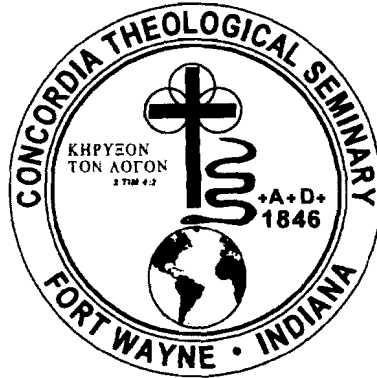


# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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## The Death of Jesus as Atonement for Sin

The teaching of Jesus' death as atonement for sin has received renewed attention recently in biblical and theological studies. Some of this attention has been in reaction to the omnipresent mantra of critical scholarship that such teaching was a later creation of the church in order to provide a more suitable interpretation of the death of Jesus. Both the Symposium on Exegetical Theology and the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Fort Wayne, held in January 2008, took up the challenge of engaging this debate. The four articles in this issue were first delivered as papers during these symposia.

David Scaer addresses the tendency of Lutherans to see atonement as a doctrine easily separated from—and less important than—justification. He demonstrates the intimate interrelationship and interdependence of these doctrines as well as the current challenges being issued against a proclamation of the atonement that is faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures, especially of Jesus in the Gospels. The remaining three articles each focus on the atonement as proclaimed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John respectively. Jeffrey Gibbs, author of the recently published Concordia Commentary on Matthew 1-10, explores the variety of texts in which Matthew proclaims the atonement. In addition to his emphasis on Jesus' substitutionary role as the New Israel, Gibbs gives significant attention to showing how Matthew proclaims the death of Jesus as the eschatological visitation of the Father's divine wrath over all sin. The article by Peter Scaer introduces us to some of the modern debate and then focuses on the teaching of atonement in Mark. Not only does he review the traditional texts proclaiming atonement (especially Mark 10:45), but he also probes how Jesus (and subsequently Mark) use the Lord's Supper and Baptism in order to proclaim Jesus' death as atonement. My article addresses the challenge that the fourth evangelist does not understand Jesus' death as atonement for sin by demonstrating ways in which this Gospel proclaims atonement that are in concert with the more explicit atonement teaching in 1 John.

Debate about the atonement in our circles used to center around the legitimacy of proclaiming the atonement also according to the *Christus Victor* model rather than strictly using the more familiar Anselmic model. Much more is at stake in the current debate. We hope these articles will help readers to ground their teaching of the death of Jesus as atonement for sin in the very Gospels that narrate our Lord's exemplary life lived and laid down in our stead to pay for the world's sin and conquer our foes, death and Satan.

Charles A. Gieschen  
Associate Editor

## The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Atonement for Sin?

Charles A. Gieschen

Distaste for the doctrine of atonement for sin through the death of Jesus is not purely a modern phenomenon of critical scholarship; it is as old as the death of Jesus itself. The Apostle Paul tells us that the death of the Son of God by crucifixion was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). The atonement was one of the teachings that Gnostics opposed already in the second and third centuries, as evidenced again in the newly published gnostic *Gospel of Judas*. April DeConick, a scholar of ancient Gnosticism, makes this relevant observation:

So the barbs in the *Gospel of Judas* are many, all directed at the theology and practices of apostolic Christians . . . . The Sethians who wrote the *Gospel of Judas* especially found the atonement theology unconscionable. Apostolic Christianity has long defended Jesus' death as a necessary sacrifice made to God the Father for the purpose of atonement, vicariously redeeming humanity from its sins. The Sethian Gnostics found this doctrine morally reprehensible—no different from child sacrifice or murder—and thus not an action that could be condoned by God. The *Gospel of Judas* is fascinating in this respect, building a very sophisticated response to skewer the atonement. And one figure that they use to do this is the cursed Judas Iscariot, the demon who was responsible for Jesus' death.<sup>1</sup>

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed countless attempts by biblical scholars and theologians to argue that later Christians have read atonement theology back into the New Testament texts.<sup>2</sup> Understanding Jesus' death as atonement, as the argument goes, was neither there from the beginning nor even from the time of the writing of New Testament documents. Like the ancient Gnostics, therefore, some theologians have simply concluded that atonement as it has been taught is cruel and unusual punishment that should no longer be used in the

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<sup>1</sup> April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephan Finlan, *Problems with the Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

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proclamation of Jesus' death. Removing atonement from the historical and theological equation that led to the crucifixion usually means Jesus' death is to be understood primarily as a faithful martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

Of all the places in the New Testament where the teaching of atonement has been challenged, the Gospel of John is probably where the most doubt has been cast.<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most influential interpreters of John in the twentieth century, bluntly pronounced the verdict on this Gospel that still holds sway: "the thought of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin has no place in John."<sup>5</sup> Both Bultmann and fellow German Ernst Käsemann argued that the death of Jesus is subordinate to other themes in the Gospel of John. Bultmann asserted that John's major message is the coming of God's Son into the world and his sojourn on earth that led him back to heaven. He viewed atonement as "a foreign element" in this Gospel and dismissed allusions to atonement as being from a non-Johannine source, even a later accretion.<sup>6</sup> Käsemann understood the central theme to be "the unity of the Son with the Father."<sup>7</sup> His claim that John is "naively docetic"<sup>8</sup> is much more well-known than his assessment about the death of Jesus as a "mere postscript" in John: "One is tempted to regard it as mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it

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<sup>3</sup> For example, David Brondos states, "God did not send his Son in order for him to die . . . but to serve as his instrument for establishing the promised reign of *shalom* and justice; his commitment to this task led to his death"; see "Why was Jesus Crucified? Theology, History and the Story of Redemption," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 499 (emphasis original). Brondos is an ELCA theologian.

