

***MENEIN* AS KEY TO A MYSTICAL READING OF JOHN 15**

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ON HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS

During my theological training, I was overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of theological insights. They mostly touched and stimulated my mind, making me aware of what I believe concerning the reformed tradition. It enabled me to work with truth and honesty in the ministry for two and a half decades.

During my study for a Master's degree in Biblical Spirituality, I was introduced to something different, or supplementary. I read literature, attended lectures, and had discussions with fellow students that touched my mind, yes, but in a forceful way also warmed my heart. I hardly ever had to force myself to read the material in preparation for the contact sessions with lecturers and fellow students. And, having been taught by both excellent local lecturers and world-renowned experts such as Profs Sandra Schneiders and Kees Waaijman, this experience became part of an unexpected new journey, also within myself. I became acutely aware of the fact that my relationship with the triune God is part of a process that has, and forever will have a transformational effect on me. As a result, I started reflecting more consciously on my life as part of a spiritual journey. Indeed, this journey still goes on, and has since delivered many unexpected turns, awesome experiences, but mostly a sense of direction and fulfilment.

On another level, the exposure to Biblical Spirituality also influenced my experience as a full-time pastor within a congregation. After a quarter of a century in the ministry, there always lurks the danger of getting bored and frustrated in doing the same things over and over again, such as preaching, visitation, praying for the sick, and pastoral sessions. However, this new endeavour transformed my ministry and way of relating to fellow believers and even strangers. It affected the way in which I regarded myself as being a pastor, of the way in which I preached, and especially of the way in which I went about counselling people. I realised that the vast majority of people, in the trying times in which we live, need not only counselling, but also spiritual direction.

Another very important result of my newly found joy was the way in which I listened to the Biblical text. My exposure to *Lectio Divina* had a profound impact on me. I experienced that I was no longer the driving force while reading Scripture. God, through His Holy Spirit, took control of the process, and opened new ways of reading, listening, praying, and living the text. These unlocked new paths for doing exegesis and preparing sermons. It involved a continual reflection on my own understanding and role in the process. Joining people on their spiritual journey became more fulfilling than trying to show them the way that I thought they must go in order to get out of their current state of not being where they want, or would have preferred to be. That included their experiences of crises relating to material issues, life-threatening diseases, and even the certainty of death.

Unavoidably, I had to reconsider the possibility of enrolling for a doctoral degree in Biblical Spirituality. Much thought went into this, and I believe that this spiritual process will not even end after the last full stop of this dissertation. Deciding on a possible subject was tough. For me, it goes without saying

that it must be in my favourite part of Scripture, namely the Second, or New Testament. In addition, in the New Testament, I have often been exposed to the so-called ‘spiritual’ Gospel, the Gospel of John. To be honest, the entire Gospel intrigues me. However, when I gave it some thought, and once again paged through the Gospel, I paused at the fifteenth chapter of this fascinating interpretation of the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pondering on expressions such as Jesus being the vine, the Father being the gardener, and us being the branches; abiding in Jesus and he in us; the unity between the Father and Jesus as yardstick for our relationship with the Lord, and many more, convinced me that there must be more to all of this than simply the writer’s interesting imagery or theological arithmetic. These thoughts became the tipping point towards the choice for a thorough investigation into the possible ‘deeper’ meaning of this enlightening and captivating book of Scripture. May the Lord be glorified by whatever becomes of this research project.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the field of Theology and Biblical Studies, a great deal of research has been done on the Gospel of John. New Testament scholars have conducted their research from different points of view. Much of the research was done from historical-critical perspectives. In recent years, a growing number of scholars began devoting their attention to the topic of Spirituality, including a spiritual reading of texts. Their work indicates that historical-critical readings of the Biblical text can, and should be meaningfully complemented with an approach that deems the spiritual nature of these texts and their appropriation as an important task for Biblical scholars. The aim of this study is to continue this development and follow in the footsteps of leading Biblical scholars such as Kees Waaijman and Sandra Schneiders in uncovering deeper layers of meaning in the Biblical text.¹ The text of John 15 was chosen to test the hypothesis that, besides historical-critical readings, a focused spiritual reading of this well-known and well-researched text can uncover more meaning.

This spiritual reading will include an investigation of the mystical dimensions of the text. Such an approach is not entirely new. Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the Gospel of John has often been understood as a symbolic text that suggests deeper meanings. Schneiders (2003:28) remarked that, because of its powerful vocabulary, it “has been said that the Fourth Gospel is a body of water in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim, that is, that even the simplest reader can understand it at one level whereas its meaning continues to deepen the longer one deals with it”.² The results of recent studies in Spirituality and mysticism promoted this deeper understanding of a new world of meaning that will yield new insights in the text.

This research project will offer such a spiritual and mystical reading of the Gospel of John. The focus will be on John 15 and its use of the verb μένειν; but the place of John 15 will consistently be investigated within the framework of the Gospel as a whole. The emphasis will be on the insights that reveal the spiritual and mystical dimensions of the text.

Chapter 2 will provide a close reading of the Greek text of John 15. The most prominent themes and words in John 15 will be investigated, with special attention to the occurrences and function of μένειν. This

¹ Schneiders (2003:2) explains something of her own struggle in order to be allowed to study the New Testament for her own interest, that of Spirituality as the lived experience of faith. This need was based on her belief that Scripture was a privileged locus of the transforming encounter between God and the believer: “But there seemed no legitimate way to introduce this interest or conviction into my study of the New Testament. Indeed, the type of objectivity that was the ideal of historical critical exegesis and that controlled its agenda and methodology seemed to forbid, if not any interest i[n] such matters, at least any explicit intrusion of such concerns into the scholarly study of the text.” Decock (2008:15) aptly notes: “At the very moment when the ‘modern’ historical-critical exegesis appeared to have won the battle and to have firmly established its claim that the historical meaning was the only valid meaning, counter-movements started developing [and] challenging this claim.” After naming a few approaches, he then continues: “Biblical interpretation as a spiritual experience belongs to a similar approach. Understanding the Bible in a religious and spiritual context is not merely about understanding concepts and teachings of the distant past, but ultimately about being touched and transformed by the encounter with God.”

² Cf. Kysar (1975:6).

Chapter will provide the groundwork for the ensuing discussions about the spiritual and mystical meaning of John 15.

Chapter 3 will begin with a cursory overview of Johannine exegesis in New Testament research as was done mostly in terms of historical-critical approaches. Although this research provided important insights that will also be used in the close reading of John 15, it did not investigate the text specifically in terms of its spiritual and mystical contents. The next section of *Chapter 3* will analyse research on Spirituality, in general, and Biblical Spirituality, in particular, and how it provides the context for, and proves the validity of a spiritual reading of texts such as John 15. It will also address concerns about a spiritual approach to the Bible that still exists among certain scholars.³ The final part of *Chapter 3* will analyse, in more depth, research specifically on mysticism that will provide insights into the nature of the mystical experience, the mystical context of the Gospel of John, and the contextual nature of mysticism. This research will prevent an imposition of modern understanding of mysticism on John as a text from late Antiquity.

Chapter 4 will investigate the place of John 15 within the narrative of the Gospel, particularly within its first part (John 1-14), as well as its setting within the Farewell Discourse (John 13-17), of which it forms an integral part. This analysis will provide the framework within which μένειν should be understood in John 15 and to show how John 15 reflects spiritual and mystical dimensions found elsewhere in the Gospel.

In the next three chapters, material arguments will be developed to explain the mystical nature of μένειν as a key term in John 15. The analysis will relate to Spirituality as the process of a transformative divine-human relationship with its mystical focus. *Chapter 5* will investigate the divine initiative and involvement in μένειν as mutual indwelling, while *Chapter 6* will focus on indwelling from the human perspective. In a closer focus on the mystical nature of indwelling, the final section of the thesis will investigate the role of Jesus as mystagogue in *Chapter 7*. Several passages in the Gospel as a whole will be analysed to show how various encounters between Jesus and individuals illuminate indwelling as transformational power, as spelled out in John 15.

³ Schneiders (1999:107, 130) remarks that interpreters of the Biblical text never have been, and are not, at present, objective, if by objective one means ideologically unbiased: “No attempt was ever made to give an ‘objective, unbiased, untouched-up’ picture of ‘the real historical Jesus.’” She is very clear that the interpretive process is not merely exegetical-critical, but properly hermeneutical: “I am interested in the truth claims intrinsic to the text as they are addressed to contemporary believers ... in their relation to their own discipleship. The aim is to allow the world of Christian discipleship as it is projected by the text to emerge and invite the transformative participation of the reader” (Schneiders 2003:126).

CHAPTER 2

A CLOSE READING OF JOHN 15

It is decisively important for the interpretation of a text that it should be read not only carefully in terms of grammatical and lexical perspectives, but also as a coherent unit through which its constitutive elements find their meaning. Each part contributes to the meaning of the whole, so that one part will also be influenced by the others and by the text as a whole. In this Chapter, attention will be paid to these aspects, with a focus on a close analysis of the Greek text of John 15.

1. Lexical meanings for μένειν

In a textual study such as this, the correct translation of words is important. This is especially true of prominent words such as μένειν, which is found 118 times in the New Testament, of which 40 appear in John and 24 in the Johannine epistles (Brown 1978:224). In the text of John 15, μένειν takes up a prominent place. It occurs 11 times in John 15, making up a quarter of the total count. Before discussing the different occurrences in more detail, an analysis of the verb itself is required.

A number of scholars provide several terms to indicate the meaning of the verb μένειν. According to Liddell and Scott (1996:1013), μένειν could have any one of the following meanings, “to stay, [to] abide, stand one’s grounds”. Moulton (1978:263) also provides a list of possibilities:

[T]o stay; to continue; to dwell, lodge, sojourn (John 1:39); to remain (John 9:41); to rest, settle (John 1:32,33; 3:36); to last, endure (John 6:27); to survive, [to] be existent; to continue unchanged; to be permanent (John 15:16); to persevere, be constant, be steadfast; to abide, [to] be in close and settled union (John 6:56, 14:10, 15:4); to indwell (John 5:38), to wait for.

According to Brown (1982a:510), the verb can be translated as “remain, abide, stay” or “dwell on”. Bauer *et al.*’s (2000:630-631) list of meanings includes “remain or stay (intransitive); to continue to exist, remain, last, persist, continue to live (intransitive) and wait for or await used transitive”. For Arndt and Gingrich (1958:503-504), it could mean “remain, stay, live, dwell, lodge, continue, abide, and continue to live”. Louw and Nida (1988b:777) list the verb μένω under the domain of relations and the subdomain of association. John 15:4 is the one verse that is listed as “remain in me and I (will remain) in you”.

The meaning of the verb can also be approached from a different angle. Lee (2002:88-89) distinguishes between the literal and symbolic meanings of μένειν and remarks:

The word “to abide” is scattered throughout John’s Gospel, occurring some forty times, with a significant number of instances clustered around the Farewell Discourse. “Abiding” is an important Johannine theological term, often occurring in the formula “to abide in/on” (*menein en*), but it is also used in the colloquial sense of “stay” or “remain.” In some instances it is difficult to determine whether the literal or symbolic meaning is required. In its theological sense the word *menein* overlaps

with other Johannine conceptions such as unity, oneness, love, and indwelling. In particular, it is related to the Johannine understanding of disciples as “friends” of Jesus (*philoï*) – an image that, like abiding, relates to the symbolism of the vine.

Other scholars distinguish a literal and theological meaning (Scholtissek 2000:157-8): “[I]m wörtlichen lokalen Sinne”⁴ and “in einem *theologisch qualifizierten* Sinn”.⁵ In addition, Heise (1967:44) differentiates between a normal use of the word (13 times) and a theological use of the word (27 times).⁶

In some instances, scholars explain the verb in terms of its use in the Johannine context. For Schneiders (2003:143), μένειν is a quasi-technical term for union with Jesus. Brown (1978:224-226) gives a more elaborate explanation from a theological point of view. It can be translated with “to live” (John 1:38) or “to remain in fellowship with” (John 14:10). In the Gospel, the verb εἶναι is also sometimes used to convey the idea of abiding or indwelling, as in John 17:21. Brown (1982a:510) qualifies this: “The verb here is *einai en* ‘to be in,’ but this is synonymous with *menein en*, except the *menein* has the added note of permanence.” These descriptions indicate the many possible meanings of μένειν. All the equivalent words are attempts to make sense of the Greek verb, but they are, in turn, products of their time and indicative of particular preferences. It can happen that some of these English words resonate better with readers or convey the meaning of the verb more efficiently. Bruner (2012:881), for example, is of the opinion that the English translation *abide* (*abode*) for μένειν is slightly old-fashioned. He, therefore, translates it with “Make your home with me” (this underlines the indwelling), which means that Jesus invites people to live with him. For the ensuing reading of John 15, the two translations for μένειν that will mostly be used are ‘dwelling’ or ‘indwelling’, as these fit the purpose of a spiritual and mystical understanding intended by the writer.⁷ This will be explained in the sections on a spiritual and, in particular, a mystical reading.

2. A close reading of John 15

A close reading of John 15 focuses on the original Greek text and analyses it in terms of its composition. It is a helpful way of reading a text carefully and, especially, of taking its formal appearance seriously. Such a close reading takes into consideration the meaning of the text, but is focused on using the surface text in order to reconstruct its meaning. Tolmie (1992:14) refers to Louw⁸ when he defines discourse analysis as

a methodological approach by which the semantic content of language segments is analysed into its constituent units in order to restate the argument in terms of its taxonomic hierarchy. By highlighting these features of the discourse, the basic development of the thought can be stated.

⁴ A total of eight occurrences: 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6, 41, and 19:31.

⁵ Used in this sense 32 times: 1:32, 33, 38, 39(2); 3:36; 5:38; 6:27, 56; 8:31, 35(2); 9:41; 12:24, 34, 46; 14:10, 17, 25; 15:4(3), 5, 6, 7(2), 9, 10(2), 16, and 21:22, 23.

⁶ “Auf den alltäglichen Gebraucht entfallen 13 Stellen. In theologischen Zusammenhängen kommt das Wort 27 mal vor.”

⁷ Unless otherwise mentioned, Scriptural quotes in English are from the NIV translation, which translates the verb μένειν as *abide* or *remain*. Take note that, in some instances, the verb μένειν will be changed to read *dwell* instead.

⁸ For a detailed exposition of a semantic discourse analysis, cf. Louw (1979).

Tolmie (1992:14) then explains the four steps that will be followed during the analysis of the text:

- The text is divided into syntactical units called *cola*.
- *Structure markers* are indicated in the text.
- The relationship between the *cola* is then discussed.
- Attention is paid to the way in which different *cola* are combined to form thematic units or clusters.

What follows is an analysis of the Greek text of John 15 based on these elements.⁹ In the case of this thesis, a close reading is more than a discourse analysis as it is sometimes known in New Testament Studies. It uses terms such as ‘*cola*’ that were part of a discourse analysis in the formal sense of the word, but, in this analysis, the term has more of a practical than a theoretical character. Louw (1979:24) defines a *cola* as “a stretch of language having a matrix which consists of a nominal and a verbal element along with additions linked to these two elements of the matrix, or additions which are in turn linked to other additions”. It is a helpful definition, although subsequent research has indicated that there are other meaningful proposals about the constitutive elements of a text. More important than a precise definition is that the text be read carefully and that thorough attention be paid to the fact that it consists of parts that make up a whole. The text as a whole should be read in terms of these parts and the parts should be read in terms of the text as a whole. A *cola* is, therefore, used in this close analysis simply to indicate a sentence unit that forms a basic constituent of a text.

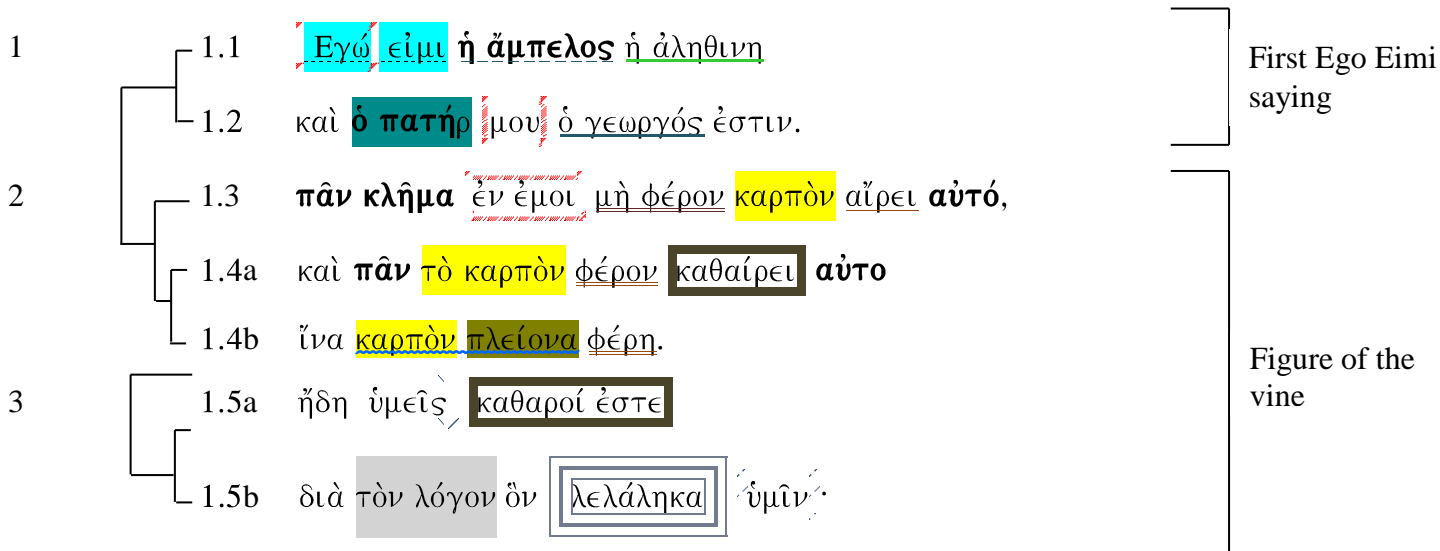
In addition to marking the basic units that constitute the text as a whole, markers of important transitions and connections in the text are also pointed out. Structure markers can be defined as any prominent word, words, or group of words that may be helpful in analysing the structure of the text. Different types of underlining and highlighting in different colours will indicate these in the text. Colour markers are also used in the text analysis. They can be informative, because the reader can obtain some key features of the text at a single glance. This is illustrated, for example, by the red markings in the text analysis (cf. Subsection 4). The approach is merely about a precise analysis of the formal appearance of the text.

⁹ The analysis is based primarily on the results of Tolmie (1992:427-431).

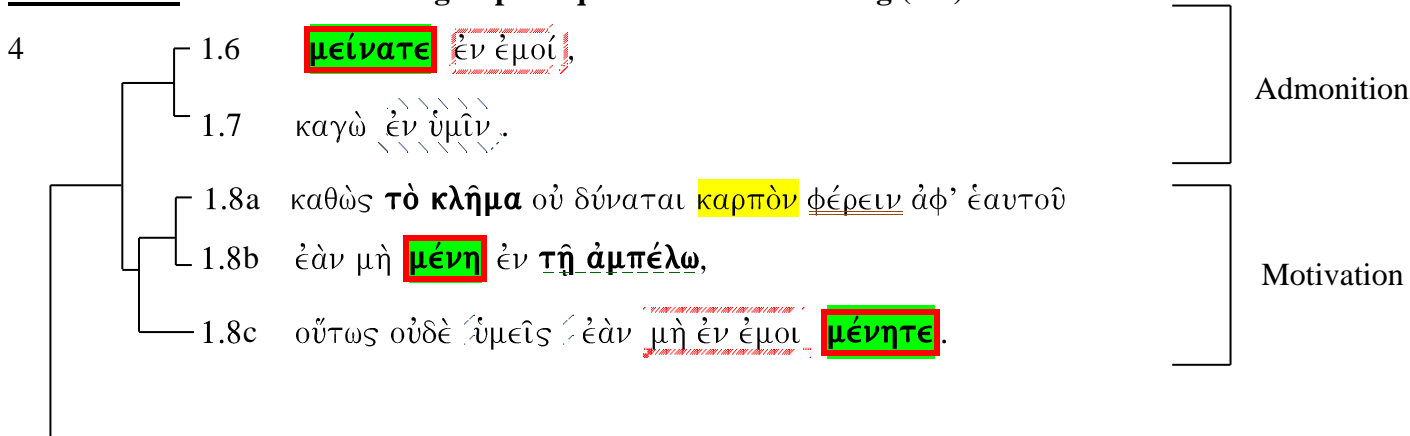
The essence of discipleship: Abiding in Jesus to bear the fruit of love

Section 1: The necessity of mutual indwelling for bearing fruit (1-17)

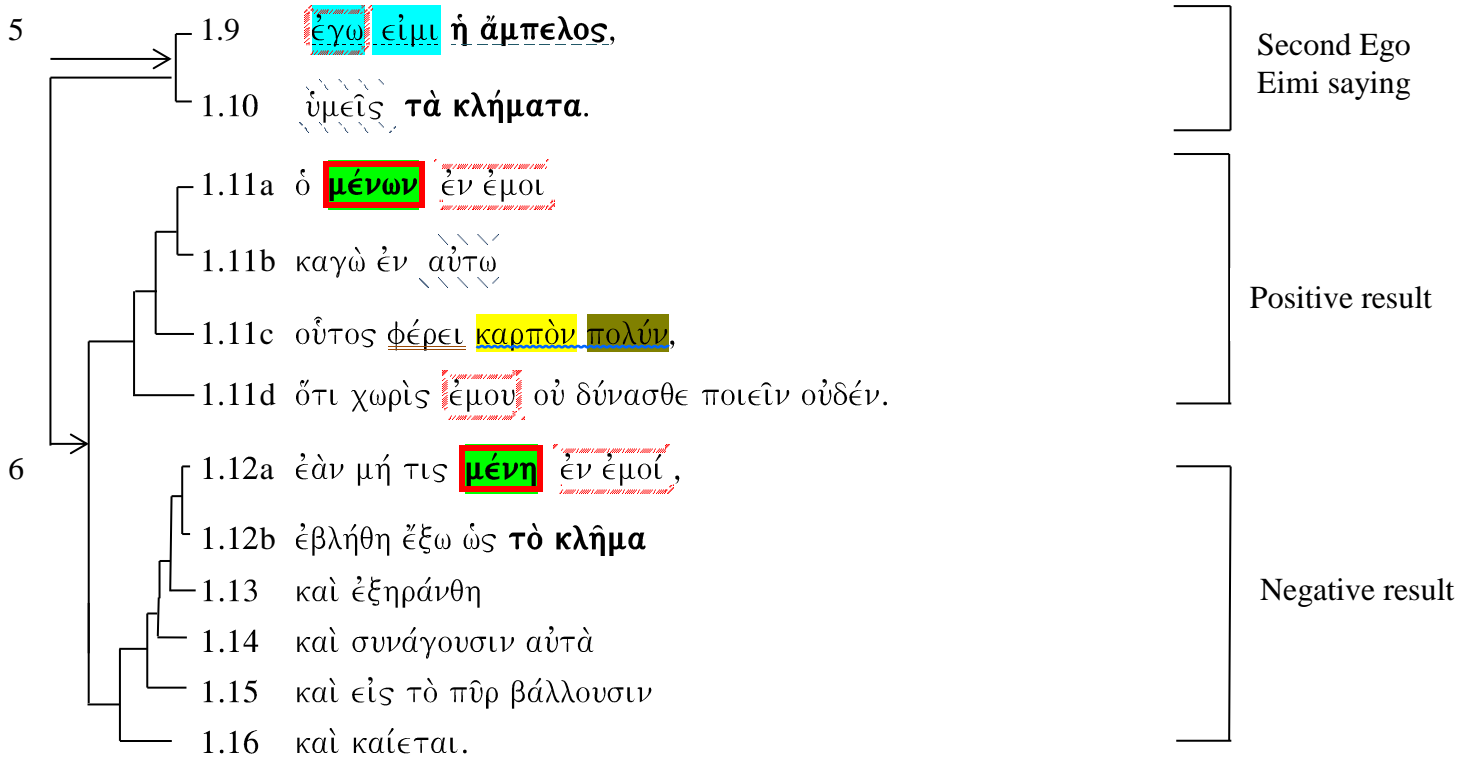
Subsection 1: The Father tends the vineyard so that it might bear more fruit (1-3)



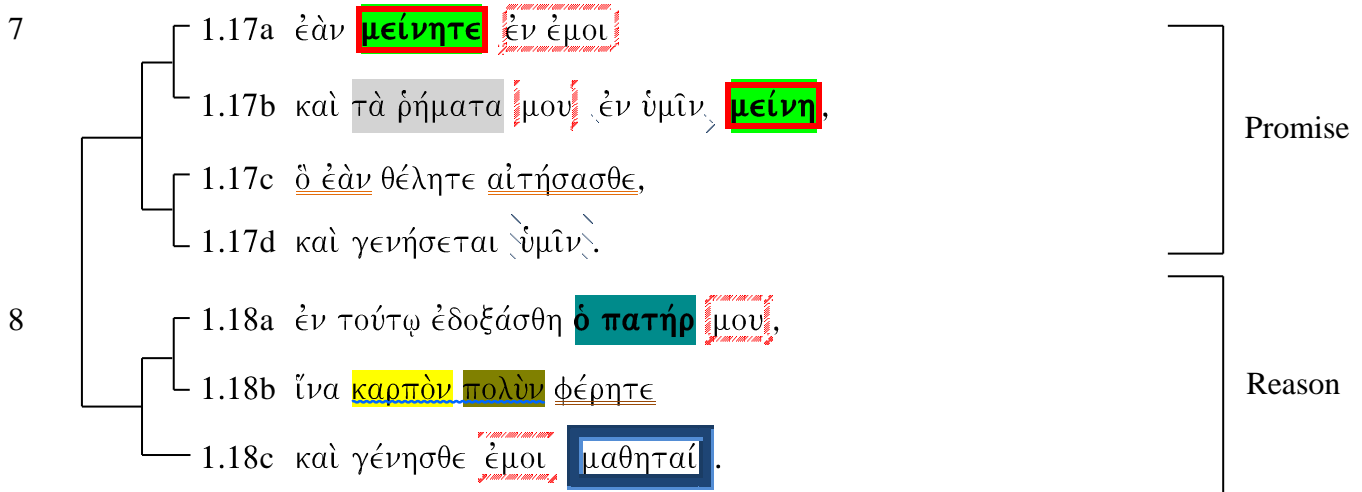
Subsection 2: Mutual indwelling as prerequisite for fruit bearing (4-6)



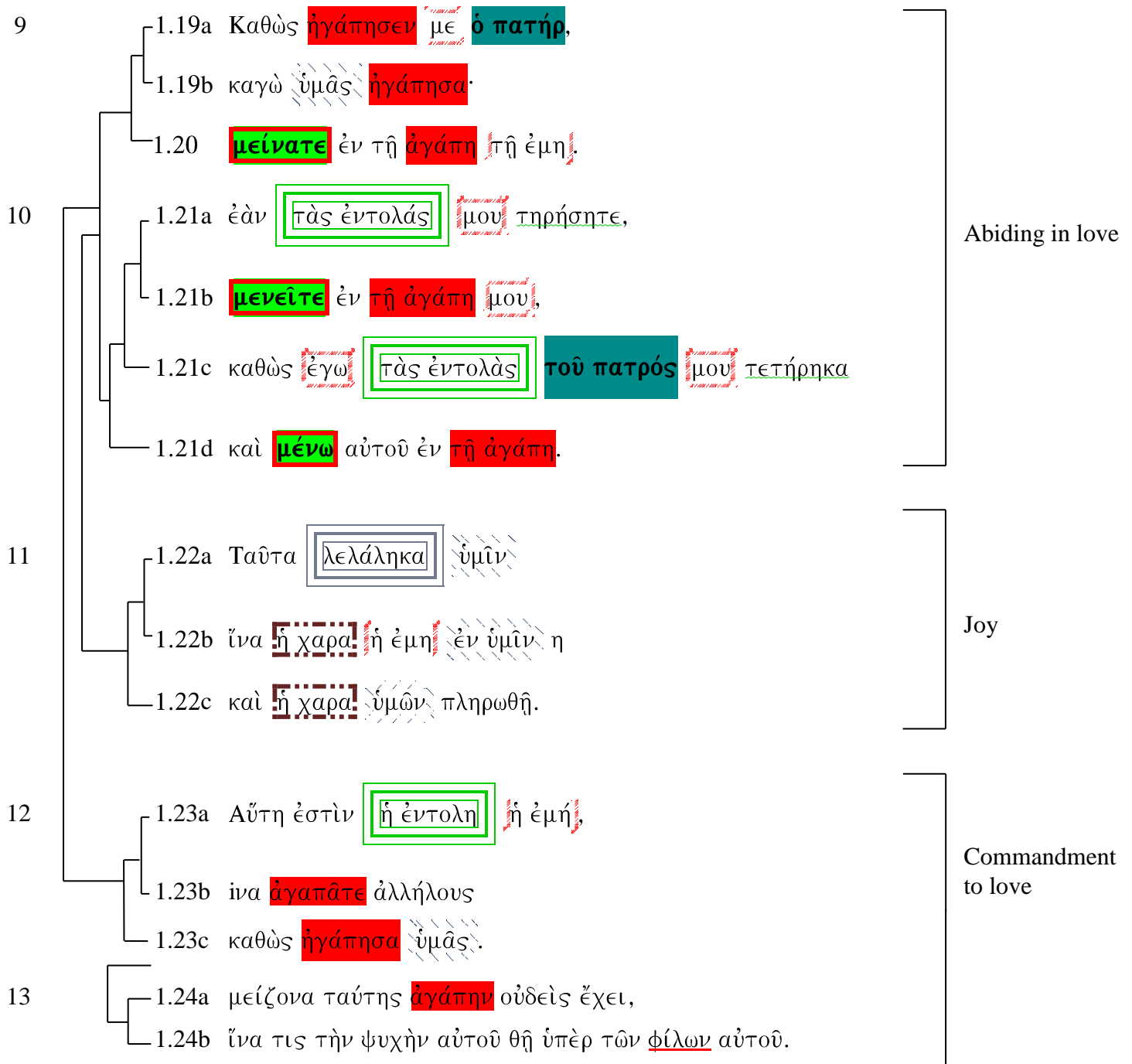
¹⁰ According to Barrett (1978:479-80), many commentators consider the unit that starts with John 15 to run into chapter 16, some to 16.4, others to 16.11, and others to 16:15. There is indeed no break, but, “[i]t is convenient to pause at the end of chapter 15 before the themes of hatred and judgement are elaborated”. According to Dodd (1953:410), 15:1-16:15 form a connected whole.



Subsection 3: Some results of abiding, bearing fruit, and discipleship (7-8)



Subsection 4: Adherence to the love command results in bearing lasting fruit (9-17)



- 14
- 1.25a ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστε
- 1.25b ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν.
- 15
- 1.26a οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους,
- 1.26b ὅτι ὁ δοῦλος οὐκ οἶδεν
- 1.26c τί ποιεῖ αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος.
- 1.27a ὑμᾶς δὲ εἶρηκα φίλους,
- 1.27b ὅτι πάντα ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν.
- Friends not slaves
- 16
- 1.28 οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε,
- 1.29 ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς
- 1.30a καὶ ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς
- 1.30b ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑπάγητε
- 1.30c καὶ καρπὸν φέρητε
- 1.30d καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὑμῶν μένη,
- 1.30e ἵνα ὅ τι ἂν αἰτήσητε τὸν πατέρα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου δῶ ὑμῖν.
- Elected to bear lasting fruit
- 17
- 1.31a ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν,
- 1.31b ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.
- The commandment to love

Section 2: Discipleship might evoke the hatred of the world (18-25)

Subsection 1: The possibility of hatred by the world (18-21)

- 18
- 1.32a Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ,
 - 1.32b γινώσκετε
 - 1.32c ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν.
- 19
- 1.33a εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἦτε,
 - 1.33b ὁ κόσμος ἂν τὸ ἴδιον ἐφίλει·
 - 1.34a ὅτι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἐστέ,
 - 1.34b ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου,
 - 1.34c διὰ τοῦτο μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος.
- 20
- 1.35 μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγου οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν·
1.35.1 οὐκ ἔστιν δούλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ.
 - 1.36a εἰ ἔμε ἐδίωξαν,
 - 1.36b καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν·
 - 1.37a εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν,
 - 1.37b καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν.
- 21
- 1.38a ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ποιήσουσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου,
 - 1.38b ὅτι οὐκ οἶδασιν τὸν πέμψαντά με·
- The hatred of the world

Subsection 2: The hatred of the world makes them guilty of sin (22-25)

- 22 1.39a εἰ μὴ ἦλθον καὶ ἐλάλησα αὐτοῖς,
- 1.39b ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον·
- 1.40 νῦν δὲ πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.
- 23 1.41 ὁ ἐμε μισῶν καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου μισεῖ.
- 24 1.42a εἰ τὰ ἔργα μὴ ἐποίησα ἐν αὐτοῖς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος ἐποίησεν,
- 1.42b ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον·
- 1.43 νῦν δὲ καὶ ἐωράκασιν
- 1.44 καὶ μεμισήκασιν καὶ ἐμε καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου.
- 25 1.45a ἀλλ' ἵνα πληρωθῇ ὁ λόγος
- 1.45b ὁ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένος
- 1.45c ὅτι ἐμίσησαν με δωρεάν.
- The guilt of the world

Section 3: The Paraclete as guarantee for sustained witnessing (26-27)

- 26 1.46a Οταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος
- 1.46b ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς,
- 1.46c τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας
- 1.46d ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται,
- 1.46e ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ.
- 27 1.47a καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε,
- 1.47b ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε.
- The Paraclete's assistance to witnessing

3. Formal analysis of John 15

The analysis of the Greek text focuses on its form, that is, how the author arranged his thoughts on the surface of the text. A close analysis of the form of the text enables one to account for its contents in a controlled manner with adequate arguments and proof. The formal analysis precedes the material analysis of contents, because it determines the understanding of the material analysis.

This formal analysis is presented by identifying markers that demarcate units in a passage, key elements in the text, as well as key motifs, words, and phrases. These are indicated in the analysis by means of colour coding. This coding helps a reader recognise certain patterns and use of formal elements more easily and thus determine the chapter's main focus points. What follows is a formal analysis of the Greek text that indicates the most important markers, the demarcation of sections and subsections, as well as the relationship between them. Ultimately, this will lead to the formulation of the unique message of John 15.

The formal analysis is divided into three main sections, namely 1-17, 18-25, and 26-27. Where necessary and where determined by means of surface markers, these main sections will be divided into subsections. As such, one recognises smaller, coherent units that constitute the larger units of the three sections in John 15.

3.1 Section 1: The necessity of mutual indwelling for bearing fruit (1-17)

John 15 is illuminated by its close relationship with John 13-17 as chapters that form the Farewell Discourse.¹¹ Within the wider context of the section in John 13-17 (Farewell Discourse), the importance of the *Εγώ εἰμι* sayings (John 15:1, 5), as well as several key words indicate that John 15:1-17 should be regarded as a unit.¹² Although the *Εγώ εἰμι* saying occurs only twice in John 15, a survey of the occurrences and the manner of their use “leaves no doubt that this [i]s a consciously used and theologically significant expression which has become a highly compressed formula”.¹³ The key words that reveal this coherence are the vine (*ἡ ἄμπελος*), the farmer (*ὁ γεωργός*), the branch (*τὸ κλῆμα*), and the fruit (*τὸ καρπὸν*). These form a natural unit, because they refer to viticulture (Dodd 1953:136).

Different markers in the text further indicate that the first section can be divided into four subsections, namely verses 1-3 (Jesus is the true vine (*Εγώ εἰμι*) and the Father (*ὁ πατήρ*) tends the vineyard so that it might bear more fruit); verses 4-6 (mutual indwelling (*μένειν*) as prerequisite for bearing fruit); verses 7-8 (results of abiding, bearing fruit, and discipleship – *ἐὰν* followed by *μένειν*, *τὰ ῥήματα* and *μαθηταί*, and verses 9-16 (adherence to the love command results in bearing lasting fruit; *αγαπάω*). These markers will be listed and discussed in more detail in the following analysis.

¹¹ The Farewell Discourse is generally recognised as an important part of John's Gospel. It consists of John 13-17. Some call it the Last Discourse (Brown 1982a). New Testament scholars have studied it in depth. Cf. Kellum (2004), Tolmie (1992), Brown (1982a:581-604), and Segovia (1991). This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, section 5.

¹² A great deal of research has been done on the role of these sayings in the Gospel as a whole.. The possible influence of passages such as Exodus 3:14 will also be explored (cf. Chapter 5, section 3.2.3).

¹³ Schnackenburg (1980:79-89). Cf. also Brown (1982a: 533-538); Ball (1996).

3.1.1 Subsection 1: The Father who cleanses through Jesus as the vine (1-3)

The chapter begins with a statement of Jesus about himself: “I am the true vine” (Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή).¹⁴ This expression introduces an image that will be developed extensively in this Chapter and that gives coherence to it as a unit. It will also, in a special sense, guide and influence the remainder of the monologue, as will be discussed later. The “I am” sayings are used twice in verses 1 and 5. In both sayings, Jesus is the subject as the vine. However, the phrase (ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος), identical in both, is linked with different phrases in the two verses. In verse 1, Jesus as the vine is linked with his father (ὁ πατήρ μου). The role of the Father is carefully clarified by another viticultural image. He is the one who acts as farmer or gardener (ὁ γεωργός ἐστίν). In verse 5, the link is different: Jesus as the vine is linked with the disciples (ὕμεις). This yields an important clue insofar as the vine image is embedded in the divine-human relationships that relate to both the divine and the human pole.

There is also another notable difference between the two. Verse 1 adds a qualification to the image of Jesus as vine by depicting Jesus as the “true” vine (ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή).¹⁵ According to Bultmann (1971:529), Jesus as Revealer presents himself as the object of the world’s desire and longing: “[I]f one asks about the ‘true vine’, then the answer is given, ‘The true vine am I.’”¹⁶

The focus then shifts to the Farmer’s activities in his vineyard. This description assumes that the time for pruning the vines is one of the annual viticultural activities.¹⁷ The text explains the introductory reference to the Father as the Farmer by portraying him as the one who is doing the pruning. In a parallel expression, it is said that the Farmer investigates every branch that grows on the vine (κλήμα ἐν ἐμοί). The parallelism refers to the Farmer’s pruning of two types of branches: those that do not bear fruit (μὴ φέρουν καρπὸν) are cut off or taken away (αἶρει αὐτό). Surprisingly, every branch that does bear fruit (πάν τὸ

¹⁴ Countryman (1987:99) confirms the importance of the image: “The image of the vine is a vivid illustration of the disciples’ dependence on Jesus: apart from him they are dead, in him they live and produce fruit.” Michaels (2010:804) confirms this, noting that the mutual indwelling is God’s doing and not theirs; it is the work of the Father through the Son.

¹⁵ This qualification also recalls Old Testament references to the people of Israel as the vine of God (Von Wahlde 2010b:667): “Among the Old Testament passages most commonly thought to bear on the image of the vine in the Gospel are Isa 27:2-6; Jer 5:10, 6:9, 12:10-11; Ezek 15:1-6, 17:5-10, 19:10-14; Ps 80:9-13; Hos 10:1, 14:8; 2 Esd 5:23.” Cf. Dodd (1953:136-137) and Brown (1982b:669-672).

¹⁶ Scholars have noted this striking emphasis and carefully spelled out its impact. Cf. Schnackenburg (1982:97): “[T]he special qualitative character of the vine had to be stressed by this attribute.” Bruner (2012:878) refers to this almost royal sentence, explaining that the emphatic addition of the *real*, the *true* and the *authentic*, placed at the end of the Greek phrase like this, “I am the vine, *the real one*” makes Jesus’ self-designation even more imperial. All human beings are looking for the root of the matter. Jesus claims to be exactly that ‘really’.” Koester (1995:245) reckons that the imagery of the true vine acknowledges the differences between Jesus and his Father, but it also conveys their unity: “Jesus applies to himself the ‘I am’ expression, whose divine connotations were apparent. He is genuine or ‘true’ (*alethinós*), a term appropriate for God (7:28; 17:3), and that which is of divine origin (1:9; 6:32; 8:16; cf. 4:23).”

¹⁷ “Certain operations belonging to viticulture are mentioned: the γεωργός tends the vine, cuts away barren branches, which were collected and burnt, and ‘cleanses’ other branches which, remaining as parts of the vine, bear fruit” (Dodd 1953:136). Cf. Barrett (1978:473-474).

καρπὸν φέρων) is not skipped, but also pruned (cleansed). The reason for their pruning is introduced by an ἵνα clause:¹⁸ They are pruned so that they can be more fruitful (καρπὸν πλείονα φέρη).

Even in this section, with its focus on the Father's role, the activities of the Father are linked explicitly with Jesus. The pruning by the Father is namely determined by the relationship of the disciples with Jesus. The Farmer prunes those who are ἐν ἐμοί, referring to Christ who speaks the words in this section. This phrase is further illuminated when Jesus speaks a “consoling” word to his disciples: “You are already clean” (ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροί ἐστέ). Their status was the result not of the Father's pruning activities, but of something that Jesus himself did. They were pruned, or more fittingly, cleansed by the word Jesus spoke to them (διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν).¹⁹ This is in line with the role of the word or words of Jesus in the remainder of the Fourth Gospel, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.²⁰

Thus, the first part of the chapter lays the foundation for what is to follow. It clarifies the relationship between Jesus and the Father (vine and farmer), between Jesus and the disciples (vine and the branches – if verse 5 is taken into consideration), and the twofold aim of the Father's pruning activity, namely to rid the vine of useless/fruitless branches, and to further improve the fertility of the vine. But, maybe because of the disciples' concerns when listening to these words, Jesus immediately follows with a consoling reassurance. They need not worry about being cut off the vine or about the pruning process, because they already have been cleansed (pruned) by the words Jesus spoke to them.

3.1.2 Subsection 2: Mutual indwelling and bearing fruit (4-6)

This subsection is *formally* marked by the imperative to dwell in Jesus (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί), placed at its very beginning, and the reference to τὸ κλῆμα, which also appears at the beginning in verse 4 and at the end in verse 2. The overall form of this subsection consists of an admonition by Jesus and its motivation (verse 4), addressed directly to Jesus' disciples. The subsection is also coherent because of the dominant imagery of the vine and the branches.²¹ There are other formal indications of coherence. This subsection contains several words that show how Jesus speaks to them directly (as “you”). This is followed by a positive (verse 5) and a negative result (verse 6) of abiding in Jesus. Both these outcomes are expressed in a more general, abstract manner. Formally, the two results are introduced by the same phrase with a singular, generic subject (ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοί (verse 4) and (ἐὰν μὴ τις μένη ἐν ἐμοί; (verse 6), marking them as units within the subsection. The use of the

¹⁸ The present subjunctive form of the verb reiterates the reason for the pruning of the ‘good’ branches. Von Wahlde (2010b:668) expresses the opinion that “[b]earing fruit is defined in v. 8 as ‘becoming my disciples’”. The point is that true discipleship is not possible without remaining in the true vine. Cf. Schnackenburg (1982:98); Michaels (2010:802), and Bruner (2012:879).

¹⁹ Koester (1995:245) supports this: “[B]oth the vine and the vinedresser serve the same end: The Father prunes or ‘cleanses’ (*kathairein*) the branches that they might bear fruit, and Jesus makes them capable of bearing fruit, or ‘clean’ (*katharos*), through his word (15:2-3).” Bruner (2012:879) recalls what Jesus told Peter: “The person who had a bath doesn’t need anything else but is *katharos holos, cleansed wholly, ...* and you disciples are now *katharoi, a cleansed people*” (13:10).

²⁰ The cleaning activity of Jesus through his words reminds one of his encounter with Peter during the foot-washing ceremony in John 3:6-11. There he declares to Peter: “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”

²¹ Cf. Brown (1982b:662).

nominative singular distinguishes this subsection from the next one, in which Jesus again addresses the disciples directly (ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοί) rather than in the more general, abstract way.

Of special relevance is that this section already starts with, and is also characterised by several references to indwelling. It appears first in the significant pronouncement of Jesus: “Abide in me, as I also abide in you” (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν). The significance of the word μένειν is evident from the many references to it in the remainder of the subsection. In this instance, it is the first of a total of 11 occurrences in John 15. In verse 4 alone, it is already used three times. This gives further coherence to subsection 2.

Through this imperative, Jesus instructs his disciples to dwell in Him, but it is then qualified by an additional phrase that refers to *his* abiding in them. The added remark is of special significance, because it is a formal indication and confirmation that the indwelling is mutual: Jesus dwells in them and they ought to dwell in him. With these words, Jesus confirms and resumes the symbolism of the vine and the branches as a basic line of thought in the subsection and reminds the audience of the reason for the Father’s pruning that was the focus of the previous section. Jesus emphasises that the disciples as the branches should stay connected to Him as the vine, otherwise there can be no prospects of bearing fruit. A continuous, ongoing indwelling is required of them.

Jesus reiterates and then develops the point with the following remark, which also contains the next two occurrences of μένειν: “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me” (καθὼς τὸ κλήμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλω, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε). Just as no fruit can be borne if a branch does not remain on the vine, the disciples cannot bear the expected fruits of love if they do not abide in Jesus as the only true vine.

The remainder of the section develops the narrative further by providing more information about key motifs. Verse 5, with its second “I am” saying in the section, again emphasises the metaphor of the vine and branch, this time also making it more explicit: “I am the vine; you are the branches” (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα). What the first “I am” saying implied is now directly stated by expressly introducing the branches to the readers or listeners. It explicitly describes the disciples as branches. The viticulture picture is now more complete: there is a farmer who tends the vineyard and a vine with branches. All these characters are linked together in an intimate web of relationships. At the same time, this additional information emphasises the mutuality. The remarks reveal that there is an intimate relationship between the farmer, the vine, and its branches. They are intimately connected and linked with each other; the vine is said to have branches and the Father is actively involved by pruning the branches in terms of their relationship with the word of the Son. All these characters are, therefore, intricately linked in relationships that are mutual in nature.

In the next part of this subsection, more attention is paid to the consequences of the intimate, loving relationship between Jesus and the disciples. As mentioned earlier, Jesus notes the *positive result* of

remaining in Him: “Whoever abides in me and I in him/her, you will bear much fruit” (ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ οὗτος φέρει καρπὸν πολύν). Once again, the same topic of bearing fruit, mentioned as the result of the Father’s pruning, surfaces again. This is the fifth time the topic occurs (verses 2, 4 and 5), and it will be mentioned again in verses 8 and 16. Jesus leaves no doubt in the disciples’ minds about the positive results of abiding in him. This is true for anyone who is in a close relationship with him. Before proceeding to the negative result, however, Jesus briefly emphasises the motif of abiding in him by means of a timely warning that nothing can be done without him (ὅτι χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν).²² The next verse will clarify this further and focus on it as a new part in the subsection.

Verse 6 provides the *negative* part of the argument that Jesus is the vine and his disciples the branches.²³ What will happen if someone does not dwell in Jesus? The fate of such a person is explained by ἐὰν with a subjunctive: “If someone does not abide in me, s/he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers” (ἐὰν μή τις μένη ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη²⁴ καὶ συναγουσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται). These branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. The author describes an ongoing result that contrasts with the ongoing, intimate relationship between Jesus and a person who dwells in him, as mentioned in the previous part. In this subsection, the author lets Jesus speak in general terms about this, as is clear from the use of the third person singular pronoun (such as ἐν αὐτῷ) and the indefinite pronoun (τις. The second person plural pronoun was mentioned only briefly in verse 4 (ἐν ὑμῖν; ὑμεῖς) before the section speaks in more general terms about “someone” who dwells in Jesus. This is striking, especially in light of the next subsection in which the second person plural forms will again prevail. The author uses more general language as if he transcends particular readers of a certain time in order to involve a more general audience. By describing the negative outcomes, the emphasis is placed on the need to dwell in Jesus.

3.1.3 Subsection 3: Indwelling and bearing fruit to God’s glory (7-8)

This subsection forms a coherent whole for several reasons. First, the explicit imagery of the vine is no longer present.²⁵ The writer also changes his address to the second person. Though he repeats some earlier themes such as μένειν (two occurrences in verse 7), the words of Jesus, the image of the Father, and a phrase in verse 7 which recalls the instruction of Jesus in verse 4, there are also new moments and other new features. He does not use τὸν λόγον, but τὰ ῥήματα to refer to Jesus’

²² The Greek word χωρὶς can be translated as either ‘without’ or ‘apart from’. In light of the symbolism of a vineyard, the second meaning makes more sense, because just as a branch separated from the vine cannot bear any fruit, similarly the disciples cannot do anything without Jesus, or being away from Him.

²³ Cf. Brown (1982b:662): “But we have pointed out that the positive counterpart for 6 is in 5.”

²⁴ Both ἐβλήθη and ἐξηράνθη are in the aorist. According to Brown (1982b:661), the aorist can have three possible meanings: “[I]n the *first instance* it can mean that the results of such a choice will take immediate effect. *Secondly* it might have the meaning that the results of such a decision will so surely take effect as though it already happened. A *third possibility* is that of the so-called gnomic aorist which describes an ongoing, continuous result that are applicable at all times, he is always cast out and withers – such an aorist is not unusual in a parable where the author is generalizing on the basis of a specific case that he remembers.” Cf. Barrett (1978:474), who also reads it as a gnomic aorist.

²⁵ Cf. Brown (1982b:662) who also noted this striking transition with the remark: “In 7 there is a change to the second person, and the vine imagery is gone.”

words. This subsection does not start with an imperative, but with a conditional sentence, which again speaks of the positive response to the call to abiding (ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοί). In an important alteration of the previous remarks about the disciples abiding in Jesus, Jesus' words are now said to dwell in them (cf. the next section). There will be phenomenal results for those who keep Jesus' words: "[A]sk whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (ὁ ἐὰν θέλητε αἰτήσασθε, καὶ γενήσεται ὑμῖν). This promise is so important to the author that he develops it further in verse 16.

The author also revisits the figure of the Father, described at the beginning of John 15, in a further development of this subsection. The dominant motif of bearing fruit is related to the *doksa* of the Father: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (ἐν τούτῳ²⁶ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ πατήρ μου, ἵνα καρπὸν πολλὸν φέρητε καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί). In line with Jesus' own intimate relationship with the Father (that is, to the glory of the Father), he also wants to guide the disciples into a way of life that is to the glory of God. For the sixth time in eight verses (cf. verses 2, 4 and 5), Jesus refers to the topic of bearing fruit. The introduction to the subsection made it clear that the farmer's pruning is to remove useless branches so that the rest of the vine can bear fruit in abundance. This abundant fruitfulness is the result of a positive reaction to the Father who lovingly tends his garden, and it is to his glory. It is an external confirmation of an inner choice.

The very last remark (καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί) raises a key issue. It is prominent in John 15 and in the so-called "Farewell Discourse" (John 13-17), of which this chapter forms part. Although the word 'disciples' (μαθηταί) is used only once, the entire chapter must be read with it in mind. The Gospel is said to have been written so that people might discover that Jesus is the son of God, and by believing in Him, might have everlasting life (John 21:31). This implies that people should become disciples and, by faith, should inherit eternal life. The nature of discipleship focuses radically on God. Although disciples are said to be 'earning' everlasting life, they should realise that *discipleship* is not about them, but must be to the glory of God.

More detail must be mentioned about the glory of God as the Holy One. It is a significant term that reflects the *kabod Jahweh* in the Old Testament and that is prominent in mystical literature, as is often pointed out in secondary research. It is an indication of the presence of the Lord. This will be discussed in more detail during the investigation of the mystical aspects of the Gospel.

3.1.4 Subsection 4: Joyfully dwelling in love (9-17)

Although subsection 4 is firmly part of John 15, there are several indications that the section represents a new development.²⁷ The formal analysis reveals the dominant place of the motif of love in the passage (ἡ ἀγάπη, ἀγαπάω and φίλος). Words for love are used no less than 12 times. In addition, the motif of love begins and ends this section. The section, with its focus on love, is also the positive counterpart to the next section (John 15:18-25), in which the motif of hatred is

²⁶ According to Barrett (1978:475), the use of ἐν τούτῳ followed by ἵνα, is typical of the Gospel of John.

²⁷ The viticultural theme remains in the background with the reference in verse 16 to bearing fruit.

prominent. The use of hatred as counterpart of love underlines the importance of love. The form of this section is also determined by the motif of “commandments” (e.g. τὰς ἐντολάς). Both these motifs are mentioned for the first time in this subsection of John 15.

Formally, this subsection begins with the repetition of the imperative μένειν, thus continuing the theme of the previous subsections. However, in a further sign of the unfolding narrative, it qualifies this imperative for the first time and in a new manner as an abiding in love. To dwell implies, therefore, to dwell in love. The subsection thus forms a coherent unit, with a focus on love and commandments. Together these motifs give coherence to John 15 as a whole and decisively distinguish it from the other sections.

Of special significance is how important relationships are in John 15, where, as pointed out earlier, the focus is strongly on the interaction between Father, Son and disciples. This is especially true of this subsection. At the beginning of verse 9, the relationship between Jesus and his Father is mentioned, as was done in subsection 1. This time, however, it is more explicit. In a further development, the intimate relationship between Father and Son is used repeatedly as example to the disciples.²⁸ Jesus compares the loving relationship with his Father with his love for the disciples: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (Καθὼς ἠγάπησεν με ὁ πατήρ, καγὼ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα). Thus the intimate relationship between Jesus and the disciples is again mooted. Whilst it was described metaphorically in the previous subsection by means of the images of the vine and the branches, in this instance it is developed as a relationship in love initiated by Jesus. Then follows the aorist imperative to call on them to follow suit: “Now abide in my love” (μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ). This eighth occurrence of the verb μένειν encourages the disciples to seek the same intimate relationship with Jesus as the one he initiated with them, whilst it also reveals to them that it is a loving relationship. Love is especially indicative of intimacy. By referring to love in this pertinent manner, the author of the Gospel intensifies the nature of the intimate relationship of Jesus with the disciples.

In the following remarks, Jesus explains the nature of the loving relationship in more detail. He adds the motif of commandment as another important theme to John 15: “¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and abide in his love” (ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου, καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ πατρός μου τετήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ). The evangelist gradually elaborates the argument in this section by using ἐὰν (if) and καθὼς (just as). He also continues to develop his previously mentioned motifs. The evangelist already touched on the close link between love for Jesus and keeping his commandments in 14:15 (“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”), and 21 (“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them”). The ninth and tenth uses of μένειν explain the abovementioned truth. To dwell in love is, therefore, to keep to the words of Jesus. Through this call for obedience, the loving relationship is depicted as a

²⁸ The Greek word καθὼς is used to make the comparison.

relationship of dependence on Jesus. Intimacy is the outcome of a relationship that is focused on Jesus and that seeks to dwell in his words.

Thus far, the evangelist portrays Jesus as often alternating instruction or imperatives, on the one hand, with ‘good news’ concerning the results or fruits of what they are called to be and to do, on the other hand, what happens to the branches that does not produce the expected fruit. This happens in verse 11, where Jesus introduces the new motif of joy: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ καὶ ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πληρωθῆ). Living according to the commandments of God (as incarnated by Jesus), particularly the love commandments, will not only bring joy, but also complete and fulfilling joy. The intensification of joy as ‘complete’ is mentioned in John 16:24 (“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete”) and in 17:13 (“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them”), revealing the importance of the motif in the Gospel as a whole. Obeying the commandments is not a heavy obligation, but a natural accompaniment of an intimate relationship with Jesus.

The loving relationship, closely linked with Jesus, has another characteristic, as is clear from the climactic end to this section, in which the mutual love of the disciples is the theme. In this instance, it is helpful to consider some pronouncements earlier in the Farewell Discourse, especially since it clarifies and explains abiding and intimacy. Significantly, the following verses introduce new imagery of slavery and friendship to illuminate the close relationship with Jesus. The remark resumes the comments of Jesus on mutual love in John 14, where mutual love between Jesus’ followers has a seminal place.²⁹ John 15:12-17 focuses on this mutual love, but then explicitly as the contents of Jesus’ ‘commandment’. It begins in verse 12 with the direct instruction to love one another: “This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you” (Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμὴ, ἵνα ἀγαπατε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς). Again καθὼς is used to show what the disciples’ criterion for love will be – Jesus himself. He sets a condition and then explains the result in John 15:14: “You are my friends *if* you do what I command” (Ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν). Jesus just explained that he regards them as his friends, but he makes it clear that there is a condition attached to that – doing what he commands or wills for their lives. It is the fourth time he uses the same word to refer to his command (ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν), but, in this instance, it is formally used at both the beginning and the end of this smaller part to frame and give coherence to it (verses 12 and 17). Having spoken of love and his commandments, this part wants to link the commandments of Jesus with self-sacrificing friendship as an intimate relationship between believers.

²⁹ This instruction is also explained elsewhere in the Gospel: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (13:34-35); “If you love me, keep my commands” (14:15); “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them” (14:21), and especially “Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’” (14:23).

This section is also illuminating insofar as it develops the notion of love, by adding slavery as its counterpart to the comments about friendship (cf. especially John 15:15, where the two are linked). Having noted the link between love and friendship in verse 13: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ), the section progressively clarifies the essence of love as giving one’s life for one’s friends. The measure of love is to be found in giving up what is dearest to oneself. This remark of Jesus reaches into the future of his own journey with his death on the cross, and yet, there is a particular new application of love when Jesus challenges his disciples to love each other. As the Son gave up his own life, the disciples will also do this, given their intimate relationship with, and dwelling in Jesus. This subsection focuses on this mutual love.

However, there is a further clarification in this part when Jesus contrasts servanthood and friendship as two well-known concepts of his time³⁰ in John 15:15: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους, ὅτι ὁ δούλος οὐκ οἶδεν τί ποιεῖ αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος· ὑμᾶς δὲ εἶρηκα φίλους, ὅτι πάντα ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν). This verse depicts a slave as being in the dark about his master’s activities. This contrasts with the completely different situation of the disciples. Instead of keeping them in the dark,³¹ Jesus told them everything he learned from the Father. This again stresses the intimate relationship between Jesus and the disciples and points to the intimate relationship that Jesus wants them to have among them. It also illuminates, once again, the close relationship of Jesus with the Father and the mutuality that exists between the Father, Jesus and the disciples. The words were mentioned previously in a description of their effect on the disciples. In John 15:1, the words ‘cleansed’ them render further cleaning by the pruning Farmer unnecessary. These are the words that bring complete joy (John 15:11) and that will bring condemnation of the ‘world’ that hates Him, his Father, and the disciples (John 15:11).

Verse 16 starts with a statement about the initiative of Jesus in establishing the close relationship of love with the disciples: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς).³² The focus is, however, on the consequences of this relationship. The evangelist uses ἵνα to explain the consequences: “[A]nd appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you” (καὶ ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑπάγητε καὶ καρπὸν φέρητε καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὑμῶν μένη). Touching on the theme of bearing fruit once again, the evangelist elaborates on the new status of the disciples. They will bear fruit that will last. By this time, it is known that the fruit Jesus desires from his disciples is to live according to his commandment of love.

