

# The Meaning of “Life” in the Gospel according to St. John

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This article focuses on the meaning of “life” in the Gospel according to John. Focusing on the present form of the Gospel of John, it uses semantic-field analysis to determine where “life” and “death” clusters occur in the gospel narrative. It then considers possible responses to the text by its early recipients that might further elucidate the gospel’s life imagery. It concludes that the meaning of life in the Gospel of John according to its first-century context may best be understood as arising out of a complex yet important comparison/contrast between Moses and Jesus Christ, *νομος* and Logos. This comparison/contrast is first introduced by the gospel Prologue and is in evidence in the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1–15. The article then concludes with ramifications of this understanding of life/death in the Gospel of John for modern-day readers.

**Keywords :** Life, Moses, *Νομος*/Law/Torah, Nicodemus, Logos

Though the New Testament as a whole speaks with clarity and consistency on the topic of “life” (ζωή) and “living” (ζῶν) it does not do so in a static or uniform manner. It asserts that all life begins with God the Creator and proceeds out of the Creator’s original purpose. It tells how all creation is declared to be “good” and how humanity is created in God’s image. It recognizes the gravity of the human predicament and the inescapable death sentence for sin. It understands God’s saving purpose for all humanity revealed in the lifetime ministry of Jesus and fulfilled by his death and resurrection. And it looks

ahead to a future day when God’s purpose will be consummated and believers will once-and-for-all receive the promised inheritance of eternal life. Individual parts of the New Testament take on different aspects of each of these topics with varying degrees of emphasis. In the Pauline epistles, for example, Paul sees things in part through the lens of his conversion experience. He understands ζωή and ζῶν as the result of God’s favor in revealing the resurrected Christ in him (Gal. 2:19–20; cf. 1:12, 16), “light” in the darkness analogous to the Word of God spoken in the first creation, which Paul now proclaims as a word of life (2 Cor. 4:4–6; Phil. 2:16; cf. 2 Tim 1:10). The emphasis here is on a present gift from God that results in victory over both sin

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and death, ultimately brought to completion on the Day of the Lord (2 Cor 1:14; cf. 4:14; Gal 6:9), but proclaimed in the present through the Gospel. The Synoptic Gospels highlight the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven drawn near in the person of Jesus Christ, to be fully perfected and made visible on the day of Christ's return. On more than one occasion "kingdom" is used as a synonym for eternal life in this eschatological sense (Mark 9:43-48; 10:17, 23-24; Matt 18:8-9, 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-27; cf. Matt 25:34, 46). The Fourth Gospel (hereafter "FG"), by contrast, highlights *ζωή* neither as something associated primarily with the resurrected Christ as in Paul, nor as that which is synonymous with the eschatological kingdom, as in the Synoptic Gospels, but rather with the person of the present, incarnate Logos (e.g., 6:35, 8:12, 11:25). Here *ζωή* and *ζών* comprise a recurring theme in the discourses of Jesus throughout FG that becomes the primary imagery around which the saving work of Jesus is described and foreshadowed.<sup>1)</sup> Rather than primarily legal standing before God as justified in Paul, and instead of the mainly future orientation of the eschatological kingdom in the Synoptics, in FG we have the gift of life wrapped up in the person of the incarnate Logos. His signs foreshadow the greatest life-giving act of all, his crucifixion and resurrection. In aligning *ζωή* with the person of Jesus in this way, FG plays an important yet distinct role within the New Testament corpus.

This paper will focus on the present form of the text of FG as well as reader-responses to the text that may reflect literary traditions of the first century.<sup>2)</sup> My goal is to understand how life/death imagery in the narrative of FG forms a part of the message that this Gospel communicates and thereby to elucidate the particular contribution of FG. I will first demon-

strate where "life" is to be found in the narrative of FG by investigating the Gospel's use of Greek vocables most often used to signify life. I will then map where clusters of life/death imagery occur, as a result of semantic field study. This procedure will reveal patterns in how life/death imagery is communicated through the gospel narrative. Next, utilizing the results of this investigation, I will choose one cluster in particular, and, after investigating how the prologue introduces and summarizes the life/death dynamic in FG, examine how this cluster passage contributes to the distinctive "life" message that runs throughout FG as a whole. The result will be an application of FG which I believe is beneficial for mission proclamation in contexts where encounter with the living Lord Jesus and his Word, rather than with a lengthy or developed Judeo-Christian theological tradition, is foremost.

### "Life" in FG

What is the meaning of "life" in the Gospel according to St. John? The question is not as obvious as it may first appear. On the one hand, to speak about "life" is to focus on an abstract idea that must be defined by its opposite, "death." To be alive is not to be dead, and the reverse is also true. But "life" in the narrative of FG, though it is indeed antithetical to death, and though it may be elucidated by any number of symbolic images (bread for the hungry; water for the thirsty; light where there is darkness, etc.), is never a mere abstraction. It is always understood in relation to living and dying beings. It is especially understood in light of God the Father, who has life in himself (5:26), and the one and only Son, the Logos (1:14), through whom all creation has come about (1:3-4). These

images of God and the Son of God as possessing and giving life communicates to those who receive this Gospel precisely because death and all FG indicates is associated with death (darkness, hunger, thirst, illness, loneliness, ritual impurity, etc.) is so very much a part of *their* existence. Not just a pulse in the veins and air in the lungs, but life accompanied by an undying sense of purpose, knowledge of what is "real" and does not disappoint, a quiet confidence in a future restoration, come what may... in short, abundant, *eternal* life for all who believe in the Son of Man lifted up (3:15) is what FG is all about.

In developing an investigation into the life imagery of FG, I first focused on "life" in FG by examining individual Greek vocables that most frequently signify life. *Ψυχή* is used in FG as the object of the verb *τίθημι* six times in the sense of "give up one's life" for (*ὑπέρ*) the life of another (10:11, 15, 17; 13:37, 38; 15:13).<sup>3)</sup> Most of the time "life" is signified by *ζωή* (36 times) or its associated verb *ζάω* (16 times). *Ζάω* can refer to life in the ordinary sense (4:50–51). More often, it and *ζωή* in FG are associated with either something God possesses (5:26), that which is made known/given through Jesus Christ (11:25, 14:6) or, especially, the gift of eternal life for ordinary people that faith in Christ obtains (3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39–40; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2–3; 20:30–31).

