interpretation of the text. The Donatists were perfectionists and they opposed the admission into the church of apostates, those who recanted during the period of persecution. On the other hand, Augustine, one who had the intention of uniting not just the church but also the Empire had a different idea. For him the church is for all, saints and sinners. This is reflected in his interpretation of the text. For him, the call to abide in Jesus is extended to all and not just a few. He believed that what was important was faith, profession of faith and then baptism. But all come through God's grace. Augustine several times in his interpretation of the texts talked about the importance of grace. This also reflected the battle that he had with the Pelagians. Augustine believed that the idea of grace the Pelagians held was erroneous, and he used any given opportunity to condemn this and to put forward the doctrine of grace that he felt was ideal. His interpretation was grace centred; every interpretation was connected with the doctrine of grace.

Like Augustine, Chrysostom had his own experience. He had to address the problem of the presence of the Jews, Judaizers and pagans in and around his community. This had reflection in his interpretation of the text. Against the Jews, he dwelt on the Divinity of Jesus. Jesus he insisted was co-vinedresser with the Father. He believed that to be in Jesus one had to bear fruit and that it is possible for man to achieve this. Chrysostom had an idea of the church that is open to those who are ready to be taught, those ready to carry out what the word tells them. What is needed for admission into the church is baptism, an important sacrament that brings the recipients into union with Jesus and the church. But once admitted, he believed that the church has a moral responsibility to teach and insist upon virtue. He also believes that men are capable of doing what Jesus

has commanded.

One sees that the fathers' interpretations were polemical. This also reflects their different situations. The situation in which they were when they interpreted the texts was a critical one that could not be ignored. There was the need to spell out the idea of unity that is desirable for the church and the Empire, one that can hold the empire together. The fathers, because of the situation of the church and their position in it, had to talk about the nature of the Church, the importance of the sacraments, the place of grace and human effort in the work of unity and abiding in Jesus. The interpretations of the fathers are engaged. It was mostly directed to a specific audience. We have a reflection of this also in their interpretation of Jn.17.

The Fathers and the idea of unity in Jn.17: 20-23

The discussion on unity of believers as found in Jn.17: 20-23 did not just begin in recent times, or with contemporary scholars. It also caught the interest of some of the early commentators among who were John Chrysostom and Aurelius Augustine.

One of the prominent homilies of Chrysostom preached in Antioch about 390 A. D and documented was on Jn.17: 20-23. Chrysostom believes that Jn.17: 20-23 is an intercession. He gave the reason why Jesus made this intercession. He opines that Jesus' concern for his own was very great, and the intercession on behalf of them was anxiously done, to show his love for them.⁴⁹⁹ Augustine states that this was a prayer of Jesus, made for the others who would believe in him just as the Apostles did which was added after the Johannine Jesus had prayed for those present. Therefore it was for the future believers. Who are these and why the prayer?

Jn.17: 20: A prayer for future believers

The Johannine Jesus said 'I do not pray for these alone' (Jn.17: 20). Chrysostom suggests that Jesus said this, so that nobody may think that Jesus sanctifies himself for the Apostles alone.⁵⁰⁰ Thus Chrysostom linked the church of the 4th and the 5th century with the Apostles. Just as unity was demanded in the apostolic time, it is demanded in the church of the Chrysostom's time. He argues that Jesus by these words once more raised the spirit of his disciples that there would be many disciples. He alleges that by

⁴⁹⁹ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p387 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁰⁰ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p390 (Homilia LXXXII)

so doing, Jesus made their singular privilege common to many.⁵⁰¹ Chrysostom maintains that Jesus said that these others would come to believe through the words of the Apostles in order to make it clear to the Apostles that they would be responsible for the salvation of the rest. He points out that by giving such a responsibility to the Apostles, Jesus meant it to serve as a consolation to them.⁵⁰² Chrysostom suggests that in this passage after Jesus has spoken of the salvation and sanctification of his own by faith and sacrifice, He finally spoke on the subject of harmony. He alleges that Jesus concluded the ‘last discourse’ with words on unity as he had begun the ‘last discourse’ with it (Jn.13: 34).⁵⁰³ Jesus, he asserts, opens the discourse by saying ‘I give you a new commandment, love one another’ (Jn.13: 34), which is similar to ‘that they may be one even as you, Father, are in me and I in you’.⁵⁰⁴ Thus Chrysostom believes that Jn.13: 34 is the beginning of the last discourse. He maintains that Jn.13 to Jn.17 are in harmony. He was also convinced that love and unity are correlated. Chrysostom had no doubt that unity was paramount for Jesus and his own.

Augustine states that when the Johannine Jesus said ‘I pray not only for these but also those who through their word will believe in me,’ Jesus wanted to make it known that believers are both those who were there in the flesh, and those who were yet to be.⁵⁰⁵ In Augustine’s words, ‘these are the many who afterwards believed in him, through the word of the Apostles, those who believed and will believe until he comes.’⁵⁰⁶ For Augustine, proclamation of faith is what opens one to becoming one with Jesus and part of the church.

He insists that ‘the prayer is not for those who were neither with him when he was saying these things, not afterwards through their words, but had believed in him either through themselves or in whatever way you prefer, nevertheless earlier.’⁵⁰⁷ Thus, for Augustine, those who believed and went away were not part of those prayed for, those who left the company of Jesus in Jn.6. One wonders, given what he said here, how he could justify the inclusion in his church of those who apostatized and came back. There is no doubt that opening the church to even the Apostates was convenient and suited the church at his own time.

Augustine also gave insight into what he understood the ‘word’ to be. He calls it the

⁵⁰¹ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p390 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁰² Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p390 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁰³ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p390 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁰⁴ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p390 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁰⁵ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p283 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 1)

⁵⁰⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p283 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 1)

⁵⁰⁷ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p283 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 1)

'word of faith.' "This is the word of faith that we preach, for if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is the Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised has up from the dead, you will be saved (Rom.10: 8-9)."⁵⁰⁸ Augustine states that one of those who received and preached the word of faith was Paul (1Cor.15: 11).⁵⁰⁹ Augustine said that the 'word of faith' was called the word of the Apostles, because the Apostles preached it primarily from the very beginning.⁵¹⁰ At the same time he argues that this is equally the word of God, just as Paul said 'the word of God' (1Thes.2: 13).⁵¹¹ He maintains that it is the word of God because God gave it, and it is the word of the Apostles because God had from the very beginning and chiefly committed it to them to be preached.⁵¹² Thus, Chrysostom and Augustine see unity as very important and of great concern to the church. For both, those prayed for are those who would come to accept the words of Jesus as preached by the Apostles. Augustine called this the word of faith. Chrysostom was not so specific.

Oneness of believers, vis-à-vis oneness of the Trinity Jn.17: 21

Jesus gave an insight into the nature of the unity for which he prayed. 'That they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you' (Jn.17: 21). Does this suggest that the unity of believers can be compared and be the same as that of the Trinity? Chrysostom contends that the expression 'just as' does not imply complete equality on their part, for such a thing was not possible for them, but it means 'as far as is possible for men.'⁵¹³ He compares this statement to 'be merciful even as your Father is merciful.' He made an important remark that 'in us' means 'in their faith in us.'⁵¹⁴ He was convinced that this is equally applicable to 'And I have loved them even as you have loved me' (Jn.17: 23). Chrysostom claims that the expression 'just as' here means being loved in so far as man can be loved.⁵¹⁵ Chrysostom believes that Jesus is of the same nature with the Father. He was also convinced that the union of Jesus and the Father, union of the Trinity is not the same with the union among believers.

In his interpretation of this passage Chrysostom turned polemical. He dived into the Christological controversy that was raging at the time. He points out that Jesus is God,

⁵⁰⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p287, (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 5.1)

⁵⁰⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p287, (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 5. 1)

⁵¹⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p288 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 5. 2)

⁵¹¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p288 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 5. 2)

⁵¹² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p288 (Tract. in Joh. CIX, 5.2)

⁵¹³ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵¹⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵¹⁵ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p392 (Homilia LXXXII)

of the same nature with the Father. This is a different position from that of the Arians. Augustine finds connection between Jn.17: 21 and Jn.17: 11. He suggests that the petitions in both are the same. He maintains that the petition is that both those who were first prayed for in Jn.17: 11 and those whom Jesus now prayed for may be one.⁵¹⁶ Jesus, he argues, did not say ‘that we all may be one’ rather ‘that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.’ Augustine contends that the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father in such a way that they are one thing, because they are one substance. He argues that ‘We certainly can indeed be in them, yet we cannot be one thing with them, because we and they are not of one substance in so far as the Son is God with the Father.’⁵¹⁷ Augustine, just like Chrysostom, dwells on the doctrine of consubstantiality of the Son and the Father, Jesus a person of the Trinity, of the same nature with God. He equally dwells on the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus: Jesus both God and man against the Arians who denied the divinity of Jesus. This idea is even more evident in what Augustine said next.

Augustine argues that the essence of this verse is to show that Jesus and the Father are one thing. ‘The Father, and I, we are one thing’ Jn.10: 30.⁵¹⁸ He maintains that this signifies that the Father’s nature and that of the Son, Jesus, is the same. He contends that for this reason, even when the Father and the Son or also the Holy Spirit are in us, we ought not to think that they are of one nature with us. Augustine maintains that God, the Trinity is one thing in their nature and the believers are one thing in theirs.⁵¹⁹ Augustine just as Chrysostom, preached the doctrine of the consubstantiality of Jesus with the Father.

The purpose of the prayer for unity

Chrysostom gave an insight into why Jesus brought it about that his own should be one. He contends that Jesus did so because nothing gives all men such grave offence as dissension.⁵²⁰ His interpretation of this passage was influenced by the situation of his church. He must have felt the impact of dissension in the church of Antioch and Constantinople. Apart from the fact that there was the attempt to unite the empire, there was also the need to unite the Christians in the presence of pagans and Jews, two sources of constant threat.

⁵¹⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p289 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 1. 1)

⁵¹⁷ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p289 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 1. 1)

⁵¹⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 1. 2)

⁵¹⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 1. 2)

Chrysostom believes that the oneness that was prayed for was accomplished. He alleges that all those who believe through the Apostles are one, even though some have become separated from them. This tells the story of the church in Chrysostom's time; even those who are separated are one; they can still come back; they are not totally lost. For him, the more who are willing to come back, the better. The implication of this is that if one accepts that even those who have separated themselves are one with those who are in the fold, one then leaves the door open. At the time of Chrysostom, nothing is more desirable. He argues that even though these others separated, it was something that was foretold. He attributed this to human depravity.⁵²¹ Chrysostom even gave excuses for them. The separated ones are not to blame for their actions. This attitude of his is reflected in what he said after his return from exile. 'The storm has not disunited us, but has bound us more closely together.'⁵²² He believes that there was the need to bring all into the unity of the church.

The two fathers are of the view that the unity of believers cannot be compared with the unity of the Trinity. Another thing is the reason for prayer for unity, for Chrysostom to ward off dissension, for nothing gives all men such grave offence as dissension. We have a reflection of this in their interpretation of what the union of believers has to do with the fate of the world.

Unity of believers and the fate of the world Jn.17: 21

The Johannine Jesus after praying for his own to be one said 'So that the world may believe that it was you who sent me' (Jn.17: 21). One wonders how the fathers understood what this means. Do they believe that it is possible that the world will believe when believers are one in Jesus and the Father? Chrysostom finds a connection between what we have here and Jn.13: 35, 'By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'⁵²³ Chrysostom argues that what we have in this verse is that by the oneness of the disciples the world would believe.⁵²⁴ He explains how this works:

Then, if they keep to the same precepts as their teacher, those who hear will know the Master by reason of the disciples; but if they are in strife with one another, other men will deny that they are disciples of a God of peace. And if I am not peaceful, they will not acknowledge that I have been sent by thee⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵²¹ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵²² Baur, 1960, p267

⁵²³ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵²⁴ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵²⁵ Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

Thus, for Chrysostom, unity of believers can lead to conversion of non-believers, conversion of pagans who were undecided about what group of religion to join at the time when the pagan religion has become outlawed. Chrysostom must have thought to himself that there was no more opportune time than his situation for this message to be heard once again.

Augustine argues that may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (Jn.17: 21), does not mean that the world will believe then, when the believers shall all be one in the Father and the Son. He contends that the believers shall be one not in order that they may believe, but rather because they have believed.⁵²⁶ Thus for Augustine, belief, faith has to come first before unity, oneness. The profession of faith is first in the order of unity. The starting point in working towards the unity that is desired is belief; faith is what brings oneness. This may be one of the reasons why he fought tooth and nail to enshrine doctrine in the mind of the people. Anything that deviates from this is not looked at kindly, and is attacked fiercely. This may be the reason why he went against the Pelagians. He was convinced that their doctrine undermined faith.

Augustine contends that the 'all' referred to in the statement constitutes the world believing.⁵²⁷ (This sounds strange. 'All' does not just refer to believers but to the world). He argues that they who will believe are not different from the world and 'All' is the world not hostile but faithful.⁵²⁸ Thus for Augustine, 'all' that is commonly referred to as the believers, is 'the world'.

Apart from this, Augustine suggests that there are two worlds, the faithful and the unfaithful. The unfaithful one is that of which Jesus said 'I do not pray for the world' (Jn.17: 9),⁵²⁹ the world condemned (1Cor.11: 32).⁵³⁰ He alleges that Jesus did not pray for this world. For Jesus is not unaware of what it is that this world has been predestined to.⁵³¹ Augustine contends that the other world, of the faithful is the one about which it is written 'For the Son of man has not come to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by him' (Jn.3: 17). He states that Paul said of this: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' (2Cor.5: 14). (Augustine seems to do much of reading of Paul into John.) Augustine suggests that Jesus prays for this world saying

⁵²⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 1)

⁵²⁷ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

⁵²⁸ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

⁵²⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p290 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

⁵³⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p291 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

⁵³¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p291 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

‘that the world may believe that you sent me.’ He states that ‘By this faith, the world is reconciled to God when it believes in Christ who was sent by God.’⁵³²

Augustine argues that ‘by believing they become one, perfectly one, who, although they were one by nature by dissenting from one were not one.’⁵³³ Thus for Augustine, ‘all may be one’ is synonymous with ‘the world may believe.’ He was convinced that what Jesus prayed for in this passage is the unity of the divided world. As a church leader, Augustine carried the burden of formulating and providing a framework for the unity of empire. In the light of the situation at his time, he was responsible for putting forward the kind of unity that would accommodate everyone. That expectation influenced his interpretation of the text on unity. What seems to be going on here is that the Empire became synonymous with the world and that Augustine is opening wide the door of the church to accommodate all, both saints and sinners. This is what makes the difference between him and the Donatists who believe that the church is a place for saints, perfect men and women.

Augustine alleges that the Johannine Jesus added the words ‘in us ‘ in order that we may know that the fact that we are made one by the most faithful love must be attributed to the grace of God, not to ourselves.⁵³⁴(Doctrine of grace) Unity can only come about through the grace of God.

Thus, Augustine and Chrysostom differ on their understanding of the meaning of ‘all’ in the text. While Chrysostom believed that the people prayed for to be one are believers through whose unity the world would become converted, Augustine held the view that the all that is prayed to come into unity is the believing world. The two church leaders were in similar situation but working for unity on different approaches and with differing ecclesiological frame of minds. The two fathers used one and the same text in talking about two different ideas. This shows the ambiguity and the richness for meaning of the text.

The Unity and the Glory given Jn.17: 22

The Johannine Jesus said ‘it is the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples’ (Jn.17: 8). Chrysostom opines that glory is miracles, teachings of Jesus, which are given so that the believers may be of one soul. He argues that glory,

⁵³² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p291 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 3)

⁵³³ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p291 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 4)

⁵³⁴ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p291 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 2. 5)

even greater than miracles, consists in this ‘that they are united’ (Jn.17: 22).⁵³⁵ He asserts that the greatest glory is that there is no dissension, no strife in the divine nature. The disciples are also to be outstanding in this respect.⁵³⁶

In this passage just like that of Jn.15, on the vine and the vinedresser, Chrysostom insists that though Jesus made the intercession on behalf of the disciples for glory, He himself is the one who has granted them this. The request was made of the Father just for the sake of consoling the disciples.⁵³⁷ Unity is only possible by Jesus being in the believers. In unity Jesus is the enabling factor. Chrysostom maintains that Jesus gave them the glory by being in them and having the Father with him so that he joined them together.⁵³⁸ Chrysostom used this exposition in propagating the doctrine of consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. In so doing he condemned the Arians, who held a contrary view.