³⁰ In her thought-provoking interpretation of the foot-washing episode, Schneiders (2003:184-201) declares: “Peter realizes that Jesus inaugurating between them the relationship of friendship, is subverting in principle all structures of domination, and therefore the basis for Peter’s own exercise of power and authority. The desire for first place has no function in friendship.”

³¹ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am” (John 13:13).

³² For the election of the disciples, cf. also John 6:7; 13:18; 15:19.

The theme of prayer also surfaces once again and reminds one of Jesus' promise in verse 7. It follows on previous remarks in John 15, where Jesus indicates, through the use of the word μένειν, that prayers will be granted where disciples dwell in Jesus and him in them (15:4), or if they dwell in Jesus and his words in them (15:7). In this instance, the thrust of the argument is that, if they keep his commands and dwell in his love, they can confidently ask the Father what they need and it will be granted.³³ This is also the last of 11 μένειν occurrences in John 15. Through the use of μένειν, Jesus calls disciples to a way of life that will have a lasting effect on their relationship with Jesus, the Father and each other. Jesus' command is based on his own example of obedient love towards his Father. These friends of Jesus are freed of slavery and were called by him to a life dedicated to bearing true spiritual fruit – lasting love.

3.2 Section 2. The world's hatred towards the disciples (18-25)

A formal analysis reveals that there are two main motifs in this section, namely "hate" (μισεῖν), which is mentioned at least seven times, and "world" (ὁ κόσμος), which occurs six times. The prominence of these words is further confirmed by their appearance in combination at the very beginning of the section, where Jesus mentions that the disciples should know that the hatred of the world for Jesus preceded its hatred for them (John 5:18).

Another notable feature of the form of this unit is the frequent use³⁴ of the particle εἰ whereby the author points out a certain condition/action, or possible condition in the world to which the disciples could be exposed, followed by the result or consequences of that condition. This construction appears six times in section 2.

The formal analysis also suggests, as noted briefly earlier, that verses 18-25, with their focus on the hatred of the world towards disciples, are the counter-image of the focus on love in verses 9-17.³⁵ In this sense, the two sections belong together. The previous section's motivational language to bear fruit in intimate, loving relationships of self-sacrifice forms a counter-balance to all the negative aspects.

The current section will be treated in two subsections: Subsection 1 – The possibility of hatred by the world (18-21), and Subsection 2 – The hatred of the world makes them guilty of sin (22-25).

³³ John confirms this in 14:13-14: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." On the topic of *petitionary prayer*, Von Wahlde (2010b:640-641) provides an overview of the variety of formulations: "In 14:13, the request is to be made to Jesus and he will grant it. In 14:14, the believer is to ask Jesus in *Jesus'* name and Jesus will grant the request. In 16:24, the request is to be made in Jesus' name but there is no mention of who will grant the petition. In 15:16 and 16:23, the request is made of the Father in Jesus' name and it is the Father who grants. In 15:7, there is no specific mention of either in whose name the petition is made or who grants the request." He concludes by pointing out the distinctive high level of Christology as the Johannine authors' unique contribution to the theology of prayer: "Just as he has done in other aspects of the action of God, he shows that Jesus shares fully in the prerogative of the Father, the Son has the power to judge and the power to give life, just as the Father does. Notice also that just as the Father gives commandments, so also does Jesus."

³⁴ Εἰ occurs in verses 18, 20(2x), 22 and 24.

³⁵ This is in line with John's use of dualism throughout this Gospel. Cf., e.g., the dualism between the world from above and the world from below in Chapter 3. Cf. also John 8:23.

3.2.1 Subsection 1: The possibility of hatred by the world (18-21)

Jesus is bidding his disciples farewell. It is thus a preparatory speech for the hostilities they may experience.³⁶ By way of introduction, Jesus starts with a general remark: “¹⁸ If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first”³⁷ (Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν). Hatred from the world should come as no surprise to the disciples. Such hatred was expressed against Jesus. From their experiences during the ministry of Jesus, they understand quite clearly what Jesus is hinting at.

The previous sections often emphasised the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples. In this section, this intimacy is once again underlined, but this time in terms of the similar fate of Jesus and his disciples. The similar fate is the result of “belonging” to Jesus, which is the result of the disciples’ election by Jesus: “¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἦτε, ὁ κόσμος ἂν τὸ ἴδιον ἐφίλει· ὅτι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἐστέ, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, διὰ τοῦτο μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος). The disciples had to make a deliberate choice to turn their back on their known religion and its leaders, and to become followers of Jesus. It is most likely that the world³⁸ refers to “the Jews”³⁹ in this context.

The world’s hatred is clarified in the next verse: “Remember⁴⁰ what I told you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master’” (μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγου οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν· οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ). What they did and will still do to the master, they can just as well do to his servants or followers. Two parallel statements, both introduced by εἰ, follow the remark and illuminate the hatred: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν· εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν, καὶ τὸν υμῆτερον τηρήσουσιν). The hatred is shown in persecution and disobedience.

This subsection concludes by giving a reason for all the hatred of the world and its results (verse 21): “They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me” (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ποιήσουσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου, ὅτι οὐκ οἶδασιν τὸν πέμψαντα με). The fate of the disciples is not so much because of something the disciples did or did not do, but because of the name of Jesus. At the end of subsection 2.1, there is again a reference to the Father. The hostile opponents do not know the Father who sent Jesus. In this instance, once again, there is an emphasis on the close relationship between Jesus and his Father, contrasted with the lack of any relationship of Jesus’ opponents who hate

³⁶ It is not strange that Jesus discusses the topic of resistance. He has already warned them in John 16:32-33 about their betrayal that would inaugurate the times of trial: “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

³⁷ John 7:7: “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.”

³⁸ The “world” has different connotations in the Gospel as a whole. Cf., e.g., John 3:16 and 13:1.

³⁹ “The Jews’ embody ‘the world’ in the Fourth Gospel, in general, and this context, in particular, for it is the same ‘world’ that opposed Jesus (15:20, 24); they claim Biblical law (15:25), and they will expel Jesus’ followers from the synagogues (16:12).”

⁴⁰ Cf. John 13:6. The explanation given during the exposition of verse 15, as well as Jesus’ argument with the Jews about his words in John 8:51-59.

Jesus, because they do not recognise his close relationship with God.⁴¹ This section contributes to an understanding of the intimate relationship between God, Jesus and the disciples insofar as it shows that those who do not recognise God in the life and work of Jesus will not enter into a relationship with Jesus, and will hate Him.

3.2.2 Subsection 2: The hatred of the world makes them guilty (22-25)

As the central theme of the previous subsection, hatred continues in this section with four more references, and with two of the same εἰ constructions. There is, however, also a difference in the form of the section when sin (τῆς ἁμαρτίας) is introduced as a new theme. The form of the section is characterised by the repetition of the following pattern which occurs in the first εἰ construction:

εἰ μὴ ἦλθον καὶ ἐλάλησα αὐτοῖς,
ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχουσαν,
νῦν δε πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν
εἰ τὰ ἔργα μὴ ἐποίησα ἐν αὐτοῖς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος ἐποίησεν,
ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχουσαν·
νῦν δε καὶ ἐωράκασιν καὶ μεμισήκασιν καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου

The contents of the section are presented in parallel form. In the first instance, Jesus refers to his words and, in the second, to his deeds. Jesus begins by referring to *the words* he spoke to them. The previous sections dealt with the powerful and life-giving effect of Jesus' words on his disciples. The reverse is also true. Not listening to the words of Jesus makes the world guilty of sin.⁴²

In the second instance, Jesus speaks about his *works*. His way of life should have convinced them. One would think that, in the case of the Jews, the saying "Seeing is believing" would become true, but not at all. They even take their sin one step further by hating Jesus and the Father (see also John 15:23). Together, the two speak of his ministry of words and deeds. Jesus points out that the hatred of the Jews is their own responsibility: they were exposed to his words and his deeds, and yet they hated Him and, therefore, also his Father. In their opposition to Him, they also oppose God.

The subsection concludes in verse 25 with a very strong argument including a reference to the Law: "But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law, 'They hated me without reason.'" In this instance, *Law* should be understood in the broad sense as referring to the totality of the Jewish Scriptures, according to Von Wahlde (2010b:685-6) who elaborates:

⁴¹ Cf. the argument between Jesus and the Jews because of his claims concerning his relationship with God as his Father in John 10:22-38.

⁴² Michaels (2010:821-822) explains John's distinctive understanding of sin: "The contrary to fact conditional clause reinforces a remarkable feature in this Gospel's understanding of 'sin'. Even though Jesus was introduced as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29), the world's 'sin' comes to expression only [in] its rejection of him, and consequently of God the Father. Although sin was obviously present long before Jesus came into the world (the devil, after all, was a murderer and a liar 'from the beginning,' 8:44), it was somehow not counted as sin until the coming of Jesus brought it 'to light' as it were (see 3:19). In short, there was plenty of sin before Jesus came, but no formal attribution of guilt." See also 1 John 3:8: "for the devil sins [ἁμαρτάνει] from the beginning."

This is another (see 8:17 and 10:34)⁴³ instance of an expression that some scholars see as indicating that the author distances himself from the Jewish tradition. That is incorrect. As was the case in 8:17, Jesus is showing that this is not some special pleading based on uniquely Christian evidence. Rather, Jesus himself argues that the Scriptures, which his opponents hold to be the word of God, testify to him.

Based on the words and works of Jesus, as well as their own Law, the world is guilty as charged: guilt-ridden by sin.

4. The Paraclete and sustained witnessing (26-27)

The third and final part of John 15 is characterised by the two dominant motifs of the Paraclete and witnessing.⁴⁴ This is not the first or only time that the Spirit is mentioned in John's Gospel. John spoke of the Spirit in verse 14:15, where he is introduced as the Advocate, Paraclete, or Spirit of truth. John 16:1-5 presents the most detailed account of his work. Between these two accounts, two verses conclude Chapter 15 of John's Gospel. These verses exhort the disciples to keep witnessing, despite the hatred and opposition, and to be encouraged by the fact that they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The verb "to testify" (μαρτυρεῖν) is introduced for the first time in John 15: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father — he will testify about me" (Ὄταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ).

These verses are striking because of the way in which the Holy Spirit is explicitly placed in a relationship with both the Father and Jesus. This section illuminates various aspects of their mutual relationships. Jesus sends them the Paraclete from the Father. At the same time, the Paraclete is called the Spirit of truth that goes out from the Father.

Finally, the concluding words of the verse illuminate the focal point of these mutual relationships. The disciples are assured that the Advocate will testify about Jesus. The story of Jesus' *words* and *works* will, therefore, be continued in a powerful manner. These remarks about the Paraclete make even more sense if they are read within the context of John 14:17: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you

⁴³ "In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid." (John 8:17) and "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law', 'I have said you are gods?'" (John 10:34). Jesus' reference to "their law" leads to the following comment by Michaels (2010:824): "Their law ... like the expression 'your law' (8:17; 10:34), places Jesus at a certain distance from the Jewish law, yet without denying its authority. It is still that which is 'written' ... and which must be 'fulfilled'."

⁴⁴ Bruner (2012:911) deals with coordinating Jesus' words about the Paraclete with the witness of the Apostles based on what Gregory of Nazianzus mentioned: "[T]he Spirit is the Son's *alter ego*, The Son's way of being with us, the '*what*' of '*way*' of the Son with us; communicating Jesus to us is the Spirit's whole way of being with us, not least in his teaching us what to say and do." Schnackenburg (1982:117-118) contests the viewpoint that this saying about the Paraclete should be regarded as a later insertion into the text. He is of the opinion that the whole context can be judged quite differently: "If the saying about the Paraclete is more closely connected with vv. 22-24, the Paraclete can be seen as having the same function as Jesus in his words and works on earth. He is Jesus' witness. The Paraclete cannot, however, speak to the world directly, but has to make use of the disciples to do this. This means that v. 27 is indispensable, providing clarification and the context in which the disciples are addressed ... In their unity, these two verses are meaningful in the context in which they are placed and can therefore be regarded as a single, unified and carefully reflected formulation."

another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (μένειν). Although there is a close and intimate relationship between the disciples and the Spirit insofar as he dwells in them and empowers them to witness, the disciples also have to witness, as John 15:27 indicates: “And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning” (καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστέ).

The final words of Jesus are significant in terms of John 15 as a whole (“for you have been with me from the beginning”). The Greek phrase μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστέ (you are with me) reminds one of the motifs of indwelling (μένειν). The phrase that they have been with Jesus from “the beginning” recalls how Jesus called the disciples:

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are you staying?’³⁹ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon (John 1: 35-39).

The word μένειν is used no less than three times in these verses. Thus, the chapter saturated with the idea of the mutual indwelling between Jesus and his friends, the disciples, is brought to a close with this unique possible allusion.

5. Conclusion

The above investigation revealed the unique Johannine perspective on the image of the vine and its branches and how vital bearing fruit is. The central place of the verb μένειν, with its implications for discipleship, shows how indwelling represents the essence of discipleship and the prerequisite for fruitful discipleship to survive as disciple. The analysis of the Greek text illuminated some key concepts that require further investigation: Jesus as the true vine; the Father as the vinedresser; the Paraclete as the Spirit of truth; bearing fruit; Jesus’ words; Jesus’ commandment of love; prayer; slaves and friends; glory; the world and its hatred (sin), and witnessing. These notions will be investigated in more detail in the following chapters. They reveal the spiritual and mystical dimensions of John 15 as it relates to the fundamental concept of μένειν as mutual indwelling.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPIRITUAL AND MYSTICAL NATURE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

1. Introduction

In order to argue the relevance and necessity of a spiritual and mystical reading of the Gospel and the mystical nature of μένειν, in particular, attention must be paid to Johannine research. Before discussing studies of such a nature, it is essential to briefly investigate contemporary analyses of the Gospel, in general. The emphasis will be on results applicable to the scope of this thesis.

2. John's Gospel in light of modern Johannine research

A considerable amount of work has been done in the field of Johannine research, as two remarks by well-known scholars in the field show. According to Moloney (1998a:xi), “[n]o other book of the New Testament has attracted so much attention from commentators”. Stevick (2011:xii) noted:

It is intimidating to write on the Fourth Gospel today. Has any generation of the church since the rise of historical criticism been better served by commentators and commentaries, by serious articles and essays? The “John industry” produces material too rapidly for anyone but specialists to follow.

The history of Johannine research is complex, due to the sheer volume and the many different scholarly opinions.⁴⁵ The extent of Johannine research is evident from remarks by Brodie (1993a:3-10) who divides the history of Johannine research into three periods, namely the theological era of research existed until the 18th century, followed in the 19th and 20th centuries by a focus on historical-critical approaches⁴⁶ and, thirdly, by the literary readings that emerged towards the end of the 20th century.⁴⁷ Until late in the 1970s, Johannine research was dominated by historical-critical approaches, including source,⁴⁸ tradition,⁴⁹ and form criticism⁵⁰ (Stibbe 1992:5). In the 1980s, the

⁴⁵ The introduction to Keener's commentary consists of 330 pages and 424 footnotes. Therefore, the remark by DeConick (2001:33), whose investigation can be labelled as a traditional-rhetoric one, makes sense. She notes the following about the origins of the Johannine texts: “This investigation offer[s] one more piece of the complicated puzzle of Johannine origins and should be read in addition to previous theories about John's origins rather than a replacement for them.”

⁴⁶ Tate (2006:166) regards historical-critical approaches as an attempt to interpret texts in setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*) by focusing on the “career of the text”, the text's history, and original circumstances. “Perhaps underlying the approach is the assumption that the real MEANING resides in the text's originating circumstances and that subsequent development and reconceptualization have distorted this meaning. The three criticisms associated with the historical-critical method are Source Criticism, Form Criticism and Redaction Criticism.”

⁴⁷ Tolmie (1995:1-7) also maintains that Johannine research can be divided into three categories: literary criticism, historical criticism, and theological criticism.

⁴⁸ *Source Criticism* is concerned with the investigation of sources behind the existing texts. The aim is to discover the role of redactors as well as different sources used in order to assess the characteristics and peculiarities of the text against its historical background (cf. C. Brown 1979:62). In New Testament Studies, the primary focus was on the Synoptic Gospels: “This focus is twofold: a concern for the relationship between two or more texts that suggest some kind of dependence, and the discovery of sources within a single text” (cf. Tate 2006:348-349).

⁴⁹ For C. Brown (1979:71), *Tradition Criticism* is also known as *tradition history*, *history of traditions*, or *traditional-historical criticism*. Its focus is the study of Hebrew and Christian oral traditions and their transmissions: “It investigates the origin, growth and background of material in its pre-literary form. On this basis scholars have tried to distinguish original material from later additions.” Cf. also Tate (2006:374).

focus shifted to narrative criticism and readers' responses, with the emphasis on the composition and nature of a text and its receptions by later readers.⁵¹ Since then, more scope is given to both the text itself and the readers of the text.

The background of the Gospel is another popular topic of discussion in historical-critical approaches. Many proposals were made concerning religious groups or traditions that provide a context in which to understand the Gospel, or sources that authors took over and incorporated in their work. How complex this can become, is shown when, at an early stage, Dodd (1953:133),⁵² for example, pointed to some religious traditions which, he thought, would help illuminate the meaning of the Gospel:

Rabbinic Judaism, Philo and the Hermetica remain our most direct sources for the background of thought, and in each case the distinctive character of Johannine Christianity is brought out by observing the transformation it wrought in ideas which it holds in common with other forms of religion.

In addition to his theory about the five stages of redactional activity, R.E. Brown (1979:17) regards research on the history and background of the Gospels and, by implication, the Johannine community, as operating on three levels:

Primarily, the Gospels tell us how an evangelist conceived of and presented Jesus to a Christian community in the last third of the first century, a presentation that indirectly gives us an insight into that community's life at the time when the Gospel was written. Secondly, through source analysis, the Gospels reveal something about the pre-Gospel history of the evangelist's christological views. Thirdly, the Gospels offer limited means for reconstructing the ministry and message of the historical Jesus.⁵³

Some scholars opine that they can point to certain trends in the historical analyses of the Gospel. Regarding the date of the Gospel, for example, Keener (2003a:140) stated: "With most scholars, I

⁵⁰ *Form Criticism* studies the smallest literary units in Biblical texts (e.g., parables, miracle stories, sayings of Jesus), in order to determine characteristic features and regular patterns that distinguish them from other forms of literature. According to C. Brown (1979:57, 67), Form Criticism has been supplemented by Redaction Criticism. R.E. Brown (1997:23) explains that the development of *Redaction Criticism* followed an earlier dominance of Form Criticism: "Form Criticism concentrated on the pre-existing units compiled by the evangelists; Redaction Criticism, or at least the branch of it that is better called Author Criticism, recognised that the writers creatively shaped the material they inherited."

⁵¹ Lee (2002:2) highlights Culpepper's (1983) contributions: "R. Alan Culpepper opened the door to literary studies of the Fourth Gospel with his pioneering work on the literary and narrative aspects of the Johannine text."

⁵² The important research of Dodd, the Johannine scholar, is also comprehensive. He is known for his two books on John: *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* and *Historical tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. In 2013, Thatcher and Williams edited a publication, "Engaging with C.H. Dodd on the Gospel of John. Sixty years of tradition and interpretation" with the aim of reflecting upon and looking beyond Dodd's writings to address the implications, limitations, and potential of his groundbreaking research and its programmatic approach to charting a course for future research on John's Gospel.

⁵³ Some researchers use central motifs in the Gospel of John to determine its background, context, communities and their understanding of Jesus. Coloe (2001:2-10), who focuses on the Temple, explains that her approach is text focused, while she involves various Jewish texts. Available results confirm the complexity of research on John's Gospel. They also show that one has to approach the Gospel within its original context, take into account its community and their opponents, and reflect on the symbolic meaning of the Gospel. Ultimately, it is about determining how the author of the Gospel reinterprets the significance of Jesus for his own time. Brown (1979:20) is of the opinion that De Jonge's comment should be taken seriously: "A Gospel may be used only with great circumspection as a historical source".

favor a date in the mid-nineties, during Domitian's reign."⁵⁴ About the sites for the Johannine community, Keener (2003a:149) concludes: "Roman Asia (most likely Ephesus or Smyrna) and Syro-Palestine (most likely Galilee or Antioch) remain the most likely and widely accepted."

Recently, scholarly work has focused extensively on the text in its written form, following a great deal of research done on older forms of the Gospel. Brown (1982a:xxxiv) motivates this later trend and notes that one should deal with the Gospel of John as it now stands, for that is the only form that certainly ever existed. In line with this point of departure, there is also an emphasis on the creative mind of the author.⁵⁵

This is not an entirely new insight. At an early stage, Dodd (1953:6) remarked that the thought of the Gospel is so original and creative that a search for its sources, or even for the influences whereby it may have been affected, may lead the reader astray. Whatever influences may have been present, he is of the opinion that it has been masterfully controlled by a powerful and independent mind. This insight, which represents a major trend in recent research, is important for this thesis. It reveals openness for the creative way in which John presented his Gospel about Jesus in terms of his own situation. He indeed uses building blocks from his traditions and context, but ultimately communicates a particular spiritual message about Jesus that is closely related to this understanding of the way in which God acted in Jesus.

3. Recent trends

There have been some significant trends in recent Johannine research. They have to be understood against the background of earlier research, which was dominated for a long time by a historical approach. Fifteen years ago, this trend was signalled by a remark of Dumm (2001:vii) who argues that the voluminous literature on the Gospel of John was so dominated by a historical-critical analysis that there is a need to spell out the more specifically spiritual meaning in this Gospel. With this remark, Dumm does not discard historical approaches, but points to certain needs that arise from them that require more attention. His plea is for an interpretation of the Bible that respects all critical interpretations, but that will also plumb the depths of a faith-guided understanding. This is even more the case in light of the spiritual character of John's Gospel. He writes:

Since John's Gospel is so obviously intent on expressing the spiritual implications of the words and deeds of Jesus, it is probably the clearest example of the basic inadequacy of the historical-critical method alone in the quest for the fullest and richest meaning of Scripture.

In the course of time, more and more researchers expressed the need to overcome the limitations of historical-critical research. Their critique was aimed not primarily at the method as such, but at an overvaluation of its results over and against other approaches to the Gospel of John. Lee (2002:1)

⁵⁴ Kanagaraj (1998:58) concludes: "I presume that John was written c. 85-110 CE and that the period between the two Jewish revolts (66-132 CE) may provide the best historical context for understanding John."

⁵⁵ Schnelle (2009:685, footnote 69) quotes Frey (2007): "The formative will of the Johannine author is thus to be evaluated more highly than the influence of his religious milieu."

referred, for example, to the rationalism and objectivism of the Enlightenment that determined historical-critical readings in a negative manner. She mentions carving the text into controllable pieces, kept firmly apart, and ignoring the relationship between the text and the faith community as interpreter.

She also expresses concern about the proliferation of methods within the historical-critical approach that had the tendency to get trapped in methodological discussions:

Postmodern study of the Bible has seen an almost obsessive concern with methodology, often at the expense of theological exegesis. The result is that biblical exegesis is drowning in a surfeit of methods and methodology, while at the same time dying of thirst from the lack of a reviving center. What has suffered most in these approaches to the text is the loss of awareness of the power of biblical symbolism, the touch of the heart, to open worlds, to cross the divide of generations and cultures, to bring about transformation. Here is the irony, all this knowledge and so little to nurture the soul.

Another point of concern was that the historical-critical approaches emphasised the distanced, objective reading of the text. This became so important that the expectations of the author of the text were being ignored or forgotten. Kellum (2004:243) thus notes that the text expects its readers to ruminate and resonate with it in order to appropriate its transformative meaning. According to him, it is doubtful whether the writer of the Gospel imagined anything like the preoccupation, in contemporary research, with the implications of one-fifth of a verse. He writes:

Indeed, giving the import of the content, he expected it to be read and re-read. Furthermore, this reading was not simply for aesthetic reasons. He expected his hearers to pour over the text and receive a message on what it is to thrive spiritually between the departure and the second advent of Christ.

Kellum's remark reflects an emerging trend according to which recent scholarship takes into consideration how texts with sacred claims such as John's Gospel wanted to be read. Such a text can obviously be used to do historical, literary and social analyses, but it is first and foremost a text that wants to be understood and read in terms of its transformative communication. Culpepper (1983:4-5) pointedly formulated this when he asked for attention to the way in which meaning is reconstructed in readings of John's Gospel:

Meaning is produced in the experience of reading the text as a whole and making the mental moves the text calls for its reader to make. The narrative world of the gospel is therefore neither a window on the ministry of Jesus nor a window on the history of the Johannine community. The text is therefore a mirror in which the readers can "see" the world in which they live.

With this remark, Culpepper directed attention to a reading that moves beyond historical and social analyses, and that uses the text to reflect on extra-textual matters with special meaning for readers. Since he wrote this remark, more and more researchers have developed research that accounts for his focus on the meaning of the text in its final form and the implications of the text for a life in faith.

With this approach, not only the text itself, but also the earliest interpretations of the text are taken seriously. In this regard, Schneiders (2003:1, footnote 1) also observed that Clement of Alexandria referred to the Gospel of John as “the spiritual Gospel”.⁵⁶ In her research on John’s Gospel, Schneiders was one of the first contemporary researchers to pursue a spiritual reading of the Gospel in a systematic manner. In her introduction to this book, Schneiders (2003:1) points out that her work is “an attempt to engage the Spirituality of the Biblical text through rigorously critical study *undertaken in the context of living faith*” (my italics, AS). She thus confirms what Culpepper also stressed in the remark quoted above. Schneiders (2003:2) argues that her work is neither individualistic, nor homiletic, nor devotional:

Rather it is an engagement of the texts which is rooted simultaneously and equally in the faith of the Christian community, past and present, and in the best of critical biblical scholarship of which I am capable or upon which I can draw. This engagement has as its objective to contribute both to the faith life of readers (myself included) and to ongoing enterprise of biblical scholarship.

According to Schneiders, both teachers and students of Biblical texts are discovering that contemporary religious significance is integral to the meaning of the text itself. Ultimately, she (1993:22) also emphasises that her reading of the text is not so much exegesis for information, but for transformation: “Finally, the culmination and fruit of the interpretive project is the engagement of the transformative potential of the text, that is, the appropriation of its *Spirituality*.” She (1993:22) then dwells on the possibilities the text opens for an enriched faith life by invoking the familiar categories of the *world behind*, the *world of*, and the *world in front of the text*. The *world behind* the text involves historical interrogation into the possibility of a text developing at a particular point in time and place. The *world of* the text asks for investigating what the text is saying theologically and literarily. The *world in front of* the text concentrates on the Spirituality of the text and the world of commitment into which the reader is invited.

The above discussion reveals a significant trend. It points to the need to understand the spiritual meaning of texts, not only for their own times, but also in terms of later communities who resonated with them. It is within this context and hermeneutical framework that this thesis investigates John 15.

4. The notion of a spiritual reading

One’s understanding of a text is, to a great extent, influenced by the angle from which it is approached. The following discussion will clarify what a spiritual reading of John 15 comprises,⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Köstenberger (2009:38-39) mentions that one should not misunderstand this remark as if it means that Clement implied that the Fourth Gospel was not historically as reliable as the Synoptic Gospels. He rather emphasises the unique nature of this Gospel’s message: “Indeed, John deepens the reader’s understanding of the significance of Jesus’ life and work, there is every reason to believe that John, as a ‘spiritual Gospel’ – in the sense of being an *interpretative* account that brings out more fully the spiritual significance of the events and teachings it features. In this sense, then, John is a *spiritual Gospel*; it is the product of profound theological reflection, which, in turn, is grounded in actual historical events through which God acted in salvation history.”

⁵⁷ In light of the wide-ranging and complex nature of Spirituality, the word “notion” is preferred to “definition”, as in this section’s heading. There is no consensus on a definition of Spirituality.

followed and motivated by an analysis of research in the field of Spirituality, and an illustration of a specific spiritual reading of the letters of John.

From the outset, it must be stated that a spiritual reading will be best understood when it is linked to, and determined by Spirituality Studies as a discipline. It is, therefore, a reading that assumes and implements theoretical insights developed in this field of study. Scholars in the field, of whom only a few will be listed in this instance, have proposed many definitions of Spirituality. For Schneiders (2005a:16), Spirituality is about the actualisation of the basic human capacity for transcendence defined as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence towards the horizon of ultimate value one perceives”.⁵⁸ For Howard (2008:15), “Christian Spirituality refers to a relationship with God as lived in practice, as dynamics are formulated, as explored through formal study”. According to Van Hoozer (2005:767), Spirituality provides a catch-all term “that recognizes an organic linkage between this *Beyond* (transcendence) and *Within* (intimacy) that is part of everyone’s experience”. For Kourie (2006:26), “spirituality in general refers to the values to which we subscribe which give meaning and orientation to our lives. Spirituality entails the ongoing harmonious integration of the whole human person”. For Barton (1992:1-2), Spirituality has to do with

the sense of the divine presence and living in the light of that presence. There are two basic aspects therefore: knowing and being known by God, on the one hand, and responding with the whole of life, on the other, and spirituality for Christians has to do specifically with life under the God who is revealed in Jesus and who graces believers with the Spirit.

Many scholars emphasise that Spirituality comprises a transformation.⁵⁹ Schneiders (1999:3) calls a transformative reading “the interaction between a self-aware reader open to the truth claims of the text and the text in its integrity an interaction that adequately takes into account the complex nature and multiple dimensions of the text and the reader”. Elsewhere, Schneiders (1999:14) reiterates this when she writes that John 15 is about involvement and transformation:

Its concern is to bring the reader into that existential involvement with the truth to which Jesus of John’s gospel invites his hearers when he urges them to indwell his word and let it abide in them in order that they might become his disciples, be made truly free, worship rightly, and bear much fruit (cf. John 8:31-32; 4:21-26; 15:1-11, and elsewhere).

⁵⁸ In another article, Schneiders (2005b:1) elaborates further on this: “First, Spirituality is an ongoing experience or life project. Second, its ultimate purpose is life integration. Third, the process of self-transcendence rules out a narcissistic self-absorption even in one’s own perfection. And fourth, the entire project is orientated toward ultimate value, whether this is the Transcendent, the flourishing of humanity, or some other value.” Implicit in these remarks is the relational, transformative and processual nature of Spirituality. Cf. also Perrin (2007:20).

⁵⁹ Culpepper (1983:4) touches, to some degree, on the notion of transformation when he declares: “The implicit purpose of the Gospel narrative is to alter irrevocably the reader’s perception of the real world.” His remark confirms that the Gospel wished to transform the reader in his/her relationship with the world. Koester’s (1995:268) conclusion is that an effective interpretive framework allows readers to be imaginative, but also discriminating. It must be possible to distinguish the plausible from the implausible: “It is also true at the level of interpretation, as the symbols in the Gospel both awaken and constrain the imagination, guiding the reader to the Christ who is its center.” In this instance, too, the intention is to want to transform the readers in their relationship with the divine.

All these insights suggest that Spirituality is about the relationship of the divine with humanity through a process of ongoing transformation.

4.1 General studies in Spirituality

The above understanding of Spirituality is the result of comprehensive research done in the field of Spirituality Studies as a discipline. A selection of literature that had an influence on this thesis will get priority, with a focus on key publications. Waaijman's comprehensive work, *Spirituality: Forms, foundations and methods* (2002), is influential in the field as a whole and decisive for this thesis. Waaijman answers the question "What is Spirituality?" from two perspectives: from within lived Spirituality and from within the discipline of Spirituality. His research leads him to the following conclusion: "Materially, spirituality is the joined process of the divine-human relation which is formally, a layered process of transformation" (Waaijman 2002:VII). Discernment, as the blueprint for his method,

is a form of critical reflection which developed within lived spirituality. It recognizes the direction of the way, discover[s] the deeper motives beneath the surface, tests the soundness of the end and the means, and describes God's possibilities in the course of life (Waaijman 2002:305).

In this thesis, the mystical perspectives on the Gospel of John will be spelled out in terms of discovering such deeper motives beneath the surface. The broad applicability of Waaijman's monumental book is the fact that it is based on examples from a very broad spectrum of Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Islamic spiritual traditions.

In addition, one could understand Spirituality from a historical point of view, as did Sheldrake. In the introduction to his *Brief history of Spirituality* (2007), he defines Spirituality in terms of periods and traditions. Sheldrake also edited the *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (2005). At the time of its publication, it was hailed as the definitive reference work on all aspects of Christian Spirituality. The dictionary is limited to Christian Spirituality, because there is no such thing as "generic spirituality". Spirituality is always particular – grounded in historical-cultural contexts. Given the fact that Christian Spirituality is a plural and complex reality, it involves a particular horizon of meaning:

It refers to the ways in which the particularities of Christian belief about God, the material world and human identity find expression in basic values, lifestyles and spiritual practices. ... Christian spirituality embodies a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the context of a community of believers (Sheldrake 2005:vii).

A quick search on the Internet reveals a range of his other publications about Spirituality.⁶⁰ Two other reference works are *The Blackwell companion to Christian Spirituality*, edited by Holder

⁶⁰ Among others, "Images of holiness: Explorations in contemporary Spirituality"; "Spirituality and theology: Christian living and the doctrine of God"; "Spirituality: A very short introduction", and "Explorations in Spirituality: History, theology, and social practice".

(2005),⁶¹ and Howard's *The Brazos introduction to Christian Spirituality* (2008). In 2007, Perrin published his *Studying Christian Spirituality*, which discusses the field of Spirituality. He, among others, also explains the traditional relationships between Christian Spirituality, theology and history. He also proposes greater connections with the human sciences such as philosophy, psychology, phenomenology and sociology and, in the process, reshapes the classical approaches to Christian Spirituality, its texts, practices, and experience.

4.2 Biblical Spirituality

The growing discipline of Biblical Spirituality is a subdiscipline in the field of Spirituality Studies which focuses on the spiritual nature of the Bible, on Spirituality in the Bible, and on the impact of the Bible on spiritual texts. In this thesis, the second one will be in focus. A good example of research in this field is found in Schneiders' work on Johannine literature. She (1999, 2003) designed a new and comprehensive hermeneutical theory for New Testament interpretation, which takes full account of the Bible as sacred Scripture, but she also published a monograph on the Spirituality of John's Gospel (1999, 2003).⁶² She describes her approach as an attempt to engage the Spirituality of the Biblical text through rigorous critical study undertaken in the context of living faith. In 2006, Lescher & Liebert published *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in honor of Sandra M. Schneiders*, in which they state:

Schneiders commands respect as one of the most significant and influential figures in the emergence of the study of Christian spirituality as an academic discipline, as the focused and disciplined exploration of religious experience. This book honors her contributions to the field by addressing issues that are emerging at the creative "edges" of the discipline.⁶³

In recent years, other scholars have developed the field in an impressive manner. One of them is Huub Welzen, who wrote extensively on Biblical Spirituality. In an article on a spiritual reading of the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38, Welzen (2011a) presents four readings of the story. Having applied five approaches (form criticism, semiotics, sociology of literature, narrative criticism, and intertextuality) for reading the text, he concludes that there is no clear-cut distinction between exegetical analyses and spiritual readings. Welzen (2011a:34) summarises his own insights in the conclusion of this article as follows:

The answer to the question as to which method is the most appropriate depends on the nature of the question that is posed. A form-critical question is not the same as a narrative-critical question, or a

⁶¹ With a collection of topics covered by a wide range of scholars such as Arthur Holder, Sandra Schneiders, Barbara Green, Ulrike Wiethaus, Philip Sheldrake, and David Perrin.

⁶² Her additional contributions include "The Johannine resurrection narrative: An exegetical study on John 20 as a synthesis of Johannine Spirituality"; "History and symbolism in the Fourth Gospel"; "The foot washing (John 13:1-20): An experiment in hermeneutics", and "The resurrection (of the body) in the Fourth Gospel: A key to Johannine Spirituality".

⁶³ For a full review, cf. <http://www.amazon.com/Exploring-Christian-Spirituality-Essays-Schneiders/dp/0809142163%3FSubscriptionId%3DAKIAI3QJHIEXG2JOMK6Q%26tag%3Dattr20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0809142163>.

question pertaining to intertextuality. However, if openness to the divine human relational process is present in the way the questions are posed, all the questions and all the answers may offer possibilities for the purposes of spirituality. In my view, this is the most decisive aspect: the researcher's openness to the process of spirituality – both in terms of the text itself, and of the impact of the text on the divine human relationship of the reader.

In the second article, Welzen (2011b:37) deals with the contours of Biblical Spirituality as a discipline. He uses three approaches in order to arrive at a definition of Biblical Spirituality, the first from lived Spirituality, the second is the analysis of literature discussing Biblical Spirituality, and the third approach is the discussion of the composing terms. He concludes:

Biblical spirituality is about the divine human relational process in the Bible and about the Bible in the divine human relational process. A dialogue of spirituality and exegesis is needed. For doing research a threefold competence is needed: in exegesis, in spirituality and in the integration of these two ... Intertextuality may help to understand the spiritual process in reading biblical texts.

Numerous other contributions on Biblical Spirituality have been published in the form of articles in a wide variety of journals and books. In a South African context, a series of supplements in *Acta Theologica* about Biblical Spirituality illustrate its breadth and contents. *Supplementum 8* (2006), edited by P.G.R. de Villiers, C.E.T. Kourie and C. Lombaard, is entitled “The Spirit that moves, orientation and issues in Spirituality”. The preface by De Villiers is of special importance, since it gives an overview of the practice and study of Spirituality in South Africa. He also conveys information about a significant event that took place on 23-24 January 2003 when the Spirituality Association of South Africa was established to promote the study of Spirituality in South Africa and international cooperation in the field. Among the articles are “What is Spirituality” (K. Waaijman); “The ‘turn’ to Spirituality” (C. Kourie); “Spirituality, theology and the critical mind” (P.G.R. de Villiers), and “The word that moves” (H. Welzen). All these contributions are of an introductory nature and set the parameters for a study of Spirituality. *Supplementum 11* (2008) addresses “The Spirit that empowers: Perspectives on Spirituality”. Contributions include “Allegorising: The relevance of an old method of interpretation” (P.B. Decock); “Towards a Spirituality of peace” (P.G.R. de Villiers); “Contemplation and social transformation: The example of Thomas Merton” (P. Sheldrake), and “Awe and respect in the Psalms” (K. Waaijman). *Supplementum 15*, edited by P.G.R. de Villiers and L. Pietersen, focuses on “The Spirit that inspires”. Among the articles are “Biblical Spirituality: Another reading (allegoria)” (K. Waaijman); “Exegetical analyses and spiritual readings of the story of the annunciation” and “Contours of Biblical Spirituality as a discipline” (H. Welzen), and “The resurrection as Christ’s entry into his glory” (Luke 24:26) (P.G.R. de Villiers). Finally, *Supplementum 17* (2013)⁶⁴ was devoted to “The Spirit that guides. Discernment in the Bible

⁶⁴ This volume of *Acta* was dedicated to Paul Decock and Kees Waaijman in celebration of their 70th birthday and in gratitude for their significant contribution to Biblical Spirituality as a discipline.

and Spirituality”. Papers that were read at the international conference on discernment in Malta (24-27 May 2012) included “Discernment – the compass on the high sea of Spirituality” (K. Waaijman); “A hermeneutic of justice. Justice as discernment in Matthew” (H. Welzen); “Discernment as ‘not knowing’ and ‘knowing’: A perspective from Matthew 25:31-46” (H.C. van Zyl); “Communal discernment in the early church” (P.G.R. de Villiers), and “Discernment in the Letter to the Galatians” (D.F. Tolmie). In this instance, discernment as a key theme in Spirituality was discussed and related to Biblical Spirituality. As a result, various spiritual perspectives on the Bible were introduced in Spirituality Studies.

With the publication of Foster’s *The Spiritual Formation Bible* (2005), the author aimed at combining the depth of a Study Bible with the heart of a Devotional Bible. One of the aims is to approach the Bible through the lens of Christian spiritual formation. The unifying theme of Scripture is regarded as the Immanuel Principle of life “with God” (xv). In the introduction, Dawn (2005:1937) elaborates on the life with God as Trinity: “The webbed lines of John’s Gospel disclose to us the Trinity’s intertwining relationships and invite us to keep asking what all of this means for us. Exploring those lines diligently will increase our celebration of, and participation in, the divine mystery”. Two objectives of Bible Study are identified that stifle spiritual life or even destroy the soul. They include the study of the Bible mostly for information or knowledge or to find some formula that will solve the pressing need of the moment (xxv-xxvi). By contrast, the editors spell out that the objective of their Bible is the transformation of the person into greater Christ-likeness, transforming the inner reality of the self so that the inner world (secret heart) becomes the home of Jesus by his initiative and human response (xxix). The recommended way of reading the Scriptures is a reading with the heart. They then point out that this way of approaching the sacred text has a long and time-honoured history. It is called *lectio divina* (xxxii). Each Bible book is read in terms of its spiritual meaning and message.

This overview of literature was an attempt to lay a valid foundation for a reading from a spiritual perspective, as described earlier. But, the spiritual reading of John was preceded by preparatory studies regarding the Johannine use of metaphors, images and symbols, some of which should be pointed out before paying attention to an example from the letters of John.

4.3 Paving the way for a spiritual reading

Spiritual readings have not only been stimulated by Spirituality Studies. Some linguistic insights also promoted the need to understand a text on a deeper level. Research on some important concepts also prepared the way for a spiritual and mystical reading of texts. This also applied to research on John’s Gospel. Growing increasingly aware of its extensive use of images, symbols and metaphors⁶⁵ that

⁶⁵ Although there are a myriad of definitions for these concepts, the following examples might help. For *Symbol*, Schneiders (2005b:66) provides a definition she regards as generally acceptable: “a sensible reality which renders present to and involves a person subjectively in a transforming experience of transcendent mystery”. For *Metaphor*, Lee (2002:17) quotes Soskice (1987) who defines metaphor as “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another”. As example, she uses John 8:12, which refers to Jesus as the light of the world. As far as image is

indicate how the text functions on more than one level, scholars spelled out its deeper meaning.⁶⁶ Though they accepted that reading and understanding the text at face value makes sense, they were increasingly aware that there is more to the text than its obvious meaning so that it had to be understood on a deeper level. This also contributed to new approaches in reading the Gospel of John.⁶⁷ Such insights helped scholars come to a new understanding of themselves and their relationship with the living God.⁶⁸

This understanding reflects the insights of researchers who realised the special function of images, symbols, and metaphors in John.⁶⁹ Culpepper's reference to a source from 1928 proves this in his discussion of symbols that provides implicit commentary and directional signals for the reader. He then quotes a remark by Macgregor (1928:256): "No understanding of the Gospel is possible without an appreciation of the part played by symbolism." Dodd (1953:135) expresses the same appreciation and views the explicit use of symbols such as living water, bread of life, the true vine, and the good shepherd, as important attributes of the fourth Gospel.⁷⁰ After treating the good shepherd, the true vine, and the signs,⁷¹ Dodd (1953:143) concludes:

Thus the very nature of the symbolism employed by the evangelist reflects his fundamental *Weltanschauung*. He writes in terms of a world in which phenomena – things and events – are a living and moving image of the eternal, and not a veil of illusion to hide it, a world in which the Word is made flesh.

Meeks (1972:47) also reiterated the importance of allowing the symbolism in Johannine language to speak in its own way: "It is symptomatic of the impasse in NT hermeneutics that we have as yet no adequate monograph on the Johannine symbolism as such." Culpepper (1983:183) also stressed the importance and nature of symbolism:

concerned, Lee (2002:20-21) regards icons such as metaphors as another subset of symbolism. She then elaborates: "The Greek word εἰκὼν is usually translated into English as 'image'. Icons in Orthodox theology are thus pictorial *images* representing sacred events or persons either Biblical or within the religious tradition. Christ is the original *Ikon*, the true *Image* of God, in whose *image* humankind is created." Cf. below for more remarks about these notions.

⁶⁶ According to Kysar (1975:6), "[t]he beginning student may well find the thought of the Gospel rather obvious and understand its symbolism in a straightforward manner. On the other hand, the lifetime scholar of the writing will still be wrestling with the nuances of the Gospel in the fading years of his or her career".

⁶⁷ Lee (2002:4-5), however, mentions that the understanding of a hidden meaning should always be determined by what is communicated in the text.

⁶⁸ With reference to the patristic period, Lee (2002:11-13) is of the opinion that "they read the Scripture as Christian theologians, homilists, mystics and pastors. The idea of the text possessing its own *skopos* to be discerned by prayerful study and by *theoria* was lost. It is vital that Biblical Studies, in all its dimensions, recover a symbolic and theological approach to the text."

⁶⁹ Zimmerman (2006:42), for example, elaborates on John's use of images: "Images are the language of that which cannot be spoken. Images can put into words that which cannot be expressed in any other way, a metaphoric 'I-am-Saying' challeng[ing] the reader to discover the deeper meaning in the 'calculated absurdity' of the formulation."

⁷⁰ Cf. Dodd (1953:134).

⁷¹ Dodd (1953:142-3) concludes that events narrated in the Fourth Gospel should always be considered significant events. He explains: "In several cases a clue to their significance is supplied in the accompanying discourses. In other cases we are required to interpret them in accordance with the evangelist's known methods and conceptions. To a writer with the philosophical presuppositions of the evangelist there is no reason why a narrative should not be at the same time factually true and symbolic of a deeper truth, since things and events in this world derive what reality they possess from the eternal Ideas they embody."

Symbols therefore often span the gap between knowledge, or sensible reality, and mystery. They call for explanation and simultaneously resist it. As a result, the more skilful and perceptive the reader, the more deeply he or she will enter into the message and the mystery of a symbolic narrative.

Culpepper thus highlights the ongoing process that is set in motion by symbols. It represents layers of meaning that are being discovered by attentive readers.

Other research also paved the way towards a spiritual reading of the Gospel. Scholars appreciate that an understanding of metaphor is also essential in order to interpret it. Culpepper (1983:181), following Friedman, defines a metaphor as “a device which speaks of one thing (tenor) in terms which are appropriate to another (vehicle), with the vehicle serving as the source of traits to be transferred to the tenor”. Meaning emanates from a combination of metaphor and symbol:

Whereas the tenor and the vehicle are given in a metaphor and the reader must discern the relationship, a symbol presents the vehicle. The relationship may be stated, implied by the context, or assumed from the shared background of culture of writer and reader. The reader’s task is to discern the tenor or meaning of the symbol.⁷²

The use of symbols and metaphors effects transformation,⁷³ and plays an important part in guiding the reader into a deeper understanding of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. The mystery of God can be encountered through symbols, but it is not fully comprehended. Koester (1995:31) explained this when he argued that the symbols in John’s Gospel refer to Jesus and through Jesus to God. A symbol’s truth is confirmed when people are drawn through its witness into faith in Jesus that brings knowledge of God. Koester notes that interpreters can identify a symbol’s structure and literary function, describe its social and cultural context, and explore the ways in which it interacts with readers, but more needs to happen. No one comes to know God in faith unless s/he is “drawn”, which, from a Johannine perspective, happens “from above”.

To discover the deeper level of a text is, therefore, of paramount importance, as described in detail by Lee (2002:7) who discusses a reading that happens on the transformational or existential level and that transcends the intellectual and theoretical readings of a text. The spiritual level also has a transformational character:

[I]n this sense, the Holy Spirit is the true interpreter of Scripture within the context of the community of faith, creating a living tradition that is able to critique the past and uncover new insights, consistent with revealed faith (John 14:26; 16:13).

With this observation, Lee confirms Schneiders’ remarks (quoted in part 1 of this Chapter) about transformational exegesis. She also touches on the key notion of transformation, which, to her mind,

⁷² Cf. Culpepper (1983:182).

⁷³ Culpepper (1983:202) concludes: “Together, if the Gospel is read in the way in which it calls for itself to be experienced, author and reader are united in the transformation effected by an experience of encounter with transcendent mystery. By the proper reading of John as symbolic narrative, the reader is called to no less than the conviction that man and God can be united and that from this union new life is born in man, and specifically in the reader.”

is the end process of sacred reading. All aspects of reading a text should lead to the one place where there is an encounter with Christ. Using Johannine language, Lee (2002:7) concludes:

Whether he is to be found in the temple, at the well, in the Galilean hills, at the festal dinner, in privacy with friends, on the cross, or in the Easter garden, finally makes no difference. The main point is that he becomes present in the place where the reader is present, and that, through the symbols, the intersection discloses new paths that lead assuredly to God.

These preparatory studies assisted in one way or the other in paving the way for a spiritual reading. They made scholars aware that a text is not merely about information, but contains language that points to a deeper meaning that has a transformational impact.

4.4 An example of a spiritual reading

A spiritual reading can be illustrated by recent research done on the letters of John that reflects a theoretical approach as developed in Biblical Spirituality. In his doctoral thesis, Lacal's (2009:4) research question centred on the Spirituality of the Catholic Letters. Only the results of the Johannine letters will be dealt with, in this instance. There is an intricate link between John's Gospel and the Johannine letters and they display close affinities. This research, therefore, proves to be insightful for an understanding of John's Gospel. In this work, Spirituality and its main components (the divine and human pole and their relationship) are analysed, and followed by the description of the main layers of transformation.⁷⁴ The aim of the research is summarised as follows:

This project aims to contribute new insights into Biblical Spirituality and into the contextualization of spirituality specifically of counter-spirituality. It aims at finding the contribution of a specific Biblical text's spirituality to the discourse of Biblical Spirituality (Lacal 2009:6).

Lacal (2009:283) uses Waaijman's well-known definition of Spirituality to characterise the way in which the Johannine community should live out their Spirituality.⁷⁵ His investigation leads him to conclude that the Spirituality of the Johannine letters centres on both love and the reality of the divine-human mutual indwelling. The contours of Christian Spirituality is a way of life, a life of discipleship, a call to belong to a community, and a call to love: "This is the penultimate goal of dwelling in God's love by loving one another, the ultimate divine-human union indeed."

The results of this study will be summarised under the following three headings: the divine-human interactions resulting in love; the process of transformation, and the ultimate goal.

4.4.1 God as the source of love

The Spirituality of the Johannine letters is first and foremost a Spirituality of love. For Lacal (2009:28), those who read the Letters are called to a way of life distinguished by love on two levels:

⁷⁴ Lacal (2009:5), following Waaijman, discerns five layers of transformation: transformation in creation, transformation in recreation, transformation in conformity, transformation in love, and transformation in glory.

⁷⁵ Cf. Waaijman (2002).

the divine-human and the inter-human. In every human response of loving one another, God's love is perfected according to 1 John 4:12, 16. The Spirituality of love encompasses the entire event and process of human life; the acts of God (indicative), and the response of human beings (imperative) in the past, in the present and in the future. Such a Spirituality of love evolves around grace and the gift of love (an event shown in the sending of Jesus into the world) that comes first from God, and in the manner in which God gives this love to humanity (a process) which is also called to love God as God loves them (transformation).

The Letters reveal the fact that God is the source of, and inspiration for love, as explained in 1 John 4:8. The initiative for the divine-human encounters comes from God by first loving us (1 John 4:19). Through the gift of God's love, human beings are led towards transformation. Love takes us to the very heart of God. Lactal (2009:285) states: "God never ceases to love the human persons and allows the human to be transformed so that he or she can love others in ways and manners that they experience the love of God."

Lactal (2009:286) continues by investigating the way and the manner in which God shows, reveals and proves the greatness of his love. Based on 1 John 4:9-10, he elaborates on the extent of God's love. This lies in the indicative action of God in sending the Son to the world so that humanity may live through him and receive atonement for their sins. Human response should include the confession that Jesus is the Son of God. Their orientation of self-interest is replaced by the new orientation of the dis-interested love of God as revealed in Jesus. For Lactal (2009:286-287), a person becomes a dwelling place of God by this conscious act of transformation.

4.4.2 Transformed to imitate Jesus

Knowing about God's love in, and through Jesus does not suffice. John invites the readers into an ever-deepening process of transformation by actively imitating Jesus. Based on the divine-human relationship, Christians are challenged to obey and follow the examples set by Jesus as the Son of God. Lactal (2009:287-289) views this as a spiritual imperative that results in being transformed into a way of life filled with respect and love for one another. Lactal (2009:288) explains: "A spirituality of love as it is shown in the imitation of Jesus means that we love in the same manner that God loves, allowing us to resemble God in His act of unselfish loving."

At stake is love as the human response to the love of God. In the case of these Letters, Biblical Spirituality points out the demands of God's love (Lactal 2009:290). On the *one hand*, the call to love one another is basically a call to transformation and conversion. On the *other hand*, love for one another is our response to God's love for us in Jesus. For Lactal (2009:490), the full circle of the divine-human relational process is thus completed:

God reaches out first to the human person (1 John 4:19), then the human person receives God's love and reveals such love in their very acts of loving others as well (1 John 4:7, 11), followed by the

mutual indwelling of both God and human (1 John 4:12-13, 15-16). In this process, the spirituality of love is made complete.

Based on the divine-human relationship, the transformational process leads to the realisation of two truths: we are born from God and know God. This is the essence of 1 John 4:7: everyone who loves has been born of, and knows God.

According to Lacal (2009:293-295), mutual indwelling is the apex of the divine-human encounter. In 1 John, μένειν is used extensively with the dominant meaning of *life*. The emphasis is mostly on a lasting relationship between God and Christians. Living in love is an actualisation of the mutual indwelling between God and a human being achieving the joy of union with God. This complete transformation in love is the ultimate goal of Spirituality. Through our mutual indwelling, the immeasurable love of God frees us to love others as God loves us. This means real kinship with God, constantly walking at God's side.

4.4.3 The ultimate goal: An eschatological Spirituality of love

The divine-human encounter culminates in a life lived in, and through love. In this section, Lacal (2009:295-299) deals with two eschatological concepts of the Spirituality of love which are detected in the Letters: *love made perfect* and the *Day of Judgement*. The eschatology of love becomes a present reality in our struggle to love our brothers and sisters. With such a new consciousness among people, the fruit of mutual indwelling between God and humanity can now be enjoyed. The *day of judgement* refers to the activity of God as judge, especially on the last day, leading to the separation of those who lived according to his command of love and those who did not. Perfection and day of judgement are catchwords for a Spirituality of the end of times and evokes the area of Spirituality as an all-embracing process. Lacal (2009:299-300) concludes that the Spirituality of love in John's Letters is related to the past, the present, and the future. Eschatological love is future oriented and is to be perfected in every effort that human beings make to love one another.

The importance of Lacal's study for the current research project can be summarised in a few observations. First, his analysis represents a spiritual reading of John's Letters. His results confirm the validity of a spiritual reading of Biblical texts. He bases his analysis on theoretical insights when he uses Waaijman's model. It thus makes use of methodological and hermeneutical insights that have been developed to account for the spiritual nature of texts. It is also helpful that his analysis approaches the text from the three perspectives of the divine pole, the human pole, and the process of transformation. His approach also yields a number of valuable insights. It shows how love and a community of love with its communal nature are key characteristics of Johannine Spirituality. It enriches existing research on the Spirituality of the Johannine Letters. It also provides an approach that will be used in this thesis.

5. Spirituality and mysticism

A spiritual reading of John's Gospel will, by necessity, attend to mysticism as a key phenomenon. Spirituality has a close relationship with mysticism. The two basically cover the same field. As Waaijman (2002:357) noted:

The basic word mysticism opens up the area of spirituality as a relational process between God and man, a process which has its own language and logic and withdraws itself from the objectivizing gaze of reason. The intimacy of mystical love purifies the intellect, the will, and the memory until they are completely attuned to God. Spirituality understood as mysticism, is at odds with rationality as it has developed in Western culture.

Although they refer to the same field, Spirituality and mysticism can, as the mere use of two concepts shows, be distinguished. Generally, mysticism is regarded as part of, but also more focussed than Spirituality, which has a broader reference to the spiritual life before God. De Villiers (2009a:1) notes: "Therefore mysticism can be seen as a particular field within spirituality."⁷⁶

Much can be said about the quest for a definition. Indeed, there are many definitions of mysticism, because this diverse phenomenon is found in many contexts. This is confirmed by the fact that there are nearly as many definitions of mysticism as there are authors. Writing about Jewish mysticism, Schäfer (2009:1) justly remarks that there is no universally recognised phenomenon of mysticism or notion of mystical experience. As McColman (2010:24) remarks: "Probably the first important thing that needs to be said about mysticism is that you can never adequately put it into words." It is, furthermore, at times, a controversial topic, because, in the words of McGinn (2006:xiii), it brings to mind something strange and uncanny, even bizarre. On the other hand, he correctly maintains that many see mysticism as the hidden core at the heart of all religion, underlying its significance.

The question might be asked as to why there is such a wide range of definitions of mysticism. There are many reasons for that. *First*, the concept of individuality plays a role in this diversity. Reading what mystics wrote over the centuries reveals the vast differences in, among others, their personalities, contexts, and experiences. *Secondly*, culture could have played a part. Differences in religious beliefs and mystical experiences are often the result of cultural influences: "It is this close connection between mystical texts and their cultural environment that makes it so difficult to produce a 'definition' which covers all mystical texts." (De Villiers 2009a:1). *Finally*, historical reasons should also be recognised. It is important to realise that the readers' perspective and their specific religious tradition and Spirituality played an important role in each definition. This is illustrated in Howard's (2008:18-19) comments. He explains the focus of mystics and mysticism in different stages of history. During the early or patristic period, the emphasis was on the

⁷⁶ In another article, De Villiers (2011:107) elaborates on the themes of Spirituality and mysticism: "This essay contributes to the study of Biblical Spirituality with the particular aim to point out how mysticism, as a key focus in Spirituality, has its own particular character in Biblical times. Spirituality and mysticism are always contextual in nature. Biblical Spirituality is therefore confronted with the necessary challenge to understand the context in which Biblical texts functioned. There is a need in Spirituality to clarify the nature of mysticism in Biblical times."

Christians' participation in the objective work of Christ. During the Middle Ages, the interest shifted to the subjective experience of those who were united with Christ, especially in prayer (contemplation). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mysticism became a focus of attention among philosophers and students of religion. Their research focused on special experiences and states of consciousness. During these times, the understanding and focus of mysticism varied.

Having examined the challenges of defining mysticism as well as the reasons for the differences in opinion, it might also help understand what mysticism is not. Mysticism that refers to the divine-human relationship is not necessarily the result of intellectual activities. DeConick (2006:7) mentions the fact that authors of mystical texts appear to rebel against the idea "that the truth about the sacred can be reached through intellectual engagement". These authors suggest that the sacred is encountered first and foremost face to face, through a direct experience of God (DeConick 2006:7-8). Dumm (2001:92) voices another perspective and mentions the fact that mysticism is often misunderstood as referring only to extraordinary phenomena. This is thought to be the province of a few cloistered monks or nuns living isolated from the community and life as most of us know it.

The truth is that the essence of mysticism cannot be captured in human language – indeed not even by the most sublime reaches of human thought. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, a large number of scholars agree on some basic characteristics of mysticism. A first characteristic has to do with union with the divine.⁷⁷ A key word in this regard is *unio mystica*, which needs to be clarified. McGinn (2006:xv) also refers to the importance of the *unio mystica* in the history of mysticism in Christianity and its sister religions. According to De Villiers (2009a:6):

Mysticism, interestingly enough, arises in religious contexts where there is a strong awareness of an unbridgeable gap between God and humanity. It reflects the desire to overcome this abyss between God and humanity so that human beings can find union with God. As a result God is transformed from an object of dogmatic knowledge to be *experienced* by mystics in a new living relationship.