Life in FG is not limited by a single Greek vocable or even a single Greek root. It can be represented by various words, or sets of words, and these expressions belong to semantic fields. In order to analyze the narrative of FG for content that refers to the life/death theme, it therefore became necessary to look not only at vocables like *ζωή* but also to investigate various semantic fields to which the concept of "life" belongs. In addition to *ζωή*, I discovered that

six other vocables or Greek expressions occurring in FG belong to the semantic field of living, and a total of nine to the semantic field of dying, both of which Louw and Nida group into a single category.<sup>4)</sup> I also found that in the related category of "exist," three vocables in FG signify topics related to life in some, though not every, instance.<sup>5)</sup> Similarly, in the semantic field of "destroy," two vocables in FG signify topics related to death.<sup>6)</sup> Finally, in order to map out as completely as possible the occurrences of life and death imagery in FG, I thought it would be helpful to go one step further and consider instances where either giving birth, or its mirror opposite, taking life, are mentioned. According to the semantic fields that Louw and Nida provide, three vocables related to giving birth and 6 related to killing occur in FG.<sup>7)</sup> I then mapped the frequency of these terms onto a graph (see "Life/Death Clusters in FG," p56) so as to discover where, if anywhere, the life/death imagery in the FG was to be found in clusters.

The diagram on page 12 shows the frequency of life and death imagery in the narrative of FG by counting the number of times that various words from these five semantic fields (dying/living, existing and destroying, giving birth and killing) occur. Frequency is listed by individual sections of FG, such as the Prologue, the passion narrative, etc. For example, the dark line reads "0.68" at the category labeled "Prologue (John 1:1–18)." This indicates that in the 19 verses of the Prologue 13 instances of life imagery were found, averaging roughly 0.68 occurrences of life imagery per verse in this section. Regarding this same passage the lighter line is flat, indicating that in this passage no corresponding death imagery was found. In this manner death/life "clusters" can be identified in FG in such a way that the overall structure of the Gospel is

mapped according to death/life imagery.<sup>8)</sup>

The pattern of death/life clusters in the narrative of FG revealed from this kind of analysis is striking. Several details are worth mentioning. First, life imagery clusters at the beginning of FG, especially as it explodes into the narrative of the Prologue and continues into the early discourses of Jesus. With the exception of Jesus' high priestly prayer in chapter 17, these clusters dwindle as the narrative progresses, while content related to death and death imagery steadily increases. The mid-point of this process seems to coincide with the Good Shepherd Discourse, where the frequency of death imagery overtakes life imagery in the narrative for the very first time. Second, the early frequency of life imagery corresponds to the first three extended discourses of Jesus in FG, episodes where Jesus is holding forth with individuals or groups of people who are said to be "Jews" (3:1; 5:10, 15-18; 6:41). These listeners range from somewhat sympathetic (e.g. Nicodemus, 3:2), to skeptical (6:41-2), to explicitly hostile (5:18). It appears that life and death imagery in FG is elucidated through repeated contrast between Jesus/Jesus' words with Moses/Law (Torah, Scripture). Third, the final sign of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus, unlike all earlier signs that either have no death/life imagery at all or significantly greater life imagery, has as much death imagery per verse as the passion narrative itself. The anointing episode (12:1-11), with the greatest frequency of death imagery outside of the passion narrative, seems to foreshadow the passion. From a narratological standpoint, it is worthy of note that not only does imagery related to death increase as we move toward the end of FG, but the death theme clusters around the Gospel's climax: the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>9)</sup> Finally, though the passion narrative has a great deal of imagery related

to death as we might expect, the resurrection account, by contrast, makes surprisingly little explicit mention of life (only 2 occurrences in 32 verses). Mary Magdalene is not told to announce that Jesus is risen, but to report to Jesus' "brothers" that he is "ascending to my father and your father, my God and your God" (20:17).

Though frequency of semantic field words is only one way of measuring specific content related to life in the Fourth Gospel,<sup>10)</sup> these four characteristics of death/life clusters invite in-depth study of Jesus' early discourses (3:1-21; 5:16-47; and 6:25-71) as a way to more fully understand the concept of "life" in FG. Throughout these discourses life is received through water and Spirit (3:5; cf. 6:63) and the word of Jesus (5:24, 6:62), but Jesus uses each of these discourses to focus on a different phase of eternal life: birth "from above" (3:1-21), resurrection of the dead on the last day (5:16-47), and eternal life enjoyed now through dependence on Jesus, the bread of life (6:25-71). Since space does not permit an in-depth study of all these passages here, I will explore the thesis that life and death imagery in FG is elucidated through repeated contrast between Jesus/Jesus' words with Moses/Torah (Scripture) by a brief analysis of John 3:1-15. I will investigate to what extent this contrast is first established in the Gospel's Prologue and how it is developed alongside other life-related themes in the early discourse material of FG.

### John 3:1-15 in Context: Prologue of FG

Although the first extended Moses imagery enters the main body of narrative in FG in the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus (3:14), the first mention of Moses in FG itself occurs in the Prologue (1:17; cf. 1:14). Detailed studies of the

Prologue of FG are abundant, and it is not the purpose of this study to reproduce their findings. It is simply worth noting that the Prologue is the introduction and summary to FG, and it is here that the nature of the Moses/Jesus dynamic is first established: "The law (*νόμος*) through Moses was given. Grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ."

How is this contrast between Moses and Jesus to be understood? Three aspects of John 1:17 related to the narrative as it now stands are significant for answering this question. I will detail these points and then check them against the wider context of FG by briefly examining the use of "Moses" throughout the narrative of FG.

First, Moses is invoked by the Prologue in verse 17 as a foil to Jesus, and not as a person to be introduced and distinguished in the narrative in his own right. The Prologue distinguishes Jesus as the one and only son of the Father (1:14), none other than God himself (1:1, 18), through whom all things are made (1:3). All of the life imagery noted in Diagram 1, whether the creation of the cosmos (1:3) or the begetting of the children of God who believe in his name (1:12-13), revolves in some fashion around Jesus Christ. Moses, by contrast, is ushered into the Prologue in verse 17 in summary fashion with the words, "The law through Moses was given." Clearly, the Prologue wants to communicate that the work and identity of Jesus Christ is on an entirely different scale from that of Moses. FG assumes that Moses and his association with *νόμος* is already familiar to the reader and needs no further elaboration. Moses' work and identity stand in contrast to that of Jesus Christ and the glory that Christ reveals as incarnate Logos (1:14).