<sup>4</sup> See the history of interpretation by Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 17 (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 19–42, esp. 20. See also the vast collection of essays in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 and 1955), 2:54.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 54–55; see also de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 20–30.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 24; see also de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 20–30.

<sup>8</sup> Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, 26. For an excellent critique of Käsemann's position, see Marie Meyne Thompson, *The Incarnate Word: Perspectives on Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

organically into his work.”<sup>9</sup> J. T. Forestell, in his book on Johannine soteriology, expresses similar doubts about atonement in John: “The vocabulary of redemption and expiation is completely absent from the gospel [of John]. The remission of sin is mentioned only once (20,23) and the action of Christ against sin only in 1,29.”<sup>10</sup> Even Craig Koester, a Johannine scholar who sees the death of Jesus as central to this Gospel, stops short of seeing atonement in John: “The imagery is sacrificial, but it is used in a distinctive way to describe the effects of the death of Jesus as the supreme manifestation of the love of God, as something that transforms people from antipathy into faith, thereby effecting reconciliation.”<sup>11</sup>

How, then, does the Gospel of John interpret the death of Jesus? More pointedly: Does this Gospel teach atonement for sin or not? This study will argue that the reason that atonement is often not being read from John is because atonement is taught implicitly through allusion. In many cases, this Gospel communicates on different levels to both the uninformed reader and the informed reader.<sup>12</sup> Even if a reader misses the subtleties of atonement in the narrative of John, therefore, he still can read Jesus’ death as a sacrificial act of love that brings life. Because of this “under-the-radar” proclamation of atonement, one may be tempted to skip the testimony of the Gospel and rush ahead to the First Epistle of John in order to find very explicit testimony to Jesus’ death as an atoning sacrifice (e.g., 1 John 2:2; 4:10).<sup>13</sup> Even though some may be more than satisfied with a few solid proof-texts from First John to answer the question posed here, this study will argue that a careful reading of the Gospel will yield similar theology that is expressed with more subtlety.

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<sup>9</sup> Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> J. T. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, *Analecta Biblica* 57 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974), 60–61. See the response by Max Turner, “Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990): 99–122.

<sup>11</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 200.

<sup>12</sup> For example, without knowing much about first-century Judaism, even a modern reader can understand that bread and water are basic elements needed for life; thus, he can understand that Jesus, as the “Bread of Life” and “Living Water” in John, satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst. The informed reader, however, knows that an important part of the context for these discourses is the first-century Jewish understanding that *Torah* is the “Bread of Life” and “Living Water.” For an argument that John was written for a wide audience, see Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking The Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9–48.

<sup>13</sup> These two texts will be discussed in Part IV below.

The thesis of this study, therefore, is that the Gospel of John interprets the death of Jesus as the key revelatory event in the life of Jesus, because it is especially in the giving of the flesh of the Son as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world that one sees the ultimate revelation of the Son of Man who is the visible glory of YHWH. Rather than seeing the atonement allusions as marginal to the theology of this Gospel, it will be demonstrated in the four sections below that they are central to understanding fully John's presentation of Jesus' death. First, we will examine how Jesus' death is repeatedly interpreted in John as "exaltation" and "glorification." Second, we will look at the theme of Jesus as "lamb of God" in this Gospel. Third, we will probe the Noble Shepherd discourse of John 10 for teaching of vicarious or substitutionary atonement. Finally, we will view the atonement theology found in First John, arguing that the understanding of Jesus' death that is implicit in John's Gospel is stated explicitly in his first epistle.

### I. Jesus' Death as Exaltation and Glorification

Even the casual reader of John will notice that this Gospel speaks of Jesus' death—not his resurrection or ascension—in terms of him "being lifted up" or "being glorified" (e.g., esp. John 3:14; 8:28; 12:23; 12:32–34; 13:31–32; and 17:1).<sup>14</sup> Since these sayings are most often found on the lips of Jesus, one can conclude that this is the primary language used by Jesus as presented in John for interpreting his own death. Before we examine each of these texts, there are two general observations that are crucial for understanding them: one concerning the source for the verbs "being lifted up" and "being glorified," and the other concerning the use of "the Son of Man" title with these verbs.

First, the Greek verbs used in this cluster of texts, ὑψώω and δοξάζω, are in all probability dependent upon the LXX text of Isaiah 52:13.<sup>15</sup> There the

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<sup>14</sup> This topic has been a considerable focus of recent Johannine scholarship; see M. C. de Boer, "The Death of Jesus as the Exaltation and Glorification of the Son of Man," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 293–326.

