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"The Word Was Made Flesh" (John 1:14)

Introduction

The tension throughout the Gospel of John between the divinity and humanity of Jesus is of paramount importance for the interpretation of John 6:51c–58 because the historical debate in scholarship about this pericope revolves around its interpretation as *either* a christological or eucharistic text.[1] As such, to anticipate my argument, the emphasis elsewhere in this Gospel, and especially in the prologue, on the relationship between Jesus' divine and human characteristics lays the groundwork for a christological interpretation of John 6:51c–58 despite its eucharistic echoes. In John, the Word is *both* flesh (1:14) and God (1:1); John's primary concern is in demonstrating the relationship between Jesus and the divine.[2] John 6:51c–58 has frequently been viewed as a eucharistic scene, inserted

1. These terms are inherently problematic when applied to John's Gospel.

by a later redactor to sacramentalize a Gospel long viewed as anti-sacramental at its core.[3] Several scholars, whose arguments will be discussed below, have argued that since John 6:51c–58 appears to them to be a eucharistic scene, it must therefore be the product of a later period in which sacramentality had become important; they argue that John's Gospel rarely has interest in sacramentality other than at this point and that the section is therefore the product of the so-called Ecclesiastical Redactor. This represents a circular argument in which a portion of John is assumed to be about a later practice (the Eucharist), resulting in a redactional argument regarding its authorship. Alternate theories have refuted this assumption and its repercussions by arguing for a christological reading of John 6:51c–58, and this alternative view is helpful to my argument. These theories have nonetheless neglected the relevance of Greco-Roman literature to John's creation of Jesus' identity vis-à-vis the divine. One of the ways this relationship can be viewed is through the lens of the Greco-Roman category of the hero. John's representation of Jesus shares many characteristics with the Hellenistic hero. I argue that this scene, in which Jesus encourages his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood, is better viewed in the context of John's concern with Jesus' identity. Other heroes in the classical world become associated with gods and goddesses through ritual sacrifice; the literary representation of this phenomenon is found in the Hellenistic romance novels from around the time of John's composition.[4] I suggest, therefore, that John 6:51c–58 is a section in

2. Raymond E. Brown, "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?" *Theological Studies* 26, no. 4 (1965): 556 n. 52.
3. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 229–30.
4. *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius (second century CE), *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton (first century CE), *The Ephesian Tale* by Xenephon of Ephesus (second century CE), and *An Ethiopian Story* by Heliodorus of Emesa (third century CE) will be discussed in the second chapter.

which the Gospel writer concretizes the identification between Jesus and God.

The context of John 6:51c–58 is Jesus' lecture on the beach of the Sea of Galilee/Tiberias (6:22ff), across the water from where he feeds the five thousand in the beginning of the chapter. Jesus has also recently performed the miracle of walking on the water (6:16–21). When the crowd confronts Jesus about his miracles, he answers with a lecture on the bread of life (6:25ff). Here, Jesus describes himself as the bread of life, which is superior to both the manna eaten in the wilderness in Exodus 16 and to that bread miraculously reproduced by Jesus the previous day in 6:1–14. When οἱ ἰουδαῖοι[5] protest that Jesus cannot possibly be from heaven as he claims, since his parents are both decidedly mortal (6:41–42), Jesus reiterates his credentials as a heavenly person sent by God and confirms his identity as the previously mentioned bread from heaven (6:44–51b). Then Jesus makes a truly shocking claim: "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (51c). That is, Jesus insists that *he* is the bread of life, and that this bread is his flesh; it is imperative for those who wish to live forever to eat this bread—that is, to eat Jesus' own flesh. This statement is not accepted enthusiastically; again, οἱ ἰουδαῖοι protest, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52). Jesus is forced to clarify. But when he does, the commandment is even stronger: while in 6:51b the listener is told that those who eat will live forever—a positive statement—in 6:53, Jesus turns the commandment into a negative one and states that those who do not eat the flesh and blood of the Son of Man have *no life in them to*

5. I have opted to leave John's use of this term in Greek to avoid the complicated issue of how to translate it since it can either be Judeans or Jews in almost all instances in the New Testament. For a discussion of these terms, see Shaye D. Cohen, "Ioudaios, Iudaeus, Judaean, Jew," in *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, ed. Shaye D. Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69–106. There is currently a great deal of debate about the translation of this term. See *Marginalia Review of Books*'s forum, "Have Scholars Erased the Jews from Antiquity?" http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jew-judean-forum/.

begin with. The negative statement's weight shocks even his disciples: "many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'" (6:60); "after this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (6:66). The context of οἱ ἰουδαῖοι questioning Jesus' heavenly identity in 6:41–42 supports the interpretation of 6:51c–58 as christological.

