# Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts

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# *Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts*

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ABSTRACT

The influence of R. Bultmann's and E. Käsemann's interpretations of Jesus' death in John's Gospel has been enormous. Their interpretations set the parameters of the debate right up to the present day. Bultmann and Käsemann insisted that Jesus' death was not at the centre of Johannine soteriology and that it was not an atoning event. One of the results of this 'Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm' was that a number of crucial Johannine texts were overlooked or not taken seriously. One such set of Johannine texts that suffered in this regard was the so-called '*hyper* texts'. The trend away from the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm, in the direction of a tradition atonement interpretation of Jesus' death, is shown to be gaining ground especially in Germany. When the Gospel text is taken seriously as a unity and when *all* the evidence concerning Jesus' death in John is taken into account (especially the important *hyper* texts), a more traditional atonement interpretation seems to be the result.

Keywords: atonement, Bultmann-Käsemann paradigm, death of Jesus, *hyper* texts, John's Gospel, soteriology.

It is difficult to underestimate R. Bultmann (1955; 1971) and E. Käsemann's (1968) influence on Johannine studies in general (see Scholtissek 1998: 229-30) and especially the interpretation of Jesus' death in John's Gospel. Their treatments of Jesus' death in John have proven to be highly influential in that for the last five decades they have set the main lines of the debate. In fact, all discussions of Jesus' death in John since Bultmann

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and Käsemann are in one way or the other reactions to their positions. The Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm insisted that Jesus' death in John's Gospel was not understood along early Christian traditional lines as an event of vicarious atonement. Furthermore, Jesus' death in John's Gospel is not a soteriological event in itself (see below). This presupposition significantly influenced the texts in John that were allowed to count for the evangelist's view, as opposed to the view(s) of a later redactor(s). This phenomenon is also quite evident in the many later scholars who followed, to one degree or another, the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm (e.g. Forestell 1974; U.B. Müller 1975; Appold 1976; Nicholson 1983; de Boer 1996). One such set of Johannine passages that have suffered neglect under the weight of this paradigm are the so-called *hyper* texts (Jn 6.51; 10.11, 15; 11.50, 51, 52; 15.13). As we shall see below, these passages are either simply ignored and/or conveniently assigned to the hand (and theology) of a later redactor. One of the problems with this methodological position is that these Johannine texts are not given their proper weight in the assessment of the meaning of Jesus' death in John. And, ironically, these texts are the ones that communicate most clearly the intended effects of Jesus' death in John's Gospel.

Another related problem with a methodology that excludes these most crucial Johannine texts is that what is considered the *evangelist's* view of Jesus' death is put at serious odds with what seems to be the consistent early Christian view that Jesus' death *for* ('*hyper*') others did in fact reveal the soteriological significance of the cross event. The characteristic expressions, or formulae, by which the meaning of Jesus' death was communicated in early Christian tradition have been described as follows. The so-called 'surrender formula' appears in statements expressing the 'giving up' of Jesus (*didōmi*: Gal. 1.4; 1 Tim. 2.5–6; Jn 6.51 or *paradidōmi*: Rom. 4.25; 8.32; Eph. 5.2) for others or Jesus' 'laying down' (*tithēmi*: Jn 10.11, 15; 1 Jn 3.16) his life for others (see Popkes 1967; Hengel 1981). The subject of Jesus' 'surrender' unto death is either God (Rom. 4.25; 8.32) or Jesus himself (Gal. 1.4; Eph. 5.2; 1 Tim. 2.5-6; Jn 10.11, 15; 1 Jn 3.16). The second formula that has been identified is the so-called 'dying formula' (or '*hyper* texts') which is typically constructed in the following way: subject (Jesus/Christ); verb 'to die' (*apothnēskō*); prepositional phrase 'for us/our sins' (*hyper* with the genitive) (1 Thess. 5.9-10; 1 Cor. 15.3; 2 Cor. 5.14, 15; Rom. 5.6, 8; Rom. 14.15; Jn 11.50, 51; 18.14) (see Wengst 1972; Hengel 1981). Of course, some texts fall into both categories: Jn 6.51; 10.11, 15. The question then is: was the

evangelist's view of Jesus' death, as the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm would have us believe, really so radically in conflict with this early Christian view of Jesus' death? If the *hyper* texts are allowed to have their proper place in John's theology, perhaps not. But this is only a suggestion and cannot be taken up with full argumentation in the present article.

Rather, the purpose of the present work is to trace the interpretation of Jesus' death in John's Gospel from Bultmann and Käsemann to the present with particular attention to the role the *hyper* texts have played in these interpretations. Because of the influential role the interpretations of Bultmann and Käsemann have played in later studies, we shall begin by discussing these interpretations in some detail. We shall then take up those studies that clearly stand in the Bultmann–Käsemann tradition but have modified, sometimes only slightly, some aspect of Bultmann's and/or Käsemann's views. We shall next discuss those works that argued that the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm was incorrect in its one-sided view that John's understanding of Jesus' death should be solely characterized as a *theologia gloriae* ('theology of glory') as opposed to a *theologia crucis* ('theology of the cross') is incorrect. These works argue that John's Gospel holds together, without contradiction, both a *theologia gloriae* and a *theologia crucis*. The last section will discuss three recent German scholars who have maintained that the centre of the soteriology of John's Gospel is Jesus' death understood as an event of vicarious atonement that deals with sin. And as such, John's Gospel turns out to cohere much more with early Christian tradition than the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm allowed. These later works tend to take more seriously the Gospel as a unified narrative and as such all the passages in the Gospel that relate to Jesus' death are considered in the attempt to its meaning for the narrative as a whole. As the ensuing survey will show, although the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm is not dead, a more traditional interpretation of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice in John has gained ground, particularly in Germany, and as a result the *hyper* passages are taken more seriously in these works. Of course, an exhaustive treatment of the studies that have dealt with the death of Jesus' in John's Gospel is beyond the limitations of the present survey of research.

## 1. *The Bultmann–Käsemann Paradigm*

For both Bultmann and Käsemann, the death of Jesus has no salvific significance as such but rather is understood as part of the overall mission of the revealer. But it is their conceptions of the Christology of the FG

[Fourth Gospel], and, more specifically, the meaning of the incarnation, that differ quite dramatically.

Any appraisal of Bultmann's and Käsemann's understandings of the Fourth Gospel must take into account that neither scholar was interpreting the extant Gospel. Bultmann believed that a later *ecclesiastical* redactor, with a very different theology than the evangelist of the original Gospel, had added material to the evangelist's work. These differences surface especially in regards to ecclesiology and eschatology but also in regards to later understandings of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for sin (see the relevant passages discussed in Bultmann 1971). In light of this, Bultmann sought to assign passages to the ecclesiastical redactor that he believed reflected ideas that were not original with the evangelist and by definition ideas that better suited a later stage in Johannine Christianity. Bultmann reconstructed *his* original Gospel on the basis of his scheme of separating tradition from redaction and as a result rearranged the order of the Gospel to conform to the original intention of the evangelist. He has, in effect, 'purified' the original Gospel from later redactional elements. It is this original Gospel, freed from later ecclesiastical theology, that Bultmann interpreted. The problem, of course, is that this method creates a situation where Bultmann disregarded certain passages as later *ecclesiastical redactions* that did not fit his conception of the nature of the original Gospel. This is inherently subjective and circular and leads to a distortion of what is in fact Johannine theology. R. Brown has recently criticized Bultmann's source and redactional-critical methodology since it 'smacks too much of a modern mind-set governed by a thesis-antithesis pattern and is unnecessary in the redactor theory' (1997: 367). Brown goes on to argue that 'a much more likely supposition is that the one who took the trouble to add to the evangelist's work agreed with it substantially and was of the same community of thought' (1997: 367). I would argue that Brown's theory here is much more methodologically plausible.