Augustine contends that the meaning of glory here is immortality, which the human nature was going to receive in Jesus.⁵³⁹ He suggests that at this point the Johannine Jesus himself had not yet received it. In his words “Jesus in his characteristic way in accordance with the inalterability of predestination, signifies future things by verbs of the past tense.”⁵⁴⁰ Augustine likened the glory here to what is in Jn.5: 21 ‘As the Father raises up the dead and gives life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.’⁵⁴¹ Thus Augustine in interpreting the text commented on the issue of consubstantiality of Jesus and the Father, a contentious topic that has divided the Church at his own time.

For what ever thing the Father does, not other things, but these the Son also, not otherwise, ‘but does in like manner’ (Jn.5: 19) . . . So, then, the glory of immortality, which he says was given to him by the Father, he himself must also be understood to have given to himself, although he does not say so.⁵⁴²

The two fathers seem to differ on their interpretation of the meaning of glory. While Chrysostom called these miracles, the greatest of which is the unity in the Trinity, Augustine is of the contention that the meaning of glory is immortality, something that would come in the future.

⁵³⁵ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵³⁶ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p391 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵³⁷ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p392 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵³⁸ Chrysostom’s Commentary, 1992, p392 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵³⁹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p292 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 3. 3)

⁵⁴⁰ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p292 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 3. 3)

⁵⁴¹ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p292 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 3. 3)

⁵⁴² Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p292 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 3. 3)

Perfected unity Jn.17: 23

In the text the Johannine Jesus gave an idea of the kind of unity that was envisaged that would make the world to know that he is the true emissary of the father. 'That they may be perfected in unity that the world may know that you have sent me' (Jn.17: 23). Chrysostom sees in this statement a repetition of Jn.17: 21. He asserts that Jesus said this repeatedly to show that peace can draw men to him more effectively than miracles. In his words 'For, just as strife causes men to disperse, so harmony causes them to unite.'⁵⁴³ This is a new thought. Chrysostom juxtaposed peace and harmony with miracles.

Augustine states that in this statement, Jesus briefly hinted that he is the mediator between God and Men. Jesus, he argues, spoke here in person of the mediator, as that of which Paul spoke: 'You are Christ's, but Christ is God's'(1Cor.3: 23).⁵⁴⁴ Augustine suggests that 'that they may be made perfect in one' shows that the reconciliation that is effected through Jesus the mediator is extended to such a point that we enjoy perfect happiness, to which nothing further can be added.⁵⁴⁵ He sees unity as a means of attaining happiness that comes only through Jesus. Unlike Chrysostom, Augustine suggests that this statement is different from what we have in Jn.17: 21. He argues that in as much as the Johannine Jesus is talking about perfection, the knowledge being referred to here must be understood as one that comes about through direct vision, not such as it is now through faith. 'For as long as we believe what we do not see, we are not yet made perfect in such a way as we shall be when we have merited to see what we believe.'⁵⁴⁶ What this would mean is that perfect unity is not attainable here; for it is a thing of the future.

In the interpretation of Jn.17: 23 one sees that the two fathers differ in their understanding of the meaning of perfect unity and in their reading of what it means for the world to know that Jesus is the true emissary of the Father. While Chrysostom believes that belief and knowledge are the same, Augustine differentiates between the two. For Augustine knowledge is a thing of the future and perfected unity is futuristic. Whereas for Chrysostom, perfected unity is attainable here. Chrysostom believes that perfection is attainable by men who put their mind to it, just as perfect unity is

⁵⁴³Chrysostom's Commentary, 1992, p392 (Homilia LXXXII)

⁵⁴⁴ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p293 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 4. 1)

⁵⁴⁵ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p293-294 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 4. 1)

⁵⁴⁶ Augustine, Tractate, 1994, p294 (Tract. in Joh. CX, 4. 3)

achievable if men work at it. This is a different idea from Augustine who believes that all must aim at perfection, even though it may not be achievable by everyone. He was convinced that human perfection and perfected unity couldn't be achieved here and now, for they are things of the future.

Conclusion

The two Fathers wrote at about the same time, in the late 4th century and early 5th century. Though the two operated in two different contexts, the concern of the Church at the period they wrote was the same. It was a turbulent period in the history of the Church; there was an ongoing battle at this period for the centre of the empire. It was also a time when there was the need to provide an ideological basis for the unity of the empire, and that of the church. The questions at the period were: what unity allows for a broad church? How best was it to accommodate and cope with those who were coming into the church? What church can unite the empire as the church metamorphosed from a minority into the major religion? Is it the rigorous, perfect church or the liberal, church of saints and sinners? The church at this period had problems from within and without, which undermined the unity of the Church. Though the problem was about the same in the two churches, the Eastern Church: Antioch and Constantinople and in the western church of North Africa Carthage and Hippo, the pressures on the unity of the church in these churches were coming from different sources. Chrysostom's problem was from the presence of Judaism and the Arians, a Christian sect. He also had problems from within his own church from the Judaizers. In Augustines's case, the pressure initially was from the Donatists and later from the Pelagians.

No doubt the two Fathers, Chrysostom and Augustine were conscious of the problem of disunity in the church. They had the intention of keeping the church united and attempted to produce a commentary that they felt would unite the church and the empire. Though the approaches of Chrysostom and Augustine looked similar from the outside, their attitude to the problem was not the same. The positions of the two are slightly different. While Augustine was ruthless with those he believed were enemies of the church, he was liberal with pagans and those whose adherence, and loyalty he wanted to maintain within the church. Augustine believed that what can bring the change is the grace of God, which alone can lead to salvation. He was more inclined to

talk about grace at every given opportunity. Chrysostom on the other hand was gentler with his enemies, but hard on his followers. He believed that they needed to be vigorously taught. He saw his audience as men and women who can be redeemed through teaching. He was convinced that the human will can will the good. All these attitudes are reflected in their preaching and commentaries.

Thus their audience influenced their interpretations. Both spoke to a particular audience. They were also influenced by the circumstance of the Church at their own time. They were able to find in the same text words to address their different circumstances. Thus Chrysostom, found words in the text to challenge the excesses of the Judaizers, Pagans and the Arians, while Augustine was able to find within the same text words to address the 'so called' false doctrine of the Donatists and that of Pelagius. Chrysostom believed that the church is our teacher, one that holds before us both rewards and punishments. He had the moral confidence that men have the power to achieve what they set their mind to. Augustine was convinced that nothing could be achieved without the help of grace, even willing the good. This shows once more the ambiguity, potential for meaning and richness of the Johannine text.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUTHER AND CALVIN ON THE IDEA OF UNITY AND ABIDING IN JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The reformation period was the most trying period in the history of the church as regards unity. At this period the fabric of the unity of the church and the western world was shaken to its foundations. The church's hierarchy, the source of the church's unity and stability was vigorously challenged; the unity of the church that seems to be stable for a period of about 1500 years (apart from the East and West schism) was put to the test and became severely strained. Things began to fall apart, the centre could no longer hold and the church was never the same hereafter.

The falling apart of Christendom and the foundation of the western world can be attributed to many factors i.e., the rising, potentially explosive, new current of life and thought;⁵⁴⁷ the contribution of some men, Martin Luther and John Calvin, two reformers who were quite remarkable. The challenge from the reformers came in various ways, most especially through their reading and interpretation of scripture. Their main preoccupation was with evangelical truth; the question in 'their mouth' was what is the meaning of scripture? And the belief was that if the evangelical truth is discovered, then unity is found.⁵⁴⁸ For these men, everything must be judged in light of the word of God, even the interpretation of scripture. The slogan for them was '*sola scriptura*.'

It is my intention in the following to use Martin Luther and John Calvin to present the history of reception of some of the Johannine passages on unity and abiding in Jesus in the reformation period. Luther and Calvin are the only reformers being examined because of limitation of space. I believe that the two can adequately represent the Protestant reformers of the 16th century. Another reason for limiting my research mainly to these two is because Luther and Calvin are recognized biblical commentators whose works are readily available.

⁵⁴⁷ Dillenberger, 1961, p. XII

⁵⁴⁸ Scholder, 1990, p14-18 Scholder in this passage presented the way the argument is played out and suggests that behind this could be traced the deep uncertainty which arises everywhere because of the split in the church; the various arguments on the question of evangelical truth betray the hidden anxieties of the time.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was born on 10th November 1483, in Eisleben in Germany, of German parents.⁵⁴⁹ He was trained as a doctor of sacred scripture and became a public preacher, Doctor of theology October 18th, 1512 and was given the biblical chair of the University of Wittenberg.⁵⁵⁰ One of Luther's convictions as a preacher was to place the Bible at the centre of everything: Church, theology and especially preaching, and as a reformer, the main point of the reformation was that the Gospel must be proclaimed.⁵⁵¹ K. Hagen points out that Luther attacked the idea of interpretation of scripture, 'for scripture is its own interpreter'. He believed that scripture is to be promoted and applied to the present age, not interpreted.⁵⁵² Luther's scriptural commentary continued the medieval genre of 'enarration', which means to narrate and apply the message of scripture in public.⁵⁵³ Luther's commentaries like the reformation interpretation of scripture are engaged in theological polemics.⁵⁵⁴ He had a lifelong attachment to the Psalms, Paul and John.⁵⁵⁵ Luther prized the Gospel of John most highly, and his favourite portion was the closing discourse of Jesus, set down in Jn.14, 15 and 16.⁵⁵⁶ Jn. 6 was part of the sermons preached in Wittenberg during Sunday services from November 5, 1530 to March 9, 1532.

Luther's sermon on John is found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar* 1883 ff. The Original editor was Johannes Aurifaber (1519 to 1575), who copied these sermons from the manuscript books of Veit Dietrich of Nürnberg, George Rörer, Anthony Lauterbach, and Philipp Fabricius, men who took down the sermon from Luther's lips.⁵⁵⁷ He first published the commentary in Eisleben in 1565.

John Calvin (1509- 1564) was French by birth and upbringing, but lived, worked and died in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin preached, lectured and wrote on almost every part of the bible and lived in an age of increasing popularity of the new historical approach to bible study.⁵⁵⁸ Calvin's method of preaching was in keeping with the tradition of Ulrich Zwingli, verse by verse expositions of the book of the Bible.⁵⁵⁹ As a preacher he always tried to accommodate his preaching to the understanding of his congregation.

⁵⁴⁹ Ritter, 1963, p24

⁵⁵⁰ Ritter, 1963, p47

⁵⁵¹ McKim, 1998, p215

⁵⁵² McKim, 1998, p219

⁵⁵³ McKim, 1998, p219

⁵⁵⁴ McKim, 1998, p216

⁵⁵⁵ McKim, 1998, p214

⁵⁵⁶ Luther's works, vol. 24, p ix

⁵⁵⁷ Luther's works, vol. 23, pX

⁵⁵⁸ McKim, 1998, p171-172

⁵⁵⁹ McKim, 1998, p173

Over the last fifteen years of his life, from 1549 onward, he preached extensively on both the Old and the New Testament, including the Gospel of John.⁵⁶⁰

According to Puckett, most of Calvin's manuscripted sermons were lost in the early nineteenth century when they were sold, but some of the volumes were later recovered. The manuscript of Calvin's commentary on John published in 1553 are extant.⁵⁶¹ Calvin was quite at home with the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture, and in his interpretation, believed in the proper contextual interpretation of scripture.⁵⁶²

Calvin's commentary was published in 1553 as a folio bearing the title *In Evangelium Secundum Iohannem Commentarius Iohannes Calvini*. Oliva Roberti Stephani. MDLI I I. It was translated in the same year by Calvin into French with the title *Commentaire de M. Jean Calvin sur l'Evangile Selon saint Jean, Traduit de latin*. 1553. This commentary was first translated into English from Latin by Christopher Fetherstone with the title *The Holy Gospel of Iesus Christ, according to John, with the commentarie of M. Iohn Calvine*, published by Thomas Dawson for G. Bushop in 1584. Another edition of Fetherstone's translation appeared in 1610 printed by Thomas Dawson for Thomas Adams. The Second rendering of the commentary was for the Calvin Translation society *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, By John Calvin, A new translation from the original Latin, by the Rev. William Pringle, Edinburgh, 1847. This edition, has since been revised by T.H. L Parker in two volumes, with the title *Calvin's Commentaries, The Gospel according to St John*, Edinburgh, 1959.

Luther and Calvin represent the early and later periods of the reformation. Luther was a first generation reformer, while Calvin was of the second generation.

In the following, I would like to see how Luther and Calvin managed to read the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in light of the crisis of division in the church. It is also to see if Luther's interpretation, the exposition of scriptural texts in the early period of the reformation, corresponds to that of Calvin, the interpretation of scriptural text by the second-generation reformers to see if and how they differ. It is my intention to indicate the sources of influence of the reading of the text in the reformation period. Some of the questions that would feature in the write up are: Did the different situations of life of Luther and Calvin influence their interpretations? Were their life-situations the same? Did the idea of unity of believers hold much interest for Luther

⁵⁶⁰ McKim, 1998, p173

⁵⁶¹ McKim, 1998, p173-174

⁵⁶² McKim, 1998, p175

and Calvin at the time they interpreted texts that dwell on unity and abiding in Jesus? Were the two reformers aware of the problem of division in the church and if they were, was it a concern for them? If it was a source of concern did this influence their interpretation of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus?

I would love to show that both Luther and Calvin were very much aware of the problem of division in the church, of which they were part and that their life situation, most especially their controversy with the Roman church, had tremendous influence on their interpretations. I hope to show how their controversies, especially the one with Rome have a reflection in all that they did and said and how it left its mark on their interpretation of the scriptural texts on unity and abiding in Jesus. I intend also to show that even though the controversies with Rome influenced Luther's and Calvin's interpretations, they differ in their interpretation of the text because of their particular background and learning.

The limitation of space requires that one concentrates more or less on the specific setting of the life of Luther and Calvin.

The Sitz im Leben of Luther's and Calvin's interpretations

One of the few things that influenced the interpretation of the scriptural text by Luther and Calvin was their life situation. These two just like most other scholars before them (Augustine and Chrysostom) and after them were children of their own circumstances. Luther much more than Calvin allowed his situation and experience to influence his interpretation of the text so much so that one can only properly understand his interpretation when one has a good knowledge of his experience, in this case, the controversies that he was engrossed in most especially the struggle with the Church of Rome. On the other hand, Calvin's history of interpretation can only be appreciated if one is aware of his religious experience most especially the one he had after parting with the Church of Rome which led to Calvin creating and formulating a new set of doctrines for his own movement. It is expedient then to study his history of doctrine in order to have a firm grip of his interpretation. These two men no doubt had the controversy with Rome before them at the time they expounded the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus.

The point of departure for the quest for the history of the reception of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus in the reformation period will be the issue of division in the church in the 16th century.

Division in the church

Though the 16th century division could be said to be the most trying period in history of the church with regards to unity; the question of who is to be held solely responsible for the division is yet to be settled. As far as Luther and his adherents are concerned, Luther and the other reformers were not responsible for the break up of the unity of the corporate world of Christendom. Dillenberger suggests that what Luther did was that he gave new form and power through his reformation insights to the potentially explosive new currents of life and thought that was building up against the church.⁵⁶³ Ritter holds the view that “Luther set in motion the revolution, which broke the spell of a tradition, which had lasted for more than a thousand years.”⁵⁶⁴

As a result, Luther rebelled against the church and broke away from the Church of Rome while the other Reformers only consolidated what Luther started. What needs now to be established is why and how Luther went about this.