De Villiers (2009a:1) himself chooses to describe mysticism simply and in the widest sense of the word as experiencing the union with God. Dumm (2001:92) explains mysticism as follows:

In simplest terms, mystics are those who enjoy a direct and unmediated experience of God. They are able to understand the true nature and purpose of the many aids or means that seek to put us in touch with God and to come therefore to a deeply personal experience of the divinity. The entire created world becomes in a sense transparent as they realize that God's presence is more real than anything else in creation.

This understanding emphasises that mysticism is about an encounter with the divine and an awareness of the divine presence. It is, therefore, to be understood as part of the divine-human relationship. McGinn (2006:xv) prefers to speak of *presence* instead of *union*: "I believe that the

⁷⁷ Cf. Chapter 6, section 8: "Union as ultimate result of $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ ", for a more in-depth discussion of the concept of unity.

notion of *presence* provides a more inclusive and supple term than *union* for encompassing the variety of ways that mystics have expressed how God comes to transform their minds and lives.”

The notion of experience as characteristic of mysticism deserves more attention. To some scholars, it is an important part of, and key term in mysticism. They argue that the mystical encounter with God is given to a human being as an *experience*. Coloe lists a number of scholars on this matter. She refers first to de la Potterie’s important remark that experience is, according to Huby, “the experiential awakening of the life of grace in the heart”. She agrees with Maréchal, that it is about “the intuition of God’s presence” in love, or, “of the certainty of the presence of [God]”. It thus recalls the awakening of the presence of God in us and us in God.⁷⁸

Both divine presence and human awareness are important in this instance. DeConick (2006:2) regards mysticism in Biblical times as an early Judean and Christian tradition that “cantered on the belief that a person directly or indirectly, immediately, and before death, can experience the divine, either as a rapture experience or as one solicited by a particular praxis”. She continues to explain that early Jews and Christians did not describe their experiences “in terms of the *unio mystica* so central to later Christian mysticism”. This understanding of mysticism emphasises the notions of experience, the divine and the human as well as the directness/indirectness of the experience. A human being encounters the divine through special experiences.

Recent research attempts to avoid the word ‘experience’ because of its negative connotations. McGinn (2006:xv-xvi) explains that, instead of mystical *experience*, he prefers to use the word *consciousness*:

[T]he word *consciousness* as employed here is meant to stress that mysticism (as the mystics have insisted) is more than a matter of unusual sensations, but essentially comprises new ways of knowing and loving based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts, not as an object to be grasped, but as the direct and transforming center of life.

McGinn (2008:44-63) describes Spirituality as a broad term signifying the whole range of beliefs and practices whereby the Christian church strives to live out its commitment to the Spirit present in the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 6:14-20; 2 Corinthians 3:17). Mysticism, he adds, is the inner and hidden realisation of Spirituality through a transforming consciousness of God’s immediate presence. The goal of spiritual practices is, therefore, mysticism. It does indeed make sense to use ‘consciousness’ rather than ‘experience’.

Another key aspect of mysticism has to do with the notion of hiddenness. Mysticism has a revelatory character insofar as it reveals what was previously not known.⁷⁹ Howard (2008:18-19) is of the opinion that mysticism has its roots in that which is secret or hidden:

⁷⁸ Cf. Coloe (2007:200).

⁷⁹ Cf. McGinn (2008:44-63).

For the early Christians, what was hidden is now made known through Christ: hidden meanings of Scripture are now revealed, the mysteries of the sacraments are now available to those who participate. The phrase *mystical theology* expresses the character of the Christian's relationship with God now revealed through Christ and the Spirit in the church.

Mysticism thus has overtones of union with God: for some, certain experiences, and for others, the experience of the divine presence. The mystical encounter with God in Christ is, therefore, as awakening, an experience that makes one aware of a hidden, profound truth. A more detailed analysis of the characteristics of mysticism will be dealt with later in this section.

A final word by McColman (2010:8) is necessary, in this instance. He refers to the fact that mysticism comprises an element of mystery. In general, he states: "Christian mysticism invites us to look at God, Christ, the church, our own souls, and our understanding of such things as sin or holiness in new ways." He then refers to the paradox of mystical experience: "Here is a central truth about Christian mysticism: the more it reveals, the more it conceals. Mysticism is concerned with mystery – spiritual mystery."

6. Research on mysticism

Any mystical reading of John's Gospel will have to account for research that has been done in New Testament Studies on mysticism, in general, and on the relationship of John's Gospel with mysticism, in particular. An overview of this history reveals that important work discloses not only the validity of investigating John's Gospel from a mystical perspective, but also the material that will empower a mystical reading of John 15. Only a brief summary will be given of some results that analyse previous work on the Gospel's mystical nature. The summary will also investigate mystical elements in John's Gospel. The focus will especially be on insights about the mystical context for the Johannine use of μένειν.

First, research on mysticism in general will be analysed, with a focus on Waaijman's (2003) contribution towards understanding the mystical experience. The value of Waaijman's article lies in its comprehensive approach to mysticism. This will be followed by a discussion of possible related movements that could have influenced John's Gospel. Schäfer (2009) will shed more light on this matter and will help clarify questions about Jewish mysticism as well as Merkabah mysticism that existed in the times of Early Christianity and in the context of the Johannine texts. This is crucial in the search for sources that could have influenced the author of John's Gospel. This will be followed by a discussion of mysticism in John's Gospel. Apart from the cursory overview of traditional commentaries on John, special attention will be paid to Kanagaraj (1998). Currently, Kanagaraj's research on the similarities between the Merkabah mysticism and the Gospel is useful as framework for this research project.

All of the above sources will, each in its own way, help lay a solid base for validating a mystical reading of the Fourth Gospel. The first to be dealt with is Waaijman's contribution.

6.1 Characteristics of mystical experiences

In his phenomenological analysis of the mystical experience, Waaijman (2003:57-79) listed ten characteristics. Crucial to Waaijman's approach to mysticism is that the mystical experience is all-encompassing and comprehensive. The mystical experience affects the whole person, the centre of the personhood, behaviour and thought patterns, affective structures, relationships, social and cultural experience as well as the interaction with nature.⁸⁰ This comprehensive reading of the mystical experience varies in many ways.

Waaijman's phenomenological approach takes its point of departure in the life situation of the object of research. This determines the outcomes of his analysis and confirms what Schäfer will stress later on in this section. Waaijman's approach decodes the experiential reality of the mystical experience as it is revealed in various forms and paradigmata. Yet he moves beyond such an analytical approach to a synthetic approach by spelling out the basic structure that characterises the forms and paradigmata.⁸¹ An investigation of the various phenomena reveals that these experiences are not bound to specific situations. Mystical experiences are found in various contexts. Sometimes, for example, they are found within the personal sphere (*wezensmistiek*), that is, within mystics themselves. They also occur within relationships with others such as family members, as in the mystical experience of Martin Buber in his interaction with his family, friends and artists, for example.⁸² In other instances, mystical experiences occur in societal contexts such as in the case of Franciscus from Assisi's encounter with lepers, for example. Lastly, there are instances emanating from experiences with nature. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reports on these experiences with nature.⁸³

In this description, Waaijman points out the various forms of the mystical experience. He also works with these forms in terms of a historical and contextual analysis. Like Schäfer, later on, he does not observe a linear growth between these various forms. He does, however, list some characteristics that are common to his objects of research. An overview of these characteristics will provide tools for interpreting John's Gospel in order to determine how useful these insights may be in order to understand John's Gospel.

6.1.1 Prayerful longing

One of the first characteristics of the mystical experience is the orientation towards God. Phenomenologically speaking, the mystical experience is already recognised in the longing and desire for God as it is expressed in prayer, for example. For this analysis, Waaijman draws on the profound insight of the twelfth-century Carthusian monk, Guigo, who stressed that the encounter with God as contemplation is hardly ever, or, only as a miracle, given without prayer. This prayer

⁸⁰ Waaijman (2003:58) explains: “[H]eel de mens wordt door de mystieke ervaring geraakt: zijn persoonskern, zijn gedrags- en denkpatronen, zijn affectieve structuren, zijn relaties, zijn maatschappelijk en cultureel beleven en zijn omgang met de natuur.”

⁸¹ Waaijman (2003:60): “Onze typologie is fenomenologisch ingesteld. Zij is bedoeld om het werkelijkheidsgebied van de mystieke ervaring te ontsluiten en in zijn grondstructuur te verstaan.”

⁸² According to Waaijman (2003:58), this experience is typical of what is found among the Chassidim.

⁸³ Waaijman (2003:58) refers to his Hymn of the Universe (“Hymne aan de stof”).

must, however, not be confused with the general spiritual practice of saying prayers, but rather, as Waaijman (in agreement with Guigo) stresses, the God-relatedness that permeates all spiritual practices.⁸⁴ According to Guigo, prayer is the dedicated orientation of the heart towards God and of a focus on God. The prayer is the asking part of the longing and is the longing. The mystical experience is the gift of grace that represents the other side of the longing. The praying person experiences something like a ‘holy intervention’ when God hastens to meet the longing soul and its desires even before the end of the prayer.

6.1.2 The presence of the experiential kernel

Closely linked to the previous characteristic is that, at a certain stage, the mystic becomes aware of God’s mystical intervention and presence. The real change in the field of the mystical experience occurs when the centre of the action shifts. The presence of what is being experienced becomes dominant. The object of the experience, of the prayerful longing, becomes the subject of the acting as the longing recedes into the background for the divine presence to move into the foreground. God is no longer the object of one’s longing, the one who is perceived to be on the horizon of the longing as the one listening to prayers. The longing is replaced by the overwhelming experience of God’s presence.

6.1.3 Ecstasy

Mysticism is often associated with ecstasy as a key term. Waaijman also includes ecstasy in his list, but interprets it differently than in some contexts where ecstasy is sometimes associated with extraordinary phenomena such as visions, stigmata, and the gift of tears. He indicates that these phenomena draw attention to the fact that a human being lacks the capacity to comprehend the divine and is, therefore, derailed by the divine presence. Ecstasy means the stepping out of a human person from him-/herself when s/he is grasped by the divine. Ecstasy is an extension of prayer; it is prayer, stripped of every human will to self-expression. This does not necessarily mean unusual, extraordinary experiences. It can be as mundane and common an experience as when believers, while reading Scripture, are being grasped, carried away beyond a sense of time and space, and drawn into the joyous experience of new insights in a well-known text.⁸⁵

6.1.4 Detachment and surrender

The multifaceted nature of the mystical experience is further evident when Waaijman continues to expand on the notion of ecstasy, with a discussion of detachment and surrender. The ecstasy that was

⁸⁴ Waaijman (2003:60): “Het gebed waarop Guigo doelt, is geen geestelijke oefening (het zeggen van gebeden), maar de Godsbetrokkenheid die alle geestelijke oefeningen doortrek[t].”

⁸⁵ For Dionysius, according to Waaijman (2003:62), the essence of the mystical experience is “de ontrukking aan zichzelf (raptus), het buiten-zichzelf-staan (ekstasis), een toestand die erin bestaat ‘niet op onszelf te zijn, maar heelemaal van onszelf af te staan en heelemaal van God te worden.’”

experienced during the shift in action implies a moment of detachment. During the mystical experience, the mystic is no longer the centre of his/her action and of his/her consciousness, as s/he was prior to the mystical experience, and experiences detachment. Without this detachment, the mystical transformation cannot be completed in the mystic.

Detachment implies that the one praying must let go of the constant focus on the self, must forget about him-/herself, in order to reach a condition of non-consciousness. Along the road, the mystic must become “Nothing” (*Niets*)⁸⁶ in comparison with God, the all-embracing focal point. In this instance, too, the nature of the detachment can be expressed in rather mundane terms. In practice, it could mean reading Scripture freed from omniscience, willing to surrender all preconceived ideas, including theological, denominational, ideological, gender, and racial ones. In some sense, it could suggest an insight like that of John the Baptist in John 3:30: “He must become greater; I must become less.”⁸⁷

6.1.5 Passivity and immediacy

Waaijman (2003:63-64) also offers more insight into the divine-human relationship with still another dimension of the mystical experience. The shifting of the centre of action brings about a consciousness that the mystic is no longer the centre of existence, but is being moved through God. As the process develops, the mystic increasingly experiences loss of control. This results in a passivity that implies that God is in control of the mystical process.

Waaijman (2003:64) underlines that this passivity is dialogical in nature. What happens with, and in the mystic is no longer the result of his/her own intentions, but in totality the result of the new control centre. Waaijman uses Buber’s language to point out that this development oscillates between the “I” and the “Thou”. The transformational inworking of the “Thou” results in the formation, the birth of a new “I”.⁸⁸ The divine-human relationship thus has a formative influence on the human pole. Waaijman’s description reminds one of such important concepts as new birth in John’s Gospel. God alone is in control of this process, which requires leaving behind any ideas or activities of self-control in order to reach complete

⁸⁶ In explaining this crucial concept, Waaijman (2003:63) also refers to Schatz’s view: “Het subject wordt losgemaakt van zijn op-zich-zijn: ‘Eerst moeten we onze levenskracht onthechten aan de materiële (zich tot zichzelf beperkende, K.W.) gedachten en aan het op-ons-zelf-betrokken-zijn, om de poort van het Niets binnen te gaan. Daarna zullen we als vanzelf verkleefd raken met de Oorzaak van alle oorzaken.’”

⁸⁷ Von Wahlde (2010b:162-163) understands this verse within the context of a marriage referred to in the preceding verses. It introduces the metaphor of Jesus as the Bridegroom and John the Baptist as his friend. The emphasis is on the joy at the arrival of the bridegroom. It can also be understood as an image of the relation between the main figure and the helper whose function is only temporary. The Baptist is not surprised by the fact that his disciples are now going over to become the disciples of Jesus (Von Wahlde 2010b:163): “In humble acknowledgement of his role, John the Baptist expresses his wish that the success of Jesus continues and increase[s] and that his own role diminish[es].” Michaels (2010:221) concludes about John’s attitude: “He retains control over his destiny precisely by yielding control to Jesus, and to the God who ‘sent’ them both (see 1:6; 3:17, 28, 34)”. Bruner (2012:221) contextualises the verse by commenting on the Baptist’s attitude: “He apparently believes that it is possible to be so consumed with Christ’s increase that one can actually be content to be less significant oneself. This is the mystery of authentic ministry. Who of us can say we have attained this poised self-diminution? It is a goal greatly to be desired.”

⁸⁸ Waaijman (2003:63) refers to a remark by Buber: “‘Ik word aan het jij, ik wordend zeg ik jij,’ vertolk treffend deze passief ondergane inwerking. De inwerking van het Jij is de wording van het ik.’”

transformation.⁸⁹ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 when dealing with the human response to the divine initiative.

Passivity as an aspect of the mystical experience is closely linked with the notion of immediacy, which indicates that God's transformation of the mystic is realised without interference or intermediary. There is no intermediary between the mystic and God.⁹⁰

6.1.6 Union

As God took over all control, the mystic becomes part of God's working and shares in God's unity. The separation between an object-there and a subject-here is transcended in the mystic who is incorporated into God's singularity, past any diversity (multiplicity), even past the dichotomy subject-object. As an example of this mystical insight, Waaijman follows Dionysius who uses Moses as the prototype of a mystic in terms of the narrative about Mt Sinai when the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:21). When Moses reached the dark cloud, he had done all in his power. The time has come to surrender, to hand over all control to God. Thus, Moses enters the dark cloud of not-knowing. He is freed from all desire to control. The urge to see and to gain some knowledge has subsided. All of these have been quieted when he entered the dark cloud where God is. He now experiences what is untouchable and invisible, and Moses belongs to the One that is beyond all, including what can be seen or known.⁹¹

In the New Testament, Paul explains the intimacy of his relationship with Christ when he uses the expression "in Christ", "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:19-20). This will be revealed in more detail by John's use of the verb μένειν. This will be addressed in the mystical reading in Chapters 8-10.

6.1.7 Contemplation

Contemplation is another key dimension of the mystical experience. The mystic is not absent-minded, unconscious or asleep. The mystic has an undeniable sense of clarity and knowledge of love in the mystical experience that lies beyond an objective knowledge gained from a distance, or gained apart from this newly acquired unity. The mystic becomes aware of the loving gaze of God, while feeling completely at ease and with a constant sense of reverence and awe.

⁸⁹ Waaijman (2003:64) refers to Blommestijn who explains this in more detail: "Daar moet de ziel alles achterwege laten – haar daden, haar vormen, haar zuchten, haar blikken en haar subtiele bewegingen, haar zeer eenvoudige bewogenheid – om zich voortaan op passieve wijze door God te laten bewegen en in beroering en verrukking te laten brengen binnen de kring van zijn onmetelijk vuur. In dit citaat van Jean Saint-Samson zien we hoe de extase (verrukking in God), de nietiging (alles achterwege laten; de mystieke dood) en de passiviteit (door God bewogen worden) in elkaar grijpen."

⁹⁰ This mystical passivity and direct inworking of God should not be confused with quietism. Waaijman (2003:64) explains this in more detail.

⁹¹ For Waaijman (2003:65), this can be summarised as follows: "De mysticus is één met Gods werking, die heel zijn kennen, willen en herinneren vervult. Hij vereent zich door de onwerkzaamheid van al zijn kennen met het volledig Onkenbare en kent de door niets te kennen 'bovengeestelijke.'"

6.1.8 Indwelling

Once drawn into the unfathomable clarity of God's love, the mystic's being is permeated by God. This could be compared with a piece of wood in the fire: while the wood is wrapped up in the fire, the fire reaches the wood's pith. Likewise, the indwelling of God touches the most intimate part of the soul. It is more internal than the most intimate part of the soul. Meister Eckhart refers to it as the little castle of the soul which is one and singular (Waaijman 2003:66). God dwells in that most inward space of the soul. In this mystical oneness, God reveals himself to the soul as being its real essence.⁹² This indwelling is seminal for the understanding of John 15, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 under μένειν in light of the human reaction.

6.1.9 Reciprocity

As pointed out earlier, mysticism is about an intimate relationship in union with God. This relationship can, however, be clarified by mutuality, as another significant aspect of the mystical experience. The soul's experience of ecstasy in God, and the indwelling by God in the soul come to full fruition in reciprocity. Waaijman (2003:67) takes over the images that John of the Cross used about the love relationship between God and the soul: in their relationship, the lovers are so transformed by their mutual love that the one becomes the other and together they become as one.⁹³

6.1.10 Lasting impact

The mystical experience inevitably has an impact on daily life and in society. For many, this lasting impact is considered a sign of authenticity: the good fruit is characteristic of the good tree. A living relationship with God results in an overflowing fountain of goodness. The inner transformation of the mystic becomes visible in a new way of life, whether it is by words or actions, work or leisure, solitude or koinonia. All of this is the result of the mystical transformation by love: it cannot be kept secret. This love overflows in abundant streams of goodness and wellness wherever it is needed.⁹⁴

Waaijman (2003:68) emphasises that the lasting impact of the mystical experience belongs to its essence. As the mystical experience inclines forward, it is depicted against the background of prayerful longing, backwards it is depicted against the reality of daily life and society, in general. The lasting impact manifests itself as the mystical way, the ongoing effect of the mystical experience in life and society. The water paved its way and now the river is flowing ...

⁹² Waaijman (2003:66) quotes Maas to illustrate this reality: "Hier is Gods grond mijn grond. Hier leef ik uit mijn meest eigene, zoals God uit zijn meest eigene leeft."; "In deze doorbraak valt mij ten deel, dat ik en God één zijn."

⁹³ Waaijman (2003:67) explains this: "De reden is, dat in de eenheid en de omvorming van de liefde de een zichzelf als bezit aan de ander geeft en ieder zich overgeeft en verruilt voor de ander. Zo leeft ieder in de ander, en zijn beiden één door omvorming in liefde."

⁹⁴ Waaijman (2003:67-68) elaborates: "Eckhart vergelijkt deze mystieke doorwerking met een maagd die vrouw is, 'Zij brengt veel vruchten voort en die zijn niet gering: niet minder en niet meer dan God zelf.'" He also quotes Buber to illuminate the relationship between the experience and the lasting impact: "Zoals men met het naakte jij op de lippen in de ontmoeting (met het eeuwigen Jij, K.W.) geraakt, zo wordt men met ditzelfde lippen uit haar naar de wereld teruggestuurd."

6.1.11 Conclusion

This general analysis is a model that helps illuminate the nature of a mystical experience. Not all texts will display all characteristics that Waaijman spells out, and the characteristics also overlap. The model will provide a heuristic tool with which to interpret a mystical text. Some characteristics will be found in John's Gospel, while others may be missing or of secondary importance only.

7. Mystical movements in the time of John

Having discussed mysticism and its meaning, it should be emphasised that the previous remarks refer to insights that are valid for mystical texts across the spectrum and throughout many ages. The basic categories that characterise a mystical text represent only one perspective. Each and every mystical text will reflect these basic elements in different forms, given their particular context. To understand John's Gospel, one has to investigate mystical traditions and movements that existed at the time when John's Gospel was written, because they offer a distinct presentation of mystical characteristics. This contextual analysis will help illuminate the interpretation of the Gospel. This does not necessarily mean that John used or was influenced by such sources. But, these traditions and sources reveal that mysticism was known in those times in various contexts and among different groups.

7.1 Jewish mysticism

Mysticism is not an exclusive Christian tradition. It is also an established, early movement in Judaism, as Schäfer's thorough investigation of the origins of Jewish mysticism indicates.⁹⁵ His important contribution is to raise awareness that mysticism is strongly determined by its historical context. Schäfer criticised the way in which contemporary research failed to recognise the differences between contemporary Christian mysticism and early Jewish mystical texts. He emphasised that one should avoid understanding mysticism in terms of the later Christian characteristic of *unio mystica* or the complete unity of the soul with God as its goal.

According to Schäfer (2009:353), all the phenomena collected in, and described under the literature he investigated, resist the modern scholar's desire to subsume them under a single all-embracing category. To draw his conclusions, he analysed the following as possible mystical traditions in early Judaism: material from the book of Ezekiel; the ascent apocalypses revolving around Enoch; ascent apocalypses by a variety of heroes including Abraham, Isaiah, Zephaniah and John; literature preserved in the Qumran community; material from the philosopher Philo; the complex and extensive rabbinic evidence of Ezekiel's Merkabah (two chapters), and finally the Merkabah mystics. While stressing their own unique forms, Schäfer (2009:353) also added that they do, despite their differences, share a basic conviction:

⁹⁵ Cf. Schäfer (2009).

What nevertheless unites all these variegated efforts is the craving of their authors to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, between human beings and heavenly powers, between man and God. In most cases it is the attempt to *restore* the lost relationship of some ancient and originally whole past: because the Temple as the natural venue for the encounter between God and his human creatures on earth has been destroyed or polluted or usurped by a competing community; because the soul, severed from its divine origin has been entombed in its human body.

All the sources focus on returning to God as closely as possible, in order “to experience the living and loving God, despite the desolate situation on earth with all its shortcomings and catastrophes”.⁹⁶

The experience of a living and loving God (that is not about a *unio mystica*) constitutes the particularly *Jewish* form of mysticism in contrast to, for example, later forms of Christian mysticism.

Schäfer’s analysis of Jewish mysticism shows that mysticism was known to groups and expressed in texts already at an early stage. At the same time, he made researchers aware to be specific about mystical movements and texts. They belong to a particular setting, group, location, and time. Schäfer rightly shies away from an essentialist understanding of mysticism, because mysticism is so divergent and contextual.

7.2 Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Jewish mysticism

Hellenistic mysticism was one of the mystical traditions at the time when the Fourth Gospel was written, best known from the *Hermetica*.⁹⁷ A characteristic feature of Hellenistic mysticism is concerned with the knowledge of God and having union with him, so that one can become God. One of the main reasons why such mysticism would not fit a Jewish-Christian tradition is the deification of the mystic.⁹⁸ It would contradict its monotheistic nature and the distinction upheld between the Creator and the created. Some Hellenistic ideas such as sending and witnessing do fit into John’s thought and could suggest that John knew Hellenistic mysticism. Kanagaraj (1998:311) is of the opinion that the total picture of those concepts in John rather point to the Merkabah mystical background that was prevalent at the time of John than to influences from Hellenistic sources.

Hellenistic-Jewish mysticism differed from Hellenistic mysticism. Philo of Alexandria is often mentioned as a representative of this tradition. He highlights two aspects of the yearning of the human soul, namely to see God and to have union with him. The communication between God and humanity normally takes place through the Logos as mediator. There are pronouncements in his writings that refer to a union

⁹⁶ Cf. Schäfer (2009:353).

⁹⁷ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:67) who investigated Hellenistic mysticism in the *Hermetica* as one of the forms known at the time the Fourth Gospel was written. In his systematic study of the *Hermetica*, Dodd (1953:10-53) describes the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum* as a collection of writings extant in Greek for the most part produced in Egypt in the second and third centuries A.D. Dodd (1953:12) declares: “The *Hermetica* in fact are monuments of the cross-fertilization of Greek and oriental thought which was characteristic of the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.” Regarding their doctrines, Dodd (1953:15) states: “It is clear that the Hermetists believed that their theological, cosmological and anthropological dogmas had in some sense saving power ... many of them indicate that at its best γνῶσις is knowledge of God, and not merely knowledge about Him.”

⁹⁸ However, the issues of deification should be treated carefully, as Genesis 1:27 is a very important text in the Jewish and Christian spiritual tradition and the creation in the image and likeness of God is at times linked to the Platonic idea of becoming like God, imitating God.

with God through the Logos, with parallels in John's teaching of indwelling and knowing.⁹⁹ Both Philo and John show familiarity with the human ascent to God. Towards the end of his investigation, Kanagaraj (1998:312) reaches a crucial conclusion:

The close link that exists between the Johannine Logos and the concepts of $\phi\omega\varsigma$, $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$, $\zeta\omega\eta$ and a broader picture of divine revelation points to Merkabah mysticism as the best possible source of inspiration for John.

These remarks underline the fact that Merkabah mysticism will have to be dealt with in more detail. Therefore, Palestinian mysticism will be explored next.

7.3 Palestinian mysticism

Another form of mysticism in the time of John's Gospel is to be found in Palestinian mysticism, of which Merkabah mysticism is the best known example. Kanagaraj (1998:87-103) investigated mystical elements in *The Wisdom of ben Sira*,¹⁰⁰ and *The Qumran literature*,¹⁰¹ as well as typical Merkabah mystical aspects in the six apocalyptic books believed to have been written in the late first century, namely *The Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37-71); the *Slavonic Book of Enoch* (2 Enoch); the *Fourth Book of Ezra*; *The Apocalypse of Abraham*; the *Testament of Abraham*, and the *Book of Revelation*. Evidence of Merkabah mysticism in the Christian era can be found in the heavenly ascent of key figures such as Paul, Isaiah, and Moses.¹⁰²

Apocalypticism and Merkabah mysticism have in common the ideas of an ascent to heaven, angels, and the revelation of the heavenly realms, although with different emphases. Dunn (1983:323-324) noted this in his discussion of Merkabah mystical traditions,¹⁰³ with their claim to direct knowledge of heavenly mysteries that were revealed through a vision or an ascent to heaven. He refers, for example, to Enoch, Abraham, Adam, Baruch, and Isaiah. Waaijman (2003:73-74), in turn, refers to Jewish mystics in the Talmudic period who were described as ascending to the seventh heaven and standing in awe in the glorious presence of God sitting on his throne-chariot (Merkabah). Preparations for this journey included prayer and

⁹⁹ For detail of the research results, cf. Kanagaraj (1998:75-77) who investigated the writings of Philo of Alexandria, the only Hellenistic Jew contemporary with the origins of Christianity.

¹⁰⁰ An example of the value of this investigation is Kanagaraj's (1998:102) observation that, because of his opposition to the attention drawn by Ezekiel's vision of God's glory to the chariot, Ben Sira's exhortation not to be preoccupied by matters beyond one's ability could have included the Merkabah mystical interest in an ascent to heaven to see God and to know cosmological secrets.

¹⁰¹ The outcome of this analysis is illustrated when Kanagaraj (1998:102) identifies three elements as "mystical" in the Qumran community: the angelology; God's glory as king on the royal throne-chariot, and esotericism: "The Qumranites believed that the angels who attend the throne-chariot of God represent for them the glory of God."

¹⁰² Kanagaraj (1998:114) believes that this investigation proves beyond doubt that Merkabah mysticism was known and practised in the first century. The major aspect of mysticism is an ascent to heaven to encounter God. As a Jew, Paul was familiar with Merkabah mysticism, given his reference to the fact that he was taken up to the third heaven or Paradise where he could have seen Christ. The mystical interests of Christians are also reflected in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, which mentions that Isaiah saw Christ in his glory and particularly his descent and ascent. Regarding Moses, he refers to Meeks' study (1967), indicating that the mystical tradition centred on Moses' ascent to God was alive in some Jewish circles.

¹⁰³ About the traces of Merkabah mysticism, Gruenwald (1980:vii) states: "The earliest post biblical traces of Merkabah mysticism are found in apocalyptic literature and in some of the texts discovered at Qumran. However, the literature that first gives a full-scale presentation of Merkabah mysticism is called the *Hekhalot* ("Divine Palaces") literature, mainly composed in Eretz-Yisrael at the time of the Talmud and the beginning of the Geonic period (circa 200-700 CE)."

whispering words of praise with the head between the knees. This pilgrimage took the mystic through heavily guarded gates, through which only those who knew the correct names and access codes could gain access. The journey became increasingly dangerous until the successful candidate reached the seventh heaven where he was transformed.

All these texts indicate that Merkabah mysticism was present in pre- and post-70 CE apocalyptic among both Jews and Christians. Already in the time of John, some leading rabbis of Judaism practised mysticism. Merkabah mystical elements are found in key passages such as Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6, and Daniel 7:9-14, representing all major elements of Merkabah mysticism found in the *Hekhalot* literature, except the heavenly ascents.¹⁰⁴ Of importance is the remark that follows after this list (Kanagaraj 1998:179-180): “These 14 aspects of Palestinian mysticism, which can primarily be known as ‘Merkabah mysticism’, can be treated as a definition of mysticism.”

Although these insights are valuable for an understanding of Merkabah mystical texts, listing the contents of such texts does not suffice to define it. One will also have to investigate the form and function of these texts. Some indication of the function of these texts is perceptible in an observation by Kanagaraj (1998:179) who notes that the main reason for such an interest is a sincere longing for closeness to God, which was probably the result of the calamity of 70 CE when Jerusalem was destroyed. Mystical texts served both to console their readers that God was present in their lives, despite the absence of the temple and city, and to emphasize the importance of Scripture. The study of Scripture and reflection on its meaning became an instrument to overcome the alienation caused by the experience. For the study of John’s Gospel, it then becomes important to be aware of the way in which John interprets his traditions and of the meaning he allocates to Scriptural passages.

7.4 John’s Gospel and Merkabah mysticism

The discussion thus far has shown how recent research investigated mystical texts that existed in the time of John’s Gospel. The most useful insights for an interpretation of John’s Gospel are to be found in Merkabah mysticism, especially in its early forms. This is indicated by a remark of DeConick (2001:51, 63) who observed the following about the first-century context of Early Christianity:

[T]here is a growing number of scholars, myself included, who contend that there was some precursor in the first century to later Merkabah and Hekhalot mysticism. Thus our first certain reference to a Merkabah vision occurs in the Qumran literature, a literature that may represent a community of Jewish mystics who liturgically built the heavenly Temple in their midst each Sabbath and entered it to worship alongside the angels before God’s throne-chariot.

¹⁰⁴ He continues by listing the major elements of the experience that was later called *Merkabah mysticism* (Kanagaraj 1998:179-180): an ascent to heaven; the descent of God’s glory; throne-chariot; God’s self-revelation; streams of fire/light; retinue of angels; one like a man or Son of Man; God’s judgement; cosmological/heavenly secrets; transformation of the visionary; communal mysticism; *The Ma`aseh Bereshit* revealed God by his name: ‘I am/I will be there; the early traditions of the *Ma`aseh Bereshit* and the *Ma`aseh Merkabah* were esoteric and were revealed only to the initiates.

This insight correlates with what other scholars specifically wrote about John's Gospel and Merkabah mystics. Meeks (1972:46, 52) argued, in his now well-known article, that a Jewish Wisdom myth lies behind both the Johannine Christology and the gnostic soul and saviour myths. He also refers to the influence of the so-called Merkabah mysticism and to early research on this matter:

As Odeberg showed, the exclusivity of the revelation by the Son of Man must be construed as a polemic, not against claims of other gnostic revealers but against the claim of prophets or seers to have received revelations by means of "heavenly journeys," as for example in apocalyptic or in the merkabah speculation, or in the traditions of the theophany's to Moses and the Patriarchs.¹⁰⁵

Soon after Meeks' article was published, Kysar (1975:127) investigated the context of passages such as John 15 and argued that it did not originate from only one source and that it reveals possible similarities with mystical thought. He wrote:

[T]here is evidence that it was a Judaism infected by certain gnostic mythologies such as the redeemer concept, and that it was in some ways similar to later Jewish mystical sects. Those influences, plus the author's own creative mind, were the ingredients which formed the metaphors and speeches of the allegorical passages.¹⁰⁶

The relationship of John's Gospel to these other mystical traditions was interpreted differently. Dunn (1989:253, 259) finds no explanation in pre-Christian Judaism or religions of the Hellenistic world for the doctrine of incarnation and intermediary beings, apart from Christianity. He writes:

Where similar beliefs concerning heavenly redeemers did emerge it is more likely that the influence ran the other way. The doctrine of the incarnation began to emerge when the exalted Christ was spoken of in terms drawn from the Wisdom imagery of pre-Christian Judaism and only in the Fourth Gospel can we speak of a doctrine of incarnation.¹⁰⁷

The relationship of John's Gospel to mystical traditions will help explain important aspects of the text. Research has indicated that one should not overdo the link between them. It is to be expected that the Old Testament and other Jewish traditions played a major role in the Gospel. An overwhelming number of scholars draw attention to the influence of the Old Testament and other traditions on John, with hardly any or no references to mystical traditions. This is also the case regarding John 15. Many suggestions have been made, for example, about a possible background for its imagery of the vine and the branches. Brown (1982b:669-672) gives a good overview of the possibilities. He mentions that some scholars stress the Old Testament and Jewish writings, while

¹⁰⁵ Cf. also Meeks' (1972:59) reference regarding the statement to Nicodemus that only the Son of Man ascends and descends, not angels, or Merkabah visionaries.

¹⁰⁶ Brodie (1993b:9) concludes: "John has filtered and synthesized virtually the whole spectrum of contemporary Jewish writing and thought." Schneiders (2003:36) calls the Old Testament the "background music" for understanding John's Gospel. These authors thus emphasise the close relationship of John's Gospel with the Old Testament, confirming the Jewish nature of the Gospel and suggesting that mystical elements in the Gospel would relate to Jewish mystical traditions.

¹⁰⁷ Coloe (2001:60) points out that the Targums shows close parallels to some Johannine terms and concepts. Depending on clear dating, Scriptures from the Palestinian synagogues offer a more likely Johannine source for the logos concept than Philo of Alexandria.

others have turned to Gnostic and Mandaean sources. He favours the Old Testament and Palestinian Judaism.¹⁰⁸ Examples of such links abound. Barrett (1978:471), who described the vine as one of the most prized of plants that, in allegorical usage, naturally represents the most privileged among nations and men, refers to passages such as Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2ff.; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10ff.; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:5ff.; 19:10-14; Psalms 80:9-16. He does, however, show how John creatively understood this material. Barrett (1978:470) links John 15 with the supper of John 13 to suggest a eucharistic understanding of the symbolism of the vine. John is speaking of the union of believers with Christ when he uses the image of the vine: “This union, originating in his initiative and sealed by his death on their behalf, is completed by the believers’ responsive love and obedience, and is the essence of Christianity.”¹⁰⁹ Harrington (1999:72) also finds the roots of the vine in the Old Testament designation of Israel as the vine of Yahweh.¹¹⁰ This is then applied to Jesus who declares that he himself, and not the Israel of old, is the genuine vine of God. It thus stresses the intimate relationship between the branches and stock within the vine. In addition, Jesus stresses the union between him and the disciples. As the “true vine”, Jesus is the source of real life. The Father remains the source for the productivity of the vine.¹¹¹ This special relationship with the Old Testament does not, however, exclude that John wrote his Gospel in a time that mystical thought, in some way or other, presented material in ways that were similar to his Gospel.

The above diverse interpretations show how the understanding of themes in John 15 depends on the perspective of the researchers and the way in which they relate the Gospel to its context. For the present research project, it is assumed that the vine metaphor stems from the Old Testament, from Israel as the vine of Jahweh, and is applied to Jesus as the true vine. At the same time, it will be pointed out how this is integrated in material that has a mystical nature.

7.5 Kanagaraj on Merkabah mysticism and John

An important milestone in research on mysticism in the Fourth Gospel was reached with the publication of Kanagaraj’s book on this theme. This Ph.D. dissertation was written at the University of Durham in 1995 under the supervision of the well-known New Testament scholar, James Dunn. The thesis was finalised as “Mysticism in the Gospel of John – An inquiry into its background”,

¹⁰⁸ Among specific passages, Brown (1982b:672) suggested Psalm 80:9-14 and Ezekiel 37 as context for John’s *mashal* of the vine and branches: “Granting the originality of John’s thought, we suggest that the Old Testament and Judaism supplied the raw material from which the *mashal* was composed.” Lee (2002:93) also traces the background of the image of the vine and the branches to the Old Testament and mentions Psalm 80:9-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-8, 19:10-14. Cf. further Schnackenburg (1982:106) and Dodd (1953:136, 411).

¹⁰⁹ Bultmann (1971:8) discusses the meaning of the symbol in terms of the influence of Gnosticism on the Gospel, with its closest parallels in the Mandaean writings: “In these Mandaean revelatory addresses are also to be found parabolic sayings that characterise the Revealer as the good Shepherd, the real vine, etc.”

¹¹⁰ He refers to Isaiah 15:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-8; Psalms 80:8-19 as examples. Harrington’s remarks also provide some insights that will be further developed during the ensuing mystical readings.

¹¹¹ Some researchers read the image of the vine more literally. Keener (2003b:990-991) agrees that Greek readers would have recognised the image of God as a farmer who cultivates the world, but for him the vine figure undoubtedly stems from the Bible.

indicating Dunn's interest in the mystical nature of John's Gospel. Kanagaraj refers to Dunn's (1983:311) remarks that inspired his research:

Consequently *the task of setting John in its historical context must be given a place of priority* into the gospel and the Fourth Gospel. Unfortunately it is a task which has often been ignored, or which has been pursued without sufficient care. In both cases, because the historical context has not been clarified, John has been *misunderstood*, the Fourth Gospel has not been heard in its own terms, John has not allowed to be John (Italics Dunn's).

The crucial question that Kanagaraj wanted to answer is whether the Gospel of John is a mystical document. To answer this question, he aimed to clarify what is meant by mysticism and what forms of mysticism were known at the time when John wrote his Gospel. His own proposal is that Merkabah mysticism is the most probable option. Kanagaraj's outline of this question is significant, because it can easily happen that modern ways of understanding mysticism can be transferred in an invalid manner to an ancient text such as John's Gospel. It is also important, because it accounts for a key perspective on mysticism, namely that mystical thought is consistently contextual in nature. In antiquity, mystics presented their mystical contents in terms of insights and traditions that were available to them at that time. In that sense, their mysticism may seem different from mystical texts of later times. Kanagaraj (1998:184), therefore, notes how scholars were tracing mystical elements in John by uncritically adopting the *unio mystica* view or the common *communio mystica*: "They approach the text anachronistically with contemporary understandings of mysticism and fail to ask what type of mysticism was prevalent in the religio-historical context of John." In addition, Kanagaraj approached (see discussion below) the theme from a methodologically sound perspective: in order to read a text from a mystical perspective, the researcher should be clear in explaining how mysticism is understood.

Kanagaraj's valuable contribution is to be found in his discussion of how John's Gospel reflects some key characteristics of Merkabah mysticism. These mystical aspects were presented in a way that was typical of first-century thought. The aim of Kanagaraj's investigation, therefore, is to determine, in light of this contextual information, whether the Gospel of John is a mystical document, and if it is, to know the nature and purpose of John's mysticism.

Based on the mystical currents at the time of John, Part 3 of the book examines more closely some of the special patterns of language used in the Gospel.¹¹² The seven aspects will not be discussed in detail, but will receive attention based on their relevance for the current study.¹¹³

¹¹² The ideas discussed in this section are based on the preceding investigation into the literature from Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic-Jewish Mysticism as in Philo, and Palestine Jewish mysticism as described by Kanagaraj (1998:184-185).

¹¹³ The seven key motifs based on Kanagaraj's (1988:186ff.) research are: ascent, glory, king, sending, indwelling, light, and the Logos.

7.5.1 The ascent motif in John

One of the key motifs of early mystical texts is that a visionary experiences a journey into heaven where revelations are given to him/her.¹¹⁴ This is often accompanied by ascetical practices. This journey is known as an ascent. Traces of the ascent motif are also found in John's Gospel, but in a different form. While the visionary ascends to heaven from earth in a vision, the ascent motif in John's Gospel has its own character. In John's Gospel, Jesus is not a visionary who ascends to heaven from which he descends later. For John, the essence of Jesus' messiahship and sonship lies in his double role as the Son of Man: he is the way to have communion with God and he is simultaneously the revelation of God's glory.

There is, however, an ascent and descent of angels that is revelatory in a twofold way: the angels radiate God's glory by surrounding his throne and serving him, and they symbolise the communication with God through the Son of Man on earth.¹¹⁵

In addition, as Kanagaraj (1998:212) shows, there is a unique descent theology of John 3:13-15, although, as Kanagaraj indicates, there are also fundamental differences. Overcoming the desires of the flesh is not attained by ascetic rituals, but by being transformed by the Spirit. Rebirth is experienced solely by believing in the Son of Man, who is accustomed with the heavenly realities:

Thus, for John, a vision of God's kingly glory and the knowledge of the heavenly world are possible here on earth in the Son of Man. In John, then, the cross, which is the throne of the Son of Man, becomes paradoxically the locus of divine glory, replacing the chariot-throne of Jewish mysticism.¹¹⁶

There is no ascent of Jesus to heaven before a descent, but there is an ascent that follows the descent of the Son of Man. This is described mainly in terms of "departure from the world" and "going to the Father" (cf. John 6:62). The ascent motif in John differs from the ascents ascribed to the patriarchs, prophets and angels in at least three ways: the descent of the Son of Man occurs prior to his ascent. In addition, there is a heavenly journey of Jesus' disciples and their dwelling with the Father in the temple as his household (John 14:2-3). Jesus' ascent paved the way for them to be taken up with Jesus to the chambers of God, to live in communion with the Father, and to behold his glory as revealed in Jesus. It is thus clear that the experience of mystical ascent with Jesus to the heavenly temple is possible only for those who believe in Jesus' incarnation, death, and ascension to the Father. Although John's ascent motif is flavoured with esotericism, there is no trace of deification of the disciples, in this instance.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:186-213).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:211-212).

¹¹⁶ For Dodd (1953:186), faith is a form of vision: "When Christ was on earth, to have faith was to 'see His glory' – to apprehend and acknowledge the deity through the veil of humanity. But no man has seen God at any time as the mystics do vainly talk. He who has seen Christ has seen the Father. Thus $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ is that form of knowledge, or vision, appropriate to those who find God in an historic Person of the past, a Person who nevertheless, through it, remains the object of saving knowledge, the truth and the life." Obviously, the Christological appropriation of seeing the glory would be different, but the basic motif of the *visio Dei* is similar.

Kanagaraj uses these similarities and differences regarding the ascent motif to outline the function of John's mystical contents. Kanagaraj (1998:212-213) comments: "In brief, by means of the ascent-motif John polemicizes, proclaims and persuades the people of his day by reinterpreting the contemporary mystical belief in terms of the person and function of Jesus, the Son of Man." It could thus be stated that John's Gospel indicates the existence of groups that were involved in the practice of Merkabah mysticism.

7.5.2 A vision of God's glory on the throne

Of special significance for mysticism is the motif of the *visio Dei* and its link with the divine throne and glory.¹¹⁷ The main concern of Merkabah mysticism, according to Kanagaraj (1998:214), is "to see God in his glory and as a human-like figure, seated on the throne as king". The mystic ascends to heaven where the glory of God is experienced. Kanagaraj uses this insight to investigate John's Gospel. In his Chapter 13, Kanagaraj (1998:214) examines "whether there is a distinctive emphasis in John on the experience of seeing God in his kingly majesty". Three major motifs in John are thus investigated, namely "seeing", "glory", and "king". The investigation of these three motifs leads Kanagaraj (1998:245) to the conclusion that John presents a picture of an enthroned God who makes himself visible in Jesus. Two levels of "seeing" become evident: to see with the physical eyes (hearing a testimony of seeing signs), and to perceive spiritually. These experiences lead one to the commitment of faith to Christ and to bear witness to that vision. According to John, God in his glory can be seen only in the earthly life of Jesus rather than within oneself or by ascending to heaven, as in Merkabah mysticism.

John deviates from Merkabah mysticism in that God's glory can be perceived not on the heavenly throne, but on earth upon the cross. God is revealed as king in Jesus, but John replaces heavenly kingship of Merkabah mysticism with Jesus' kingship on earth (Kanagaraj 1998:246-247).

7.5.3 The sending of the Son

Merkabah mysticism has, as a recurring feature, the commissioning of the visionary by God to go back to the world in order to bear witness of what he has seen and heard.¹¹⁸ This also influenced John's Gospel. According to John, one mark of Jesus' kingship is his coming into the world to bear witness of the truth. Kanagaraj (1998:248-251) points out that Jesus becomes both the manifestation of God's glory on earth and the testimony to that glory. Jesus and his mission replace the typical Merkabah idea of a mystic, who returns from his journey to God on a mission to bear witness of what he has seen and heard.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:214-247).

¹¹⁸ For the sending of the Son, cf. Kanagaraj (1998:248-263).

¹¹⁹ Kanagaraj (1998:259-260) draws attention to the following important distinctive elements in the Johannine sending motif: (1) Jesus was sent into the world as redeemer, but also to make God known and visible; (2) In the mission of the Son, the Father is glorified; (3) The words uttered by the Son indicate his pre-existence with the Father; (4) The Son renders judgement on behalf of the Father who sent him; (5) In the mission of the Son, the Father speaks, acts and bears witness based on their oneness and mutual indwelling. Jesus represents God. John most likely is counter-arguing with the adherents of the Merkabah mystical

Once again, Kanagaraj (1998:262-263) maintains that the mystical elements were used to confront mystical groups with the message that God was manifested by sending God's Son, whose revelation of the heavenly is authentic, because he reveals only what he had seen and heard with the Father. This message demands faith in the Son of God as agent, should one wish to attain eternal life.

7.5.4 Indwelling

Kanagaraj (1998:264-281) also discusses this vital, prominent topic in John's Gospel. He analyses two major concepts embedded in the Johannine indwelling motif, namely μένειν ἐν and γινώσκειν. He found that both of them show evidence of the influence of Merkabah mysticism. While John uses the Merkabah mysticism concepts familiar to the people of his time, he radically alters them to stress the personal and historical nature of union with God, which is attainable only in Jesus rather than by contemplation. John is thus calling his audience, especially those who had been engaged in mystical experiences based on Ezekiel's throne-chariot, to come to faith in Christ.

7.5.5 The light motif

Merkabah mysticism describes seeing God as light that transformed the visionary unto divine glory. This can also be linked with John's Gospel. John uses the term φῶς not only to indicate God's revelation in Jesus, but also as a source of divine life imparted to those who believe in him as the light of the world (Kanagaraj 1998:287-288). In this instance, too, John polemicises against those involved in mystical practices and proclaims that the mystical light is revealed in Jesus. Kanagaraj (1998:290) notes:

John's conception of φῶς as identical with δόξα, its function of revealing God in a human figure, Jesus, its transforming effect over the lives of those who see and follow him, and its task of bringing God's salvation and judgment, all point to Merkabah mysticism as the most probable source of background.

7.5.6 The Logos

The Logos is also prominent in Merkabah mysticism. Kanagaraj (1998:299-300) points out how the Logos is inseparably linked with the motifs of life, light, and glory. Other than Philo's philosophical depiction of the Logos, John treats it on a historical and practical level by stating that the Logos became flesh, in which one can encounter God. John further fuses the Logos-Christology with the Son-Christology, in order to preserve monotheism. John replaces the Jewish throne mysticism with the vision of divine glory in the Logos on the cross.

practice that the glory of God, which mystics claim to have seen in their heavenly ascent, has been sent down to earth in his Son, Jesus.

7.5.7 Esotericism

As an integral part of Merkabah mysticism in the first century BCE, esotericism refers to mystical experiences or teachings grasped only by the initiated and not by the so-called “outsiders”.¹²⁰ An investigation into irony, symbolism, misunderstanding, and signs in John’s Gospel leads Kanagaraj (1998:310-311) to conclude that esotericism presupposes a community that lived in the phase of conflict and/or persecution. Esotericism gives evidence to the presence of “mysticism” in John, for mysticism, in general, and Merkabah mysticism, in particular. It was all about the revelation of God and the secrets of heaven.¹²¹ Kanagaraj (1998:317) concludes:

[T]he Gospel of John is a “mystical” document, written, at least as one of its purposes, to address with the Gospel those who were preoccupied with Merkabah mystical practice and with cosmological speculations. The esoteric character of the Gospel, however, makes it possible that John himself, hailing from a priestly family, had Merkabah mystical background and that naturally he adopted the esoteric tendency to proclaim the message of Christ to fellow Christians as well in order to strengthen them in Christian faith in the wake of persecution.

Having paid attention to Spirituality and mysticism in its diversity, the question may be asked as to the researchers’ views on mysticism in John as well as a mystical analysis of John 15. This is in addition to the general remarks by scholars earlier in this section. These views will help decide the need and validity of the anticipated reading.

7.6 Views on a mystical reading of John’s Gospel

Kanagaraj’s research does not come unexpectedly. It should be regarded as part of a development over a period of time that linked New Testament and Johannine Studies to the phenomenon of mysticism as a movement. Modern scholarships have divergent views on the validity of mysticism for the interpretation of the New Testament, in general, and John’s Gospel, in particular. It does not fall within the scope of this thesis to give an exhaustive overview of research results on this issue. The following paragraphs will endeavour to present at least a few examples from this field of enquiry.

7.6.1 A positive approach towards John’s Gospel

Recently, McColman (2010:271) remarked enthusiastically: “Not only is the Bible the text par excellence for *lectio divina*, it is also the single most important document for Christian mysticism.” According to him, the mystical contents of the Bible can be fruitfully investigated by a reading of John’s Gospel. This positive appraisal of mysticism may seem surprising, given that for many

¹²⁰ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:56-57, 99-100, 106, 301).

¹²¹ Kanagaraj (1998:310) also points out that the whole idea of Esoterism presupposes a community that lived in the phase of conflict and/or persecution.

scholars mysticism has been controversial.¹²² Some modern Johannine scholars have been reserved on the subject of mysticism in John.¹²³ For example, Bultmann noted in 1955 the influence of “mystical” language on the Johannine concepts of mutual knowing, mutual abiding, and oneness among the disciples, but he discounted any form of mystical interpretation in his commentary on John.¹²⁴ In this regard, Barrett (1978: 87) states: “For many reasons it is impossible to classify John with the mystics of his age, or of any age; but at the same time it must be admitted that there are mystical elements in his thought.” He then mentions a number of references to mutual indwelling in John 14:17, 23 and 15:1-6.

A more detailed analysis of modern scholarship reveals that a surprisingly large number of scholars pointed out the need to read John’s Gospel from the perspective of mysticism. In fact, this happened from an early stage. Influential scholars, who wrote on the relationship of John’s Gospel with mysticism, include Deissmann (1892, 1912), Inge (1899), Von Hügel (1911), Odeberg (1929), Schweizer (1931), Borgen (1965), Dahl (1962), Scholem (1964), and Meeks (1967). Some of these studies will be investigated in more detail below. More recent studies were done by DeConick (2001, 2006), Rowland (1980, 1982, 1985, 1996), and, as pointed out in the previous Chapter, Kanagaraj (1998) and Schäfer (2009).¹²⁵ DeConick (2001:34, n. 1) provides a list of commentators who suggested that John’s Gospel reflects knowledge of early Jewish mysticism. Countryman (1987:2-3) also gives an interesting overview of scholarship regarding mysticism and John’s Gospel.

Schneiders’ contribution to Biblical Spirituality and a spiritual reading of John’s Gospel were mentioned in previous discussions. In this instance, a valuable insight from her (Schneiders 2003:1, footnote 1) provides a helpful direction:

According to Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesia* 6.14.7), Clement of Alexandria in the second century referred to the Gospel of John as “the spiritual gospel”. Although the use of this epithet in the history of Johannine commentary has not always been positive, intended at times to suggest that the Gospel was without historical substance, the real significance of the name has stuck for the very good reason

¹²² De Villiers (2009a:2) explains the negative image of mysticism, sometimes even regarding it as heresy, by referring to Rabbinic resistance, the prejudices of Protestant scholarship, and leading scholars such as Ritschl, Troeltsch, Von Harnack, Barth, and Brunner. Countryman (1987:2-3) suggests that modern analytical scholarship has made us uneasy about studying the specifically religious or mystical wellsprings of early Christianity for the following reasons: “This sense of unease has been reinforced by factors not strictly academic, such as a historic Protestant antagonism towards mysticism, resurgent in our century in Barthianism and neo-orthodoxy, and apologetic concerns for making Christianity intelligible in a supposedly post religious era.”

¹²³ Kanagaraj (1998:20) notes: “While Dodd and Barrett take a neutral position in this area of study, scholars such as B.F. Westcott, A. Plummer, E.C. Hoskyns, J.H. Bernard, R.H. Lightfoot, R.E. Brown, F.F. Bruce, G.R. Beasley-Murray and T.L. Brodie, in their commentaries, and L. Newbigin and B. Milne, in their expositions, are almost reluctant to discuss the subject. J. Ashton’s two recent studies on John’s theology give no place for ‘mysticism.’” Recently, in his article on mysticism and the reformation, McGinn (2015:61) drew the following conclusion: “While the mystical element in Christianity did not play as large a role in the Protestant confessions and groups as it did in Counter-Reformation, the Reformers and their heirs did not reject mysticism, as Ritschl, Von Harnack, and others once argued. The Reformers, though in different ways, sought to come to terms with the rich tradition of Christian mysticism, adopting some aspects, rejecting others, and more often effecting transformations in what they had inherited.”

¹²⁴ “In fact the Farewell Discourses does contain some well-known mystical terminology: the formula of mutual mystical immanence—we in Jesus—Jesus in us; the dwelling in us and God too in us along with him; all one in one, the Father, the Son and those who belong to him” (as quoted by Ashton 1991:54).

¹²⁵ Cf. De Villiers (2009a:1-4).

that, of the four Gospels, the mystical or unitive character of Christian discipleship is most salient in this Gospel.

How important the mystical nature of John's Gospel is, is further shown by Schneiders' (2003:15) remark that John 17:20-24 represents a summary of the message of the entire Gospel:

Its point is to bring those who contemplate the Gospel into a union with Jesus, which will plunge them into the depths of God's very life, the life Jesus shares with his Father. There is no question that the purpose of the Gospel is the mystical union of the disciples with Jesus in God through the Spirit.

Some scholars drew attention to the fact that the apprehension in contemporary scholarship regarding the mystical nature of John's Gospel stands in contrast with early Christian readings of the Gospel (Kanagaraj 1998:20). Some ancient commentators show hardly any such reserve about the mystical nature of John's Gospel. According to Kanagaraj (1998:19, 317), the view that the Gospel of John contains mysticism or mystical ideas was prevalent in patristic circles in the early centuries of Christianity.¹²⁶

Dumm (2001:11-12) also emphasised the mystical nature of John's Gospel. He is of the opinion that the community, under the guidance of the Beloved Disciple, was so mystically inclined that it was predisposed to adopt a Christology that would emphasise the divine reality in Jesus as the eternal Word made flesh. He concludes:

One would expect to find such awareness in a mystical community for whom the divine presence is felt so intensely that the whole world seems to be transparent. This would account for the emphasis on the divinity of Jesus and the absence of many episodes that reflect his human nature such as the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

7.6.2 Questioning the link with mysticism

Some scholars' remarks reveal their struggle with possible mystical elements regarding the Gospel. Barrett (1978:85) declares: "Of mysticism in the proper sense ('a tendency of religious feeling marked by an effort to attain direct and immediate communion with God' [*Chambers' Dictionary*]) there is nothing in John." In his discussion of John 1:14, Bultmann (1971:67, note 6) states that ἐν ἡμῖν without a doubt refers to "the indwelling of the Logos in the soul of the Gnostic ... or of the mystic ..., for v. 14 states the theme which will be developed by the Gospel itself."¹²⁷ Mysticism is

¹²⁶ To support this view, he refers to various examples such as the gnostic commentators, from Heracleon to Steiner who found in John support for their mystical experience; Origen who accepted John as a *mystical* document, and Augustine who gave a *mystical* interpretation to John. Koester (2008:4) also refers to Clement's opinion that the Synoptics recorded the "physical" things about Jesus' ministry and that John composed a "spiritual" Gospel. He suggests an alternative opinion, namely that John wrote independently from the other Gospels. The Patristic view of mysticism focuses on hidden knowledge attained by contemplation.

¹²⁷ Later, Bultmann (1971:69) critically discusses the meaning of "seeing" and then concludes that it is neither sensory nor spiritual, but the sight of *faith*. He substantiates this by declaring: "On the one hand such 'seeing' has nothing to do with the 'spiritual' sight, found in the Greek contemplation of Ideas or in mysticism. The Revealer is not an Idea of Christ, nor a symbolic figure, but the Logos as the σὰρξ ἡ γεινομένης; and the object of such 'seeing' is no less that the σὰρξ ἡ γεινόμενης." Bruner (2012:420) sounds very disapproving as far as mysticism and Spirituality are concerned in his comments regarding

again a topic when discussing John 5:25 and the life that Jesus promises believers. Bultmann (1971:258-259, note 3) is of the opinion that the Johannine Revealer does not take the believers out of the world (17:15); and the elimination of the future judgement does not mean the complete elimination of the future in a mystical present. Bultmann (1971:381-382) also touches on the topic of mysticism in his exposition of *γινώσκειν* and the reciprocal relationship between Jesus and his sheep, on the one hand, and between Jesus and the Father, on the other. Although, in mysticism, the reciprocal relationship between God and the mystic is used to describe a kind of unity in which all differences between them disappear, it takes on a different meaning when used in conjunction with revelation: “Thus the mutual relationship is not a circular process, as it is in mysticism, in which the mystic raises himself to equality with God,¹²⁸ but a relationship which is established by God.” Bultmann (1971:382) further states:

Not only does the Revealer’s relationship to God exclude any mystical relationship with him, it also excludes any form of pietistic relationship. He does not yield himself up to man’s tender emotions, for he is none other than the Revealer, in whom God addresses man.

These remarks indicate that Bultmann rejected mysticism, because it eliminates the distinction between God and humanity, and divinises a person. His negative understanding of mysticism is found elsewhere. In dealing with John 12:23-26, Bultmann (1971:427) discusses the participation of the disciples in the *δόξα* of Jesus: “It is not the ‘nature’ of those who belong to him but their ‘ministry’ that establishes their unity with him.” Moreover, as far as his accessibility is concerned:

The exalted Jesus however is not directly accessible, say in moments of ecstatic or mystic vision which suspend the historical existence of man. Rather the way to him is the way of ‘service,’ which leads to the acceptance of death as a man follows in his steps.