As for Käsemann, the issue is, as M.C. de Boer states, 'more subtle' (1996: 23). Suffice it to say that Käsemann recognized 'the presence of redactional work in John' (Käsemann 1968: 32) and the result, as scholars have observed (Martyn 1986: 110; Bornkamm 1986: 90), is that Käsemann's understanding of Jesus' death in the FG coheres more with a pre-Johannine source (or an earlier form of the Gospel) than it does with the Gospel as it now stands before us.

a. *R. Bultmann*

Bultmann's Christology is grounded in the first clause of Jn 1.14: 'the word became flesh'. It is thus the incarnation, or the 'coming' of the heavenly envoy, that serves as the central affirmation of the Gospel (1955: 40). Jesus is the 'sent one' from the heavenly realm who mediates revelation to the earthly realm. Jesus' revelatory mission begins at the incarnation (his 'coming') and ends at his death (his 'going') (1955: 47-52). This 'coming' and 'going' of the heavenly revealer is understood as a unified, eschatological event in which salvation is mediated to humanity. The death of Jesus, of course, is part of this eschatological event since it is death that completes the obedience of the revealer and releases him from his mission so that he can return to the glory he had in his pre-existence (1955: 53). For Bultmann, this motif of departure, as M.C. de Boer points out, 'merely supports the idea of revelation. It shows that Jesus never becomes a worldly phenomenon, someone to be captured and domesticated in worldly categories'. It is for this reason that 'Jesus' death is thus no offense, no scandal… The incarnate Christ, not the crucified Christ, is the Johannine stumbling block' (de Boer 1996: 21).

This 'double aspect' of Jesus' death noted above (completion of obedience and release from mission which leads to previous glory) is unique to John and is apparent most clearly in the passages that relate Jesus' death with his 'exaltation' (3.14; 8.28; 12.32, 34) or his 'glorification' (7.39; 12.16, 23; 13.31f.; 17.1, 5). Jesus' death is understood as his exaltation or glorification instead of his 'crucifixion' as in the Synoptics. The 'centre of gravity' then of the revealer's mission (understood as 'coming' and 'going') is his incarnation which enables him to carry out his mission of revelation, not his death which simply brings that mission to a close (Bultmann 1955: 52) and functions as the means of his exaltation. It is quite clear therefore that the evangelist 'has subsumed the death of Jesus under his idea of revelation' for 'in his death Jesus himself is acting as the Revealer and is not a passive object…' In summary, Jesus' death is but a part of his total revelatory work and as such has no salvific significance in and of itself (1955: 53). Thus, salvation is by way of *revelation*, and not by way of an objective act of atonement on the cross. This is Bultmann's fundamental assumption and as such affects his exegesis of the relevant Johannine passages.

Even though Bultmann admits that it may be possible to find a few instances in the Gospel where the evangelist has 'adapted himself' to the common traditional view that Jesus' death was an atonement for sins

(particularly evident in such places as Jn 1.29; cf. 1 Jn), this traditional view 'would still be a foreign element in his [evangelist's] work' (1955: 54). In fact, the issue of the 'forgiveness of sins' appears not to be important to the evangelist since it is mentioned only once, in Jn 20.23. Here, the authority of the disciples to forgive sins is attributed to a saying of the risen Jesus. But, the source of this solitary reference to the forgiveness of sins (along with 1 Jn), according to Bultmann, is a later ecclesiastical redactor and thus does not reflect the concern of John's Gospel (1955: 55). The conclusion is that any view that would characterize John's understanding of Jesus' death as an atonement or sacrifice for sins simply 'has no place in John' (1955: 54). In fact, in view of the Gospel's total emphasis, the Baptist's confession 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (Jn 1.29) should not be understood as saying that Jesus' death as such is a sacrifice for sin but rather that Jesus' whole ministry is a kind of sacrifice which delivers people from sin and reveals the Father. Thus, 'his death is to be understood in connection with his life as the completion of his work' (1955: 55).

If Jesus' death is not salvific *per se*, then what, for Bultmann, is the means of salvation in John's Gospel? Consistent with the overall Christology of the Gospel that emphasizes Jesus as the revealer of the Father, salvation comes by way of revelation. More specifically, salvation comes by faith in Jesus' word (1955: 54). It is Jesus' revelatory word that cleanses and renews (15.3; cf. 13.10; 17.17), mediates life (6.62), delivers from bondage (8.31-34), and functions as the means by which the disciples are 'sanctified' (17.17). This 'revelation' that Jesus communicates turns out in the end to contain no real content other than that Jesus is the Revealer. The revelation then is Jesus himself; he and only he is the one who fulfils the human longing for life and truth. Thus, the Gospel presents only the fact (*das Das*) of the revelation, not its content (*ihr Was*) (1955: 66).

In light of these conclusions, what then does Bultmann make of the Johannine *hyper* texts? In his *Theology* (1955), Bultmann states that it is telling that John does not narrate the founding of the Lord's supper where the atonement idea is noticeable in the words 'for you' (or 'for many') (cf. Mk 14.24; Mt. 26.28; Lk. 22.19-20). The only *hyper* passages Bultmann directly addresses in his *Theology* is Jn 6.51b-58. But, its significance for the theology of the Gospel is dismissed since Bultmann assigns it to a later ecclesiastical redaction (1955: 59; 1971: 234). The thought of Jn 6.51b-58 is more related to Jesus' death 'which in the early

Christian view was a death *hyper*…' (1971: 234). The evangelist was simply not interested in this early Christian view of Jesus' death. In his commentary (1971), Bultmann judges that the significance of Jesus' death *for* ('*hyper*') his sheep in Jn 10.11, 15 communicates 'the "being" of the revealer as a "being for his own" ' (1971: 378, 383). Bultmann ignores any other possible connotation of the thought of Jesus' laying down of his life *for* his own here.

Bultmann's treatment of 11.50-52 is quite interesting. Bultmann followed J. Finegan (1934) in arguing that 11.45-54 is in fact a *Johannine* composition with no source behind it (1971: 409). Bultmann's comments concerning 11.45-54 are limited to recognizing the 'tragic irony' present in Caiaphas' suggestion that Jesus should die so that the nation should not perish, a suggestion from the point of view of political necessity, but, in reality, from the evangelist's point of view, Jesus' death fulfilled the purpose of God in that he died 'for his people and the children of God' (1971: 409). The question that is not dealt with by Bultmann is as follows: what is it about Jesus' death in this passage that effects the saving of the nation from *perishing* (a loaded Johannine term; cf. Jn 3.16; 6.12, 39; 10.28) and the gathering of the dispersed children of God into one (Jn 11.50-52)? If this pericope is *Johannine* as Bultmann believed, why has he not incorporated its unique assertions about the *purpose* of Jesus' death into his understanding of the evangelist's view of this death? Has Bultmann's presuppositions about what is either 'foreign elements' to Johannine theology or what is at best the evangelist's rare 'adapting' of himself to Christian tradition caused him not to take seriously the assertions of Jn 11.50-52 and the other *hyper* texts?

b. *E. Käsemann*

As was the case with Bultmann, the content and thrust of the Gospel centres on its Christology for Käsemann. Thus, the death of Jesus must be related to Christology. For Käsemann, the Christology of the Gospel is found in crystallized form at 1.14c ('we beheld his glory'), contra Bultmann who pointed to 1.14a ('the word became flesh') as the main statement of the Gospel's Christology. The Gospel, in Käsemann's view, is essentially about the glory of Christ from beginning to end. Thus, the problem for Käsemann

> is not how the crucified one could be the Son of God, but why God descended into the human realm and manifested his glory, and why this earthly Christ, whose nature is not changed by his 'coming' and

> 'going', who acts out of his oneness with the Father at all times and who shows forth the divine glory at all times, why *this* Jesus gave himself to death (Nicholson 1983: 7).

The solution for Käsemann was to de-emphasize Jesus' incarnation (1.14a) in the direction of docetism. He states directly that the Gospel does not present a 'realistic incarnation'. The incarnation is 'totally overshadowed by the confession "we beheld his glory" ', so that it receives its meaning from it (1968: 9-10). Käsemann does not completely deny 'features of the lowliness of the earthly Jesus in the Fourth Gospel'. But, he asks, 'do they characterize John's Christology in such a manner that through them the "true man" of later incarnational theology becomes believable?' (1968: 10). The answer for him is clearly in the negative. In light of this, what then does the assertion 'the word became flesh' (1.14a) mean? It means simply that the divine Son descended into the world of humanity 'so that an encounter with him became possible' (1968: 9). Thus, Jesus' 'incarnation' is purely a functional event and does not imply a change in his nature as such but only a 'change of place', namely, his 'coming' from heaven to the world of humanity (1968: 20). Käsemann's incarnation is more of a 'concealment', or an 'accommodation', or a 'point of transit' to the earthly realm (1968: 12). He also speaks of the incarnation as 'the disguise, the hiding of a divine being' in the world of suffering and death (1968: 12). But, in this 'transition' from heaven to earth, Jesus never loses his oneness and unity with the Father; he is always the divine revealer who 'belongs totally on the side of God even on earth' (1968: 11). Considering Käsemann's emphasis on the glory and divinity of Jesus and his downplaying of a realistic incarnation in the direction of docetism, it is not difficult to anticipate that Jesus' 'human' death and 'earthly' humiliation will have little significance for his revelatory mission.