Luther’s break from Rome

Martin Luther and Calvin were both former members of the Church of Rome. Luther was even once a monk of the Augustinian order and a well-recognized theologian even before he parted ways with the church. The starting point that eventually culminated in the break from Rome was Luther’s challenge of church authority, raising the standard against indulgences.⁵⁶⁵ The inability of resolving the problem generated by this led to Luther’s excommunication from the Roman Church after the Diet of Worms.⁵⁶⁶ That notwithstanding, Luther’s excommunication could be attributed to many other reasons, but Luther was convinced that the cause of his problem was his opposition to scholastic theology, with its divergence from the church’s traditional source of Holy Scripture, the ancient fathers and canon law.⁵⁶⁷ The question is how did he come about this new knowledge, when did the break eventually start.

In as much as one cannot say with certainty when the idea of breaking away from the church came to Luther’s mind, some scholars lend credence to the view that Luther’s break started with his new understanding of the gospel, the new knowledge of salvation

⁵⁶³ Dillenberger, 1961, p xii

⁵⁶⁴ Ritter, 1963, p21-22

⁵⁶⁵ Olivier, 1978, p4

⁵⁶⁶ Bagchi, 1991, p20

⁵⁶⁷ Bagchi, 1991, p32 (Luther W. A. 1, 220-228)

of the gospel,⁵⁶⁸ which eventually became the central focus of Luther's and the reformation's theology. This was the doctrine of justification.

Luther in his preface to the complete edition of his Latin writings Wittenberg 1554, gave an insight into how this new experience came about.

At last, by the mercy of God meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, In it the righteousness of God is revealed as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'he who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire scripture showed itself to me.⁵⁶⁹

One could ask what was Luther's life like before this experience? Luther before this time was repelled by the idea of the 'justice of God' 'And now, as much as I formerly hated that word 'justice of God' (*Justitia Dei*) so now I love and extol it as the sweetest of all words.'⁵⁷⁰ What this shows is that Luther is only ready to accept the aspect of the word of God that is 'sweet to his ears', ready to pick and choose what he wants. Before Luther came to accept this newfound position, it seems that the thought of the 'justice of God' as retributive punishing justice lay at the heart of Luther's troubles. Rupp asserts that Luther had this to say in 1515, 'If I may speak personally, the word 'justice' nauseated me to hear, so that I should not have been sorry if somebody had made away with me.'⁵⁷¹

Having said that, the question remains where does this new idea of Justification come from? Is it through spiritual inspiration or the influence of others? Ritter suggests that Luther never based his right to proclaim a new teaching on a special gift of the spirit, but rather exclusively quite simply and naively on pure study, on his profession as Doctor of Holy Scripture.⁵⁷² Luther claimed that he received his inspiration through reading Paul and Augustine.

Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's *The spirit*

⁵⁶⁸ Ritter, 1963, p27

⁵⁶⁹ Dillenberger, 1961, p 11 Luther's works vol. 34, (Career of the Reformer iv Lewis W. Spitz ed.) p327-38

⁵⁷⁰ Rupp, 1951, Dillenberger, 1961, p 11 Luther's works vol. 34, (Career of the Reformer iv Lewis W. Spitz ed.) p327-38

⁵⁷¹ Rupp, 1951, p34. The word *justitia* contained Luther's religious problem. The experience of justice meted to him by his parents did not help matters. According to Rupp, his mother at an occasion caned him to bleeding point, his tough life as a monk and the doctrine of justification of God all weighed heavily on his heart. All these can really affect one and it affected Luther badly. He looked for an escape from the parents, the monastery, and the church and even from God. The opportunity came through reading of Augustine and Romans and Galatians. In Luther's thought he imaged that justification by faith was the central soteriological concept in Paul's thought. This position is being questioned now by scholars like Sanders who is of the view that what lies at the heart of Paul's thought was participation in Christ (abiding in Christ) rather than justification by faith.

⁵⁷² Ritter, 1963, p36

and the Letter, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.⁵⁷³

There is no doubt that the constant change of Luther's position is problematic. One only wonders what is responsible for this? Some scholars like Bornkamm, according to Rupp, were of the view that Luther's religious problems were related to his theological research, his personal experience and scholarly theological exegetical discoveries.⁵⁷⁴ It is also possible that Luther's earlier studies had a great influence on his theological development. There is no question that Luther's new religious experience and his personal convictions pervade all his teaching, the interpretation of the bible and all theological exposition after the tower experience. Indeed after this experience Luther's attitude and views on many doctrines changed. As he broke away from Rome he equally separated himself from other Roman teaching on the authority over the word, on questions of church and tradition and the interpretation of scripture.

Having said that, what needs to be done is to examine some of Luther's new understanding that influenced his reading and interpretation of scripture.

One of the influences on Luther's interpretation of the bible is his belief that scripture is the only infallible norm, which contains a perfect doctrine, to which one can add nothing.⁵⁷⁵ This is a challenge to the Catholic position and a threat to the 'consensus ecclesiae'.

Consensus ecclesiae: authority over the word

The Catholic consensus principle is that the 'consensus ecclesiae' was wider than the church, in the sense of its teaching office, for it includes the teaching of the fathers, apostolic tradition, and precedent and positive law established outside the apostolic tradition and it included the Holy Scripture.⁵⁷⁶ The church maintains that the true, spiritual interpretation existed solely within the community of the Spirit, the church, and could be divined only from the consensus of the church.⁵⁷⁷ Thus the church had jurisdiction over scripture and not vice versa. As Augustine puts it, 'I would not have believed the gospel had the authority of the Catholic Church not prompted me.'⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷³ Dillenberger, 1961, p12, Luther's work vol.34 (Career of the Reformer iv Lewis W. Spitz ed.) p327-38 Augustine The Spirit and the letter, chapter XI

⁵⁷⁴ Rupp, 1951, p38

⁵⁷⁵ Lane, 1999, p35

⁵⁷⁶ Bagchi, 1991, p165

⁵⁷⁷ Bagchi, 1991, p165

⁵⁷⁸ Bagchi, 1991, p164

Luther had a different opinion. He rather interprets scripture in its plain sense.⁵⁷⁹ Luther accuses others who do not agree with him of incompetence in preaching the word of God. He also accused them of not having the right attitude for 'they treat the scriptures and make out of them what they liked, as if they were a nose of wax, to be pulled about at will.'⁵⁸⁰

There is no doubt the Luther here refers to the Roman church. The statement is also a pointer to Luther's opposition to the Roman Church's claim of jurisdiction over scripture.

Luther upheld the authority of scripture against that of the church and ecclesiastical tradition, a belief in the sole sufficiency of scripture.⁵⁸¹ Luther insisted that no doctrine not found in scripture could be enjoined as generally necessary for salvation.⁵⁸² This is why he opposed the Roman Church. Luther saw himself fighting a battle, a battle of the word of God, one that Bagchi suggests Luther believed could be fought only with the word of God, through writing and preaching.⁵⁸³ What this would mean is that any other teaching even that of the fathers was secondary to scripture. He was of the contention that a council could not, and had never been expected to establish new articles of belief beyond the articles contained in Holy Scripture.⁵⁸⁴ Luther believed that the pronouncements of councils were subordinate to scripture, for councils defend and explain teaching, which the prophets and apostles have already articulated.⁵⁸⁵ For him the council is the servant of the word.⁵⁸⁶ He was convinced that every other teaching even that of the fathers is to be judged in the light of scripture.⁵⁸⁷ One can assume that the attitude of Luther might have been developed because of his controversy with Rome a controversy, which as earlier said was before Luther's eye as he penned his interpretation of the texts on unity and abiding in Jesus.

Luther's doctrine of the church

For Luther, the church is an assembly of holy Christian people, (holy because their sins

⁵⁷⁹ Watson, 1947, p12

⁵⁸⁰ Watson, 1947, p12

⁵⁸¹ Watson, 1947, p11

⁵⁸² Bagchi, 1991, p163

⁵⁸³ Olivier, 1978, p191 Luther was convinced that the word of God was itself a sword that was in no need of being defended by a weapon forged by human hands.

⁵⁸⁴ Steinmetz, 1986, p89

⁵⁸⁵ Steinmetz, 1986, p89 (WA 50, Theodore G. Tappert ed. Selected writings of Martin Luther, Vol. IV (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) p325

⁵⁸⁶ Steinmetz, 1986, p90

⁵⁸⁷ Steinmetz, 1986, p94

have been forgiven and now being mortified through Christ) who preaches and hears the word of God, baptizes, celebrates the eucharist, administers discipline, calls and ordains ministers, prays, and bear the cross.⁵⁸⁸ Steinmetz alleges that Luther was of the view that the most important mark is the possession of the word of God:⁵⁸⁹

'... even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's Word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's Word.'⁵⁹⁰

What this shows is that the most essential sign of the church is the word of God.

Calvin's break with the Church of Rome

Calvin's break from the Church of Rome was not as dramatic as that of Luther⁵⁹¹ who had a long running battle with the church before his eventual excommunication. What is known is that despite Calvin's coming into contact with the leading reformers' ideas in his early stage,⁵⁹² he was still loyal to the church till about the year 1533, the year his father died. The starting points of his eventual break was his inability to obtain remission of the excommunication placed over his father two years before his death and of the excommunication of his brother Charles, a catholic priest. All this helped to prepare his feeling for the ultimate rupture.⁵⁹³ Though this was the last straw that broke the camel's back, there were other reasons put forward for Calvin's separation from the Church of Rome. Some of these were the church's diversion from the word, the question of scriptural authority, which had led to division in the church.

It is alleged that just like Luther, Calvin turned his back on the church because of the church's preoccupation with traditions formed in the medieval schools, which was responsible for the brokenness of the church's harmony.⁵⁹⁴ Calvin alleged that the unity of the church was already broken when Luther's reformation began.⁵⁹⁵ He was convinced that this could only be rediscovered when the true doctrine is discovered. He opined that the aim of the reformation was precisely to do this.

The Protestant reformation by recovering the true teaching of scripture was restoring unity to the badly fragmented church of the later middle ages.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁸⁸ Steinmetz, 1986, p90

⁵⁸⁹ Steinmetz, 1986, p90

⁵⁹⁰ Steinmetz, 1986, p90 (WA 50, Theodore G. Tappert ed. Selected writings of Martin Luther, Vol. IV (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) p342

⁵⁹¹ Wendel, 1963, p44

⁵⁹² Wendel, 1963, p38

⁵⁹³ Wendel, 1963, p25

⁵⁹⁴ Wendel, 1963, p36

⁵⁹⁵ Steinmetz, 1986, p91

⁵⁹⁶ Steinmetz, 1986, p92

Thus Luther started the challenge on the church, which led to further fragmentation of the church's corporate unity, while the efforts of men like Calvin were building on the foundation laid by Luther, which is done through teaching and preaching on what they believed was the true doctrine. What then is the true doctrine for Calvin? The true doctrine would be the new teaching as it is found in the 'true church'.

Calvin's 'True Church'

The true church for Calvin is that wherein the gospel is preached in its initial purity.⁵⁹⁷ The idea of pure scripture comes up more often than not in Calvin's exposition of scriptural texts. Calvin gave his new understanding of church:

Now . . . it is a society of all the saints, a society which, spread over the world, and existing in all ages, and bound together by the one doctrine and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord. With this church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.⁵⁹⁸

This gives a clear picture of the kind of church to which Calvin belongs. It also defines the one that is not the true church, the church that does not preach the gospel in his original purity. One of such for Calvin is the Roman church.

Calvin believed that the church presents itself in two aspects; the visible church, the Christian community, formed by grouping of Christians together in one and the same parish. The other aspect is the invisible church, the supreme church, the communion of saints, the totality of the elect living and dead.⁵⁹⁹ The notion of election features prominently in Calvin's writings. Calvin pointed out that those who belong to the church community are those who have entered into communion with Christ.⁶⁰⁰ In his words:

By a charitable judgment, all may properly be held to be member of the church who, by their faith, their conduct and their participation in the sacraments 'confess one same God and one same Christ with us.'⁶⁰¹

Calvin at this point had come to be comfortable and very much at home with the notion of churches, so far as they are united in faith in Jesus. There is no doubt that Calvin's new understanding of the Church pervades all his teachings and interpretation of the scripture. But apart from this, the reformation teaching on the authority of scripture

⁵⁹⁷ Wendel, 1963, p62

⁵⁹⁸ Steinmetz, 1986, p93

⁵⁹⁹ Wendel, 1963, p296, Calvin Inst. iv, I, 7

⁶⁰⁰ Wendel, 1963, p295

⁶⁰¹ Wendel, 1963, p298, Calvin Inst. iv, I 8

influenced Calvin's interpretation of the scriptural texts exceedingly even though he developed this further.

Scriptural Authority

Calvin's point of departure is that it is only Christ and the word that have power over scripture. Calvin disparages the Roman church's claim of authority over scripture. He maintained that the Roman church does not have the right authority to interpret scripture. 'The authority of Scripture does not rest on any basis external to itself'⁶⁰² But if these do not have authority over scripture who or what has? Is it the fathers of the church, the church council, the scholastics or church scholars?

Calvin like Luther before him challenged the 'consensus ecclesiae'. He was of the contention that the church's tradition does not supersede scripture. He was convinced that scripture lacks nothing for which tradition had to make up, for him Jesus is the one and only teacher who left nothing for others to say.⁶⁰³

Calvin was also convinced and advocated that no one has the right to claim dominion over the faith of others, the right over men to compel them to subscribe with unquestioning faith to all that he might teach.⁶⁰⁴ Calvin argues that the authority of all including that of the church universal is subject to the judgement of the word of God. 'But if a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent' (1Cor.14: 29-30).⁶⁰⁵ Thus for him, there is nothing to add to the written word, no room for church tradition. The church has no power to command men to believe what it puts forward as articles of faith.

Calvin held the view that the power over the word must not be located outside the 'word' as it was in the Roman church. He maintained that the church could not rule by the spirit apart from the word. 'For the Spirit wills to be conjoined with God's word by an indissoluble bond.'⁶⁰⁶ He challenged the church's claim to infallibility; that the church cannot err because of the presence of Christ in the church through his spirit.⁶⁰⁷ Calvin pointed out that he is in agreement that the church cannot err in matters necessary to salvation in so far as the church, having forsaken all its own wisdom, allows itself to be taught by the Holy Spirit through God's word. He is of the view that

⁶⁰² Parker, 1995, p23

⁶⁰³ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 7

⁶⁰⁴ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 9

⁶⁰⁵ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 9

⁶⁰⁶ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 13

⁶⁰⁷ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 13

the power of the church is not infinite but subject to the Lord's word and in fact enclosed in it.⁶⁰⁸ What this would suggest is that they have no power over it. Thus, for him, what gives the assurance that one has the help of the Holy Spirit is resting on the word of God and allowing the word alone to be one's guide.

Closely related to the power of the church is the power of the council. Calvin according to Steinmetz would only concede that the fathers and early councils are mere venerable interpreters of the Holy Scripture, not superior to it, even though they are indispensable aids to its proper understanding.⁶⁰⁹ He was even more critical of the later councils. He accused these of adding to the word of God, distracting from Christ, and gathering sometimes in assemblies not governed by Jesus' word and Spirit.⁶¹⁰ He reckoned that the councils sometimes make men consider what is diametrically opposed to Christ's institution.⁶¹¹ That is, they make interpretations not in accord with the mind of Jesus.

Calvin seems to be less critical of the church fathers. But he regards them as not more than venerable interpreters of the Holy Scripture. He believed that the bible is superior to them, even if they are indispensable aids for the proper understanding of scripture.⁶¹² Thus, for Calvin scripture is the only authority over scripture, which alone is worth submitting to. He is opposed to passive implicit faith, passive submission to every opinion uttered by the Catholic Church or its hierarchy. He rather proposed the active spirit of *docilitas* or learning readiness, to the word of God⁶¹³. This is reflected in his interpretation. This belief goes a long way in influencing his interpretation of scripture. Since one is not bound to be docile to the authority of the Catholic teaching one can by one self search for the true meaning of the word in the word itself. Thus Calvin just like some reformers before him was optimistic about the clarity of scripture. This optimism gave him the needed confidence in his interpretations.

Having touched on Calvin's understanding of the church and the notion of authority over scripture, I now want to look at another idea that had a great influence on his interpretation, the reformation doctrine of justification.