The second significant aspect of John 1:17

concerns the syntax of this verse. The syntax here compliments the content of the Prologue that sets Moses and Christ in contrast to one another while simultaneously indicating that this contrast is not a radical antithesis. First, the contrast between Moses and Christ is highlighted. The different voices used for the main verb of each phrase in verse 17 highlight the essentially distinct role that Moses and Christ have. The passive voice is used to describe the giving of the law through Moses, implying divine agency. By contrast, grace and truth through Jesus Christ have "come about," and this is the same verb used to describe the creation of the cosmos through the Logos (1:3) earlier in the Prologue.<sup>11)</sup> Had FG wanted to highlight a comparison between Moses and Christ, it is difficult to understand why an adverb such as *καθώς* would not have been used, as it is used throughout FG in just such instances (cf. 3:14, 17:18, 20:21, et al). In verse 18 immediately following, similar syntax (lack of a conjunction or adverb of comparison) delivers an unmistakable contrast. "No one [including Moses; cf. Exod 33:20] has ever seen God; the only-begotten God who is near the bosom of the Father...that one has made [the Father] known." At the same time, however, it is significant that FG does not link each of the two phrases in 1:17 with a conjunction that sets them in opposition.<sup>12)</sup> Also, it is hard to miss the roles of both Moses and Christ explained through parallel *διὰ* clauses. Though Moses and Jesus Christ are easily perceived by the reader as being contrasted to one another in verse 17 regardless of the surrounding context, the syntax of the verse simultaneously suggests that some sort of limited parallel relationship between them also exists.

The third important aspect of verse 17 is that even though Jesus Christ is elevated over

Moses as the true giver of life (1:4), the difference between Moses and Christ in light of the gifts of life that each brings is such that Christ does not negate or stand in radical opposition to Moses. Christ fulfills and completes the divine plan of salvation in which Moses plays a part. Insufficient context exists in FG to determine the precise meaning of *χάρις* in verse 17. The significance of verse 17 ultimately rests on the correct understanding of *νόμος*<sup>13)</sup> and whether “grace and truth”<sup>14)</sup> constitute an indivisible package or are to be understood separately.

*Χάρις*, both because it is opposite *νόμος* according to the syntax of verse 17 and because it is associated with the life-giving work of the incarnate Logos, could become a signal for the reader to understand *νόμος* according to Paul’s use of the term in the book of Romans as Law in the “strict sense,” as a commandment or body of legislation. According to this reading, that “grace...through Christ came about” could mean that an act of God, performed with no preconditions for successful human performance of the law, has resulted in the forgiveness of sins (1:29; cf. 20:23) and God’s favor toward humankind. It has opened the way to eternal life (cf. Rom 6:14), and this has all occurred “through Christ.”<sup>15)</sup>

On the other hand, it is by no means certain that *νόμος* in verse 17 of the Prologue is either limited to this narrow sense of “God’s commandment” or else that *νόμος* in the wider context of FG is able to signify revelation that no longer contains grace and truth after the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore some commentators argue that the significant issue may not be the contrast of “law” and “grace” which is so important to Paul, but actually a comparison of divine revelation in the “Old Testament” Word of God given through Moses with the grace and truth that comes about in the person of Jesus.<sup>16)</sup> No

longer is the understanding “law” vs. “grace,” but rather a movement from “old grace” to “new grace.” The difficulty with this latter understanding of the text, however, is that it tends to set Moses and Jesus on more equal footing, a move that doesn’t jibe with the overall thrust of the Prologue.

A third reading of *νόμος* is put forward by Pancaro. He argues that *νόμος* in verse 17 does not signify “commandment” and stand in contrast to “grace,” as it often does for Paul. Pancaro understands *νόμος* to be signifying a Word of God that, after Christ’s coming, is significant in so far as it points to Christ. Later in the narrative of FG it becomes clear that Jesus’ Jewish opponents do not understand this (cf. 7:19, 22–24; 8:17; 10:34; 19:7). Pancaro argues that for those receiving Christ the Torah is of value, even “grace and truth.” For those who do not recognize that the Torah points to Christ, Pancaro concludes that the Torah must be worthless. Yes, the relationship between Torah and grace/truth of Jesus Christ is presented antithetically in verse 17, but this is only because Christ has now come and the Torah can no longer be a Word of God that points beyond Christ.<sup>17)</sup>

The literary context of FG as a whole seems to drive home this third reading of *νόμος* elucidated by Pancaro. Elsewhere in FG we see that the contrast between Moses and Jesus is not the radical antithesis of polar opposites but a matter rooted in redemption history to which Scripture has testified. Christ has superseded and replaced Moses. According to Jesus, Moses originally wrote about him (5:46). For Philip, likewise, Jesus is the one “about whom Moses wrote” (1:45). The reference is likely to the prophet “like [Moses]” through whom Yahweh would one day speak (cf. Deut 18:15–22). Through Moses, who lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness (3:14–15), God sustained the life of his people Israel, but the origin of life was not Moses himself but God (6:32). Now Jesus, the Son of Man, is not merely a prophet like Moses, but the very gift of life that God directly bestowed on his people (cf. 3:15; 6:32–33). Because the Jewish leaders do not believe in Jesus but instead put their hopes entirely in this same Moses, he will one day accuse them before the Father (5:45). When Jesus seems to put himself and his disciples at a distance from the Jewish leadership with the phrase "your Law" (10:34) or "their Law" (15:25), the issue is not the Law/Torah *per se* but Jesus' opponents use of it to reject Jesus and his testimony about himself.<sup>18)</sup> They attempt to elevate Moses, the "true" prophet, over Jesus the "false," claiming that they are disciples of the former (9:28). The reader knows what they do not: the ἀληθεία rests, in the end, not with Moses, but with Jesus.

It therefore appears that Moses is used as a foil to Jesus in the Prologue to FG, and despite the parallel syntax between them in verse 17, the contrast between both remains immediately obvious. A brief investigation into the "law," and "grace/truth" contrast in this passage, together with a short examination of the wider usage of "Moses" throughout the narrative of FG, does not reveal a radically antithetical "relationship of opposites" between Moses and Jesus Christ. But neither does it present Jesus as merely a new and improved version of Moses. The Prologue of FG depicts God's gift of life in the Logos as something to which Torah can only point. Jesus supersedes and replaces Moses and Torah. We now turn to an investigation of John 3:1–15 to see what, if anything, this dynamic between Jesus and Moses introduced in the Prologue to FG can reveal about the abundant life/death imagery of this text.