<sup>15</sup> Many scholars have recognized Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) as the source of this language; for example, Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 63–68. It should also be noted that this language of exaltation in 52:13 is drawing on Isaiah's call narrative, where it states that Isaiah saw the Lord "exalted and lifted up" (Isa 6:1; cf. 57:15). For a contrary opinion on Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) as the source of these verbs, see John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 495.

verbs ὑψωθήσεται and δοξασθήσεται introduce the “Suffering Servant song” that continues through Isaiah 53. That text reads:

ἰδοὺ συνήσει ὁ παῖς μου καὶ ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται σφόδρὰ ὄν τρόπον ἔκστησονται ἐπὶ σέ πολλοὶ οὕτως ἀδοξήσει ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων τὸ εἶδος σου καὶ ἡ δόξα σου ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Behold, my servant shall understand, and *be lifted up*, and *glorified* exceedingly. As many shall be amazed at you, so also shall your form be without glorification from men, namely your glory shall not be from men.<sup>16</sup>

Allusions to the Old Testament, such as these, are seldom meant to link the reader myopically to a few words of text; they are usually used to draw the reader to the wider context. For example, the “In the beginning” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ) of John 1:1 is not only meant to call to mind the first two words of Genesis in the Septuagint, but the entire creation narrative of Genesis 1–2. The use of this exaltation and glorification language from Isaiah 52:13 (LXX), therefore, indicates that the servant song of Isaiah 53 is an important source for the interpretation of Jesus’ death throughout the Gospel of John. The probability of this dependence is strengthened by the repeated use of Isaiah—especially chapters 40–66—in John, including the quotation of Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:40.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this Isaiah 53:1 quotation is followed by a quotation of Isaiah 6:10, after which John states that Isaiah “saw his [the Son’s] Glory and spoke concerning him [the Son]” (12:41).<sup>18</sup> John not only identifies the servant as the Son, but even understands that the enthroned Lord of the call vision is the Son. Catrin Williams states,

Isaiah occupies a prominent, if not the highest, position among the scriptural texts that have contributed to the shaping of John’s gospel . . . allusive modes of verbal and thematic scriptural reference attest the deeply embedded and thoroughly absorbed character of John’s use of Isaiah, and reflect the extensive process of christological reflective on scripture from which this gospel emerged.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Italics are used in the translation here and others below to bring attention to key words. All translations of Greek texts are my own.

<sup>17</sup> Catrin H. Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 101–116.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss this in *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 275, and “The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology,” *CTQ* 68 (2004): 120–122.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” 101.

The use of these verbs indicates that there are numerous allusions to Isaiah 53 in John, calling to mind one of the most powerful prophetic expressions of God's atoning work that has its roots in Israel's atonement rites narrated in Leviticus 16. Jesus' death in John is, therefore, interpreted in light of the Suffering Servant's atoning work, as expressed vividly in these words of Isaiah 53:4-6:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What is noteworthy, however, is that the verbs used in Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) speak of the *future* exaltation and glorification of the servant that will *follow* his humiliation and death, whereas the Gospel of John interprets the exaltation and glorification of Jesus happening specifically *in*—not after—his death.<sup>20</sup> The "hour" (ὥρα) of revelation in John is not in the upper room with disciples touching resurrected flesh; the "hour" is the death of Jesus on the cross.<sup>21</sup>

The second general observation is that these texts which refer to Jesus' death as exaltation or glorification also use the title "the Son of Man" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).<sup>22</sup> This title is found primarily on the lips of Jesus—except John 12:34—and is frequent in all four Gospels.<sup>23</sup> It is clear "the Son of Man" is not a "confessional title" of the later church since it is not the content of the major confessions in the Gospels, but it is Jesus' *public self-designation* used during his earthly ministry.<sup>24</sup> Absolutely crucial to understanding the significance of this title in John is seeing the influence of

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<sup>20</sup> See further Williams, "Isaiah in John's Gospel," 115.

<sup>21</sup> For this theme, see John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; and 17:1 (cf. 7:6, 8; and 16:21).

<sup>22</sup> For a good summary of the philological issues, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The New Testament Title 'Son of Man'," *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 25 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 143-160. For discussion of the history of scholarship on the subject, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 107 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> It is found 30 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 25 in Luke, and 12 in John; see Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 33-65.



Daniel 7:13 on the later use of this title among first-century AD Jews, including Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came *one like a son of man* [MT: כְּבָר אֲנֹשׁ; LXX: υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου], and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 7 was not a marginal text in the canon used by first-century Jews and Christians. Both its relationship to the depiction of YHWH as the enthroned likeness of “the man” in Ezekiel 1:26–28 as well as its significant influence upon later apocalyptic texts like *1 Enoch* 37–71, the Book of Revelation (1:13; 14:14), and *4 Ezra* 13 testify to its importance.<sup>26</sup> Many first-century Jews longed for the revelation of the Son of Man.

The Gospel of John evinces this interest in the Son of Man; for example, note the comment of Jesus to Nathaniel: “You will see greater things than this, you will see angels ascending and descending upon [ἐπί] the Son of Man” (John 1:51). In an obvious allusion to the crucifixion by way of Jacob’s comforting vision of God enthroned at the top of a ladder stretching between earth and heaven in Genesis 28:10–17, Jesus promises Nathaniel a theophany in which the Son of Man is seen as the ladder stretching between heaven and earth rather than being enthroned at the top of the ladder where one would expect to see him.<sup>27</sup> John also contains a polemic against those who claimed a heavenly ascent to see the Son of Man who is the visible form of God: “No one has ascended except he who has descended, the Son of Man” (John 3:13).<sup>28</sup> What was puzzling for Jesus’ followers was not that he speaks of himself as the Son of Man, but

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<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the assessment of Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 290–306.