Calvin's doctrine of justification

There is no other thing that predisposed Calvin to interpreting scripture more than his

⁶⁰⁸ Calvin inst., IV, VIII, 4

⁶⁰⁹ Steinmetz, 1986, p92

⁶¹⁰ Calvin inst., IV, IX, 1,2

⁶¹¹ Calvin inst., IV, IX, 14

⁶¹² Steinmetz, 1986, p92

⁶¹³ Steinmetz, 1986, p92

notion of justification. Calvin believed that justification by faith is the principal article of the whole doctrine of salvation and of the foundation of all Christian religion.⁶¹⁴ The understanding of Calvin's notion of justification helps to understand his interpretation. For Calvin justification is closely related to sanctification "Christ justifies no one whom he does not sanctify at the same time . . . he bestows both together and never the one without the other."⁶¹⁵

The question is where did Calvin get his idea of justification? Calvin's new understanding of justification is an offshoot of the reformation idea of justification, though his conception is slightly different from that of Luther.⁶¹⁶ He defined justification thus

He will be said to be justified by faith who, being excluded from the righteousness of works, appropriates by faith the righteousness of Christ, being clothed wherewith he appears before the face of God not as a sinner, but as righteous.⁶¹⁷

Calvin later on in life developed further his notion of justification in 1543.

Thus we say, in short, that our righteousness before God is an acceptance, whereby receiving us into his grace, he regards us as righteous. And we say that this same consists in the remission of sin, and in this, that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us.⁶¹⁸

But there is another concept that is closely related to this, the concept of union with Jesus. It is expedient to have a closer look at his understanding of the concept of union with Jesus because this has a direct bearing on the notion of unity and abiding in Jesus. Calvin believed that it is impossible to talk about justification without the notion of union with Jesus, because imputation is made possible only by our union with Jesus. He was convinced that imputation and union with Jesus are two inseparable aspects of one and the same grace: the one is not possible without the other.⁶¹⁹ Calvin maintained that imputation is made possible only by one's union with Jesus because one becomes at the same moment a member of his body, although the union with Christ cannot be regarded as the cause of the imputation of righteousness.⁶²⁰ Calvin calls the union with Jesus mystical union and to be justified by faith means to be united to Jesus in a bond of mystical union.⁶²¹

Thus, for Calvin justification, righteousness is by imputation; one is unrighteous but held to be righteous by imputation, in so far as one possesses the righteousness of

⁶¹⁴ Wendel, 1963, p255-256, Calvin Inst., III, II, 1

⁶¹⁵ Wendel, 1963, p257, Calvin Inst., III, 16, 1

⁶¹⁶ Wendel, 1963, p257

⁶¹⁷ Wendel, 1963, p258, Calvin Inst., III, II, 2

⁶¹⁸ Wendel, 1963, p258, Calvin Inst., III, II, 1

⁶¹⁹ Wendel, 1963, p258

⁶²⁰ Wendel, 1963, p258

Christ by faith. But how does this work out?

Calvin points out that justification is not just a single act; even after one has received the faith one's works are still contaminated by sin, even though God does not impute them to one as sins but holds them acceptable.⁶²² This is a reaction against the Catholic position. Calvin opposed the Catholic Church's position that good works are the fruit of faith. He denies that works contribute to justification or form even the partial basis for God's acceptance of the sinner.⁶²³ Through this Calvin developed the notion of double justification: Justification of the sinner, and justification of the justified, the justification of the work of the justified.⁶²⁴ But he insists that both depend on the grace of Christ.⁶²⁵ What this means is that the justification of sinners and that of the justified is reliant on Grace. Calvin also mentioned that faith has a part to play in justification, even though he did not insist on the part played by faith. Calvin believed that faith is nothing in itself, for it acquires its value only by its content, by Jesus Christ.⁶²⁶ Calvin states about justification.

We say that faith justifies, not that it is accounted as righteous to us for its own worth, but because it is an instrument by which we freely obtain the righteousness of Christ.⁶²⁷

Thus, for Calvin justification is closely related to union with Jesus and it comes about through grace without which one cannot talk about justification and union with Jesus. Calvin's new understanding of justification influenced his interpretation more than any other source of influence.

Luther and Calvin were two scholars who were involved in controversy with the Church of Rome during the reformation period. But while Luther represents the early period of the reformation, Calvin was the archetype of the later period. These two reformers challenged the authority of the Catholic Church through their writings, preaching and interpretation of scripture. Apart from the Roman church, there were other forces that were challenged, for example the factions among the reformers referred to as 'factious and rebellious spirits, the enthusiasts'.⁶²⁸ These were accused among other things of spreading the notion that learning was not important to the Christian, since the guidance of the Spirit was sufficient to lead into all truth. A good

⁶²¹ Steinmetz, 1986, p93

⁶²² Wendel, 1963, p260

⁶²³ Steinmetz, 1986, p94

⁶²⁴ Wendel, 1963, p260

⁶²⁵ Calvin inst., III, 17, 5

⁶²⁶ Wendel, 1963, p262

⁶²⁷ Wendel, 1963, p262, Calvin inst., III, 18, 8

⁶²⁸ Luther's Works vol. 34, pxiv

example of such opponents was Andreas Karstadt.⁶²⁹ Apart from this, Luther, for example, had to contend with other opponents among the reformers such as the Sectaries and the Sacramentarians.⁶³⁰ The same was the case of Calvin.

The two reformers, Luther and Calvin were very critical of the church that they both thought had deviated from the old long teaching of the early church. The two aspired to bring the church back into the unity it had lost in the medieval period. The two were of the conviction that the unity that the church seeks beyond any theological and doctrinal strife is the unity that the word itself creates through the action of the Holy Spirit. What remains to be seen is how much of this conviction comes out of their interpretation of the texts on unity and abiding in John

Having said that, it has to be pointed out that though Luther and Calvin agreed on many issues that affected their interpretation, on the nature of church, power over the word, exegetical optimism, they also had their differences. Though Calvin was influenced by Luther's reformation idea of justification, he developed it further. Calvin was critical of Luther's interpretation,⁶³¹ and for making himself 'the teacher.' Calvin was of the contention that the reformation was about '*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, sola scriptura* and not *solus Lutherus*, meaning that the bible and not Luther's teaching is the standard to which evangelical theologians are bound.⁶³² This is an indication of the division that was later found in the reformation church. This may suggest that Calvin was more critical than Luther or that Luther is uncritical in his method. The question is what makes the difference between Luther and Calvin?

It has been suggested that what distinguished Calvin among all Reformers (Luther inclusive), is the humanistic method he embraced.⁶³³ But is it not the case that Luther also had humanistic influence? I believe that we would profit by giving consideration to the above questions even if briefly.

Scholarly influence on Calvin and Luther

Humanism had an influence upon Calvin's biblical exegesis.⁶³⁴ George claims that

⁶²⁹ Luther's Works vol. 34, pxiv

⁶³⁰ Luther's Works vol. 34, pxv

⁶³¹ Steinmetz, 1986, p85 (Calvin to Viret, May 19, 1540, CO 11: 36 (no.217) Steinmetz opines that Calvin deprecated Luther's tendency to find an edifying point in biblical texts without first subjecting these texts to hard and critical analysis, a teacher who initiated but did not culminate a theological development.

⁶³² Steinmetz, 1986, p86

⁶³³ Wendel, 1963, p35

⁶³⁴ George, 1988, p 47 He points out that the humanism in the Renaissance and Reformation period was much closer to what we mean by the humanities today. He also asserts that the motto of the humanist

Calvin was steeped in the classics and was a devotee of the humanist revival of learning before he became a reformer.⁶³⁵ Like many students of his era, Calvin studied humanism and had contact with many humanists such as Simon Grynée,⁶³⁶ with whom Calvin agreed that the task of a commentator was to explain the authors' meaning and keeping to the point.⁶³⁷ The influence of such men left their mark on him.⁶³⁸ Though it can be argued that the bible was the main focus in his exposition of scriptures, he employed humanist method as the very basis of his exegesis.⁶³⁹ It was suggested that even after going over to the reformers, Calvin still retains his humanism, for by the time Calvin joined the reformers his mentality had assumed its definitive character.⁶⁴⁰ It is also believed that Calvin saw in humanism a tool for the propagating of the gospel.⁶⁴¹

Humanist culture was not only, in Calvin's eyes, a torch bearing the light of the gospel, but in spite of his strict Biblicism, his humanist mind was in some degree harmonized with the gospel'. The mental formation and the religion, the culture and the morality, went hand in hand.⁶⁴²

One wonders how possible it is to combine humanism and faith in light of potential danger in humanism? On this, Neuenhaus has this to say:

Calvin while absorbing all the elements of humanist culture, endeavoured to use them to the service of his faith, and avoided the dangers, which might have arisen from them. The Hellenist spirit faded little by little before the Christian spirit; nevertheless, Calvin preserved to the end the reputation of an excellent humanist⁶⁴³

The humanist method that Calvin embraced is the scientific method, concern for external form, well-conducted reasoning, chaste style and good taste.⁶⁴⁴ The humanist studies equally influenced Calvin as a theologian. Though Calvin used humanism to the service of his faith, the humanist contempt for scholasticism greatly influenced his attitude to tradition.⁶⁴⁵ This explains why he did not find it too difficult to turn his back on medieval scholasticism.

Just like Calvin, the scholars with whom Luther associated, men like Martin Pollich of

scholars then was *Ad fontes!* – back to the sources! Humanism was also to some extent a movement of reaction against the regnant scholasticism of the day.

⁶³⁵ George, 1988, p49

⁶³⁶ Parker, 1971, p5

⁶³⁷ Parker, 1971, p6

⁶³⁸ Wendel, 1963, p31

⁶³⁹ Wendel, 1963, p31 Wendel points out that in doing so Calvin founded the modern science of exegetics

⁶⁴⁰ Wendel, 1963, p33

⁶⁴¹ George, 1988, p 49, He suggests that the humanist perspective continued to inform his biblical studies as a reformer.

⁶⁴² Wendel, 1963, p33 (R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch des Dogmengeschichte*, 2nd edn., 1920, vol. Iv, 2, p558)

⁶⁴³ Wendel, 1963, p34 (J. Neuenhaus, 'Calvin als Humanist,' *Calvinstudien*, Leipzig. 1909, p2)

⁶⁴⁴ Wendel, 1963, p35

⁶⁴⁵ Wendel, 1963, p36 Wendel points out that the traditions that he rejected were primarily those that were formed in the medieval schools and which Calvin knew well

Mellerstadt (1513) and Andreas Bodenstein of Carlstadt (1480-1541), two Thomist scholars who broke away from Thomism,⁶⁴⁶ had much influence on him. Apart from these men the Ockhamite theology of Middle Ages played an important role in Luther's theology.⁶⁴⁷ Luther in the early stages of his theological education studied the Occamist theologian Gabriel Biel and later John Pupper of Goch, two theologians that had much to say about the views of Thomas Aquinas on sin and grace.⁶⁴⁸ Steinmetz suggests that Goch's attacks on justice and proportionality, on the cooperation of the natural will with grace, for example, helped to confirm Luther's already negative judgement of Thomistic theology and his labeling of Thomas Aquinas as one of the modern Pelagians.⁶⁴⁹ Is it possible that Luther rejected the whole of Thomistic theology? Though the Thomistic theology he rejected initially was the theology of his Occamist teachers, Luther in his 1517 'Disputation against Scholarly theology' attacked all scholastic theology, including Thomistic theology.⁶⁵⁰ One aspect of Thomistic theology that Luther attacked was the proposition that it is possible to do what is morally good or avoid sin without the help of grace.⁶⁵¹ Luther's new theology of justification by faith alone must have come from his rejection of the Thomistic theology.

Luther a Humanist

Though Luther studied under the Occamist theologians, some of those who were acquainted with Luther originally saw in him, among other things, a humanist.⁶⁵² Brecht asserts that during Luther's studies he became acquainted with Cicero and Livy from whom he inherited the humanistic heritage that was part of him even as he embraced the monastic life.⁶⁵³ The humanistic heritage played an important role later in Luther's life. It is suggested that humanism may have developed Luther's critical senses and made the departure from scholastic tradition easier for him.⁶⁵⁴ This would not be a surprise for the humanist pruning of classical sources led to a radical critique

⁶⁴⁶ Steinmetz, 1986, p47 Andreas Bodenstein charged that scholastic theology (including the views of the Thomist) capitulated to a new Pelagianism, a charge echoed by Luther several months later in his 'Disputation against Scholastic theology' (Denis R., Janz, Luther and late Medieval Thomism': A study in Theological Anthropology, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p 115-116

⁶⁴⁷ Ritter, 1963, p47

⁶⁴⁸ Steinmetz, 1986, p48-49

⁶⁴⁹ Steinmetz, 1986, p58

⁶⁵⁰ Steinmetz, 1986, p56

⁶⁵¹ Steinmetz, 1986, p57

⁶⁵² Brecht, 1985, p42

⁶⁵³ Brecht, 1985, p43

⁶⁵⁴ Brecht, 1985, p43

of ecclesiastical institutions and traditional theology.⁶⁵⁵ Humanism also influenced Luther's biblical exegesis. George points out that the development of linguistic analysis applied to scripture changed the way the bible was formerly read, and Luther took full advantage of this.⁶⁵⁶ But having said that, Luther still had his reservations. Brecht alleges that:

As a theologian and biblical expositor, Luther also had some of his roots in the humanism of his student days. Nevertheless, he applied what humanism offered in his own way. Final authority for him, were not the classical authors.⁶⁵⁷

What all the above show is that, though Luther had lots of influences, he picked and chose what best suits his purpose from the different theologies and studies that he encountered.

Having said that, Luther's nominalistic heritage is alleged to have remained dominant over the humanistic heritage.⁶⁵⁸ But is this what makes the difference between the humanist Calvin and the humanist Luther?

Arguably, this may be one aspect of it, but what makes the difference between the two reformers is much more than that. The nature of the schools where they studied, the scholars with whom they associated and their personal development have parts to play. Luther studied in Erfurt and Wittenberg, whereas Calvin studied in Montaigu and Orleans.⁶⁵⁹ He studied under the nominalist John Major, and through him was aware of Luther's thesis.⁶⁶⁰ Secondly, the humanists with whom Luther associated are different from those of Calvin. Calvin according to Wendel, studied under Guillaume Budé, for whom the re-establishment of good literature was infinitely more important than attack upon Roman dogmatics.⁶⁶¹ He also studied under Pierre de l'Estoile, who was open-minded to humanism, with a readiness to appropriate it to his own use.⁶⁶² It is also probable that Calvin had more opportunity than Luther had and was more devoted to humanist studies,⁶⁶³ just as Luther was much more devoted to biblical studies.

One other thing that influenced their reading of the text was their knowledge of the biblical languages, Greek and Hebrew. Luther studied Greek and Hebrew associated in

⁶⁵⁵ George, 1988, p48

⁶⁵⁶ George, 1988, p48 According to George, Luther find in the fresh reading of the original texts of Matt. 4: 17 Greek word *metanoia* incorporated by Erasmus in his 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament borrow from Lorenzo Valla (humanist) 1457, rendering, a basis for his formal assault on the practice of indulgence.

⁶⁵⁷ Brecht, 1985, p43

⁶⁵⁸ Brecht, 1985, p43

⁶⁵⁹ Wendel, 1963, p21

⁶⁶⁰ Wendel, 1963, p19

⁶⁶¹ Wendel, 1963, p20-21

⁶⁶² Wendel, 1963, p22

⁶⁶³ Wendel, 1963, p23

the early days with the '*via moderna*,⁶⁶⁴ while Calvin studied Greek under Mechion Womar of Rothweil, a convinced Lutheran.⁶⁶⁵ George suggests that the most positive contribution of the humanist scholars to religious renewal of the sixteenth century was the series of critical editions of the Bible and the Church Fathers, which were disseminated due to the phenomenal success of the printing press.⁶⁶⁶ The study of the Bible, which is much helped by Luther and Calvin's humanistic heritage, influenced their theology and exegesis in no small measure. Ritter suggests that the most important element that influenced Luther is the intensive study of the Bible and its earlier commentators in which he gradually tried to introduce the new aid of humanistic philology.⁶⁶⁷ How their different studies influenced their reading of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus hopefully would be seen in the following. Having said that about the background of the two famous reformers, Luther and Calvin, what I want to look at now is the way they interpreted some of the texts that dwell on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus. The first of the texts to be considered is Jn.15, the passage that dwells on abiding in Jesus the true vine.