As with Bultmann, Käsemann believed that Jesus' death must be understood in the context of his total mission—his coming and going. Jesus' death is nothing more than his transition or return back to the Father and the completion of his earthly mission (1968: 20). This can be discerned in the term that is the characteristic description of Jesus' death, namely, *hypagō* ('to go away').

> This verb includes exaltation and glorification in so far as it refers to the separation from the world and the return to the Father, which is at the same time the return to the glory of the pre-existent Logos… Jesus' death, in the Fourth Gospel…is the completion of his incarnation (1968: 18).

Käsemann's understanding of Jesus' death in John can also be seen in the Johannine phrase 'the hour of Jesus'. This phrase indicates that the 'hour of his passion is in a unique way the hour of his glorification and from this viewpoint we can include all the references to the hour of his passion as being allusions also to the hour of his glorification' (1968: 19). In John, Jesus' passion is understood as his glorification 'because in it Jesus leaves the world and returns to the Father' (1968: 19). This is clearly seen in Jn 13.1 where the meaning of the passion is interpreted as Jesus' departure to the Father: 'Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father'.

In conclusion, the purpose of Jesus' 'coming' or incarnation was to make possible his earthly ministry and the purpose of his 'going' or death was to make possible the completion of his mission and his return to the Father. Neither his coming nor his going, his descending nor his ascension, his incarnation nor his passion indicate a change in his nature as the divine revealer; rather, they only indicate a change of place and a change of the 'scope of the manifestation of Christ' (1968: 20). It thus turns out that even though Bultmann and Käsemann have very different understandings of the nature of the incarnation (Bultmann emphasizes the humanity while Käsemann emphasizes the divinity), their understandings of the nature of Jesus' ministry and his death as simply the completion of his mission and return to the Father is in the final analysis virtually identical. Furthermore, Käsemann gives even less attention to the *hyper* texts in his discussion of the meaning of Jesus' death for John than does Bultmann: Käsemann mentions only one such text, Jn 6.51b-58, and he does so only to say that it is clearly from the hand of a later editor and thus not Johannine (1968: 32).

## 2. *The Cross as a Non-Atoning Event*

### a. *J.T. Forestell*

In 1974 J.T. Forestell offered the first major response to Bultmann's and Käsemann's views. The trend continued with such scholars as U.B. Müller (1975), M. Appold (1976) and G.C. Nicholson (1983). These scholars did not intend to overthrow Bultmann's and Käsemann's basic conclusion that Jesus' death is primarily an event of revelation and not of atonement in the FG. Rather, the intent was to argue that the death of Jesus was more related to the soteriology of the FG than Bultmann and Käsemann had allowed.

Forestell's stated purpose in his book is 'to show that the properly Johannine theology of salvation does not consider the death of Jesus to be a vicarious and expiatory sacrifice for sin' (1983: 2). Reminiscent of Bultmann, Forestell does admit that a sacrificial–cultic appraisal of Jesus' death may in fact surface in Jn 1.29 ('the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'). But, this interpretation is 'secondary with reference to the Johannine theology' and this 'isolated and disputed text is not sufficient to overthrow a point of view which otherwise pervades the entire gospel' (1983: 148, 194).

Forestell attempted to show that the FG's understanding of Jesus' death is unique when compared with most of the other conceptions of the purpose and meaning of the cross in the NT (New Testament). The dominant view of the New Testament is one which views Jesus' death as a death for our sins, a *vicarious* death that effects the expiation of human sin (1983: 190-91). Contrary to this early Christian view, 'the dominant understanding of Christ's work in John is the glory of God through his word. This work embraces the entire ministry of Jesus including the cross and is effective for the salvation of men through faith' (1983: 191). Thus, with Bultmann and Käsemann, Jesus' death in John must be understood in the context of the evangelist's theology of revelation. Hence, salvation is by way of *revelation* in John not by way of the cross as an atoning event. But, contra Bultmann and Käsemann, the cross of Christ is not merely the 'release from his mission' (Bultmann 1955: 55) or the 'transition back to the Father' (Käsemann 1968: 20) but rather it is a revelatory event precisely because it is the exaltation of the Son of Man and 'the supreme revelation of the love of God for men because Jesus effectively lays down his life for his sheep' (Forestell 1974: 191-92). As such, the cross is both a symbol of the gift of eternal life and the means of its bestowal to humanity (1983: 192). It thus appears that it is not the *death* of Jesus *per se* that effects eternal life or salvation but rather his death as the culmination of a larger program of Jesus' revelation and manifestation of the Father's love, hence the term *supreme revelation* in the quote above. The cross is one of the steps along the continuum of salvific revelation in John, albeit the final and supreme step. In other words, the real salvific event in the Gospel is Jesus' manifestation of the Father and the cross is simply the culminating or final act in the drama of salvific revelation. Forestell puts it this way: 'Jesus' manifestation of the Father is not complete until he lays down his life for men, *fully* revealing God as life-giving love. It seems to us that revelation understood in this sense can

be considered to be salvific' (1983: 192). What Forestell has not made sufficiently clear here is summed up by M. Turner as follows:

> If Forestell had not (correctly) argued that John has focused the cross as the supreme revelation of God's saving love, it may have been possible to agree with Bultmann that the death of Jesus is itself of little soteriological import in John. But having made this point, Forestell's own account successfully focuses the importance of the cross without explaining why *this death* of Jesus is necessary at all, or *how* it can reveal God's love (Turner 1990: 118).

Forestell's treatment of the *hyper* texts is concerned primarily to argue that 'none of the *hyper* texts in the fourth gospel demands a sacrificial evaluation of Jesus' death' (1983: 82). His general conclusion about the meaning of the formula 'Jesus died/laid down his life *for* others' in John is that it is primarily an act of life-giving love and revelation of the Father' (1983: 194). Further he concludes that *hyper* in these texts 'always designates the purpose of Jesus' death but never its cause' (1983: 193) and similarly this preposition 'designates the salvific meaning of Jesus' death, but…it does not of itself indicate the manner of its efficacy' (1983: 194).

The following example will serve to illustrate Forestell's treatment of the Johannine *hyper* texts. He argues that the meaning of the formula 'Jesus died *for* the people' in 11.50-52 is that the Evangelist was concerned with the 'universal and unifying efficacy of Jesus' death'; nevertheless,

> the phrase *hyper tou laou* ['for the people'] of itself does not tell us how Jesus' death benefited the people of God. The evangelist, however, tells us that it achieved this effect by drawing together the children of God scattered throughout the world. The attractive power of the cross spoken of in 12,32 seems to be in his mind. Thus we conclude that none of the *hyper* texts in the fourth gospel demands a sacrificial evaluation of Jesus' death (1983: 82).

Whether Jn 11.50-52 intend to present Jesus' death in sacrificial–cultic terms is up for debate. In addition, Forestell is correct to point out that 'for the people' does not clearly indicate the precise mechanism that allows Jesus' death to bring about the results of, for instance, the saving of the nation from perishing (Jn 11.50) or the unity of the children of God (11.52). But what does seem clear by the preposition *hyper* in 11.50-52 and the other *hyper* texts is that Jesus' death was understood to have brought about *soteriological* effects. This fact has simply not been taken seriously by Forestell. In light of these brief comments, it does not seem

to me that 'life-giving love' and 'revelation of the Father' fully explain the actual language and assertions made in 11.50-52 or the other *hyper* passages. In other words, these assertions must be taken seriously in their own right.

b. *U.B. Müller*

U.B. Müller's article 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium. Erwägungen zur Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament' (1975) slightly modified Bultmann's and Käsemann's view by attempting to show that Jesus' death is an integral part of his mission for the fourth evangelist and thus his death cannot be dismissed as a superfluous piece of tradition. But in what way is Jesus' death *integral* for the FG?

The proper context for understanding Jesus' death in John is the 'descent' and 'ascent' of the Son of Man scheme. The Gospel is primarily oriented to Jesus' return to God and not to Jesus' suffering and death (1975: 53-54). John's primary interest in Jesus' death is Jesus' glorification—Jesus' glory is shown most fully in his sovereign passage *through death* back to the Father. Therefore, it is not Jesus as the *crucified* one but Jesus as the *glorified* one whom the Johannine community proclaimed (1975: 69).