<sup>26</sup> *1 Enoch* 37–71 is especially important testimony concerning how the Son of Man of Daniel 7 was being interpreted among first-century Jews as a preexistent person within the mystery of YHWH who would bring deliverance on the last day; see James C. VanderKam, “Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in *1 Enoch* 37–71,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 169–191. For the identification of the Son of Man with the Ancient of Days in these chapters, see Charles A. Gieschen, “The Name of the Son of Man in *1 Enoch*,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 238–249.

<sup>27</sup> See Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 586–605, and Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 280–283.

<sup>28</sup> See also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 282.

specifically *how* he speaks of himself as the Son of Man. John does not focus on seeing the Son of Man enthroned *in heaven* at the *end* of time, but seeing the Son of Man enthroned *on earth* upon the cross *in time* (John 12:23, 32–34; cf. Jesus is “King of the Jews” in the passion narrative).<sup>29</sup>

### *Jesus’ Death as “Being Lifted Up”*

There are three texts in John that speak of Jesus’ death as “being lifted up.” Lest there be any confusion that this language refers to Jesus’ resurrection or ascension and not to the crucifixion, the evangelist clearly explains Jesus’ words in the third text: “He was saying this to indicate *the kind of death by which he was to die*” (John 12:33).<sup>30</sup> As one studies these texts, it is apparent that there is an intentional and profound double meaning to the verb ὑψώω in John: even as Jesus will be literally “lifted up” in the crucifixion, he will also—in this very action of humiliating sacrifice—“be exalted” by the Father in order to show forth his divine identity for all to see and be drawn to him. These texts are the primary passion predictions in the Johannine narrative.

The first of these texts is found near the end of the dialogue with Nicodemus:

[John 3:14; Jesus said] “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so it is necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up* [ὑψωθῆναι] that whoever believes in him has eternal life.”

This text states that the gracious action of the YHWH in Numbers 21, where he instructed Moses to place a bronze serpent on a pole to bring healing to Israel, provides a pattern for the gracious action of the Son of Man being lifted up in the crucifixion (note the καθώς, οὕτως structure). There is great irony in the fact that the last place one would expect to see the Son of Man is lifted up on a cross from earth; Daniel 7 and subsequent Jewish writers have him lifted up on a throne in heaven.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Richard Bauckham, “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, Supplement to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 43–69.

<sup>30</sup> The resurrection/ascension of Jesus in John uses the language of “going away/departing” to the Father; see Martinus C. de Boer, “Jesus’ Departure to the Father in John: Death or Resurrection?” in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 184 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005), 1–19.

<sup>31</sup> See Charles A. Gieschen, “The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity, Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes,

The second text, spoken amid the escalating conflict with the Jews in John 8, emphasizes that it is precisely in his crucifixion that one will see Jesus to be YHWH:

[John 8:28; Jesus said] “When you lift up [ὑψώσῃτε] the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [ἐγώ εἰμι], and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me.”

Catrin William’s impressive treatment of Old Testament divine disclosure statements, primarily found in Isaiah, confirms much of the past research asserting that the background for the absolute ἐγώ εἰμι (“I am” or “I am he”) sayings in John—including this saying—is to be found in these statements.<sup>32</sup> John wants the reader to understand that the same YHWH who speaks in Isaiah is the Jesus speaking in John. Richard Bauckham explains how the use of the “lifting up” and the self-disclosure “I am” sayings from Isaiah function together: “When Jesus is lifted up, exalted in his humiliation on the cross, then the unique divine identity (‘I am he’) will be revealed for all to see.”<sup>33</sup>

The third text comes in chapter 12, the pivotal chapter that shifts the narrative from Jesus’ signs to the passion week:

[John 12:32-34; Jesus said] “And I, when I am lifted up [ὑψωθῶ] from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” But he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which he was to die. The crowd then answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah remains forever, and how can

April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, and Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 221–243.

<sup>32</sup> Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of ‘Anî Hû’ in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II.113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), esp. 255–303. There are nine divine disclosure statements in the MT and seven in the LXX: אֲנִי הוּא (Deut 32:39) אֲנִי הוּא (Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6) אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא (Isa 43:25; 51:12) and ἐγώ εἰμι (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10; 45:18) ἐγώ εἰμι ἐγώ εἰμι (Isa 43:25; 46:4; 51:12). The Gospel of John has seven absolute ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, but in the last occurrence in Gethsemane it is spoken three times (for a total of nine). Although the ἐγώ εἰμι formula in John should not be understood as the Divine Name that Jesus is said to have been given (John 17:6), nevertheless these absolute sayings are very closely related to it and function as a way of indicating that Jesus is the possessor of the Divine Name. The message they convey is bold: Jesus’ seven self-declarations are a complete revelation of the same YHWH who made the self-declarations in the Old Testament. See also Charles A. Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 115–157. Because of the obvious relationship between the absolute and predicate nominate ἐγώ εἰμι sayings in John, it is probable that the latter at least alludes to Jesus as possessor of the Divine Name (6:35, 41, 48; 8:12, cf. 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

<sup>33</sup> Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 65–66.

you say that it is necessary for *the Son of Man to be lifted up* [ὑψωθῆναι]?  
Who is this Son of Man?