Abiding in Jesus the true vine Jn.15

As was said earlier, Luther and Calvin devoted a lot of time to the study of the Johannine gospel and they dwell substantially on Jn.15, one of the main passages where the notion of unity and abiding in Jesus comes across in the fourth gospel. Though both devoted much time to the study of the passage they read it differently. As a first generation reformer, Luther's main preoccupation was how to defend his position against that of the Roman church that he was having a fierce controversy with. On the other hand Calvin's experience was that of a second-generation reformer who, having embraced the reformers' theology, was preoccupied with its consolidation, most especially the new found doctrine of justification, doctrine of grace and the concept of union with Christ. The question is does one see the reflection of Luther and Calvin's various preoccupations in their interpretation of Jn.15?

⁶⁶⁴ Steinmetz, 1986, p60

⁶⁶⁵ Wendel, 1963, p23

⁶⁶⁶ George, 1988, p48

⁶⁶⁷ Ritter, 1963, p45

Jn.15: An admonition to endurance

Luther opines that Jn.15 was an address by the Johannine Jesus to the apostles after supper on the way to the garden.⁶⁶⁸ He suggests that Jesus used the parable to teach his own to have a view of the affliction and suffering of Christians which is far different from what appears on the surface and before the world.⁶⁶⁹ Luther was of the contention that the vine and branches parable depicts the suffering which Christ and his Christians must endure on earth.⁶⁷⁰ This seems at least strange, to find the idea of suffering in the vine branches parable. One wonders how this works out. Luther points out that the passage indicates that the vine went through pruning just as did the branches. "Through my cross and my death I shall come to my glory, begin my reign, and be acknowledged and believed throughout the world."⁶⁷¹ One sees Luther here talking about the theology of the cross as opposed to the theology of glory. Luther advocates that the time for reading this text is the time of trial.⁶⁷² He relates this to his own trial, which he saw as the time of pruning and fertilizing predicted by the Johannine Jesus.

Hence, Luther does not just interpret the text, he allowed the text to interpret his own experiences. This is basically a reflection of Luther's confrontation with the Church of Rome. Being a first-generation reformer, he had his whole life caught up in the confrontation and persecution associated with the division in the early days of the reformation. Luther's bitter experience during the early days of division shines out in his interpretation of the text. This is slightly different with the second-generation reformers. Calvin opines that 'I am the true vine' (Jn.15: 1) means that we are, by nature, barren and dry, except in so far as we have been engrafted into Christ, and draw from him a power which is new, and which does not proceed from ourselves.⁶⁷³ Calvin pointed out from the outset that in his reading of the passage, he adopts the opinion that Jesus compared himself to a field planted with vines, and compared his disciples to the plants themselves.⁶⁷⁴ He suggests that there are three principle parts in the chapter: the first part tells us that we have no power of doing anything except what comes from God himself. The second is that the branches have a root in Jesus, and are pruned by the Father and thirdly, that he removes the unfruitful branches, that they may

⁶⁶⁸ Luther's Work, vol.24, p193 (W, XLV, 636)

⁶⁶⁹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p193 (W, XLV, 636)

⁶⁷⁰ Luther's Work, vol.24, p194 (W, XLV, 637)

⁶⁷¹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p195 (W, XLV, 638)

⁶⁷² Luther's Work, vol.24, p195 (W, XLV, 638)

⁶⁷³ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p106 (Ioh. Com. 942) I

be thrown into fire and burned.⁶⁷⁵ Calvin suggested that the essential teaching in the passage is the necessity of grace for every good thing, even for abiding in Jesus. He insists that this grace comes only from Jesus⁶⁷⁶. One interesting thing about Calvin's thought on grace is that he denies the idea of universal grace, permanent grace, one implanted in man by nature. Calvin argues that this was Jesus' emphasis that the vital sap, all life and strength proceed from Jesus alone.⁶⁷⁷ Here one sees the evidence of how Calvin understood the meaning of grace and how it works with the believers. Calvin argues that the nature of man is unfaithful and destitute of everything good, because no man has the nature of a vine till he is implanted in him, which is given to the elect alone by special grace.⁶⁷⁸

Thus, Calvin gave an entirely new concept of election and special grace. Through this one gets into Calvin's method of interpretation; interpreting in terms of doctrine. Calvin became a theologian only after he left the Catholic Church. It would not be a surprise to see him chart his own theology. And one of the ways of getting this across would be through preaching and exposition of the biblical texts, which is precisely what he did.

Pruning of fruitful branches Jn.15: 2

The Johannine Jesus after talking about the disciples abiding in him spoke about the gain that accrues to those who are fruit bearing. 'Every branch in me that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more' (Jn.15: 2). The two reformers differ on the understanding of the meaning of pruning and on the means by which this is carried out. Luther opines that God is the vinedresser, who does the pruning; but alleges that he carries out the work of pruning sometimes through the use of the devil 'Praise God, who can use the devil and his malice to serve our good.'⁶⁷⁹ He suggests how God does the pruning;

He does not let him be idle but sends him trials, which compel him to exercise his faith: He lets the devil and the world hound him with external and internal persecutions.⁶⁸⁰

Luther maintains that God the vinedresser does this solely for the good of Jesus' own.

⁶⁷⁴ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p107 (Ioh. Com. 942)

⁶⁷⁵ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p107 (Ioh. Com. 942)

⁶⁷⁶ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p107 (Ioh. Com.942.)

⁶⁷⁷ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p107 (Ioh. Com. 942)

⁶⁷⁸ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p107 (Ioh. Com. 942)

⁶⁷⁹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p195 (W, XLV, 638)

⁶⁸⁰ Luther's Work, vol.24, p209 (W, XLV, 651)

We must surely acknowledge him a great master, who knows how to employ the devil's and all the world's wickedness for the vine's good and not for its harm and ruin, as these intend⁶⁸¹

Luther alleges that the reason for the pruning is for them to become sure and strong in order that they may praise God all the more, pray, preach and confess.⁶⁸² This is quite different from the opinion that one is used to. It would mean that God the vinedresser sometimes employs the hand of the devil in his work of pruning of the disciples. Once again Luther applied the text to his situation, and applied his situation to the text. Luther perceives his situation, most especially his trial, as a process of pruning whereby God uses those under whom he felt persecuted as a means of pruning him. This would mean that the running battle he had with the Roman church, whose authority he challenged was a means of purification for him.

Calvin is of the view that by the Johannine Jesus talking about the branches being pruned, He shows that believers need incessant culture, that they may be prevented from degenerating. Calvin maintains that this means that believers produce nothing good, unless God continually apply his hand; "For it will not be enough to have been once made partakers of adoption, if God does not continue the work of his grace in us."⁶⁸³

Here again Calvin enunciates the doctrine of grace. He insists that the word pruning was suppose to serve as a warning to Jesus' disciples to be on their guard because man's flesh by nature abounds in superfluities and destructive vices, which grow and multiply without end, if one is not cleansed and pruned by the hand of God.⁶⁸⁴ Thus, for Calvin, pruning enables the branches to yield more abundant fruits, which he reckons as the progress of believers in the course of true religion.⁶⁸⁵ Thus the pruning is to prevent the branches from vices that are natural to it. Who and what does the pruning is God's hand.

Hence, the two reformers differ in their interpretation of the meaning of pruning and how this is carried out. While Luther talks about God employing an outside help, a third party in pruning Jesus' own, this idea did not surface in Calvin. For him the one who does the work of pruning is the Father. One could ask what might be responsible for this difference in approach and interpretation? It is possible that what was

⁶⁸¹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p195-196 (W, XLV, 638-639)

⁶⁸² Luther's Work, vol.24, p209 (W, XLV, 651)

⁶⁸³ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁶⁸⁴ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁶⁸⁵ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

responsible for this difference was their situations and experiences, and what was happening at the time they worked on the exposition of the text?

Luther reflects the experience of the first-generation Protestant reformer. He felt more of the persecution than did Calvin. The whole problem started with him, and it is not impossible that he bore the burden of being the leading figure in the reformation and seems more vocal about his trial. Calvin on the other hand was more caught up in the late controversy over nature and grace. His preoccupation was the doctrine of justification and grace which has become also a debate among the Reformers.

Unfruitful Branches: Jn.15: 2

The Johannine Jesus said, 'every branch in me that bears no fruit, He takes away' (Jn.15: 2). Luther opines that in this statement, Jesus distinguished sharply among those who are called branches on the vine.⁶⁸⁶ He alleges that those who are cut away are false Christians, 'suckers' or wild branches, who hinder others and their being cut off is to the advantage of the good branches.⁶⁸⁷ Luther points out that those cut away used to be part of the vine, but they do not remain; they were baptized, heard the gospel, had forgiveness of their sins, at first in Jesus, but degenerated into wild offshoots and were Christians in name only.⁶⁸⁸ Luther alleges that these are good in appearance but do not teach and confess the word properly. Luther calls them 'schismatic spirits and false brethren'.⁶⁸⁹ There is no doubt that Luther's polemic here is directed at the Roman church that he accused of not confessing the Word properly. Luther's grouse with the Roman Church is not adhering properly to the Word. Interestingly the Roman Church is not the only one that Luther turned the search light on in his interpretation. He has some words for those he called the indolent Christians. Luther states that the second group of branches that would be cut off are the indolent Christians, who had the word and pure doctrine, but who do not live in conformity with it.⁶⁹⁰ In this regard then those who would be cut off are those who do not treat the word of God accordingly. What matters most is teaching and confessing the word properly.

Thus, Luther's reading of the passage shows that apart from the Catholic Church, Luther was involved in controversy with other sects of Christians. It also shows Luther for what he was, verbose, and wordy in his interpretations. Consequently those who

⁶⁸⁶ Luther's Work, vol.24, p201 (W, XLV, 644)

⁶⁸⁷ Luther's Work, vol.24, p201 (W, XLV, 644)

⁶⁸⁸ Luther's Work, vol.24, p201 (W, XLV, 644)

⁶⁸⁹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p201 (W, XLV, 644)

Luther would regard as being called to be in unity would be true Christians, which excludes bad and indolent Christians.

Calvin states that Jesus declared that every branch in me that bears no fruit would be cut off to awaken anxious inquiry. He alleges that the reason why Jesus did this is because men sometimes corrupt the grace of God, others suppress it maliciously, while others choke it by carelessness.⁶⁹¹ Calvin claims that this needs to be pointed out because many branches, which by human reckoning are supposed to be in the vine, actually have no root in the vine.⁶⁹² Thus, for Calvin the branches that would be cut off are men who corrupt, suppress and who are careless about the grace of God. It is not possible for one who is grafted into Christ to be without fruit. Those who are without fruit that seem to be in the vine are not actually in him. What this would mean is that once one is grafted one cannot be without fruit. Once elected there is no going back. Thus, Luther and Calvin addressed the question of those who would be cut away. Both believe that some branches would be cut off, but differ on who these are. While Luther is of the view that these are those who do not teach and confess the word properly, Luther believes they were former Christians, who hinder the progress of the true believer. Calvin alleges that these are those who corrupt, suppress and are careless about the grace of God. But unlike Luther, he did not talk about them being a hindrance to the elect, rather as pretenders who were never elected, never ever really Christians. What makes the difference between Luther's interpretation and that of Calvin is where they placed their emphasis. Luther placed his emphasis on the importance of the Word, true confession, while Calvin placed his emphasis on the doctrine of grace and election.

The cleansed disciples Jn.15: 3

Jesus after talking about the fate of the unfruitful and fruit bearing branches gave a word of consolation to his disciples. 'You are clean already by means of the word that I have spoken to you' (Jn.15: 3). Luther opines that this is said about the true branches, those who have retained the doctrine as it is established in scripture in its truth and purity, as the apostles and prophets had it.⁶⁹³ This reflects Luther's belief in the idea of pure doctrine. Luther contends that what is here are words of consolation directed to

⁶⁹⁰ Luther's Work, vol.24, p202 (W, XLV, 644-645)

⁶⁹¹ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁶⁹² Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁶⁹³ Luther's Work, vol.24, p203 (W, XLV, 645)

persecuted believers who suffer much grief and great harm from false spirits, besides the persecution they experienced at the hands of the world and the devil.⁶⁹⁴ This is not surprising for Luther had already said that the passage is one to be read at the time of trial. He is the persecuted, and his persecutors are the unfruitful branches.

Luther states that through the words ‘You are already made clean by the word which I have spoke to you’ (Jn.15: 3), Jesus offers a fine preservative against presumption of one’s own holiness to remind them that they are not clean by virtue of their deeds, suffering fruit.⁶⁹⁵ Luther contends that this means that the bearing of fruit is consequent upon being pruned, which made them good and true branches.⁶⁹⁶ He maintains that the words are to remind believers that their suffering is not the cleanness itself, and it is not what makes them clean in the sight of God. Rather it serves to drive them to grasp and hold the word with a better and firmer grip, in order that in this way faith may become active.⁶⁹⁷

Therefore, for Luther work is not what justifies, good work only comes after one has been justified, made clean through the word. The word according to Luther is Jesus’ entire sermon.⁶⁹⁸ He further states the word does cleanse. One may ask what does the word cleanse? From what are the disciples cleansed? Luther points out that ‘The word makes man clean when the heart takes hold of it in faith, that is, it brings forgiveness of sin and makes man acceptable to God.’⁶⁹⁹ Luther was of the contention that with this statement Jesus taught the real core of Christian doctrine; how man is purified and justified before God.⁷⁰⁰ Luther points out that the cleansing justification comes about through acceptance of the word of faith.⁷⁰¹ Thus for Luther, in the order of execution, man is first declared clean by God’s word and then second is constantly pruned and cleansed.⁷⁰² But how does this work out?

Luther alleges that after the first action, whatever impurities and sins, that still cling to one are not imputed to one.

This weak, imperfect, and inchoate purity is reckoned as wholly perfect purity. God makes a sign of the cross over it (blesses it) and acknowledges it, and he closes an eye to the uncleanness that still remains in me.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁴ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p204 (W, XLV, 647)

⁶⁹⁵ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p210-211 (W, XLV, 652-653)

⁶⁹⁶ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p211 (W, XLV, 653)

⁶⁹⁷ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p211 (W, XLV, 653)

⁶⁹⁸ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p211 (W, XLV, 653)

⁶⁹⁹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p211 (W, XLV, 653)

⁷⁰⁰ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p211 (W, XLV, 653)

⁷⁰¹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p212 (W, XLV, 654)

⁷⁰² Luther’s Work, vol.24, p212 (W, XLV, 654)

⁷⁰³ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p212 (W, XLV, 654)

Luther therefore argues that what this shows is that the cleanness of Christians does not come from the fruit they bear but that, conversely, their fruit and work spring from the cleanness, which they already have from the word, by which the heart is cleansed.⁷⁰⁴ In Luther's interpretation of this passage he brought into the fore the main reformation doctrine, the doctrine of justification upon which all the reformation theology is built.

Calvin states that in the words in Jn.15: 3 Jesus reminds his own that they have already experienced in themselves what he had said; that they have been planted in him, and have also been cleansed or pruned.⁷⁰⁵ Calvin suggests that the means through which they are clean is doctrine, (doctrine of the gospel) outward preaching, words that the disciples have heard from the mouth of Jesus.⁷⁰⁶ One sees that in Calvin's interpretation he points to another angle; he contends that Jesus did not mean that the apostles are pure from sin, rather Jesus held out to them their experience, that they may learn from it that the continuance of grace is absolutely necessary.⁷⁰⁷ Once again Calvin did not disappoint. He interpreted the passage doctrinally.