Jesus' death is thus a *necessary* and therefore *indispensable* step toward his glorification and return. And, as such, his death is a necessary event along the way to life, but it is only one such event which stands in the shadow of the glorification of the Son (1975: 63). It is therefore not surprising that the event of salvific revelation is not the cross as an event of suffering but the cross as an event of glorification (1975: 70). For the fourth evangelist, 'the reality of the cross is certainly perceived, but its lasting theological significance is ignored' (1975: 69).

Although a slight difference in nuance remains between Müller's understanding and the Bultmann–Käsemann view, namely, that the cross is a necessary step toward Jesus' glorification and return, in reality both interpretations do not see the cross event as such as being related to salvation. In addition, Müller virtually ignores the Johannine *hyper* texts, only to say that, although Jn 10.11, 15 speaks of the salvation meaning of Jesus' death, nevertheless, what we have here is simply a pre-shaped, or traditional, text 'that does not grasp the actual Johannine theology' (1975: 63). In a work that seeks to investigate 'the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross in John's Gospel', this fact is more than perplexing. As we shall discover below, Müller's views anticipated those of G.C. Nicholson (1983).

c. *M. Appold*

M. Appold (1976) keeps alive Käsemann's basic understanding of Jesus' death in John as well as aspects of Bultmann's understanding. Appold rejects any possibility that the fourth evangelist intended to present Jesus' death in atonement or vicarious terms. Even though he recognizes that the idea of Jesus' death as a vicarious sacrifice is present in such passages as 1.29; 10.11, 15, 17 and 17.19, these passages did not originate from the evangelist but are part of his received tradition. Furthermore, the thought of expiatory sacrifice reflected in this traditional material 'is not further developed' by the evangelist and 'plays no central role in John's proclamation' (1976: 273).

Appold reflects his dependence upon Bultmann and Käsemann when he characterizes the significance of Jesus' death as his exaltation/glorification and his 'return' from where he 'came':

> The crucifixion, as we have seen, has the character of exaltation and glorification, a manifestation of his sovereignty and kingly power. The singular most unique feature of John's understanding of the cross event centers on the one who is there exalted and glorified, i.e. on him who comes from and returns to God, on him who is one with the Father (1976: 274).

Thus, the primary meaning and function of Jesus' death is his departure which in turn 'causes *krisis* ["judgment"], final *krisis*, for the Jews and an ongoing *krisis* for the world. As such, Jesus' death has a causative function in exposing the face of unbelief and in laying bare the roots of one's origin, whether of God or of the devil (8.44, 47)' (1976: 273).

The main contribution of Appold's study is his explication of the Christology of the FG in terms of the oneness motif. The identity of Jesus for John is found in his oneness with the Father and this essential oneness is manifested even in his death. Since his death is an event that reveals Jesus' glory, namely, his oneness with the Father, it takes on the functional role of 'projecting' the heavenly oneness of the Father and the Son into the earthly sphere. As such, his death has the soteriological goal of effecting solidarity among believers by integrating them into the oneness of the Father and the Son. John 11.47-52 becomes an important passage for Appold at this point:

> Because Jesus shares equivalent status with the Father and manifests this relation even in his death, it is possible for those who are to believe to be gathered into one. Here [John 11.52] Jesus' oneness has functional priority in effecting the soteriological goal of the gathering into

> one. His inseparable relation with the Father represents heavenly reality. Projection of that reality into the earthly sphere is manifested in the mission and work of Jesus. Integration into this oneness effects believing existence and results in solidarity among the believers (1976: 274-75).

Appold's insistence that Jesus' death be connected with soteriology is a welcomed departure from Bultmann and Käsemann. But, in the final analysis, it appears that Appold's position remains essentially equivalent with Käsemann's. It becomes quite clear that salvific significance is not in fact connected to Jesus' death *per se*, but rather what his death reveals, namely, oneness with the Father. The significance of Jesus' death is that it provides an event (the cross) in which this oneness can be manifested. Thus, in reality, it is not Jesus' death as such that has a causative salvific function but rather the revelation of Jesus' glory, his true identity as the one who shares oneness with the Father, which the cross event reveals. However, Appold does not make clear *how* the cross, understood as an event of the manifestation of oneness, effects salvation or the oneness of believers.

Appold's exegesis of his primary text for this assertion, 11.47-52, is not altogether convincing. First, Appold argues that the evangelist provided a completely different orientation to the traditional material found in 11.47-52. This new orientation or interpretation is precisely the oneness motif:

> The cumulative evidence demands that this passage [11.47-52] be regarded as a segment of his given tradition. This is significant not only because the sacrificial orientation of the verse is not further developed, but in the interpretation by the evangelist is given a decidedly different twist by its incorporation into the oneness theme. Thus the evangelist repeats the words of Caiaphas that Jesus is to die for the nation but qualifies the meaning by adding 'and not for the nation only but that the children of God who are scattered abroad be gathered into one' (1976: 273).

The problem for Appold here is that the motif of oneness between the Father and the Son is not specifically emphasized in 11.47-52: it is not the oneness of the Father and the Son, nor the glorification of the Son, nor the departure of the Son, that brings about the oneness of believers in 11.51-52 but rather it is Jesus' death *for* others that effects this oneness. In addition, Appold does not explain *how* the oneness between the Father and the Son, which is manifested in the cross, actually *causes* or *effects*

the soteriological oneness of believers in 11.51-52 or anywhere else in the Gospel. In his abhorrence of any notion of sacrifice being present in the evangelist's reinterpretation of the traditional material in 11.47-52, Appold has simply not dealt with the actual assertion of the passage, namely, that it is Jesus' *death for* others that effects the soteriological oneness of believers. If Appold is correct in arguing that the evangelist understood this pericope to be saying that the oneness of the Father and the Son, manifested in his death/departure, functions to bring about the unity of believers, then he still must explain what the phrase 'that one man must die for the people' (11.50) or 'Jesus was about to die for the nation', along with their soteriological effects (11.51), meant for the evangelist.

Second, if the evangelist so disagreed with the 'orientation' this pericope had in the tradition, namely, an atonement orientation, then why would the evangelist not reword the pericope to reflect his own theology? It is obviously very difficult to determine what material the evangelist took from his tradition. But it is surely impossible and perilous to conclude that the evangelist took over a particular tradition from his source without further modifying the tradition to cohere with his own theology. The point is simply this: interpreters must assume that the evangelist *owns* the material in *his* Gospel, regardless of the possible (and really unknown) orientation or meaning this material may have had before the evangelist.

d. *G.C. Nicholson*

G.C. Nicholson (1983) is in full agreement with Käsemann that the death of Jesus is to be properly understood in the context of the Gospel's Christology, a Christology that is fundamentally characterized by the motif of 'coming' and 'going' or 'descent' and 'ascent'. In this scheme, Jesus' death is simply his departure back to the Father. Thus, his death is in a unique sense his glorification because it is *through* death that Jesus returns to his heavenly abode. Nicholson is also in agreement with Appold's insistence that John's Christology emphasizes the oneness between the Father and the Son and that it is precisely Jesus' departure back to the Father that demonstrates who he is (1983: 8-10).

In light of this, Nicholson wants to move Käsemann's and Appold's conclusions one step further: 'It is our conviction that Käsemann and Appold have not thrown the net widely enough, for the oneness motif forms a part of a larger motif which we have called the Descent-Ascent

Schema' (1983: 10). Thus, Nicholson's study attempts to argue that 'in the Fourth Gospel the death of Jesus does not gain its true perspective except from the larger pattern of descent and ascent' (1983: 168). It is not surprising, then, that Nicholson's study largely focuses on the 'lifting up' texts (Jn 3.14; 8.28; 12.32f.) within the context of the Gospel's portrayal of the larger descent–ascent motif.

In the 'lifting up of the Son of Man' (LUS) texts, John uses the unique verb *hypsoō* to refer primarily to Jesus' 'lifting up' to heaven and also to Jesus' death by crucifixion (1983: 103). Nicholson's conclusion is that the fourth evangelist used the LUS texts 'to interpret what could be seen as the grisly and embarrassing fact of the crucifixion of Jesus to his readers and ultimately to their non-Christian audience' (1983: 163). The evangelist's 'interpretation' of Jesus' death here is that this death, though necessary, was only one part of a larger divine movement: 'the one who descended to this world had to ascend to the world above, and this return was accomplished through his death by crucifixion. The LUS texts, hence the crucifixion, receive their meaning from the DAS [descent-ascent schema]' (1983: 163). Thus, the evangelist wants his community to understand Jesus' crucifixion not as 'an ignominious death but a return to glory' (1983: 163).