In this chapter, I will strengthen the argument for this understanding of the passage by first discussing the state of the research concerning Jesus' divine identity in John. I conclude that John overlays divine and human identities in the person of Jesus by emphasizing Jesus' body and identity through the signs that he performs. Second, I will outline the scholarship dealing specifically with the Christology of John 6:51c–58. I argue here that a christological interpretation dovetails with John's continued use of Jesus' body as a sign and further, that a christological interpretation obviates the need to explain away this passage as late and redactional. Third, I will engage with Rudolf Bultmann's argument concerning the so-called Ecclesiastical Redactor and suggest that there is in fact no need for such an explanation given (1) the interpretation of this section as christological in meaning, and (2) the continuity in language use, especially with regard to the terms σάρξ and τρῶγειν, terms to which some scholars have pointed as evidence for 6:51c–58 as a later addition. Fourth, I will discuss the problem of sacramentality in John. I will particularly address the problems of John 6's interpretation as eucharistic, especially given the absence of a Last Supper institution in John. I argue that John 6:51c–58 reappropriates the sacrificial language of consuming flesh and drinking blood in order to make claims about Jesus' divine identity. The chapter will conclude with a final proposal to view Jesus using the lens of the Hellenistic hero, and in particular, the heroes and heroines found in the romance novels that circulated at the time of John's composition.

Johannine Christology: State of the Question

The simultaneously human and divine category of Jesus' identity is the subject of one of the most divisive debates in the field of Johannine studies, a debate that naturally relates most closely to this project. Generally, scholars have tended to align themselves either with a more divine reading of Jesus or a more human one. There has been little in the way of chronological consensus; the debate has numbers on either side throughout the history of scholarship.[6] While scholars rarely, if ever, deny outright the importance of the other element of Jesus' being, there is a tendency to present reasoned arguments as to why one aspect of Jesus' identity is more significant than the other. As such, this kind of discussion is representative of the overarching trend in scholarship when discussing the Christology of John's Gospel; in dichotomizing flesh and glory, Jesus' complex identity as *both* God and human can become something of an afterthought. The contention surrounding this debate between the supporters of the flesh and the supporters of the glory speaks, in my

6. A classic example of the debate exists in the scholarship of Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann. For these scholars, the christological perspective of the entire Gospel rests on each of their perceived emphases of John 1:14. Bultmann takes 1:14a as the starting point for John's Christology. The emphasis on the flesh, for Bultmann, indicates John's original concern for a fleshly Jesus; other christological conclusions reflect a later source (e.g., *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel [New York: Scribner, 1955], 2:3–14). Käsemann emphasizes 1:14c, the glory of Christ, as the most significant theological point of this verse, going so far as to deny the significance of the corporeal aspect of John's Christology altogether (Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* [London: SCM, 1968], 12; "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, ed. Ernst Käsemann [London: SCM, 1969], 160). Contemporary discussions of this type are also common. For instance, Paul N. Anderson, in his discussion of John's Christology, notes that John O'Grady and Jerome Neyrey argued for the emphasis of the flesh on the one side and of the glory on the other, despite their work being published within a few years of one another (Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996], 24; John F. O'Grady, "The Human Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 14, no. 2 [1984]: 63–66; Jerome H. Neyrey, "'My Lord and My God': The Divinity of Jesus in John's Gospel," *SBL Seminar Papers 1986*, SBLSP 25 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1986], 152–71.)

opinion, to the importance of both the divine and the mortal in John's Christology. John's insistence that Jesus is *both* fleshly (1:14) and divine (1:1) indicates the author's concern with Jesus' identity as *both simultaneously*. Marianne Meye Thompson puts forward an argument that represents a shift in the debate.[7] Her response to Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann's Christology rests on the interpretation of the word σάρξ in John 1:14.[8] Thompson looks to other locations of Johannine use of this term in an attempt to come to a definition of σάρξ from context. For her, σάρξ is, as it is for C. K. Barrett and Raymond Brown and to some extent Käsemann as well,[9] the opposition of the realm of humanity to that of God. In 1:14 this is demonstrated by the use of the term in contradistinction to λόγος.[10] The close juxtaposition of "the Word was with God" and "the Word became flesh" highlights the contrast between the godly and the fleshly spheres for John. The glory referred to in 14c, then, represents the ability of witnesses to *testify* about the glory, rather than, as it is for Käsemann, the pinnacle of Johannine Christology.[11] For Thompson, then, Jesus' incarnation as described in the prologue emphasizes both aspects of Jesus' identity in order to exacerbate the offence of the incarnation; this offence exists (John 6:60, 61) *because* Jesus embodies both the human and the divine.

7. Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
8. Jaime Clark-Soles makes the argument that John uses the term σάρξ in different ways depending on the context, which is a significant contribution to this debate. She views the body of Jesus as a unification of the body and spirit, something which Jesus uniquely accomplishes on earth ("I Will Raise [Whom?] Up on the Last Day—Anthropology as a Feature of Johannine Eschatology," in *New Currents Through John: A Global Perspective*, eds. Francisco Lozada Jr. and Tom Thatcher [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 37–38); see my complete discussion of this in chapter one).
9. For Käsemann, the definition differs slightly: "the Word became flesh" indicates the coming into the *kosmos* of the *logos*, rather than the humanification of God ("Structure," 158); C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 164–65; Brown, *John*, 1:12.
10. Thompson, *Humanity*, 40.
11. Ibid., 42.