Thus, Luther and Calvin in their interpretation of Jn.15: 3 differ in their reading on what the believers are clean from. While Luther alleges that they are cleansed from sin, the idea is not well articulated by Calvin. What seems to be responsible for the differences in their interpretation of this passage is their understanding of the concept of justification. While Luther believes that after one has been justified through acceptance of the word of faith, God closes his eyes to whatever impurities and sins still cling to one and are not imputed to one and thereby one is made clean. Calvin was convinced that believers are not totally cleansed from sin and so in continuous need of grace. This shows once again where the two reformers placed their emphases: While Luther placed his in the confession of the word of faith, Calvin placed his on the importance of grace. Also while Luther read scripture from his own vantage point, using interpretation as a polemic against those who he perceived were his persecutors; Calvin used the interpretation of the passage in making doctrinal points about grace. This shows once more that the interpreters' experiences influence the reading of the text.

What I intend to look at now is Luther and Calvin's reading of Jn.15: 4, the main verse on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus.

⁷⁰⁴ Luther's Work, vol.24, p212 (W, XLV, 654)

⁷⁰⁵ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷⁰⁶ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p108 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷⁰⁷ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

‘Abide in me and I in you’ Jn.15: 4

The Johannine Jesus after talking about the repercussion of abiding and not abiding, went into the heart of the matter ‘Remain in me as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me’ (Jn.15: 4). Luther believes that the words of the Johannine Jesus in Jn.15: 4 are an admonition, ‘if you want to continue bearing fruit, remain in me through faith’.⁷⁰⁸ He suggests that it is a warning by Jesus that the believers must not allow any trial to alienate and tear them from the faith.⁷⁰⁹ Luther opines that Jesus gave the warning because he foresaw how difficult it would be to remain in him in the face of the many obstacles that the devil would throw in the way, ‘For it will require great exertion and be very dangerous to remain in him’.⁷¹⁰ Where are all these views coming from? There is no doubt that Luther reads through his experience, an attitude betrayed by some of Luther’s utterances.

Therefore see that you remain true in me and that you do not permit the hypocrites, who claim to be the true branches to mislead you, lest you, like them and with them, be uprooted and cast away.⁷¹¹

Luther points out that the fruits being referred to by the Johannine Jesus are not natural fruits but fruits that remain eternally, with no end.⁷¹² He argues that the text refers solely to a life conducted so as to please God both here and there, a life alien to the heathen and the Turk, a Christian and everlasting life.⁷¹³

Calvin perceives the words of the Johannine Jesus ‘Abide in me’ as an exhortation. He states that Jesus again exhorts the disciples to be earnest and careful in keeping the grace that they had received, for the carelessness of the flesh can never be sufficiently aroused.⁷¹⁴ Calvin contends that:

Jesus has no other object in view than to keep us as a hen keeps her chickens under her wings (Matt.23: 37), lest our indifference should carry us away, and makes us fly to our destruction.⁷¹⁵

Calvin maintains that in this statement, Jesus promises that his spirit will always be efficacious in his own if they do not prevent him. Thus, Jesus abides in the believers

⁷⁰⁸ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p213 (W, XLV, 655)

⁷⁰⁹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p213 (W, XLV, 655)

⁷¹⁰ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p215-216 (W, XLV, 657-658)

⁷¹¹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p216-217 (W, XLV, 658-659)

⁷¹² Luther’s Work, vol.24, p214 (W, XLV, 655)

⁷¹³ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p214 (W, XLV, 655-656)

⁷¹⁴ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷¹⁵ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

through his spirit, which is part of the work of salvation.⁷¹⁶ Calvin seems to juxtapose grace and Jesus' spirit. Once again the element of grace comes out from Calvin's reading of the text.

Hence, while Luther sees the words of Jesus in Jn.15: 4 as an admonition and a warning to believers not to allow trials to separate them from faith, Calvin read it as an exhortation to believers to keep the grace already received.

Those who abide in Jesus

Luther points out that those who abide are those whose deeds, sufferings, worship of God proceed from the word that Christ proclaims.⁷¹⁷ Therefore, those who do not abide are the opposite of these. But not surprisingly, Luther went further to name those who do not abide. These are the advocates of good works as a means of cleansing from sin, who teach that one must always doubt and can never be certain of being in Christ that is, in God's grace and of bearing true fruit.⁷¹⁸ Consequently, those who do not abide in Jesus are those who disagree with Luther's notion of justification.

Luther was convinced that what we have in Jn.15: 4 'unless you abide in me . . . neither can you unless you abide in me' give the assurance that God is gracious to us and pleased with us.⁷¹⁹

Likewise as long as a man remains in Christ and receives and retains sap and strength from him through faith- Christ works in him with his power and the gifts of the Holy spirit- the weakness still inherent in him and incited by the devil and his evil nature cannot harm him.⁷²⁰

Thus, for Luther, the words of Jesus in this passage support the reformation concept of justification.

Calvin argues that when Jesus said he who abides in me bears much fruit, it was a declaration that all who have a living root in him are fruit-bearing branches.⁷²¹ This would mean those who have Jesus' spirit in them are those who are-fruit bearing and they are the ones who abide in Jesus.

Thus, Luther and Calvin dwell on the words of Jesus in Jn.15: 4 but differ on what it is and why Jesus said it. While Luther believes that it was a word of admonition, to warn the disciples to be on their guard, Calvin sees it as an exhortation to the elect to keep the grace of God that they have already received. Also while Luther talked about the

⁷¹⁶ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷¹⁷ Luther's Work, vol.24, p217 (W, XLV, 658)

⁷¹⁸ Luther's Work, vol.24, p217-218 (W, XLV, 658-659)

⁷¹⁹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p219 (W, XLV, 660)

⁷²⁰ Luther's Work, vol.24, p221 (W, XLV, 662)

difficulty of remaining in Jesus, Calvin spoke about the possible of being careless about the grace of God. This once again shows that Calvin believed in the necessity of grace for abiding.

Necessity of Grace for abiding Jn.15: 5

Luther states that the statement ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ is a brief conclusion and a clear explanation that if the believers do not remain in Jesus and become regenerated Christians through him, they would do nothing try as they will.⁷²²

This is still a condemnation of work, of human effort not relying on God alone.

Calvin insists that what this means is that so long as we are separated from him, we bear no fruit that is good and acceptable to God; we cannot do anything good.⁷²³ In his interpretation of these passages, he attacked the Catholic position that advocates man’s co-operation or collaboration with the grace of God to do well, work along with grace. He alleges that the Catholic position is that, ‘we can do nothing without Christ, but aided by him, we have something of ourselves in addition to his grace.’⁷²⁴

Calvin insists that the phrase ‘without me’ must be explained as meaning ‘except from me’.⁷²⁵ Therefore, he would not succumb to anything less than his own view.

Calvin also accused the Catholics of upholding the view that the branch has something from nature. He vehemently disagrees with this position. He insisted that what the Johannine Jesus taught was that one only becomes a branch at the time when one is united to him (one is dry and useless wood before one is in him). For him, Jesus did not explain what the branch has naturally, before it becomes united to the vine.⁷²⁶

Calvin therefore presumed that since Jesus did not say it, the branch must be assumed to have nothing before it became part of the vine.

Hence, for Luther and Calvin, abiding in Jesus does not come through one’s own effort. Luther opines that those who can do any thing are those who are regenerated, while Calvin believes that nothing is possible at all if separated from God. One has to be in Jesus before one can bear fruit; anyone outside is an unfruitful branch open to grave repercussions.

⁷²¹ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷²² Luther’s Work, vol.24, p227 (W, XLV, 668)

⁷²³ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p109 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷²⁴ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷²⁵ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 943)

⁷²⁶ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 943)

The fate of unfruitful branches Jn.15: 6

The Johannine Jesus said to his disciples ‘anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt’ (Jn.15: 6). Luther states that this is directed against those who are not sincere and believing Christians but arrogant spirits, who think that they are the only ones of this kind and imagine that they have the strength to take root and remain green even without Christ.⁷²⁷ This surely is polemical, an attack on those who held a different view on nature and grace from that of Luther.

Luther alleges that the cutting away means being ‘cut off from Christ and Christendom and deprived of the word of Baptism, and the sacrament, the intercession of Christ, his blood, his Spirit and everything there is in Christ and in Christendom’.⁷²⁸ Luther also gave his own view about what it means to wither.

Luther states that this means that the condition of these people will steadily deteriorate until finally they become callous and hardened, like branches that have lost their sap and are now entirely withered and no longer pliant but only break.⁷²⁹ Luther opines that those who are burnt will remain in the fire forever and be burned to powder (Mk.9: 48) where the fire is not quenched.⁷³⁰ This is Luther at his best; as I said earlier Luther is very wordy most especially in his polemics.

Calvin opines that in this statement, ‘if anyone abide in me’ (Jn.15: 6), Jesus laid before his own the punishment for ingratitude, a word of admonition to perseverance. He suggests that in this call, the exhortation to fear is a gift of God, to prevent the flesh through too great indulgence from rooting one out.⁷³¹ Therefore, for him what we have here are kind words from Jesus to warn one against being cast out which would ultimately lead to withering. Calvin alleges that those who are cut off from Jesus wither like dead branches because both the commencement and uninterrupted continuance of strength is from Jesus.⁷³² He maintains here that the elect are not effected, but those who are effected are those who are not the elect but who appear as the elect. He refers to these as

Many hypocrites, who in outward appearance, flourish and green for a time, but who afterwards, when they ought to yield fruit, show the very opposite of that which the Lord

⁷²⁷ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p235 (W, XLV, 675)

⁷²⁸ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p236 (W, XLV, 676)

⁷²⁹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p237 (W, XLV, 677)

⁷³⁰ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p238 (W, XLV, 678)

⁷³¹ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 944)

⁷³² Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 944)

expects and demands from his people⁷³³

Calvin once again brought in the doctrine of divine election. He believes that once one is elected, chosen, there is no going back. Those who fall back are mere pretenders.

Thus, Luther and Calvin express the same view that the words here are addressed to those who are not in Jesus, but they differ in their understanding of who these are. While Luther sees these as those who refused to repent and come back into the fold as against those who abide who are in the fold, Calvin is of the conviction that these are the non-elect who have never been in the fold even if they once seemed to be in the fold.

Abiding in Jesus' Love Jn.15: 9

The Johannine Jesus after talking about the fate of those who do not abide said 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, abide in my love' (Jn.15: 9) this seems to suggest that Jesus gave an idea of how his own should remain in him. Luther claims that this is an instruction and command about the love that believers were to bear toward one another. He opines that the reason the Johannine Jesus spoke about this is that he foresaw a situation of disunity, of discord in Christendom.⁷³⁴ This would suggest that Luther saw this passage as a part of the Johannine text on the union of believers. He argues that what the statement means is that believers must hold firmly to love above all else, once they have come to faith in Jesus and have become his branches.⁷³⁵ Luther also suggests that Jesus placed the Father and himself before the eyes of his own as the noblest and most perfect example.⁷³⁶ What this would mean is that the believers must pattern their love on that between Jesus and the Father. Luther thus opened the discussion on unity. Jesus called his own, the believers to abide and to love one another in order to avert any occasion for disunity.

Calvin suggests that in the words of Jesus 'as the Father has loved me', Jesus does not refer to the sacred love of God the Father which he always had towards the Son. He argues that, rather, it is the design of Jesus to lay in the bosom of his own a sure pledge of God's love towards them.⁷³⁷ Thus, for Calvin, Jesus and the Father's love is not placed before the disciples as a pattern, rather it is an assurance of God's continuous

⁷³³ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p110 (Ioh. Com. 944)

⁷³⁴ Luther's Work, vol.24, p244 (W, XLV, 684)

⁷³⁵ Luther's Work, vol.24, p246 (W, XLV, 685-686)

⁷³⁶ Luther's Work, vol.24, p246 (W, XLV, 686)

⁷³⁷ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p112 (Ioh. Com. 944-945)

love for them.

Calvin also insists that ‘abide in my love’ does not mean that Jesus demands that his disciples should return his love. He opines that what Jesus is talking about here is his love toward his own, which means that Jesus’ own should continually enjoy that love with which Jesus once loved them and to take care not to deprive themselves of it. “For many reject the grace which is offered to them and many throw away what they once had in their hands.”⁷³⁸

What all this translates to is that since the believers have been once received into the grace of Christ, they must see that they do not fall from it through their own fault.⁷³⁹ Once again Calvin brought out the doctrine of grace, which alone enables one to abide in Jesus’ love.

Hence, Luther and Calvin differ on their understanding of the passage Jn.15: 9. While Luther is of the opinion that Jesus is putting the love between him and the Father before the disciples as an example to follow, Calvin saw it otherwise. He opines that what is put before them is Jesus’ pledge of God’s love for them. They also differ in their understanding of what ‘abide in my love’ is. While Luther in his reading saw Jesus talking about mutual love, Calvin denies the evidence of this, but rather opines that what Jesus is taking about is his love for his own.

Abiding through keeping the commandment Jn.15: 10

The Johannine Jesus said ‘If you keep my commandment you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandment and remain in His love.’ Luther opines that what we have here is an exhortation to believers (after they have become Jesus’ branches and now abide in him) to hold together in love. He opines that the reason why they must do this is in order not to be misled by alien doctrine and thus be cut off from him.⁷⁴⁰ Luther relates Jn.15: 10-12 to Jn.13: 35 ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ He argues that what this tells us is that for believers to remain in Jesus they must keep the commandment of love.⁷⁴¹ Luther argues that this means that faith and work must go hand in hand, and must be preached for either one is not enough. Preaching of faith alone, he argues, leads to false Christians, for no work ensues. He insists it must be faith and work with faith taking

⁷³⁸ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p112-113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷³⁹ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁰ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p249 (W, XLV, 6)

⁷⁴¹ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p249 (W, XLV, 6)

primacy of place.⁷⁴² Luther alleges that serving and helping the neighbour by promoting his welfare, by showing him fidelity and love, prove faith.⁷⁴³ Thus, for Luther, faith the primary thing necessary for abiding in Jesus must be accompanied with good work, love of the others.

Calvin argues that in the statement ‘if you keep my commandment’ (Jn.15: 10), Jesus points out to his own the method of perseverance, how to follow his call. He points out that this is done in two ways: through faith, and a good conscience and newness of life.⁷⁴⁴ He argues that those who do not prove that they are true disciples by true obedience reject the love of Jesus.⁷⁴⁵ Calvin also alleges that keeping the commandment, rendering obedience to Jesus, is not the cause why Jesus continues his love towards his disciples; rather, it is the effect of his love.⁷⁴⁶ What this would mean is that the believers keeping the commandment are part of the effect of Jesus’ love for them. Keeping the commandment is not what comes first, but rather the love of Jesus for his disciples, which enables them to keep the commandment. He insists that this is the reason why no one should claim that the security of his life depends on himself.⁷⁴⁷ Calvin called what enables believers to answer their calling ‘the Spirit of adoption of free grace’.⁷⁴⁸ This once again shows that Calvin’s main preoccupation is promoting the doctrine of grace. For him in order to keep the commandment of love, grace must have been given.

Calvin explains the way the believers are able to keep the commandment, the absolute perfection of righteousness that exceeds human capacity:

When Christ speaks of the desire of living a good and holy life, he does not exclude what is the chief article in his doctrine, namely, that which alludes to righteousness being freely imputed, in consequence of which, through a free pardon, our duties are accepted to God, which in themselves deserved to be rejected as imperfect and unholy.⁷⁴⁹

He then explains how this works. He points out that believers are reckoned as keeping the commandments of Christ when they apply their earnest attention to them, though they be far distant from the object at which they aim; for they are delivered from that rigorous sentence of the law’ (Deut. 27: 26).⁷⁵⁰ What this would mean is that what matters is that believers make the effort even if it is not sufficient and God takes care

⁷⁴² Luther’s Work, vol.24, p249 (W, XLV, 688)

⁷⁴³ Luther’s Work, vol.24, p250 (W, XLV, 689)

⁷⁴⁴ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁵ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁶ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁷ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁸ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p113 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁴⁹ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p114 (Ioh. Com. 945)

⁷⁵⁰ Calvin’s Commentary, vol. II, p114 (Ioh. Com. 945)

of the rest. Hence, Luther and Calvin differ on what it means to abide in Jesus through keeping the commandment. While Luther emphasizes the necessity of faith and work, serving and helping the neighbour, showing him fidelity and love, Calvin spoke about faith and good conscience and newness of life, with less emphasis on work.