In these LUS texts, the Gospel is not interpreting the exaltation of Jesus but rather his crucifixion. Thus the emphasis is on the crucifixion 'understood in terms of exaltation/ascent/return' (1983: 141-42):

> By embedding some of the allusions (those inherent in the three LUS) within the framework of the descent and ascent of the Son of Man (i.e. within the DAS), the Fourth Evangelist is saying that the crucifixion receives its 'meaning' by being understood as a part of a larger schema: crucifixion was the *beginning* of the ascent to the Father, the means by which the Son of Man left the world *katō* to return to the world *anō* (1983: 142-43; emphasis mine).

Nicholson has succeeded in clarifying more fully Käsemann's already well-established description of Jesus' death as his return back to the Father. Nicholson has also brilliantly and convincingly shown that the death of Jesus, and really the entire movement of the Gospel's plot, should be understood within the larger scheme of the Son's descent and ascent. However, Nicholson's unique argument that the 'hour of Jesus' and the 'hour of his glorification' are not precisely the cross event is a departure from Käsemann. Rather, the hour of Jesus' glorification is to be associated not with his death but with his return to the Father:

> The glorification of Jesus is an action of the Father, consequent on the return of Jesus, which restores him to the glory he had with the Father before the creation of the world (17.5). The 'hour' of Jesus is thus also the 'hour' of his glorification, and both are coincident with, or subsequent to, the 'hour' of his return to the Father (13.1)… The *hora* [hour] of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is *not* the hour of his death, but the hour of his return to the Father, in which hour the death played a part (1983: 146-47; emphasis original).

Nicholson's view here supports the main thrust of his study that, in the FG, salvation is not dependent on Jesus' death as an event in itself, but rather on his return or ascent back to the Father. It is from Jesus' restored position back with the Father that he now mediates salvation. Jesus' death is a necessary event that *leads to* his glorification and return to the Father. In this sense, Nicholson seems to actually diminish the significance of Jesus' death or crucifixion more than Käsemann: for Käsemann, Jesus' death *is* his hour of glorification; for Nicholson, Jesus' death is simply one of the steps, albeit a crucial step, on the way to glorification and the Father (quite reminiscent of U.B. Müller 1975).

Nicholson further argues that the texts about Jesus' death *for* others (the '*hyper* texts') are really not, contrary to the approach of 'earlier scholars' (1983: 2), the key to John's interpretation of Jesus' death. Nicholson's reasoning for downplaying the importance of these texts is as follows:

> We know that Jesus' death is understood elsewhere in the New Testament in terms of sacrifice and atonement (e.g. Rom. 5.6-11; 14.15; 1 Cor. 1.13; 11.24; 15.3; Gal. 1.4; 2.20; 3.13; Heb. 2.9; 10.12). Such an approach was often followed by earlier scholars but we would have to say that this judges the Fourth Gospel by non-johannine standards. For while there is an outcropping of such language in the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel itself is not determined by categories of sacrifice and atonement. This language occurs in places but the Fourth Evangelist does not make anything of it (1983: 2).

Nicholson may in fact be correct that the Gospel's interpretive framework for understanding Jesus' death is the larger Christological motif of ascent–descent. But his reasoning for downplaying or more accurately virtually ignoring the *hyper* texts seems to be flawed. Nicholson's reasoning is as follows: (1) sacrifice and atonement theology are foreign to John's Gospel; (2) the *hyper*-texts (and Jn 1.29) originate in the sacrificial-atonement interpretation of Jesus' death; (3) therefore, they are essentially

foreign elements to the evangelist's real understanding of Jesus' death. Whether or not these passages reflect pre-Johannine tradition or not does not affect the reality that these *do* appear in the Gospel; thus, they should be given their due and integrated into the whole of the evangelist's view.

e. *M.C. de Boer*

M.C. de Boer (1996) investigates the meaning of Jesus' death in light of his view of the composition history of the Gospel and thus the history of the Johannine community reflected in the Gospel and the Epistles. He argues that the Gospel has undergone at least four distinct editions that corresponded with the four phases of the Johannine community. Each edition is essentially a recontextualization of the previous edition in order to reinterpret the Gospel for new contexts (1996: 76-79). These 'new contexts' were created by the three crises that the Johannine community experienced: expulsion from the synagogue, martyrdom because of the community's high Christology, and the schism and subsequent dissolution of the community at the turn of the century. These crises thus gave rise to the need for a new, recontextualized edition of the Gospel that did not do away with or reject the emphases and theologies of the earlier editions but rather takes them up and reinterprets them in such a way that each edition becomes a 'new literary entity' (1996: 79; similar to Brown 1979: 22-71).

De Boer argues that it is in the third phase of the community and the composition of the FG that the language of Jesus' death *for* (*hyper*) others (cf. 6.51; 10.11, 15; 11.50, 51, 52) appears. With Forestell (1974), de Boer argues that this language has nothing to do with atonement but rather points to the self-giving love 'for others' (1996: 314). It is surely correct that Jesus' love is the basis of his laying down of his life for his own (cf. 13.1). But, contra both de Boer and Forestell, the description 'self-giving love' alone does not adequately explain the assertions of the *hyper*-texts. For instance, as we have already emphasized, 11.50-52 interprets Jesus' death for (*hyper*) others as having concrete soteriological effects, namely, the saving of the nation and the people from 'perishing' and the 'gathering' of the dispersed children of God into one.

According to de Boer, none of the phases, or editions, of the Gospel viewed Jesus' death as having soteriological effects. Jesus' death in the first three phases essentially functions to point to something else, another event more significant theologically, than his death as such. It was not until the fourth phase of the community, namely, after a schism in the

surviving Johannine community, that the idea of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice fully developed and rose to the surface (cf. 1 Jn 1.7-8; 2.2; 4.10). The epistolary author interpreted Jesus' death in this manner in order 'to protect his Johannine audience from the propaganda of Johannine Christians who had left his own community (or communities)…' (1996: 313). The overall conclusion reached by de Boer is that there 'is no single theology of the death of Jesus in the extant Johannine Corpus'. The several theologies that we have outlined above represent 'discrete responses to different, and changing, situations in Johannine history'. There is furthermore no evidence that the Johannine writers attempted or achieved a synthesis (1996: 315).

### 3. *The Cross as an Event of Glorification and Atonement*

The Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm reflected in the works above has not gone unchallenged. Beginning with the insights of Th. Müller (1961; see below), subsequent scholars specifically emphasized that the FG's *theologia gloriae* should not be emphasized at the expense of a *theologia crucis*. In fact, the proper interpretation of John's narrative will hold both of these realities together. Thus, the *hyper* texts will now understandably be elevated to a much more central position by scholars who emphasize Jesus' death in John as vicarious and atoning. Another characteristic that is often present in the critiques of the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm is a greater respect for the Gospel's narrative unity, and thus a more synchronic reading of the narrative is observable (see Frey 1997: 298-343, 430).

#### a. *Th. Müller*

In 1961, Th. Müller took issue with Bultmann's views in the direction of a more traditional interpretation of Jesus' death as an atoning event in John (see also Braun [1966] and Delling [1972]). Müller argues against Bultmann's existential interpretation of salvation whereby the exercising of faith in the word of God brings about a new self-understanding; in other words, salvation lies in a new existential understanding which is mediated by the preached word about God in Jesus. The problem for Müller here is that Bultmann's concept of salvation appears to be reduced to a purely subjective (or 'existential') experience. Salvation is solely a matter of the existential response of faith to the revealer. Bultmann's concept of salvation naturally leads to his view that the death of Jesus has no objective salvific meaning. Müller's own assessment of the connection

between Jesus' death and salvation turns out to be diametrically opposed to that of Bultmann's. Müller argues that revelation is an objective event outside the believer and that it is grounded in Jesus' death as an expiatory and vicarious sacrifice for sin. Müller believes that evidence for this interpretation of Jesus' death can be found in such passages as 1.29; 3.16; 10.11, 15, 17; 11.50f.; 12.24, 31; 13.1-11; and 17.19. In opposition to Bultmann, Müller argues that the objective event of Jesus' vicarious, expiatory sacrifice is that which removes sin in the FG. This is not to say that Bultmann is entirely wrong when he emphasized the important role of revelation in John's Gospel. But Müller would rather describe John's Gospel as a synthesis of a revelation theology and traditional Christian theology which he terms *Gemeindetheologie* (1961: 76). Thus, for Müller, the objective saving event is both revelation and sacrificial death (1961: 112-14). Müller's critique (and that of Braun [1966]) of Bultmann anticipated many of the later critiques of both Bultmann and Käsemann almost point by point. The substance of the critique was that salvation by revelation and salvation by vicarious atonement were not two incompatible soteriologies in the FG; both should be held together as complementary. The works of Grigsby (1982) and Turner (1990) clearly stand in this line (see also Nielsen 1999; Loader 1989; Grigsby 1982; Braun 1966).

b. *B.H. Grigsby and M. Turner*

Grigsby and later Turner set out to show that Bultmann's and particularly Forestell's understanding of Jesus' death in John was at best one-sided and did not reflect the multi-faceted portrayal of this death in the FG. Both scholars are in fundamental agreement about John's overall view of the cross contra Bultmann and Forestell: the cross as salvific revelation and the cross as expiatory sacrifice are two basically complementary conceptions found in the Gospel (Grigsby 1982: 52; Turner 1990: 122; cf. Loader 1989; Knöppler 1994; Nielsen 1999; Frey 2002).