## John 3:1–15

As already mentioned above, John 3:1–21 is one of three discourses of Jesus that is replete with life and death imagery. The symbolism in the text is admittedly rich, with imagery of birth through water and Spirit<sup>19)</sup> recalling the narrative context of John's and Jesus' baptisms (cf. 1:26, 33), and foreshadowing imagery associated with the death of Jesus on the cross.<sup>20)</sup> The significance of this imagery for the Christian sacrament of Holy Baptism<sup>21)</sup> and the word play on ἄνωθεν (3:3, 7) are crucial for understanding this passage. Both aspects of the text are very familiar and do not need extended commentary here. As the Life/Death Clusters Diagram indicates, this is the first of three extended discourses of Jesus with Jewish listeners on the topic of life and death. The text contains more life/death imagery related to the gift of life received from God by humanity than any other passage in FG, including the Prologue. Accordingly, I want to mine this text for anything it can elucidate about life/death imagery in FG, especially as that imagery elicits reader responses that recall Old Testament texts and ancient Jewish or Samaritan commentary on those texts. Especially pertinent will be material related to the person of Moses, whom I will argue is at the center of Nicodemus's and the Pharisees' misunderstanding. Since this is a prominent sermon text in most parts of the world it is likely to already be a familiar passage for most Christians, making a renewed investigation of the text all the more welcome.

The narrative of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus continues without change of scene all the way through to verse 21 of chapter 3, but I would like to focus especially on the first fifteen verses of this discourse in FG because of what

it has to say about “life” through a comparison/contrast between Jesus and Moses. Moses does not enter the narrative explicitly until verse 15. But here, as in chapters 5 and 6, we will see that FG communicates a message of life that reader responses can associate with the Jesus/Moses dynamic.

No change of location in John 3:1 is noted, implying that the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus occurs where chapter 2 leaves off, in the environs of Jerusalem. The text specifies that Nicodemus came to Jesus “at night” (3:2; cf. 19:39), but nothing explicitly identifies the day of the week or otherwise clearly indicates that Nicodemus came to Jesus on the evening of *Passover* (i.e., at the beginning of the day of Nisan 15).<sup>22)</sup> Nevertheless, since the text follows a description of Jesus in Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover (2:23) in the context of his performing (or not performing) signs (2:23), the context of 3:1–15 is clearly in the same orbit as an entire host of images related to the Exodus event. Associations between this text and Old Testament passages related to the calling of Moses and the “signs and wonders” (Exod 7:3) God performed through Moses are, for this reason, justified.

**“A person from among the Pharisees...a leader of the Jews” (3:1).** Nicodemus’s encounter with Jesus is associated with the content of the latter part of chapter two in two specific ways. First, Nicodemus seeks Jesus out because of the signs that Jesus performs (3:3). He and the Pharisees he represents, like “the Jews” that confront Jesus in the temple (2:18), base their response to Jesus on his performance of “signs” that buttress his claims and validate his actions. Jesus, in response, points to his rebuilding of the temple, symbolic of his gift of life through resurrection from the dead, as the all-surpassing

sign that will validate his words and actions (2:19–21). Second, translated word for word, the Greek text of verse one reads that Nicodemus is “a person from among the Pharisees... a leader of the Jews.” Reference to “a person” (*ἦν δὲ ἄνθρωπος*) from among the Pharisees follows a pattern of introduction for new characters entering the narrative of FG which is not unusual or noteworthy (1:6, 5:5; cf. 9:1) in itself. But several details repeated from the passage immediately preceding John 3:1 suggest that the author could have chosen this particular phrase to make a point. Jesus, the reader is told, knows what was in the heart of “a person” (2:25), many of whom witnessed his miraculous signs and “believed” (2:23) though “he did not entrust himself” to them (2:24). Repeating the Greek vocable *ἄνθρωπος* a third time as Nicodemus enters the narrative serves to link Nicodemus to the unnamed people that precede him in the narrative of chapter two.<sup>23)</sup>

The context of FG that follows this pericope in the narrative of John demonstrates Nicodemus to be a man drawn closer and closer to Jesus as an individual, even as he represents the larger community of disbelieving “Pharisees.” On the one hand, unlike any other of those who are labeled either “Jews” or “Pharisees” in the narrative of FG, Nicodemus develops as the narrative unfolds. First, he demands that Jesus receive a fair hearing (7:51), then together with Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple (19:38), he receives the body of Jesus and prepares it for burial.<sup>24)</sup> Given the manner in which the narrative of the Gospel as a whole progresses, it is highly likely that even here in chapter three Nicodemus has sought out Jesus in part for his own personal reasons. On the other hand, verse one is a reminder that Nicodemus is also representative of the Pharisees. In the follow-



ing verse he offers a pronouncement on Jesus' identity through the use of the first person plural personal pronoun. These same Pharisees have already entered the narrative of FG as a group, and have tried, through their emissaries, to identify John the Baptist according to their traditional categories of "the Messiah," "Elijah," or "the prophet" (1:20-21; 24-25). If the Pharisees have misunderstood the mission and purpose of John, it should not be surprising that one of them will similarly fail to understand Jesus' true identity. Jesus' use of the second person plural in verse 11 makes it clear that no matter how unique Nicodemus, a Pharisee, may be in seeking Jesus out, he, as well as they, "are not receiving" either Jesus' own testimony or that of his followers. The alert reader will suspect that this one-on-one conversation between a Pharisee and leader of the Jews with Jesus will reveal a gap between this man's traditional expectations and the reality of who Jesus truly is.<sup>25)</sup>

**"We know you are a teacher come from God, for no one is able to perform these signs which you are doing unless God were with him" (3:2).** The above considerations lead to the inevitable question: What precisely is the nature of Nicodemus's (and the Pharisees') misunderstanding?

Verse two gives the first clue. It should be noted that Nicodemus does not call Jesus a "prophet," but that he addresses Jesus as "rabbi" and calls him a "teacher (*διδάσκαλος* without the definite article)." However, Nicodemus focuses on Jesus' performance of signs and confesses that he and his colleagues know that Jesus is a teacher "come from God," an expression not usually found in rabbinical literature.<sup>26)</sup> For this reason, I disagree that Nicodemus sees Jesus as little more than an ordinary rabbi, akin to similar statements found in the Synoptic Gospels,

as some have argued.<sup>27)</sup> It is more likely that Nicodemus understands Jesus to be a rabbi who has been authorized by God in a manner analogous to the prophets of God who performed distinguishing signs, or in other words, prophets who followed in the tradition of Moses and were comparable to him.<sup>28)</sup> The narrative of FG, as we have seen, suggests Jesus be understood in some sense in comparison with Moses. The signs that both Moses and Jesus performed testify to God's saving work through each of them. God's gift of life given through Jesus is comparable to the life-and-death gift of Torah which was given through Moses (1:17; cf. Deut. 30:15-20). But the relationship between Jesus and Moses in the text is a complex one, and the narrative of FG insinuates neither that Jesus is merely "a new Moses" nor that he is the fulfillment of the eschatological prophet according to mainstream Jewish expectations of his day. Receiving and dwelling in the gifts that Jesus brings, like receiving Torah, is a matter of eternal life and death (3:16-21). Jesus, as we have seen, both fulfills and surpasses Moses because the Word he came to deliver and the work he came to accomplish result in a gift of life for all people. This was life to which the Torah could only point. This surpassing "grace and truth" of life that Jesus brings was what Nicodemus, and with him, the Pharisees as a whole, did not and could not yet understand.