Abiding in Jesus and loving one another Jn.15: 12

Luther states that this means that the disciples should allow Jesus' love for them to be reflected in their love for one another. He also points out that it may at the same time mean standing firm in the face of all trials and opposition.⁷⁵¹ Everything in this interpretation for Luther must be connected one way or the other with trial and opposition. He seems to be so obsessed by his trial. He was a man who is very conscious of being attacked. Luther states that there are two loves, the love of God and the love of others

This is the first love, our love for Christ. We must maintain it over against the hatred of the world. The second is that of love for one another.⁷⁵²

Calvin states that what this means is that believers should cherish mutual love among themselves.⁷⁵³ He also points out that the love for God is the first one, but the true proof of this is the love towards the neighbour. The neighbours being referred to here are believers.⁷⁵⁴ What this would mean is that it is a kind of love found among believers. Calvin also opines that in this instance Jesus puts himself forward as the true example to follow.⁷⁵⁵ One could see that though Calvin spoke about love of the neighbour, it is a restricted and exclusive love; love just for fellow believers.

Thus, for Luther and Calvin, the commandments of Jesus are given for a purpose. For Luther, lack of love for the others leads to cutting away from Jesus, whereas for Calvin the commandments are ways of perseverance in faith. While Luther advocates that one abides in Jesus through faith and work, Calvin alleges that one does through faith, good conscience and newness of life.

What I want to look at next is the reformers' reading of Jn.6, another Johannine passage that dwells on the question of abiding in Jesus.

⁷⁵¹ Luther's Work, vol.24, p247 (W, XLV, 686)

⁷⁵² Luther's Work, vol.24, p248 (W, XLV, 687)

⁷⁵³ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p116 (Ioh. Com. 946)

⁷⁵⁴ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p116 (Ioh. Com. 946)

⁷⁵⁵ Calvin's Commentary, vol. II, p116 (Ioh. Com. 946)

Abiding through eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood Jn.6

Though Jn.6 is mainly about Jesus, the bread of life, the chapter also dwells on the idea of abiding in Jesus. The Johannine Jesus after talking about the importance of eating his body, relates this to abiding in him. 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him' Jn.6: 56. The question is how did Luther and Calvin understand this statement and the other related ones in Jn.6?

The point of departure for Luther's exposition of the passage was the way Jn.6: 56 was interpreted earlier. He alleges that it was interpreted by some as meaning merely to meditate on Christ through contemplation of his suffering and death. Luther argues that these do not construe faith in Christ as the true spiritual indwelling of Christ in us, and our indwelling in Christ.⁷⁵⁶ Luther alleges that to dwell in Christ is to have faith in him, having Christ in one's heart, but insists that this is not meditation on Christ's suffering.

The Lord does not say your thoughts of me are in me' or 'My thoughts are in you; but rather 'you, you are in me, and I, I am in you'⁷⁵⁷

Luther contends that abide in me is a demand that Jesus' own be in him with body, life, soul, piety, and righteousness, with sin, folly, and wisdom; while Jesus is in them with his holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and salvation.⁷⁵⁸

On the question of what it means to eat the body of Jesus, Luther gave an insight into how this is done. He points out that it is done through hearing the gospel 'to hear the gospel from Christ, by letting one be taught and instructed and not resisting the message is to eat his flesh'.⁷⁵⁹ This sounds strange, how does hearing become eating? How does the gospel become the food? What this would mean is that those who abide in Jesus are those who hear the gospel from Christ. Those who do not abide would then be the opposite of these.

Those who do not abide in Jesus

Luther in his reading of the passage gave an idea of those whom he reckoned do not abide in Jesus. He points out that these are men who remain steeped in wickedness, in sins, and in error,⁷⁶⁰ the others are those who fail when confronted by trials, faced with

⁷⁵⁶ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p 144 (W, 33: 224-225)

⁷⁵⁷ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p144 (W, 33: 225)

⁷⁵⁸ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p144 (W, 33: 225)

⁷⁵⁹ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p151 (W, 33: 236-237)

⁷⁶⁰ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p144-145 (W, 33: 225-226)

loss of life, honour and goods and particularly with death. He maintains that one who remains is one who can confess Christ with heart and lips when it really counts.⁷⁶¹ Here again Luther allowed his experience to interpret the text. He and others like him who endure and confess Jesus in time of trial are those who truly abide in Jesus.

Luther argues that abiding in Jesus transcends human strength and human work.⁷⁶² Luther points out that Jesus is not present nor does he speak, act and has never been in those who recoil from the test of adversity. He argues that these people couldn't make their own the words of St. Paul: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal.2: 20)⁷⁶³ This fits in with Luther's life long 'principle' that not by work but by faith can one dwell in Christ.

Luther gave an insight into how one abides in Christ: 'Through faith in Christ and through eating, the poor sinners have him abiding in us with his might, power, strength, righteousness and wisdom.'⁷⁶⁴

Luther in the latter part of his exposition mentioned those who have misunderstood and probably misinterpret this passage. These are the Arians, the Sacramentarians and some unnamed schismatic spirits and fanatics.⁷⁶⁵ These are those he disagrees with. Luther concludes that the true meaning and significance, the sum and substance of this text, that Jesus abides in him who believes in him is that, no matter the situation, position, weakness of the believer, Christ is in him.⁷⁶⁶ This is still consistent with Luther's theological principle of Justification by faith, the idea of 'graciousness of God', God's passive righteousness.

Calvin states that in the statement 'he who eats my flesh', Jesus shows that the way the believers may enjoy this life is by eating his flesh; for there is no other way in which he (Jesus) can become the believers than by their faith being directed to his flesh.⁷⁶⁷ Calvin insists that when Jesus says that he lives in his own, the meaning is that the only bond of union and the way by which Jesus becomes one with the believers is when their faith relies on his death.⁷⁶⁸ He argues that Jesus here did not speak of an outward symbol that many unbelievers receive equally with believers and yet continue separated from Christ.⁷⁶⁹ What this suggests is that the passage is not about the Eucharist. Calvin

⁷⁶¹ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p145 (W, 33: 226)

⁷⁶² Luther's works, vol. 23, p145 (W, 33: 226)

⁷⁶³ Luther's works, vol. 23, p146 (W, 33: 227)

⁷⁶⁴ Luther's Works, vol.23, p146 (W, 33: 228)

⁷⁶⁵ Luther's Works, vol. 23, p147 (W, 33: 229)

⁷⁶⁶ Luther's works, vol. 23, p148 (W, 33: 230-231)

⁷⁶⁷ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p267-268 (Ioh. Com.807)

⁷⁶⁸ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p268 (Ioh. Com.807)

⁷⁶⁹ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p268 (Ioh. Com. 807)

further argues that it is a mockery to dream of any way of eating the flesh of Christ without faith, since faith alone is the mouth and the stomach of the soul.⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, for Calvin, eating the body of Jesus is directing one's faith at Jesus' flesh.

Thus, Luther and Calvin, both agree that those who abide in Jesus are those who have faith in him and eat the body of Jesus. But they differ in their interpretation of how one eats the body of Jesus. Luther opines that one does through faith and eating of the body of Jesus, which is different from contemplation of Jesus' suffering and death. Calvin is of the view that one eats Jesus' body by directing one's faith to his flesh, for faith is the mouth and stomach of the soul. The two reformers also differ in their views on the question of those who abide in Jesus. While Luther contends that those in whom Jesus abides are those who stand firm in time of trial and persecution, those who hold firm to the end, Calvin held the view that it is those whose faith is directed to Jesus' flesh and who rely on his death. From this one sees once again that while Calvin used his reading to propagate doctrine, pursue doctrinal debate with the Reformers, Luther allowed his experience to interpret the passage.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that Calvin did not think that Jn.6: 51-58 is about the Eucharist, but rather it was about doctrine, the doctrine of grace, which meaning was sealed by the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper.⁷⁷¹ Calvin believes that the discourse does not relate to the Lord's Supper, but rather to the communication of the flesh of Jesus obtained apart from the use of the Lord's Supper.⁷⁷² He was convinced that if it were about the Eucharist, all who partake of it would obtain life, which he believed was impossible. Calvin was also convinced that it would be inconceivable for the Johannine Jesus to talk about the Eucharist when it had not been instituted.⁷⁷³ For him it is more about grace received through faith.

Having said that about Luther and Calvin's reading of Jn.6 what I now want to look at is Calvin's reading of another text that dwells on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus. Even though one would have loved to look at Luther's reading of this same texts to have the opinion of another reformer on this very important text on unity and abiding in Jesus, unfortunately we do not have Luther's commentary on Jn.17. Nevertheless, the consolation is that Luther has already dwell substantially on the notion of unity and abiding in Jesus in the two previous texts we have considered and one can easily draw inference about his understanding of the idea of unity in John from these.

⁷⁷⁰ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p268 (Ioh. Com.807)

⁷⁷¹ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p266 (Ioh. Com.806)

⁷⁷² Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p265 (Ioh. Com.806)

⁷⁷³ Calvin's commentary, vol. 1, p266 (Ioh. Com.806)

In what follows, I intend to examine Calvin's reading of Jn.17, one of the main texts in John that dwells on the notion of unity and abiding in Jesus.

John Calvin on Jn.17: 20-23

Jn.17: 20-23: A prayer for union of believers

The Johannine Jesus said 'I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me' (Jn.17: 20). Calvin points out that the prayer here is directed to the apostles with extension to all the disciples of the gospel, so long as there shall be any of them to the end of the world.⁷⁷⁴ This is in line with the general interpretation that it is for all believers. That notwithstanding, Calvin already defined intrinsically who in his opinion are believers. These for him are the 'disciples of the gospel'. Though the phrase disciple of the gospel looks inclusive, it is equally exclusive. It excludes those who believe in tradition. Calvin is one of the reformers who upheld the reformation doctrine '*sola scriptura*'. Calvin seems to be polemical here. His interpretation of this passage is largely influenced by his conflict with the Catholic Church, the church that up-held the church tradition. Calvin would not want to have any thing to do with this church in regard to the question of Christian unity.

Calvin believed that the prayer for unity is for believers, excluding the members of the Roman church. Calvin as a reformer worked assiduously for the unity of believers. Despite his intransigence,⁷⁷⁵ he was ready to give certain concessions in the interest of unity and good understanding between churches produced by the reformation and was always ready to fight for the unity of these churches. He believed these were the churches that acknowledged the same Lord.⁷⁷⁶ The obvious fact is that Calvin's interpretation was influenced by his controversy with the Roman church.

Faith through the words of the Apostles Jn.17: 20

Calvin opines that through the clause, 'through their word' (Jn.17: 20), the Johannine Jesus reminds the believers that their faith ought to be directed at him, a confirmation that the faith of believers is founded on the gospel taught by the apostles. 'God is the author of faith, while men are the ministers by whom the believers believe' (1Cor.3:

⁷⁷⁴ Calvin's commentary, vol.2, p181(Ioh. Com.976)

⁷⁷⁵ Wendel, 1963 p57

5).⁷⁷⁷ This is a reflection of the reformation conviction that faith comes only through the preached word of God. Calvin opines that the papists' faith is far removed from this rule. He did not reckon them to be part of the 'us', those who know that their faith is founded on the gospel taught by the apostles.⁷⁷⁸ This is not surprising because Calvin would not want to have any thing to do with the Catholic Church. He condemns any reformers who associate with the Church, those often referred to as '*waverers*' or '*Nicodemites*'.⁷⁷⁹

Therefore, for Calvin, those who are not among the believers prayed for, to be in union, are papists who he accused of accepting the tradition of the Church as their only authoritative guide to what they shall believe.⁷⁸⁰ Calvin was convinced that Jesus did not approve any other faith than that which is drawn from the doctrine of the apostles as founded on their writings.⁷⁸¹ This is a reflection of how Calvin would interpret the main passage on unity and abiding in John where the Johannine Jesus prayed for his own to be one.

Unity of believer Jn.17: 21

The Johannine Jesus after talking about faith that comes through hearing the word prayed for his own 'That all may be one' (Jn.17: 21). Calvin was of the opinion that Jesus laid down the end of happiness as consisting in unity.⁷⁸² He also points out that Jesus spoke about unity to remind his own of how basely and shockingly the world is scattered, when separated from him. This would suggest that the cause of disunity is separation from Jesus, not abiding in Jesus. This would mean that the problem of disharmony is actually separation from Jesus. Calvin postulates that the kind of unity prayed for as Paul suggests is unity in one spirit (Eph.4: 3, 11-16).⁷⁸³ This I believe would mean spiritual union, one that resembles that of Jesus and the Father.

Unity of Jesus and the Father a model for unity of believers Jn.17: 21

Calvin was of the contention that whenever Christ declares that he is one with the Father, he does not speak simply of his Divine essence, but that he is called one as

⁷⁷⁶ Wendel, 1963, p101

⁷⁷⁷ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com.977)

⁷⁷⁸ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁷⁹ Wendel, 1963, p47

⁷⁸⁰ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁸¹ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁸² Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com977.)

regards his ‘mediatorial’ office and in so far as he is our head.⁷⁸⁴ Calvin contends that this is the right interpretation as against the interpretation presented by many of the fathers, who interpreted it as meaning that Christ is one with the Father, because he is the eternal God.⁷⁸⁵ (Calvin as earlier pointed out does not feel obliged to follow the teaching of the fathers). Calvin suggests that Jesus prayed for the unity of his own in order that his unity with the Father would not become fruitless and unavailing. He opines that the power of that unity must be diffused through the whole body of believers.⁷⁸⁶ The question is who are the believers?

Thus, for Calvin, in Jn.17: 21, Jesus reminds believers that the union of Jesus and the Father would become fruitless and unavailing if they are disunited. Interestingly, the same verse seems to convey the message that there are other reasons why the believers are to be united. This is in order that the world may believe that Jesus is the true emissary of the Father (Jn.17: 21).

Unity of believers and the fate of the world Jn.17: 21

Calvin points out that the word ‘world’ in Jn.17: 21 does not mean the elect, who at that time were still dispersed as imagined by some unnamed persons. He insists that throughout the whole chapter the word ‘world’ denotes the reprobates, as distinct from Jesus’ disciples.⁷⁸⁷ Calvin alleges that the mark of difference between Jesus’ disciples and the ‘world’ is the keeping of the doctrine of the gospel and the world for Calvin is all that is opposed to the salvation of the believers (Jn.16: 33)⁷⁸⁸ and the opposites of the ‘world’ are the elect.⁷⁸⁹ The world then in light of this would mean the non-elect.

In Calvin’s interpretation of this phrase one sees the hallmark of his exegesis, putting down the interpretation of others. This is also very obvious in his exposition of what it means to believe. Calvin took on the Evangelist himself for the use of the verb ‘to believe instead of ‘to know’.

Calvin contends that for the verb to know the Evangelist has inaccurately used the verb ‘believe.’ What this would mean is that the Johannine Jesus did not mean that the world, the reprobate would come to faith through the union of believers. Calvin was convinced that they do not deserve this. He argues that “It is just the vengeance of God

⁷⁸³ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁸⁴ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁸⁵ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p183 (Ioh. Com. 977)

⁷⁸⁶ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p184 (Ioh. Com. 977-978)

⁷⁸⁷ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p184 (Ioh. Com. 978)

⁷⁸⁸ Calvin’s commentary, vol. 2, p162 (Ioh. Com. 967)

that the splendour of Divine glory dazzles the eyes of the reprobate because they do not deserve to have a clear and pure view of it.⁷⁹⁰

This would suggest that it is not Jesus' intention that the world may believe in him. Faith then is just reserved for the elect, the partakers of the glory of Jesus Jn.17: 22.⁷⁹¹ These are those Jesus prayed for to be united.

Union of the Elect

It can be said that though we do not have Calvin's reading on Jn.17: 21 'May they be one,' he already alluded to this in his reading of Jn.17: 11. Calvin opines that the phrase 'that they may be one' points out the way in which the disciples shall be kept after the bodily departure of Jesus. He argues that those the heavenly Father has decreed to keep, (presumably the elect) he brings together in holy unity of faith and of the Spirit.⁷⁹² He further states that Jesus added 'as we are' to show the manner in which the oneness of the believers should be, since, in his opinion, it is not enough that men be agreed in some manner. He contends that the unity of the believers would be truly happy when it shall bear the image of God the Father and of Christ, as the wax takes the form of the seal, which is impressed upon it.⁷⁹³ Hence, for him, those who are being prayed for to be one are the elect. And the kind of unity that is being spoken about is unity of faith and of the Spirit.