This text not only confirms that the lifting up is the crucifixion ("he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which he was to die"), but it also helps the reader to see that the "hope of Isaiah, that the one true God will demonstrate his deity to the world, such that all the ends of the earth will turn to him and be saved, is fulfilled when the divine identity is revealed in Jesus' death."<sup>34</sup> *The important point is this:* All three of these texts understand the lifting up of the Servant depicted in Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) and his subsequent work of atonement as happening in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is in the death of Jesus where the Son of Man, the visible form of God now in flesh, is truly seen for who he is: YHWH, the suffering servant who atones for sin.

### *Jesus' Death as "Being Glorified"*

With the movement in John 12 to passion week, the dialogue about Jesus' death moves from the language of "being lifted up" to the language of "being glorified," the other verb from the pair in Isaiah 53:12 (LXX).<sup>35</sup> John regards these as distinct verbs describing a synonymous reality, because the narrative in John 12 carefully weaves together both "exaltation" (12:32, 34) and "glorification" language (12:23). Listen to the abundant use of the verb δοξάζω ("I glorify") in these four texts:

[John 12:23–24] And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for *the Son of Man to be glorified* [δοξασθῆ]. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

[John 12:27–28; Jesus said] "Now my entire self has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, *glorify* [δόξασόν] *your Name*." There came therefore a voice out of heaven: "I have glorified [ἔδοξασα] him and will glorify [δοξάσω] him again."

[John 13:31–32] When therefore he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is *the Son of Man glorified* [ἔδοξάσθη], and God is glorified [ἔδοξάσθη] in him; if God is glorified [ἔδοξάσθη] in him, God will also glorify [δοξάσει] him in himself, and will glorify [δοξάσει] him immediately."

[John 17:1, 5; Jesus prayed] "Father, the hour has come; *glorify* [δόξασόν] *your Son* in order that the Son glorify [δοξάσῃ] you . . . And now, Father,

<sup>34</sup> Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 495.

glorify [δόξασον] me in your own presence with the glory [δόξη] that I had with you before the world existed.”

The primary question in understanding these texts, and also where many interpreters have gone astray, is: What does δόξαζω mean in these texts? Although the basic semantic field of δόξαζω centers on the action of “honoring” someone or something, it is necessary to read this verb as used in *John*, especially in relationship to the noun δόξα. It is widely recognized that John frequently uses the noun δόξα with its profound Old Testament theophanic connotations from the Septuagint where it is used as a designation for YHWH’s visible form.<sup>36</sup> The use of the noun in John is a prominent theme in the Prologue (“we beheld his glory, glory as of the Father’s Only-Begotten” in John 1:14) and the Farewell Prayer (“glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world began” in John 17:5). John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise: “The Glory of YHWH will be revealed and all flesh shall see him” (Isa 40:5).

The use of the verb δόξαζω in John seems to take on these theophanic or revelatory connotations of the noun usage. A translation like “honor by tangibly showing forth true identity” is very clumsy, but it gets to the heart of what is being communicated by the verb in these texts. The irony in John is that Jesus is “glorified,” namely honored by his true identity being shown forth, not primarily in his Baptism, miracles, resurrection, or ascension, but in his death. As stated earlier, many first-century Jews longed to see the Son of Man, the mystery of God’s tangible form, revealed; John indicates that this apocalyptic event happened in the crucifixion. Remember, this glorification language is from an interpretation of Isaiah 53 that sees glorification happening in the humiliating suffering and death of the servant that atones for sin. Jesus stressed that even if people reject his words, they should believe his works (John 14:11); this work of atonement, above all, reveals his true identity.<sup>37</sup>

It is worth observing that John 12:27 gives us a unique interpretation of the Gethsemane passion tradition while blatantly acknowledging the true struggle Jesus wrestled with on the way to his death.<sup>38</sup> As in the Synoptic

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<sup>36</sup> See Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 78–88.

<sup>37</sup> C. H. Dodd even argues that the death of Jesus is the “final and all-inclusive” sign in this Gospel because it reveals Jesus’ true identity in the ultimate manner; see *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 439.

<sup>38</sup> See the discussion in Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 368.

Gospels, Jesus is very troubled by what lies ahead at the cross (e.g., Matt 26:38–42; cf. Isa 53:11). In John, however, he does not ask to be delivered from this suffering: “Shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27). This same attitude is reflected later in John (18:11) during his arrest in Gethsemane where Jesus says to Peter: “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given to me?” Although these texts present Jesus as more resolute in facing death than the Synoptic Gospel accounts, John affirms with them the passion tradition that Jesus drank the metaphorical cup of the divine wrath over sin in his death. This is an interpretation of Jesus’ death as atonement of sin.