In dealing with John 8:30-40, Bultmann (1971:434-435) hints at *ἀλήθεια*, which he considers identical to the promise of *ζωή*. He regards *ἀλήθεια* as God’s reality insofar as it manifests in Jesus the fight against the *ψεύδος*. He denies that *πιστεύειν* and *γινώσκειν* can imply that accepting the dogma can yield esoteric knowledge in mystagogical teaching. For him, this is contrary to Jesus’ view, even in the Farewell Discourses.¹²⁹

John 6:46. He quotes Jesus’ words: “I don’t mean that anyone has ever seen the Father (except, of course, the One who has his very Being from God: He has seen the Father!)” and then states: “Jesus here blocks any idea of constructing mystical ladders up to divinity, of any access to God, of any literal ‘seeing’ of the Father.” A few lines later he continues: “This verse, I think we may fairly say, is an antimystical, antispiritualistic verse, barring any ideas of ‘climbing up to God’ via spiritual disciplines.” He later repeats these sentiments (Bruner 2012:428).

¹²⁸ Bultmann (1971:382, note 1) refers to Angelus Silesius: “I know that God cannot exist for a moment without me, If I come to nought-he will render up his spirit in his torment.’ or ‘There is nothing but I and thou- and if we two did not exist then God would no longer be God, and the heavens would fall!’ Such statements could be brought into line with the Johannine understanding of the believer’s relationship with God only if they were taken as paradoxical statements of the security of faith.”

¹²⁹ Bultmann (1971:434-435) even states: “Nor is it that a new world of thought opens itself to the believer through his sinking down and gazing inwardly; nowhere is there a hint of such ideas; faith always remains bound to the Word, and does not hover out or beyond in mystic vision.”

This illustrates how important it is to explain one's use of mysticism. Where it is understood negatively, it will follow that the relationship of John's Gospel with mysticism will be denied. It is, however, clear that mysticism need not be understood like those scholars who viewed it negatively.

7.6.3 Μένειν as mystical motif and John's Gospel

Since indwelling is a major theme in this thesis, it is illuminating to note how it is understood in past research in terms of mysticism. Researchers have interpreted μένειν in different ways. Some of the attempts by researchers to understand this theme will now be discussed briefly, but the concept will be analysed in more depth later.

First, there is an attempt to understand the temporal connections of abiding. Bultmann (1971:267) explains μένειν using the concepts of past, present and future: "Μένειν in John normally refers not to the future state of what exists in the present, but to the present state of what is past. The relationship expressed by μένειν ἐν is the relationship of trust."

Other investigators understood the theme in terms of what enables one to dwell in Jesus. For Koester (1995:220), the answer is that the Gospel (the word of Jesus) enables people to dwell:

Much of the Gospel's witness is presented in symbolic form, and in Johannine terms an effective symbol must enable people to "remain" in Jesus and "continue" in his word together with other disciples (*menein*, 6:56; 8:31; 15:4).

Yet another approach is to regard indwelling in terms of union. Keener (2003b:998-999) understands μένειν as an image of organic union that works well for, and goes even beyond the idea of intimate relationship. Brown (1982b:511-512) writes about this union in terms of mysticism:

[T]here can be no doubt that the intimate indwelling of Father and Son is being transferred through the Son to the Christian. Divine indwelling is an intimate union that expresses itself in a way of life lived in love. If we understand this truth, we shall avoid the mistaken identification of John's concept of indwelling with an exalted mysticism like that of a Teresa or a John of the Cross. To remain in Jesus or in one of the divine attributes or gifts is intimately associated with all basic Christian duties. Thus, indwelling is not the exclusive experience of chosen souls within the Christian community; it is the essential constitutive principle of all Christian life.

Schnackenburg (1982:99-100) also discusses indwelling in terms of mysticism when he observes:

The disciples are called, not to a mystical experience, but to bear abundant fruit and they will do this thanks to the community with Christ that they have been given. This is the fundamental statement for the Christian's understanding of himself and his function and activity.

Finally, Dodd (1953:187-200) devoted an entire chapter to examine this notion of union with God by mutual indwelling. After discussing the different instances of mutual indwelling and unity with God in the Gospel (which will be discussed later in the thesis), he proceeds to mysticism as another important theme with which it could be understood. In his thorough reflection, he offers an

interesting example of contemporary research into the mystical nature of John's Gospel. Dodd poses the question as to whether the type of religion represented by the Fourth Evangelist can be properly described as mysticism. He then enters into a dialogue with Bauer regarding his point of view on the above question.¹³⁰ Bauer queries whether the author of the Gospel experienced and felt what he spoke about. Did he actually experience visions or even hours of oneness with Christ and God? Did he experience anything more than conversion to Christianity? Bauer's reply (Dodd 1953:198) to his own questions is:

In any case he never trod or recommended the way of ecstasy. Relations to God and Christ are established through the keeping of the commandments. This conception of what makes a Christian, as the keeping of commandments, makes it unlikely that the Christian life should reach its highest points at moments when the other world mysteriously interpenetrates this world.

In reaction, Dodd (1953:198-199) fiercely contests Bauer's opinion:

If the mystic is one whose religious life is expressed in ecstasy, or one who experiences an impersonal absorption in the divine, then Bauer is certainly right in refusing the name to the Fourth Evangelist. But, to suggest that he was merely using stereotyped terms in vogue, without attaching any particular meaning to them, is precarious; and to reduce his conception of Christian life to a kind of legalism ("keeping the commandments") is certainly to misunderstand him.

Dodd (1953:198-199) explains that the evangelist's thought consists of two strains. The *first* is about knowledge of God, of vision, of the mutual indwelling of man and God. The *second* is the fruition into deeds. Both are important and only obtain fullness of meaning through their combination. These two strains are united by the divine ἀγάπη: "But while it expresses itself in obedience to the law of charity, the love of God is not to be identified with, or restricted to, law-abiding obedience." Dodd's (1953:199-200) final remarks about mysticism in John hint at the discussion in the later stages of the study, but they also provide an open conclusion to the current section:

So concrete, so actual, is the nature of the divine ἀγάπη; yet none the less for that, by entering into the relation of ἀγάπη thus opened up for men, we may dwell in God and he in us. Whether this should be called "mysticism" I do not know.¹³¹

8. Implications for a mystical reading of John

The above summary highlights the challenges facing a mystical reading of John's Gospel. The sheer volume of Johannine research revealed wide-ranging ideas about the background and scope of the Gospel. It is clear that, for a long time, the historical-critical reading of the text dominated research.

¹³⁰ Bauer (1925:240).

¹³¹ The above discussion about mysticism should be read against the background of previous remarks by Dodd (1953:197-198). He sketches the status quo as one where some scholars consider John the greatest of Christian mystics, while others vigorously deny that the term 'mystical' is applicable. He then concludes: "To some extent the dispute seem[s] to be about words."

The need to also focus on the spiritual meaning of Biblical texts became obvious from recent trends and insights in New Testament research, such as the study of Lactal discussed earlier.

To come to a clearer understanding of mysticism as a particular field of study within Spirituality, the informative characteristics of mysticism identified by Waaijman (2003) were analysed. Based on their relevance, they will often be referred to in the course of this study. Investigations into Jewish, Hellenistic, Hellenistic-Jewish, as well as Palestinian mysticism revealed the sincere longing for closeness to God as a common characteristic. Of utmost importance for this research is the question as to whether John was influenced by mystical movements or ideas of his time. Though there is a trend in research that confirms some relationship of the Gospel with mystical thinking, there are still different views about the link. However, mystical motifs and insights are common to both and illuminate the interpretation of John 15.

The diversity of mystical thought, as pointed out in contemporary research, also helps one approach a mystical reading of John with the necessary caution. No “Jewish” or “Christian” mysticism existed in Antiquity; only a large variety of mystical groups and texts. The challenge is to be aware of how they differ from each other in terms of content, location, and time. At the same time, though, a comparison with the many different texts will help spell out mystical leanings in the Gospel as well as the unique identity and particular form of mysticism in John’s text.

With such a mystical reading, more will be done than simply a spiritual reading of the text that focuses on the divine-human relational process. A mystical Spirituality will explore the full transformational effects of a mutual indwelling as the intimate relationship and union of God with humanity, taking into account the mystical longing to live consciously in the divine presence.

The following general perspectives will be points of departure for further investigation. *First*, John knew of, and was influenced by mystical thought, as can be detected in mystical movements of his time, specifically Merkabah mysticism.¹³² Waaijman (2003:57-79) spelled out the characteristics of mysticism.¹³³ These insights provide a basic pattern with which one can compare a text in order to discuss its mystical quality. *Secondly*, John did not simply take over the mystical thought of his time, but creatively incorporated it within his own understanding of the Gospel. His understanding of the Gospel determined his mystical understanding. *Thirdly*, the evangelist and even members of the Johannine community practised some forms of mysticism known and acceptable to them. *Fourthly*, the evangelist’s exposure to, and knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth determined his mysticism. *Fifthly*, certain words and concepts such as μένειν, ἐγώ εἰμι, τὰ ῥήματα and δοξάζω have a proven mystical meaning or are sensitive to a mystical interpretation. *Finally*, the mystical reading will focus on John 15 as part of the Farewell Discourse within the context of the Gospel as a whole.

¹³² McGinn (2006:xiv) supports the insistence that mysticism was always part of religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

¹³³ De Villiers (2014:1) fittingly summarised these characteristics as follows: “(1) a human longing and desire for God that (2) shifts to an awareness of a divine presence, (3) is experienced in ecstasy, (4) brings about feelings of unworthiness and nothingness, (5) is received in passivity and is encountered directly, (6) brings about unity with, (7) contemplation and (8) indwelling of the divine, (9) in a relationship of mutuality (10) that is brought to fruition in everyday practice and life.”

Building on the said spiritual insights, deeper levels of mysticism in John's Gospel need to be discussed. All these confirm Schneiders' (2003:47) statement:

In short, the spirituality of John's Gospel is essentially mystical and contemplative, giving rise to a theology that is very little concerned with institution and very much concerned with union and life. For this reason, it has always been the favourite Gospel of the church's mystics.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Schneiders (2003:56) elaborates on this fact: "Failure to understand and appreciate this aspect of John's Gospel makes the Gospel as a whole unintelligible, as it is indeed to people who want to read it for information about divine realities but who do not open themselves in prayer to the necessary transformation."

CHAPTER 4

THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF *MENEIN* IN JOHN 15

1. Introduction

The mystical and spiritual nature of John's Gospel can be illustrated concretely in terms of μένειν as an important theme in John 15, as will be argued in the following chapters. In this Chapter, attention will be paid to John 15 as the result of the previous narrative that provides important clues for the understanding thereof. This Chapter will focus on how earlier occurrences of μένειν in the Gospel reflect and prepare for a mystical reading of John 15. This will be followed by a detailed examination of the position of John 15 within the Farewell Discourse (John 13-17), as its most immediate literary context.¹³⁵ The Chapter will include investigating the arrangement and argument within these chapters, as well as the place of indwelling within the Discourse. This Chapter provides a literary analysis of John 15 in the narrative plot, as it is presented in the first half of the Gospel.

2. Μένειν in John 1-14

Different occurrences of μένειν in the Gospel of John need to be considered in order to understand its transformative nature. The wide-ranging meaning of μένειν in John 15 cannot be grasped if read in isolation, because it forms part of the Gospel as a whole. With a systematic author such as John, it is highly unlikely that his use of a key spiritual and mystical concept such as μένειν and its application throughout the Gospel could have been accidental. It is especially important how the first part of the Gospel contains several references to indwelling that prepare for its use in John 15. An analysis of the relevant occurrences will help conceptualise the bigger picture.

The following investigation will analyse the concept of indwelling in John 1-14 from two perspectives. First, the use of μένειν within mainly positive situations will be analysed. Then its use within negative scenes will also be pointed out.

2.1 Μένειν within positive settings

It is not possible to make a clear-cut division between positive and negative usages of μένειν in John's Gospel. However, in most instances, the context displays a more positive or negative mood. The following instances of μένειν appear within a positive setting.

2.1.1 John 1: Indwelling and discipleship

In a first occurrence, John 1:32-34 already describes John the Baptist's witness to events. He "saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain (μένειν) on him". In this instance, the

¹³⁵ Moloney (2013:33) emphasises the importance of context: "Text without context is pretext, and the above presentation of a coherent narrative and literary unity ... will guide us as we interpret the passage relevant [to the] study of the love theme. This approach to the question attempts to avoid a myopic focus upon words."

indwelling of the divine Spirit in John is spelled out. This is so important to the author that he repeats it a second time. The narrative continues with a second reference to the indwelling when John remarks:

I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain (μένειν) is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.

John emphasises that the Spirit is not only given to Jesus, but continues to be with, and remain in him. Michaels (2010:114), who comments that the frequent use of μένειν shows that it is a significant term, refers to this remark about the Spirit and states: “The relationship it dramatizes between Jesus and the Spirit is a continuing one (compare 3:34).”¹³⁶ Other scholars have also noticed the relevance of this verse for the notion of indwelling. Bruner (2012:87) highlights this first use of the verb μένειν as the single most emphasised characteristic of the Spirit’s relation to Jesus,¹³⁷ whereas Coloe (2007:165) concludes that John 1:32 illuminates its use in John 15:1-17. According to her, μένειν (as used in 1:32) is one of the expressions in John “that come to their clearest and richest exposition in these seventeen verses”.¹³⁸ These interpretations already pave the way for relating the use of μένειν in the earlier parts of the Gospel with the elaborate use in John 15.

A more subtle use of μένειν is then described in the next part of the Gospel. Two of the Baptist’s disciples decided to follow Jesus after John called him the Lamb of God. When Jesus asks them what they want (seek),¹³⁹ they reply by addressing him as Rabbi and asking him: “Where are you staying” (μένειν)? “Come”, he replied, “and you will see.” Their response is then described in language that repeats and develops the meaning of the indwelling motif: “So they went and saw where he was staying (μένειν), and spent (μένειν) that day with him. It was about the tenth hour” (1:35-39). On the surface, the text seems to refer to a physical place where Jesus was staying. Brown (1982a:510), for example, distinguishes between the use of μένειν for reciprocal indwelling and the more ordinary use in John 1:39: “The use of *menein* for reciprocal indwelling gives the possibility of a secondary, spiritual meaning to the more ordinary uses of *menein* e.g., John i: 39 where the disciples stay with Jesus.” Michaels (2010:120) is, however, of a different mind when he reads the terms used in this instance less literally. He distinguishes between following and remaining: “To ‘follow’ is to embark with Jesus on a journey, while to ‘stay’ or ‘remain’ is to maintain a lasting personal relationship with him.” Later, Michaels (2010:803) even states that the use of μένειν in

¹³⁶ “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (John 3:34).

¹³⁷ Bruner (2012:87) links this to the Spirit’s characteristic staying power mentioned by Jesus when he introduces the Paraclete to his disciples: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever” (John 14:16).

¹³⁸ Based on her understanding of John the Baptist’s role in establishing a new household for the followers of Jesus, Coloe (2007:81) makes another important observation regarding the Spirit’s dwelling in Jesus. The disciples, “who are believing in Jesus, are experiencing a process of new birth enabling them to see the reign of God and hear the voice of the Spirit (3:8) dwelling in Jesus (1:33).”

¹³⁹ The verb ‘to follow’ has a deeper, mystical meaning, as attested by the use of other similar verbs in John’s Gospel. According to Schneiders (2003:86), for example, the verb ‘to seek’ (ζητέω) in John is a theological freighted term: “It is typical of John to denote fundamental attitudes and dispositions by verbs rather than by nouns. The verb ‘to seek’ denotes the goal determined dynamism of a person’s life. What one seeks reveals one’s deeper concerns.”

John 1:39 should be read to mean: “‘and they stayed (ἔμειναν) with him that day’, meaning they ‘made their dwelling’ with him.”¹⁴⁰ Within the context, however, this reading does not suffice, because ‘staying’ obtains a deeper mystical meaning of a close, intimate relationship with the divine that will become clear as the drama further unfolds, reaching a more detailed explanation in John 15. Malina & Rohrbauch (1998:55) confirm this when they observe that the meaning of μένειν in these verses is more than merely literal. They consider it another part of John’s antilanguage against other groups that indicates the special bond between Jesus’ followers:

John uses the word to indicate loyalty of deep attachment, suggesting here that while the loyalty of these two disciples to John the Baptist and his group may have been marginal, their new attachment to Jesus and his antisocial group is not.

John’s remarks in this passage have enduring relevance. They reflect his conviction that this attachment is typical of the identity of Jesus’ followers and of discipleship. The original disciples seeking, finding and remaining with Jesus serves as paradigm for all future disciples so pertinently explained by Coloe (2007:52). She states that these disciples are seeking more than mere accommodation and that “dwell” hints at the depth of their seeking. She then emphasises how this passage prepares readers of John for what is to follow when John 15 will develop its fuller meaning:

For first time readers the word “dwell” (*menein*) has yet to reveal its rich theological potential, which will become apparent particularly in the final discourse, but they have noted it twice in the witness of John concerning the Spirit descending and remaining/dwelling on Jesus (1:32-33).

What is particularly noteworthy is how concrete historical remarks in the Gospel illuminate the notion of indwelling. Thus μένειν is used to describe the gathering of disciples and believers around Jesus: John 2:12 (Jesus, his mother, brothers, and disciples in Capernaum); John 4:40 (his two days’ stay with the Samaritans); John 6:56 (the mutual abiding between Jesus and those who eat his flesh and drink his blood), and John 8:31 (the Jews who are willing to remain in his word are true disciples). Although these references can be read literally as referring to the simple fact of being at a place, they indicate the bond that existed between Jesus and those who responded positively to him.

The indwelling is, therefore, a matter of being open to Jesus and willing to become a disciple. It, therefore, assumes and refers to a human attitude towards Jesus. The disciples sought Jesus, and this seeking leads them to dwell with Jesus. Their attitude reminds one of the mystical characteristics of prayerful longing, identified by Waaijman as a typical characteristic of the mystical experience.¹⁴¹ The mystical orientation towards God is clearly visible in the action of the disciples, as described earlier. The positive meaning of indwelling is also illustrated in Jesus’ response to them. Their search only ended when they accepted the invitation to dwell in Jesus. The divine role during this process should not be overlooked.

¹⁴⁰ In her discussion of these verses, Hera (2013:53, footnote 54) links the use of μένειν with John 15: “‘Staying’ or ‘abiding’ with Jesus is an important aspect of discipleship which is developed further in 15:1-17.”

¹⁴¹ Cf. Waaijman (2003:60-61).

Closely connected to the previous characteristic is Jesus' mystical intervention and presence.¹⁴² At some stage, the experience of human longing shifts and becomes an experience of the divine presence. In this encounter, it may seem as though the disciples were the dominant party. During the ensuing events, Jesus himself takes over the lead. They are drawn into the overwhelming experience of dwelling in him.

2.1.2 John 6: Indwelling and Christ

Closely connected with the previous remarks is the way in which μένειν is linked with following Jesus. It is once again a positive use that refers to the relationship with the divine. The Gospel gives a special Christological presentation of this link with Jesus in John 6:27. Jesus encourages his followers not to work for food that can get spoiled, but for food that endures (μένειν) to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give them. The food is given a symbolic meaning with the addition of "eternal life" and then obtains a Christological meaning. Scholars have clarified the full meaning of this remark by referring to other verses in which food is read christologically. Michaels (2010:364) develops the deeper meaning of food for John's Christology when he reads it metaphorically and recalls Jesus' teaching to the disciples: "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (John 4:32), and "My food is that I might do the will of the One who sent me and complete his work" (John 4:34). He then concludes:

"Work" for Jesus, was not a way of earning food. Rather, his "food" *was* his work, the work his Father had given him to do (see 5:17, 36). Food to him is more than a physical necessity of life. It is a metaphor, and he invites the crowd to think of it in a similar way.

This characterisation of food has special mystical implications for Jesus' followers who can share in the God-given eternal life in, and through Jesus: "Abiding in this context, now has sacramental overtones: the Son of Man both gives and is the food that abides to eternal life, in contrast to mortal food that perishes" (Lee 2002:90). The sacramental meaning is emphasised when John elaborates on this topic, linking the food to the last supper. It is a matter of "[w]hoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides (μένειν) in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In this instance, food is the fourth subject of μένειν,¹⁴³ but it is observed from a Christological perspective and used in sacramental language. The Son of Man gives the food, approved by the Father. He is the food. In a mystical manner, the indwelling is found in the presence of Jesus amidst his followers in their sacred meal. The long-term impact of the close, mystical relationship that was so implicitly mentioned in John 1 is growing in intensity through this reference in John 6 and will become even clearer in John 15.

2.1.3 John 8: An intimate dwelling

Μένειν is sometimes used with a positive inclination in a negative context, as in John 8 which describes how Jesus, in an argument with the Jews, points to the need for a permanent relationship

¹⁴² Waaijman (2003:61) calls this characteristic "[t]he presence of the experiential kernel".

¹⁴³ The first being John 1:32-33; the second, John 1:35, and the third, John 4:40.

with him in verse 31: “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’” (ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους· ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μου ἐστέ). In the next occurrence, it is done with the use of familial language. The intimate relationships that exist in a family are used to indicate who Jesus is and what he does in terms of μένειν. The “holding on to my teaching” as translation on the surface does not relate it to indwelling. However, scholars did draw attention to the intimate relationship that the phrase suggests. Thus Von Wahlde’s (2010b:399) view is that the use of μένειν, in this instance, connotes a permanent relation with the word of Jesus. True followers of Jesus are those who continue to believe in him. John is thus reiterating the permanent importance of Jesus’ word. Schnackenburg (1980:205) also notes that only remaining in the word of Jesus leads to true discipleship:

This phrase was coined in the Johannine word theology, and means that the believer must move completely into the sphere of influence and action of Christ’s word and let himself be led to that deeper union with Christ which μένειν denotes (cf. 14:21, 23-24; 15:4-10).

The following text sheds more light on this intimacy, when Jesus continues: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place (μένειν) in the family, but a son belongs (μένειν) to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). In this instance, (ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα), dwelling is used to highlight the contrast between the position of a child (son) and a slave within a family. The use of μένειν describes the enduring, continuous place of a child in the family, other than that of a slave. This indicates that the freedom of those who belong to the Son is real and everlasting. The reference to the Son also assumes the presence of the Father, who is the One who sent his Son and who is in an intimate relationship with the Son. By choosing to dwell in Jesus, Jesus’ followers are freed from slavery and become part of the new divine family.

This should be considered within the wider context of John 8:31-50. Von Wahlde (2010b:414) refers to the listeners mentioned in this instance, and concludes: “Because they do not do the will of God and accept the word of Jesus, they have allowed themselves to accept the devil, rather than God as their ‘father’.” This familial language reminds one of union as a key characteristic of the mystical experience (Waaijman 2003:64-65). After the call to be Jesus’ disciples, staying with, and following him, the description of his relationship with them gradually becomes increasingly intimate until it reaches its peak in John 15.

2.1.4 John 12: Indwelling and selflessness

Another insight on indwelling is offered in John 12:24, where μένειν appears in a short parable about a grain of wheat: “I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains (μένειν) only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Indwelling is subtly

linked with a particular form of discipleship that suggests nothingness and selflessness. Scholars have often noted how new life is the result of death, as suggested in this verse. Thus, Brown (1982a:471-472) links this with fruit that a disciple bears when he comments that Jesus is speaking of death as the means of gaining life: “[T]he peculiar feature of this parable is the insistence that only through death is the fruit borne.”¹⁴⁴ Michaels (2010:689) agrees that John is emphasising the truth that new life comes only through death. In addition, he poses the question as to whether the death of the grain of wheat simply represents the glorification of Jesus through his own death, or whether it could have a wider application to discipleship in general. He concludes:

As we have seen, the analogous “Amen, amen” pronouncements introducing “unless” clauses (3:3, 5; 6:53) had to do with discipleship, not with Christology per se, and the same appears to be true here. If so, the “grain of wheat” does not represent Jesus, at least not Jesus uniquely, but *anyone* who would be his disciple.¹⁴⁵

This verse clearly anticipates the path that Jesus is about to travel in selfless love. At the same time, it reminds the disciples of the example set by Jesus for them in the feet-washing episode in John 13. What is striking is the link of this thought with μένειν. Brown (1982a:471), for example, points out that the use of the verb μένειν in this parable of the seed that dies, is typically Johannine. The death of the seed indicates that the remark can be read within the context of the passion. Lee (2002:97) remarks that “suffering and dying are seen to be a kind of pruning or cleansing that brings life and growth (cf. 12:24)”, and then notes that “the discipleship of abiding has as its heart the symbolic reality of the cross”. John 12 spells out the consequences of following and indwelling, and prepares for what is to follow in John 15. Koester (1995:247) spells out what this implies. He recalls that mutual indwelling results in abundant bearing of fruit, and then remarks: “All people will lose their selves and their lives – that is a given – but those who lose themselves in service to Christ enter into a relationship that bears fruit and brings them life.”

This discussion reflects a number of ideas that will be dealt with by the evangelist in more detail in John 15, which lends a mystical quality to the Gospel. Being united with Jesus through indwelling (μένειν) will help clarify Jesus’ reference to the grain of wheat destined to die. His disciples need to contemplate his path of self-surrender that will culminate in his lifting up from the earth (John 12:32).¹⁴⁶ The consequences of following in his footsteps are noted when Jesus declares:

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me (John 12:25-26).

¹⁴⁴ Bruner (2012:714) states: “What *looks like* the grain’s demise is *in fact* its harvest. So Jesus’ Cross.” Schnackenburg (1980:384-385) contends that Jesus is showing his disciples that death is not the end, but the perfection of life especially by “laying down one’s life in imitation of Jesus”.

¹⁴⁵ Koester (1995:13) applies the image first to Jesus and then to the disciples.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. contemplation as described by Waaijman (2003:65-66).

To lose one's life (John 12:24) is an indication of becoming nothing, which is a key aspect of the mystical experience. It reminds one of what John the Baptist explicitly remarked in John 3:30: "He must become greater, I must become less." At the same time, the reference to loving Jesus as a disciple also has the quality of losing oneself completely in, and to him. These words imply what Waaijman (2003:61-62) explains as ecstasy, meaning "the stepping out of a human person from him/herself when such a person is grasped by the divine." Decock's (2014:8-10) explanation also makes sense in the Johannine context, suggesting a process of self-transcendence, renouncing the self to comprehend the living God. Applied to the current text, it means losing one's self-centred life to serve Jesus. Giving oneself is characteristic of Jesus' own life, but it is also true of those in whom he dwells. It implies following him in order to be where he is. About the meaning of serving Jesus, Michaels (2010:692) observes:

The unspoken implication is that "serving" Jesus involves imitating his behaviour, doing what he did by serving others, or each other. This will become explicit later on, when Jesus speaks privately to all his disciples about what discipleship means (see, for example, 13:14-15, 34-35; 15:12).

2.1.5 The Spirit as eschatological gift

Finally, indwelling also has a special positive connotation when it is linked with the gift of the Spirit to the disciples. Lee (2002:91) observes that, in the Farewell Discourse (John 13-17), the symbol of indwelling is used for discipleship as a present reality, but also with a future dimension. The Spirit will be intimately present in their ongoing existence:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you, dwells with you (μένειν) and will be in you (John 14:16-17).¹⁴⁷

The Spirit as the subject is given to the disciples as an ongoing presence in their lives, but it is also linked with the future. The relationship with Jesus is, however, upheld. John underlines that Jesus, as the subject in John 14:25, promises the Spirit on the basis of his past presence among them. The μένειν is in the past: "All this I have spoken while still with you" (μένειν)." In addition, the Spirit is ultimately also a divine gift: God is the subject of the μένειν in 14:10, so that it is the Father who remains in the Son. The purpose of this pronouncement is to refer to the presence of God in Jesus and the divine character of Jesus. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me (μένειν), who is doing his work" (ὁ δὲ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων). The profound meaning of these verses will become clear during Jesus' explication in John 15.

¹⁴⁷ Lee (2002:81, 92) also mentions the role of the Holy Spirit of sustaining unity with Jesus and the Father. She cites John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7b-11, 13-15. She also indicates that the fullest treatment of the interrelationship between the Father, Jesus and the community of disciples is found in the Farewell Discourse, resulting in "theology and ecclesiology to cohere in a perfect union of intimacy and love" (Lee 2002:120).

2.2 Μένειν within negative settings

Indwelling as an intimate relationship that gives new life has another side to it. The evangelist sometimes uses μένειν within a negative context, as was noted briefly in the previous section. In John 3:36, the author links indwelling with the wrath of God, when Jesus notes: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains (μένειν) on him” (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον· ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται ζωὴν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ’ αὐτόν). This verse appears within a discussion about faith in Christ that brings eternal life. The opposite is also spelled out: Rejection of Jesus brings the divine wrath. God dwells in Jesus within believers, but God’s wrath, as antithesis, dwells in unbelievers.¹⁴⁸

Scholars have noted this double use of μένειν, pointing out that John repeatedly emphasises how the word recalls the concept of union in both a positive and a negative sense. For Schnackenburg (1968:390-391), the giving of oneself to the Son in faith is the decisive step: “The personal union with the Son brought about by faith remains the essential presupposition of the assurance of salvation.” As far as the second (negative) part of verse 36 is concerned, he observes: “It illustrates the same truth from the negative side, in keeping with the Johannine style (cf. 3:18; 1 John 15:12, etc.), and thereby makes the kerygmatic call more urgent.” John’s emphasis on both is not merely about a stylistic variant. He underlines the responsibility to choose life and the negative consequences of failing to do so. In addition, the lack of faith is presented in the same way as not dwelling in Christ. Bruner (2012:230-231) regards the way in which John contrasts faith and unfaith not as a single act, but as a pattern of life calling believers “to ‘abide in’ (‘stick by’, ‘remain beside’, ‘make our home with’, John 15) Jesus in a continuing relation of trust.” Where faith is lacking, this way of life will be absent, too – with devastating consequences. This pronouncement is given within an eschatological context when the motif of eternity is mentioned once again. The divine presence in the divine wrath is an ongoing matter.

John links the lack of faith explicitly with indwelling. One of the reasons for Jesus’ negative approach towards the Jewish leaders is given in John 5:37-38: “And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell (μένειν) in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.” In this instance, the divine word that dwells in those who believe in Jesus is linked with μένειν. Once again, a close link is established with Jesus. On the other hand, their lack of faith means that Jesus’ word does not dwell in them. Explicating John 5:37-38, Michaels (2010:330) declares: “God’s word is not ‘dwelling’ in them because Jesus’ word is not in them.” Those who do not dwell in Jesus’ word are guilty of sin: “Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (μένειν)” (John 9:40-41).¹⁴⁹ In this instance, μένειν

¹⁴⁸ Barrett (1978:366) mentions that μένειν is one of John’s characteristic words: “Generally it is used in a good sense (e.g. of the abiding Christ), but cf. 3:36, ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ’ αὐτόν.”

¹⁴⁹ This is another negative use of μένειν. According to Barrett (1978:366), “[t]he blindness of such men is incurable since they have deliberately rejected the only cure that exists”. Commenting on the “sin that remains”, Schnackenburg (1980:256)

has the meaning of a continuing, ongoing and enduring action. The divine presence in Jesus' word is found in those who believe, but guilt remains with those who do not believe.

In John 12:34, μένειν is once again used in a negative setting. This time it is linked with both Christ and eternal life, but, strikingly, also with the Law. Jesus uses the Law to justify his own position. "The crowd spoke up, 'We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain (μένειν) for ever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (John 12:34). If one considers Jesus' remarks in John 15:25 (the hatred of the world is the fulfilment of what is written in the Law), one realises that the forces opposing Jesus will be condemned by the same law they appealed to in rejecting the divinity of Jesus.¹⁵⁰ This lifelong struggle of Jesus to prove his true status as the Christ forms a crucial part of the Fourth Gospel. Only after the passion and his lifting up on the cross will the real meaning of these words and the irony thereof be revealed. In this instance, μένειν is used in an eschatological sense. Jesus' hour of glory initiates the downfall of his greatest enemy with consequences for his followers, as Brown (1982a:477) explains: "Perhaps we can say that the victorious hour of Jesus constitutes a victory over Satan in principle; yet the working out of this victory in time and place is the gradual work of believing Christians." In John 15:18-25, Jesus will discuss the hatred of the world in more detail as well as the fact that it is only a continuation of the hatred that he himself experienced. John wishes to underline that the Law confirms that Jesus will be with his disciples as an ongoing presence.

3. Conclusion

The above discussion analysed the use of μένειν in the first part of the Gospel as it paves the way for John 15. The positive meanings of μένειν in the above instances have to do with the ongoing and enduring presence of the divine among those who believe, from the first chapters and the first occurrence in John 1:32-34 about the Spirit descending and remaining in Jesus, to John 14:14-17 where the cycle is completed when the Spirit is also given to the disciples. In-between, the evangelist uses μένειν in a positive sense to describe the beginning and growth of discipleship (1:35-39) as an increasing number of seekers gather around Jesus and follow him (6:27). Slavery is traded for filiation (8:31, 34-36) as they are taken up and become part of the divine family. And yet, indwelling also brings with it death and loss of one's life. Based on the symbolic reality of the cross, disciples are prepared for the fact that fruit is only borne through death (12:24-26).

When μένειν is used in a negative sense, it usually conveys the consequences of not believing in Jesus as the Son of God. Those who distance themselves from him will experience how the divine will hold

explains: "[T]he person who is locked within himself and wants only his own advantage is closed to God's claim because it challenges him. As he hardens his attitude the more brutally he is confronted with God's demand if he does not free himself from the straitjacket of his egoism." Brown (1982a:376-377) mentions that the Pharisees who sat in judgement of the miracle are the ones judged guilty by Jesus. As far as μένειν is concerned, he adds: "The theme of remaining is common in John, but here it is sin that remains rather than a gift of God."

¹⁵⁰ Ridderbos (1997:441) confirms that the idea of a Messiah elevated to heaven was alien to the crowd and, therefore, they responded with an appeal to the Law: "The Messiah remains for ever." Ridderbos (1997:442) then concludes: "But it is only the incarnation of the Word and the descent of the Son of [M]an in and from which the Messiah's 'remaining for ever' can be known and understood."

them responsible for their unbelief. This includes the wrath of God (3:36); being guilty of sin (5:37-38), and being condemned by the same law they appealed to in rejecting the divinity of Jesus (12:34; cf. 15:25).

4. Μένειν in the Farewell Discourse

Any analysis of John 15, which forms part of the so-called Farewell Discourse (John 13-17), cannot be done in isolation. This is especially relevant, because John's Gospel is a close-knit narrative in which themes are constantly developed in interaction with each other. What is said in one passage could decisively be determined by pronouncements in the remainder of the Gospel.

4.1 A literary unit

The contents of John 13-17 indicate that it forms a literary unit, as will be argued later. It represents Jesus' last communication with his disciples. It shows similarities with other texts that can also be described as farewell addresses. The best known Biblical counterpart of John 13-17 is Deuteronomy, which can be described as Moses' Farewell Discourse to Israel.¹⁵¹ According to Beasley-Murray (1998), for example, a precedent for the Farewell Discourse is to be found in the genre of farewell discourses or testaments of famous men, known in the literature of the Hellenistic world, also prominent in Jewish writings. He refers to "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" as best known instance in the writings of early Judaism, with the Book of Deuteronomy as the most important example of this kind of writing.

This intricate nature of Johannine research, also in terms of John 15, is further evident from scholarly research on the Farewell Discourse. Based on his narratological research on John 13-17, Tolmie (1995:12) made some important remarks regarding coherence of John 15, the Farewell Discourse, and the Gospel as a whole:

The interpretation of the text in terms of the book as a well-designed, coherent text also implies that John 15 should be read within the larger unit in which the author incorporated it. Scholars have isolated John 13-17 as a unit. It became known as the Farewell Discourse because it represents the last extensive discussion between Jesus and his disciples. All the events narrated in John 13:1-17:26 form part of the coherent unified narrative of the Fourth Gospel, and were situated by the implied author as taking place on the evening before Jesus' death, and, as such, form a crucial part of the overall organisation of the narrative.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ "The most important example of this kind of writing, however, is the Book of Deuteronomy, which could well have been in the Evangelist's mind when composing the discourses of the Upper Room. This work in its entirety consists of the farewell discourses of Moses to Israel. The concept of Jesus as the new (or rather, greater than) Moses, bringing about a second Exodus for life in the kingdom of God, is a major theme. Moreover, the situation of Israel addressed in Deuteronomy is curiously similar to that of the disciples addressed in John 13-17: Israel is on the point of entering the promised land as the chosen people of God, and the disciples are about to be launched as the new Israel in order to be the instruments of the divine sovereignty in the world. There is also a surprising number of connections between the farewell discourses of Moses and those of Jesus" (Beasley-Murray 1998; 2:13-14).

¹⁵² Segovia (1991:2) also considers John 13-17 as a unit and "as a narrative section and farewell type-scene".

The Farewell Discourse follows on the first 12 chapters of the Gospel that describe how the ministry of Jesus brought him into contact with numerous people, including loyal supporters and hostile adversaries. However, in John 13-17, the so-called Farewell Discourse, the lens of the evangelist focuses exclusively on Jesus and his beloved disciples. Most of the discourse consists of a monologue. The close and loving relationship between Jesus and the twelve is revealed in more depth in this part of the text on the unfolding of their last few hours together. The Farewell consists of words of advice, encouragement, and confirmation of his and their calling done in light of the resurrection. The composition of the Farewell hints at the fact that they only grasped much of the real meaning of what Jesus did and told them, such as the dramatic washing of their feet, after his death and resurrection. Only then did they start to comprehend the full implications of his ministry.¹⁵³

The Farewell Discourse is carefully integrated in the Gospel as a whole. This is one reason why the analysis of *μενεειν* in the previous section took cognisance of previous parts that illuminated its meaning. The careful composition of the author of the Gospel is evident when the links between the Farewell Discourse and the previous section are investigated. Key terms in the early narrative are tied to the Farewell Discourse. Culpepper's (1983:39-40) analysis is aimed at disclosing just that, showing how the narrator carefully commented on important themes in the narrative:

The correlation of the narrator's explanatory comments with the themes of the farewell discourse is surprising. The following sample of evidence shows how the author has tied the farewell discourse to the gospel narrative by using the narrator to introduce some of its key terms earlier in the narrative.

The following diagram illustrates this point of view:

	Narrator	Farewell Discourse
ὥρα (<i>hour</i>)	7:30; 8:20; 13:1	16:32; 17:1; cf. 16:2
δοξάζω (<i>glorify</i>)	12:16	13:31, 32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:1, 4, 5, 10
πνεῦμα (<i>spirit</i>)	7:39; cf. 11:33; 13:21	14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13
ἄποσυναγωγῶς (<i>out of the synagogue</i>)	9:22; 12:42	

With reference to the “*hour*”, the narrator refers to Jesus’ hour that has not yet come. In both John 7:30 and 8:20, nobody tries to arrest Jesus, “because his time (hour) had not yet come”. Although later, during the Farewell Discourse in John 13:1, 16:32 and 17:1, Jesus announces that his “hour has come”.

As far as “*glorification*” is concerned, John 12:16 explains: “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.” In the Farewell Discourse, it is stated that the Son of Man has been glorified (13:31); God will glorify Him at once (13:32); the Father may be glorified in the Son (14:13); the

¹⁵³ Countryman (1987:91-92) spells out the distinctiveness of this part of the Gospel when he writes that Jesus’ crossing over to the father will make possible a new reality in the life of the believing community, and that Jesus now prepares the faithful for it. Jesus is now departing, but this does not bring his word to a close. He will continue to be active in, and with his disciples through an all-encompassing love.

Father is glorified by discipleship and the bearing of fruit (15:8); the Spirit will glorify Jesus (16:14); the petition that the Father should glorify his Son so that the Son may glorify him (17:1); Jesus glorified the Father by finishing the earthly work he gave him (17:4); Jesus asks the Father to glorify him with the glory he had before the world existed (17:5), and Jesus has been glorified in all those whom the Father gave him from the world and they belong to the Father and the Son (17:10).

Regarding the “*Spirit*”, the narrator declares: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:39), while 11:33 and 13:21 refer to being moved or troubled in spirit. In the Farewell speech, Jesus refers to the Spirit of truth, which it does not know, see or accept. Nevertheless, the disciples know him, for he lives with them and will be in them (14:17); the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father to teach the disciples and remind them of what Jesus said (14: 26); when Jesus sends them the Spirit of truth from the Father, he will testify on behalf of Jesus (15:26) and, when the Spirit comes, he will speak what he hears to guide them and declare the things that are to come (16:13).

The narrator deals with the theme of excommunication or being put “*out of the synagogue*” in John 9:22, where he informs his readers about the decision of the Jews that anyone who confesses Jesus as Messiah will be put out of the synagogue. John 12:42 mentions that many of those who believed in Jesus did not confess this out of fear for the Pharisees. In the Farewell, the theme surfaces again when Jesus declares that the disciples will be put out of the synagogue and could even be killed (16:2).

4.2 The composition

Culpepper’s scheme thus confirms that the Gospel comes from the hand of an author(s) who composes a systematic and coherent text. In order to determine how John 15 is part of this carefully composed Farewell Discourse, its internal composition requires attention. The design and unity of this final discourse will also help disclose the meaning and importance of μένειν.

Scholars have offered a number of proposals for the pattern of Jesus’ Farewell. The order proposed by Bultmann (1971:461) comprises the following: John 13:1-30 (the last meal with Jesus); 17:1-26 (farewell prayer); 13:31-35; 15-16:33; 13:36-14:41 (Farewell Discourses and conversations), while the most popular division is based on Brown’s proposition: Part One, 13:31-14:31 (the meal, the departure of Jesus, and the future of the disciples); Part Two, 15:1-17 (the vine and the branches); Part Three, John 15:18-16:4a (the world’s hatred for Jesus and his disciples); Part Four, 16:4b-33 (Jesus’ departure and the coming of the Paraclete; Jesus’ return will bring the disciples joy and understanding); Part Five, 17:1-26 (Jesus’ concluding prayer).¹⁵⁴

In an attempt to grasp the logical development and coherence of the Farewell Discourse, Dodd (1953:390-423) chose a distinctive approach and drew a conclusion that seems to be the most helpful for

¹⁵⁴ Brown (1982b:542) divides the Gospel into two main sections: John 1-12 as the Book of Signs and John 13-21 as the Book of Glory. The book of Glory is then subdivided into four parts: 13-17 (The last supper); 18-19 (The passion narrative); 20:1-29 (The risen Jesus), and 20:30-31 (Conclusion). The divisions of the Last Discourse are then treated in detail (Brown 1982b:586-594). Cf. also Barrett (1978:14, 436); Dodd (1953:390); Schnackenburg (1982:1-5), and Keener (2003b:891-893).

interpreting the text. He works with the obvious sources that were combined by the author/redactor, with the possible accidental displacement of pages. Dodd (1953:399-400) defines his *modus operandi* as follows:

I conceive it to be the duty of the interpreter to attempt in the first place to understand and account for the actual text which lies before him, and if possible to discover the plan on which it is arranged, whether or not any possible plan might be discovered behind it.

This particular approach by Dodd (1953:396-397) is motivated as follows. First, he believes that the intention of the evangelist was to interpret the eschatological event of the death and resurrection of Christ in the fullest sense and, in doing so, “offer a revision of the eschatological teaching current in the Church and embodied in the other Gospels”. Secondly, the evangelist utilises themes from earlier parts of the Fourth Gospel such as the Book of Signs. An example is the archetypal relation between Father and Son (held forth in the Book of Signs as the ultimate relation between God and men), which is realised in the disciples as the eschatological event: “For it is the fulfilment of all the prophetic promises: it is the glory of God revealed; it is the knowledge of God made available for all, from least to greatest; and it is the dwelling of God with men.”¹⁵⁵

The remainder of this section will follow, in broad lines, the structure proposed by Dodd. In his examination of the formal structure of John 13-17, Dodd attempts to relate the structure to the argument. His exposition is based on general patterns detected in the Book of Signs.¹⁵⁶ The pattern for the Farewell Discourse, as Dodd (1953:400) suggests, begins with a dramatic scene combining action with dialogue (13:1-30). This is followed by pure dialogue with progressively increasing monologues (13:31-14:31; 15-16). After a short concluding dialogue in John 16:29-33, the discourse ends with Chapter 17, a unique monologue in the form of a prayer. What follows is based on the assumption that the Farewell Discourse reproduces a standard Johannine pattern.

4.2.1 Dramatic opening scene: The imminent departure

The Farewell Discourse begins in John 13:1-30, with Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. This part paves the way for what is to follow in the remainder of the discourse. This opening scene sketches a significant spiritual deepening of the relationship between Jesus and his inner circle of followers that prepares them for the process of transformation ahead of them, namely the passion. Why? This startling deed of footwashing should be treated as a significant action (σημεῖον), according to Dodd (1953:401). He admits that the symbolism is complex, but clues are not wanting, leading him to detect references to both the Lord’s Supper and baptism.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Dodd (1953:397). According to him, the prophecies of Isaiah 40:5, Jeremiah 38 (31):34 and Ezekiel 37:27 are more or less clearly echoed in this instance.

¹⁵⁶ Examples of the parallels mentioned by Dodd (1953:400) can be found in John 5:1-9 action (healing at Bethesda); 10-18 dialogue (Sabbath healing); 19-40 monologue (the work of the Father and Son); 41-47 appendix; John 6:1-23 action and dialogue (feeding of the multitude); 24-59 dialogue tending to monologue (bread of life); 60-65, 66-71 two brief dialogues; John 9:1-7 action (healing at Siloam), 8-41 dialogues (trial and colloquies), and John 10:1-18 monologue (shepherd and sheep); 19-21 dialogue (between Jews), and 22-39 (appendix).

Among the clues, he points out that the evening meal, as the time when the action took place (δείπνου γινομένου; 13:2), is indicative of the κυριακόν δείπνον (the Lord's Supper),¹⁵⁷ which focuses on the ἀνάμνησις (remembrance) of the crucified and risen Christ. The washing of the feet with water could further suggest baptism (λουτρόν παλιγγενεσίας, as in Titus 3:5). Although the uninitiated reader might not be aware of all this, an attentive reader of the Book of Signs would recognise these clues.¹⁵⁸

4.2.2 Christ's departure and return: Consolation

John 13:31-14:31 represents the first cycle of dialogues in the Farewell Discourse. In John 13:31, the evangelist continues with the theme of glory (δόξα), already identified as having mystical overtones. Jesus gives his disciples the "new commandment" of loving each other as he has loved them.¹⁵⁹ John 14 reveals how Jesus consoles the disciples not to be troubled or afraid (John 14:1, 28)¹⁶⁰ because of his pending departure (John 13:33; 14:2, 4).¹⁶¹ The disciples misunderstand Jesus and are given more insight into what will happen. Dodd (1953:404-405) describes part of the clarification as the journey of Christ to the Father: "Christ is the way to the Father, He mediates the knowledge of God, or the vision of God; to see Him is to see the Father, since He is one with the Father by mutual indwelling, and His words and deeds are those of the Father." All of this means "that, after the death of Jesus, and because of it, His followers will enter into union with Him as their living Lord, and through Him with the Father, and so enter into eternal life".¹⁶²

Jesus announces the aim of his departure, namely to prepare a dwelling for them in his Father's house, to return and to take them to himself (John 14:3). But, there is more consoling news. In his absence, they will not be orphaned, but they will be in good care – none less than another Advocate (Paraclete), the Spirit of truth. This news should bring peace to their worried minds and souls. The unity of the Farewell Discourse is underscored by the brief introduction of subjects such as the mutual indwelling of Christ and his disciples (14:20), as well as the Paraclete (14:15-17). These will be addressed in more detail later.

¹⁵⁷ This should be read together with 1 Corinthians 11:20, written, like this Gospel, at Ephesus (cf. Dodd 1953:401).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Dodd (1953:401).

¹⁵⁹ This is a love with a special nature, as Coloe (2007:143) points out: "The Fourth Gospel does not present Jesus as the 'Servant of God' as do the Synoptics but rather as the 'Shepherd-King' who freely lays down his life for love of his friends (John 15:13). "To the outside observer love may appear to be service, as it can also seem to be duty; but the experience of love transcends and transforms service and duty. As Jesus gathers his own, the process of his 'hour' begins, and Jesus enacts a loving welcome into the Father's household with the simple, homely implements of a towel, a basin, and water."

¹⁶⁰ As Dodd (1953:403) points out, Chapter 14 is clamped together "by the repeated use of the expression μή παρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἢ καρδίᾳ in verses 1 and 27".

¹⁶¹ Cf. Dodd (1953:403).

¹⁶² In passing, a note should be made regarding the question as to where the Lord would be after his resurrection. Schneiders (2003:213) presents a number of important concepts in clarifying this issue. For her, it is not primarily a spatial or geographical question, but "[i]t denotes indwelling, the communion between Jesus and God and between Jesus and his disciples. Where Jesus is, is in the bosom of the Father. He comes into the world to give the power of divine filiation to his disciples. He then departs again to resume his primordial glory in the presence of God and returns to initiate his disciples into that glory."

4.2.3 Christ and his church: From sorrow to joy

The next phase of the Farewell Discourse (John 15-16) is about discipleship and the clarification of how life will be in the “absence” of him as their mentor. The concept of “abiding” or “indwelling” (μένειν) explains the essence of discipleship. John 15 is situated in the middle of the Farewell Discourse and the recurring use of μένειν will be crucial for a mystical reading of the entire Gospel.

In John 16, μένειν is not used, but εἰμί is used twice in the sense of being with someone: “I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you” (John 16:4), and: “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me” (John 16:32). This use of εἰμί elaborates and complements μένειν, and points to the close and intimate relationship within the divine and between the divine and humanity.

Based on the structure proposed by Dodd, John 15:1-16:15 presents the longest monologue in the Gospel.¹⁶³ John continues with themes mentioned earlier which have now become major themes of discourse. Special mention should be made of the mutual indwelling of Jesus and the disciples (15:1-7), as well as the work of the Paraclete (15:18-16:11). The effect of μένειν leads to the conclusion:

[T]he organic union of the branches with the vine and so with one another provides a striking image for that idea of the mutual indwelling of Christ and His people which the author wishes to develop. Soon it appears that the principle of such indwelling is ἀγάπη (Dodd 1953:412).

Up to John 16:15, the Gospel deals with various aspects that characterise the life of the Church after the death of Jesus, ending with a few verses that “bring the reader back from the thought of the Church in conflict with the world to that of the Church in living dependence on its Lord”.¹⁶⁴ From verse 16, the discourse seems to revert back to 13:31-14:31 about the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection, “without which there is no assurance of divine ἀγάπη, no abiding in Christ, and no power in the Church to judge the world”.¹⁶⁵ Based on the exposition of John’s argument and structure, as explained earlier, the first cycle of discourse ends with the summons to advance against the enemy (John 14:31). The second section declares victory: “The attack and the victory are both upon the inward, spiritual plane.”¹⁶⁶

4.2.4 John 17: The final prayer

John 17 signifies a final act of compassion in Jesus praying for his disciples. The issues he touches on comprise motifs with mystical overtones such as glory, life, joy, sanctification, and unity. By praying, Jesus sets an example of what he encouraged them to do in John 15:7, 16 and 16:23. The level of intimacy created by the group of friends uniting in prayer could hardly be overestimated. It

¹⁶³ Cf. Dodd (1953:410).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Dodd (1953:415).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Dodd (1953:416).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Dodd (1953:416).

sets the stage for the final drama that will be unfolding soon – his followers will be scattered and he will paradoxically be raised to fulfil a life of selfless love.

5. Concluding remarks

This Chapter explained how $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ was used in the immediate literary context of John 15 and paved the way for a fuller understanding of the mutual indwelling required of the disciples. The humble beginning in the disciples' choice for, and answer to Jesus' call had to develop to their ability to grasp the depth and far-reaching implications of the farewell message documented in John 15. A choice for Jesus involved staying with, and following him, constantly moving more completely into his sphere of influence. They had to realise that they were no longer slaves, but members of the divine household. Based on the gift of the Paraclete, they could listen more open-mindedly to the vine metaphor and its consequences. All of these should have prepared them for Jesus' new commandment of love, the call to mutual indwelling and abundant bearing of fruit. The next Chapter will deal with the spiritual and mystical effects of $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ in more detail.

The Chapter also analysed the structure and unity of John 13-17 that could benefit a mystical reading of John 15. In the Farewell Discourse, John reveals the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples, using special metaphors, symbols, and descriptions. He reassures them of his divine presence among them during the time pending between separation and farewell. The discourse is, at the same time, about the growing union between Jesus and his disciples in the wake of the coming time of absence and in terms of distance. Jesus is intensely involved in assuring his disciples of his intimate presence among them even after his imminent departure.

In light of much disagreement among scholars about the interrelationship between the chapters of the Farewell Discourse, Dodd's (1953:400) contribution is invaluable. This is especially true of his choice to examine the text as it lies before him and to relate the structure to the argument. The theme of mutual indwelling continues to surface in his exposition. The value of investigating the whole Farewell Discourse lies in revealing the intention of the evangelist. He displays how eternal life is realised in the experience of the disciples by exhibiting its true nature and character:

It is described in various terms, but chiefly in terms of the mutual indwelling of Christ and His disciples, reproducing the archetypal mutual indwelling of Father and Son (xiv.10-11, 20, xv. 4-5, xvii. 20-3). This in turn is construed in terms of divine $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$... note especially how mutual indwelling passes into $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ in xv.1-17 and xvii.20-6.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Dodd (1953:398).

CHAPTER 5

MENEIN FROM THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, a close reading of the Greek text identified the most important themes in John 15, in preparation for a reading focused on the importance and nature of *μένειν*. Chapter 3 provided a brief analysis of research results of mostly the historical-critical approach, followed by an investigation into the validity of the mystical readings of Biblical texts. The spiritual nature of the Gospel and the soundness of a mystical reading of John 15 in terms of *μένειν* were confirmed. Chapter 4 spelled out the immediate and wider textual framework for a spiritual and mystical reading of *μένειν* in John 15. The remainder of this thesis will focus on an analysis based on the above insights regarding mystical Spirituality.

2. John 15 from the perspective of mystical Spirituality

A mystical reading of John 15 reminds one of Scholem's (1961:14) remarks about the essence of mystical interpretations of Scripture. For him, the thoughts of God in contrast with those of humanity are of infinite profundity. Neither the so-called "original meaning" of the author, nor the single interpretation of Scripture in human language can exhaust a text's meaning. He concludes:

It is the usual fate of sacred writings to become more or less divorced from the intentions of their authors. What may be called their after-life, those aspects which are discovered by later generations, frequently become of greater importance than their original meaning; and after all – who knows what their original meaning was.

These remarks not only reveal the potent character of sacred texts to generate new meanings, but also indicate why historical-critical approaches are complemented and replaced by other approaches such as spiritual and mystical readings. In her dealing with the characteristics of Johannine Spirituality, Schneiders (2005c:387) provides valuable guidelines for her mystical reading of John 15, but also indirectly indicates the inseparability of a spiritual and mystical reading. According to her, Johannine Spirituality is first,

a mystical spirituality in which presence, mutual indwelling, and union rather than dogma or morality predominate. Union with Jesus is the source of intimate knowledge of God and the strength to live as the body of Jesus in the world, to love unto the laying down of one's life.¹⁶⁸

This insight of an established and informed New Testament scholar confirms the validity of reading John's Gospel from both a spiritual and a mystical perspective. In line with Scholem's and

¹⁶⁸ Schneiders (2005c:387) mentions five more characteristics of John's Spirituality. It is intensely personal (based on the vine metaphor); the disciples are presented as equalitarian (including women); the only criterion of holiness is the love between Jesus and his friends; the source of life is the Spirit rather than observing rules and rituals, and physical death does not endanger life eternal guaranteed by believing in Jesus.

Schneiders' remarks, the reading from the perspective of mystical Spirituality will build on the groundwork of scholars, as explained earlier. In addition, such an approach will reveal new meaning in the well-known message of John 15. A crucial question is: What should be the key for such a reading? Until now, this study revealed the special place of the verb μένειν in John 15, the Farewell Discourse as well as in the Gospel as a whole. Μένειν will thus be used as the key to interpret Jesus' vine metaphor in light of mystical Spirituality.

3. Μένειν within the divine-human relationship

Indwelling, represented by μένειν in John's Gospel, articulates the divine-human relationship that fundamentally characterises Spirituality. It is, therefore, a spiritual theme that comprises both a divine and a human pole related to one another. John 15 confirms this Spirituality, because it is permeated with relational language. This also fits in well with its context in the monologue of John 13-17 that reveals the loving relationship between Jesus and his disciples (as explained in Chapter 4). The relationship of God with humanity defines all other relationships in the Gospel and motivates people to follow Jesus' example. The initiative and presence of God is, therefore, of seminal importance in the divine-human relationship. The relationship is presented in John 15 in terms of the divine indwelling in humanity. The word μένειν is the focal point for the divine-human relationship in John 15. In the following chapters, this verb will be used to focus on Jesus' call to mutual indwelling from the divine and human perspective. In this present chapter, the divine initiative and involvement will be investigated before analysing the human pole in Chapter 6.

3.1 Μένειν and the divine outreach

Mutual indwelling is, in the first instance, about the presence of God in the life of the disciples. A study of μένειν, therefore, requires an understanding of how Jesus, as the Son, represents God in the divine-human relationship. In addition, the distinctive role of the Spirit of truth, the Johannine Paraclete, will also be spelled out by exploring the different aspects of the divine presence.

Divine indwelling is set in motion by God's initiative in reaching out to humanity.¹⁶⁹ In mystical Spirituality, God begins, but never ceases with this outreach. This divine initiative is particularly prominent throughout John's Gospel. The divine initiative and outreach to humanity is emphasised in the Gospel by the use of language that reminds one of God's creative activities. The terminology of the prologue of John shows similarities with Genesis' account of creation, such as "in the beginning" in John 1:1 (Εν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος). In comparison with Genesis, John's introduction to the Gospel reveals a new initiative by the Creator, a new beginning, bringing light and life to humanity. The creation motif is indirectly confirmed by the cosmic nature of the prologue. Already in the prologue, the life that was given by God in Jesus (the Word) is considered the light of all people (John 1:4).

¹⁶⁹ Waaijman (2003:66) mentions that indwelling by God is one of the vital mystical characteristics.

This sustained and creative outreach to the world is noted throughout the Gospel. John points this out in his references to actions by God himself via people such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, the disciples, and numerous others, as shall be explained later. In the Gospel, the divine calling and equipment of believers is transferred to Jesus. God's initiative in John 1 is, therefore, compared to a new act of creation. It recalls Waaijman's description of transformation in creation: God begins a relationship where nothing exists; it is complemented by a transformation in recreation which refers to the divine restoration of a situation that has become deformed.¹⁷⁰ Through this initiative, life is brought into existence out of nothing, but also restored to its initial status. This special insight points to the Spirituality of the Gospel. It reveals the nuanced nature of transformation as a key element in Spirituality as a powerful, creative and restorative act of God.