While Thompson's argument about 1:14 diffuses the problems with dichotomizing flesh and glory to a certain degree, as I will show in the following section, it is Paul Anderson's discussion of John's Christology as a dialectical relationship between the flesh and the glory that is perhaps the most helpful here because it elaborates on the issue of how the seemingly disparate identities coexist in one being.[12] He argues, and I agree, that John 1:14 is indeed key to understanding the Christology of this Gospel. However, unlike Bultmann or Käsemann, Anderson argues that 1:14's reference to both the flesh and the glory

> is a representative encapsulation of the dialectical portrayal of Jesus which runs throughout the entire Gospel. Therefore, any attempt to remove one of the poles which create the tension does violence to the central fibre of John's christology overall . . . John 1:14a and c are held together by 1:14b 'and *dwelt* among us', which suggests that John's high and low presentation of Jesus is not founded primarily on a theoretical construct, but on *experiential* ones.[13]

Indeed, throughout the Gospel, John takes care to emphasize that people experience both Jesus' corporeal and divine attributes in their encounters with him. In John 3:13–16, the author reiterates that Jesus is unique in his simultaneous earthly and heavenly natures: he is the one who has come down from heaven and whose body will be lifted up on the cross. In this example, Jesus highlights that his identification with God depends on the lifting up on the cross of his physical body, implying that his glorification is implicated in his physical being; this concept is solidified in John 8:28 when Jesus again claims, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he."

12. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 137–66.
13. Ibid., 162–63.

This correlation between the physical presence of Jesus' flesh and the belief in the truth that Jesus is God is found throughout John's Gospel, and especially in Jesus' healing acts. Whereas other Gospels require faith prior to the miracle, such as Mark 5:34 (where a woman is healed without any physical action on Jesus' part), 6:5-6 (where Jesus is unable to perform miracles because of the lack of faith in the local population), and 9:24 (where Jesus requires the belief of an ill child's father before he is willing [able?] to perform a cure), in John, faith emerges out of actions. John's emphasis on Jesus' physical body, expressed through both Jesus' statements and in particular through his signs, *causes belief* in the glory of God-as-Jesus. Embedded in a healing narrative and nestled among verses that speak of Jesus as the light in the world, John 9:5-7a highlights Jesus' physical body by featuring his saliva: "'As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.' Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.'" Likewise, 10:33 concretizes the relationship between Jesus' divinity and his physical acts of healing when Jesus is accused of claiming to be divine—here the accusation is directly linked to Jesus' healing works in verse 32:

> οἱ ἰουδαίοι fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?" οἱ ἰουδαίοι answered him, "We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only a man, you claim to be God." (10:31-33)

Here, οἱ ἰουδαίοι react to Jesus' physical works in the physical world and conclude that through them, Jesus is indicating his identification as God.

The very corporeal actions that Jesus does--his signs, whether feeding people with bread, healing the wounded with mud made

from his own spit, or urging the consumption of his own flesh and blood--concretize the dialectical relationship between the Word and the flesh. The incarnation of the Word in the flesh of humanity means that the divine aspects of God and the corporeal ones of Jesus are in fact inseparable; through Jesus' physical acts his divinity is recognized. As many scholars, especially those mentioned above, have already pointed out, this dialectical relationship between the Word and the flesh is most obvious in the prologue, where the purpose and message of the Gospel is set forth—namely, to identify Jesus with God—but is exhibited throughout the Gospel. That the ideas that the Word and God are equivalent and that the Word then became a real human being with flesh and blood are implicated so early in John's text indicates the paramount importance of a fleshly *and* divine Jesus for John's Christology.

However, of all the passages in John that exemplify this concern, John 6:51c-58 is perhaps both the most significant and obscure in meaning. Insofar as the signs Jesus performs in John point consistently to Jesus' divine identity, the feeding miracle on the beach provides a context for the Bread of Life Discourse in 6:51c-58 that suggests a christological interpretation. In every case, the miracles performed by Jesus allow for Jesus' identity to become apparent (e.g., 9:16-17, 28-33, 35-38; 10:33, 37).[14] Even (or perhaps especially) to Jesus' opponents, Jesus' emphasis on his physical nature in his healing miracles points, somewhat paradoxically, to the (dangerous) truth about Jesus' divinity. In fact, John points out specifically that faith is the direct result of witnessing Jesus' miracles, even as early as the wedding at Cana: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him"

14. Helmut Koester argues that Jesus' signs in John underscore both the people's belief in Jesus and also Jesus' own dissatisfaction with the work these signs do in promoting belief (Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: History and Literature of Early Christianity* [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995], 2:190).