**"Unless you are born from water and the Spirit you are not able to enter into the kingdom of God" (3:5; cf. 3:3).** As in the Synoptic Gospels, so also in FG, Jesus' mention of the "kingdom of God/heaven" first occurs in the narrative context of baptism, specifically, baptism with water that began with John the Baptist and was later administered by the disciples of Jesus (cf. 4:2).<sup>29)</sup> As we have already

seen, the phrase “kingdom of God” can be used as a synonym in the Synoptics for eternal life. Its usage here strikes me as equivalent to its use in the Synoptics, even if its association with birth *ἄνωθεν* from water and Spirit is unique to FG. The phrase cited is the second of two references to the kingdom of God in FG and it demonstrates the necessary corrective to an inadequate understanding of true life/death in the mind of Nicodemus.

I include the text here in a study of John 3:1-15 not because I believe that this passage speaks principally to the sort of anti-Moses polemic that appears more explicitly in 3:2, 13, and 15,<sup>30)</sup> but because I understand it to be pointing positively to the event in the Gospel narrative where eternal life begins: the death of Jesus Christ. As the Life/Death Clusters Diagram demonstrates, the death of Jesus is the counterweight in the narrative of FG to the life imagery of the Nicodemus episode. Specifically, the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus describes here in verse five is not delivered to Jesus’ own disciples until Jesus, crucified yet risen from the dead, breathes it over them (20:22; cf. 7: 2:22). It is even possible that FG intends the reader to understand the death of Jesus (19:30) as the event which instigates the transfer of the Spirit; upon dying on the cross, Jesus, we read, literally “passed on the spirit” (*παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα*).<sup>31)</sup> More explicit is the appearance of water at the cross: Jesus’ side is pierced, and water and blood come flowing out (19:36). To be born “*ἄνωθεν*” of water and Spirit will be elucidated further in 3:13-15, but for the time being, the connection with the cross of Jesus and his death is key.

**“No one has gone up into heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13).** Various traditions outside the Old Testament corpus may be read inter-

textually with verse 13 to lend significance to what might otherwise be a bit of a bewildering passage. In Philo, the rabbinical tradition, and Samaritan sources, Moses himself is lauded as king of Israel and one “enthroned as king” in the course of a mystic ascent to heaven from Mt. Sinai.<sup>32)</sup> This mystical ascent is not the same as the legendary translation to heaven, which according to some rabbinic sources, occurred at Moses’ death. Rather, it is grounded in the notion that Moses went up to God where he received the Torah, was crowned king of Israel, and descended again. By contrast, the narrative of the FG repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus is the one who has heard the voice of God and seen God’s appearance (5:37; 6:46; cf. 1 John 4:12). As we have already seen, a similar statement occurs in the Prologue (1:18) immediately following a contrast between Moses and Jesus (1:17), implying that the one who has truly seen God and speaks of heavenly things is Jesus, not Moses. In Jesus there is a new understanding of Moses’ importance that turns the spotlight away from the eschatological prophet and Torah and toward Jesus and his Word. Ultimately Jesus, who begins with the Father and returns to him again (1:18; 13:3), that is to say, Jesus who “comes down from heaven” and ascends to the Father (1:51; 6:33, 41, 50, 51, 58, 62; 20:17), is where true life is to be found. To be born from him is to be born “from above” (*ἄνωθεν*).

**“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, in order that everyone believing in him might have eternal life” (3:14-15).** Verses 13 and 14 are joined together with reference to the Son of Man. Here at last is an unequivocal reference to Moses from the Pentateuch (Num 21:4-9) in which the life/death theme is explicit. Moses is set in comparison with/contrast to Je-

sus, who describes himself as the "uplifted" (ὑποθῆναι) "Son of Man" (cf. 1:51). The nature of "Son of Man" in FG is a matter that has been investigated at length elsewhere, so we need not be concerned with that topic here. More important for our purpose is not only what this verse communicates about the Moses/Jesus dynamic, but what it has to say about life and death in FG.

Unlike verse 17 from the Prologue in which Moses and Jesus were put in analogous phrases without either conjunctions or adverbs to explain the nature of their relationship, here we have a pair of adverbs that denote comparison (καθώς...ὅπως...), though exactly *what* is being compared can only be demonstrated after close examination of the text. The narratological context of FG indicates that being "lifted up" is another way to speak about Jesus' crucifixion (cf. 12:32–33) and that the people responsible for lifting Jesus up on the cross are "the Jews" (8:28; cf. 22). Moses' lifting up the snake on the pole is therefore analogous to "the Jews" lifting up Jesus on the cross. Every Israelite who had sinned and been bitten (Num 21:7), if he/she would but look at the snake on the pole, would live (Num 21:8, 9), and not die. Similarly, Jesus is lifted up on the cross in order that every person believing in the crucified Son of Man might have eternal life (3:15). Though human sin is not mentioned explicitly in the text from FG, "both the serpent on the pole and the Messiah on the cross display the results of human sin and alienation from God."<sup>33)</sup> What of the relationship between Moses and Jesus? This time they are not the points of either comparison or contrast. Instead, the crucified Jesus and the snake are both the "visible result of sin"<sup>34)</sup> even as they are simultaneously the means for God to grant life in the shadow of death. But eternal life resulting from faith in the crucified Jesus is

on a completely different scale from the gift of life received through the bronze snake of Moses. Once again, Moses and the gifts God gives through him merely point ahead to, rather than directly dispense, the abundant grace and truth which are given through Jesus Christ. The crucified—yet living and ascended—Christ, the dying Christ whose death results in new life from "water and Spirit"(3:5), points to this same elevated, and therefore crucified, Jesus Christ.