## II. Jesus as the Lamb of God

John’s Gospel combines its depiction of Jesus as the Passover Lamb with atonement lamb imagery and language from Isaiah 53. Shortly after the prologue, John the Baptist announces Jesus to be “the Lamb [ὁ ἀμνός] of God *who takes away* [ὁ αἴρων] *the sin of the world*” (John 1:29; cf. 1:36). Richard Bauckham, in his recent collection of essays on John, calls to our attention the noteworthy fact that “Lamb of God” in the Gospel of John is understood to be an interpretation of the name “Jesus” by *gematria* (i.e., the numerical value of a word is calculated and understood to communicate meaning).<sup>39</sup> The name “Jesus” written in Hebrew (יהושע) and the title “Lamb of God” in Hebrew (שה אלהים) have the same numerical value: 391. This title, therefore, is seen in John as a significant way of understanding the person and work of Jesus.

John’s use of ὁ ἀμνός (“the lamb”) is probably dependent on the use of this noun in LXX Isaiah 53:7.<sup>40</sup> Catrin Williams argues this point by stating:

the most probable interpretation is that Passover lamb imagery, which plays a prominent role later in the gospel (cf. 19:14, 29, 36), has been combined with echoes of the descriptions of the Servant of God in Isaiah 53 LXX. The Servant, ‘like a lamb (ὡς ἀμνός) before the shearer’ (53:7), is one who ‘bears our sins’ (53:4) and ‘bore the sins of many’ (53:12).<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Williams’s assertion that John’s language of “taking away sin” (αἴρων) may be dependent on Isaiah’s language of “bearing sins,” some

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 276.

<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that other Greek nouns are used in the New Testament for Jesus as “the Lamb” (e.g., τὸ ἀρνίον in Revelation).

<sup>41</sup> Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” 104–105; see also A. T. Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 32–34.

interpreters are quick to point out that in John the Lamb of God neither “carries” (φέρει) sin nor “bore” (ἀνήνεγκεν) sins as the servant does in Isaiah 53:4 and 53:12 respectively, which draw on the scapegoat rite of Leviticus 16.<sup>42</sup> Further support for the intertextual relationship between John 1:29 and Isaiah 53:7 (“lamb”) and 53:11–12 (“to take away the sins”) is found in 1 John 3:4–7.<sup>43</sup> 1 John 3:5 also provides helpful background for understanding that the verbal action of αἴρων (“taking away sins”) is probably linked to the *purity* of Jesus whose death pays for sins of others because he has no sin: “You know that one [Jesus] was manifest in order that he take away sins [ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ]; in him is no sin.”<sup>44</sup>

The universal – even cosmic – effect of Jesus’ death is emphasized here (“takes away the sin of the world”) and several times elsewhere in John (3:16; 4:45). Sometimes atonement of sins is not seen in John because interpreters do not see much teaching about sin in John. The evangelist at times uses the singular form of ἀμαρτία (“sin”) to signify that sin is a *singular and cosmic condition* rather than merely *multiple individual actions* (see John 1:29; 15:22; 16:8). Both the use of the singular (τὴν ἀμαρτίαν) as well as the inclusive genitive modifier that indicates universal scope (τοῦ κόσμου) in John the Baptist’s announcement signify sin is a condition that enslaves creation, including all people.<sup>45</sup> John, however, also speaks of the multitude of individual sins that result from this condition of bondage. This is expressed with explicit simplicity by Jesus in John 8:34: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin [πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἀμαρτίας].” Sin’s grip is clear: man is “dead” in sin and commits a multitude of individual sins. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he tells

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<sup>42</sup> For an overview of scholarship on this subject, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 58–63.

<sup>43</sup> Maarten J. J. Menken shows five elements of 1 John 3:3–7 that are similar to Isaiah 53; see “‘The Lamb of God’ (John 1,29) in the Light of 1 John 3,4–7,” in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 581–590.

<sup>44</sup> Although he emphasizes Jesus as victor rather than victim, this point is made by J. Ramsey Michaels, “Atonement in John’s Gospel and Epistles,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives, Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 108–109.

<sup>45</sup> For further discussion, see Charles A. Gieschen, “Original Sin in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal* 31 (2005): 359–375, esp. 363–364. See further Daniel Johansson, “Anthropology in the Gospel of John in the Context of First Century Judaism” (STM thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, 2007).

his disciples: "Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven" (John 20:23). The implication of bestowal of authority to forgive is that his death has done something to free mankind from the consequences of sin. When people believe, they receive forgiveness, which is more often called "life" or "eternal life" in John (e.g., John 3:15, 16, 36).

John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" at the beginning of this Gospel is understood as fulfilled in the death of Jesus.<sup>46</sup> John's passion narrative makes this clear by noting that Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation when all the lambs are slaughtered for the Passover Feast (John 19:14), by calling attention to Jesus being offered wine on hyssop (John 19:29) and by quoting Exodus 12:46, "Not one of his bones will be broken," at the close of his passion narrative (John 19:36). The blood and water pouring from the side of the Lamb of God is also important. Jesus' Bread of Life discourse in John 6:22-59, presented in the context of Passover (6:4), has already introduced the importance of Jesus' blood in John's Gospel. Jesus is the Passover Lamb whose flesh is not only eaten, but whose blood is drunk because life is in the blood. Here Jesus is also seen as the new temple of Ezekiel (Ezek 47:1; cf. Zech 14:8) from which water, which is the Spirit, flows to give life to the world.<sup>47</sup> In this image of blood and water, John sees the sacramental life of the church instituted at the death of Jesus, the very source of life for the world.<sup>48</sup>

### III. Jesus as the Noble Shepherd

This Gospel contains what can be characterized as Jesus' own funeral sermon in the so-called Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. Jerome Neyrey has shown parallels between this discourse and funeral orations on noble death.<sup>49</sup> Whether it be the death of a Roman soldier in the first century or a United States Marine in the twenty-first century, a death on behalf others can readily be understood as a "noble" death—thus, the translation of *καλός* as "noble" instead of "good" shepherd. Here are the primary texts:

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<sup>46</sup> See the discussion by Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 133 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 133-140.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 280.