The divine outreach shows God's desire for a close relationship with humanity. From this most intimate and divine unity described in the opening verses of John springs the well that produces the water of life. The initiative is important, because it brings life in its fullness to the disciples. The divine aim was to offer people everlasting, fruitful life in Christ (e.g., John 3:35; 6:27, 40, 47; 17:2; 20:31). In John 15, God's loving outreach reaches new heights with Jesus' remarks about mutual indwelling when he uses the verb μένειν: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα. ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ οὗτος φέρει καρπὸν πολύν, ὅτι χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν (John 15:5).

The divine initiative in the process of mutual indwelling underlines the graciousness of God's actions shielding humanity against itself, as Ridderbos (1997:517) explains:

[W]ithout this reciprocal remaining in him and him in them they will fall back on themselves, either in total unfruitfulness or lapsing into the wild growth that is no longer shaped by his word, into activism of idealism that is neither derived from nor directed to him.

Humanity is so imprisoned in its own deformity that its liberation can only come from outside itself.

The divine outreach is decisively Christological in nature. In this divine initiative, Jesus is the one who reaches out to God's world. The initiative is aimed not only at the salvation of sinners, but also at establishing a relationship with believers in him as the divine Word who is the real and true way for humanity to be restored to an abundant life. This is illustrated when John elucidates the role of the divine with the μένειν relationship and the image of the vine, especially the ἐγὼ εἰμι saying in John 15.

3.2 The "I am" saying as revelation of Jesus' divine nature

Several aspects of the vine image, with which John describes the divine character of Jesus, point towards its special and mystical nature.

¹⁷⁰ Waaijman (2002:456) refers to the five layers in the transformation process. The first is "the transformation from non-being to being in God's creation of man". He mentions Psalm 139 as an ancient song fragment celebrating the formation of man during the events of creation. The verbs used articulate the most important transitional moments: designing, realising, and destining. Within the context of the Gospel, these concepts will acquire new spiritual meaning with profound mystical implications through the use of μένειν.

3.2.1 The revelatory nature of the “I am” sayings

Jesus’ introductory words in John 15:5, namely “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι), depict Jesus as the divine one. These words explain, in more depth, to his disciples who he is and represents a revelation about his divine identity. The Johannine Jesus makes known to his audience what they do not know and what the hidden truth is in his life and work. By using such revelatory language, the evangelist discloses knowledge that was crucial for his readers. A major characteristic of mysticism is dealing with hidden and unknown matters that are made known to an individual or group. It is about revelation of that which was not yet revealed and that was previously inaccessible to people; being enlightened about what was previously not understood or known by them. This is not only the case with the “I am” expression in John 15:5. Numerous other sayings, words and concepts that refer to unknown and hidden matters are found in the John’s Gospel, including the vine metaphor, the other ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, and the use of μένειν. They refer to an ultimate reality behind the world of appearance and the secret teachings revealed exclusively to the initiates and not to outsiders.

The “I am” pronouncement of Jesus is repeated elsewhere in the Gospel and offers a key insight into Jesus’ true identity. Schnelle (2009:686) stressed the special significance of the “I am” sayings when he described them as the centre of Jesus’ self-proclamation and as sayings of the Johannine revelation, theology, and hermeneutic:¹⁷¹

In them, Jesus declares who he is, what he wants to be for humanity, and how people are to understand him. The “I am” sayings embody a uniquely concentrated combination of Christology and soteriology.

On the basis of the Gospel itself, one can deduce that there were many hidden issues which its readers would like to have clarified. In the Gospels, in general, but in John, in particular, the person of Jesus was constantly a matter of reflection and debate. Thus, a major hidden issue that required clarification was related to the real identity of Jesus. Jesus’ followers were uncertain about him. Although the disciples are given an insight into who Jesus was, they failed to fully understand him. The evangelist often mentions that the disciples only understood the sayings of Jesus after his death and resurrection (e.g., John 2:22; 8:28; 13:7, 36; 16:12).¹⁷² Outsiders were also uncertain or unaware of who Jesus was, speculating about his enigmatic references to his descent and his claim that God is his heavenly Father. This caused confrontations with the Jews. On the surface of things, they viewed Jesus as the son of Joseph, whose father and mother they knew. They struggled with the claim that he came down from heaven (John 6:42; see also 1:45). Jesus’ words about his mystical descent from heaven that indicated hidden knowledge puzzled his opponents.

¹⁷¹ Schnackenburg (1968:380) also emphasises their importance when he regards ἐγώ εἰμι as typical of the Johannine revelatory discourses.

¹⁷² Cf. Dodd’s exposition of the Farewell Discourse’s structure in Chapter 4.

It is in this context that the Johannine Jesus discusses his identity. John explains the enigma, using the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings. By using the “I am” saying together with μένειν, John reveals more about God and his relation to the world, but at other times he elucidates other aspects of the divine pole in the divine-human relationship. This includes God’s relation to Jesus and the Paraclete.

Several scholars have recognised the special nature of the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings. Schnackenburg (1980:88-89) confirms their revelatory features: “The images of the ‘I am’ style express his role in revelation and salvation in an incomparable way, their main purpose is the positive illustration of John’s revelation of Christ.” Schneiders (2003:49) emphasised the mystical nature of this revelatory aspect by pointing out that revelation in John is unique – it connotes an ongoing relationship resulting in true friendship and, ultimately, discipleship. Jesus reveals his divine nature in its ineffability to his disciples: “Jesus’ self-revelation is his ongoing and progressive opening to his disciples of his own inner life, the life of divine filiation, which is infinite in its depth and breadth and richness.” Tellingly, Schneiders (2003:164) adds that, whenever Jesus uses the “I am” as self-identification with God, it has overtones of divinisation. A closer look at the different aspects of this revelation is necessary.

3.2.2 The Christological nature of the “I am” sayings

It is noteworthy that Jesus himself is the agent of revelation that he is the “I am” in John. He is the one who speaks authoritatively to his disciples about his own identity, using traditional images, symbols and metaphors.¹⁷³ The importance of the vine image is clear from the fact that it was part of well-known and established traditions and that it points to the hidden matters that are not always accessible to its readers. In John 15, the image of the vine for Jesus thus has a Christological character when John combines it with the traditional motif of the ἐγώ εἰμι as foundation for what is to follow. The divine outreach is not only about God who establishes a relationship, but also about the way in which it is done through Christ. God thus begins and implements the relationship through the life and work of Christ who uses images to identify himself as the embodiment of the divine outreach to humanity.

John’s sevenfold use of the ἐγώ εἰμι formula shows the significance of these hidden matters. It is used, in this instance, in the heart of the Farewell Discourse in John 15:1 as an opening revelatory statement.¹⁷⁴ The other ἐγώ εἰμι sayings will also share hidden insights about God and about the mystery of who Jesus really was.¹⁷⁵ In them, Jesus is referred to as the bread of life, the light of the world, the good

¹⁷³ Cf. also Chapter 3, section 5.2.

¹⁷⁴ The seven are found in John 6:35 – the bread of life; John 8:12 – the light of the world; John 10:11 – the good shepherd; John 10:7 – the door of the sheep; John 11:25 – the resurrection and life; John 14:6 – the way, and the truth, and the life, and John 15:1 – the true vine. Schnackenburg (1980:79) compares the occurrence of ἐγώ εἰμι in the Gospels (Matthew – 5 times; Mark – 3 times; Luke – 4 times, and John – 29 times); in the mouth of Jesus (Matthew – once; Mark – twice; Luke – twice, and John – 26 times), and then concludes: “(This) leaves no doubt that this is a consciously used and theologically significant expression which has become a highly compressed formula.”

¹⁷⁵ Bultmann (1971:225-226) distinguishes between four forms of the ἐγώ-εἰμι formula: (1) The “*presentation formula*”, which replies to the question “Who are you?”; (2) The “*qualification formula*”, which answers the question “What are you?”; (3) The “*identification formula*”, in which the speaker identifies himself with another person or object, and (4) The “*recognition*

shepherd, the door of the sheep, the resurrection and life, the way, the truth, the life, and the true vine. The image of the vine in John 15 is the seventh and final saying.¹⁷⁶ Since numbers in Biblical texts are usually important, this fact calls for special attention, especially given John's symbolism that points to deeper meanings. As seventh saying, it may point to the fact that, of all the sayings, it represents the climax and deepest truth of who Jesus really was.¹⁷⁷

3.2.3 The traditional nature of the "I am" sayings

As mentioned briefly earlier, these mystical concepts of the vine and the name used in the divine-human relationship stem from tradition. John uses the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula to communicate an important dimension of the hidden knowledge that is revealed about Jesus. The ἐγὼ εἰμι phrase is intricately linked with the Old Testament. This intertextual relationship further illuminates the full meaning of Jesus' pronouncement. The phrase indicates that the revelation is about God, because the "I am" refers to the Name of God in the Old Testament. In John and Jesus' time, an observant Jew would be aware of the link between the revelatory ἐγὼ εἰμι of Exodus 3:14 and the words of Jesus.¹⁷⁸ Durham (1998), for example, linked this phrase with the Mosaic traditions. He explains that, during his encounter with God when he was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses asked God to identify (reveal) himself. God replied with the now well-known words "I AM what I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"¹⁷⁹ God not only identifies himself to Moses, but also reveals himself, using the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula. Since then, Moses' life clearly reveals a very intimate and even mystical relationship with God.

The name of God in the Old Testament played a central role in Waaijman's (2002:431) interpretation of mystical Spirituality. It is such a unique dimension of his work on Biblical Spirituality that he allocated much value to the name of God in Exodus 3:14 and its use in the Old Testament generally. He captured the essence of this phrase's meaning with his translation of the divine name of Jahweh. He does so against the background of patriarchal traditions. He explains that, whenever the ever-transmigrating semi-nomadic families entered new pastures, they built an altar and called on God with the name Jahweh. The call

formula", which is to be distinguished from the others by the fact that, in this instance, ἐγὼ is the predicate. Bultmann regards John 6.35, 41, 48, 51; 8.12; 10.7, 9, 11, 14, and 15.1, 5 as recognition formulae. On the other hand, 11.25 and perhaps 14.6 are probably identification formulae. In John 4.26; 8.18, 23; 18.5f., the ἐγὼ εἰμι is not used as a sacred formula.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Smalley's (1978:91-92) interesting arrangement of the seven signs, discourses and "I am" sayings. A concise summary is included in Addendum 3.

¹⁷⁷ Bruner (2012:878) remarks that "this is the seventh and last of Jesus' 'I-Am-with-a-predicate' sayings, and it is one of the most impressive".

¹⁷⁸ Barrett (1978:292) identifies the Old Testament as background for John's use of ἐγὼ εἰμι, with specific reference to texts such as Exodus 3:6; 3:14 and 20:2. Schnelle (2009:686) agrees, adding some texts from Isaiah 43:10-11 LXX; 45:12 LXX. Brown (1982a) also associates the Johannine use with ἐγὼ εἰμι employed as a divine name in the Old Testament and rabbinic Judaism.

¹⁷⁹ Durham (1998): explains that the verbs are first person common qal imperfects of the verb היה "to be", connoting continuing and unfinished action, "I am being that I am being" or "I am the Is-ing One", that is, "the One Who Always Is". Not conceptual being, being in the abstract, but active being, is the intent of this reply, which suggests that it is inappropriate to refer to God only as "was" or as "will be", for the reality of this active existence can be suggested only by the present "is" or "is-ing",¹⁷⁹ "Always Is" or "Am". The LXX reads: ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. Although this verb is difficult to translate into English, it most probably means the "Ising one".

represents the wish for Jahweh to “be present here. Protect us from misfortune. Be there!” The name was originally a petition, literally meaning: “May he be there!” In time, this litany became an independent divine name: Be-er. This meaning is present to such an extent that Waaijman prefers to translate it into English as “Be-er”. The name indicates that God, Be-er, who participates and is intimately involved in human life, reveals himself as protective presence. Waaijman thus understands the name in a mystical manner. It profoundly reflects the consciousness of the divine presence among the people of God. This has special relevance for Jesus’ use of the name in combination with the indwelling motif. Indwelling is about God’s presence, which is so important that it is reflected in God’s name. God as Be-er is God who indwells in humanity, who is there for humanity.¹⁸⁰ This is, then, made applicable to the person of Jesus.

The Johannine Jesus builds his ἐγώ εἰμι sayings on this mystical tradition about the name of God. In a clear act of revelation, he applies the well-known formula from the Old Testament to himself. The implication of this combination is that indwelling in Jesus means being in a relationship with none other than the divine. The divine indwelling articulated by μένειν is intricately related to Jesus. John needed his audience to realise that Jesus is more than the much-discussed man from Nazareth; he is not only the Son of God, he is himself God. The ἐγώ εἰμι revelation, together with the use of μένειν, is all about the divinity of Jesus which is to be revealed, accepted and believed. John’s account, read against the milieu of Moses’ experience, enriches the meaning of this divine revelation.¹⁸¹

3.2.4 Linking μένειν and the “I am” saying

The symbolic nature of the ἐγώ εἰμι saying is underlined when John combines it with the image of the vine to illuminate the nature of the divine indwelling as focus and part of the mystical relationship with humanity.¹⁸² The vine confirms that Jesus is using symbolic language that points to a deeper meaning, which would be in line with John’s symbolic use of the “I am” saying for Jesus. Koester’s (2008:2) explanation of the symbolic meaning of the vine offers an insight into its intention: “A straightforward statement often has a trap door that swings open to reveal depths of meaning that were only hinted at on the surface.” The vine has a symbolic quality that invites the reader to dwell on its deeper meaning, just as the “I am” saying which seems too straightforward.

The “I am” saying, together with the two references to the vine in John 15:1 and 5, thus forms part of Jesus’ revelation of his hidden and true identity: “I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Vinedresser. I am the vine, you are the branches.” (Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινὴ καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστίν.

¹⁸⁰ In this instance, the concept of intertextuality is detectable between the uses of the Lord’s name in Exodus and John’s Gospel. John expands on the divine-human relationship in the Old Testament. The relationship with the disciples now includes the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. Waaijman (2006:112-122) describes this incomparable reciprocity in dealing with the calling out of the Lord’s name in the Psalms: “In de Naam is het volk Wezer nabij en Wezer zijn volk nabij. De Naam is de mystiek-dialogiese ruimte, waarin Wezer en zijn volk wederkerig verbonden zijn. Deze eenheid word gevierd in het uitroepen van de Naam.”

¹⁸¹ Brown (1982a:537) states: “John draws attention to the implications of divinity in the use of ἐγώ εἰμι by Jesus” and “it is possible that John thinks of ἐγώ εἰμι as the divine name given to Jesus. If this name is to be glorified through the hour of the death and resurrection, John viii 28 says, ‘when you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.’”

¹⁸² The image of the vine is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, section 3.1.1).

ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα). Jesus is revealed as the only *true* vine. Life everlasting is to be found in him alone, despite all the allegations and objections from the religious elite of his time.¹⁸³

4. Complete indwelling by the divine characters

There is another unique aspect of the divine pole in John's Gospel that relates to the hidden presence of God as expressed in the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. All three of them, in their own unique way, represent and express the indwelling of the divine and offer a deeper insight into the rich understanding of God as the mystery that is being revealed. Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are involved in a mystical life guided by the Johannine μένειν, as its characterisation of the divine partners reveals. This ever-present *Trinitarian activity* can be detected throughout the Gospel.¹⁸⁴

4.1 Powerful and enduring indwelling by Jesus

The above exposition of Jesus' ἐγώ εἰμι saying characterised him as the one who takes the initiative in his relationship with the disciples. His divine action comes to the fore in different verses in John 15, illustrating various characteristics of Jesus' actions. He cleanses or purifies the disciples (15:3) by his Word, but also as the Word himself, the Λόγος par excellence.¹⁸⁵ Jesus further empowers his followers. Without him, they can do nothing (15:5). His power is illustrated in his changing their status. Having freed them from slavery, he made them his friends (15:13-15). In doing so, he goes to extraordinary lengths. He lays down his life for his friends, including the disciples (15:13). Jesus as the vine clearly implies that he is the only source of life for his followers who powerfully transfer their lives. Lee (2002:94) underlines how crucial indwelling by Jesus is for their survival. Without it, discipleship will die. Indwelling is the source for the ongoing existence of discipleship. Lee (2002:94) also compares it with the bond between mother and child connected by the umbilical cord and then concludes: "Disciples cannot be disciples except to the extent that they abide in union with Jesus. Christology lies at the center of John's understanding of relationship."

The nature of Christ's indwelling is characterised in yet another way when John 15 portrays his indwelling presence as continuous and ongoing. In Jesus' monologue, he remarks: "[Y]ou have been with me from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, John 15:27). This spells out their long association with him. As indicated earlier, the start of this ongoing relationship was already mentioned in John 1:35-42 with the use of μένειν. John wanted to emphasise that the disciples were indeed with Jesus from the beginning of his

¹⁸³ Barrett (1978:5) compares the Synoptics' use of certain words with that of John: ἀλήθεια, ἀληθής, and ἀληθινός are used as follows: Matthew (2); Mark (4); Luke (4), and John (46). This underlines the importance John attributes to it.

¹⁸⁴ Cf., in this regard, Lee (2002:109) who argues that the Johannine symbolism of indwelling signifies participation in the Trinitarian life of God and communion of saints within and beyond the visible world.

¹⁸⁵ Barrett (1978:149-156) supports the fact that much of John's Christology is condensed in the word λόγος. In a cosmological sense, the eternal divine Word is the source of light and life for men. John's reference in John 1:1 "and the Word was God" is of importance. Barrett (1978:156) states: "John intends that the whole of his Gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous." Brown (1982a:524) also stresses the importance of Jesus as the λόγος: "In the mind of the theologian of the Prologue the creative word of God, the word of the Lord that came to the prophets, has become personal in Jesus who is the embodiment of the divine revelation."

ministry. Their life-changing choice, which begun early on, continues. During Jesus' final hours on earth, as described in the Farewell Discourse, they are still with him. This contrasts with Judas' relationship that was discontinued when he made the choice to leave him. The continuity of their relationship and their ongoing unity with him is thus reiterated. The symbol of the vine is about the indwelling unity between Jesus and his followers that can never be broken.¹⁸⁶ Jesus' actions, therefore, reveal the way in which God continues to uphold a close, intimate union with the faithful from beginning to end. It is an ongoing indwelling. God remains present in the lives of the disciples through Jesus. The full implications of God's initiative in the lives of the disciples will be explained in Chapter 6.

Other aspects of the indwelling as an intimate relationship between Jesus and God play a decisive role in the remainder of the Fourth Gospel. It is, therefore, helpful to read John 15 in light of the Johannine narrative as a whole.

Indwelling can, first, be related to the complex nature of Jesus' mission. John emphasises that Jesus is not on his own mission; the Father sent him.¹⁸⁷ Jesus' mission is characterised by, and reflects the exceptionally close relationship between God and Jesus. It is, therefore, an indication of the indwelling of the Father in the Son. So strong is this bond that it determines Jesus' understanding of his mission. Nothing is more important to him than the will of his Father and to accomplish his mission on earth.¹⁸⁸ Jesus teaches people only what he has received from the Father.¹⁸⁹ In an effort to convince his listeners that he was sent by God and that they should, therefore, believe in him, Jesus refers to the intimate relationship between himself and the Father in John 14:10:

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.¹⁹⁰

This remark has direct relevance for the understanding of μένειν.

This aspect of indwelling in the Father-Son relationship is illustrated in another way. Two Greek verbs are used in John's Gospel to describe the relationship of Jesus with the Father: εἶναι and μένειν (cf. John 14:10-11). In the Gospel, the verb εἶναι is occasionally used to convey the notion of abiding or indwelling, as in this verse and John 17:21. Brown (1982a:510) qualifies this: "The verb here is *einai en* 'to be in,' but this is synonymous with *menein en*, except the *menein* has the added note of permanence." Earlier in the Gospel, talking about his miraculous signs, Jesus told them: "But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:38). The relationship is so close that even the Father validates Jesus' judgement (John

¹⁸⁶ Barrett (1978:483) stresses this unity and permanence. He also points out that, elsewhere in John, ἀρχή refers to the beginning of creation or time.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:24, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28-29, 33; 8:16-18, 42; 11:27, 42; 12:43-44, 49-50; 16:5.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. John 4:34; 5:36; 6:38-40; 10:18, 37-38; 12:27; 13:3; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; 18:11; 18:37; 19:28-30.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. John 3:34; 7:16; 8:26, 28, 38, 40; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24; 15:15.

¹⁹⁰ Barrett (1978:460) mentions the closeness between Jesus and the Father by suggesting that the activities of Jesus can never be understood without reference to the transcendent God because of the exalted Christology of John.

8:16). Jesus often refers to this life-generating relationship between Father and Son in the Farewell speech and it is considered a loving relationship. Bruner (2012:203) confirms that John 3:16 is the heart of the Gospel:

[F]rom the heart of the God who ‘*loved us so much*’ to the heart of every individual who needs him so much, ‘*for every single individual, whoever.*’ May this Gospel never be made less extensive or less grave or more complex. It is the International Treasure.¹⁹¹

Michaels (2010:201) further explains the meaning of the grammar used in this instance. In his description, he spells out the divine nature of the indwelling:

Jesus builds on the language and thought of verse 14 and 15 to explain precisely *why* “the Son of [M]an must be lifted up” (v. 14). He confirms that the necessity is divine, grounded in “God”, and God’s love for the world. Having looked at the cross from the human side, by a strange analogy with a snake fastened to a pole, he now places it within the eternal purpose of God. The grammar of the verse reflects this, as Jesus echoes the correlative construction of verse 14 (“And *just as ... so*”) with a corresponding one (“God *so* loved ... *so that* he gave”).¹⁹²

Other indications of the intimate relationship include, for instance, Jesus’ reference to God as his Father with the possessive pronoun.¹⁹³ The Father dwells in Jesus in such a way that Jesus can speak of God as “my Father”. In prayer, he addresses God as “Father” (John 11:41; 17:1-26). This special relationship is further spelled out when Jesus is being referred to as the Son of God.¹⁹⁴ The unique Father-Son relationship is characterised, among others, as close and intimate (John 1:18) in several ways, including knowing (John 10:15) and loving each other (John 10:17; 17:1, 5, 24); references to their unity (John 10:30), to honour (John 8:49-50, 54-55; 13:31-32; 14:13) and, as stated earlier, mutual indwelling.¹⁹⁵ One recognises in all these references some key aspects of a mystical relationship such as union, mutuality, and intimacy.

A further important element is that the indwelling of God and Jesus is not exclusive of humanity. Though it may be unique to the extent that Jesus shares union with God like no one else, the indwelling includes believers to the extent that they are also described as children of God. Believers who dwell in Jesus are reminded of their own sonship by sharing in this close relationship. The Prologue contains the statement that those who believe in Jesus are children of God and born of God: “Yet to all who received him, to those

¹⁹¹ Ridderbos (1997:138-139) describes in detail the starting point of the faith referred to in this instance: “God in his eternal love returned to the world as to his own, that he loved it in the surrender of his only-begotten Son (cf. 3:35), and that the Father loves the Son because he gave his own life (cf. 10:15) in a love that persisted to the end (cf. 13:1ff.). It is faith in a path that, before it ascended to the glory of heaven, first descended to the depth of the earth, that is not itself from below but from above as the sign of true sonship and of those who are born of God (cf. 1:21f).”

¹⁹² In Greek: *καθὼς ... οὕτως* in verse 14, and *οὕτως ... ὥστε* in verse 16.

¹⁹³ Cf. John 1:18, 34; 2:16; 5:17-47; 6:28-59; 7:28-29; 8:16-19, 26-29; 10:14, 17-18, 25, 29-30, 36-38; 11:4, 27, 41-42; 12:28; 13:1-3; 14:2, 6-17, 20, 23, 28-30; 15:1, 8-9, 15, 16, 23-24; 16:2-3, 9, 15, 23; 17:1-26; 19:7; 20:17.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. John 1:34; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7.

¹⁹⁵ Cowan (2006:135) wrote on the question as to whether Jesus is subordinate to God. He refers to Cullman (1963:259) who remarked: “We must allow this paradox of all Christology to stand. The New Testament does not resolve it, but sets the two statements alongside each other: on the one hand, the Logos was God; on the other hand, he was with God. The same paradox occurs again in the Gospel of John with regard to the ‘Son of God’ concept. We hear on the one hand, ‘I and the Father are one’ (John 10.30); and on the other hand, ‘the Father is greater than I’ (John 14.28).”

who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). This intricate unity between Jesus, the Father and the disciples is not confined to the time and people of John. In his final prayer with the disciples, this relationship is expanded to the future generation of believers, and, therefore, also to John’s readers: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21). Lee (2002:88, 97, 99) regards the mutual indwelling of Father and Son as the source and archetype of the indwelling of believers. She notes that, in John’s Gospel, abiding is a quality of the divine realm, an aspect of eternal love offered to all human beings. The loving relationship between Father and Son ripples out to embrace human beings and finally all creation in a relationship of abiding.¹⁹⁶ The relationship of Father and Son is thus used to speak about the union of humanity and the disciples with the divine. The call to a mutual indwelling between Jesus and the disciples cannot be understood without considering the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father.¹⁹⁷

Jesus’ vision of abundant bearing of fruit (to be discussed in Chapter 6) depends on the disciples’ unceasing consciousness of the divine presence. The disciples will need guidance for the spiritual journey. Jesus provides this need. But even more, he empowers them with a relationship with the Father. The life-giving, intimate relationship with Jesus as unique source of life can only be sustained under the watchful eyes and involvement of the Vinegrower (Father).¹⁹⁸ The Father is explicitly mentioned as the One who is involved and on whom discipleship is focused. In this way, they are united with Jesus and, ultimately, with God. The deepest dimension of the divine-human relationship finds its meaning in the focus on the Vinegrower, whom Jesus represents. In her comprehensive analysis of the image of the vine, Lee (2002:89-90) stresses this aspect when she points out that dwelling in Jesus takes believers to the Father as the eschatological abode of faith and their source of life. This gives a special character to the divine-human relationship. The direction of a disciple’s life journey is reversed when the disciple is part of the divine-human relationship. It is not the disciples who dwell in God, but God who dwells in them. Indwelling is characterised as a quality of the divine realm, an aspect of eternal life, found in Jesus, but given by God, that is offered to all human beings. Jesus is present in his disciples as the vine is present in the branches, but Jesus represents the vinegrower, and his work is empowered and sustained by the vinegrower. Thus, Jesus’

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Dodd (1953:195, 262).

¹⁹⁷ Koester (2008:196) explains that Jesus’ bond with the Father shows what it means to bear fruit. *First*, God commanded Jesus to lay down his life for others and to take it up again by going the way of the cross. *Secondly*, God commissioned him to speak a message to people. Jesus did just that by abiding in his Father’s love and keeping his commandments (15:10). His love is expressed in obedience. Thus Jesus sets the pattern for discipleship. By giving love and keeping Jesus’ word, faith comes to fruition.

¹⁹⁸ Barrett (1978:470) confirms this: “John is speaking of the union of believers with Christ, apart from whom they can do nothing.” Brown (1982b:666) is of the opinion that there is nothing futuristic about the union between the branches and the vine, because, in verses 1-6, the disciples are already in union with Jesus, and the emphasis is on remaining in that union. Dodd (1953:187-200) sought possible antecedents for the Johannine usage of abiding in Jesus. Some imprecise meanings included dependence on God, conformity with his will, ecstatic possession by the divine, and a mystical inclusion or absorption into the divine being. The Pauline expression of “in Christ” could also be a possibility. He then concludes: “Christ mediates to men the relation in which he stands to the Father.”

followers are participating in a mystical-spiritual relationship that finds its deepest source in its link with God. The divine pole is thus depicted as the source, the initiator, and the sustainer of a special and close relationship with the human pole. More needs to be said of the distinctive role of the Father in this relationship.

4.2 The role of the Father

John's portrayal of Jesus' mission to the world focuses specially on the role of the Father. His mission takes place in the closest possible collaboration with his Father. Without the Father, Jesus would not have been able to do what he did. John 15 explicitly refers to the key role of the Father within the divine-human relationship. God the Father is the gardener of the vineyard who is driven by love (15:1, 9). He offers humanity a new way of life in, and through Jesus. This new life God offers is realised only after the disciples have been grafted onto Jesus. God, like the Vinedresser, takes care of the vine by grafting and transforming believers into the new divine way of life.

The Father is behind Jesus' actions within the mystical relationship of μένειν. Jesus' "new" commandment originated in both the Father's commandment and God's love for the cosmos (3:16; 15:10).¹⁹⁹ God is the source of everything Jesus revealed and taught his followers (15:15). Jesus revealed the truth of God to his listeners (15:22). The Father gave Jesus his disciples. John 6:37 explains: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." An important reference to the Father occurs in John 20:17 when Mary recognises Jesus: "Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.' Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" The importance is illustrated in a remark by Michaels (2010:1001-1002) about the phrase *my Father and your Father*. Previously, Jesus' brothers and his disciples were clearly distinguished from each other: while his disciples believed in him (John 2:11), his brothers did not (7:5). Yet now Jesus' *disciples* became his *brothers* with the same Father in heaven, the God of Israel. Michaels (2010:1002) refers to this as a milestone in the Gospel, "for it is the first and only instance (out of 120 in all) in which God is explicitly identified as 'Father' of anyone except Jesus himself". All of this confirms that the ongoing mystical existence finds its origins and power in God the Father.

The special role of God in the divine-human relationship implies a particular understanding of the human pole. While God is the active one who looks after the vine, humanity is depicted as the receivers. The divine outreach of God the Father is to be understood in terms of the mystical element of passivity. The image of the vine accentuates that God is the outreaching one who takes the initiative. That godly process recalls the mystical processes of passivity and immediacy, as described by Waaijman²⁰⁰ who stresses, in general, that God is in control of the process of rebirth, but also controls the development of the new life.

¹⁹⁹ This is underlined by the quality of the intimacy that exists between the Father and Son, as explained so aptly by Lee (2002:125-126). It is a relationship based on their mutual love (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23-24, 26): "It is a love that is expressed in affectionate rather than dutiful terms, suggesting the most profound attachment and the deepest unity of will and heart. This intimacy, however, does not exist merely in and for itself." Furthermore, "the relationship of Father and Son in John's theological framework is inclusive and embracing of other".

²⁰⁰ Cf. Chapter 5, section 5.1.5.

Referring to the divine initiative, Johnson (1999:542-543) argues that the statements about Jesus as the true vine are metaphorical for God as the source of life, and refers to John 14:6 about Jesus as the way, the truth and the life that makes clear what all the other statements have suggested, that “in contrast to every form of human self-aggrandisement and pursuit of life, Jesus brings the genuine life that can come only from God. He is revealer and life-giver.”

4.3 The part of the Paraclete

A discussion of the separate and combined efforts of the Father and the Son in the divine outreach will not be complete without considering the involvement of the Spirit. The evangelist extends the divine indwelling between the Father, Jesus and the disciples to include the divine Spirit of truth or Counsellor. The role of the Spirit has a particular character. Already in John 14, his consolation is explained by Jesus and directly related to the notion of indwelling: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (παρ’ ὑμῶν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῶν ἔσται; 14:16-17). The use of the verbs μένειν παρά and εἶναι ἐν in John 14:17 designate the Spirit as the most effective means of indwelling within a believer.

Elsewhere in the Johannine writings, the presence of the Spirit is said to reassure believers of this mysterious mutual divine-human indwelling: “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13). John 15 concludes with a reference to the Counsellor, the Spirit of truth: “When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (15:26). The Spirit is the agent through which Jesus operates after his exaltation and glorification. God will be present in the ongoing existence of the faithful as Spirit. Brown explains how this relates to indwelling: “Since the Paraclete can come only when Jesus departs, the Paraclete is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent. Jesus’ promises to dwell within his disciples are fulfilled in the Paraclete.”²⁰¹ This insight underlines the spiritual nature of the indwelling.

Based on the evidence gained from the Gospel, *the Father, Jesus* and *the Holy Spirit* are crucial for John’s symbolic discourse on the vine and the branches.²⁰² They act in unison as a divine team, not only for the salvation of humanity, but also to maintain the mystical relationship with humanity by dwelling in

²⁰¹ Brown (1982b:1139, 1141) thoroughly deals with the Johannine understanding of the Paraclete. He contends that John presents the Paraclete as the Holy Spirit in a special role as the personal presence of Jesus in the Christian, while Jesus is with the Father.

²⁰² Köstenberger (2009:241) remarks: “Still in response to Judas’s question (14:22), Jesus now elaborates on the organic unity between him and his followers that will be sustained subsequent to his exaltation with the Father in and through the Holy Spirit (note the Trinitarian theme).” Dodd (1953:404) also dwells on the relationship between the Trinity and the effect on the disciples: “The journey Christ is undertaking (in dying) is the journey to the Father and Christ Himself (Christ crucified) is the way in which the disciples must travel to the same goal. This divine activity on earth will not cease when he goes to the Father (when he dies). It will continue in those who believe in Him, and continue on an even greater scale, since he will act in answer to their prayer, and through Him the Spirit will be with them and in them.”

them.²⁰³ John's Gospel thus depicts the relationship with the divine in a complex manner: it involves the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Although they work together, they are also different. As noted earlier, the Father initiates, the Son mediates, and the Spirit confirms and consoles. After investigating the accurate understanding of the Triune indwelling in the Gospel, Bruner (2012:853) concludes: "In short, in the presence of the Paraclete we have the presence of the Father and of the Son."²⁰⁴ Lee (2002:120) states:

The Visio Dei ("vision of God") is perfected in beholding the glory of the Johannine Jesus (1:14) – implying also the advent of the Paraclete who mirrors life, and the birth of the believing community, which receives the realization of his risen life.

In a unique revelation, John enlightens his readers about the way in which all three persons of the divinity form part of the mystical indwelling in the divine-human relationship.

5. The divine pole in polemical context

John's understanding of the divine pole in the divine-human relationship was discussed earlier in terms of textual information. It can also be understood from a different, contextual perspective. As discussed in Chapter 4, John's Gospel came into being in a context where different forms of mysticism were known and practised. As pointed out earlier, the Johannine author *deviated* from the known mystical traditions of his time in accordance with his own theology.²⁰⁵ His understanding of the divine pole might be regarded as a polemical reaction against these other traditions, as suggested in the following examples, some of which could lead to a clearer understanding of John's unique portrayal of the divine nature of the indwelling in John 15.²⁰⁶

5.1 Jesus as the true revealer

A first example is John's reference to Jesus as the true vine (ἀλήθεια). Dodd (1953:177-178) remarks that "[h]e is not only the Revealer of ἀλήθεια, He is Himself ἡ ἀλήθεια (xiv:10)". He traces the use of the term ἀλήθεια in John back to common Hellenistic usage meaning "reality", or the "ultimately real", and "knowledge of the real"; "On one side at least, the knowledge of God which is life eternal is an apprehension of ultimate reality – that reality which stands above the world of phenomena, and is eternal while they change and pass away." With the addition of the adjective ἡ

²⁰³ In her section about abiding as friendship, Lee (2002:106) shares the following insight: "First and foremost, abiding in love dissolves the subject-object relation between the divine and human. The divine 'I am' stands in personal relation to human becoming, so that human beings find within themselves subjective 'I am', a sense of selfhood that is the gift of the incarnate God. Abiding defines the divine-human relationship as one of immanence: subject to subject, face to face, I-Thou, redeeming the world from the terror of objectification, the fear of alterity, the dread of intimacy."

²⁰⁴ Bruner (2012:853) also refers to Frey (Eschatologie 3:159) who is convinced that, in the last half of John 14, "the threefold coming of God – of the Spirit (vv. 16 and 26), of Jesus himself (vv. 18-21), and then, climatically, of Jesus with the Father (v. 23) – [is] intended by the Evangelist, in just that order, and are 'definitely not accidental.'"

²⁰⁵ DeConick (2001:39) refers to two examples: "Kanagaraj correctly notes that ascent into heaven is limited to the end-time when Jesus' disciples will go with him into the Father's house. The Merkabah vision of God on his throne-chariot is reinterpreted by John to be Jesus on the Cross as the manifested Glory and King. Jesus, as the light of the world and the Son of Man, represents the enthroned *kabôd* surrounded by light."

²⁰⁶ The discussion in the remainder of this section is predominantly based on the work of Kangaraj (1998).

ἀληθινῆ to the ἐγὼ εἰμι saying, and viewed from the perspective of mystical Spirituality, John could be hinting at the beliefs of other mystical movements such as the Merkabah and eschatological mysticism. Experiencing the presence of the divine and the true spiritual life is given to humanity through Jesus, rather than through heavenly journeys. John elaborates on some ideas of Merkabah mysticism in order to convince his audience to come to faith in Christ. He transforms the basic pattern to point out that it is not humanity that travels through heavenly spheres to enter the divine presence. Rather, it is God who reaches out to humanity in Jesus as divine figure. In this way, the divine indwelling is decisively linked with Jesus. It has a strong Christological nature: the hidden face of God is revealed and to be seen in Christ.²⁰⁷

5.2 John 1:51: The ascending and descending angels

The divine pole is depicted in another example as a polemical remark against Merkabah mysticism and a selective use of such traditions. Mystical practices in John's time were aimed at closer contact with God, to be in God's presence, and even to become one with God. Typical of the Merkabah mysticism was a heavenly journey based on the experiences of Ezekiel, Daniel, Moses, and Isaiah. These heavenly journeys were described in mystical texts as mystical ascents: a pious person travels through heavenly spheres, obstructed by various gates, to arrive before the throne of God where the mystic experiences the divine glory. The journey ends in union with God when the mystic is found in this glorious presence.²⁰⁸ Such an elaborate mystical ascent-descent is not found in the Gospel. According to John, union with God does not take place through a heavenly ascent of mystics.²⁰⁹

In this instance, there is a slight nuance. Although the Gospel has no elaborate ascent-descent description as in the Merkabah texts, there is some engagement with mystical traditions that deserves attention. In a distinctive way, John shares the motif of heavenly journeys with other mystical texts of his time on a much more indirect and symbolic level. Keener (2003a:250) notes:

John may use the imagery of heavenly ascents, but usually he uses the term more figuratively: spiritual perception of the true character of Jesus and the realm 'above', insight which enabled an intimate relationship with (not merely a mystical experience of) God.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ A comparison between John's view of the divine indwelling and Paul's experience of heavenly journeys might produce interesting insights regarding this issue.

²⁰⁸ Grese (1988:686-687) refers to widespread descriptions and reports of heavenly journeys in Persian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian texts. John 3:12 asserts that Jesus "is the only one qualified to provide a revelation concerning the heavenly things, since he is the only one who has been to heaven to view them". Verse 13 rejects all other heavenly journeys "and reserves the claim to heavenly knowledge exclusively for Jesus".

²⁰⁹ According to Kanagaraj (1998:80), the mystical tendency prevalent in Hellenistic circles and in Hellenistic-Jewish circles in the late first century contained these two major aspects: seeing God and having union with him.

²¹⁰ Texts from the time of John's Gospel reveal a similar interaction, for example, between Philo and Merkabah texts. Meeks (1967:130-131) refers to an exceptional aspect of Philo's portrait regarding the enthroned Moses as king in the course of a mystic ascent to heaven from Sinai. Meeks (1967:209) also refers to hints of Moses' ascent in early portions of the midrashim, in Josephus, in Pseudo-Philo, in Ezekiel the Tragedian, and the mystical function of Moses as hierophant in Philo. Likewise, there are the extraordinary paintings of Moses in the Dura synagogue with analogous function.

This interaction suggests some insights into the way in which John speaks of the divine indwelling. Martyn (2003:139) observes that there were a number of possibilities open to John to reflect on the life and work of Jesus. Faced with the problem posed by Jesus' departure, John could have him speak consolingly about heavenly resting places.

Alternatively he could allow the Redeemer to talk of a mystical union between himself and his own, spanning the distance between them by taking the believer out of the world, at least in mystic trances. The religious literature of the Hellenistic age abounds with motifs easily employed in order to make this point. John allows the departing Lord to elect both of these options; yet he has the Lord do so in a sovereign manner (Martyn 2003:139).

A particular relevant example, in this instance, is the ascent and descent of angels mentioned in John 1:51. There are some general interpretations of this passage. Without any significant reference to angels, John observes: "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Scholars often observe that Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:12 forms the background for this text: "He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." They then draw attention to how John shifts the focus of Genesis away from the angels to the Son of Man, who replaces the stairway, and the presence of Yahweh. According to Koester (1995:40-41), this episode is about the divinity of Jesus. John used so-called progressions to establish a frame of reference within which Jesus can be understood. In this instance, texts from the Old Testament are used to create a reference for a better understanding of whom Jesus really was. Koester is thus of the opinion that readers familiar with Scriptures would have been able to connect John 1:51 with the story of Jacob in Genesis 28:18 and would have understood this as referring to the divinity of Jesus by calling him the Son of Man. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth as the Son of Man who descends from, and reascends into heaven (3:13; 6:62). He is the one through whom the presence of God is manifested (John 1:14; 12:45; 14:7), and who executes divine judgement.

John 1:51 can, however, be better understood in terms of the mystical context in which John wrote. The verse should be understood in connection with the fact that Jesus as the Son of Man plays a double role in John's Gospel: he is the way to have communion with God and, at the same time, he himself is the revelation of God's glory (John 14:6-11; 1:14; 8:54-56; 17:1-26). He is depicted as a divine figure. As in the Merkabah texts, John also mentions human beings' experience of the divine glory. For the evangelist, the appearance of God's glory as in Merkabah mysticism is not attained by an ascent to heaven, but is found in Jesus, the Son of Man on earth.²¹¹ The promise of Jesus in John 1:51 was confirmed when the disciples together saw his divine glory manifested at Cana, Nathanael's hometown in John 2:11 (cf. John 21:2).²¹²

²¹¹ Grese (1988:692) confirms this: "For the evangelist the vision of God, eternal life, the revelation of heavenly secrets – the kind of benefits that others expected to gain via heavenly journeys – are to be found in Jesus."

²¹² Cf. Koester (1995:68); Schäfer (2009:36-37). Coloe (2007:35) views the reference in John 1:51 as the scene when the disciples hear for the first time about Jesus' identity as the Temple of God's presence (2:19), the new house of God.

The ascending and descending angels radiate God's glory by surrounding his throne and serving him, but also symbolise communication with God, which has become possible through the life and work of the Son of Man on earth. Other than in Merkabah traditions, angels are ascending and descending and not human beings, as in the Merkabah texts. All this indicates how John's Christology contextualises his mysticism.

5.3 John 3:13-15: The descent of Jesus

There is another seminal reference to a heavenly journey of Jesus as Son of Man in the unique theology of descent in John 3:13-15: "No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.²¹³ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." In this instance, Jesus is described in terms of a journey from heaven to earth and a return to heaven. John stresses the need for overcoming the deeds of the flesh, not by means of ascetic practices as in Merkabah mysticism. Before one can see and enter the kingly realm of God, a life transformed by the Spirit is required. For John, a vision of God's kingly glory and the knowledge of the heavenly world are possible on earth in the Son of Man. This happened when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, surrounded by his adversaries. This leads Kanagaraj (1998:212) to conclude: "In John, then, the cross as the throne of the Son of Man, becomes paradoxically the locus of divine glory, replacing the chariot throne of Jewish mysticism."

5.4 John 6:61-63: The ascent of Jesus

John also describes the future implications of indwelling by Jesus, as Kanagaraj (1998:212-213) noted. The ascent of Jesus is described in John's Gospel mainly in terms of departure from the world and going to the Father. John 6:61-63 shows how faith in the incarnational life of Jesus decides one's faith in his ascension: "Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.'" This ascent motif is distinguished from that of the patriarchs, prophets and angels with two main motifs connected with Jesus' ascent: the heavenly journey of the disciples to the chambers of God and to live in communion with the Father beholding his glory as revealed in Jesus (John 14:2-3).²¹⁴ This mystical ascent with Jesus is only for those who believe in Jesus' incarnation, death and ascension. In all this, there is no trace of deification of Jesus' followers.²¹⁵ Once again, John alters Merkabah mysticism by replacing the mediating role of angels and the human-like figure with Christ himself.

²¹³ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:212).

²¹⁴ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:213).

²¹⁵ Although the Johannine concepts of "children of God" (John 1:12-13) and "being born again" (John 3:3, 7) might hint in the same direction, it will need a thorough investigation into the Christian meaning of deification that falls outside the scope of this research project.

Kanagaraj (1998:213) concludes: “[B]y means of the ascent-motif John polemises, proclaims and persuades the people of his day by reinterpreting the contemporary mystical belief in terms of the person of Jesus, the Son of Man.”

5.5 Glory

John’s transformation of the mystical practices of his time continues in an attempt to further the mutual indwelling between Jesus and the disciples in the concept of throne mysticism, as found in first-century Palestinian mystical movements (Meeks 1967:299). John reinterprets the longing to see God on the throne-chariot so typical of Merkabah mysticism.²¹⁶ The majestic throne of mystical visions is replaced by Jesus himself, the Logos who was with God, his Father from the beginning. But there is more to it: the Logos was God (John 1:1). The revelatory nature of Jesus, as discussed earlier, is already confirmed in the first chapter of the Gospel: “No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). John’s Gospel makes it clear that an ascent to heaven is not necessary to see God on the throne-chariot, because God in all his glory can be seen in Jesus: “Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.* How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9; my italics, AS). John’s *visio Dei* differs from that of the Merkabah mystics. To see Jesus is to see God. To dwell in Jesus concludes the needs of the mystic.

Part of John’s reinterpretation of seeing God on the throne-chariot is by using the noun δόξα and its verb δοξάζω.²¹⁷ Jesus alone bears the very nature of God’s δόξα and he becomes the one who reveals the glory of God to human beings: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1: 14); “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (17:5).²¹⁸ John depicts the divine without a glorious throne. The cross becomes the place where the glory of God is revealed.²¹⁹ Δόξα is found only in Christ and not through a journey to heaven. Other than in mystical texts, in which the glory of God is linked with the heavenly throne, glory is found in Christ.

²¹⁶ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:313-314). His research, in general, investigates the possibility of a mystical background for the Gospel. He investigates the Hekhalot literature, the wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, and some Qumran texts. He also examines evidence in the Christian era by analysing three important traditions that describe the heavenly ascents of key figures, namely Paul, Isaiah and Moses.

²¹⁷ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:313).

²¹⁸ In this regard, Lee (2002:36) suggests *flesh* as a core symbol in John, because it bears and conveys divine glory just as metaphor operates to disclose new meaning. This meaning is primarily Christological: “Without the miracle of faith, made possible only through the advent of the Logos in human flesh, human beings of themselves are incapable of divine disclosure: they can barely recognize their own Creator. In the Johannine worldview, the symbol of the flesh revealing the divine glory becomes universal because it is first particular: only now, because God has taken on flesh, can all flesh disclose the glory of God. What is at stake is the reality of salvation.”

²¹⁹ Moloney (2013:124), with reference to John 11:4, treats the link between the death of Jesus and glorification: “Jesus explicitly links the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son, and the decision of ‘the Jews,’ in their final negative response in the story to Jesus’ words and actions (see 11:45-50, 57; 12:9-11), reinforce the relationship between that revelation and glorification, on the one hand, and Jesus’ oncoming death, on the other.”

6. Conclusion

This Chapter analysed John 15 in terms of the divine pole, with a strong focus on ἐγώ εἰμι as part of Jesus' self-revelation and divine identity. His mission was to reveal the divine outreach and indwelling in humanity. The "I am" sayings contain a concentrated combination of Christology and soteriology, resonating with sayings in the Old Testament such as Exodus 3:14. John's linking of ἐγώ εἰμι with μένειν illuminates the distinctive nature of the divine-human relationship. The divine mission to free the world from death has a trinitarian nature. Jesus as the true vine provides all that is needed to produce abundant fruit under the watchful eye of his Father and vinegrower. The indwelling Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, safeguards the divine endeavour.

John's reworking of Merkabah mysticism was also highlighted. He did it to suit his own theology and Spirituality, as clearly illustrated earlier. In this thesis, the point of departure is that the text itself plays a decisive role in the process of understanding. Whilst background material is useful, it should not speak the final word in interpreting the text. John's Gospel differs from the mystical thought of movements in his own time. There are no heavenly ascents to experience union with God, but only dwelling in Jesus. Angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man replace heavenly journeys by mystics (John 1:51). In a very different way, Jesus is said to have descended from heaven (John 3:13-15) and he will ultimately return ascending to his Father (John 16:61-63). The experience of glory in seeing God on the throne-chariot is also reinterpreted and eventually substituted by Jesus on the cross. John thus replaces throne mysticism with cross mysticism.

This section supplied overwhelming evidence regarding the revelation of divine grace as well as other elements of mystical spirituality that were previously concealed. In the centre of the disclosure is the mystical concept of indwelling so exceptionally depicted by the verb μένειν. This is supported by John's unique use of images, despite what the background may have been. Keener (2003a:319) confirms this:

Like the vine to which the branches are attached, Jesus is the very life of those who depend on him (1:4; 11:25; 14:6). This means that Jesus offers the life of the resurrection, the life that would characterize the coming age; but it also speaks of absolute dependence on him, affirming that Christ's own character is lived out through the believer in a way unparalleled in early Judaism.

CHAPTER 6

MENEIN FROM THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

Whereas the previous section focused on the divine pole of the divine-human relationship, the effect of the divine indwelling on humanity will now be explored. The discussions about discipleship during the close reading in Chapter 2 paved the way for a detailed investigation of the human pole in the divine-human relationship. The analysis in Chapter 5 complements the understanding of Jesus' followers. Being drawn into a mystical relationship with the divine has consequences for who people are and for the way in which they live. It leads, for example, to Jesus' followers discovering the essence, nature, and implications of discipleship. This section will explore μένειν as the essence of discipleship.²²⁰ The focus will mainly be on the abundant bearing of fruit, as envisioned by Jesus and as a consequence of the divine indwelling. These consequences are to be viewed in terms of transformational discipleship, bodily space, the community of friendship, love, the call of Jesus to remain in his words and his love, the effects of mutual indwelling (μένειν), including prayer, glory, joy, and witnessing through the Paraclete in a hostile situation, pruning, unity, and faith.

2. Discipleship in John

The mutual indwelling described in John 15 brings about a new identity to those who believe. It characterises their existence after their commitment to follow Jesus. As such, it has to do with the lasting results of their transformation. They become disciples. The term 'discipleship' occurs 78 times in the Gospel, identifying it as a primary category for John.²²¹ In John 1, it became clear that the divine aim of Jesus' mission is the salvation of humanity. The revelatory words of the Logos in the Gospels's prologue provide detail about the inheritance of those who will receive him by believing in his name: light, grace, truth, the right to become children of God, everlasting life, and glory (cf. John 1:1-18). The divine initiative, as John explains in the introduction to his Gospel, begs for a human response. The subsequent unfolding drama reveals discipleship, coupled with all that it entails, as the notional response. Guided by the verb μένειν, Jesus' followers are exposed to the realm of discipleship by discovering a new abode in him, following him, and staying with him. The

²²⁰ Cf. the analysis of the Greek text in Chapter 2.

²²¹ For discipleship as basic category in John, cf. C. Brown (1979:84, 191, 197). Köstenberger (1998:141-198) provides a detailed characterisation of the followers of Jesus and their mission. For a more comprehensive discussion of disciples, community and Church in the Gospel, cf. Schnackenburg (1982:203-217). Segovia's (1985:90) characterisation of the disciples delivered the following results: a sustained and deliberate contrast between the believing disciples and the unbelieving Jews; central to this contrast lies believing Jesus' claims regarding the Father, and this belief underwent a process of gradual understanding and perception. Collins (1990:53-55) notes that the Spirituality of John is revealed by the fact that one of the first disciples is not named (maybe the Beloved Disciple), perhaps because John wanted the reader to identify with him.

climax of it all is being exposed to the spiritual abundance of mutual indwelling, as described in John 15.²²²

The importance of the concept of discipleship in John can hardly be overestimated. In a sense, the disciples can be regarded as the representatives of the human side of mutual indwelling. Köstenberger (1998:145) is of the opinion that the disciples are significant characters in the Gospel based on their call (1:37-43), accompanying Jesus (2:2, 11, 17), participating in his work (4:2, 8, 27, 31, 33, 38), and gradually becoming more prominent (6:3, 8, 12, 16, 22, 24, 60-71). Their importance reveals the relevance of Christ for the unbelieving world. Schnackenburg (1982:208) articulates this as follows:

Discipleship and the imitation of Christ have the same origin and belong together and for this reason the statement in 8:12 has also to be included here: “He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Clearly, then, the idea of discipleship is transferred to all believers.²²³

Taking into account the importance of discipleship in the Gospel, the only appearance of the concept in John 15:8 is noteworthy: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (ἐν τούτῳ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ πατήρ μου, ἵνα καρπὸν πολλὸν φέρητε καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί.) The use of δοξάζω highlights the importance of fruitful discipleship from a mystical perspective.²²⁴ In his summary about this verse, Bruner (2012:886-887) refers to continuing conversion:

What is striking in our text’s context is that *in order to be* fruitful we need to be discipled to Jesus, and that *the result* of our fruitfulness is becoming “*discipled*” to Jesus. Both the condition *for*, and the consequence *of* fruitfulness is discipleship to Jesus.

The evangelist’s compositional technique offers a paradigm for discipleship, as illustrated by Collins (1990:46-55). In line with this study, the first account about discipleship in the Fourth Gospel (John 1:19-51) should thus be read on two levels, namely the narrative and the symbolic. Having read the narrative version of the encounter between Jesus and the disciples who left John the baptiser, it should be reread on a symbolic level. In the process, one discovers that John is offering a pattern of discipleship.²²⁵ Collins (1990:50) then elaborates on the compositional techniques used by the evangelist in John 1:19-51:

²²² With reference to the importance of John’s use of μενέιν ἐν, Ray (1983:154-155) maintains: “It is an understanding of this union that will contribute most to a proper theology of discipleship.”

²²³ Ray (1983:212) elaborates: “The community of disciples is the final result of God’s concern for the world of men who had become estranged from him.”

²²⁴ Regarding the glory of discipleship, Von Wahlde (2010b:679) states: “By becoming disciples of Jesus (v. 8), the disciples also give glory to the Father just as Jesus did throughout his ministry.” According to Michaels (2010:809), the somewhat unexpected formulation “become my disciples” might have come as a shock to the disciples at this late date. It reminds him of Ignatius’ remarks about “becoming more of a disciple” and “beginning to be a disciple” when faced with the prospect of martyrdom in Rome. This leads Michaels (2010:809) to conclude: “*Discipleship*, it seems, means different things at different stages of a person’s spiritual growth. Jesus’ so-called *disciples* still have a way to go.”

²²⁵ Collins (1990:50) states: “To appreciate that nuance of the story, one must note how the evangelist has woven his story (see vv. 35-36) into Act I of his Gospel drama (John 1:19-51) and chosen action-packed words with rich connotations as well as observe the many signs of the evangelist’s narrative skill.”

He uses the dialogue technique, the question and answer format, which characterizes so much of the Fourth Gospel. He employs traditional language, and then tells his reader what the traditions mean[s] with the help of an interpretive note. His references to time allow him to string his scenes together and invite readers to participate in the drama that is unfolding before them.

The symbolic reading requires attention to the Johannine notions of following, seeking, seeing, and staying. Collins (1990: 53-55) stresses that abiding in Jesus is about being a disciple in John's Gospel. Someone who "comes and sees" (John 1:38), and sees and understands, is consequently invited to deeper intimacy with Jesus and the Father.

Having analysed the importance of discipleship, its use with μένειν requires more attention.

2.1 Μένειν as the essence of discipleship

During the close reading of the Greek text in Chapter 2, the current heading crystallised as an important subject in John 15. In the subsequent sections of this thesis, μένειν features as an important clue for a spiritual and mystical reading of the Gospel and of John 15, in particular. Before focusing on indwelling in the well-known vine metaphor, it is necessary to point out how the prologue reveals the spiritual and mystical roots of discipleship early in the Gospel. Even before the calling of the first disciples, it is revealed that Jesus came to the cosmos to pitch his tent among human beings and to dwell in their midst (σκηνώω, John 1:14).²²⁶ Σκηνώω indeed recalls the long history of God's presence among his people. But, it serves as far more than simply a recollection of the past. According to Collins (1990:198-199), the reference to the dwelling of Jesus in John 1:14 is pregnant with theological significance. For him, it is much more than an ordinary allusion to the short-lived company of the Word with his own: "It situates the presence of the enfleshed Word in the world within the broad context of salvation history by means of sacerdotal-liturgical imagery." He also views John 1:14 as a programmatic statement for dwelling as one of the major themes in the Gospel as a whole.

The use of ἐσκήνωσεν thus paves the way for what is to follow in the remainder of the Gospel when the consequences of indwelling for humanity are spelled out. The dwelling of Jesus will be to the benefit of all who are willing to believe in him. From the perspective of mystical Spirituality, the evangelist explains how Jesus, who came from the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), came to draw people into an intimate relationship with the divine.

It is helpful to remember, in this context, that God used to dwell among his people as in the tabernacle, the temple, and by his incarnation.²²⁷ The requirement to dwell in Jesus can be viewed from

²²⁶ Koester (1995:125, footnote 3) remarked that the use of σκηνώω in John 1:14 "recalls the tent 'dwelling' (skene) erected by Israel in the wilderness and identifies the locus of God's glory (e.g. Exod. 40:34-38)".

²²⁷ Regarding the enfleshed presence of the Word as the new mode of the divine presence among men (cf. John 1:14), Collins (1990:202) makes the link with the Old Testament: "Yahweh's Old Testament presence in Tabernacle and Temple is less a reality in itself than it is a sign of the reality to come. Yahweh's tented presence in the Old Testament is a waiting which will be fully realized in the Word's tenting among his own people." Collins (1990:206) adds: "The very construction of John 1:14, in which the verb *skenoun* unites two contrasting notions, the enfleshment of the Word and the glory of the only God,

another perspective. The destruction of the temple in 70 CE was a severe loss that left a vacuum in the daily life of believers.²²⁸ It is, therefore, not strange that John tried to suggest a way to fill this lacuna. Collins (1990:216) explains that the locus of God's presence among men in the history of salvation was the Tabernacle, which, in time, had given way to the temple, only to be replaced by the definitive locus, Jesus himself: "He is the eschatological mode of God's presence among men, the locus of revelation and the place of salvation. In him all men can contemplate the glory of the Lord."

God's dwelling among his people stimulates the imagination of researchers. In a probing inquiry, Coloe sheds new light on the mysticism at work in the Fourth Gospel, especially through the use of μένειν and the notion of dwelling. Her first book, *God dwells with us* (2001), is about Temple symbolism in John's Gospel. Coloe (2007:219-221) attempts to answer two questions: first, how the Temple reveals the identity and mission of Jesus and, secondly, the significance of the Temple for the Christian community in the absence of Jesus. Her reference to the temple as bridging metaphor and the use of μένειν are worth noting. Although Jesus is no longer physically present with the disciples, the Paraclete will mediate the continuing presence of Jesus.²²⁹ Coloe (2007:ix) remarks: "It is my belief that underlying the Gospel of John is a profound experience, a mysticism of divine mutual indwelling." The focus shifts from the Temple, as a place of human activity and cultic things, to a place of divine activity, of God's dwelling within creation. For Coloe (2007:2-3), the Temple raised up by Jesus is "my Father's household" (20:19-29). This has consequences for the human pole in the divine-human relationship: the community is the space where the transformative impact of the divine relationship is experienced. The community is now known as God's house, rather than the temple. Moreover, as house of God, the community displays holiness and observes rituals that give access to the indwelling of God.