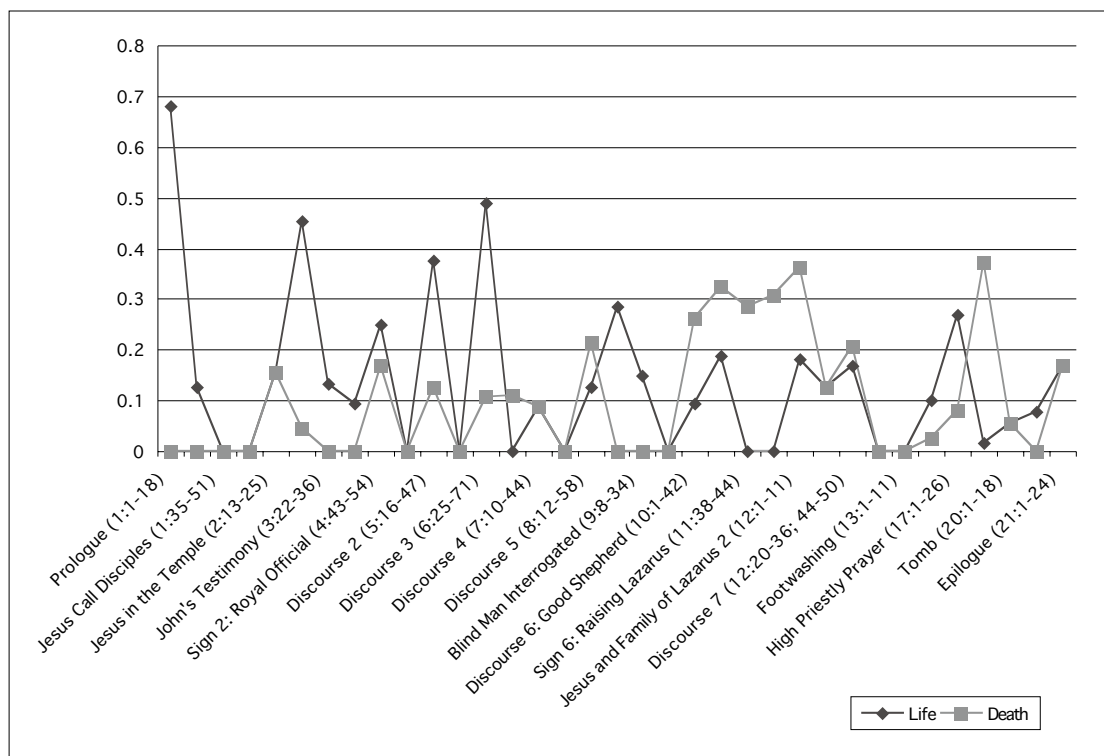
## Conclusion

Narratological and reader-response approaches to this text have revealed that the frequent life/death imagery here runs in tandem with a message that critiques faith in Jesus as either a "new Moses" or as merely an eschatological prophet like Moses and nothing more. New life is no longer gained through Israel's encounter with the Moses traditions. According to FG, encounter with the crucified, yet living and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, and discipleship to him, is where life is to be found.

## Application to Today

Though it is true that the language found in the Pauline epistles centering on legal standing before God as "justified" is not emphasized in FG, Jesus' rescue from ἁμαρτία (1:29; 8:24, 31–36; 19:21–23) is nevertheless an important dimension of what the Gospel communicates regarding God's salvation in FG. As is noted repeatedly in theological studies of FG, ἁμαρτία seems to point especially to unbelief or refusal to accept Jesus or come to him (cf. 16:8–9), even though this sin (singular) of unfaith ultimately results also in the sins (plural) or wrongful actions that people commit.

# Life/Death Clusters in FG



“Post-Christian” or non-Christian societies highly educated in matters related to personal morality who maintain a keen awareness of the value and fragility of the natural world around them may find a voice in the Fourth Gospel that speaks to them like no other in the New Testament. The present eschatology of the Fourth Gospel and its emphasis on the incarnate Logos elevates life in and through the created world in a manner that highlights the creation declared to be “good” in the creation account of Genesis. In so doing, it speaks against the radical dualism found in many forms of Gnosticism,<sup>35)</sup> both ancient and contemporary.

FG communicates the message of Christian salvation found in the New Testament in a way that is intelligible to many who are outside the traditional Christian mainstream and may be

unfamiliar with the important Christian doctrine of “sin” or original sin. In such circumstances, rather than an overwhelming focus on either the sin of humanity or the divine imperative, there is another message that is in keeping with John 3:1–15 and the narrative of FG in general: In spite of the corruption of death and the human need to know and to follow the divine will, the gift of life is given “from above,” through Spirit and water, and is received through the recreating Word of the crucified yet risen Christ. All that is needed for human salvation has, in the death of Jesus, the Word made flesh, been accomplished (19:30). Encounter with Christ, then, is where true life is to be found. It is this personal encounter with the risen Christ that leads to faith in God and love for others, both of which constitute “life” for FG.

"Death/life" constitutes the primary theme around which the saving work of God through Jesus Christ is developed in FG. As we have seen, human encounter with the incarnate Logos, the crucified and ascended Lord who now carries the sign of his death in his resurrected body (20:27), is, according to FG, where eternal life is to be found. For non-Christian post-industrial societies of the 21st century, struggling with soaring elderly populations,<sup>36)</sup> suicide, and a host of ethical questions related to life and death, encounter with the crucified yet risen Lord through his Word and Spirit—as well as encounter with His disciples who testify to the love and purpose of God for the cosmos (3:16) in word and deed—is what will continue to bring abundant "grace and truth." In a world that must increasingly learn to live, as Karl Barth puts it, "in the shadow of death,"<sup>37)</sup> the contribution of the FG to the New Testament message of God's saving work in Christ is a timely one, indeed.