<sup>48</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 37-119, esp. 114-116.

<sup>49</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Noble Shepherd in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 267-291.



[John 10:11, 14–15; Jesus said] “*I am the Noble Shepherd* [Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός]. *The Noble Shepherd lays down his entire person* [ψυχὴν] *in behalf of* [ὑπὲρ] *the sheep* . . . . *I am the Noble Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my entire person* [ψυχὴν] *in behalf of* [ὑπὲρ] *the sheep.*”

[John 10:17–18; Jesus said] “*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my entire person* [ψυχὴν] *that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.*”

Jesus is not presented here as the *passive* victim of political circumstance; he is the priest who *actively* lays down his entire person as the sacrifice. It is part of Johannine irony that the sacrificial Lamb of God is also the Noble Shepherd who lays down the sacrifice. It is also ironic that Jesus, who is presented as the new temple in John 2:19–21, is not only the new Holy of Holies where YHWH dwells but is also the altar of sacrifice. The Noble Shepherd discourse is given in the context of τὰ ἐγκαίνια (John 10:22). Although usually translated “the Dedication,” the title of this feast may better be translated “the Inauguration.”<sup>50</sup> This festival—commonly known as Hanukkah—celebrates the Maccabean recapturing of the Temple from the Seleucids in 164 BC that led to its purification, the consecration of the new altar, and the *inauguration* of the altar with sacrifice. The end of the Noble Shepherd discourse indicates that Jesus was “consecrated” (ἡγίασεν) by the Father (John 10:36; cf. John 17:19), the kind of language used for consecrating an altar. Richard Bauckham proposes this implication: “If Jesus is treated symbolically as the new temple or the new altar, sacrifice ‘in’ or ‘on’ him could not be a fact of the past, but an event still in the future at this point in John’s narrative. God has already consecrated Jesus to be the place of sacrifice, but the sacrifice has not yet been offered.”<sup>51</sup>

In spite of this kind of sacrificial content, we should not be surprised that some interpreters argue that atonement is not found in John 10.<sup>52</sup> J. T. Forestell, for example, states, “This is clearly an act of self-devotion on the part of the shepherd proceeding from love for his sheep; it has no specifically religious, sacrificial or expiatory value. The shepherd does substitute his life for the life of the sheep, but this action is not performed out of any religious necessity; it is not an act of cult.”<sup>53</sup> Raymond Brown, on the other hand, holds that the language of laying down one’s entire

<sup>50</sup> This argument is made in detail by Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 256–262.

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 263.

<sup>52</sup> De Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 233.

<sup>53</sup> Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, 74.

person stems from the reference in Isaiah 53:10 (LXX) to the servant giving his ψυχή ("entire person") as an offering for sin.<sup>54</sup> Because of the relationship with Isaiah that has already been demonstrated above, this is very possible. It is important, however, also to notice that Jesus does not here call himself the Son of Man or the servant, but shepherd. Those who know Ezekiel 34 would conclude that Jesus is speaking in this narrative as if he were YHWH, for in Ezekiel YHWH promises: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ezek 34:15; cf. Zech 10:1-12). The use of the predicate nominative ἐγώ εἰμι construction also supports this conclusion. If Jesus speaks as YHWH and shares his divine name, that makes the "entire person" that he lays down extremely significant and very valuable.

Much theology is taught by prepositions; the use of ὑπέρ ("in behalf of") in John is no exception.<sup>55</sup> This preposition can be used to communicate the theology of substitutionary atonement. A clear example of this is the ironically prophetic words of Caiaphas, "It is better for us that one man die *in behalf of* [ὑπέρ] the nation and that the whole nation not perish" (John 11:50). John immediately clarifies that the benefactors are not only Israel: "and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52). The benefactor of the sacrificial action spoken of in this text and the Noble Shepherd discourse is not *only* Israel, be they sheep in Jerusalem or scattered abroad. It has been taught earlier in John's narrative, using the same ὑπέρ preposition, that this giving of Jesus' flesh in death benefits "the world" (τοῦ κόσμου): "And the bread that I will give *in behalf of the life of the world* is my flesh [ὑπέρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς]" (John 6:51). This is an expression of universal substitutionary atonement. This theme is also found in the Farewell Discourse: "Greater love has no person than this: that a person lay down his entire person in behalf of [ὑπέρ] his friends" (John 15:13; cf. John 17:19 and 18:14).

#### IV. The Death of Jesus in Light of 1 John

The atonement theology of John can stand on its own, but its presence is substantially strengthened by the explicit testimony about Jesus' death as the atoning sacrifice in the First Epistle of John.<sup>56</sup> Reading the theology of the Gospel in light of the Johannine Epistles has been tempered by twentieth-century critical scholarship postulating a long development

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<sup>54</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 1071-1072.