Furthermore, Coloe regards John 15:1-17 as a relecture of 14:1-31.²³⁰ She points out the important role μένειν played, especially in John 14 and 15. In John 15, indwelling is used in the image of the vine in the sense of reciprocal immanence and a profound divine-human intimacy. The rich theology of divine-human intimacy, that forms the basis for the logic across John 14-15:17, is sustained by the word μένειν.

indicates how well the divine tenting was a convenient idiom for expressing the presence of the Transcendent in the world of creation."

²²⁸ This also recalls Jesus' remark regarding the Samaritan's place of worship in his discussion with the Samaritan woman in 4:22-23: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks."

²²⁹ Coloe (2001:214-221) describes how the temple, as locus of the Divine dwelling among Israel, is replaced by the inner indwelling of the Divine. This reminds one of the Samaritan woman, when Jesus points the way to his new relationship with humanity, stating that the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The mystical relationship is spiritualised – it is no longer linked with the temple, or a physical space, but with the inner life of a human being. What counts is how rather than where one worships.

²³⁰ For the use of the two literary processes of *réécriture* and *relecture*, Coloe (2007:147-155) refers to Scholtissek's description of intertextual relationship between passages: *réécriture* is a synchronic development of previously introduced material. The author returns to an earlier theme and develops it further. *Relecture* is both a synchronic and a diachronic elaboration of an earlier theme, rewritten to meet the needs of a later community situation. Scholtissek (2000:131-139) argues that John 14 is a revised and developed form (*réécriture*) of John 8:12-59.

According to Coloe (2007:165), “[p]articipation in the divine ‘household’ is the Johannine equivalent of salvation. The initiative for this divine filiation comes from God, who dwells with us in Jesus.”²³¹

These remarks are useful in an analysis of John 15. The importance of indwelling for discipleship is underlined in John 15:8: “It is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” However, fruitful discipleship becomes possible only by dwelling in Jesus, as indicated in the following verses:

⁴ *Abide in me*, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit *unless you abide in me*. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. *If you abide in me* and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ *If you do not abide in me*, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (my italics, AS).

There can be no doubt that not dwelling in Jesus will have disastrous consequences for the disciples, because, without him, they can do nothing. Based on the text of John 15, it is clear that μένειν is a central concept for discipleship. Its spiritual and mystical value will become even clearer when the effects of the divine indwelling unfold in due course.

2.2 Μένειν and transformational discipleship

Μένειν as indwelling is not only about a union with the divine that brings about an awareness and consciousness of God. Indwelling leads to transformation and lasting relationships. A transformed life will be manifested on different levels, as is shown in John 15, which provides several insights into the nature of this transformation. The current discussion will clarify that bearing fruit is essential for discipleship. This is in line with Sheldrake’s (2005:388) remarks about discipleship as a journey of turning away from falsehood and turning towards God: “The Christian understanding of the spiritual journey is thus a lifelong process of commitment to this process of turning – in other words, a movement of ongoing transformation.”

To understand the implications of this insight, more attention should be paid to the notion of transformation. Lee (2002:6-7) links this notion with the reading of Scripture by contemporary readers and the church. She regards transformation as essential for the life of the church:

²³¹ Coloe (2007:165) quotes Scholtissek (2000:314) in this regard: “The reciprocal immanence between the Son and Christians articulates a living and relationship-rich salvation reality: the post-Easter union of the Christian with Christ. This reciprocal immanence is not only a praxis (namely the presence of love), but the reality of salvation.” Coloe (2007:131) also quotes Lee: “The relationship between God and Jesus, Father and son, is the symbol and archetype of abiding. To be a disciple means to be in union with Jesus, and through Jesus with God – a union that is reciprocal and oriented towards community.” Lee (2002:97-98) discusses the theological core of abiding, with reference to Jesus as the symbol or icon of both the divine and human dimensions: “(I)n his own flesh he is the abiding place of God among people (1:14), the one who establishes an I-Thou union of persons, the embodiment of divine indwelling. In his abiding with the Father, he is able to bridge the estrangement and alienation between the divine and the human, gathering all that is human – into the divine love which precedes and undergirds all creation.”

The remaking power of God, through the Spirit, continually reforms the church. Transformation is the end process of sacred reading: without it, the other tasks are intellectual games, without ultimate significance.

In his discussion of the nature of transformation, Howard (2008:231) names the following as unique features of Christian transformation: it is about a change in relationship; it is characterised by a Godward reorientation of life; it is the work of both God and human beings, and it is the goal of Christian faith. Perrin (2007:205) also stresses the comprehensive nature of transformation: “In Christian Spirituality, the transformative event includes transformations of the life of the individual, the Christian community, and the world in which we all live.” Waaijman (2002:859) has the following powerful remark about the impact of transformation:

To people who have completely appropriated the transformation model a new world of perception can open up. Sometimes they are capable of heroic deeds: deep, creative sources of life are unleashed in them; they suddenly seem to have inexhaustible energies at their disposal.²³²

Transformation embodies an ongoing and multifaceted process. The life-changing decision not only to believe in Jesus, but also to dwell in him must be viewed in a new way of life, because μένειν exposes Jesus’ followers to a life characterised by transformation. Such a life must be exemplified by unique priorities, attitudes, and relationships. The implications and effects of spiritual transformation are about a commitment for life from Jesus’ disciples, as John insists when he writes about the branches that grow on the vine and need regular pruning (15:2-3). It affects their inner life, their relationship with, and openness to God and Christ, as well as their relationship with their community and their opponents. Just knowing or hearing that Jesus is the vine and his followers the branches does not guarantee any transformation in itself. At stake is rather a “dwelling” in Jesus as the only source of life everlasting, which results in a meaningful and abundant spiritual life with mystical undertones. This necessitates the ensuing discussion on the practical implications for disciples making their home with Jesus.²³³

The effects of this exceptional mutual indwelling become clearer when compared with the relationship between Jesus and his Father. This is illuminated by the use of the word καθὼς in John 15:9-10.²³⁴ The implications and the new existence of a human closeness to God are explained in terms of divine love. Jesus, who lived the will of God and experienced the intimacy of the divine relationship, illustrates

²³² Waaijman (2002:456) provides the most elaborate explanation of transformation and distinguishes five layers in the transformation process: “(1) the transformation from non-being to being in God’s creation of man; (2) transformation from being malformed to being re-formed in God’s recreation of man; (3) man’s becoming conformed to a divine-human transformation model which introduces a person into divine reality; (4) transformation in love in which the soul is led into God, while God takes up his abode in the soul; (5) the transformation in glory which awaits us after this life but of which the transformation of love already contains a sketch.”

²³³ Bruner (2012:881-883) mentions four homemaking ways to which John refers, namely prayer (John 1 and 4); the Communion meal (John 6); continuing in his Word (John 8), and keeping his love command (John 15).

²³⁴ Köstenberger (1998:186) states that the adverb ‘just as’ (καθὼς) occurs in the Fourth Gospel in 1:23; 3:14; 5:23, 30; 6:31, 57, 58; 7:38; 8:28; 10:15; 12:14, 50; 13:15, 33, 34; 14:27, 3; 15:4, 9, 10, 12; 17:2, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23; 19:40, and 20:21. John uses καθὼς to explain the relationship between the disciples and Jesus regarding the concepts of sending (17:18; 20:21), life (6:57), knowledge (10:14-15), love (15:9; 17:23), and unity (17:22).

what the human pole will experience. What characterises the divine pole also characterises the human pole: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” (Καθὼς ἠγάπησεν με ὁ πατήρ, καγὼ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα· μέναιτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ. ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου, καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ πατρός μου τετήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ). The same technique is often used elsewhere in the Gospel.²³⁵ Bultmann’s (1971:535-536) view might broaden the perspective on this *καθὼς* clause. He refers to the *καθὼς* clause in John 15:2 as only a comparison, which makes the abiding appear as the condition of bearing fruit, whereas, according to verse 2, bearing fruit is the condition for remaining on the vine:

However, it is in accordance with the reciprocity of the relationship that both can be said. There is no abiding in him (no being held), without bearing fruit; nor is there any bearing fruit, without abiding in him (without allowing oneself to be held). What is demanded has already been given, i.e. the possibility of the future, which however has still to be grasped by the believer. This is why even the Farewell is no reason for dismay; it makes quite clear that the significance of the past lies in the disclosure of the future.

Regarding the implications of mutual indwelling, the *καθὼς* clause serves not only as an example, it is also a source of empowerment for Jesus’ followers. Both indicate reciprocity. This will be explained in more depth in the description of mystagogy in Chapter 7.

The relation between *μένειν* and the way of life implied for the disciples could also be explained in another way. A certain state of affairs leads to, or is followed by an admonition, command, or imperative. The fact that Jesus is the vine, his Father the Vinegrower, and the disciples the branches brings about a certain way of life. The image of the vine (*ἐγὼ εἶμι*) is inevitably followed by the implication thereof (*μένειν*). After the departure of Jesus, the disciples must remain and continue to dwell in him. Booth (2015:119) mentions that God, who used to dwell among his people in the tabernacle, the temple and the incarnation, now promised to dwell in them through the Spirit:

Yet, this indwelling presence would require that they continue to abide in Jesus, his words and his love just as [a] branch abides in the vine – a metaphor that captures their utter dependence on the indwelling Spirit. Jesus’ repeated use of the word “abide” underscores the significance of the privilege and attendant responsibility.

Much of what has been mentioned thus far accentuates the spiritual progression within the disciples. According to Collins (1990:54), a disciple “addresses Jesus with a faith that is as yet superficial (‘Rabbi’) but which will grow to greater fullness by interacting with Jesus. He finally appreciates where Jesus abides and comes to abide with him”. This remark represents discipleship as a dynamic

²³⁵ Cf. John 5:23; 6:57; 10:15; 12:50; 13:34; 15:12; 17:11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 20:21.

concept that develops in an ongoing manner.²³⁶ It is a transformation that is in progress. This new self is not the result of a natural birth, but it stems from the close relationship brought about by the loving initiative and indwelling of the Father. Schneiders (2003:54-55) makes some meaningful observations about the 12 disciples in John. In the Synoptic Gospels, they are called apostles and they play an important role.²³⁷ Not so in John. Simply being a disciple is significant, and discipleship is characterised by a teachable spirit. Her remarks also illustrate the importance and growth of discipleship as an ongoing process:

It is an apprenticeship in divine filiation, a being “taught by God” (see John 6:45-46). The “final examination” in this “course” on love is the willingness to lay down one’s life for those one loves after the example of Jesus. Because salvation in John is accomplished through revelation, the relationship between Jesus and those who believe in him is most appropriately one of discipleship, which fructifies in friendship.

However, what was mentioned earlier must not create the impression that what happens with, and in the mystic is the result of his/her own intentions. As key notions in mysticism, the concepts of mutuality and reciprocity put the contribution of the human pole into perspective. Once drawn into the divine-human relationship, in which one becomes conscious of “the unfathomable clarity of God’s love”, as Waaijman (2003:66) formulates it, the mystic’s being is totally directed towards God. It could be compared with a piece of wood in the fire: whilst the wood is wrapped up in the fire, the fire reaches the wood’s pith. Waaijman (2003:63-64) also states that the mystic is being moved through God. What happens with, and in the mystic is no longer the result of his/her own intentions, but it still has a formative influence on a disciple. Although they are the beneficiaries of the association described by μένειν, human beings did not establish the relationship. Theirs was a response of faith. The human pole experiences the birth of a new “I”,²³⁸ reminiscent of new birth in John’s Gospel (John 3:1-15). It is not an easy process, as is implied in the description of the pruning by the divine (John 15:1-4), but also the hostility that disciples may experience because of their relationship with Jesus.²³⁹ All this happens without interference or intermediary. Human involvement should be viewed in the right perspective in order to do justice to Jesus’ instruction, without compromising the grace of God. As reasoned in the previous section, God through Jesus takes the initiative in calling and leading people to discipleship. Everything stands or falls by his gracious love. So all-encompassing is his grace that sinners are invited not only to become followers of Jesus, but also to get involved in a relationship with the vine, resulting in a lasting and abundant life.

²³⁶ In a discussion of the many christological titles in the narrative of the first disciples in John 1:35-51, Hera (2013:59) refers to the suggestion that “the Johannine usage of the titles indicates a gradual deepening of the disciples’ understanding of Jesus: as a human figure, as the Messiah, and finally as the revealer of God.” Cf. Koester (1995:39-41); Brown (1982a:78).

²³⁷ Barton (1992:137-138) agrees with this point of view: “There is the shift in attention away from the apostles, including even Peter, in the direction of a focus upon discipleship in general.”

²³⁸ Waaijman (2003:63) refers to a remark by Buber: “‘Ik word aan het jij, ik wordend zeg ik jij,’ vertolk treffend deze passief ondergane inwerking. De inwerking van het Jij is de wording van het ik.”

²³⁹ Cf. discussion in section 7 below.

In essence, μένειν, as mutual indwelling, embodies far-reaching spiritual and mystical consequences for the community of believers. The notion of bodily space still needs to be clarified.

2.3 Μένειν and bodily space

The ongoing relationship between the disciples and the divine is further illuminated by reflecting on the nature of indwelling in terms of language that refers to space and body. Indwelling suggests the notion of space, given that one who dwells, dwells bodily in a place. This language shows that physically sharing the same space with the divine reflects a special, tangible intimacy. The notion of space surfaces as a significant aspect in John's Gospel (14:2): "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." Another prominent example is detected during the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus mentions that the locus of worship will no longer be the temple on the mount, but Jesus as Spirit: "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' called Christ 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.'" (John 4:24-26).

It is even more striking that the indwelling of the disciples in Jesus, illustrated in terms of the intimacy of Jesus and the Father in John's Gospel, is also formulated with bodily language. References elsewhere in John's Gospel could help illuminate the implications of this language. A reference in the Prologue (John 1:18) is metaphoric of the spiritual intimacy between Father and Son. In John 13:23, it even takes on a distinctly physical and symbolic meaning on account of the incarnation. The use of physical imagery in John 1:18 and 13:23 is striking. John 1:18 remarks: "No one has ever seen God. It is God, the God, the only Son, who is close to the Father's *bosom*, who has made him known." In this instance, the relationship between God and Jesus is expressed in physical terms as being exceptionally close and intimate. It is also mystical in the sense that it is about seeing God, the *visio Dei*, about an awareness of who God is, but also about union – both elements of the mystical experience.²⁴⁰ Strikingly, this happens in John 13:23 and 13:25 regarding the relationship between Jesus and his followers: "One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at the breast (*bosom*) of Jesus; so leaning back in this way at the *chest* of Jesus, he said to him, 'Master, who is it?'" (my italics, AS). It is noteworthy that John underlines the bodily intimacy between the two by repeating it. The intimacy between Jesus and the disciples is, therefore, expressed in a most perceptible way through bodily language.²⁴¹ Lee (2002:42-43) emphasises the symbolic meaning of the physical closeness, leading her to conclude that

²⁴⁰ For a more detailed description, cf. section 8, and Waaijman (2003:66-67).

²⁴¹ According to Von Wahlde (2010b:16, 32), the language used in John 1:18 connotes the intimate union between the unique Son of God with the Father. He also refers to the possible connection between this text and John 13:23. Bruner (2012:56) quotes Hoskyns (1947:94-95) who remarks that the author of John's Gospel forces his readers to look behind themselves, the church and the Apostles to the flesh of Jesus. This is in line with Countryman's (1987:18) observations: "As flesh he is the historical person Jesus. And since 'no one has ever seen' God, only the now-incarnate logos can make a real difference in the human relationship with God." As far as the Beloved Disciple in 13:23 is concerned, Countryman (1987:90) remarks that his importance lies, among other things, in his privileged intimacy with Jesus as signalled by his location at supper. Schnackenburg (1982:29) argues that the way in which John introduces the disciple whom Jesus loved reveals certain special

[i]ntimacy with the Father is made tangible through the flesh of Jesus; the closeness of mutual knowing is palpable and bodily. Jesus' flesh makes possible a divinely human love, functioning as the bridge between heaven and earth, and the beloved disciple exemplifies the place occupied by the believing community in its loving attachment to God.²⁴²

Köstenberger (1998:158) reiterates the fact that the author intended readers to look beyond the physical closeness between the Beloved Disciple and Jesus:

But in light of Johannine multi-layered language, it is hard to escape the notion that 13:23, in allusion to 1:18, also presents the Beloved Disciple, who is later identified as the Fourth Gospel's author (cf. 21:24), as in a position of proximity to Jesus that enables him to provide a close-up account of the life and mission of the Messiah.

In the prologue, the body of Jesus, the dwelling place of the divine, bridges the divine and human world, being closely linked with a bodily description of his being with the Father. This physical, spatial understanding of Jesus' mission illuminates the nature of discipleship. For Dumm (2001:95), discipleship is the result of a profound yearning for a meaning in life that is more than what worldly wisdom can offer. To follow Jesus expresses a desire of someone to discover the truth, the hidden revelation, the life with God. This desire is fulfilled, among others, as μένειν illustrated, by being physically close to Jesus, being bodily in the presence of the divine. This bodily language represents a desire to dwell spiritually in the space where Jesus is. Coloe (2007:39) mentions that “[d]iscipleship in the Fourth Gospel appears to be simply being and remaining (μένειν) with Jesus”. It is about an enduring and lasting relationship that is expressed in terms of real closeness. In addition, the nature of the divine as being about intimate love is carried over to express the nature of the human-divine relationship. It reflects mutuality where human nature ultimately reflects the divine. Lee (2002:101) explains the relevance of the above discussion about the Beloved Disciple and its implications for the church: “His place of honor at the Last Supper, reclining at the breast of Jesus (13:23), is emblematic of the church, which resides in the same place, enjoying the same intimacy with Jesus.”

Μένειν in John is, however, not simply about being in the divine presence and to continue being in it in a tangible manner. The Farewell Discourse illuminates how this should be understood. In John 14:3, Jesus speaks of rooms that will be prepared.²⁴³ As far as the Greek text of this verse is concerned, Brown

intentions. He was lying next to Jesus and indeed in his bosom, clearly being “a very special confidant, to whom Jesus revealed himself more than to others, and was therefore, more than others, called and able to present the revelation of Jesus, even in this Gospel, which is attributed to him by the editor (21:24).”

²⁴² Regarding this closeness of heart, Dumm (2001:169-170) concludes: “When the author of the Gospel of John, who is called the ‘one whom Jesus loved’[,] reclines next to him at the Last Supper (13:23), we are surely meant to conclude that he is close to the heart of Jesus, just as Jesus is close to the Father’s heart. As such he is able to speak to us most eloquently about the love of the Father that comes to us through his beloved Son.”

²⁴³ Hera (2013:51) explains: “Just as Jesus is forever at the ‘bosom’ of the Father (1:18), so believers are to be always with Jesus (12:26; 14:3; 17:24), as represented by the Beloved Disciple who is at the ‘bosom’ of Jesus (13:23).” In discussing John 17:24-26, Hera (2013:162) links this with John 14:3, affirming that Jesus wants his disciples “to be with him just as he has promised them, ‘Where I am, you will also may be’ (ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε, 14:3; cf. 12:26)”. This is reiterated once again “in order to see his glory Jesus wants his disciples to be with him where he is (ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ)” (Hera 2013:166). As a response

(1982a:627) states that Jesus literally states: “I am coming back to take you to myself.” Thus, in John’s Gospel, the future is described as encompassing a physical closeness with Jesus. Indwelling implies a transformation in glory when disciples will be where Jesus is going, in the glorious presence of God. This reality generated the following conclusion by Lee (2002:27): “The flesh will no longer be a closed door but will lead the believing community to the vision of divine glory.”²⁴⁴ Furthermore, as illustrated by Coloe (2007:52-53), μένειν provides a spatial metaphor for the Johannine theology of immanence, finally comprehended in the hour of Jesus’ glorification and the outpouring of the Spirit: “The disciples who seek, are invited into, and remain in the dwelling (place) of Jesus mirror in the text the post-Easter experience of believers who seek, are invited, and come to dwell in the household of God.”

3. Μένειν and the resulting community of friendship and love

Ultimately, the individual disciples of Jesus became part of a new circle of friends. Indwelling in the fourth Gospel is closely linked with friendship, as is clear from John 15:13-15:

Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.²⁴⁵

John introduces another perspective on the ongoing and transformative nature of indwelling. More is explained about the new identity given to the disciples. Based on their unity with Jesus, the disciples have undergone a change in status. They are no longer slaves of a rude master whose business is a secret to them. Those who dwell in Jesus are now in a unique relationship of friendship with him.²⁴⁶

As a result of the friendship, Jesus made known to them everything that he learned from his Father (John 15:14-15). Jesus’ own mission and life illustrate the meaning of friendship. The price he paid to make all of this possible is giving his life for his friends: “Greater love has no one than this that he

to Jesus’ invitation, discipleship leads to the knowledge of where Jesus lives, as described by Collins (1990:101, with reference to John 14:2-3, 25; 15:4, 7, 10; 17:24); the disciples learn that Jesus abides with the Father. The Farewell Discourse will make it clear that the place where Jesus abides is also the place where his disciples abide. Köstenberger (1998:178) adds: “In life and death, in humiliation and glory, Jesus’ disciple is to be with his Master.” According to Moloney (2013:132), John 14:2-3 refers to the time when the disciples will be with Jesus in the place he has prepared for them.

²⁴⁴ This is based on Lee’s (2002:29) belief that, in the Johannine language of incarnation, “the symbolism of ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) and its related imagery unfolds divine glory (*doxa*) in the person of Jesus, in order to restore glory to the scattered children of God (11:52).” To this, Lee (2002:237) adds: “Flesh and glory are not alternatives in the Johannine symbolic worldview. In the end, it is the union of the two which spells out for the reader the meaning and experience of salvation.”

²⁴⁵ See the earlier discussion of friendship in Chapter 2, section 3.1.4.

²⁴⁶ Koester (1995:245-246) alludes to a model of friendship involving mutuality: “The obedience that is a fruit of discipleship involves Jesus’ followers in a community of friends. The model of friendship depicted in John 15 involves reciprocity though not equality with Jesus: They did not choose him, he chose them and commissioned them to bear fruit (15:16).” The freedom and friendship that Jesus offers his disciples replaces the old dispensation of slavery. Schnackenburg (1982:111) compares this with what is mentioned of Moses in Exodus 33:11: “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” He then concludes: “What individual men of God were granted in the Old Testament was extended by Jesus to all disciples.” This is in line with Moloney (1998b:66) who regards *philoï* as “intimate and equal associates of Jesus who loves them without limit (see 13:1 – *eis telos*).” Coloe (2007:143) points out a distinction between the Synoptics and John, stating that, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is not the *Servant of God*, but “rather the Shepherd-King who freely lays down his life for love of his friends (15:13)”.

lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Schneiders (2003:54) indicated that friendship involves the trilogy of life, light, and love:

The life of Jesus in which his disciples participate is the life of children of God, divine filiation. This extraordinary union in friendship between Jesus and his disciples, a friendship that calls for laying down one’s life for the beloved, connotes an equality in the relationship, a mutual indwelling, a total sharing of being and life, which grounds the mystical spirituality into which this Gospel invites its readers.

Schneiders’s important remark about “a total sharing of being and life” concerns the notions of reciprocity and mutuality, which are key elements in the mystical experience.²⁴⁷ God grants the disciples divine life that establishes unity between them and that leads the disciples to portray the divine life. To be a disciple ultimately means to resemble God. The disciple gives life to others, like the divine self-giving. This relates to love of, and friendship with others. In her exposition of the Johannine symbol of indwelling, Lee (2002:99-104) includes a fascinating section on love and friendship. According to her, it is impossible to explore the symbol of indwelling without eventually coming up against the notions of love and friendship:

The friends of God are those who abide on the living vine, those in whom the image is restored, those who have become adult children within the household of faith. The obedience asked of them is one that arises from love and is directed towards love.

This friendship should be aimed at God (whose friendship goes to the end – εἰς τέλος – in John 13:1, and the laying down of life) and the others within the same circle of love. One could add to this that, in being obedient to God, the divine life is expressed in the life of the disciples.

In John 15, the change in identity from slavery to friendship hinted at the formation of more than simply a close circle of friends. It implied the birth of a new community of love. John 17 portrays this unity within the community as a proviso for the world to believe in Jesus and his God-sent mission to earth. By truly believing that Jesus and the Father are one through faith in Jesus, believers enter into a mysterious unity with God that brings about a way of life, which, again, displays the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17. If believers live and work together in unity, they exhibit and become a showpiece of union with God through Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁸ John 15, therefore, depicts the human response in terms of a community that is given a new status and lives in a new way, due to the divine initiative and the intimate union with the divine. Lee (2002:109) adds:

The Johannine symbolism of abiding and friendship opens the way to a new sense of personhood, grounded in the love of the Spirit. It signifies participating in the Trinitarian life of God and in the communion of saints, both within and beyond the visible world.

²⁴⁷ Cf. discussion in Chapter 3, section 6.1.9.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Nicol (2012:222-223; 246-247).

The mutual indwelling of Father and Son is the source and archetype of the indwelling of believers, the foundation of the indwelling-in-love of the community. This divine indwelling creates a centripetal force that draws human beings out of isolation into the community. In other words, the disciples are drawn into a pre-existing union and communion within the divine being (Lee 2002:109).

The concept of unity repeatedly surfaced, in this instance. This will be dealt with in more detail in section 8 below (Union as ultimate result of μένειν). The command for mutual indwelling is extended by Jesus calling on the disciples to μένειν in his words and his love.²⁴⁹

4. Μένειν and the words of Jesus

When calling upon his disciples to dwell in him, Jesus links this specifically to his proclamation. The way in which Jesus dwells in believers is through his word(s). The importance of the Lord's words is mentioned thrice in John 15. Two different Greek words λόγος and ῥῆμα are used and will be dealt with separately. The first use of λόγος is found in John 15:3, where one comes across the remark that the disciples are already cleaned by the word (τὸν λόγον) Jesus spoke to them (ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροί ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν). The meaning of the cleansing logos within this context needs to be clarified. According to Brown (1982b:660), λόγος means, in this instance, Jesus' whole teaching. He quotes two other verses: 5:38 "His word you do not have abiding [μένειν] in your hearts because you do not believe the one he sent" and 1 John 2:24: "If what you have heard from the beginning abides in your hearts, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father." Barrett (1978:474) interprets the λόγος as John's way of referring to the total effect of what Jesus was and did for his own: "It is the speaking and acting Christ who cleanses, but the meaning of his action is revealed by his active word." Schnackenburg (1982:98) is of the view that, according to the evangelist, the disciples have been cleaned through the discourse of Jesus, which contains life and spirit (6:63). They received it through faith into themselves. He reckons that attributing "purifying" force to the word of Jesus' word can certainly be reconciled with the "word" theology of John's Gospel (cf. 5:24; 6:63; 8:31, 51; 14:23; 17:17), but it is still rare and striking: "God, the vine-dresser, does not need to clean or purify the disciples, because they are clean already and can therefore bear abundant fruit as long as they abide in Christ."²⁵⁰

Ridderbos (1997:517) raises a word of caution regarding the meaning of Jesus' words that the disciples are already clean: "[This] does not mean they have already attained a degree of spiritual or moral perfection, but that he has deeply bound them to himself by his word that in virtue of that fellowship they

²⁴⁹ Cf. Von Wahlde (2010b:677).

²⁵⁰ On the subject of cleansing, Koester (1995:244-245) mentions that both the vine and the vinedresser serve the same end. The task of the Father is to prune or cleanse (*kathairein*) in order to bear fruit, while Jesus makes them capable of bearing fruit, or clean (*katharos*), through his word. He then continues: "Disciples, like the branches of a vine, have the source and the norm for their lives in Jesus, a disciple's life bears fruit only when nourished by Jesus."

are able and ready to his word and to bear fruit.” On the subject of a cleansed people, Bruner (2012:880) explicates:

Whoever listens to Jesus’ Word with attention (and this “attention” is what discipleship to any Master means) is, *ipso facto*, being “cut” to the core. Jesus’ Word cuts – cleanses, purifies, purges. All disciples have experienced this cutting as they have “taken in” Jesus’ often sharp Words.²⁵¹

The next use of λόγος referring to the word of Jesus is in verse 20, μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγου οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν. Because this verse is concerned with the antagonism of the world, it will only be dealt with later in this Chapter.

The following reference to the words of Jesus is found in John 15:7 where ῥήματα is used: ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ τὰ ῥήματα μου ἐν ὑμῖν μένῃ, ὃ ἐὰν θέλητε αἰτήσασθε, καὶ γενήσεται ὑμῖν. This time τὰ ῥήματα interact with John 14:10 (οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐστίν; τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐ λαλῶ, ὁ δὲ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων ποιεῖ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ.). This passage from the previous Chapter is regarded as model for the present text, according to Schnackenburg (1982:102): “The man who assimilates Jesus’ words into himself accepts him as the one sent by God and also at the same time commits himself to keeping the words and realizing them (cf. 12:47f.; 17:8).”²⁵²

Barrett (1978:469) highlights the close connection between the words and works of Jesus: “John is able to pass readily from the words to the works of Jesus since both alike are revelatory and both are full of power” (cf. John 14:10). For Michaels (2010:808), it can mean that “Jesus’ spoken ‘words’ take root, or ‘come to dwell’ in the disciples’ minds and hearts so as to govern their attitudes and actions.” Ridderbos (1997:518) highlights the possible link with Jesus’ plea for mutual indwelling: “‘And my words remain in you’ stands in the place of and explains the ‘I in you’ of vss. 4 and 5, referring to the permanent impact of Jesus’ words on his own.”

Bornkamm (1973:144) remarkably understands the disciples’ obligation to remain in the words of Jesus:

This meaning of discipleship is expressed clearly and exhaustively in the Gospel of John, in its own peculiar way: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn. viii. 31 f). The Greek verb translated as continue is μένειν.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Michaels (2010:803) remarks that the disciples are clean, not because of the footwashing itself or baptism, but “Jesus’ ‘word’ or ‘spoken words’ are the means by which the Father has ‘given’ or ‘drawn’ the disciples to Jesus (see 6:37, 44, 65), trimming them ‘clean’ to be his messengers. The implication is that now they are ready to bear ‘more fruit.’” Subsequent disciples are cleansed in five ways, according to Bruner (2012:880): (1) when meeting Jesus by getting “Word” of him and trusting in him; (2) being cleansed publicly and officially in holy baptism; (3) re-cleansed regularly and communally by hearing his “Word” through the fellowship in Church; (4) re-cleansed again and again in his meal, and (5) through all the cutting experiences allowed in their lives by the pruning Lord. Brown (1982b:676) touches on the meaning of the cleansing action in order to bear more fruit: “Since the bearing of fruit is symbolic of possessing divine life, the passage (15:1-6) concerns growth in that life and growth in union with Jesus.”

²⁵² According to Barrett (1978:475), ῥήματα are probably the specific sayings and precepts of Jesus (cf. v 10), which must remain in the Christian’s mind and heart.

²⁵³ The link between the words of Jesus and prayer will receive further attention when dealing with the abundant fruits the disciples have to bear.

The dwelling of the Lord's words in his followers has permanent and long-term implications. This perspective is highlighted when Bruner (2012:885) uses the term *homemaking*: "A major way Jesus makes his home with his disciples is when his conversation – his words – can find listening friends, can find 'a home' where these words are taken seriously, listened to expectantly, and responded to honestly."²⁵⁴

Once again, there is a link between Jesus' holding on to the words and the disciples doing so. Based on the previous section about the divine initiative, the emphasis in the Gospel to hold on to the words of Jesus should be read against the example laid down by Jesus himself. According to the Gospel, Jesus' manner of life was characterised by obedience to the two commandments he received from God. The first was God's commandment about what to say (John 12:46). He spoke as the Father had taught him, which was pleasing to God (John 7:17; 8:28). The second was that he should lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:18).²⁵⁵

All the above remarks highlight the importance of the indwelling words of Jesus for lasting transformation. This is closely connected with the next notion to be discussed, namely love. This is, in more than one sense, of utmost prominence for understanding the full implications of mutual indwelling.

5. Μένειν and the love of Jesus

The empowering indwelling by the trinity must also be linked with the notion of love, another qualification added by John to μένειν.²⁵⁶ Those who remain in Jesus' love observe his commandments, thus following the example of Jesus who remained in the Father's love and obeyed his Father's commandments.²⁵⁷ In John 15:9 and 15:10, Jesus reminds them to dwell in his love (ἀγάπη). In John 15:12 and 15:17, he commands (ἐντολή) them to love each other as he loved them. This should be read with what Jesus said to his disciples after the foot-washing episode: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Whatever mystical interpretation is given to μένειν, the mystic who longs to dwell in, and thus live in union with Jesus will always be guided by love.²⁵⁸ With reference to the concept of love, Barrett (1978:84) remarks:

This allegory of incorporation into Christ might seem at first to bear purely mystical interpretation: μέινετε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν (15.4). Nevertheless, it soon appears that union with Christ and in

²⁵⁴ Note the important part the words of Jesus played in the community's understanding of itself, a memory tied to the history of Jesus, as stated by Schnackenburg (1982:115). In his discussion of John 15:20, he explains: "The disciples are reminded of the word that was known to the Johannine community from the tradition of Jesus: 'A servant is not greater than his master'."

²⁵⁵ Cf. Koester (1995:238).

²⁵⁶ Ray (1983:113) highlights the importance of the concept of love in John: "Of the 143 NT occurrences of ἀγαπάω, 68 are Johannine (47%) while 3 of the 25 occurrences of φιλέω are Johannine (52%)." Ridderbos (1997:522) regards John 15:1-7 as "the magna carta of the Christian love commandment". Calling the following section, John 15:12-17, love in discourse, Moloney (2013:117) explains: "Jesus has *shown* love in 13:1-38. He now *tells them* of the need for their response to that love (15:12, 17), built on his prior love for them (13-16)."

²⁵⁷ Cf. Koester (1995:244-245).

²⁵⁸ Jeanrond (2010:36) highlights the prominence of John's focus on abiding in the love of God.

Christ cannot be adequately expressed without the use of ethical terms, and the key term is love. Nor is the thought allowed to rest here; the greatest love is shown when a man lays down his life for his friends (15:13), and it is precisely this love that Jesus shows. There is no communion, whether sacramental or mystical, that is independent of this.

These insights have been supported in Johannine research in which love is regarded as a key motif in John's Gospel. Schnackenburg (1982:102) points out that the bearing of fruit by the disciples is revealed at the deepest level as love. There is an inextricable connection between discipleship and love: "The fruit of being a disciple of Jesus grows in the soil of love, as a gift of Jesus' love, and is essentially love itself, as Jesus demonstrated it." Schnackenburg's reference to Jesus' demonstration of love reflects John's Christological perspective and confirms how the author links love with the life and ministry of Jesus. This insight is also to be found in Barrett (1978:215) who explains that the frequent use of love in John's Gospel corresponds to the fact that God's love for the world only becomes effective among those who believe in Christ.

According to Barrett (1978:215-216), love reflects a reciprocal relationship. His remarks confirm that strong link of love with Jesus. There is, namely, love between Father and Son, but also the reciprocal love between Son and disciples. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 10:17; 15:9f.; 17:23f., 26), and the Son loves the Father (14:31); Jesus loves his own (11:5; 13:1, 33, 34; 14:21; 15:9f., 12; 21:7, 20), and his disciples, who are called to love one another (13:34f.; 15:12f., 17; 17:26), must also love him (14:15, 21, 23f., 28; 21:15f.). The central place of Jesus in love is confirmed by the fact that John only occasionally refers directly to the Father's love for the disciples (14:21, 23; 17:23), whilst it is made clear that men, in general, do not, and cannot love God (3:19; 5:42; 8:42). John, more than any other writer, develops the concept of love as the means whereby divine life, the relation of the Father and the Son, is perpetuated and demonstrated within the community (13:35). Barton (1992:118) agrees when he affirms: "[I]t is clear also that the relationship of the Father and the Son provides the pattern for the relationship of mutual indwelling and subordination in love between Father, Son and believer."²⁵⁹

At this point, one should briefly note the claim in recent research that love in John's Gospel had a sectarian character, because it was directed to fellow believers only. It is then claimed that the Gospel does not speak of love for the neighbour and the enemy. The Gospel of John is then described as tending toward sectarianism: believers only care for one another. Their mission is to call outsiders to faith, but not to enter with them into a relationship of love. Sometimes reference is made to the Qumran community's limiting love to their community.²⁶⁰ To counterbalance these claims, he refers to the Gospel's statements "that God loved the world (3:16); that Christ came to take away the sin of the world (1:29); that it is God's good

²⁵⁹ Note Hera's (2013:108) ample conclusion: "Thus, the exhortation to abide in Jesus and his love, which is characteristic of discipleship, is grounded in the Christological understanding of Jesus as the 'true vine'. His union with the Father becomes the pattern and source of the disciples' relationship with him." Schnackenburg (1968:387) clarifies the close relationship between the Father and the Son, stating: "When the evangelist come[s] to speak of Jesus' union with the God, he always uses the absolute 'the Father' and 'the Son', because this is the only way in which he can indicate the ultimate metaphysical source of the common thought and action of God and Jesus.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Ladd (1974:280-281).

pleasure to save the world (3:17); that Christ came to give life to the world (6:33)". Moloney (2013:206) rejects the idea of Johannine sectarianism and being over against the world. He argues that the Johannine community "supported by their love for one another, and showing 'the world' the exquisite fruits of mutual love (cf. John 13:34; 17:21, 23), embrace the hostile world with their dramatic presentation of a story of God's saving love, made manifest in the self-gift of his Son". He convincingly argues that the narrative of John's Gospel shows that love is a central theme, which refers to Jesus' revelation of God's love and his call to the disciples to do the same. Moloney (2013:209) links all of this to the *hour of Jesus* as an important marker for a correct understanding of the love John is talking about: "If God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that it might be saved and have eternal life (3:16-17), and the perfection of that gift takes place in the "hour" of Jesus (4:34; 13:1; 17:1, 4; 19:30), the community can gaze upon the pierced one and there see Jesus' manifestation of God's love (19:36-37)."

All of the above stresses that love is an important motif in mystical Spirituality.²⁶¹ Jeanrond's (2005:415) remark illustrates how comprehensively love should be at work in the community and how extensively it affects their position in the world:

Loving attention to the other requires more than individual acts of charity. It calls for a radically transformed view of the dignity and vocation of the human person as God's friend and of the Christian Church as God's eschatological community called to help renew the earth. Hence, a Christian Spirituality of love needs to include political, emancipatory, economic, environmental and ecological dimensions. In this way, the praxis of love will reveal new and surprising ways of being in the world. A Christian spirituality of love lives from the energy emerging from the radical difference between God and human beings, a difference that creates the desire for closeness, a longing to enter into the transforming mystery of the creative and redemptive love of the triune God for all creation.

The love practised by the community of believers represents the lasting effect of the process of transformation characterised by μένειν. Jesus wants love to become and remain one of the indispensable characteristics of the community of believers in future. As a hallmark of their existence, love will be a testimony to their discipleship. This reminds one of Waaijman's (2002:469-476) important exposition about transformation in love: "The peculiar nature of transformation in love is that love prompts God and man to rest completely in each other ..." (Waaijman 2002:469), and "Transformation in love ... so strongly joins God and the soul that it unites and transforms them both." (Waaijman 2002:474). But, an important word of caution should be noted (Waaijman 2002:472):

²⁶¹ With reference to 1 John 4:12: "If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.", Ladd (1974:280) remarks: "This verse suggests that the 'Johannine mysticism' is a mysticism of love." For Waaijman (2002:313), fear of God and love are intrinsically connected. He observes that fear of God is one of the basic words that "encompass the entire process of encounter between God and man – from the first awesome touch to and including respectful fulfilment in love". Everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus does not manufacture his/her own abiding. According to Lee (2002:97), they are gathered into the community already redolent with love and life: "Disciples are to abide within that love (3:16; see 1 John 3:17; 4:12) – an abiding that, as we have seen, is dependent wholly on Jesus (14:1-11) and on his relationship with the Father."

This transformation in love can in no way be effected by the soul itself. The only thing that can prepare for this transformation is to pacify and silence the senses, the intellect, the will, and the memory, so that the Beloved can give himself without form. The three faculties must be so emptied of all form that they are completely present to the love of God.²⁶²

Lee (2002:104) remarks: “Disciples are friends of Jesus, but they remain disciples, followers of the one who is the Kyrios, and who directs that their love for each other be as radical and self-giving as his for them.”

It is evident from the above discussion that discipleship and love are the results of a radical transformation. A disciple’s way of life is no longer characterised only by periodic deeds of care, but s/he is also fundamentally transformed into a new loving being. Such a new lifestyle respects the unique identity and dignity of others as well as being aware of their need to be loved and appreciated. Dodd’s (1953:199-200) remarks about the relation between indwelling, union and love is significant. According to him, “love is the only kind of union between persons of which we can have any possible experience. John says that this is in truth the kind of union with God given in the Christian religion.”²⁶³ Ridderbos (1997:466) further clarifies Jesus’ distinctive love command:

The commandment to mutual love is a commandment to “remain” in the love of the one who sends the disciples. For just “as” the Son kept the commandments of his Father and remains in his love, so they will keep his commandments when they – taken up into the oneness of the Father and the Son (17:21, 23, 26) – remain in his love (15:10).

The focus on the human pole thus far revealed that Jesus’ mission and the call to indwelling, in particular, elicited two responses. Some people responded by bidding the darkness of the world farewell and becoming children of God; others, sadly enough, chose to remain in the darkness of their sinful existence (John 3:16-21). In John 15, the responses of these two groups are expressed and lead to a lifestyle of either love or hate. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the positive and negative responses to Jesus’ invitation to indwelling as well as the resultant bearing of fruit. Most of the time, fruit will refer to a specific way of live, positive or negative.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Waaijman (2002:678) also makes the following crucial remarks regarding powerlessness in love: “Love is the act-center. It draws the soul out of itself into Love. This is *ek-stasis* in the literal sense, standing outside of oneself, as Dionysius the Areopagite says: ‘Not by being ourselves but by totally dissociating ourselves from ourselves and so becoming completely the possession of God.’”

²⁶³ He continues by saying that John “makes use of the strongest expression for union with God that contemporary religious language provided, in order to assure his readers that he does seriously mean what he says, that through faith in Christ we may enter into a personal community of life with the eternal God, which has the character of ἀγάπη, which is essentially supernatural and not of this world not only because real ἀγάπη cannot but express itself in practical conduct, but also because the crucial act of ἀγάπη was actually performed in history, on an April day about A.D. 30, at a supper table in Jerusalem, in a garden across the Kidron valley, in the headquarters of Pontius Pilate, and on a Roman cross at Golgotha. So concrete, so actual, is the nature of the divine ἀγάπη; yet none the less for that, by entering into the relation of ἀγάπη thus opened up for men, we may dwell in God and he in us. Whether this should be called “mysticism” I do not know.” The concept of unity will be treated in more detail below.

²⁶⁴ In Chapter 1, the use of viticulture language in John 15 was mentioned with reference to Dodd (1953:136) who stated John’s metaphorical usage of concepts such as the vine, the cutting away of barren branches, and bearing fruit. In his explanatory note, Witherington (1995:257) points out that vine is used as a symbol for “an especially prized and fruitful source of nourishment and strength”. Moloney (1998b:55, footnote 1) mentions more propositions.

6. Μένειν and its fruit

To bear fruit means to do something actively, as explained by Moloney (1998b:61): “Union with Jesus, and fruitfulness, is not a matter of enjoying the oneness that exists between the disciple and the master; it also consists of *doing something*, which is impossible without abiding in Jesus.” Bearing fruit is closely associated with the life of a disciple. Whoever is called by Jesus and dwells in him bears fruit that is to the glory of God. Bearing fruit is closely linked with the divine, as explained in Chapter 5 about the inworking of the Trinity. It begins with the call by Jesus and it is only possible when one remains in a close relationship with Jesus as his disciple. Ongoing intimacy with the divine through μένειν affects one’s existence in many ways. John explains with various remarks and images how mutual indwelling, as well as the dwelling in the words and love of Jesus, disembogues into an ever-expanding network of spiritual values. The relation between dwelling (μένειν) in Jesus and bearing fruit is of importance. Bultmann (1971:536) enquires whether abiding is the condition for bearing fruit or for abiding in the vine. He concludes that both are true:

There is no abiding in him (no being held), without bearing fruit; nor is there any bearing fruit, without abiding in him (without allowing one to be held). What is demanded has already been given, i.e. the possibility of the future, which however has still to be grasped by the believer.²⁶⁵

Bearing fruit also echoes the integral unity between ethics and mysticism.²⁶⁶ Dwelling in Jesus as he dwells in them not only guarantees fruitfulness, but also leads to bearing abundant and lasting fruit:

Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (15:4-5).

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you (15:16).

Bearing fruit thus stems from μένειν as the essence of discipleship, and discipleship is after all about dwelling in Jesus and following the required lifestyle. The nature of bearing fruit resulting from a positive response to Jesus’ invitation to indwelling will be dealt with next.

6.1 Μένειν and prayer

Bearing fruit is, first, closely linked with prayer. Dwelling in Jesus and his words guarantees continuing contact between Jesus and his disciples. Mutual indwelling even opens the door to direct contact with the Father, the vinegrower. The communication thus has to do with revealing one’s needs. Prayer is mentioned four times in Jesus’ Farewell speech. In the first instance, Jesus remarks: “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my

²⁶⁵ To bear fruit means to do something actively, as explained by Moloney (1998b:61): “Union with Jesus, and fruitfulness, is not a matter of enjoying the oneness that exists between the disciple and the master; it also consists of *doing something*, which is impossible without abiding in Jesus.”

²⁶⁶ Cf. Kanagaraj (1998:315) regarding salvation and judgement.

name you ask me for anything, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). Jesus is the one who fulfils the requests of the disciples who dwell in him. In the following references to prayer, the Father responds, but the prayer is in the name of Jesus. Brown (1982b:662) correctly notes that the use of the passive in John 15:7 (it will be done) is a circumlocution for describing the actions of God: “If you abide in me, and my words (ῥήματα) abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). This recalls the command given to Jesus to speak as the Father told him. Those who have Jesus’ words in their hearts can speak to God with the assurance of being heard. This is stated more explicitly when Jesus mentions: “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (John 15:16), and: “Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 16:23b). In all these instances, the divine response to prayer in Jesus’ name is to give “whatever” is being asked.²⁶⁷ Prayer has extraordinary power, although the requests must be in line with the Father’s will. Barrett (1978:475) declares: “The prayer of a truly obedient Christian cannot fail, since he is asking nothing contrary to the will of God.” Michaels (2010:808) further highlights the importance of prayer for bearing fruit: “If answered prayer is not itself the ‘fruit’ of which Jesus speaks, it is at least the means – perhaps the only means – by which the expectation of ‘much fruit’ is to be fulfilled.”²⁶⁸

There is thus a strong link between indwelling and prayer. John 15:7 and 16 are concerned with requests made by one who dwells in Jesus: “Verse 7 gave assurance that God would hear those united to Jesus; verse 16 gives assurance that God will hear Jesus’ chosen and loved ones” (Brown 1982b:679, 684). Schnackenburg (1982:101-102, 113) explains that the assurance to the disciples in John 15:7 that their prayers will be heard is based on their keeping the admonition to dwell in Jesus. It reiterates the importance of a living union with Jesus. Prayer once again reveals the dynamic nature of this union: believers are transformed to hear God’s will and to live according to the divine commandments. This union confirms their own identity: in their existence, they have the freedom to share their needs and desires with God. Their humanity is not eliminated, but, rather, confirmed. Once again, this points to mutuality and reciprocity. Although humanity will want to live in the divine will, there is no clear indication of how this will actually take place. They will have to learn what it means for their daily lives to be in an intimate relationship with God. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 illustrates the importance of prayer for this ongoing school of learning, as is clear from the unifying effect of that prayer. Brown (1982b:748) explains this so aptly: “This is more a

²⁶⁷ Under the heading “A deep conversational promise”, Bruner (2012:885) discusses John 15:7 and refers to it as an “extravagant promise” by Jesus. Bruner (2012:899) also provides a most helpful overview of the commentary tradition of Jesus’ promise to prayer.

²⁶⁸ Commenting on the concurrent promise by Jesus in John 15:16, Michaels (2010:816) puts the possible success of the disciples into perspective when he notes that “whatever success they may have in ‘bearing fruit’ in the course of their mission to the world is gained through answered prayer, and only through answered prayer. At times we were reminded that this is true even of Jesus himself (see 9:31; 11:22, 41-42), and he has made it clear in the present discourse that prayer was indeed the key both to the disciples’ ‘greater works’ (14:13-14) and to the bearing of ‘much fruit’ (vv. 7-8).”

prayer of the union or communion of the Son and the Father than it is a prayer of petition. This prayer is said aloud before the disciples precisely so that they may share this union (21-23).”²⁶⁹

The mystical and spiritual perspective of prayer becomes increasingly clear. The mystics remain themselves (Waaïjman 2003:67), but they need to be in constant unity with God in order to discover what the relationship implies and how to grow deeper in that relationship. They need to learn what it implies that the divine is dwelling in them. Prayer is explicitly characterised as asking the divine to intervene on their behalf. These requests are, however, a result of the deeper prayer that has to do with the longing to be with the divine and for the divine to dwell in the midst of the believing community. One recognises how the desire and longing to be with God brings with it the human desire to speak with God and to ask God to intervene for one’s sake. The believer is depicted as an active partner in the divine-human relationship whose longing and desires are welcomed by God. Indwelling ultimately means to be empowered in a special manner in order to be in an active partnership with God.

A few remarks from Waaïjman’s (2002:667-673) description of the mystical nature of prayer are necessary. He describes prayer as “man’s vital orientation to God throughout all man’s spiritual practices and exercises of virtue ... not as a form but as an attitude: directedness to God. This directedness is realized in but also apart from all exercises. It concerns the whole of life.” (Waaïjman 2002:667). It is wholly directed towards the divine centre drawing all strength and meaning from it. Such prayer permeates everything leading to supreme fulfilment by realising that God is the prayer: “The ecstatic delight of losing oneself in God draws the petitioner into God himself.” (Waaïjman 2002:673).

Although a great deal more could be said about the importance of prayer, the above will suffice to highlight the necessity of a vibrant life of prayer originating from the mutual indwelling commanded by the Lord. This recalls the command given to Jesus to speak as the Father told him; accordingly, those who have Jesus’ words in their hearts can speak to God with the assurance of being heard. Brown (1982b:662) agrees: “Jesus and his revelation are virtually interchangeable, for he is incarnate revelation (the Word).”

6.2 Μένειν and glory

Glory (δόξα) is an important motif that is closely linked with indwelling, as some references will show. It is mentioned in John 15:8: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (ἐν τούτῳ ἔδοξάσθη ὁ πατήρ μου, ἵνα καρπὸν πολλὸν φέρητε καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί). After the previous verse’s call to μένειν and prayer, fruitful discipleship is related to the glory of God. Thus, transformation effected by indwelling is connected with “exalting” God and the divine glory.

Discipleship is linked explicitly to bearing much fruit, which is then, in turn, said to glorify God. Brown (1982a:503) shows that δόξα occurs 23 times in the Synoptics and 18 times in John’s Gospel. According to him, “[t]he only *doxa* that is worth the while is that which is given to God (vii 18, xii 43). And

²⁶⁹ Moloney (1998b:66) confirms this unity: “The oneness that exists between Jesus and the Father will also be enjoyed by the disciples chosen (v. 16a) and sent out (v. 16b) by Jesus (see 13:18-20).”

this *doxa* or praise that men give to God is only recognition of the *doxa* or glory that God possesses.” Their new status directs and orientates the disciples to God rather than to themselves, as is indicated by Barrett (1978:475) who points out that, in John, it is usually the Son who is glorified. However, based on John 12:28; 13:31; 14:13, and 17:4, he concludes:

The Father is glorified in the Son – in his obedience and perfect accomplishment of his work. It is therefore but a short step to see the glorification of the Father in the obedience and fruitfulness of those who are united to the Son.²⁷⁰

Von Wahlde (2010b:679) declares: “By becoming disciples of Jesus (v. 8), the disciples of Jesus also give glory to the Father just as Jesus did throughout his ministry.” Schnackenburg (1982:102) suggests a link, in this instance, with the Father as the vine dresser in John 15:2: “God, who hears the petitions of the disciples who are united to Jesus, is ‘glorified’ by their bearing fruit, in other words, he is honoured and shown to be true in his glory, because, as the vine dresser, he is intent on an abundant yield of fruit (cf. v. 2).”²⁷¹

Glorification and prayer are also linked in the climax of the Farewell in John 17. The prime example for glorifying God is Jesus himself. The glorification is mutual, as in John 17:1: “After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.’”²⁷² The concept of glory is prominent in the remainder of this prayer by Jesus, as is shown in 8 occurrences.²⁷³ Moloney (2013:130) explains what is meant by glory, and makes three important remarks about what the disciples may have overheard Jesus telling his Father. Glory has to do with the mutuality between himself and the Father that he passes on to the believers (8:22); with love and oneness between Father and Son (1:1-2; 17:5) made known in, and through the Son (1:14; 2:11; 3:16-17; 5:44; 7:18; 8:50-54; 11:4, 40), and the love between believers that reflects the love between Father and Son. Bruner (2012:793), who regards “glorify” as the Passion’s thematic word, relates it to the weekend of the passion that embodies a massive glorification. It reflects glorification of Jesus through the cross and resurrection, but also the glorification of the human race by God’s and Jesus’ love for, and rescue thereof. Glorification has another implication: God is glorified through the gift of eternal life to believers (Michaels 2010:858). John 13:31

²⁷⁰ Cf. Schnackenburg’s (1980:398-410) elaborate Excursus 13 about the exaltation and glorification of Jesus, where he concludes that Jesus, in his person, words, actions, demands for faith and love, “brings to us the distant and totally other God, who would otherwise remain inaccessible and unintelligible. In his life and death he reveals God’s loving approach to mankind, in the full force of the incarnation formula, as a man who dwelt among us.”

²⁷¹ The interconnectedness of different concepts in the Gospel becomes transparent in Schnackenburg’s comment on prayer and glorifying God in John 15:5. He ends his exposition of the verse by stating that all believers were called disciples of Christ, “but what is most important is that believers should become true disciples by bearing fruit and above all by brotherly love (13:35) or to show that they are such disciples (*γενήσασθε*). It is only then that Jesus will accept them as his disciples (*ἐμοί* in the dative, *ethicus* or *commodi*) who are dear to him and who really serve him (cf. 12:26).” He adds that it is not always possible to treat them in total isolation from each other without affecting their meaning.

²⁷² In line with this, Ridderbos (1997:387) comments that the glory of God and the Son is mentioned in a single breath: “It is in the sending of the Son that ‘the glory of God,’ that is, God’s reality in the power and majesty of his presence, manifest[s] itself (cf. 13:31; 14:13; 17:4).”

²⁷³ Cf. John 17:1(2), 4, 5(2), 11, 22, 24.

and 17:4-5 spell out that the glorification of the Father and the Son means concretely that the Son confers eternal life on those who believe.²⁷⁴

The above discussion reveals how the human side of the mutual indwelling (μενεῖν) must, at times, be analysed in terms of the concurrent mysterious inner workings of the divine. Dodd does this in his discussion of various meanings of δόξα.²⁷⁵ He reasons that a part of the writer's technique is "playing upon different senses of a word – or rather, this ranging up and down the scale of its possible meanings and making one meaning fill out another" (Dodd 1953:208).²⁷⁶ Insight into the glorious consequences of the indwelling of the Word (John 1:14) is essential for true discipleship and the transformation associated therewith. This concerns all the nuances of glory in the Gospel,²⁷⁷ culminating in the final act of glory set in motion by his ascension onto the cross (John 12:27-33). This illustrates his being devoid of seeking self-glory and willing to suffer self-renunciation. With such a broad overview, the reader reaches the point where the importance of John 12:23 can be grasped: "Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'" This leads Dodd (1953:374) to conclude:

Such is the logic behind the so-called "paradox" of the Fourth Gospel, the paradox involved in using the term δόξασθῆναι to connote the death of Christ (more properly, the complex event which is His death-and-resurrection, and gives life to the world).

It should now be clear that the prime example for disciples in glorifying God is Jesus himself. Only through dwelling in the Lord will his true followers be enabled to sense and grasp these spiritual truths that motivate and enable them to live a life to the glory of God by bearing abundant fruit.

The Johannine meaning of δόξα is also an important motif in other Old and New Testament texts. Glorifying God is often a Biblical subject for the culmination of the spiritual journey, as expressed in the prayer "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 5:9). What is linked with Jesus is intensified in apocalyptic texts such as Revelation with its mystical nature. In Revelation 5:12, the angels are said to sing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!". In addition, Isaiah 6:1-3, as a mystical Old Testament passage, confirms this:

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory'.

²⁷⁴ Michaels (2010:859) regards *those who believe* as the disciples' representatives of a wider group, "including the Samaritans, the royal official and his household, the man born blind, and woman disciples such as Martha and Mary" (cf. John 6:37, 39; 10:28; 16:30).

²⁷⁵ Without going into the detail of Dodd's (1953:206-208) argument, it should be mentioned that he discusses three concepts together in this section, namely light, glory, and judgement.

²⁷⁶ Examples of different meanings for glory occur in John 12:23, 28; 13:31-32; 14:13.

²⁷⁷ The theme of glory also occurs in John 1:14; 8:50, 54; 11:4, 40; 12:28; 13:31-32; 14:13; 16:14; 17:1, 4-5; 17:22, 24.

Words such as ‘glory’ (δόξα) and ‘glorification’ (δόξαζω) have strong spiritual and mystical meaning for the ongoing existence of believers. Glory is a crucial spiritual theme in John, especially with reference to believers who discovered their new identity as God’s children in Christ. McIntosh (2005:323) refers to the dual role of Christian Spirituality in John:

It marks the newly emerging identity of those who believe, and it does so precisely because it is a sharing in “the glory as of a father’s only son” (John 1.14), made known within the transformed community by the hidden presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Glory is thus the shining into historical visibility of the Father’s joy (the Holy Spirit) in the Word.

Schneiders (2005c:387) also illuminates the role of glory in her definition of Johannine Spirituality as a mystical Spirituality dominated by presence, mutual indwelling, and union. To be a disciple in whom Christ dwells and who remains in Christ reveals the glorious presence and work of the divine in the ongoing existence of believers. This underlines that the ongoing existence of believers does not only transform the community and its world, but it ultimately also reveals that God is mystically present in their midst: “Believers manifest God’s glory in their daily life as Jesus reveals his Father’s glory.”²⁷⁸ With this link between glory and bearing fruit, John once again utilises a concept with mystical overtones, calling to memory a recurring theme in Merkabah mysticism.²⁷⁹

In conclusion, some brief insights may be gained from what Waaijman (2002:476-481) calls the transformation in glory. His exposition is based on a distinction by John of the Cross between transformation in love that occurs in this life, and transformation in glory belonging to the after-life (of which we know nothing yet). This helps one understand glory in John’s Gospel. He notes how transformation in love contains a sketch of the transformation in glory.²⁸⁰ The glory of Jesus as the Risen One is a glory-in-God. Having transformed believers in likeness to him, it is possible for the Risen One to see himself in Christians. Conformed to the death of the Lord, “he will change the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to his glory.”²⁸¹ The faith proclamation, “We live, now not we, God lives in us”,²⁸² resembles Jesus’ claim to the disciples to μένειν in him. It is even deepened by the claim to mutual indwelling (cf. John 15:4-5). This should be read together with John 15:8: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples.”