Although Grigsby does not want to downplay the Johannine emphasis on revelation, he does set out to show that there is good evidence in the FG that the evangelist also understood Jesus' death in atonement terms and that the elimination of sin is directly tied to the benefits of his death. Grigsby points to the following evidence to support his assertion: (1) Christ as the Paschal victim (Jn 1.29; ch. 19); (2) Christ as the Isaac figure or 'Akedah' theology (Jn 1.29; 3.16; 19.14, 29, 36); and (3) Christ the cleansing fountain (13.10; 19.34). He concludes, against Bultmann and Forestell, that 'the traditional concept of an expiatory rationale between

sin's removal and Christ's death has exerted its influence on the Fourth Evangelist' (1982: 62).

M. Turner takes issue with Forestell's unwillingness to consider that the FG may in fact combine the conception of the cross as 'an objective atoning event *and* as such the high point of redemptive revelation'. Turner further makes his point by concluding that 'the emphasis on Jesus' *death* in John actually makes a combination of sacrificial and mediatorial views of salvation *entirely coherent*, if not *essential*' (1990: 119; emphasis original). He believes that this conception '*provides a more coherent explanation of the place of the cross in John than Forestell's does*' (1990: 119; emphasis original). There is no doubt, according to Turner, that the fourth evangelist believed that 'the cross is the supreme revelation of God's love', but, for Turner, it is such a revelation for the evangelist precisely '*because* he [the evangelist] believes that there, in his Son, God dealt decisively with man's sin' (1990: 121).

For Turner, the most important statement in the Gospel for understanding not only John's view of Jesus' sin-destroying death but also for John's total narrative is the Baptist's statements about Jesus in 1.29-34. Turner states:

> We must note that 1.29-34 is part of the chapters 1–2 which together have *programmatic* significance for the whole Gospel, and thirdly, most important, 1.29-34 is the *first witness* to Jesus, and so, like the prologue, the one, above all, *through which the rest of John is inevitably read*… Far from being insignificant, its position would suggest 1.29 is a doorway to the Johannine understanding of the cross (1990: 121-22, original emphasis).

As the 'doorway' to understanding the cross in John, Jesus as the lamb of God (a fusion of the apocalyptic lamb and the pascal lamb), the other references to Jesus laying down his life for the sheep (10.11, 15) or dying for the nation (11.50-52) should be read in the light of the programmatic description of Jesus at the very outset of his ministry, namely, the lamb who takes away sin in his death on the cross. In this context, we now can know how Jesus' death can be truly 'for us', or 'why it should be considered the cardinal revelation of the Father's love' (Turner 1990: 122), concepts that Forestell is not able to satisfactorily answer. Turner believes that these concepts would have been understood by the earliest Christians (as Forestell admits) who

> had an explanation of some sort for these things—as far as they were concerned the death of Jesus revealed God's love because in it the Son,

> in union with the Father, took into himself the divine righteous wrath against sin, and so became both expiation and (provided the word is used carefully) propitiation for us (and the writer of 1 Jn evinces similar views). John may not emphasize this explanation, but he can barely have failed to realize his readers were likely to assume it (1990: 122).

c. *J. Zumstein*

Zumstein (1992) sets out to investigate the place of the cross in the narrative of the FG. With this aim Zumstein challenges Käsemann's view that the passion of Jesus in John is simply a literary appendix without any real theological importance (1992: 2119).

Zumstein believes that the best method to unfold the place of the cross in John's narrative is 'narratological analysis' (*l'analyse narratologique*) (1992: 2119). Thus, Zumstein pays special attention to narrative techniques such as inclusios, prolepses, irony and explicit and implicit commentary to make his ultimate point 'that the narrative of the passion is at the center of the evangelist's preoccupations' and 'that the whole narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry is oriented toward the hour of the passion' (1992: 2128).

Zumstein recognizes well John's unique characterization of Jesus' death as his departure to the Father, his glorification, and his sovereignty (1992: 2130). But he also sees direct salvific significance in Jesus' death for John. This reality is shown by the symmetrical inclusio of Jesus as the lamb of God (1.29–19.14f.) and by the quote of Zech. 12.10 at 19.37. There are actually two inclusios that frame the Gospel and provide the keys for the evangelist's emphases. The first inclusio that frames the narrative is the programmatic theme of the divinity of Christ: Jn 1.1 ('the word was God') and the confession of Thomas at 20.28 ('my Lord and my God'). The Gospel is fundamentally about the person of Christ, the *logos*. But there is a second discernable inclusio that frames the narrative and as such provides a key to the evangelist's purposes. This frame or inclusio is the Baptist's description of Jesus as the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (1.29) and the paschal symbolism and imagery in the passion narrative (Jn 19). Though the precise referent of the phrase 'lamb of God' is not entirely discernable, an 'allusion to the passion is clear' (1992: 2120). This is particularly evident when Jesus' passion is related directly to the immolation of the passover lamb (Jn 18.28; 19.14). Jesus' death is understood in the contexts of the key event of Israel's history, namely, the exodus. Thus, 'Christ's imminent execution must be understood as the great act of God's liberation for his

people' (1992: 2131). Furthermore, in this same context, the quotation of Zech. 12.10 in Jn 19.37 'intends to present Jesus as the unique son whose death causes mourning as well the renewal of Israel' (1992: 2132).

In light of Zumstein's conclusions here, it is quite surprising that he does not mention the passage in the Gospel that most unambiguously states that the death of Jesus effects the 'renewal of Israel', namely, 11.50-52 (v. 50: 'that one man should die…that the whole nation not perish'; vv. 51-52: 'Jesus was about to die…that he might also gather the dispersed children of God into one').

d. *C. Dietzfelbinger*

Dietzfelbinger (1997) attempted to show that John *approvingly* incorporated traditional elements that understood Jesus' death in the sense of *Stellvertretung* (vicarious representation) and *Sühne* (atonement) and that this tradition surfaces in the Gospel (1997: 72). This view clearly opposes the many scholars who argue that if traditions concerning the vicarious atoning death of Jesus surface in John, they are not only rare but they do not reflect John's understanding of this death (particularly Bultmann and Appold). Some of the evidence Dietzfelbinger points to in this regard are the *hyper* texts (particularly 6.51c; 10.11, 15; 11.50-52) and the presentation of Jesus as the passover lamb (1.29; ch. 19) (1997: 67). But Dietzfelbinger also recognizes John's unique portrayal of Jesus' death as the event of his being lifting up to the Father (3.14; 8.28; 12.32, 34) and his glorification (7.39; 12.16, 23, 28; 17.1, 5). Jesus' death is not understood as 'a tragic event', but rather as a step toward the glory of the Father (17.1-5) (1997: 76).

Dietzfelbinger's solution as to why John has incorporated different (not necessarily contradictory) visions of the significance of Jesus' death is that the evangelist believes that the traditional view (vicarious atonement), although true, is simply not a fully sufficient conception of this death. For John and his community, Jesus was not only an 'offering of atonement' (*Sühneopfer*) on the cross, but he was also the resurrection and the life, the glorified one who returned to the Father (1997: 75).

Thus the description of Jesus' death as a vicarious atonement is not an adequate description of the meaning of his death for the evangelist. 'Vicarious atonement' (*stellvertretende Sühne*) cannot be the 'key word' (*Stichwort*) that adequately describes John's understanding of Jesus' death. For there are other unique aspects that better characterize Jesus' death for the evangelist (return to the Father, glorification, the sending of

the Paraclete, etc.) and these aspects more accurately characterize Jesus' death for the evangelist. Jesus' death as vicarious atonement then remains the first stage of the evangelist's understanding (1997: 76) and the evangelist adds to this first stage elements that he thinks are more fundamental.