(2:11). Not only did Jesus' miracle of the wine reveal his divine glory, it also caused belief to grow in those who followed him. Likewise in 2:24, Jesus' miracles cause belief among the population of Jerusalem; here, however, it is Jesus who refuses to trust in the people. This contradiction is apparent throughout the Gospel because for Jesus and his Johannine creator, belief because of miracles misses the point. The signs point away from themselves and to a man whose body is itself a sign (John 3:11–15). Thus, given John's preoccupation with Jesus' dual nature, it seems best to approach John 6:51c–58 as a text about Jesus' identity following the pattern of the other signs.

John 6 and Christology

The importance of Jesus' signs to Jesus' divine identification suggests that John 6, and particularly John 6:51c–58, tells us much about the Gospel of John's ideas about Jesus' identity. John 6 participates in the pattern of John's use of signs to promote belief; for Vernon Ruland, "this entire chapter is . . . a *semeion*, an exfoliating revelation, an ever-more-dazzling theophany"[15] that reaches its climax in 6:51c–58. For Ruland, Jesus' body is a "sacrament" in that his very existence is the expression of God's divine glory in the person of Jesus; eating Jesus as sacrament "makes his incarnate presence operative."[16] Ruland further argues that just as the Word is incarnate in Jesus, so too is Jesus "incarnate" in the Bread of Life; he therefore interprets the scene as primarily soteriological-eucharistic. For Ruland, all of Jesus' actions are sacramental since Jesus himself is a future sacrament. The consumption of Jesus' flesh in 6:51c–58, for Ruland, *is* the eucharistic consumption of the bread that Jesus *is*—the scene is an allusion to the Eucharist that complements Johannine sacramental theology.

15. Vernon J. Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament: John's Bread of Life Discourse (Chapter 6)," *Interpretation* 18, no. 4 (1964): 459.
16. Ibid., 460.

Bultmann's view of John's Christology is formulated without the inclusion of 6:51c–58, unsurprisingly. He defines "the Johannine view of *sarx* as the human and the worldly sphere, which is transitory, illusory, inauthentic, helpless, futile and corrupting—'the nothingness of man's [sic] whole existence.'"[17] The fact that Bultmann's definition of John's concept of the flesh omits 6:51c–58, where, I argue, flesh and divinity are so intermingled as to challenge Bultmann's definition, is problematic. Thompson includes these verses in her definition of σάρξ but examines them out of order, since their integrity is in dispute. Nevertheless, she contests Bultmann's dismissal of the feasibility of reading these verses in the context of the flesh/glory debate and further contests his interpretation of the scene's meaning in general. Pointing out that it is unnecessary for Bultmann to assume that the verses refer to the Eucharist exclusively, Thompson joins other scholars[18] in noting that 6:51c may well refer to Jesus' very fleshly death on the cross.[19] She argues that, while Bultmann interprets the phrase "I shall give" in 6:51 as a reference to the Eucharist, it should actually be interpreted to refer to the gift that is Jesus' death on the cross.[20] Thompson supports this conclusion by pointing out the similarities between 6:51 and passages elsewhere in the Gospel where Jesus speaks about his death, noticing that in these instances, Jesus emphasizes his own willingness to give up his life; verse 51 participates in this mode of discussion and should therefore

17. Thompson, *Humanity*, 34, who quotes Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 141.
18. For example, James D. G. Dunn, "John 6: A Eucharistic Discourse?" *NTS* 17 (1971): 330, 335–36; Edwyn Clement Hoskyns and Francis Noel Davey, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 297; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 267; Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 2:55, and D. Moody Smith Jr., *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann's Literary Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 145.
19. Thompson, *Humanity*, 45.
20. Ibid. This allusion will have significance for my conclusions in chapter four, where I will draw connections between Jesus' death and the type of heroic cult *aition*.

be understood, according to Thompson, in that context.[21] Helpfully, Thompson also observes that 6:51-58 elucidates several points made earlier in chapter six, making both their inclusion in an "original" John more palatable and their interpretation as christological more sound. In terms of the observation that this section clarifies statements made earlier in John, Thompson suggests that 6:27, "do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you," and 6:33, "the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world," collaborate with 6:51 to explain Jesus' precise meaning about his purpose on earth.[22] That is, in light of Jesus' typical way of talking about his death and in light of the earlier statements made about eternal life, Thompson argues that John 6:51-58 should be read as a christological and soteriological statement that Jesus' death on the cross "bestows eternal life."[23]

Where I disagree with Thompson is in her contention that this statement has nothing to do with the eating of Jesus' flesh.[24] In my view, the eating of Jesus' flesh can still be read as a significant symbol in John 6 quite apart from the fact that it brings up remembrance of the Eucharist both to modern scholars and ancient interpreters. The key to its meaning, I argue, lies in the Hellenistic literature prolific during John's time, and here I especially refer to the Hellenstic romance novels; in taking a step back from the debate somewhat internal to John (glory versus flesh), variant meanings become apparent. Nevertheless, Thompson's arguments regarding John 6:51c-58's christological implications are useful.