Conclusion

Luther and Calvin, the two most famous of the Protestant reformers were among the scholars who devoted time and energy to the exposition of the Johannine texts, most especially the ones that dwell on the idea of unity and abiding in Jesus at the reformation period. This period when they wrote was the most turbulent time in the history of the church when the unity of the church that seems to have been intact for 1500 years was stretched to its limit. Though the two are separated by age (Luther being a first generation reformer and Calvin a second-generation reformer), culture and education, they had their meeting points. Both were involved in the Protestant reformation struggle over and against the Roman Church, a struggle for the restoration

⁷⁸⁹ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p173 (Ioh. Com.972)

⁷⁹⁰ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p184 (Ioh. Com.978)

⁷⁹¹ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p185 (Ioh. Com.978)

⁷⁹² Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p175 (Ioh. Com.973)

of the divided church back to its lost unity (restoration of evangelical unity return to primitive biblical Christianity). Both reformers attempted restoring the evangelical unity through their teachings most especially through their exposition of scripture, which is reflected in their interpretation of the Johannine texts that dwell on the unity of believers.

The two reformers dwell substantially on the exposition of Jn.6 and 15, Calvin equally paid much attention to Jn.17. In their exposition, they gave insight into the meaning in the text but in the attempt to explain the text in line with their fundamental principles they allowed themselves to fall into some fallacies of which they accused others. Luther who was of the view that the saintly fathers, who were also human beings themselves, must be read with discernment where they follow their own views,⁷⁹⁴ brought his own opinion to bear on his interpretations. On the other hand Calvin who accused the fathers of mis-interpretation of the text fell short of this same fault. Though Calvin and Luther held the view that the authority over the word is the word of God, they arrogate this authority to themselves in their interpretation of the word. Luther would not acknowledge any limitation. He made himself the centre of all knowledge of the word of God; though he claimed that Jesus is the centre, he made himself the one who knows and can lead others to this centre, i.e. the mind of God and the teacher. For this he was even challenged by Calvin. There is no doubting Luther's intelligence but he allowed the controversy most especially the one he had with the Roman Church to interpret the text and to lead him to extremes. His interpretation was verbose, which is one of the things that make the difference between Luther and Calvin.

Calvin though could equally be said to be fundamental in his interpretation of the text and opposed to the Roman church dogmatic stance, but he was not as loquacious as Luther. His careful and close reading of the text has much to contribute to the interpretation of the pericope but sometimes in his exposition went against some of his own principles. One of these is the principle that the chief virtue of an interpreter lies in lucid brevity.⁷⁹⁵ Calvin in some of his exposition gave interpretations that were wider than the meaning of the text. Though Calvin is said to be of the conviction that the locus of authority in interpretation does not rest with those who seek to know or interpret it or even the Church,⁷⁹⁶ he arrogated authority to himself in his exposition of the texts. One other attribute of Calvin that I found lacking in his exposition of the

⁷⁹³ Calvin's commentary, vol. 2, p175 (Ioh. Com.973)

⁷⁹⁴ Luther's work vol. 30, p299-300

⁷⁹⁵ McKim, 1998, p173, Parker, 1971, p51

⁷⁹⁶ Torrance, 1988, p64

pericope is his desire for really judicious interpretation, which involves setting opposing views side by side for readers' judgement.⁷⁹⁷ There is no doubt that he attempted to do this but he was not objective enough. He is always quick in condemning the position of those with whom he did not agree.

There are certain things responsible for the way the two went about their interpretation. The most obvious was the controversy they had with the Roman church. Luther's interpretations reflect the theology of the cross, which was due to his own affliction, the situation of persecution, whereas Calvin laid more emphasis on the doctrine of grace. All these show once again that interpretation is affected by the interpreters' situation.

Apart from this, the reformers' interpretations were influenced by other factors. One of these was their religious experience. Luther as a theologian and a biblical interpreter depended much on his personal spiritual experience. He was more convinced about new knowledge acquired through his closer reading of the texts enhanced by his good knowledge of the biblical languages than any other learning. One of the things he learnt through this is the notion of justification by faith. It was always his conviction or nothing else, which made him controversial. But Luther was not afraid to be seen as being controversial; he in fact gloried in it. The same could be said of Calvin, who though influenced by Luther was critical of Luther for making himself another authority apart from the word of God.

Other sources of influence on the two reformers were their studies and the scholars with whom they associated. The most significant of these was their humanistic studies, and the humanists with whom they were associated. Both Luther and Calvin drew on the tradition of humanism and applied their humanistic principles to the biblical exegesis. While this is much more apparent in Calvin's interpretations, it was mixed in Luther. But having said that, their humanistic heritage helped to prepare them for the eventual break from scholastic theology. For the humanism they imbibed was opposed to scholasticism. One sees that Calvin's elegant commentaries have roots in the humanist tradition, while Luther's humanist heritage helped to modify his understanding of grace.

The two differ in the reading of some of the passages in the texts on unity and abiding in Jesus. While Calvin believes that those prayed for to be united were the elect, those who uphold the doctrine of the gospel, Luther did not talk much about the elect, as did Calvin. On the question of the kind of unity prayed for, while Luther spoke about unity

⁷⁹⁷ Torrance, 1988, p110

of faith, Calvin talked more about unity of 'faith and of the spirit', a kind of spiritual union. On the question of those prayed for to be in unity, Luther was of the contention that it was those who abide in Jesus, those who have retained the doctrine as it is established in scripture in its truth and purity, those who confess the word of faith. For Calvin, it is a union of the disciple of the gospel, those in whom abide Jesus' spirit, and grace; these are those who open themselves constantly to God's grace. For him this excludes those who believe in tradition as to what they believe. On the question of how the unity prayed for comes about, Luther held the view that the way the unity of believers comes about is through holding firmly to love above all things, a love that is patterned on that of Jesus and the Father, the Divine love. But unlike Luther, Calvin did not see the Divine love as being placed before the believers as a pattern; rather it is an assurance of God's continuous love for them, which enables the unity prayed for to come about.

The two reformers also touched on why the Johannine Jesus prayed for the believers to be in unity. Luther believes that Jesus did so because he foresaw a time when disunity would undermine Christendom, while Calvin is of the view that the reason why Jesus prayed that the believers should be united is in order for the divine unity not to be fruitless and unavailing. All these show once again the potential for meaning of the biblical text.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus have a long history of interpretation and form part of the Johannine texts that continue to generate interest in modern times. This is due to the ever-widening interest and concern for the unity of believers, which reminds one that the history of reception of these texts cannot be separated from the history of the church, of which it is an integral part.

The thesis has shown that the various Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus are very important and have been read at different periods in the history of the church, as is being done today. The history of the reading of the texts is that in every age people look to the texts to provide a theological basis for unity, and to provide a whole culture for people to live their lives by. But part of the problem is the diversity of understanding of the Johannine notion of unity attributable to the complex nature of the text and the ambiguities therein. Some of the diversity is attributable to the use of images like the 'vine' in Jn.15: 1, 'pruning' (Jn.15: 2), 'clean' (Jn.15: 3), which lend themselves easily to be read in a variety of ways. Others are certain ambiguous statements like 'abide in me, as I in you' (Jn.15: 4), a phrase, which can be read either as an imperative, or an indicative; in such cases, the interpreter's choice may be influenced by his or her theological preferences, needs, concern and situation. Other complex metaphors in the texts are 'Eat my flesh and drink my blood' (Jn.6: 54, 56), 'Coming to Jesus' (Jn.6: 35, 44, 45, 65), 'Believe in Jesus' (Jn.17: 20, 21). There is no doubt that such texts invite multiplicity and diversity of readings as seen in the thesis.

The thesis shows that the divergent interpretations found in the reception history of the texts are attributable also to readers' attempts to fill in the gaps and to resolve ambiguities. It is this, which underlies the development of the effective history of the texts, something, which started as early as the time the fourth gospel was written. In the 4th and 5th centuries, the fathers of the church, Augustine and Chrysostom in their reading of the Johannine texts on unity interpreted them in light of the position of the church in the empire. The story is the same at the reformation period regarding efforts of Luther and Calvin, just as it is with modern Johannine scholars such as Bultmann, Brown, Schnackenburg and Barrett to mention but a few.

It is observable that various attempts at resolving the ambiguities in the texts at one period in the history of the church rub off on the others; the best insights from early generations serve as the point of departure for the next generation.⁷⁹⁸ One generation of interpreters refers back to the reading of the text in earlier generations; Augustine and Chrysostom appealed to the Johannine community, the first community in which the text was interpreted, and the same, is true of the reformers. Luther's point of departure was the scholastic reading of the text, and he sometimes referred to the reading of the text by Augustine, and lays claim to him as one of his sources of influence. Calvin sometimes made Luther's reading his own point of departure while at times he referred to some of the fathers, even though more often than not, he does not mention these by name. In modern scholarship traces of influence of the earlier readings of the text are observable. The modern scholars in their reading of the text participate in its history by identifying with earlier participants in different ways. A reader like Brown always refers to the fathers most especially Augustine, and sometime goes deeper than that. He appeals sometimes even to the understanding of the text in the Johannine community. The thesis has also established clearly that divergent interpretation emanating from the reading of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding is attributable to the circumstances, the situation in life of the interpreters, readers; including the Johannine community. Brown for example, singled out the changing situation in the Johannine community as being responsible for the seeming change in emphasis in Jn.6 from abiding in Jesus through faith to abiding in Jesus through eating his flesh. This suggests that the idea that what we have in Jn.6: 51b-58 was a rereading Jn.6: 35-51a. This suggests that the Christian readers, members of the Johannine community just like others after them, the fathers, Augustine and Chrysostom, Protestant reformers, Luther and Calvin and even modern scholars are all children of their circumstances.

Most of the scholars who have attempted reading the text did so with their eyes focused on their situations and most especially on the concern of the church, as they perceive it. Augustine and Chrysostom for instance, interpreted the Johannine texts on unity with their eyes fixed on the situation of the church in the late 4th and early 5th century. This was the period when the church found itself in the position of fashioning the teaching that would guarantee the unity of the church and the empire. The concern at this period was how to overcome Christian disunity: how the church could assist in holding together a very diverse empire. The fathers interpreted the text in the midst of controversies ravaging the church, which was undermining the unity of the church.

⁷⁹⁸ Casurella, 1983, p174

Their interpretation of the texts had a deep reflection of their situation and the controversies raging at this period. Augustine's interpretation of the texts on unity and abiding in Jesus was greatly influenced by his controversies with the Donatists and the Pelagians, while Chrysostom's reading of the text was affected by his controversies with the Arians, Pagans, Jews and Judaizers. The same is true in the 16th century, the reformation period. The various interpretations from this period cannot be separated from the situation in life of the readers. The main reformers, Luther and Calvin in their reading of the texts on union and abiding in Jesus betray the circumstances most especially the controversies that they had with the Church of Rome. The reformers' concern was for the church unity; they were very much aware of the problem of division in the church, which they attributed to diversion from right interpretation of scripture in the Roman church that they challenged vigorously. While this was more obvious in Luther, a first generation reformer, who was very loquacious, Calvin went about it in a more calculated and lucid brief manner, yet their interpretations betray the fact that they both had the controversy with Rome before them as they pen their exposition of texts.

The thesis also makes it clear that modern scholarship is not short of circumstantial influences. The modern scholars in their interpretation of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding in Jesus were predisposed to taking most of their stand by the religious institution to which they are attached. Bultmann for example, epitomizes the traditional Lutheran position in his exposition of most of the text. While often more than not one sees Brown and Schnackenburg, two Catholic theologians (despite the fact that they sometimes differ in the interpretation of some aspect of the texts) presenting the traditional Catholic view in their interpretation of the key passages in the Johannine texts. Equally a scholar like Barrett, a Methodist scholar, exemplified the evangelical view in his interpretation of the texts.

The thesis also shows that interpreters' studies influence interpretation. Luther and Calvin's interpretations reflect their humanist influences, while the interpretations of modern scholars show evidence of an historical-critical approach to exegesis which is not so obvious in the reformers and even less so in the fathers, who belong to the pre-critical era of Biblical interpretation.⁷⁹⁹ What this shows is that interpretation keeps reworking itself. The history of interpretation shows that just like the history of the church, the reading of the scripture has moved from the pre-critical era (when there was lack of research and communication tools), through the renaissance (with the

development of printing press, which improved communication) to the modern critical period. This is the period when modern tools of research and communication are readily available. Calvin modifies Luther, who modified the work of the fathers, the present generation tries to improve on the works of their forerunners. This is a sign of continuous process of generation of life in the history of reading, of which the vine and branches is a good example; most especially for our notion of unity; different generation, different crops, diversity of fruits.

One other conclusion from the inquiry is that the Johannine texts were used as means of promoting doctrine and the official church position. Augustine and Chrysostom used it in promoting the doctrine of the nature of Christ as against the Arians. In the texts Augustine found words to support his doctrine of grace as against the Pelagians, and the same can be said about the reformers who used the same texts in propagating the doctrine of grace and nature against the Church of Rome. Luther and Calvin claimed that they followed Augustine in doing this. One sees Luther using the text in promoting his new-found notion of justification, while Calvin who adopted the reformation doctrine, used the same text in promoting his own new set of doctrines, doctrines of election and grace, developed from the reformation doctrine of Justification. Brown a modern scholar points out in his exposition that these same texts were used by the Roman church in some of the councils against the reformation doctrine of grace.

The different circumstances notwithstanding, certain basic ideas came out in the reading of the text in all the periods that were considered and the diversity of interpretation of the various scholars came out in their exposition of these questions more than on any other aspect of the texts. The first of these is the question of those who are prayed to be in unity. There is no debating the fact that most scholars agreed that the unity prayed for is that of believers, but they differ in their understanding of who believers are.

The second area that is given good attention, which is close to the first aspect, is the meaning of abiding. One sees that the majority of those who consider the question agreed that those who are called to be in union with Jesus and with themselves are those who abide in Jesus, but they differ mainly on how one abides in Jesus. In contemporary scholarship, the divide is between scholars like Bultmann, Morris and Marrow who are of the view that one abides through faith and scholars like Brown, Schnackenburg and Barrett. These second group of scholars believe that one abides in

⁷⁹⁹ Casurella, 1983, p174

Jesus not just through faith but also through eating and drinking the eucharistic body and blood of Jesus.

The third is the nature of unity that we have in the Johannine texts. In the exposition of the early fathers the notion of unity was seen as all embracing, Augustine sees the union in John as one for all, the church was that of saint and sinner. In the interpretation from the Protestant reformers, we see the notion of unity that was both inclusive of those in the churches of the reformation and exclusive of the Roman church, whereas in contemporary scholarship, the notion of unity promoted is that of unity in diversity.

Another aspect of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding that got good attention was the question of the effect of unity of believers on the world. While some of the scholars are of the view that the unity of believers would lead to faith in the world, others think otherwise. This makes one to wonder why is it that such different theologies can be supported by the same text? One of the answers for this is that the biblical text resembles a source, where new water emerges from the same place, and not a reservoir or a cistern, with a fixed amount of water in that it can be clearly measured.⁸⁰⁰

The findings in the inquiry bring into focus questions about the future of ecumenical endeavours, the promotion of unity of believers, in the light of multi various understandings of unity. It also raises the question whether it is possible to talk about the union of believers, when there is no consensus on what it means to abide in Jesus. Is it possible to talk about Christian union when there is no agreement on what it means to be in union with Jesus?

The history of reception of the Johannine texts on unity and abiding is an encouragement to think about the life of the church and its unity in terms of greater diversity and at the same time it suggests fruit bearing and not rigid conformity to legal code and particular doctrine. All that we have suggests to us the need to look at other models, which are less monolithic ones, which encourages continuous growth and allows for diversity.

⁸⁰⁰ Luz, 1994, p19

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