Secondly, Waaijman deals with the glorification of humanity in God. This happens when humanity as God’s covenant partner passes into God (*transire in Deum*): “The creation of man assumes the primal

²⁷⁸ God’s glory is now manifested in a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. The δόξα of the incarnate Word is the δόξα of the Father. Kanagaraj (1998:307, 315) corroborates: “It is not merely the person Jesus who is the Christ, the Son of God, but, more specifically, his glory which is the same as the Father.” Inge (2015:574-577, Kindle Location) comments: “The world is the poem of the Word to the glory of the Father: in it, and by means of it, He displays in time all the riches which God has eternally put within Him. In St. John, as in mystical theology generally, the Incarnation, rather than the Cross, is the central fact of Christianity. ‘The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us’ is for him the supreme dogma.”

²⁷⁹ The vision of God’s glory on the throne in Merkabah mysticism is explained in more detail in Chapter 3, section 7.5.2. For earlier expositions regarding glory, see Chapter 2, section 3.1.3; Chapter 3, section 7.5.1, as well as Chapter 5, section 5.5.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Waaijman (2002:476). The Scriptural references are mostly Pauline, but still add value to the current discussion.

²⁸¹ Cf. Waaijman (2002:477).

²⁸² Quote from *The Spiritual Canticles* B, 12, 8. Cf. Waaijman (2002:477).

form of the covenant which culminates in the human beings who see God in glory.”²⁸³ The Gospel of John reflects some of these insights. Through faith, believers experience the divine rebirth in their becoming children of God (John 1:12; 3:3) and comprehend the glory of the One and Only (John 1:14). Jesus confirms human glorification, stating: “My Father will honor (τιμή) the one who serves me.”²⁸⁴ This takes place “by letting such a disciple share in the honor and glory of the Son (cf. 14:21, 23; 16:24; 17:22, 23).”²⁸⁵

Finally, he deals with the theme of total reciprocity. He describes five aspects, “for which the transformation in love yearns and of which it has a foretaste.”²⁸⁶ These include co-spiration with the Holy Spirit; jubilation in the pleasure of God; the knowledge of creation; the contemplation of God’s essence, and the total transformation in the measureless love of God. This topic awakens the senses to a mystical inclination, incited above all by remarks such as “Transformation in glory escapes all definition. Yet transformation in love catches a glimpse of it”, and “Transformation in glory is perfect and immeasurable, completely reciprocal and unhindered.”²⁸⁷ This could hardly be truer for the mystical implications of reciprocal indwelling, as explained by Jesus. Realising only a fraction of the depth of Jesus’ call can only lead to a complete devotion to a fruitful life of discipleship. This will be done in honour of the Word that came to dwell among men, sacrificing himself in selfless love (John 15:13), his Father who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son (John 3:16), and the Spirit of truth that will guide them in all truth (John 14:12-15).

Το μένειν in the words and love of Jesus leads to prayers being answered as well as the glorification of God. The next result of mutual indwelling is the concept of joy.

6.3 Μένειν and complete inner joy

From the Gospel it becomes clear that discipleship characterised by indwelling also leads to a joyful existence. Contemporary scholarship has emphasised the exceptional character of Johannine joy. A formal analysis will assist in revealing the significant place of joy in the Gospel. It will also be shown how the indwelling Christ brings the disciples’ joy to fulfilment. Finally, the mystical nature of joy will be discussed.

6.3.1 The significance of joy

Joy is a seminal motif in John’s Gospel. This is confirmed on a formal level. Two passages reveal how John foregrounds joy in John 13-17, within which John 15 fits. Just (2015) wrote that the theme

²⁸³ Cf. Waaijman (2002:477-478).

²⁸⁴ The following explanations confirm the uniqueness of John’s statement that God honours human beings. Brown (1982a:467) comments: “We have heard of the honor that men pay to Jesus or to the Father (v 23, viii 49), but here we have an example of the reciprocity in the eternal life promised in John.” Barrett (1978:424) notes that “John nowhere else uses τιμάω with God as subject, but cf. 5:23 (that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him).”

²⁸⁵ Cf. Ridderbos (1997:433). According to Von Wahlde (2010b:551), “[i]t simply speaks of the reward to be expected by the one who serves Jesus”.

²⁸⁶ Quote from *The Spiritual Canticles* B, 39, 2. Cf. Waaijman (2002:477).

²⁸⁷ Cf. Waaijman (2002:478, 481).

of “joy” and “rejoicing” may not seem as prominent in John’s Gospel as, for example, it is in Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He then notes that joy is surprisingly central in some key Johannine passages. He analysed John 13-17 and found that joy occurs in the chiasmic centre in this Last Supper Discourse (15:11) and the great Prayer of Jesus (17:13). He outlines the following pattern, which includes the last supper in John’s Gospel (13:1-17:26); the washing of the feet (13:1-30); the last supper discourse (13:31-16:33), and the prayer of Jesus (17:1-26).

O) 13:1-30 – The washing of the feet: An example of love and service [*see chiasmic substructure below*]

A) 13:31-38 – Discourse introduction: Jesus gives a new love commandment, and foretells Peter’s denials

B) 14:1-7 – Don’t let your hearts be troubled; I am the way, the truth, and the life

C) 14:8-14 – Seeing and believing in Jesus and in the Father; mutual indwelling

D) 14:15-24 – The Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth; keeping the commandments/words of Jesus

E) 14:25-31 – The Paraclete, whom the Father will send in my name; I love the Father

F) 15:1-10 – The vine and the branches; remain in me, as I remain in you

G) 15:11 – Purpose/Goal: My joy in you, and your joy complete

F') 15:12-17 – My commandment: Love one another as I have loved you

E') 15:18-27 – The world hates you; the Paraclete, whom I will send from the Father

D') 16:1-11 – Opposition from the world; the Paraclete will not come unless I go

C') 16:12-15 – Speaking and hearing the truth; the glory of the Father

B') 16:16-24 – You will no longer see me; you will have pain, but later your joy will be complete

A') 16:25-33 – Discourse conclusion: Jesus speaks plainly about the Father’s love and the disciples’ scattering

O') 17:1-26 – The prayer of Jesus: A summary of the Johannine Jesus’ themes

In this instance, one observes how John places the theme of joy in the heart of the Farewell Discourse (G).

Another formal analysis, this time within John 15 itself, also shows how John foregrounds joy (Brown 1982b:667). It has an interesting chiasmic pattern: Jesus’ teaching (vv. 7, 17) and the promise of answered prayer (vv. 7, 16) are located at the two ends and Jesus’ joy is placed in the centre (v. 11).²⁸⁸ This shows how joy represents the heart of what Jesus says and what he answers. It is, however, not only the form of the passage, but also the meaning of joy that reveals its significance.

6.3.2 Joy and indwelling by Christ

Joy is an important characteristic of someone who experiences an enduring and intimate relationship with God in Christ. In John 15:9-17, joy includes the theme of love as the Father’s love for Jesus, Jesus’ love for his disciples, and his love command to them. Joy seems to appear unexpectedly in verse 11: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

²⁸⁸ Jordaan (2015) also mentions the union: “The disciples’ joy in John 15:11 is the effect or result of their union with Christ”, while Schnackenburg (1982:104) wrote: “It is the joy of the time after Easter and therefore of Christ’s lasting presence.”

Jesus envisions that his joy dwells in his disciples just as he himself (15:4, 5), and his words (15:7) will dwell in them, thereby establishing an inextricable link between abiding and joy. According to Arockiam (2002:41), “[t]he abiding assures joy; where there is abiding there is joy – the joy of Jesus.”

Jesus explains the nature of joy, noting that everything he told the disciples brings joy to their lives. This is not joy in the general sense of the word as a feeling of excitement, but a “complete” joy that dwells in them as a firm part of their spiritual journey (John 15:11).²⁸⁹ It is a joy that is linked with the person, message and love of Jesus and his proclamation of the Father’s will (John 15:14). Joy is given to the disciples in order to remain in them (Schnackenburg 1982:104). Twice in other parts of the Farewell Discourse, John refers to this joy: “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:24). Taken together with John 15:7, the active role of the disciples in expressing their needs will bring their joy to fulfilment. In John 17, Jesus expresses a similar thought in his prayer to his Father: “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13).

John’s use of the word ‘complete’ (πληρωθῆ) refers to the fullness of this joy, as in Bruner’s (2012:889) translation: “I have said all these things to you so that my very special joy can be right there in the midst of your community and so that your own personal joy can be filled to overflowing.” This refers to an overflowing personal joy (Bruner 2012:890). This full, overflowing joy is closely linked with indwelling, particularly of Jesus in the disciples. There is a consistent link between joy and the person of Jesus in several places in the Gospel: “Jesus apparently believes that the unique need for joy that each of us has will find maximum satisfaction when we are wanting to make our home with Jesus and wanting to keep his commands.”²⁹⁰ Ridderbos (1997:519) also explains the link with Jesus and regards complete joy as the highest implication of Jesus’ self-revelation to his own: “Here all stress lies on the disciples being absorbed into the joy of their Lord in fulfilling God’s work on earth, if they remain in his love.” Dumm (2001:59) explains that joy is a gift that may seem as elusive as it is precious. Joy might seem to be vague, because one is seeking it in the wrong place: “Those who dare to love as Jesus did, who are free enough to seek the happiness of others rather than just their own, will enter into his joy.” Its perfection lies in the role of Jesus (Dumm 2001:59-60): “Jesus offers us the wisdom that makes joy our partner in life, no matter what hardships may come our way.”²⁹¹ In his thorough investigation into joy in the Johannine literature, Arockiam (2002) also underlines the important role of indwelling in the experience of joy when he deals with the concept of complete joy in John 15:11. He argues that 15:10-11 embodies all that is said in 15:1-

²⁸⁹ The addition of πληρωθῆ (complete) to the joy is typically Johannine and occurs also in 3:29; 16:24; 17:13; 1 John 1:4; 2 John 12.

²⁹⁰ Bruner (2012:890) also links prayer with joy when he notes that “the spirit that sings, ‘Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart,’ the spirit of longing, is the spirit of joy.” He continues by associating joy with Jesus’ paradoxical Beatitudes in Matthew (5:3, 4, 6), translating “blessings on” with “deep joy to”. He concludes that the Beatitudes comments on this Johannine text (15:11): “Blessings on (deep happiness to) those who have a heart for others; they will find a Heart for themselves” (Matt. 5:7).”

²⁹¹ Dumm (2001:59) quotes the beautiful passage from Hebrews 12:1-2 to illustrate that “Jesus has gone before us and has blazed the trail for us”.

17.²⁹² Complete joy comes about by abiding in Jesus and being in friendship with him.²⁹³ This abiding guarantees joy, the joy of Jesus. Arockiam (2002:41) concludes:

In abiding the disciples will have Jesus' joy in them and therefore they have the possibility of having their own joy to be complete. Both departure and its effect, sorrow, are overcome by abiding and its effect, joy, in the context of abiding in Jesus and becoming his friends.

A decisive characteristic of joy is, therefore, that it finds its source in the intimate relationship with, and ongoing indwelling in the divine. It brings to mind the concept of union that will be discussed in detail later. At this point, it can be noted briefly how Brown (1982b:681) emphasises that joy flows from the obedience and love of which Jesus has spoken, but also that the disciples' joy comes from the joy of Jesus, which, in turn, originates in his union with the Father:

Jesus' own joy springs from his union with the Father which finds expressions in obedience and love (xiv 31). The obedience and love to which in turn Jesus calls his disciples both constitute and witness their union with him; and it is this union that will be the source of their joy.

Brown elaborates on the meaning of joy and refers to it as a salvific gift. It is interesting to note how often in the Gospel 'joy' is associated with the saving work of Jesus. He mentions John 3:29; 4:36; 8:56; 11:15, and 14:28 and then concludes (Brown 1982b:681): "So also in the present instance, if joy flows from the disciples' union with Jesus, it comes to fulfilment in their continuing his mission and bearing fruit."

The Christological nature of joy was delineated at an early stage in the Gospel. John the Baptist remarks in John 3: "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" (29-30). The joy is complete when one hears the bridegroom's voice. Other commentators such as Koester (1995:245) also drew attention to the Christological nature of joy:

Disciples, like the branches of a vine, have the source and norm for their lives in Jesus, (they) are called to lay down their lives in love for one another (John 15:12-13), and as Jesus finds his joy in them, their own joy will be made complete (John 15:11).

Michaels (2010:811) observed that Johannine joy also reveals an eschatological character: "[T]he joy of these disciples, as of the readers of the Gospel, is a shared joy. It is shared with Jesus, for it his joy to begin with him, and by implication with each other, but its ultimate 'fulfilment' is yet to come."

²⁹² Arockiam (2002:40) reasons: "Thus, ταῦτα in 15:11 functions as a summary of the whole unit of 15:1-17 just as ἐντολὰς in 15:10 summarizes the whole unit."

²⁹³ Note how Koester (1995:247) elaborates on this when he links joy with friendship. He notes that Jesus as the true vine displaces anything else that might claim to be the source of a disciple's life. He reads the joy as a metaphor for virtue: "Virtue and the joy it produces were part of genuine friendship, the ideal of which is affirmed and redefined in John 15:13."

6.3.3 The mystical nature of joy

An analysis of joy will reveal more about its mystical quality (cf. Jordaan 2015). Ultimately, joy is the awareness of, and the delight in the presence of God in Jesus who, as a true companion, mediates and represents the divine presence among people. It is not merely about an abstract concept such as the Kingdom of God. As Redmont (2005:390) states, joy is not optimism or a self-satisfied contentment, but it is associated with peace, gratitude, delight, simplicity, and purity of heart that is the result of the union with, and the indwelling of the divine. She writes: “For the mystics, joy is the very union with God, that knowledge that is also an indwelling.” Joy is, therefore, about the feeling of delight in being with God in Christ, of abiding in him. It is a truly spiritual concept.

The joy is that this presence is about eternal, true life that is a gift of the resurrected Christ. The Gospel reveals this clearly at a formative moment when it states that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the risen Lord (John 20:20). Jesus who overcame death and is now the risen Lord instills joy in them, since this confirms all his promises that they will be with the Father and that he will be a powerful presence in their earthly existence. What is said at a key moment in the Farewell Discourse (John 15:11), therefore, finds its confirmation and culmination in John 20:20. This is further confirmed by the link between joy and grace. Bruner (2012:1162-1163) points out that joy (χάρα) and grace (χάρις) share the same root and are intimately and emotionally connected: “The grace of the Lord’s return to his frightened disciples, his greeting of peace to them, and now his offered hands and side – are all grace and joy-full.”

A joyous life is such an important part of discipleship that it is included in Jesus’ final prayer: “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). For Jesus, as the true vine, the joyfulness of his followers is of vital importance. As Hera (2013:20) mentions, and as pointed out earlier, joy in John 17:13 is the centre of the prayer.²⁹⁴ Hera (2013:152) also refers to the ἕνα clauses in John 17, indicating that the qualities (unity and joy) characterising the disciples “are the goals of Jesus’ acts in his capacity as the Son and revealer of the Father”.

This plea for joy expressed in Jesus’ prayer is reminiscent of John 15:11 and John 16:20-24, as acknowledged by Schnackenburg (1982:183): “This is a clear indication that the prayer was conceived with a knowledge of Chapters 15 and also following them.” Lee (2002:94-95) explains that the symbol of the vine produces paradoxically both rest and joy for those who dwell. She links joy with indwelling:

Yet abiding is also joyful. The eucharistic overtones of the vine imagery recall the Wedding at Cana and the transformation of water into wine, expressing a sense of *jouissance* (joy and ecstasy) that comes from a self-transcending experience of union – union that is fecund and life-giving (John 15:11; 16:20-22). It is not surprising that what the disciples experience when they first encounter the risen Christ behind the closed doors of their fear is a sense of intoxicating joy and peace: the

²⁹⁴ This remark forms part of his discussion of Boyle’s (1975) opinion that the theme of joy in John 15:11 is the centre of Jesus’ farewell speech, as joy in 17:13 is the centre of the Lord’s Prayer. Cf. the chiasmic analysis of Just (2015) above.

continuation of that abiding relationship, on the other side of death, which they assume they have lost in 20:19-23.

Lee's remarks help explain the mystical nature of joy in the Gospel, because transformation is also about transcending oneself and finding ultimate meaning in the intimate relationship and union with the divine. What is described as joy in John's Gospel displays characteristics of such transcendence. Joy in John 15:11 is the joy in the divine, the joy that is found in Jesus, in his words and in the life that flows from them. Joy is not from, and in oneself. It is the joy of Jesus that the disciples receive and that becomes part of their lives. They find their joy outside themselves, but at the same time the joy is granted to them and dwells in them in all its completeness, as explained earlier. Their joy, therefore, essentially transcends them. This characterises the joy as ecstasy, as Lee also observes.

Waaajman (2016:61-62) pointed out that ecstasy is an important part of the mystical experience. Often ecstasy is linked with the extraordinary, as if it has to do only with such unusual phenomena as visions, tongues, levitations, stigmata, and the gift of tears (Waaajman 2016:61-62). He notes that these unusual phenomena are interesting, because they show that the human capacity for understanding is insufficient to fathom the divine presence. Ecstasy is, however, not to be identified with such phenomena. In the context of John's Gospel, it indeed refers to the self-transcending experience of the divine presence. Human beings are moved beyond their own senses. They stand, by way of speaking, outside themselves, to experience that which comes from beyond and resonates with them. It is an awareness that reflects an inexpressible, intense joy because of the awareness and consciousness of the divine intervention and presence. In John's Gospel, the joy of the disciples when they meet the resurrected Jesus has an ecstatic nature. Joy is an indication of an ecstatic experience: it is about being overwhelmed by the divine presence. As such, it points to the mystical nature of indwelling.

All these observations emphasise the special place of joy in John 15. It forms part of, and is in the centre of the new life in Jesus. The new life in joy is given to those who dwell in Jesus and who are united with him in love. The complete joy given by Jesus turns out to be a treasure of great value resulting from a life characterised by μένειν. Joy is also a prominent concept in both spirituality and mysticism. It is remarkable to discover that joy is placed in the centre of the potentially negative atmosphere created by the Farewell Discourse.

6.4 Co-witnessing to the world through the Spirit

This section focuses on the positive consequences of a life built on a μένειν relationship between Jesus and his close circle of friends. These include aspects such as remaining in the word and love of Jesus, prayers being answered, glory, and joy. However, the Gospel also paints the other side of the picture, reflecting the dualistic composition of this narrative. John often uses opposites such as light and darkness, above and below, life and death in his Gospel. He has the same approach to indwelling. The choice put before the disciples and other listeners was between an abundant

meaningful life by dwelling in Jesus and a meaningless life by rejecting him. The end result of such a choice is a life characterised by love or a life determined by hate.

This dual reality highlights another key aspect of Jesus' farewell message to his disciples. Indwelling, as depicted in John 15, has consequences not only for the faith community itself, but also for its external relationships. Jesus' followers shall witness to the outside world: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26-27). Faithful testimony must ensure a constant awareness of Jesus' call to mutual indwelling and its implications. Although following Jesus brings cleansing, joy and eternal life, it also has negative consequences for those who reject the community's witness. Before dealing with witnessing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the hostile context, created by those who exerted a negative choice, requires some clarification.

6.4.1 The negative consequences of a fruitless life

When people respond negatively to the testimony of Jesus, they will bear no fruit. This has many consequences. In John 15:18-25, Jesus speaks comprehensively about the hatred of the world aimed at the disciples, with serious consequences. Concisely, the result of a choice not to follow, not to believe and not to μένειν in Jesus is a fruitless life, a meaningless existence, and death. The evangelist vividly portrays such a way of life in his use of the word 'hatred'. They become entrapped in hatred.

Life without Jesus determines the identity of a person. John 15 puts fruitlessness in a broader context by describing the outcome of unbelief as finding an identity in the world. The true identity of the fruitless branches is that they belong to the world, unlike the disciples who are no longer from this unbelieving world: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:19). The topic of the world is also significant in John's Gospel. In Johannine Spirituality, "the world" is an important aspect, according to Barton (1992:122). He comments that "the world is viewed in pessimistic and even dualistic terms in John, especially in the second half of the Gospel which emphasizes the negative response of humankind to revelation (cf. 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18f.; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14ff.)." The notion of the "world" has special meaning in the Gospel. In the Farewell speech alone, John refers to "the world" 28 times, often in a negative sense for those who do not believe in Jesus. To belong to the world brings with it a negative life characterised by lies. It indicates their loyalty and filiation that brings them under the devil's control. Earlier, in John 8:44, Jesus also spells this out when he identifies the father of his adversaries: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Jesus' pronouncement about them stands in sharp contrast with the positive way of life that the indwelling of Jesus brings to believers.

He who who finds an identity in the world falls prey to a hateful lifestyle and actions. Without a lasting relationship with Jesus, only an evil outcome can be expected from the world. The main accusation against them is their hatred. They are found guilty of hate against Jesus (15:18), Jesus and the Father (15:23-24), and the followers of Jesus (John 15:19). It becomes clear that hatred is a serious crime that qualifies for a conviction of murder, as explained in 1 John 3:15: “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” In the process, they are even fulfilling the law by hating Jesus for no reason (John 15:25).²⁹⁵ John is thus contrasting their lifestyle with that of his disciples to whom he gave a “new” law, the law of love and friendship (John 13:34).

Sin is, however, not only about being guilty of bad behaviour or about having misconceptions. The three references in John 15:22-24 to ἀμαρτία refer to the fact that, despite being privileged to see the miracles of Jesus, they still chose to hate him and the Father. They deliberately hardened their hearts, refused to be converted through a loving indwelling by Jesus, and continued their campaign of hatred against his faithful followers.

The use of the motif of hostility in John’s Gospel is a result of its historical context. The hatred reflects the situation in which the community found themselves. The importance of the Jews and their antagonism towards Jesus and his disciples likely represent a valid historical setting. There was a serious threat of being expelled from the synagogue (John 9:22, 34-35; 12:42; 16:2), or even being killed (11:53; 12:10). It is clear that the thrice-repeated risk of expulsion was aimed at those who confess their faith in Jesus.²⁹⁶ In fact, their Jewish opponents seek the silencing of Jesus’ followers, forcing them to refrain from witnessing. The reality and intensity of these threats could indeed lead to the immobilisation of the community of believers.

John’s Gospel does not only speak of external hostilities. It also indicates that hostility could arise between members within the community itself. Early on in the Gospel narrative, the disciples questioned and criticised Jesus’ teachings in the synagogue in Capernaum in John 6. After his ἐγώ εἰμι saying that he is the bread of life, Jesus called on them to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood (John 6:53-59). This teaching of Jesus led to a dispute among his disciples.²⁹⁷ Many of them grumbled about the hard teaching of Jesus, turned back and no longer followed him (John 6:60-66). They thus endangered their relationship with Jesus and the indwelling. When Jesus confronted the remaining disciples and asked whether they did not want to leave, Peter reacted with his now well-known response: “Lord, to whom shall

²⁹⁵ As to which part of Scripture is quoted in this instance, Schnackenburg (1982:117) refers to the following possibilities: Psalm 35:19; 69:5; 109:3, or 119:161: “Those who hate Jesus without any reason are, like the traitor (13:18; 17:12), the subject of scriptural prophecy.” The kind of hatred, to which John refers, fulfils the prophecy that is quoted according to Bultmann (1971:551): “Manifestly the emphasis that the prophecy lays on the groundlessness of this hatred provides the Evangelist with confirmation of the guilt that attaches to it.”

²⁹⁶ Keener (2003b:1017) states: “John’s emphasis on the world’s hatred, relevant to his own situation and outlook, probably stems from authentic Jesus tradition.”

²⁹⁷ Dunn (1983:328-329) considered reasons why the Christian confession of Jesus as Messiah provoked such confrontation with the Jews: “One is John’s claim of a *heavenly origin* for Jesus the Messiah, a heavenly origin that goes back to the beginning of time. Jesus is not one whose claims on our attention derive from an ascent to heaven; they derive rather from the fact that he descended from heaven. The other is John’s claim for a *closeness of continuity* between Father and Son which is more than simply identity of will or function: the Son is so like, so close to the Father, that we can even speak of some kind of identity of being (he makes himself God; he and the Father are one).”

we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). It is worth mentioning that John places these important words, “the words of eternal life”, in Peter’s mouth. Disagreement among Jesus’ disciples could have a negative influence on their witnessing to the world.

John’s Gospel provides an eschatological perspective on a fruitless life. The ultimate outcome of a fruitless life is associated with punishment. In John 15:6, Jesus explicitly spells out what their fate will be if there is no indwelling: “If anyone does not abide (μένειν) in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” The fate of fruitless branches is death.²⁹⁸ This is in line with the warning sounded in John 12:48: “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words (τὰ ῥήματα); that very word (ὁ λόγος) which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” Those who do not dwell in Jesus will remain in the divine wrath, because they did not accept Jesus’ words (and John’s Gospel). This stands in sharp contrast with the positive results of remaining in the words of Jesus, as explained earlier. The text for abiding in the vine (15:1-17) is directly followed by the hatred of the world (15:18-25), leading Lee (2002:98) to remark: “In these verses we encounter the other face of abiding, or rather the consequences of failing to abide. Images of friendship, union, and love are now replaced by the language of hatred, rejection, and persecution.” However, the community’s sense of indwelling is not crushed, because “persecution intensifies the symbolic perception of belonging and abode” (Lee 2002:98).

The Gospel does, however, emphasise that, despite the hostility towards Jesus and his followers, the focus of the divine mission remains the world with all that it entails. The hostile response to the witness does not bring it to an end. Despite the negative outcome, it remains a major focus in the lives of those in whom Jesus dwells. The ultimate purpose remains to offer life to those who chose death. As Köstenberger (1998:176) explains: “[B]y witnessing to Jesus, the disciples enter into one of the major purposes of Jesus’ mission, the giving of life.”²⁹⁹ This mission of the disciples will now be analysed.

6.4.2 Witnessing amidst hostility

Discipleship is not only about the inner life of a community, but also about the community’s relationship with their opponents and enemies. Their identity and lives are a witness that will have negative consequences for them. Witnessing forms an undisputed part of their new identity. The hostile context, in which the community finds themselves, reacts to them because of their indwelling in Christ. Brown (1982b:692) fittingly comments: “Jesus loves his disciples because they remain or

²⁹⁸ There has been speculation as to whom this warning applies. Brown (1982b:545, 586) mentions a theory that John 13:31-14:31 comprises the first Farewell Discourse, and then 15:1 follows directly after 13:30. This theory led Michaels (2010:799-800) to surmise about the meaning of the negative speech about those who do not μένειν in Jesus. If the theory is accepted, the reference could then be appropriate after the apostasy of Judas. Nevertheless, Michaels ultimately prefers an understanding against the background of all that has been said in the preceding chapter 14, as the canon would dictate. The warning would thus apply to believers, in general, and not only to what Judas did.

²⁹⁹ He supports this claim by quoting John 20:31, which states that the purpose of the Gospel is that people would believe and receive life everlasting.

abide in him; the world hates them for the same reason.”³⁰⁰ The loving community, however, has to find ways to handle opposition and resistance. One option is that they should be aware that this is part of their new identity. In his Farewell Discourse, John depicts Jesus as being realistic about the challenges of discipleship. The disciples need to be prepared and ready for a negative attitude towards them. Jesus points out to the community that they will be experiencing nothing new. The hatred against them is based on a deep-seated rejection of the divine throughout history. History reveals a constant pattern of opposition to God. It is so consistent that one could even say that it has been mentioned in the Law (John 15:25), which states that opponents hate God for no reason.³⁰¹

Jesus also reminds them of his own fate to prepare them for the hostility against them. Based on his personal experience and on the history of salvation, he warns his followers about the possibility of conflict and hatred against them, stressing that the community shares the same destiny as his own (John 15:20), and of their ancestors. Their opponents, who hated Jesus first (for no reason), will also hate his followers (John 15:18-25). Michaels (2010:824) interprets this even more broadly, stating that, in John 15:25, Jesus expects

not only his own imminent betrayal by Judas Iscariot, but the prospect of further betrayals among the disciples in the course of carrying out their mission to the world, so here he looks both at the world’s present hatred of him and its future hatred of his disciples.³⁰²

Despite Jesus’ reassuring words, it is clear that it is not easy to be a disciple. They will be required, once again, to give up their own safety and security for the sake of the Gospel. This is even more reason why they should μένειν in him – they could also appeal to divine intervention on their behalf in the exigencies of their spiritual journey. They should not withdraw from the world and live an exclusive life. Barton (1992:122) draws attention to John 17:15, which speaks against a sectarian withdrawal: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”³⁰³ John’s Gospel not only depicts Jesus as acutely aware of the timeless opposition against the divine, but it also shows how Jesus empowers the disciples to persevere amidst such hostility.

This confirms a positive outcome of μένειν, despite the negativity. It speaks of the protection the disciples will be given. Staying in a relationship with Jesus shields them against the hatred of the world (John 15:18-25). The ongoing relationship of the divine with humanity encompasses the empowering presence of God in their ongoing existence in a hostile context. This will encourage them to overcome the consistent attacks of evil. What will keep them in this challenge is to dwell in Jesus, like Jesus himself, also

³⁰⁰ Countryman (1987:99) comments: “The mere existence of such a community bound to one another and to the father through the love of the son is an affront to the cosmos, for the cosmos represents the opposite mode of life, that of hatred and alienation.”

³⁰¹ Cf. footnote 292 for the relevant quotes from Scripture (6.4.1.) Moloney (1998b:70) explains that the Jews, in effect, hated and rejected, and stand accused by the word of God in Scriptures: “Jesus does not refer to the Scriptures as ‘their Law’ (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν) in mockery, but ironically indicates that they are making a lie of the Law by which they claim to live.”

³⁰² Note Countryman’s (1987:99) statement: “Judas is the example of what happens to the one who fails. He was motivated not by love, but by greed (12:4-6), and ended in betrayal.”

³⁰³ Barton (1992:122) gives the following example: “Unlike the Qumran separatists who withdrew to the desert, but like the cosmopolitan Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10), the fourth evangelist is prepared to live with the tensions of his ambivalence towards unregenerate human society, for the sake of bearing witness.”

an object of persecution, dwelled in God.³⁰⁴ Disciples live with a spiritual perspective on hate against them: dwelling in Jesus implies that one surrenders one's own interest and even one's own safety, while also knowing that indwelling creates the parameters within which love and intimacy thrive. As Lee (2002:99) remarks: "[A]biding as a force for life, does not bypass suffering and death: the vinedresser prunes, the world purs scorn, the seed 'dies', the Son buds forth community with his dying breath."

Jesus' support and strengthening are aimed at witnessing as an important characteristic of discipleship based on mutual indwelling. The support is found by holding on to the words of Jesus amidst the hostility. In John 15:20, Jesus notes that they should remember his words (τοῦ λόγου) about persecution.³⁰⁵ This statement implies that the word of Jesus' disciples will have the same effect as the word of Jesus himself (Brown 1982b:696). The mission of the disciples is virtually always mentioned with reference to Jesus' mission (Köstenberger 1998:141).³⁰⁶ It places them in the humble position of merely extending the mission of Jesus as a sign of bearing fruit (καρπὸν φέρω; 15:8, 16), and witnessing (μαρτυρέω; 15:27) to the whole world (cf. also John 15:26-27).³⁰⁷ Jesus' words have an ongoing transformative effect. Jesus gives the word of God (John 17:14) to the disciples. He also sends them into the world (John 17:18), despite the potential antagonism. As Hera (2013:155) explains:

Now "their word", in turn, becomes the medium that evokes faith in a larger circle of followers. Inasmuch as these followers believe in him through the word of the disciples, they are Jesus's disciples as well.

Schnackenburg (1982:120) hints at the link between bearing witness and μένειν:

It is because the disciples are in communion with Jesus, the historic Revealer who brought God's ultimate word to mankind and is in fact the "word of life" in person (1 Jn 1:1; he is himself "from the beginning," 2:13), that their "witness" has a lasting and unsurpassable value in the word of proclamation. The community of believers must also let what it heard "from the beginning" dwell in it (1 Jn 2:24; 3:11). Subsequently, based on the variety of experiences with and teachings by Jesus, the disciples should now be well equipped to openly testify about the true vine, their only source of life.

Taking into account the severity of the hostility the disciples might face, Jesus reveals that they will be empowered in more ways, as will be explained next.

³⁰⁴ They should realise what Dodd (1953:413) remarked about persecution. He regards it as an indication that disciples no longer belong to the world and is in itself a form of communion with Christ, since He too was hated by the world (xv. 20-21, 23).

³⁰⁵ This reminds one of what Bruner (2012:67) calls the first "I am" of John the Baptist: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' just as Isaiah the prophet said [Isa. 40:3]." The disciples are to continue even in the footsteps of the Baptist.

³⁰⁶ Köstenberger (1998:186) also links his explanation to the repeated use of καθώς: "The two major 'sending' passages of 17:18 and 20:21 link the way in which the disciples are sent with the way Jesus is sent." In both of these, the adverb καθώ is used. Later, Köstenberger (1998:189) elaborates on the implications of the Father-Son relationship for the sending of the disciples: "(T)he disciples are also brought into Jesus' relationship with the Father as [the] sent one. This spiritual participation places the entire mission of the disciples in the orbit of the love and unity between Father and Son."

³⁰⁷ Schnackenburg (1968:524) notes that John restricts the working of signs to Jesus, leaving the disciples "to recount, attest and recall the revelation given by Jesus given in 'signs' (and words), which becomes thereby 'present' in their own day".

6.4.3 Empowerment by the Paraclete

The ongoing indwelling of Jesus empowers disciples in their ongoing existence to overcome hostility and resist temptation. There is always the possibility of becoming unfaithful and giving up. Jesus reveals the gift of the Spirit as a source of support that will strengthen and support his indwelling in the disciples. In John 15:26-27, the disciples are promised empowerment in adversity through the Spirit. Amidst the uncertainty about the future, Jesus' words were meant to console and strengthen his disciples: "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (John 15:26).

There is a close connection between Jesus and the Spirit. The Spirit will help remind them of what Jesus told them. Despite the always-present temptation of ignoring Jesus' instructions, the disciples are given the Holy Spirit who will also μένειν in them to empower them with the words of Jesus, as stated in John 14:26 and 16:12-15. Whilst Jesus takes the initiative to share the words with the disciples, the Spirit will continue with the work of holding on to his words. Since it is also a word of God, the trinity is involved.

In an extensive discussion, Brown (1982b:1135-1143) singles out two basic functions of the Paraclete. He comes to the disciples, dwelling with them, teaching and guiding them. On the other hand, he puts the unbelieving world on trial. The word παράκλητος captures the complexity of his guiding and forensic functions (Brown 1982b:1137):

The Paraclete is a *witness* in defense of Jesus and a *spokesman* for him in the context of his trial by his enemies; the Paraclete is a *consoler* of the disciples for he takes Jesus' place among them; the Paraclete is a teacher and guide of the disciples and thus their *helper*.³⁰⁸

The Spirit, who is taking Jesus' place among the disciples, will continue the divine indwelling in the community. It is an ongoing, mystical embodiment of the divine presence in the world. Jesus' departure will not suspend the transformation process. The transformation will happen again and again as the opposition is overcome and the community expanded. God continues to recreate the world. The disciples' struggle against opposition stands in the line of a long history of opposition to God: it is about the divine struggle against evil. For Brown (1982b:698-699), in persecution the disciples are not passive victims, because the Paraclete dwells within them:

The Paraclete represents Jesus' presence among men; and in hating the disciples who are the dwelling place of the Paraclete, the world is striking at Jesus' continued presence on earth. Through the Paraclete's indwelling, the disciples represent Jesus *contra mundum*.

³⁰⁸ Brown (1982b:1135) also provides a list of the texts that explain the role the Paraclete plays in relation to the disciples: John 14:17 (The disciples recognise him); 14:17 (He will be within the disciples and remain in them); 14:26 (He will teach the disciples everything); 16:13 (He will guide the disciples along the way of truth); 16:14 (He will take what belongs to Jesus to declare to the disciples); 16:14 (He will glorify Jesus); 15:26-27 (He will bear witness on Jesus' behalf, and the disciples too must bear witness); 14:26 (He will remind them of all that Jesus told them), and 16:13 (He will speak only what he hears and nothing on his own).

The divine presence in the midst of the community's struggle is, therefore, real and tangible. Dumm (2001:62-63) stresses this by discerning two levels of meaning in the Johannine text. The experience of the Johannine community in the 70s and 80s are attributed to Jesus during his ministry in the late 20s. He uses this to elaborate on the ongoing presence of Jesus through the Spirit:

This is no doubt in part to the intense sense of mystical union between them and Jesus, so that his presence among them is experienced as a more powerful reality than the decades which separate them. From the perspectives of the community, Jesus truly lives with them and suffers with them.

In summary: it should be obvious that the Paraclete is the spearhead of the Trinitarian empowerment, the ultimate driving force behind the community's witness. Equally important is the fact that divine commissioning is one of the major elements of mysticism in John, a mystical motif also found in traditional Merkabah visions.³⁰⁹ Persistent testimony amidst resistance contributes to the goal of this Gospel, that more and more people would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing would have life in his name (cf. John 20:31). The disciples should thus stay alert and be aware of the hostility stemming from the world. To strengthen and protect them against this danger, they should persist in doing what Jesus advised them to do, "μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν" (John 15:4). John is clear on the fact that all of this is possible only under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

In conclusion, a word of clarification is needed. The previous discussions emphasised the importance of mutual indwelling as commanded by Jesus. These diverse characteristics from John 15 provide the reader of the Gospel with a portrait of abundant bearing of fruit. In the process, some parts or elements might overlap, because they are inherently interrelated. The topic of bearing fruit requires that more attention be paid to the contents of the close reading of Chapter 2 and the discussion of transformational discipleship.

7. Pruning for abundant bearing of fruit

Bearing fruit and pruning are closely connected. Special attention must be paid to the image of pruning, because it also illuminates the ongoing transformation of the disciples.³¹⁰ Both bearing fruit and pruning are a divine action. John 15 begins with the reference to the Father who is the gardener: he cuts off branches without fruit, but even the branches that do bear fruit are pruned so that they may bear more fruit (John 15:2). Cultivation necessitates cutting of what is dead in order to make way for new life, as explained by Lee (2002:96): "Such 'purification' is the work of the vinedresser, and it takes place in union with Jesus, its purpose being to lead disciples to a deeper knowledge of

³⁰⁹ This is evident from the combination of witnessing with glory, according to Kanagaraj (1998:316). The Son is sent into the world to reveal God's glory. He was sent not only to bring a message, but he is himself the message. The Son then witnesses to the disciples about heavenly realities seen and heard with the Father. The witness of the disciples is then depicted in a similar manner. They are equipped by the Spirit to reveal the same glory in their witness about Jesus. This mystical motif is also found in traditional Merkabah visions. John modifies this motif through his Christological approach. For John, Jesus is not merely the witness, but he himself is the revelation. Schnelle (2009:681) confirms this: "The sending of the Son has its basis in the love of God, and its goal in the salvation of the world". This implies the following: "The Sent One not only represents the Sender, but the sending is as though the Sender himself has come; he not only brings a message, but is himself the message."

³¹⁰ Pruning was also dealt with during the close reading of the text in Chapter 2, sections 3.1.1-3.1.3.

love.” What this means is further explained with reference to the purification of the disciples. They are already clean and purer (καθαροί ἔστε).

This purification takes place through the word of Jesus (John 15:3), revealing the strong Christological nature of the Gospel and emphasising the divine action that brings about the purity. Ridderbos (1997:516) explains the dividing and purifying power of Jesus’ word:

What makes Jesus the true vine is that, as the one sent by God, he gathers a community, a fellowship of life, in which his word exerts a redeeming, life creating, continually purifying, and dividing effect (cf. 14:23f.). For that reason he can say to his disciples, “You are already clean.”

The image of pruning further explains the nature of the human pole as giving up oneself, as suffering in order to obey the divine will. This has mystical connotations, because the notion of nothingness is suggested (Waaïjman 2003:63). One does not follow one’s own way, but listens to the commandments of God (John 15:1). The “pruning” by the Father and the call of Jesus to μένειν are both aimed at fruitfulness, which amounts to the growth of the divine love in their existence and abandoning which prevents it.³¹¹ Brown (1982b:676) observes that

[s]ince bearing fruit is symbolic of possessing divine life, the passage concerns growth in that life and growth in union with Jesus, the imagery of trimming clean the branches so that they bear more fruit involves a growth in love which binds the Christian to Jesus and spreads life to others.

This nothingness, as giving up one’s own self-occupation and yielding to God’s presence, does not come easily. Lee (2002:98) explains the pruning as “a metaphor of the interplay between suffering and growth, both of which are vital for the community to thrive”. The divine-human relationship involves a process of transformation that implicates a sacrifice on the part of the disciples. They should be open to be purified by God. To let go of one’s own self-occupation and become nothing implies passivity – as illustrated when Jesus refers to his election of the disciples – which is intensified when he adds that he sent them out to “go and bear fruit” (John 15:16).

Once again, this points not only to the divine initiative, but also to the ongoing relationship that seeks a deepening bond with God. Disciples have to seek fruit that “lasts” (John 15:16). This resumes the thought about pruning those who do not bear fruit. The relationship with the divine only thrives and continues where there is human longing and attachment. Pruning has increasing spiritual impact. It is also irreversible, in that it produces fruit that will last.³¹² The reverse image confirms the importance of bearing fruit. Jesus deems it necessary to sound a warning for branches that do not bear fruit: “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown

³¹¹ Dodd (1953:136) refers to the interesting use of two similar sounding verbs to cleanse and cut off, namely *airein* and *kathairein*, and concludes: “[B]oth verbs were chosen not because of their suitability for describing vineyard practices but for their applicability for Jesus and his followers.” Cf. Brown (1982b:660). Schnackenburg (1982:98) is of the opinion that the pruning or cleaning of branches is at the most reminiscent of purification and trials undergone by the disciples. Koester (2008:40), however, believes that pruning does not describe the various kinds of suffering that believers experience. Rather, it depicts the way in which God, the vinedresser, addresses sin through the words of Jesus.

³¹² Köstenberger (1998:185) quotes Carson (1991:523) who writes about the fruit that remains: “... that these closing allusions to the vine imagery ensure that, however comprehensive the nature of the fruit that Christians bear, the focus on evangelism and mission is truly central.”

away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6). This emphasises salvation (fruit) and judgement (burning).³¹³

8. Union as ultimate result of μένειν

Unity is another aspect of spiritual and mystical importance in John 15 and the Gospel.³¹⁴ This topic already emerged in the discussion about the Johannine community of friendship and love (section 3) and requires more detail. John extends the invitation to dwell in Jesus. The indwelling should be mutual. John makes it clear that μένειν refers to a mutual action. This reciprocal indwelling both reveals and conceals the mysterious life-giving unity between God and mankind. The relationship between indwelling and unity is best expressed when Jesus states: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23). This union is, furthermore, closely linked with Christ. Christian life is unthinkable, except in union with Christ (Barrett 1978:474).

The notion of union can be clarified when one takes cognisance of its meaning in mystical writings. Waaijman (2003:66) refers to indwelling by, and union with God as typical aspects of mysticism. His explanation about the indwelling captures the heart of the matter:

Once drawn into the unfathomable clarity of God’s love, the mystic’s being is permeated by God. It could be compared [with] a piece of wood in the fire. Whilst the wood is wrapped up in the fire, the fire reaches the wood’s pith. The indwelling of God touches the most intimate part of the soul. It is more interior than the most intimate part of the soul. In this deepest interior, where no one is at home, there is only the soul satisfied in that it is more interior than in itself. The Deity dwells in that most inward space of the soul. There, the light comes to rest in this infinite and motionless silence. In this mystical oneness, God reveals himself to the soul as being its real essence.³¹⁵

These remarks indicate how the indwelling of God and unity are closely related. Reciprocity characterises the mystical relation between God and a person. This relation is one of mutuality. For Coloe (2007:193-201), the teaching about the reciprocal relationship between Father and Son, and Jesus and believers, is the greatest insight of the fourth Gospel. The same loving communion of life within the Godhead is now opened up as possibility for all:

The Johannine vision of mutual indwelling of God and the believer opens to all Christians the possibility of experiencing the divine presence. What is particularly Johannine is the emphasis on reciprocal indwelling. God dwells in us, and we dwell in God. In his use of the verb “dwell” (menein),

³¹³ The fate of fruitless branches is dealt with in more detail in the above exposition on the hostile context in section 6.4.1.

³¹⁴ Cf. Chapter 3, section 6.1.6.

³¹⁵ This is a free translation of the Dutch text. Cf. Waaijman (2003:66).

the Fourth Evangelist expresses the mystery of divine interiority known through experience, which is usually termed mysticism.³¹⁶

Three examples that illuminate the importance of unity based on indwelling in John's Gospel include John 10:30, "I and the Father are one"; John 14:20, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you", and John 17:21-23:

(I pray) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Dodd (1953:178) highlights the special nature of this unity. The relationship between the believers and Christ (through which they know the truth) is more intimate than that between disciples and teacher:

To "know the truth" they must not only hear His words: they must in some sort be united with Him who is the truth. Thus even when the concept of knowledge of God is most fully intellectualized, it remains true that it involves a personal union with Christ, which goes beyond mere intellectual apprehension.

The nature of unity, as described in John's Gospel, requires further clarification. The use of μένειν read together with the unity statements reveals that this union does not mean fusion. The Gospel seems to imply a union without assimilation or loss of identity. The complexity of the Johannine concept of unity is already illustrated by the fact that the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are all involved. From this perspective, there is already diversity in the unity. Jesus and the Father dwell in each other, but Jesus does not become the Father. The same applies to the relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. This diversity also characterises the indwelling between the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit, on the one hand, and the disciples, on the other.³¹⁷ In all these relationships, each partner's identity remains distinct.³¹⁸

More light can be shed on understanding the human element in the relationship characterised by μένειν. Diversity in the unity stresses the divine and human's unique identities and roles. The close relationship between God and Jesus does not remove the differences between them, as is the case with the relationship between God and humanity. John's Gospel presents an understanding of the divine-human

³¹⁶ Coloe (2007:193-201) also refers to the interesting fact that Scholtissek (2000:379; 1995:412-426) uses the term *mystagogisch*, which carries the experience as an ongoing dynamic process of coming to, and following Jesus.

³¹⁷ Brown (1978:225-6) states: "The statement that Christ abides in the believer is a statement with an indubitably mystical element; it creates an inner unity, a unio mystica ... But this does not mean that God is absorbed in man, and so could be found in him by a mystic plumbing of the depths of personality. Rather Christ's abiding in his own is inseparably linked with the abiding of his word in them (Jn. 15:7; 1 Jn. 2:24; cf. Jn. 8:31)."

³¹⁸ This distinction can be explained by comparing forms of unity. Nicol (2012:222) refers to his contact with an elitist movement among Hindus in India who use the word *advaita* (non-dual) for the divine-human relationship. According to him, such mysticism is not in line with Scripture. Nicol is of the opinion that John laid the foundation for a Biblical mysticism that was acceptable to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is a mysticism that respects God as the "Other", the One that knows me, to whom I can speak, and who speaks to me, the One with whom I can be in a relationship, a relationship of love.

relationship as a union in which the divine is clearly distinguished from the human pole. Waaijman's (2003:64-65) view illuminates this unique relationship in a special way. He explains that becoming one with God should be understood from a dialogical point of view. As God (Jesus) took over all control, the mystic becomes part of God's working and shares in God's unity.

Pointing out the importance of the theme of union, Barrett's (1978:470) remarks illustrate its reciprocal nature:

John is speaking of the union of believers with Christ, apart from whom they can do nothing. This union, originating in his initiative and sealed by his death on their behalf, is completed by the believers' responsive love and obedience, and is the essence of Christianity.

What begins with God implies a human response. McColman (2010:88) refers to the interface between the trinity, unity, and communion:

Christian mysticism fosters an openness to receive the gift of union with God. This union, as understood in the Christian faith, is actually a communion, in which we are invited into communion/union with the Holy Spirit, with Christ, and, through them, with the infinite mystery of the Father and the fullness of the One Triune God.

The ever-broadening significance of this union eventually incorporates an eschatological dimension. In discussing the return of Christ, which differs from the popular Christian view, Dodd (1953:405) declares: "It means that after the death of Jesus, and because of it, his followers will enter into union with Him as their living Lord, and through Him with the Father, and also enter into eternal life."

The essence of *μῆνεν* as mutual indwelling is also about union as a direct awareness and consciousness of God's presence. Dumm's (2001:52) observations regarding mysticism illustrate these important aspects. A mystical union with God is more than merely knowing the right words, a correct doctrine, or even performing the right rituals: "Mystical experience is an unmediated contact with God." However, there is more to it. Jesus as the Word refracts the light of God's love to touch every creature in the universe. Dumm (2001:163), therefore, concludes that union reflects a direct awareness and consciousness of who God is:

(A)ll creation at all times, represents and constantly reminds us of the reality and presence of God. We live in that presence as a fish lives in the sea. To a person of mystical sensitivity, all of creation proclaims the reality and presence and love of God. To develop one's mystical nature means to become sensitized to that all-pervasive presence of God among us – a presence that is more real than anything that we can touch or see.

Fruit-bearing branches of the true vine cannot go unnoticed. As a consequence of the divine-human indwelling in John 15, unity must become visible within the community of believers.³¹⁹ This reminds

³¹⁹ Dumm (2001:xii) draws attention to John's concern for a religious experience that goes beyond rituals, titles, and formulas. It is never satisfied with less than a profound mystical experience of God, in and through Jesus Christ, concluded by the ministry of the Spirit that has tangible consequences.

the reader of the perceptible unity Jesus prayed for in John 17. Regarding this unity, Hera (2013:161) stresses the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and concludes:

Jesus' unity with the Father becomes the model as well as the locus of the unity of the disciples. What Jesus possesses (God's word, glory, and love) in his capacity as the Son of the Father is a privilege also shared by the disciples.

Unity turns out to be one of the essential features of a life transformed by mutual indwelling. Based on the words of Jesus and guided by his selfless love, the disciples should continue bearing the fruit Jesus envisioned in John 15. The previous section made it clear that, even in the face of fierce opposition, they could continue witnessing about the Word that came to dwell among them, and still continue to do so via the Paraclete. This reminds one of the provisional character of this life, as described in the Unitive Way that forms part of the classical spiritual itinerary (Perrin 2005b:630):

In the Unitive Way life will continue, with its disappointments and losses, joys and celebrations, until mortal death ushers the pilgrim into the eternal embrace of the Beloved other. At that time, in the fullness of the state of glory, one will be "face to face" with God.

Having discussed the most obvious results of the mutual indwelling through μένειν, attention must be paid to faith as the genesis of discipleship and all that it entails. Without faith, indwelling is impossible and all the fruits discussed in this section hard to imagine.

9. Faith-based indwelling

The human pole of μένειν can further be illuminated by an analysis of how the abiding relationship between Jesus and his followers came about. The answer is suggested towards the end of the Gospel where the aim of the evangelist is disclosed: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31; my italics, AS). The prologue contains a similar remark where it refers to John the Baptist who had the task to testify about the light "so that through him all men might *believe*" (1:7) and, in 1:12, the testimony about Jesus as the true light, "to all those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (my italics, AS).

The importance of the notion of faith in John can hardly be overestimated.³²⁰ The word for faith, πίστις, never occurs in the Gospel, but it occurs 243 times in the remainder of the New Testament. The verb πιστεύειν is used 241 times in the entire New Testament with 98 occurrences in the Gospel, and only 34 in the Synoptics. This shows John's preference for verbs and action. According to Brown (1982a:512-

³²⁰ Schnackenburg (1968:558-575) deals comprehensively with the notion of faith. Of importance is the statement (Schnackenburg 1968:570): "The genesis and growth of faith, its trials and its triumphs, its human inadequacy which can still gain firmness from Jesus, its constant fragility which can still be overcome by the memory of Jesus' word (cf. 13:19; 14:29; 16:4), in a word, the whole dynamism of the life of faith is certainly portrayed by the evangelist, and his chief means of doing so is the faith of the disciples." Cf. also Brown's (1982a:512-514) overview of the concept of faith in John.

513), this proves that “the evangelist is not thinking of faith as an internal disposition, but as an active commitment”, and “another proof of the dynamic nature of the Johannine concept of belief”. He draws attention to the fact that 74 out of the 98 uses of πιστεύειν occur in the Book of Signs (Chapters 1-12):

This division of frequency agrees with the thesis that in the Book of Signs Jesus is presenting to men the choice of believing, while in the Book of Glory (chs. xiii-xx) he is speaking to those who already believe and, is presuming faith ... The emphasis on the response of the disciples in the Book of Glory is in terms of love which is the perfection of the commitment of the believer (Brown 1982a:513).

This illustrates faith’s ongoing, transformational character. Faith is also illuminated when John links it with dwelling in Jesus. In a sense, it means that believing in Jesus is a prerequisite for dwelling in him. Dwelling in Jesus is a continuation of the initial visit to Jesus’ abode (1:38-39). It implies an ongoing event: John links faith with a human response to God’s movement towards humanity (Nicol 2012:161). This idea of faith as a motion is confirmed by the way in which the evangelist portrays faith in Jesus: πιστεύειν εἰς. Faith in Jesus resembles a movement into Jesus based on the use of the Greek εἰς.³²¹ This πιστεύειν εἰς expresses more than mere confidence or trust. It represents an active commitment to the person of Jesus (Brown 1982a:513). That includes accepting who he claims to be, dedicating one’s life to him, willing to respond to God’s demands presented by him, and abiding in the word and commands of Jesus, in particular (8:31; 1 John 5:10).³²²

The Johannine concept of faith is relational rather than notional or intellectual (Schneiders 2005c:386). The use of εἰς with the accusative case “suggests a progressive entrance into and growth in the relationship. Jesus says, ‘If you remain (or continue) in my word you are truly my disciples’ (8:31)”. This understanding of faith is noted in other instances in the Gospel. The first two disciples almost hesitantly followed Jesus, enquired about his abode, and ultimately spent the day with him. The remainder of the Gospel indicates that their spending the day with Jesus was the disciples’ initiation into a new way of life. Jesus was not interested in a short-term relationship. He had a long-term relationship in mind. The initial faith-generating encounter had to develop into an ongoing dwelling in Jesus, as explained in detail in John 15. Consequently, this mutual indwelling underlines the reality of salvation, as explained by Coloe (2007:165) and Scholtissek (2000:314):

The reciprocal immanence between the Son and Christians articulates a living and relationship-rich salvation reality: the post-Easter union of the Christian with Christ. This reciprocal immanence is not only a praxis (namely the presence of love), but the reality of salvation.³²³

³²¹ Nicol (2012:161) substantiates his claim with the fact that the verb “to believe” is used 98 times in John. The use of εἰς for believing *in* Jesus occurs 36 times. Schnackenburg (1968:560) regards πιστεύειν εἰς as the key expression on the subject of faith.

³²² Cf. Brown (1982a:513) who also makes this interesting comment: “This is why there is no conflict in John between the primacy of faith and the importance of good works.”

³²³ Schnackenburg (1968:389) confirms this: “Thus what the Johannine faith primarily produces is union with the person of the revealer sent by God, and hence salvation.”

The mutual relationship caused by μένειν is also evident in Bultmann's (1971:535-536) description of faith:

[I]t is a relationship of faith; but faith is the unconditional decision to base oneself on the act of God, at the cost of giving up one's own ability. Μένειν is persistence in the life of faith; it is loyal steadfastness to the cause only in the sense of always allowing oneself to be encompassed, of allowing oneself to receive ... it is not the holding of a position, but an allowing oneself to be held.

A life characterised by mutual indwelling confirms that faith is linked on a profound level with grace. This insight clarifies the nature of faith by stressing that it is not a human achievement. Faith is the fitting answer to the grace of God and the revelation given by Jesus (Schnackenburg 1968:575). Thus, although faith is linked with a human decision, God draws men and leads them to Jesus. On the basis of the Gospel's primary Christological view, Schnackenburg (1982:217) maintains that the evangelist's intention was to provide the community with a deep vision of Christ and "to strengthen members in their struggle for faith and their attempt to preserve their own faith".³²⁴

Different results of indwelling that reflect the abundance of bearing fruit were discussed earlier. A few concluding remarks are in place. The above discussion is based on concepts that appear primarily in John 15, but also in the remainder of the Gospel. Despite all these concepts, the meaning of bearing fruit remains open (Schnackenburg 1982:112; cf. 15:4).³²⁵ Bultmann (1971:532-533) also noted that the nature of bearing fruit is not expressly stated: "[I]t is every demonstration of vitality of faith to which according to vv. 9-17, reciprocal love above all belongs. The description of the life of faith as a growing, vital activity of faith is the prime concern here." On the basis of the call to μένειν, he continues: "God takes care that the believer can never give himself over to rest; he continually demands something new from him, and continually gives him new strength." In another attempt to understand what bearing fruit is all about, Michaels (2010:804-805) points out a striking similarity between two truisms from the world of agriculture in John 15:4b: "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me." (καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε), and John 12:24: "[U]nless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (ἐὰν μὴ ὁ κόκκος τοῦ σίτου πεσὼν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἀποθάνῃ, αὐτὸς μόνος μένει· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ, πολὺν καρπὸν φέρει.). This comparison leads Michaels (2010:805) to conclude:

In both instances, the agricultural facts serve as metaphors for the disciples' experience: like the "grain of wheat", they too must "die" in order to live (12:25), and like the branches, they must continually "dwell" in Jesus and he in them.

³²⁴ Dodd (1953:186) agrees, stating that faith is a form of vision possible and necessary for those who saw him in flesh: "Thus πίστις is that form of knowledge, or vision, appropriate to those who find God in an historic Person of the past, a Person who nevertheless, through it, remains the object of saving knowledge, the truth and the life."

³²⁵ Cf. Bruner (2012:897-898) for other possible meanings for bearing fruit. He prefers to leave it completely open.

Faith is indeed simply the humble response of God-seekers to the outreach of the divine growing into a lasting relationship. The self-sacrificing love of Jesus the Christ remains the sole impetus for every decision to believe. As Hera (2013:49) noted: “[T]he Johannine message concerning the acceptance of Jesus in faith (discipleship) flows from the Gospel’s christological teaching. The witness about the true identity of Jesus leads to faith, which is the correct response of all who receive the light”, and “Johannine discipleship entails both divine sovereignty and human responsibility”. (Hera 2013:87)³²⁶

10. The lasting impact of μένειν

In addition to all the other results of mutual indwelling discussed earlier, the enduring character of such a relationship and its fruit needs to be mentioned. Transformational discipleship as a continual process must lead to a new way of life. Mutual indwelling is thus mystically brought to fruition in everyday life. Nevertheless, mystical experience not only leads to a new way of life, but also becomes part of what Waaijman (2003:68-77) discusses as the mystical way or journey (*De mystieke weg*). It has to do with the ongoing impact of the mystical experience that continues to transform the mystic’s way of life. The mystical journey is about the personal life of the mystic, as well as the mystic’s relationship with society.³²⁷

Bearing fruit, as the inevitable result of John 15’s mutual indwelling, is all but a short-lived spiritual experience. This is implied by this chapter’s numerous references to the kind of fruit required from Jesus’ followers, as explicitly stated in John 15:16: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”³²⁸ The mystical undertones of “lasting impact”, as an explicit instance of spiritual transformation, will be examined next.