Paul Anderson, as I mentioned above, also supports a christological interpretation of John 6:51c-58. According to Anderson, the Bread

21. Ibid., 46.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 47.

of Life Discourse is marked by an apparent discontinuity in plot in order to alert the reader about the importance of the christological statement to follow.[25] Bultmann has observed that Jesus' response in verse 26, a statement regarding the food that endures for eternal life, does not logically follow verse 25, where the people ask Jesus when he arrived. He has likewise noted the rough transition between verses 28f and 30ff; Anderson responds to Bultmann's observations by pointing out the continued use of irony by the author of John to highlight the "misunderstanding motif" common throughout John's Gospel as an invitation to belief in Jesus.[26] Thus, what Bultmann considers inconsistencies attributed to a redactor, Anderson interprets as a way for the author to jar the readers' attention to the important question of Jesus' divinity. Paul Duke notes that in John it is often the unanswered questions that direct the reader to consider "new dimensions of meaning."[27] Anderson argues that this section of John 6 is one such instance that points to the levels of meaning couched in 6:51c–58. This discussion will become particularly helpful in the next section, when we examine the Ecclesiastical Redactor.

Bultmann, unlike Anderson and Duke, sees the incongruities in John's Gospel as evidence for the hand of the Ecclesiastical Redactor. He also argues that John 6:51c–58 is an interpolation given its contrast to the evangelist's view on salvation. Whereas in most of John, he argues, belief in Jesus is enough for salvation, in these verses the consumption of flesh is a requirement, which must point to the Eucharist.[28] For Bultmann, not only is this section not an original part of John, but it also has little to do with Christology. However, in

25. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 93–94.
26. Ibid., 96; cf. Bultmann, *John,* 219–25.
27. Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 91.
28. Bultmann, *John*, 218–29; see also Edmund J. Siedlecki, "A Patristic Synthesis of John VI, 54-55" (PhD diss., Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary, 1956); Alan Richardson, *The Gospel According to Saint John: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), among many others.

viewing these verses in a context other than the Eucharist, I propose that it is possible to find another, christological, interpretation. Given the surprising lack of eucharistic discussion where one might expect it, the Last Supper of John 13, it seems odd that a redactor would choose this location to interpolate sacramental theology into the Gospel of John. Instead, it fits nicely with Jesus' continued use, throughout John, of his body as a sign pointing to his true identity. This insight not only sidesteps the tricky issue of the redactor, but also resolves perceived contradictions in John's theology.

In sum, I suggest that these verses, John 6:51c–58, taken as a christological statement that unites the Word with the flesh, are key to understanding John's message about Jesus' identity. If we accept that these few verses are actually integral to the message about Jesus that the final hand responsible for this Gospel sought to advocate, regardless of their origin, then they should be taken into account seriously when evaluating John's christological views; it behooves scholars not to omit verses simply because they are confounding to our traditional understandings of an ancient author's theological standpoint. A christological approach to this section evades the problems of a unified or fragmented John and provides space for thinking about the significance of the christological statement and its meaning. While many scholars have attempted to resolve the apparent dichotomy between Christology and soteriology-through-Eucharist by rendering either one or the other void, I seek to reconcile the clearly christological statements implied and stated in John 6:51c–58 with the language of eating used therein, which has real significance for the interpretation of this passage. As I have suggested throughout and will continue to suggest, a way to resolve these two "opposing" tropes is found in the cultural expectations of the Hellenistic world as preserved in its literature.

John 6 and the Ecclesiastical Redactor

Before proceeding with the details of what such a christological interpretation of John 6:51c–58 would entail, the issue of the composition of this section should be addressed. When approaching John 6:51c–58, we have seen that scholars have normally taken one of two paths: either they argue that this portion of John represents an attempt to bring in sacramental theology to a text largely devoid of it, or that it does not.[29] In my view, the debate can be best illustrated