### 4. *The Cross as an Atoning Event*

In the last few years, three important works have appeared from a new generation of German Johannine scholars. These works consciously depart from the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm. As such, they argue that the FG not only understands Jesus' death as an event of vicarious atonement but that this understanding is central to the fourth evangelist's soteriology. Thus, not only does atonement theology surface in the FG, it is given a central and constitutive role in the theology of the evangelist.

#### a. *R. Metzner*

In his monograph entitled *Das Verständnis der Sünde im Johannesevangelium* (2000), Metzner aims to show that Haenchen's contention that sin 'is not a fundamental concept in the message of the evangelist' (Haenchen 1980: 167) is misguided (Metzner 2000: 23). For Metzner, the sin concept does not receive simply a casual mention in the FG; rather, it is a central concern for the evangelist. The fundamental orientation for the sin concept as given by the evangelist is the confrontation between God and the world, and, more specifically, this confrontation takes the form of a lawsuit between the Son and the world and the Son and the Jews (2000: 23, 30-113). This central role sin plays in the Gospel begins in the prologue where the confrontation, or lawsuit, between Jesus and the world is first made clear. This confrontation continues throughout the entire Gospel. What becomes evident is that the evangelist is concerned to show that Jesus has confronted and defeated the power-lock that sin has wielded over the world of lost humanity. How Jesus accomplished this defeat of sin according to Metzner is more central to our present concerns.

The very fact that the issue of the elimination of sin appears at the beginning (1.29) and end (20.23) of the narrative reveals its constitutive role for the fourth evangelist. But it is the first occurrence of the term (*amartia* 'sin') in Jn 1.29 that provides the hermeneutical key for how sin is dealt with in the FG. Very similar to Turner (1990: 121-22), Metzner argues that the Baptist's confession, 'behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1.29) functions as the *programmatische*

*Leitthese*, or the 'leading thesis', of the Christology of the FG and specifically of the evangelist's view of Jesus' death (Metzner 2000: 9, 137; cf. Knöppler 1994: 67; Frey 2002: 200-201). John presents Jesus as the true and final passover lamb who takes away sin by means of his vicarious atoning death (*stellvertretende Sühnetod*) (Metzner 2000: 22-23, 132-37). This interpretation is confirmed by the clear passover associations in the passion narrative and specifically surrounding the cross event (18.28, 39; 19.14, 29, 31-37). Against those who argue that the passover lamb was not considered an atoning sacrifice, Metzner argues that the atonement character of the lamb of God in the FG coheres both with the Old Testament, post-biblical Judaism and the New Testament. The sacrificial character of the passover lamb is evident in Deut. 16; 2 Chron. 30; *Jub*. 49; Philo (*Spec. Laws* 2.145), Josephus (*Ant.* 2.312) among other references (2000: 130). In New Testament times the passover lamb was clearly understood as an atoning sacrifice (2000: 129; cf. Lohse 1963: 142), and Paul's statement that Christ is our 'passover lamb who has been sacrificed' (1 Cor. 5.7) reveals this sacrificial character.

The lamb of God deals with sin by 'removing' or 'taking away' (*airo*) the 'crushing load of sin from the world' (2000: 129). The point of 1.29 is not the forgiveness of individual sins as such but rather 'the *totality of sin* whose power is once and for all broken at the cross' (2000: 129). Thus, God confronts the world *through* the lamb; and it is through the lamb's vicarious atoning death that God defeats and removes the power of sin (2000: 129, 137).

All other statements about Jesus' death in the FG must be read in light of the programmatic statement in 1.29 (Metzner 2000: 131; cf. Frey 2002: 198). This is most clearly the case for the *hyper* passages where Jesus' vicarious death for others is in view (Jn 6.51c; 10.11, 15; 11.51-52; 15.13; 17.19; 18.14). These passages contain a formulaic statement which contains the following elements: a statement about Jesus' death/laying down his life and the preposition *hyper* ('for') plus the object of the preposition in the genitive case (namely, his sheep, the nation, etc.). The preposition *hyper* with the genitive connotes the idea of *benefit* for the object of the preposition. Thus, the statement 'Jesus should die *for* the nation' (11.51) means that Jesus' death will be *for*, that is it will *benefit* the nation in some way. The way in which Jesus' death benefits the nation (or the sheep, etc.) should be informed by the clear programmatic confession in 1.29 (and later passion connections). Jesus' death for the evangelist is to be fundamentally understood as a vicarious atoning death which breaks

the power of sin in humanity (2000: 131). This coheres with the use of the *hyper* formula in early Christianity (e.g. Rom. 5.6, 8; 1 Cor. 15.3; 2 Cor. 5.21; Eph. 5.25; Tit. 3.18; Heb. 7.27; 9.7; 10.12) where it is clearly used to interpret Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for sin (2000: 131). Therefore, Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice is at the centre of John's soteriology.

If the cross is the 'place of atonement for sins' (2000: 135), then, according to Metzner, there must be an implied criticism of the cult (temple) (2000: 135; cf. R. Brown 1979: 34). Jesus is portrayed in the FG as the new, eschatological sanctuary (1.14); in his death and resurrection Jesus becomes the new temple (2.19-22). Thus, for the post-Easter community, Jesus, through the mediation of the Spirit, is the true 'place' of worship (4.20-24). 'If the temple was regarded as the place of the presence of God and the place of atonement for sins, then it is now Jesus Christ alone, in whom God dwells and brings about atonement for sins (independently from the cultic-ritual atonement of the temple institution)' (2000: 135). Metzner's assessment of the place of the cross event in John's theology moves him far away from the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm, a paradigm that he explicitly rejects (2000: 130).

b. *T. Knöppler*

T. Knöppler's contribution to the interpretation of Jesus' death in the FG first appeared in his dissertation published as *Die* theologia crucis *des Johannesevangeliums: Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der johanneischen Inkarnations- und Erhöhungschristologie* (1994) and then later in his *Habilitationsschrift* published as *Sühne im Neuen Testament. Studien zum urchristlichen Verständnis der Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu* (2001). In the introduction of his dissertation, Knöppler states explicitly that the view of Bultmann and Käsemann (later followed by such scholars as Müller [1975] and Schulz [1983]) that insisted that there is no soteriological meaning ascribed to Jesus' death in the FG must be seriously questioned (1994: 10). Knöppler's work is thus intended to argue that John's Gospel does in fact have a *theologia crucis* ('theology of the cross') and that in the Gospel Jesus' death has specific soteriological meaning.

Knöppler's view is quite similar to Metzner's: Jesus' death understood as a vicarious atoning event is at the centre of Johannine Christology (1994: 88; 2001: 233). It is the Baptist's confession in 1.29 which serves as the entrance into John's understanding of Jesus' death as an atoning

sacrifice for sin (1994: 67; 2001: 49; cf. Metzner 2000: 22-23, 132-37). The passion narrative makes clear that Jesus is the passover lamb whose death atones for sin (19.14, 29, 33, 36). The statement that 'blood' and 'water' flowed from Jesus' side at the cross (19.34), together with the clear passover connections in Jn 19, show that Jesus' death was understood as an atoning and purifying event for the fourth evangelist (1994: 97; 2001: 234; cf. Metzner 2000: 267). Therefore, in his death, 'Jesus is the source of atonement and purification' from sin (2001: 234; cf. Metzner 2000: 132).

Knöppler raises the question as to whether the programmatic statement in 1.29 and the later passover-atonement associations in the passion narrative mean that the *hyper* texts, or the texts that speak about Jesus giving his life vicariously for others, must also be understood in atonement terms. Although Knöppler recognizes that atonement is not possible without some kind of vicarious event (in the Jewish understanding), he nevertheless insists that not all the vicarious passages in John convey an atonement idea (2001: 251). This view separates Knöpper from other scholars that he otherwise follows on almost every point (e.g. Metzner 2000; Schnelle 1987, 1998). Under the influence of such scholars as H. Gese (1989) and Janowski (1982), Knöppler defines atonement as follows: 'atonement is a salvation act of God that rescues humanity lost in death because of sin' (1994: 91; 2001: 250). Furthermore, God's redemptive and atoning rescue of lost humanity from sin and death involves the granting of life. If these elements are present in the context, then we are dealing with a genuine *Sühneaussage* ('atonement-passage') (2001: 252).