## Notes

- 1) Rescue from sin emerges explicitly in FG in two places, forming an inclusio that surrounds the narrative of the earthly ministry of Jesus. The Baptist testifies to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who "takes away the sin of the world" at the onset of Jesus' earthly ministry in FG (1:29), and the clearest association between the rescue from sin and the gift of eternal life comes at the end of FG as the disciples receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are authorized to forgive and retain sins by the resurrected Christ (20:23).
- 2) Regarding the historical issues involved with intertextuality, see Kirsten Nielsen, "Old Testament Imagery in John," in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel, Århus 1997* (ed. Johannes Nissen and Sigfried Pedersen; New York: T & T Clark, 2004; repr., JSNTSupp 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 66–72. Cf. Spike Draisma, ed., *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honor of Bas van Iersel* (Kampen: Kok, 1989).
- 3) *Bíos*, though translated as "life" elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 1 Tim 2:2), is found in 1 John (2:16 and 3:17) to refer to "worldly goods." The term does not appear at all in FG.
- 4) See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 23.88 – 23.128. The words or expressions listed here that belong to FG are ζάω, ζωοποιέω, ανάστασις, ἐγείρω, ἀνίστημι, ἀποθνήσκω, θνήσκω θάνατος, τελευτάω, κοιμάομαι, παραδίδωμι τὸ πνεῦμα, ἀπόλλυμι τὴν ψυχὴν, τὴν ψυχὴν τίθῃμι, and νεκρός. I found it odd that Louw and Nida include τὴν ψυχὴν τίθῃμι but not τὴν ψυχὴν λαμβάνω, so have added this as an additional phrase that denotes "living." Also, BDAG (s.v., ἀπόλλυμι, 1.b.a) lists the middle of ἀπόλλυμι as "perish" or "die" when used of persons, thus I have included this vocable in the semantic field of "dying."
- 5) In certain instances, εἶμι, γίνομαι, and μένω, see *ibid.*, 13.69–13.103.
- 6) Ἀπώλεια and κατεσθίω, see *ibid.*, 20.31–20.60.
- 7) A semantic field related to birth or procreation (*ibid.*, 23.46–23.60) includes three vocables appearing in FG: γενετή, τίκτω, and γεννάω. A similar field related to killing (Louw and Nida, 20.61–20.88) contains the following from FG: ἀποκτείνω, αἶρω, θύω, σταυρώω, συσταυρώω, λιθάζω, and ἀνθρωποκτόνος.
- 8) For a comparable procedure, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 18–37.
- 9) Regarding the crucifixion as the climax of FG, see R. A. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 236. By contrast, neither life nor death imagery clusters in the resurrection account. The following words of Craig R. Koester (*The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], 23), prove instructive: "The Gospel shows the problems that arise when people try to understand Jesus on the basis of his public ministry alone. Their triumphant portrait of the miracle-working Messiah disintegrates at the prospect of his death."

- 10) Other examples of important life/death imagery in FG that cannot be measured in this way include symbols that depict life (the imagery of the vine and the branches, 15:1–11) or signs of Jesus' death (the wounds that are visible in Jesus' resurrected body, 20:24–29), Greek vocables outside the semantic fields analyzed above that recall the creation account in the Septuagint (cf. 20:22, Gen 2:4), and the meaning of actions that connote life-giving activity, such as the healing miracles of Jesus. Regarding the latter, see "Level Two" signifiers as explained by James Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1995), 156–65.
- 11) Koester (*Word of Life*, 30), points out that the same word ἐγένετο is used in John 1:3 and Genesis 1:3, 6–7 (LXX) to refer to the creation of the cosmos.
- 12) Craig S. Keener, (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 1:422), writes, "The lack of an adversative conjunction here does not eliminate the contrast...but it also does not permit us to exaggerate the force of the contrast."
- 13) The precise meaning of νόμος in verse 17 must be determined from one of three possibilities: 1) "Law" in the strict sense, understood either as "God's Commandment" and opposed to grace, as it often is in the letters of Paul (cf. Rom 6:14, οὐ γάρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμῳ ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριτι); 2) "Torah" for Jews that can no longer stand over against true revelation of God in Christ after the coming of Christ (see Severino Pancaro, below); or 3) "Torah," "Pentateuch," or "Old Testament Word of God" that is inclusive (even if to a limited degree) of grace and truth for everyone, including Jews who reject Christ. The former two interpretations tend toward what Pancaro calls "antithetical parallelism," i.e., grace and truth are to be found in Christ alone. The latter interpretation results in a "synthetical parallelism," or the view that grace and truth exist in a limited capacity with Torah, but abundantly and more completely in Jesus. Cf. *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and The Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 537. Interpretations that focus either on the narrow sense of the term and so the typically Pauline contrast between law and grace, or else an understanding of Torah in which grace and truth no longer exist in the law in the same way after the coming of Christ, include Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. Martin H. Betram; LW 22; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1957), 139–48; Pancaro (*The Law*, 539–40); U. Busse (*Das Evangelium: Ein Kommentar* [13<sup>th</sup> ed.; Tübingen: 1980], 131); and J. Gnllka (*Johannesevangelium* [Die neue-Echter Bibel, vol. 4; 6<sup>th</sup> ed.; Würzburg, 2004]), 16. Many, especially more recent English-language commentaries, interpret the passage on the basis of the wider sense of the term and identify an overall positive understanding of νόμος in the narrative of FG so that the Law "given through Moses" is seen as a revelation of grace and truth which is used as a point of comparison for a greater "grace and truth" that came about through Christ. Representative of this argument are Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 78–79, Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 98; Ruth B. Edwards, "XAPIN ANTI XAPITOE (John 1:16)—Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue," *JSNT* 32 (1988), 7–9; and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 535.
- 14) See Yu Ibuki, *Johane Fukuinshoh Chuhkai* (3 vols.; Kommentar zum Johannesevangelium; Tokyo: Chizenshokan, 2004–2009), 1:65. Ibuki notes that this is an almost formulaic expression found repeatedly in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 32:11; 47:29; Exod 34:6; Josh 2:14; 2 Sam 2:6; 15:20, Ps 25:10; 26:3; 40:11, 12; 57:4; 61:8; 85:11; 89:15; 108:5; 117:2; 138:2; Hos 4:1; Mic 7:20). A less obvious, yet no less real contrast between Jesus and Moses suggested by verse 17 of the Prologue can be traced through verse 14, of which verse 17 is an echo: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have beheld his glory, glory as of the one-and-only son of the Father, full of grace and truth (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας)." Though χάρις and ἀλήθεια are not found in the same passage of the Septuagint, "full of grace and truth" seems to be an approximate rendering of the Hebrew text וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת of Exodus 34:6 (cf. MT, Ps 86:15).

where Yahweh reveals his glory to Moses on Mt. Sinai in the narrative just prior to the covenant renewal (Exod 34:10–28). When taken together with the added detail that both the context of this passage, Exod 33:18–23, and the Prologue emphasize the revelation of the divine glory, the association between Exodus 34 and the prologue appears stronger still. The One revealed as "full of grace and truth" on Sinai bestowed Torah and through it, life (cf. Deut 30:11–20; Acts 7:38). Jesus Christ, the one and only Son of the Father, like Yahweh, reveals his glory (2:11) and is "full of grace and truth" (1:14).