29. See Herbert Klos, *Die Sakramente im Johannesevangelium* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970), 11–44 for a thorough overview of the various opinions to that date. More recently, Maarten J. J. Menken, "John 6,51c–58: Eucharist or Christology?" in *Critical Readings of John 6*, Biblical Interpretation Series 22, ed. R. Alan Culpepper (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 183 n.3 gives an excellent overview of the debate. Menken includes Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1979), 199, 219–21; Kikuo Matsunaga, "Is John's Gospel Anti-Sacramental?—A New Solution in Light of the Evangelist's Milieu," *NTS* 27 (1980–81): 516–24; Michel Gourgues, "Section christologique et section eucharistique en Jean VI. Une proposition," *RB* 88 (1981): 513–15; Simon Légasse, "Le pain de la vie," *BLE* 83 (1982): 243–61; John Dominic Crossan, "It is Written: A Structuralist Analysis of John 6," *Semeia* 26 (1983): 3–21; J. Gnilka, *Johannesevangelium*, Die neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg: Echter, 1983), 53–54; Urban C. von Wahlde, "*Wiederaufnahme* as a Marker of Redaction in Jn 6:51-58," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 542–49; Stanislas Dockx, "Jean 6:51b-58," in *Chronologies néotestamentaires et Vie de l'Église primitive: Recherches exégétiques*, ed. Stanislas Dockx (Leuven: Peeters, 1984), 267–70; Ludger Schenke, "Die literarische Vorgeschichte von Joh 6:26–58," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 29 (1985): 68–89; H. Weder, "Die Menschwerdung Gottes: Überlegungen zur Auslegungsproblematik des Johannesevangeliums am Beispeil von Joh 6," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 82 (1985): 325–60; David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority In the Jewish and Earliest Christian Literature*, WUNT 39 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 110–14; Christof Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord's Supper," *NTS* 33 (1987): 102–34; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (Linda M. Maloney, trans.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 194–208; P. Stuhlmacher, "Das neutestamentliche Zeugnis vom Herrenmahl," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 84 (1987): 1–35; Lothar Wehr, *Arznei der Unsterblichkeit: Die Eucharistie bei Ignatius von Antiochien und im Johannesevangelium* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1987), 182–277; Joachim Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte. Mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 180–232; C. H. Cosgrove, "The Place Where Jesus Is: Allusions to Baptism and the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 35 (1989): 522–39; Peter Dschulnigg, "Überlegungen zum Hintergrund der Mahlformel in JosAs. Ein Versuch," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der ältern Kirche* 80 (1989): 272–75; Jean-Marie Sevrin, "L'écriture du IVe évangile comme phénomene de reception: L'exemple de Jn 6," *The*

through discussions around the interpretation of two key terms used in this section: σάρξ and τρώγειν. John uses bread imagery in these verses and states that Jesus himself is this bread of life. The identification of John 6:51c–58 with the Eucharist arises out of the traditional association of this bread language with the Synoptic Gospels' treatment of the Last Supper discourse. Likewise, although John's Jesus does not mention wine, the fact that he urges his audience to drink his blood finds parallels with the language used in Matthew 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–24, and Luke 22:19–20. Rather, John's discussion of the bread is specifically with reference to the manna that falls from the sky in Exodus. Thus, the meanings of the Greek words for "flesh" and "eat" have been used variously to argue both sides of the Ecclesiastical Redactor problem.

Many scholars argue that while the verses preceding 51c discuss bread in a metaphorical sense, after 51c the tone shifts, and the eating of bread is no longer metaphorical, suggesting to some scholars that another hand is responsible;[30] Bultmann is a main proponent of this view. For Bultmann, the association of eucharistic language with Jesus' discussion of salvation in 6:51c–58 marks the crux of the problem for this portion's originality to the Gospel. Bultmann views these verses as a demonstration of an "instrumentalistic view of the eucharist, which opposes diametrically the evangelist's belief that faith in Jesus Christ alone is, in and of itself, efficacious."[31] That is,

New Testament in Early Christianity, eds., J.-M. Sevrin and Barbara Aland (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 69–83; Philippe Roulet and Ulrich Ruegg, "Étude de Jean 6: la narration et l'histoire de la redaction," in *La communauté johannique et son histoire: La trajectoire de l'évangile de Jean aux deux premiers siecles*, eds. J.-D. Kaestli et al. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990), 231–47; Johannes Beutler, "Zur Struktur von Johannes 6," *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* 16 (1991): 89–104; to this list we must of course add Bultmann, *John*; Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 284, and others referred to throughout in the present study.

30. Menken, "Eucharist or Christology?" 183 n.1; Smith, *Composition,* 141, 216; Bultmann argues this shift happens in 5:51b: Bultmann, *John*, 218.

for Bultmann, the idea that a person must perform an actual ritual activity in order to achieve what the rest of John posits can be done simply through faith contradicts the fundamental message of the text as found in the prologue; thus, John 6:51c–58, having to do with the Eucharist, must be an interpolation. Bultmann's view is that the theological opposition between this passage and the rest of John is so strong that it overrides even literary similarity as a factor in deciding its originality.[32] Bultmann notes that the (supposed) redactor of this section does use the style and language not only of John as a whole but specifically of the preceding section about the bread from heaven.[33] Bultmann argues that, because it disagrees with his interpretation of 1:14a that the only way to God is through faith in the incarnate Word in Jesus, 51c marks the beginning of the interpolator's interpretation of what has come before: an explanation of the bread already mentioned, which is, according to 51c, in fact Jesus' flesh.[34] Bultmann takes this reference to flesh as a foreshadowing of Jesus' death on behalf of the world.[35] This is no longer metaphorical bread: this is real flesh to be eaten *as an institution*, argues Bultmann, and it is for this reason that οἱ ἰουδαῖοι are disgusted in 6:52.[36] Without discussion, Bultmann assumes that this eating of flesh should be understood in the context of the institution of the Eucharist and not in any other gastronomic context. As a result, Bultmann determines that this section, John 6:51c–58, is the product of a redactor. In fact, Bultmann makes a circular argument. As Anderson rightly points out,

31. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 110.
32. Bultmann, *John*, 234, esp. n.4, where Bultmann argues that the redactor imitated the style of the evangelist.
33. Ibid., 234 n.3.
34. Ibid., 234.
35. Ibid., 235.
36. Ibid.