<sup>55</sup> Paul, for example, uses this preposition repeatedly in his interpretation of Jesus' death: Rom 5:6, 8; 8:32; 1 Cor 11:24; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14, 21; Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; Eph 5:2, 25; and 1 Thess 5:10.

<sup>56</sup> Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles," 112.

process for the writing of the Gospel as well as a different (and later) author for the three Epistles of John.<sup>57</sup> Once the wedge of distinct authorship is placed between the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, the latter becomes of lesser value in interpreting the former. This critical perspective on authorship has been challenged, however, by several in the guild, including both Martin Hengel and Richard Bauckham.<sup>58</sup> Rather than build a case here for using the Johannine Epistles to support our reading of the Gospel, this study will assume a sympathetic readership and proceed.

There are three primary texts where atonement theology is especially explicit. First, already in the first chapter John sets forth the present purification from sin offered through the blood of Jesus: "*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin* [τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας] . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and *purifies* [καθαρίζει] us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9). Although this text emphasizes the present purification that takes place when sins are confessed, it grounds that purifying activity in the blood that poured forth from Jesus side upon his death (John 19) which is also the blood that gives life in the Eucharist (John 6). This blood both takes away our sin and appeases the Father. In dogmatic terms, this blood both expiates sin and propitiates the Father.

That this is a proper understanding is supported by our second text, which follows a few verses later: "And if someone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins* [αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν], *and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world* [καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου]" (1 John 2:1b-2). The use of ἱλασμός, both here and in 1 John 4:10, is very explicit and strong testimony to Jesus' death interpreted as atonement. This noun is related to ἱλαστήριον, the term used for the mercy seat in the LXX (Lev 16:13-15; Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). It has been translated three primary ways: "expiation" ("removal of sin"), "propitiation" ("appeasement of divine wrath over sin"), or the more generic "atoning sacrifice." There has been considerable debate between advocates of the "expiation" and "propitiation" meanings, with the former being favored slightly in the context of 1 John.<sup>59</sup> The generic and more inclusive "atoning

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<sup>57</sup> See especially Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>58</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989), and Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 33-72.

<sup>59</sup> Toan Joseph Do, "Jesus' Death as Hilasmos According to 1 John," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum

sacrifice" translation is used here because Jesus' death *both* expiates sin by removing it from us (1 John 1:7) and also propitiates the Father, as the description here of Jesus as our Paraclete (i.e., "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1) shows.<sup>60</sup> It is noteworthy that Reformed exegetes, who confess *limited* atonement, must do gymnastic maneuvers to get around this testimony to *universal* atonement: "not only our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world." J. Ramsey Michaels, for example, gives this explanation: "The point is not that Jesus died for everyone indiscriminately so that everyone in the world is in principle forgiven, but that all those forgiven are forgiven on the basis of Christ's sacrifice and in no other way."<sup>61</sup> This text does not teach *universalism*, but it does teach *universal atonement*.

The third text, 1 John 4:10, also uses the *ἱλασμός* ("atoning sacrifice") language. It reads: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins [ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν]." This text provides a terse exegesis of John 3:16 that helps interpreters to see that God's "giving" of the Only-Begotten Son spoken of there is nothing other than the "sending of the Son to be an atoning sacrifice for sin" (1 John 4:10). The love discussed in both the Gospel and First Epistle is not a love grounded in a warm-fuzzy feeling of God towards mankind, but in a love revealed through the atoning death of the Son for the sin of the world, which includes our individual sin. It is apparent from these three texts that the implicit atonement theology of the Gospel of John is stated very explicitly in 1 John.

## V. Conclusion

Bultmann was right: John is about revelation. He was wrong, however, in arguing that John's revelation was not about atonement. He was also wrong in concluding that John's revelation *in and of itself* saves apart from atonement. The revelation that John's narrative ticks towards as the reader awaits "the hour" is the death of Jesus because that is where the incarnate Son of Man is shown giving his flesh for the life of the world. The Gospel of John does not sanitize the death of Jesus by using the language of "exaltation" and "glorification" to describe it. As demonstrated above, this language is part of this Gospel's identification of the Son of Man with the atoning work of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Furthermore, this Gospel presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the Noble Shepherd who lays down his entire person for the sheep,

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Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 537-553.

<sup>60</sup> Turner, "Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John," 115.

<sup>61</sup> Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles," 117.

both of which help readers to see Jesus' death as that which atones for sin. In support of this interpretation, First John speaks very explicitly of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Each year, on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, much of the church observes the Festival of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. The Synoptic Gospels each have an account of Jesus' transfiguration, where he is glorified upon a mountain (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36). These are the accounts where—according to the synoptic evangelists—the divine identity of Jesus as the Son of God is revealed, if but briefly. There is no transfiguration, however, in the Gospel of John. It may have been intentionally omitted because in the Gospel of John it is specifically in the death of Jesus where the divine identity of Jesus as YHWH is most clearly revealed: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [ἐγώ εἰμι]” (John 8:28). Jesus promised Nathaniel that he would see “greater things” (John 1:51). When the Gospel of John is read closely and these atonement allusions are followed, these “greater things” continue to be seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus that John presents.