- 15) Cf. BDAG, s.v. *χάρις*, 3.b.
- 16) See, e.g., Edwards, "XAPIN ANTI XAPITOM," 7–9.
- 17) Even for Luther, the contrast between law and grace did not highlight the law as evil so as to negate either Moses or the law. Rather, even though *χάρις* in Luther's Sermons does not extend to the *νόμος*, for Luther this contrast was evidence of God's redeeming work in history: the law is holy and good, even though the gift of life to which the law could only point was fulfilled and delivered in the person of Jesus Christ. Luther (*Sermons*, 140, 143–44) writes: "This grace and truth were not taught by the law or given by Moses. Grace and truth draw a line of demarcation between Christ and Moses. The law is not to be discarded as useless. It is given for a purpose...To be sure, it did not impart life; for we were not able to fulfill it. But it was to be a means to that end. The law is holy and good; in view of its authorship God's commandment cannot be evil and wrong. John abides by this opinion when he declares that the law was issued for a good purpose, but that it offered no grace and no truth. It only points to eternal life, but it does not impart it to anyone." And again: "The law does not *give* life. It resembles a hand that directs me to the right road. ... The law, given through Moses, is indeed a law of life, righteousness, and everything good. But far more was accomplished through Christ. He comes and fills the empty hand and purse."
- 18) John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1992), 118, writes "It is not the true witness of the law which Jesus rejects, but that confidence in the law which refuses to see fulfillment in Christ, so that the law itself becomes self-sufficient and absolute, and thus a false substitute for the truth of Christ... John does not reject the place of Moses, but he does contest the claims of those who, out of a false loyalty to him, reject the person of Jesus."
- 19) See Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 71; Mary L. Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 76.
- 20) Specifically, the expiration or giving up of the *πνεῦμα* (19:30) that marks the moment of his death together with the flow of water from the pierced side of Jesus (19:34).
- 21) See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 226–32; and Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance; London: SCM Press, 1953), 12–22.
- 22) Contra Jean-Pierre Charlier, *Les jours et la vie* (vol. 3 of *Jésus au milieu de son peuple*; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 41–47, who sees in the imagery of chapter three clear references to Passover evening.
- 23) The association between Nicodemus and the witnesses of Jesus' signs in chapter two is widely acknowledged. Representative of the opinion are R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John* (AB 29–30; New York: 1966), 1:135, 137; and Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household*, 60.
- 24) Regarding the individual and representative aspects of Nicodemus, as well as the development of his character throughout the narrative of FG, see R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), 134–36. That Nicodemus is not "flat" or static in the narrative of FG argues against the opinion of some (Bultmann [*The Gospel of John*, 132], or Ibuki [*Yohane Fukuinsho Chukai*, 155]) that he is not "historical" or is an invention of the author.
- 25) Though FG presents a relatively flat portrait of those referred to throughout the narrative as "Jews" and "Pharisees," Nicodemus changes throughout the course of the narrative.
- 26) Cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 134 n. 4.
- 27) Contra Stephen E. Witmer, *Divine Instruction in Early Christianity* (WUNT 246; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 73–4, who understands the significance of Jesus as "come from God" as an ironic

detail added intentionally by the “narrator” of FG, which Nicodemus the character uses voices unreflectively and “without major Christological import.”

- 28) God’s presence with his prophet Moses, to be demonstrated through the fulfillment of the “sign” (σημεῖον) of Israel’s rescue from Egypt, is promised in Exod 3:12. Reader responses to John 3:12 may discover an intertextual relationship. Cf. Marie-Emile Boismard, *Moses of Jesus: An Essay in Johannine Christology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 57, 63; Jean-Marie Auwers, “La nuit de Nicodème (Jean 3,2 ; 19, 39) ou l’ombre du langage,” *RB* 97 (1990): 485–86; and Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household*, 64, 77.
- 29) Regarding the narrative context of FG, see 1:26; 3:1–33; see also Matthew 3:2, 11; 4:17; and Luke 3:16.
- 30) Wayne Meeks, by contrast, sees 3:3 and 5 as anti-Moses polemic and indicative of a “throne mysticism” practised by Pharisaic leaders in the first century. He argues that in this context seeing the “kingdom of God” would have meant seeing God reigning in heaven, and entering the kingdom of God would have meant ascending to heaven. According to him, the terms convey a range of meaning which is independent of the Synoptic Gospels. Meeks concludes that based on this interpretation, the referent of the one born “ἀνωθεν” is Jesus himself. See his *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovT-Supp 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 298–99 and my analysis of John 3:13, below. I believe the primary intertextual association to be made with Jesus’ reference to being born of water and spirit is Eze 36:23–28, but since this passage doesn’t fall under the category of “anti-Moses polemic” I will not pursue an investigation of it here. Moses appears in the Pentateuch associated with the giving of water (Exod 17:1–7) and the Spirit (Num 11:16–30), but neither of these references has to do explicitly with new life, or birth.
- 31) For similar readings, see R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 319; D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (New Testament Theology Series 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 120.
- 32) See especially early Jewish and Samaritan commentary on Exodus 7:1, such as Philo, *Sac.* 3.9 and *Memar Marqah* 2.12. Cf. Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovT-Supp 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 110–11; 130; 205–209; 232–36; Auwers, “La nuit de Nicodème,” 485–86.
- 33) Koester, *Word of Life*, 44.
- 34) *Ibid.*, 45.
- 35) In reference to the first-century context of FG, I am especially thinking of early manifestations of Gnosticism, possibly manifested at Qumran and in the writings of Philo, as summarized by Hans Jonas. Cf. his definition found in *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 31–32.
- 36) The number of people 65 or older in Japan currently stands at roughly 25 percent of the population, but the number of elderly people is forecasted to swell so that people aged 75 and older will comprise roughly one quarter of the population by 2025 and people aged 65 and older will reach 40 percent of the population by the year 2055. Cf. Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan, “Fiscal 2008 The Aging Society: Current Situation and Implementation Measures,” 1. Cited 11 Oct 2010. Online: <http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/english/annualreport/2009/pdf/clsection1.pdf>.
- 37) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; 14 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958) IV, 2:317.



## ヨハネ福音書における「いのち」の意味

ジョナサン・A. ブランキ

本研究は、ヨハネによる福音書における「いのち」の意味に焦点を合わせる。ヨハネ福音書の現在の形態をそのまま受け取り、「いのち」及び「死」を意味するギリシア語の言葉が福音書の物語の中でどこに集まるのかを決定するために、意味領域の分析を行う。また、ヨハネ福音書のいのち像を更に明らかにするであろう、1世紀の受け手のなし得るテキストへの反応を考察する。最後に、ヨハネ福音書の1世紀の背景における「いのち」の意味が、ノモスとロゴス、モーセとイエスという複雑ながらも重要な対比によって理解され得ると本稿は結論付ける。この対比が福音書のプロローグで初めて紹介され、3:1-15におけるイエスとニコデモの会話にもはっきり見える。ヨハネ福音書における生死についてのこの理解が、現代の読者にとってもたらず結果を論じて本稿を締めくくる。

**Keywords** : いのち, モーセ, ノモス・律法・トーラー, ニコデモ, ロゴス