> the tenability of the interpolation hypothesis assumes: a) that Bultmann's analysis of the evangelist's christology is correct; b) that his analysis of the sacramentalistic christology of 6:51ff. is correct; and c) that the christological views of 6:51c–58 *cannot* have been embraced by the author of 6:26–51b.[37]

Once more, the interpretation of the word σάρξ is at the core. One side of this source-critical debate rests on John's choice of vocabulary throughout John 6:51c-58. As discussed above, Bultmann argues that for John, σάρξ always designates the human realm whereas πνεῦμα consistently designates the divine realm: σάρξ represents the lowliness of the human condition when compared to the divine and emphasizes, especially in John 1:14, Jesus' humanity.[38] Bultmann's view is that the divine aspect of Jesus is intentionally completely effaced by flesh.[39] This understanding of the term supports Bultmann's view that John 6:51c-58 is an addition, since the term σάρξ is used to refer to the eating of Jesus' body in a eucharistic context; the term does not fit into the dualistic pattern Bultmann constructs out of his interpretation of 1:14, which opposes σάρξ as human weakness to the divine πνεῦμα. Bultmann finds it incongruous that John 6:51c-58 speaks of σάρξ as something heavenly, Jesus' own body. While linguistically Bultmann and Käsemann are in agreement that σάρξ is in opposition to πνεῦμα, Käsemann interprets its use in John 1:14 to indicate that the divine aspect of glory *must* be visible in the person of Jesus, since God is now present on earth and that God in fact uses flesh *as a means* to communicate with creation; the Word could never completely

37. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 111.

38. This term is the most important theologically as far as Bultmann is concerned, so much so that he does not discuss the term σῶμα in *John*. See esp. Bultmann, *John*, 63.

39. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1955), 2:42.

become flesh.[40] Käsemann nonetheless agrees with Bultmann at least in the sense that 6:51c–58 must be a later sacramental addition.[41]

More recently, Jaime Clark-Soles has discussed the different uses of σάρξ and σῶμα in John, specifically with a view to determine John's eschatological aim.[42] In her philological study, Clark-Soles determines that, contra Bultmann, σάρξ is not used to denote only human weakness, but also human *bodies.* All humans, including Jesus, have both σάρξ and αἱμά; when not used in reference to Jesus—that is, when used to describe ordinary humans—σάρξ is usually used in opposition to the spiritual, to πνεῦμα, which is a term used exclusively to describe Jesus.[43] However, when σάρξ *is* used of Jesus,[44] Clark-Soles argues that Jesus, in these instances, unites the material with the spiritual in order to create a bridge to the spiritual from the material—from the σάρξ to the πνεῦμα. "*Sarx* alone ends in death, just as bread alone, the kind that Moses gives (6:49), ends in death. . . . Jesus transforms the mundane into the spiritual by his participation in the mundane."[45] Clark-Soles's interpretation of this term is very helpful as it does away with the dichotomous, and problematic, interpretation of σάρξ wrought by both Bultmann and Käsemann. Because it prioritizes John 1:14, it also accounts for the term's use in 6:51c–58: the invitation to consume this divine flesh creates new meaning—one that identifies Jesus with God. This interpretation also allows for a variety of valid meanings of the term, rendering its "problematic" use in John 6:51c–58 moot as a marker of its redaction. In other words, John's use of σάρξ in 6:51c–58 refers to Jesus' own human body, emphasizing Jesus' participation in the

40. Käsemann, "Structure," 159, 161; the debate surrounding the term ἐγένετο can be found below.
41. Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 32–33.
42. Clark-Soles, "I Will Raise."
43. Clark-Soles, "I Will Raise," 38.
44. John 1:14a is an example outside of the disputed 6:51c–58 where such a usage occurs.
45. Clark-Soles, "I Will Raise," 37–38.

world in a way that transforms that world. I argue that this fleshy participation is precisely what marks Jesus as divine.