With this definition in mind, Knöppler argues that 'among the vicarious formulations [*hyper* texts], only 6.51c should be regarded as an unambiguous instance of a Johannine atonement passage' (1994: 94-95; cf. 2001: 251). In Jn 6.51c, Jesus' vicarious giving of his flesh mediates eternal life to the world (vv. 27, 33, 51b, 54, 57) and saves it from sin and death (v. 50) (2001: 245-46). There is therefore a convergence in 6.51c between the idea of vicarious death and atonement. This convergence is precisely what sets Jn 6.51c apart from the other Johannine vicarious (*hyper*) passages (1994: 202; 2001: 246). How then should the other vicarious passages (namely, 10.11, 15; 11.50-52; 15.13; 18,14) be understood? These other passages speak about Jesus' vicarious death for others to be sure. But in these instances, the issue is *not about* the soteriological and redemptive deliverance from sin and death but rather the deliverance

from some kind of trouble or disaster (*Unheil*). For instance, in Jn 10.11, 15, Jesus gives his life to protect the sheep from the wolf, and in 11.50-52 the authorities plan Jesus' crucifixion in order to prevent Rome from destroying the temple, the nation and the people. In addition, the vicarious passage in Jn 15.13 speaks simply about Jesus' unsurpassed love for his own (1994: 95; 2001: 251-52). But has Knöppler too narrowly limited the atonement idea to include only 6.51c? Are the intended effects of Jesus' death in the other *hyper* texts not also *soteriological* effects? These questions are taken up in the work of J. Frey below.

c. *J. Frey*

J. Frey's recent contribution ('Die "*theologia crucifixi*" des Johannesevangeliums' [2002]) specifically sets out to address the debate which has raged since Käsemann, namely, whether the soteriology of John's Gospel is linked to a theology of the cross or a theology of glorification (2002: 169-76). Frey argues, against Käsemann, that Jesus' death has an explicit soteriological interpretation in John, and Jesus' death as a vicarious atoning event is the focus and centre of the FG. 'Compositionally, Jesus' death on the cross is the purpose and highpoint of the whole book' (Frey 2002: 191). Frey goes so far as to say that John's Gospel is 'even more "a passion-story with an elaborate introduction" than Mark's Gospel' (Frey 2002: 193; quoting Kähler 1969: 60).

Frey shows that the FG contains many proleptic statements leading up to the cross that reveal the pervasive and central place of the cross for John's narrative (2002: 197). The primary proleptic and programmatic statement of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice is the Baptist's confession in 1.29 (2002: 197, 201; cf. Knöppler 1994: 67; 2001: 49). But there are other important texts that also point ahead to the cross: Jesus' 'lifting up' (3.14-15; 8.28; 12.32-34), his glorification (7.39; 11.4; 12.16, 23; 13.31; 17.1, 5), his 'hour' (2.4; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23, 27, 38; 13.31; 17.1) and the temple pericope (2.14-22). The notices of death threats (5.18; 7.1, 19, 25; 8.37, 40; 11.53; 12.10) and attempted stonings (10.31-33; 11.8) by Jesus' opponents also point directly to the cross (2002: 198-99).

With Metzner, Frey argues that statements about Jesus' death, and particularly the *hyper* passages, should be read in light of 1.29 and indeed the entire Gospel (Frey 2002: 198; Metzner 2000: 131). Therefore, all the vicarious *hyper* texts in which Jesus gives his life for others speak of Jesus' *atoning* death (Frey 2002: 197, 214-16). It is not surprising, then, that Frey takes issue with Knöppler's view that the only vicarious passage that clearly also has an atonement orientation is 6.51c. If one allows the

Johannine narrative itself to determine the meaning of the *hyper* or vicarious passages, then the Baptist's programmatic statement in 1.29 must function as the interpretive context for all the statements about Jesus' death, and particularly the vicarious texts. Although formal differences exist between the *hyper* passages, they nevertheless should be interpreted 'in the context of the Gospel in its harmony and as such they form a dense texture of statements about the soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death' (2002: 213).

Frey does concede that Knöppler is correct in his observation that the other *hyper* passages do not explicitly say that Jesus' death deals with sin, but rather, in these passages, Jesus' death serves to avert some disaster. But, on the basis of a synchronic reading of the narrative, the reader who already knows the information in 1.29, has read the first vicarious atoning passage (6.51c), and who is familiar with the atonement tradition in 1 Jn (2.2; 4.10), will incorporate the other *hyper* passages (10.11, 15; 11.50-52; 15.13; 18.14) into an 'overall picture' (*Gesamtbild*) of John's understanding of Jesus' death as a vicarious and atoning event (2002: 215). Thus, in this narrative light, the *hyper* texts speak not simply about an averted disaster (cf. Knöppler), but the rescue from death and the opening of salvation and life (2002: 214-15).

For example, the plan to put Jesus to death in 11.47-52 is only superficially about the aversion of a disaster. The deeper soteriological significance of Jesus' death is the point. First, the two pericopai that frame the Lazarus narrative (11.1-44) are mutually interpreting. On one side, the Lazarus narrative is framed by the retrospective notice that Jesus 'went again across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized… And many came to him; and they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true"' (10.40-42). On the other side, the Lazarus narrative is framed by the Sanhedrin's plan to put Jesus to death (11.47-52). The Baptist's programmatic confession about Jesus' identity and mission in 1.29 (alluded to in 10.40-42) and the high priest's 'prophecy' about Jesus' vicarious death for others in 11.50-52 share a certain reciprocal relationship: the Baptist's confession that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away sin by his death is shown to be 'true' (cf. 10.41) in Jesus' death *for* the nation and the people (11.50-52) (2002: 217). Jesus dies as an atoning sacrifice *for* the people, so that they will not 'perish' (11.50), that is, so that they will not *die*. Thus, Jesus' death here rescues from death and effects a new community (11.51-52: 'Jesus was about to die for the nation…in order to gather the dispersed children of God into one') (2002: 218). This evaluation also applies to 10.11, 15:

Jesus' death saves the sheep from the destruction of the wolves, or the leaders of Israel, and brings about the soteriological restoration of the true people of God (promised in Ezek. 34–37 and Jer. 23). Thus, the Gospel should be read more in line with the community tradition evident in 1 Jn where Jesus' death understood as an atoning event (1 Jn 2.2; 4.10) and as a vicarious 'laying down' of his life for (*hyper*) others (1 Jn 3.16) are inextricably linked (2002: 214).

In the end, Frey has pinpointed a weakness in Knöppler's evaluation of what counts for a genuine atoning passage. Against the Old Testament/Jewish background, the deliverance of the sheep and their unity (10.11-16) and the gathering of the true people into a unity (11.52) is 'end of exile' language and thus by definition these passages speak about the salvific effects of Jesus' death *for* his people. It therefore appears that Frey is correct: if the entire Gospel narrative is taken into consideration, all the *hyper* passages reveal the *soteriological* effects of Jesus' death *for* his own.

## 5. *Concluding Remarks*

This survey of the interpretation of Jesus' death in John's Gospel from Bultmann and Käsemann to the present has unearthed the following insights.

(1) The Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm that reigned for many years, and is still alive to some degree, argued that, for the Johannine evangelist, Jesus' death was not understood along atonement lines. The redaction- and source-critical methodology of this paradigm was concerned to isolate traditional material and later redactional elements from what was deemed to be *genuinely* Johannine material. This methodology results, more times than not, in unjustifiably disregarding material that is in fact in the Gospel (whether that material is regarded as pre-Johannine tradition or later). This was particularly evident concerning the Johannine *hyper* texts. With this sometimes quite arbitrary method of separating tradition from redaction (and most of the time scholars do not agree on the results), a skewed picture of the Gospel's view of Jesus' death often resulted. In addition, what was concluded to be *the Johannine view* of Jesus' death was at serious odds with the view of early Christianity.

(2) The subsequent responses and critiques of the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm usually coincided with an increased appreciation for the Gospel narrative as we now have it. As K. Scholtissek has concluded, recent studies on John's Gospel have presupposed that the 'present text, with

both its tensions and its message, is to be taken seriously and remains the primary subject of interest' (1998). When the actual narrative of the Gospel is allowed to provide both the content *and* the context of John's view of Jesus' death, a very different picture of Jesus' death emerges when compared to the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm. When *all* the evidence in John's Gospel is taken seriously, the Johannine *hyper* texts naturally rise in importance in the evaluation of John's view of Jesus' death. Furthermore, this methodology results in a view of Jesus' death in John that coheres much more with early Christian tradition. The trend *away* from both the methodology and the results of the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm has been underway for a number of years and has been especially observable in recent important German works on John's Gospel. It remains to be seen whether these works, and the others we have surveyed, will decisively demolish the Bultmann–Käsemann paradigm.

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