Since Bultmann's proposal, other scholars have responded with their own solutions to the Johannine problem represented in chapter six. Werner Georg Kümmel acknowledges the theological discrepancy in the Johannine material but argues that the difficulties cannot be attributed either to the shuffling of various disparate passages or to the insertion of later sacramental material, as suggested by Bultmann.[46] Specifically, Kümmel rejects the argument that John 6:51b–58[47] is an insertion by a later redactor; he argues instead for its originality to the Gospel despite its sacramental content because, among other reasons, of its linguistic affinities to the rest of John.[48] Kümmel defends John's integrity against several common charges: that it engages futuristic eschatology (Kümmel points out definitively Johannine passages where such theology occurs[49]); that traces of an anti-Docetic redactor can be seen in certain passages[50] (which he counters by citing Ockham's Razor); and that in particular, John 6:51b–58 is the product of a redactor because of its theology.[51] Since the argument against the inclusion of this section in the "original" John is based on its theological content rather than on its linguistic differences, Kümmel argues, based on Eugen Rukstuhl's study, that it is wrong to argue for its instertion by a redactor simply because it disagrees with scholarly expectations of Johannine interests.

46. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 206–207.
47. Kümmel, to some extent in good company, divides the section here, at 6:51b rather than at 6:51c.
48. Kümmel, *New Testament*, 209–10; Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums: der gegenwärtige Stand der einschlägigen Forschunge* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1951), 169ff, 220ff.
49. John 3:5; 10:9; 12:32; 14:3; 17:24; Kümmel, *New Testament*, 209.
50. I.e., 1:14–18; 5:28f; our own 6:51b–58, etc. Cf. Georg Richter, "Zur Formgeschichte und literarischen Einheit von Joh 6, 31–58," in *Studien zum Johannesevangelium*, eds. Georg Richter and Josef Hainz (Regensburg: Pustet, 1977), 88–199.
51. Kümmel, *New Testament*, 209–10.

Ruckstuhl criticizes Bultmann's "weak" methodology and argues that there are no stylistic inconsistencies that would lead one to believe that the section is from another hand than John's.[52] Ruckstuhl further argues that even theologically, there is no real barrier to John 6:51c–58 being considered indigenous to the text, given that the Bread of Life Discourse given just previously could itself be considered an allusion to the Eucharist.[53] However generous Ruckstuhl is in giving this section of John a fair evaluation based on theology and linguistics, he, too, falls into the anachronistic trap of attempting to wedge John's understanding of Jesus and eating into categories that only appeared on the scene much later; in the end, Ruckstuhl resorts to finding sacramentality in places where it ought not to be sought.

James Dunn proposes another, more intriguing, solution to the source-critical problem some scholars find in John 6:51c–58. He suggests that, rather than assume that the section is the product of a later redactor, it is possible that the evangelist uses eucharistic language to emphasize the metaphorical nature of the ritual. In other words, Dunn proposes that the sheer unbelievability of Jesus' command in 6:51c–58 points to John's emphatic rejection of actual ritual being a necessary component of true life.[54] The tone and style, and even the vocabulary, of this section are not incongruous with the rest of John.[55] Thus, given that the section is at most a later addition by the same author,[56] and therefore part of the intended message of the Gospel, Dunn associates this section of John in particular—with its gory references to flesh and blood—but also the Gospel as a

52. Ruckstuhl, *Literarische Einheit,* 169.
53. Ruckstuhl, *Literarische Einheit,* 170–71.
54. Dunn, "John 6," 335.
55. Ibid., 329; Eduard Lohse, "Wort und Sakrament im Johannesevangelium," *NTS* 7 (1961): 120. Arguing for linguistic coherence: Ruckstuhl, *Literarische Einheit*, 220–71; Richter, "Zur Formgeschichte," 35–39.
56. Dunn, "John 6," 330.

whole to the overarching theme of Jesus' death on the cross and resultant exaltation. For Dunn, John's aim concerning this section of the Gospel is to highlight the act of Jesus' death as salvific because of Jesus' scandalous existence in the σάρξ.[57] Thus, for Dunn, and I agree, John 6:51c–58 represents a core statement in the christological view of the Gospel writer. Dunn's conclusions in this regard further lead him to evaluate critically the section's eucharistic overtones that are so frequently debated. For Dunn, John does indeed refer to the Eucharist, not in such a way as to

> stress the necessity of the Lord's Supper and its celebration, but rather . . . he uses eucharistic terminology with a metaphorical sense, namely, to describe not the effect of the sacrament as such, but the union of the ascended Jesus with his believing followers through the Spirit.[58]

Although I diverge from Dunn in his conclusion about the end purpose of this passage in some aspects, I agree that any potential allusion to eucharistic language and the practice of the Lord's Supper in John 6:51c–58 functions not as an apology for the practice as a means to salvation, but rather, in its reference to his death on the cross, as a siphon to direct attention to the true method of salvation, which is Jesus' existence as *both* a god *and* a human being.[59]

While Dunn's argument may be correct in locating this scene in a christological context pointing to Jesus' eventual salvific death, I would argue that this section of John also functions in another way. The crosshairs of Dunn's argument are trained specifically on the question of the sacrament and its relation to other Christian texts, comparing language, form, and content to Ignatius, Paul, and the Synoptic Gospels; in this sense, his argument is sound. However, Dunn has neglected to explore how the context of the Greco-Roman

57. Ibid., 331.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 337.