The lasting impact shows agreement with the common Biblical concept of perseverance. According to Dysinger (2005:486), “Christian perseverance means persevering in ‘doing good’, in proclaiming and acting in accordance with the Gospel, even in the face of threat or fatigue” and perseverance “implies continuing to pray and to act in accordance with the Gospel in the very presence of the enemy”. It makes even more sense in terms of Jesus’ warning about the hatred of the world and its implications. Howard’s (2008:166) remarks about the mystique of martyrdom come to mind: “Our heroes of the Christian faith are of those who persevere in faith, love and hope (who live out authentic culture) in the midst of the worst society can offer.” The concept of transformation in love, explained earlier, always leads one back to the perfect example of love when considering sustained discipleship even amidst hardship, as Perrin (2007:173) emphasises:

The example of the martyrs shows that relationship with God is reflected in the selfless acts of men and women who lived profoundly their personal love relationship with Jesus. The nature of that love

³²⁶ Note also Hera’s (2013:158) statement regarding faith and unity in John 17: “[B]elieving in Jesus is the point of departure for attaining unity because the unity for which Jesus asks the Father is meant for those who believe in him.”

³²⁷ Cf. also Chapter 3, section 6.1.10.

³²⁸ The fruit that should remain, according to Ridderbos (1997:521), “continue[s] the thought of ‘remaining’ in Jesus (vss. 1-8), in his love (vss. 9ff.)”. For Von Wahlde (2010b:682), the lasting fruit refers to the disciples remaining faithful to Jesus.

relationship, ultimately one that is characterized by faith and modelled on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is the truth of embodied Christian life. Christians trust that, in the end, God's self-manifestation and self-giving can be translated into the concrete history of human beings.

Waaïjman explains the lasting impact as a mystical characteristic.³²⁹ The mystical experience inevitably has an impact on daily life and in society. For many, the lasting impact is regarded as a sign of authenticity: The good fruit is characteristic of the good tree. A living relationship with God results in an overflowing fountain of goodness. The inner transformation of the mystic becomes visible in a new way of life, whether it is by words or actions, work or leisure, solitude or koinonia. All of this is the result of the mystical transformation by love: It cannot be kept secret. This love overflows in abundant streams of goodness and wellness wherever it is needed.³³⁰ Waaïjman (2003:68) underlines that the lasting impact of the mystical experience belongs to its essence. As the mystical experience inclines forward when depicted against the background of prayerful longing, it inclines backward when depicted against the reality of daily life and society, in general. The lasting impact manifests itself as the mystical way, the ongoing effect of the mystical experience in life and society. The water paved its way and now the river is flowing ...³³¹

Only Jesus, as the true vine and the one who took the initiative, can secure a lasting relationship. The foundation for a mutual indwelling is Jesus himself who was sent by the Father and who continues his work through the Spirit of truth. Human beings are open to the work of the divine, yearning to experience more, and willing to be transformed. Ultimately, though, the source of transformation and sustainable bearing of fruit is the divine.

11. Conclusion

This section provided an investigation into the human response to the divine initiative and actions described in Chapter 6. Being exposed to Jesus, as the true vine, leads to a critical choice: To follow him or to turn away from him. But, whatever their choice, people's Spirituality will be detectable in their way of life. Those who choose to become his followers are called to μένειν in Jesus. In John 15, this choice became evident through a lifestyle of either love or hate.³³² As noted earlier, the spiritual process of becoming a disciple of Jesus and dwelling in him consists of different interwoven concepts, which cannot be treated in isolation. It once again recalls the image of a spider's web. The

³²⁹ The concept of lasting impact (*Doorwerking*) is quoted regularly throughout this thesis, following Waaïjman (2003:67-68).

³³⁰ Waaïjman (2003:67-68) elaborates: "Eckhart vergelijkt deze mystieke doorwerking met een maagd die vrouw is, 'Zij brengt veel vruchten voort en die zijn niet gering: niet minder en niet meer dan God zelf.'" He also quotes Buber to explain the relationship between the experience and the lasting impact: "Zoals men met het naakte jij op de lippen in de ontmoeting (met het eeuwigen Jij, K. W.) geraakt, zo wordt men met ditzelfde lippen uit haar naar de wereld teruggestuurd."

³³¹ McGinn (2006:19) fittingly confirms this, emphasising that mysticism is essentially a process, a life commitment: "The significance of the effect of mystical consciousness on the life of the mystic is important because the Christian tradition has always insisted that the only way to validate the claims of mystics is through the impact their inner transformation has upon their lives and the lives of those they influenced."

³³² This explains the cautionary note of the evangelist's message. John reveals the alternative to a meaningful existence – a fruitless and unfulfilled life. Such an existence is the inheritance of those, such as Judas Iscariot, who are children of the devil (cf. John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; 17:15). Their father is also called the evil one. Consequently, they are called people from the world; they lack true knowledge, and lead a life of sin characterised by hatred, punishment and, ultimately, death.

above exposition is based on such a treatment of interwoven spiritual and mystical concepts in both the Gospel and John 15, in particular.

The discussion showed that discipleship has various nuances. Based on the close reading in Chapter 2 and ensuing discussions, μένειν is regarded as the essence of discipleship involving ongoing transformation. Over time, Jesus' followers developed into a loving community founded on his life and work. John 15 points out that they were to dwell in Jesus by living according to his words and guided by his selfless love. Typical of such a community is abundant bearing of fruit that has mystical characteristics such as pruning, joyfulness, prayer, witnessing, and glorification. All of this will happen, as Jesus predicted, within a hostile context, but always under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

All of this has spiritual meaning within the framework of Jesus' call to mutual indwelling. In the Gospel, only the indwelling of the divine can change humanity completely. Those who are open to the indwelling become true disciples and share in the outreach of the divine to the world. As such, they become like Jesus, who, representing the divine, reached out to them. However, the fact that μένειν also describes the abiding relationship within the trinity should make it clear that it is impossible to exhaust the meaning of μένειν. Further, it reiterates that to continue living a life characterised by mutual indwelling depends on the unceasing presence, love, and grace of the triune God.

Another aspect needs to be discussed, namely the effects of Jesus' input on the lives of those who were exposed to him as mystagogue.

CHAPTER 7

MENEIN AND JESUS AS MYSTAGOGUE

1. Introduction

The Gospel of John introduces its readers to a wide spectrum of God-seekers who, during encounters with Jesus, sensed the need of being and remaining in an ongoing relationship with him that can be characterised by μένειν. Regular encounters with Jesus set in motion a process, “through which there is a gradual self-revelation of Jesus leading to a life-giving, rich relationship and intimate friendship”.³³³ This desire is implicit in John 15, but is supported and explained in more depth by mystagogical elements elsewhere in the Gospel of John.³³⁴ In John’s Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as responding to this desire by entering into a relationship characterised by indwelling, union, and reciprocity. In this relationship, Jesus acts as a mystagogue, being present in the ongoing spiritual journey of others to guide them deeper into a life conscious of the divine presence.

In order to illustrate the portrait of Jesus as mystagogue, some of the most outstanding encounters with him will be discussed, among others those with the Samaritan woman, Peter, Thomas and the Beloved Disciple. Such a broader investigation will also reveal the comprehensive use of μένειν in John.

2. The mystagogical overtones of μένειν

The term ‘mystagogy’ can be associated with spiritual direction or accompaniment. It is about the communal journey of a mystagogue with someone who seeks to discern God’s will in times of uncertainty and doubt. Mystagogy refers to a person’s final destiny.³³⁵ The person, who seeks to dwell in Jesus, often fails to detect or experience the divine presence in his/her situation.

According to Waaijman (2002:564), mystagogy involves discerning the difference between someone’s factual situation and his/her perfection in God. A mystagogue guides a person in his/her growth in God. Based on the view that mystagogy is accompaniment in the direction of mystical experience, Waaijman (2002:870) notes:

Mystagogy suspends the boundaries of human existence and transforms it into an expectant openness to the divine mystery, leads individuals into God’s gracious self-communication, and helps them understand their unique calling.³³⁶

The mystery of the divine encounter involves three elements.³³⁷ It unfolds through God’s gracious self-communication realised in the proximity of the mystery itself. It is an uncreated grace that

³³³ Cf. Coloe (2007:52) who quotes Scholtissek (1995:412-413).

³³⁴ For a more comprehensive analysis of the positive occurrences of μένειν in the Gospel of John, cf. Chapter 5, section 2.1.

³³⁵ Cf. Waaijman (2002:565-566, 584-589, 869-942).

³³⁶ The original Dutch text mentions this even more clearly (Waaijman 2000:858): “Mystagogie ontgrenst het menselijk bestaan tot een wachtend openstaan voor het godsgeheim, voert binnen in Gods genadige Zelfmededeling en doet iemands unieke roeping verstaan.”

³³⁷ Cf. Waaijman (2002:588).

contains all the created gifts of grace. Human beings receive this offer of God's grace as an unexpected gift. Mystagogy reveals the traces of the human search for God and God's gracious answer. In the last instance, Jesus Christ reveals the divine-human mystery of seeking and self-giving. In an important guideline, Waaijman (2002:588) mentions that the mystagogy of God's gracious self-communication to the seeking human being

is not an existential-phenomenological clarification of human existence, but a mystical-dialogical analysis of the Mystery of the divine encounter, an analysis in which the figure of Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian love-structure stands in the background. Tangible in this mystagogy is the influence of the mystical traditions.

The manner in which God selects a person in the mystagogy of a personal calling captures the imagination.³³⁸ The process unfolds in a unique way and differs from person to person based on his/her particular circumstances. The mystagogy is then set in motion by discovering one's call to do certain things in a concrete historical situation. At that time, God awakens and dispenses the necessary charismata. The moment of truth occurs when the recognition of calling and gifts come to fruition in the discernment of spirits (diakrisis).

This pattern is discernible throughout Scripture. Several instances in the Gospel of John will be discussed below.

3. Μένειν and Jesus as mystagogue

All this is also true of John's Gospel: Jesus acts as mystagogue guiding people to discover the presence of God and the divine will for their lives. This includes accompanying them on their spiritual journey into the hidden life with God. The comprehensive character of Jesus as mystagogue in the Fourth Gospel can be detected in the specific terms used by the evangelist. "Word" is such a key term. John uses two different Greek words, λόγος and ῥῆμα.³³⁹ Concerning the framework of John's use of "the Word" (ὁ λόγος) for Jesus, one of Brown's (1982a:523-524) suggestions catches the eye. He indicates instances where John takes his citations from the Targums or Aramaic translations. He emphasises that the *Memra* of the Lord in the Targums is not merely a translation of "the word of the Lord", but a substitute for God Himself.³⁴⁰ The consequences are far reaching. Jesus now becomes the embodiment of divine revelation, the one who guides man into the life-giving

³³⁸ Cf. Waaijman (2002:588-589).

³³⁹ For earlier references to especially λόγος, see Chapter 5, section 5.2.1, regarding *Hellenistic and Jewish-Hellenistic mysticism*; section 8.6 regarding *the Johannine Logos*, and section 4, dealing with *Μένειν and the words of Jesus*.

³⁴⁰ He mentions three examples: Exodus 3:12; Genesis 28:21, and Exodus 19:17. The last case is of special significance: "If in Exod. XIX 17 we are told that Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, in Targum Onkelos we are told that they were brought out to the *Memra* of God." This relates to Waaijman's (2016) article regarding Holiness. His four insights need to be mentioned: "A first insight: the notion of 'holiness' in Scripture can be understood as 'what belongs to God, unconditionally, immediately, and totally'. Secondly, God has chosen his creation, his people and his order of justice to belong to Him. By his choice, they are holy. Being holy, they are called to participate consciously and publicly in his holy choice. My third point of reflection: human holiness is a process, a process of becoming aware. My last point of reflection: holiness is not only awareness, it is above all holy practice. From the viewpoint of holiness, spirituality is essentially ethical."

presence of God himself. This is possible simply because “He is the Memra, God’s presence among men”.³⁴¹ Kanagaraj (1998:213) declares: “Thus, for John, Jesus is not only the ὁδός, but also the mystagogue to the Father.”

Various elements throughout the Gospel point to Jesus’ proficiency as mystagogue. To name but a few: his origin, being from God, as well as his divinity (1:1; see also the repeated use of ἐγὼ εἰμι); the unity or mutual indwelling between himself, the Father, and the disciples (14:10, 11; 17:21); his descent to dwell among men longing for God (1:14); being sent by God and sharing the words of God (3:34; 14:10; 17:8); yielding eternal life by the words he spoke (3:16; 6:68); his entire mission benefitting those whom he was given by the Father (17:6); his message of unconditional love (13:1; 15:9, 12, 17); all that he has done to glorify the Father (17:1, 4-5, 22, 24), and finally bringing everything to divine completion (19:30).

Jesus, as the Word par excellence, uses mostly personal dialogues during the recorded encounters with people. Aware of people’s yearning for God, often hidden in their language, he articulates their longing in such a way as to guide them into the presence of God. In the process, he creates opportunities for divine-human relationships by generating a mystical home through mutual indwelling (μένειν).

In a discussion with Scholtissek, Coloe (2007:52-53) reflected on the link between mystagogy and μένειν. The gradual stages of discipleship revealed in the encounter between the disciples and Jesus (John 1:35-39) justify the use of the term ‘mystagogic’. The process of their seeking, finding, and remaining with Jesus reflects a pattern that could be useful for all future believers.³⁴² It is set in motion with Jesus’ question in John 1:38: “What do you seek?” (*menein*).³⁴³ This represents a question posed to disciples of all times:

This question addresses the deep religious hunger within the human heart, and the disciples’ reply “where do you dwell (*menein*)” needs to be read with the same depth of meaning posed by Jesus’ initial question (Coloe 2007:52).

With this remark, μένειν as indwelling becomes a key term to indicate the human desire to be in the divine presence. With regard to John’s Gospel, it indicates how Jesus represents the one in, and through whom this desire is fulfilled.

4. Encounters with mystagogical implications

Throughout his Gospel, John narrates how Jesus as mystagogue guided people in making the right choices in life and facilitating the mystical unification between himself and the followers.³⁴⁴ This reflects the ultimate goal of discipleship, namely a life in unison with the vine, as expressed by

³⁴¹ Cf. Brown (1982a:524).

³⁴² Ridderbos (1997:83) supports this view.

³⁴³ The words “what do you seek?” (τί ζητεῖτε;) are the first words spoken by Jesus in this Gospel. It is essentially repeated to the soldiers who arrested Jesus (18:4, 7), and to Mary Magdalene (20:15). This leads Michaels (2010:119) to conclude that this question usually leads to a self-disclosure.

³⁴⁴ While he has reservations about mysticism in John’s Gospel, Barrett (1978:87) declares: “The Johannine Christ may rather be described as himself[,] the one true mystic. He is essential[ly] one with the Father ... he is the Son of God ... and thus makes himself equal with God ... If John has borrowed from contemporary mystical thought he has done so not in his description of Christians but in his portrait of Christ. The ‘mystical’ life of Christians (the word is misleading) is derivative and rests upon the essential relation of Jesus with the Father in 17:23: ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί.”

μένειν, especially in John 15. A broader examination of some events from the Gospel will illustrate how John's Gospel portrays the role of Jesus as mystagogue, that is, the one who guides his followers to remain in him through faith.

4.1 The choice to μένειν with Jesus

Already in John 1:35-37, Jesus acts as mystagogue who initiates the fascinating and ongoing process of transformation. The typical process is that Word is followed by re-word, re-action, and oral re-action. This develops into a dialogue, representing the ever-present dialogical process. After John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus is the Lamb of God, two of his own followers, who heard the testimony, decide to follow Jesus:

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?' They said, 'Rabbi' which means Teacher, 'where are you staying?' 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.' Therefore, they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.³⁴⁵

The question "Where are you staying?" (ποῦ μένεις;) is intelligible as it stands. However, the use of the verb μένειν is striking, as this is so characteristic of John's theology that a deeper meaning is intended. Several matters confirm such a deeper meaning. There is the later profound use of μένειν in the Gospel, but, in John 1, it is telling that the verb is used within a call to discipleship. To follow Jesus means to dwell in him and to be where he stays. At the same time, there is the striking reference to the tenth hour, which is a symbolic remark. Through this reference, the focus on discipleship is narrated in a context that refers to Pentecost which speaks of harvesting – that is, the first fruits of the believing community.³⁴⁶ The entire episode thus points to Jesus encountering people and guiding them towards discipleship.

The desire for encounters with Jesus ends in discipleship. John 1:40-42 describes how the new followers, including Andrew and Nathanael, confess Jesus as Messiah, following on their desire, and longing to know where Jesus dwells. Their question to Jesus is an indication of their longing for the divine, and their confession confirms that they have experienced Jesus as the Christ. Behind this simple narrative of the first disciples lies a mystical experience expressed concretely by the author of the Gospel. They move from longing and desire to confirmation and confession. What they sought has become a divine reality to them. The narrative portrays them as believers open to, and desirous for the transcendent.

The symbolic nature of this narrative can be illuminated by Waaijman's view on the mystical experience. Mystical experiences happen where mystics are attuned to the divine. Mystics have a deep-felt longing for God, a desire to get closer to him and to experience his presence. Sometimes this could take

³⁴⁵ Coloe (2007:57) makes important remarks regarding μένειν and discipleship: "Discipleship in the Fourth Gospel appears to be simply being and remaining (*menein*) with Jesus." (Coloe 2007:39). See also Barrett (1978:181).

³⁴⁶ According to Michaels (2010:120), μένειν implies a commitment to discipleship, i.e., to maintain a lasting personal relationship with Jesus.

place within the context of a typical mystical attitude of waiting, longing, and desiring. The mystic is then surprised by a shift in perspective. In the prayerful longing, searching and reaching out to God, the mystic's own experiences inexplicably fade into the background, only to be replaced by the all-embracing presence of the One for whom he so longed. The initial "prayerful longing" is replaced by what Waaijman (2003:60-61) calls "the presence of the experiential kernel". The centre of the action shifts: what once seemed like a human longing shifts to become an overwhelming awareness of the divine presence and initiative. The initial object of the experience becomes the subject of the acting. The mystic is no longer the active one, but surrenders to the transforming inner working of the divine.

All of this sheds light on the special connotation of μένειν in this simple narrative about the first disciples. What these disciples did is explained in more depth in John 15:4-5, where Jesus calls on his disciples to dwell in him as he dwells in them. The dormant, but slowly awakening need (longing) of these two curious followers was to get closer to Jesus, to be in his company, to get to know him better, to see where he lives, and to be with him. John's use of μένειν helps one name the crux of their desire. The repeated use of μένειν (staying, abiding, mutual indwelling) becomes one of the most basic requirements for discipleship spelled out by Jesus in John 15. From a mystical perspective, the important link between the two events, and the other results discussed earlier, are the use of the verb μένειν.

The shift from a "prayerful longing" to "the presence of the experiential kernel" continues to surface in the Gospel.³⁴⁷ John consistently relates Jesus' way of always taking the initiative and dealing with each person in a unique way, according to his/her needs. During meetings with Jesus, it is clear how the experience of a loss of control leads transformed believers to "passivity and immediacy", culminating in mutual indwelling. This reflects a mystagogical approach that mirrors Jesus' presence in his disciples' spiritual journey.

4.2 Nathanael and imminent revelations

John 1:43-51 introduces the reader to Nathanael, another future disciple of Jesus. When Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, Nathanael reacted sceptically and doubted that anything good can come from Nazareth. Yet, despite his reservations, he does respond and approaches Jesus, as John 1:47 explicitly spells out. Jesus takes control in a way that totally surprises Nathanael.³⁴⁸ One could describe this as indicative of his mystagogical approach. He engages with Nathanael by giving him a revelation of how he saw him under the fig tree. This revelation leads to Nathanael's confession: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of

³⁴⁷ Cf. Waaijman's (2003:60-61) explanation of the mystic's "prayerful longing" followed by the unexpected "presence of the experiential kernel".

³⁴⁸ The mystagogical role of Jesus is implied in Schnackenburg's (1968:315) comment: "It will be shown in the case of Nathanael that only faith overcomes all objections and recognizes the divine origin of Jesus in spite of his earthly lowliness – and it is Jesus himself who awakens this faith, by his words and his majesty."

Israel.”³⁴⁹ This narrative reflects Nathanael’s own openness and desire to experience more, not only by approaching Jesus, but also the continued interaction between them (1:48-51).

The description of Nathanael’s interaction with Jesus has an intriguing aspect when John describes how Jesus promised Nathanael more revelations: “You shall see greater things than that, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” This pronouncement reflects elements such as open heavens, heavenly journeys, and angelic figures that are typical of mystical texts, but it also links the elements explicitly with Jesus, reflecting John’s Christological mindset. It also reflects the ongoing growing relationship with a mystagogue that leads one into the mysteries of God. The initial revelation of Jesus’ identity and the intimate relationship is followed by still further revelations about heavenly journeys that bring one in the divine presence (a motif typical of Merkabah mysticism). The mystical union is, as is to be expected within Spirituality, a process of growth and increasing intimacy with the divine. One senses how the meeting between the first two disciples when they dwelled with Jesus expands to include others. Nathanael could well have been one of the Baptist’s disciples who joined Jesus. Despite the fact that his name is mentioned only once more in the New Testament (John 21:2), Ridderbos (1997:87-88) notes that “Nathanael followed Jesus along with the other four mentioned here and that he belonged to the circle of those always around Jesus from this point on”.

4.3 Nicodemus and the mystery of rebirth

In John 3:1-21, Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee and one of Israel’s teachers, and probably a member of the Jewish ruling council, pays Jesus a nightly visit.³⁵⁰ This visit is in itself an indication of his desire and longing to experience more of what he heard. He represents a longing for the divine presence. The ensuing conversation about being born again or from above (among other important themes) illustrates how Jesus takes the initiative and becomes the true teacher.³⁵¹ Jesus ends their discussion with a reference to light and darkness: “This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” The light motif, characteristic of mystical texts, plays a significant role in this episode and Jesus’ revelation of hidden things. In this instance, there is also the modification of mystical elements found in Merkabah texts. Grese (1988:689) aptly notes:

³⁴⁹ This response is the result of Nathanael’s deep insight caused by Jesus’ knowledge of him. According to Brown (1982a:87), “[i]t is Nathanael, the genuine Israelite, who hails him; and therefore ‘the King of Israel’ must be understood as the king of those like Nathanael who believe.”

³⁵⁰ It should be noted that researchers disagree on the faith of Nicodemus. Collins (1990:15) comments: “The encounter is basically nocturnal; it took place in darkness rather than in the light of revelation.” Based on John’s portrayal, he regards Nicodemus as a representative figure with a type of belief that is insufficient for salvation offered by Christ (Collins 1990:58). Culpepper’s (1983:136) evaluation is similar, namely that Nicodemus represents those who, out of fear for the Jews, refuse to confess their faith in Jesus lest they be evicted from the synagogue: “He remains therefore one of them, not one of the children of God. Like the scribe in Mark 12:28-34, Nicodemus is not far from the kingdom of God, but he remains outside.”

³⁵¹ As a Pharisee, Nicodemus belonged to a faction within Judaism that believed that God will renew their lives at the end of time through bodily resurrection, as described by Coloe (2007:64-65). Based on the existence of an openness to renewal of life, she concludes: “Jesus, in turn, introduces the concept of rebirth as the means of seeing and apprehending an even deeper reality in himself. Rebirth enables vision of the reign of God, the presence of God now incarnate in history.”

The heavenly journey set before Nicodemus is not a trip through the heavens to God, but through the enigmas and riddles that surround the heavenly revelation made available in Jesus. Only those who by being born again become like Jesus, “born from above,” will be able to understand the revelation brought by the one whose origin is “from above”.

Jesus as mystagogue draws humanity with him into the divine communion, as explained by Coloe (2007:65), to participate in his own filial relationship with, and in God, to empower believers to become children of God (1:13). In the words of Dodd (1953:196): “The Father, the Son and the disciples dwell in one another by virtue of a love which is the very life and the activity of God.”

Although Nicodemus is mentioned only twice again in John’s Gospel, these references to Nicodemus suggest that the initial meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus was only the beginning of a process that included other visits. Coloe (2007:82) notes:

His final words to Jesus are not an outright rejection but a question: ‘how is this possible?’ (3:9), which leaves open the possibility of further development, as in fact the narrative will show later (7:50-52; 19:39).

The second reference to Nicodemus is found in John 7:50-52, where Nicodemus speaks in favour of Jesus:

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing? They replied, ‘Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.’

Michaels (2010:473) makes an important remark regarding Nicodemus’ earlier visit to Jesus: “If Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus left some doubt as whether Nicodemus in fact ‘believed,’ the doubt is now removed.”³⁵²

The third reference to Nicodemus is mentioned in the closing stages of the Gospel at Jesus’ burial: “He (Joseph of Arimathea) was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds” (19:39). Such an immense quantity expresses veneration.³⁵³ This third and final reference to Nicodemus in the text symbolises the completion of the process of transformation he underwent. It could be that he, having seen Jesus being “lifted up from the earth” in order to “draw all men to himself” (John 12:32), was reminded of the words during their first visit: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). His transformation through love brought his discipleship to fruition, as Bruner (2012:1134) so fittingly explains:

³⁵² Brown (1982a:330) describes Nicodemus as a calm and honest man in the assembly of the Sanhedrin.

³⁵³ Cf. Bultmann (1971:680). Culpepper (1983:96) calls it a lavish kingly burial. Moloney (2013:41), who initially referred to Nicodemus’ faith as “partial faith”, now concludes: “The community emerges from the darkness as “secret disciples,” Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, no longer “secret disciples,” courageously accost Roman authority, ask for the body, and bury the deceased Jesus as a king in a new tomb where no one has been laid.” (Moloney 2013:152).

He comes to his discipleship, finally, all the way, and publicly. This scene seems to indicate Nicodemus's conversion of public confession of faith. He apparently never forgot Jesus' sermon that memorable evening or the unjust accusations of his colleagues against Jesus that critical day.

Finally, in the spiritual life of Nicodemus, the light of love conquered the darkness and hatred of the world. John made note of the darkness surrounding their first encounter, and Jesus himself used the images of darkness and light as he spoke with his visitor:

Nicodemus battled new birth within and watched Jesus suffer and die, coming to belief somewhere along the way. He had missed the chance of anointing Jesus' body in life, but he heaped spices on Christ after his death, risking his own life to finally let loose the overpowering fragrance of belief. Because Nicodemus had approached Jesus, even in the night, God brought a slow, steady wind of understanding, of new life, of light.³⁵⁴

These later references reveal the results of the mystagogic input of Jesus in the life of Nicodemus and indicate the unceasing and ongoing realisation of his spiritual journey. His relationship with Jesus deepens his spiritual journey: he discovers the divine presence in his life through Jesus' work and words. Although Nicodemus appears in only 17 verses, three scenes and speaks only 63 words,³⁵⁵ he ultimately "qualifies" to experience Jesus' promise in John 12:26: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. *My Father will honour the one who serves me.*" (my italics, AS).

4.4 The improbable disciple-apostle

Another outstanding illustration of Jesus in his role as mystagogue can be detected in the well-known passage about the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42.³⁵⁶ This woman stands in sharp contrast to Nicodemus, as pointed out by Culpepper (1983:136): "He is a male teacher of Israel; she is a woman of Samaria. He has a noble heritage; she has a shameful past. He has seen signs and knows Jesus is 'from God,' she meets Jesus as a complete stranger."³⁵⁷ The "before" and "after" of the conversation between Jesus and this woman is all about grace, love, and transformation. They discuss spiritual matters. The roles are reversed when the supposedly thirsty and helpless Jesus becomes the one who supplies the water of life, not only to the woman, but also to the people of the town. The Samaritan woman becomes a missionary in her own right. Not only the woman's eternal thirst, but also that of the local people, is quenched. Jesus thus acts as her mystagogue who reflects with her about the spiritual way. The spiritual transformation is so comprehensive that Jesus is invited to stay over in the Samaritan's town: "So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them (μένειν), and he stayed (μένειν) two days." John's use of μένειν is not accidental and continues to

³⁵⁴ Cf. Dawn (2005:1943-1944).

³⁵⁵ Cf. Culpepper (1983:135).

³⁵⁶ For the heading of this section, cf. Schneiders (2003:137).

³⁵⁷ Moloney (2013:42) remarks: "The narrator's earlier comment on the relationship between Jews and Samaritans is still operative in the narrative: 'The Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans.'" Cf. Lee (2002:71).

invite the reader to a mystical reading of the text. It draws the reader's attention to the impact of Jesus' indwelling. Once again, the divine indwelling is closely linked with discipleship. It has a relational character that is transformative in nature; Jesus transforms the woman disciple into a witness. She is not only open to the divine initiative, but also becomes an instrument in the divine action among humanity when she brings her townsfolk to Jesus.

Schneiders (2003:126-148) interprets John 4:1-42 from a feminist point of view under the heading: "Inclusive discipleship". For her, the theological focus of the story is mission, and the identity of the Samaritan woman is one of a Christian disciple and apostle.³⁵⁸ The woman, like Nicodemus and the Roman official, is also a representative figure. Often these symbolic characters are nameless which enhances their power to represent collectives without losing their particularity. Jesus functions as the Messiah who comes to restore true worship in Israel, a worship of spirit and truth that includes the Samaritans. This story is thus meant to validate the presence of Samaritan Christians in the Johannine community and to affirm their equality with Jewish Christians.

Schneiders also touches on two aspects of the story that reveal the possibility for a deeper spiritual, mystical, and mystagogical reading. They are the very first use of the revelatory "I am" formula in the Fourth Gospel (John 4:26),³⁵⁹ and the use of μένειν (mentioned earlier):

The effectiveness of her ministry is underlined by the fact that the townspeople not only "come to Jesus," which is the Johannine expression for beginning to believe, but they entreat Jesus to "remain with them" and he "remained there two days" (v. 40). In the fourth Gospel, *meno*, "to abide" or "to dwell" is a quasi-technical term for union with Jesus. These new believers are presented as coming to full Johannine faith in Jesus as the Christ, proclaiming him as "the Savior of the World" (v. 42).³⁶⁰

This narrative also illustrates the spiritual and mystical implications of μένειν as used by John, suggesting the mystagogical role of Jesus. Jesus uses the discussion with the woman to be with her in her search for deeper meaning. According to Lee (2002:74), the passage of the Samaritan woman (4:16-19) is not about exposing moral guilt in her life, but about uncovering the pain in her intimate relationships:

Through the woman's developing self-knowledge, Jesus reveals himself as the source of life, the giver of living water. Her Spirituality moves appropriately from the self-knowledge she has gained in dialogue with Jesus to the knowledge and worship of God.

The consequence of this woman's contact with Jesus and his way of touching lives was unforeseen. He introduces her to the essence of a divine-human relationship, but also to realising and expressing

³⁵⁸ Although he has some reservations about Schneiders' opinion (1996:161) regarding the role of women in the Gospel (and especially in the Easter events), Von Wahlde (2010b:854) concludes: "There can be no doubt that, for the Johannine community, women had a central role. It seems possible to affirm this demonstration of equal discipleship without attempting to conclude that one gender was given precedence over the other."

³⁵⁹ Collins (1990:17) points out that "[t]his is the first use of the *ego eimi* formula of self-revelation in the Fourth Gospel. John's Jesus once again interprets a Messianic confession, this time by revealing that he is the Revealer, the one who speaks."

³⁶⁰ Cf. Schneiders (2003:139, 142-143). Collins (1990:18) mentions that the other side of the Samaritan woman's representative function is revealed by her testimony about Jesus, representing the Christian messenger who brings others to faith.

her own spiritual potential. All of this was the end result of her encounter with Jesus, the passionate mystagogue.

4.5 The humbling impulsiveness of Peter

The character of Simon Peter (Cephas) is also a good example of Jesus' role as mystagogue. Peter, John's son, is named 33 times in John's Gospel. He was one of the first disciples called by Jesus (John 1:41-2). The image of Peter in the Gospel is one of a talkative, self-assured, almost presumptuous person. He is the one who told Jesus that his disciples could not leave him, because he has the words of eternal life as the Holy One of God (John 6:68-69).³⁶¹ During their last meal and the washing of the disciples' feet, Peter vows to lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:36-38). In the olive grove during the arrest of Jesus, it appears that Peter will stand by his promise by cutting off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant (John 18:10). Then follows the suspenseful episode when Peter disowns Jesus by denying his discipleship (John 18:25-27).

The mystical part of his transformation by love is revealed only in the Gospel's epilogue, when Jesus confronts Peter face to face. The reader can almost feel the emotional atmosphere as well as the intimate nature of the conversation. Peter is no longer self-assured and in control of the situation. The loving One, the Lord, the Holy One of God, once again takes over. During this moving scene, Jesus asks the most important question so central to discipleship: "Do you love me?" Touched by Jesus' words, an emotional Peter confesses what he discovered along the way to self-surrender and humility: "Lord, *you know* all things; *you know* that I love you" (John 21:17; my italics, AS). Jesus as mystagogue brings Peter to realise that it is unconditional love for Jesus that is the foundation of Peter's task as shepherd of the new covenant community. As Moloney (2013:182) explains: "Only when the dynamism of love is in place is Jesus' request of the Father possible: that the disciples be swept up into the love that exists between the Father and the Son." Zimmerman (2006:40) highlights the effect Jesus as mystagogue has on his disciples and the Johannine community:

The roles and images which bring Jesus closer should become paradigms or models for the disciples. The disciples should and can also take over roles and images from Jesus. The images of Christ thus become role models of a life in faith. In this way, individual images of Christ can now be transferred to the believer: the "Good shepherd" commissions his disciples to be shepherds.

This is true of Peter in a very special way (21:15-19).³⁶² John's development of Peter's character reflects the mystical elements, which Waaijman (2003:63, 65-66) calls "*schouwen*" (contemplation)

³⁶¹ On the basis of John's portrayal of Peter's character, Collins (1990:40) comments: "He is the one who represents the Twelve in so far as they acknowledge that Jesus is the Revealer whose words bring eternal life. He is the spokesman for those who believe that Jesus is Messiah in so far as he is Revealer." Culpepper (1983:120) regards Peter as the most complex character besides Jesus: "Peter's story traces his preparation for the twin tasks of shepherding and martyrdom. He is given the task of tending the sheep and, like the good shepherd, he will have to lay down his life for the sheep (10:14-16; 21:15-19)."

³⁶² Tolmie's (2006:366-367) conclusion insists on Jesus being the example for his disciples and for leadership. He points out that Peter receives the role as shepherd, which asks of him to lay down his life: "The only way Peter can 'shepherd' Jesus' sheep is by doing himself what is expected of the sheep of the Good Shepherd: by following the Good Shepherd!" Brown's

and “*nietiging*” (detachment) at work. The road to Peter’s transformation included stops and time spent at these two mystical “stations”. Along the way, his spiritual eyes were opened to see Jesus for whom he really was. That revelatory insight led Peter to a sincere and deep felt humility in his presence, whom he also confesses as his Lord. Without these mystical experiences, his formation as one of the leading disciples would have been incomplete. Peter’s dwelling in Jesus as the ultimate mystagogue had far-reaching consequences, as stressed by Köstenberger (1998:168):

Eventually Peter’s following of Jesus will extend even to sharing with Jesus his manner of death (cf. 12:33; 21:19). The fourth evangelist pre-empts, however, the notion that faithful following of Jesus *necessarily* involves martyrdom. Hence his representative rebuke of Peter (cf. 21:20-23).³⁶³

4.6 Thomas’ search for evidence

Thomas Didimus, one of twins, who is depicted as a heavy-hearted follower of Jesus, also illustrates the effect of Jesus as mystagogue on the disciples. His appearances in the Gospel provide a clearer picture of his transformation by Jesus. The reader is struck by his negative and doubtful attitude. When Jesus decides to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, Thomas mentions to the remaining disciples: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). In this instance, Thomas reappears as a figure that, according to Collins (1990:37), embodies the bravado and ignorance of the disciples. Culpepper (1983:123) describes Thomas as “the clear-eyed realist who knows that following Jesus back to Judea means risking death. He therefore labels him as the model of the disciple who realises Jesus’ flesh but not his glory. This is quite the opposite of Peter who saw Jesus’ glory but could not agree to his suffering”. During the Farewell Discourse, Jesus prepares his disciples for his return to the Father to prepare their heavenly abode. In this instance, one recognises how Jesus as mystagogue enters into a dialogue with them. In trying to console their troubled hearts, Jesus tells them: “You know the way to the place where I am going”, to which Thomas responds: “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (14:4-5). This objection is raised by Thomas whose melancholy is known from the incident in John 11:16, as explained by Schnackenburg (1982:64). According to him, it throws light on the disciples’ slowness to understand and simultaneously provide Jesus with an opportunity to articulate his idea more precisely.

The next incident involving Thomas transpires during Jesus’ first appearance to his disciples after his Resurrection. Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus came. Therefore, the other disciples told him that they saw the Lord. He reacts with the remark: “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my

(1982a:1111) remarks bring to mind the transformative effect of Jesus on his followers: “Most commentators have found in Jesus’ thrice-repeated question ‘Do you love me?’ and in Peter’s threefold ‘You know that I love you’ a symbolic undoing of Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus. Consequently, they have seen in 15-17 Peter’s rehabilitation to discipleship after his fall.” Ridderbos (1997:665) declares: “It seems that Jesus wants to make Peter feel that, before going further with him, he must first make a fresh beginning with him.” Barrett (1978:583) goes even further: “His death by crucifixion is predicted, and he is bidden to ‘follow’.”

³⁶³ Köstenberger (1998:158) also stresses this: “Thus the disciple’s calling extends to dying the same kind of death Jesus died – though in Peter’s case without any atoning significance – as well as to ‘shepherding’ Jesus’ ‘flock’.”

finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:24-25). The following decisive transformational event took place just a week later, when Jesus appears among his disciples and invites Thomas to touch him. This brings Thomas to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and God (John 20:26-29). Thomas’ change of heart from his doubt to an almost ecstatic confession of faith, “My Lord and my God”, was a result of his prolonged exposure to Jesus. In this final episode, he not only meets Jesus again, but also sees him with the eyes of faith, face to face.³⁶⁴ Thomas also functions as a representative character in the Gospel and brings into the text the experience of future believers regarding the apparent absence of Jesus. Coloe (2007:191) remarks: “Thomas’ confession is the high point of Johannine faith, giving voice to the community’s faith in Jesus’ identity and its own self-identity as the household of God.” Jesus’ response (John 20:29) is crucial, as pointed out by Coloe (2007:191): “These are the final words of Jesus, now the risen Lord and they are a beatitude spoken into history to all communities of faith: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe’.”³⁶⁵ In the case of Thomas, one can detect the Johannine inclination towards typical mystical meaning that is not always visible on the surface of the text. Moreover, Jesus is at work in his typical role as the mystagogue in service of the Father. Thomas began in unbelief (John 20:24) but, as cited by Moloney (2013:31), the risen Lord leads him into a final complete commitment in faith. With this remark, he summarises the mystagogical activity of Jesus.

Based on the above exposition, two significant mystical elements can be identified in Thomas’ formation as disciple, so fittingly named by Waaijman (2003:61-62, 65-66) as “*schouwen*” (meeting face to face with Jesus) and “*extase*” (ecstasy, the ecstatic confession of faith). His refusal to believe the testimony by his fellow disciples is intercepted by Jesus who set into motion the final stage of Thomas’ transformation. Discovering the Resurrected One, listening to his voice, seeing and touching him resulted in a spontaneous and sincere confession. Collins (1990:37) cautions against underrating the confessional formula in John 20:28: “My Lord and my God”. He points out that it is “the sole explicit confession of the divinity of Jesus on the lips of a disciple in the entire fourth Gospel”. It is thus not surprising that the last reference to Thomas is found in John 21:2. He made sure not to miss another possible encounter with Jesus. As one of the disciples, he was present during the final appearance of Jesus at the Tiberias Lake (Sea of Galilee). The once heavy-hearted follower of Jesus was fortunate enough to be a part of the miraculous catch of fish. Ultimately, Thomas made the decision to μένειν in the True vine, experiencing the complete joy to which Jesus referred in John 15:11.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Coloe (2007:191) also highlights the importance of the confession: “I see Thomas’s confession as the high point of Johannine faith, forming an inclusion with the pronouncement at the start of the Prologue (1:1c) and appropriately bringing the narrative [to] its conclusion.” Cf. Brown (1982b:1047). Collins (1990:37) refers to faith based on the appearance of the risen Jesus as one of the most ancient and authentic resurrection traditions: “What is central to the narrative is that Jesus is truly risen and that Thomas truly believes: his faith is a resurrection faith.”

³⁶⁵ Dodd (1953:443) stresses the significance of this moment in the Passion narrative: “From this moment the company no longer consists solely of the eleven disciples gathered at that particular time and place; every reader of the Gospel who has faith, to the end of time, is included in Christ’s final beatitude: μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες. This is the true climax of the Gospel.”

³⁶⁶ Thomas began in unbelief (John 20:24) but, as cited by Moloney (2013:31), the risen Lord leads him into a final complete commitment in faith.

4.7 The disciple that Jesus loved

A discussion regarding Jesus as mystagogue in John's Gospel cannot be concluded without dealing with the Beloved Disciple.³⁶⁷ This mysterious figure plays a distinctive role in John's Gospel (13:23-26; 19:25-27, 35; 20:2-10; 21:7, 20-23, 24).³⁶⁸ A great deal has been written about the identity of the Beloved Disciple.³⁶⁹ This short discussion will focus primarily on the effect of Jesus on him/her. A very common theory is that s/he is a representative figure, the paradigm of discipleship, the ideal disciple of Jesus. Culpepper (1983:121) asserts that he was "a real historical person who has representative, paradigmatic, or symbolic significance in John".

The relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter has interested many scholars. Without going into much detail, a few remarks might add value to the current discussion. The influence of Jesus on both of them is enlightening. It appears that the fourth evangelist wanted to convey a particular understanding of this relationship, since, as Köstenberger (1998:155) points out, "the beloved disciple is in all but one occurrence closely identified with Peter (1:37-42; 6:68-70; 13:6-10, 23-25, 36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27, 35; 20:2-10; 21:7-24)". R.E. Brown (1979:83) affirms: "The Beloved Disciple was no less a real human being than was Simon Peter, but the Fourth Gospel uses each of them in a paradigmatic capacity."³⁷⁰ Ridderbos' (1997:472) explanation is significant:

What makes this witness so important and gives him a certain priority amongst the disciples next to Peter is his intimate relationship with the *earthly* Jesus, whose glory *in the flesh* he observed and experienced at such close range that he could well be called his witness per excellence.³⁷¹

The Gospel makes it clear that both Peter and the Beloved Disciple played important roles in their own right. The scenes in which they appear together define their relationship. If there is an anti-Petrine polemic in John, Culpepper (1983:122) mentions that it is defensive, rather than offensive: "In the community's Gospel it is clear that there is no basis of pressing Peter's superiority over the Beloved Disciple, but there is no denial of Peter's pastoral role either." He has a close and special

³⁶⁷ Cf. discussion in Chapter 6, section 2.3: "Μένειν and bodily space".

³⁶⁸ The references in 1:37-40 and 18:15 are debated.

³⁶⁹ For example, R.E. Brown (1979:31-34; 1982a:XCIII-IV; 1982b:1004-1008); Schnackenburg (1982:375-388); Schneiders (2003:233-254); Bultmann (1971:483-485); Culpepper (1983:121-123); Collins (1990:42-45); Charlesworth (1995:127-224). Brown (1982a:XCIV-XCVIII) summarises the possible solutions for the identity of the Beloved Disciple: he is not a real figure but a symbol; Lazarus; John Mark; John, son of Zebedee, and concludes (XCVIII): "When all is said and done the combination of external and internal evidence associating the Fourth Gospel with John, son of Zebedee, makes this the strongest hypothesis, if one is prepared to give credence to the Gospel's claim of an eyewitness source." Earlier, R.E. Brown (1979:34) declared: "[W]e cannot know the name of the Beloved Disciple, even though we can suspect: 'He is a former disciple of John the Baptist. He began following Jesus in Judaea when *Jesus himself was in close proximity to the Baptist*. He shared the life of his master during Jesus' last stay in Jerusalem. He was known to the high priest. His connection with Jesus was different from that of Peter, the representative of the Twelve.'" On the contrary, Charlesworth (1995:436) declares: "I have concluded, with some surprise and full conviction, that the best candidate for the identity of the Beloved Disciple is Thomas." Cf. Schneiders' (2003:233-254) feminist approach, especially regarding the role of Mary Magdalene.

³⁷⁰ Note should be taken of Köstenberger's (1998:158) point of view: "It is difficult to imagine a procedure that would have inserted the Beloved Disciple as an ideal figure alongside Peter, a historic figure. At the same time, the fourth evangelist appears to invest these two figures also with representative roles."

³⁷¹ In dealing with John 21, he again refers to these two disciples and reiterates their special roles as the main characters along with the risen Jesus. It includes their difference in charismas, their relationship with each other and with the Johannine community. Collins (1990:45) agrees: "[W]ithin the Johannine tradition he typifies the disciple of Jesus *par excellence*".

relationship with Jesus. However, from the moment he was lying on Jesus' bosom, he followed him so closely that he was able to become a true witness. In his own special way, most of the time operating in the background, his dwelling in Jesus bears the abundant fruit Jesus expected from his faithful followers. As Culpepper (1983:123) states: "In him belief, love, and faithful witness are joined. He abides in Jesus' love, and the Paraclete works through him." Through an intimate relationship with Jesus, even the Beloved Disciple saw and believed without seeing Jesus (John 20:8, 29b), which leads to Moloney's (2013:31) comment: "[A]ll who follow the way of the Beloved Disciple are specially blessed. They are all beloved disciples." In the Gospel, this disciple already illustrates what it means to be a true follower of Jesus as the mystagogue sent by the Father.

Finally, Collins' (1990:45) view appropriately concludes this section about Jesus as mystagogue by articulating the important role of the Beloved Disciple:

Within this Gospel the Beloved disciple is the epitome of discipleship ... In a sense, the tradition of the Fourth Gospel capsulizes in the single person of the Beloved disciple the testimony of John, the receptivity of Mary, the faith of Nathanael as well as that of the man born blind, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas. In a word, he is no longer a representative figure for the evangelist; he is *the* representative figure, the one who epitomizes all that faith in Jesus Christ implies.

5. Conclusion

This final section enriched our understanding of Jesus as mystagogue, especially in equipping believers for their part in the divine-human relationship. *ΜΕΥΕΙΝ* remains vital to secure the long-term effects of this relationship. The above cases provide a good indication of the unconditional and unlimited scope of life emanating from the true vine of John 15. As Boselli (2014:8-9) indicates:

For Gregory (Of Nazianzus) then, Jesus is the mystagogue of his disciples, and the twelve then become the initiated who in turn initiate others to the mystery of God ... We can therefore describe Jesus, with the Fourth Gospel, as the exegete of God and, with the Greek fathers, the mystagogue of God, meaning that nothing reveals the mystery of God more than the words and actions of Jesus.

Zimmerman (2006:42) rightly, to some extent, points out that the Johannine images work towards an inclusion of the recipient. This is confirmed in a unique way by the anonymity of one of the first two disciples of Jesus (John 1:35-40). Readers of the Gospel may be puzzled that the evangelist omitted one of the initial pair in concealment or even assume that the unidentified one is the Beloved Disciple. Collins (1990:55) concludes:

In a sense the presumption is true. Yet in another sense, the presumption is false since the anonymous one is the reader himself, for the story of the first encounter is the story of anyone who is truly a disciple of Jesus.

Thus, humanity is forced to make a choice: “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind’.” (John 9:39) The choice is clear. That choice is ours ...

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

A brief reflection on the results of this thesis will now be presented. In *Chapter 2*, an in-depth analysis of the Greek text of John 15 identified its cohesion, internal relationships, patterns, dominant motifs, words, and topics. Based on its occurrence and function, μένειν turned out to be among the most prominent of these.

The first part of *Chapter 3* provided a brief analysis of contemporary Johannine research that indicated its strong interest in, and occupation with historical-critical approaches to the Gospel. Despite important and helpful results, these approaches offered limited insights into the spiritual and mystical nature of the Gospel. The approaches mostly focused on textual information, with attention to sources, form, redaction, and genre, as well as contextual issues such as the socio-historical conditions in which the Gospel was written. In recent times, some theological readings understood the text in terms of key theological themes, but the spiritual nature and implications of the text were not systematically investigated. This indicated a gap in present research that requires more attention.

In *Chapter 3*, research on Spirituality was reviewed in order to provide methodological and theoretical insights for a spiritual and mystical reading of John's Gospel. Helpful was Waaijman's description of Spirituality that provided a fitting model to analyse the Gospel and John 15, in particular. His model describes Spirituality in terms of the ongoing and transformative divine-human relationship. In terms of John 15, this model reveals that Jesus' disciples, as representatives of the human pole, are transformed by the selfless love of Jesus, as the representative of the divine Father, in order to bear abundant and lasting fruit. Such Spirituality bears testimony to the everlasting life they inherited from the Father, through Jesus under the guidance of the Paraclete. The investigation then focused on mysticism as the heart of Spirituality. Research on the general nature of mysticism and on mysticism in John's Gospel was analysed. Attention was paid to the seminal work of Kanagaraj, Waaijman, DeConick, and Schäfer. The investigation revealed not only difference on a definition of mysticism, but also some agreement that mysticism reflects the consciousness of an intimate relationship with God. It is about life *coram Deo* and awareness of being in the ongoing presence of God. Attention was also paid to contextual forms of mysticism, with analyses of mystical movements in the time of John, including Jewish, Hellenistic, and Palestinian mysticism. It included reflection on the experiences of Biblical figures such as Ezekiel, Daniel, Moses, and Isaiah. An important part of this Chapter was exploring similarities between Merkabah mysticism as a mystical movement and Johannine thought. The 10 characteristics of mysticism identified by Waaijman (2003:57-68) as well as the 11 elements of mysticism in John's Gospel identified by Kanagaraj (1998:312-317) turned out to be vital for this study. The similarities do not necessarily reveal any influences, especially given the striking differences. The Johannine author turned out to be an independent thinker, reworking the mystical traditions in terms of his own theology and in light of the words, works, and person of Jesus.

Chapter 4 investigated the spiritual and mystical dimensions in the Gospel of John. It began with an analysis of the relation of John 15 with its previous parts. There is a literary build-up of occurrences of μένειν in the Gospel that prepare readers for its use in John 15. This analysis showed a pattern of incidences of indwelling with positive and negative associations. The Chapter then analysed the immediate literary context of John 15. This Chapter is part of the carefully structured Farewell Discourse in John 13-17. The understanding of John 15 is influenced by its place in the Farewell Discourse. Key terms in the remainder of John's Gospel tied to the Farewell Discourse were identified. These analyses show how the Farewell Discourse focuses on the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples by the use of distinctive language and symbols such as the vine metaphor in John 15. Jesus assures his disciples of his presence at the time of separation and farewell. The developing union between them and Jesus, as expressed by μένειν, confirms his intimate presence among them, even after his imminent departure.

Chapters 5-7 formed the heart of this thesis and investigated the mystical nature of John 15, with μένειν as key term and focus. Suggestions as to the spiritual nature of the Gospel in Chapters 2 and 3 were developed in more detail and specifically in terms of their mystical nature. The mystical reading was done in *three parts*. The exposition in *Chapter 5* focused on divine initiative, ongoing involvement, and activities. The intimate relation with God, reflected in the key mystical motif of indwelling, is built on the firm belief that a life in union with God is not only a possibility, but also a reality. Not only Jesus, but also the Trinity is depicted as dwelling in humanity. This underlines the power of Jesus in John's Gospel as a divine figure, but it also illuminates the dedication of the divine in its fullness to the relationship with humanity. The divine initiative is indicated by the use of the self-revealing ἐγώ εἰμι formula (with its Old Testament roots), by the description of Jesus as the true vine, and in terms of the Father and the Paraclete as the Spirit of truth. The abundant involvement of the Trinity underlines the grace that is implied in the Johannine μένειν. Indwelling is a gift of grace that is bestowed on, and given to humanity.

The role of Jesus in John's Gospel in the indwelling reveals how John's own faith experience influenced his mystical understanding and its transformation of other mystical movements such as Merkabah mysticism. John's spiritual and mystical understanding of the divine is detected in different sections of the Gospel. Although there are similarities with mystical movements and thought, there are also major differences. Heavenly ascents to experience union with God are not found in the Gospel. These ascents become redundant, since they were replaced by indwelling in Jesus (μένειν). In one instance, angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man (John 1:51), not a mystic who embarks on heavenly journeys. Even the contrary seems to be the case: it is not a mystic who ascends and descends, but Jesus as divine figure who descended from heaven (John 3:13-15) and who will again ascend to his Father (John 16:61-63). Even more drastic is the substitution of the divine glory on the throne-chariot with Jesus on the cross. In the process, John's cross mysticism replaces the throne mysticism of Merkabah mysticism. This section supplied overwhelming evidence regarding the revelation of different elements of mystical Spirituality that were

previously concealed. In the centre of the disclosure is the mystical concept of indwelling so exceptionally depicted by the verb μένειν.

Chapter 6, as the *second part* of the mystical reading of μένειν, focused on the human side of the mutual indwelling (John 15:4-5). The discussion concentrated on concepts with mystical undertones that illuminate this aspect. The loss experienced by believers as a result of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD explains Jesus' invitation to find a new home in him (cf. John 2:13-22). Those who made their dwelling in him came to be known as disciples, an indication of their new identity in Jesus. The mutual indwelling of John 15 implied drastic transformation, and μένειν turned out to be essential for discipleship. Over time, his individual followers grew into a new community of friendship love. Apart from using μένειν to articulate the call to remain in Jesus, it is also directly linked to the words and love of Jesus. Of utmost importance in maintaining the reciprocal relationship is dwelling (μένειν) in the words of Jesus. His words cleansed them (John 15:3) and should continually dwell in them (John 15:7). Dwelling (μένειν) in the selfless love of Jesus (15:9) brings about the enduring transformation of the community's way of life. Their conduct must be in accordance with the new love commandment of Jesus (John 13:34; 15:12-17).

There can be no uncertainty regarding the importance of abundant and lasting bearing of fruit in the Gospel of John (15:2-5, 8, 16). Bearing fruit should become visible through the life of a disciple. This was illustrated in a discussion of some of the consequences of mutual indwelling detectable throughout John 15.³⁷² The mystical nature of the concept of prayer (15:7, 16) was discussed. To μένειν in Jesus and his words guarantees enduring contact between him and his disciples. Prayer also opens the door to direct contact with the Father as the ultimate vinegrower. Another important mystical motif is glory (John 15:8). The introductory chapters already revealed its spiritual importance. The transformation effected by indwelling and its abundant bearing of fruit leads to divine glory. In John 17:1, prayer and glorification are linked to each other.

The concept of joy turned out to be a seminal motif in John's Gospel, especially in the Farewell Discourse. The discussion revealed that joy is surprisingly central in both John 15:11 and John 17:13. This joy is characteristic of those who experience an enduring intimate relationship with God in Christ. Complete inner joy is the awareness and delight of the presence of God in Jesus who mediated the divine presence among people. A joyous life to the glory of God forms part of ecstasy, devoting oneself to continued divine-human indwelling. John also echoes the ultimate mystical goal of believers – unity with the divine through μένειν. Indwelling of God and unity are closely related. The reciprocity of John 15 characterises the mystical union between God and a person. Consequently, unity turned out to be an essential feature of a life transformed by mutual indwelling.

The intimacy of indwelling is illustrated by its counterpart of not dwelling in God. The disciples are warned about the ever-present temptation to turn their back on Jesus, become part of the world (in a negative sense) and be children of the devil. This will destroy the indwelling of God and its fruits of love. Such a

³⁷² Most of these notions relate to the characteristics of mysticism, as pointed out by Waaijman (2002). For a discussion, see Chapter 3, section 6.1.

decision will lead to a life characterised by sin, hatred, and a lack of knowledge. Such a miserable life will, in turn, end in death as the punishment of sin. Not dwelling in God means a life that ends in destruction and hatred.

Another important feature of bearing fruit is witnessing on behalf of Jesus. The effects of μένειν on the human pole of the divine-human relationship are illuminated by the way in which the faithful followers of Jesus will be strengthened in their discipleship. Despite the looming threat of hatred by the world, Jesus' followers are called to witnessing under the guidance of the Paraclete. The disciples' new status comprises the empowerment by the Paraclete or Spirit of truth that will protect them in a powerful manner from the hatred of the world. In addition, any form of hardship recalls pruning (John 15:2) as part of the ongoing transformation of the disciples, yielding an abundance of spiritual fruit. Jesus thus encourages disciples to persevere and to stay firm in their faith through mutual indwelling. The importance of the notion of faith in John can hardly be overestimated. The fundamental choice to follow Jesus and to dwell in him sets in motion a mystic's spiritual journey. Finally, indwelling has a lasting impact that is mystically brought to fruition in daily life through commitment and perseverance.

To arrive at a more complete understanding of the comprehensiveness of μένειν in John, some mystagogical elements in the Gospel are highlighted in *Chapter 7*. In the Gospel, Jesus reminds one of a mystagogue for his disciples and people in general. As illustrated in *Chapter 4*, there is a build-up of meaning for μένειν leading up to John 15 that serves as a décor for a more complete understanding of this unique verb in the Gospel. Interpreting previous encounters with Jesus from the perspective of John 15 proved to be illuminating. This is especially relevant regarding his role as a mystagogue. John depicts Jesus as the caring guide who accompanies some of the main characters in the Gospel. He dwells with them on their spiritual journey and brings them to a deeper understanding of their relationship with the divine.

Several examples were discussed to elucidate Jesus' role as mystagogue. The intimate relationship with them and his desire to remain a presence in their lives are noted in his mystical guidance of the first disciples who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus, in his conversation with Nathanael the man of little faith, with Nicodemus a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, with the Samaritan woman who became a disciple and apostle, with the self-assured and talkative Simon Peter who disowned Jesus, with the doubting Thomas Didimus, and finally, with the enigmatic Beloved Disciple. This wide range of people from different spheres of society aptly illustrated Jesus' power to overwhelm seekers with his unselfish love and humility and guide them to become part of a new community of truth and love. This Chapter challenges contemporary readers to reflect on ultimate values. It suggests the need to reflect on the devastating effects of materialism and consumerism on communities of faith and society, in general. It raises questions as to what extent a transformational relationship with the Trinity has been sacrificed on the altar of prosperity religion. The global trend towards self-centredness is in stark contrast to a life of self-surrender aimed at the good of others. Jesus' humility and selfless love are offered as substitute for all the egocentricity, hate and conflict across the globe, and even in churches. Jesus exhorts believers who are experiencing hostility from

the world, not to be disheartened, but to continue witnessing under the guidance of the Spirit of truth. Such a way of life ought to be grounded in the mutual indwelling, as described in John 15, with the resultant fruits Jesus promised his faithful disciples and friends. This is but one insight among many others to be gained from reading John 15 in light of its spiritual and mystical nature.

The transformational effects of such readings are not only rewarding, but also limitless. Reading and studying the Biblical text leads to a testimony that is of self-implicating character, as Schneiders explains (1999:136):

[T]estimony is both the most reliable of human communications because of its highly self-implicating character and yet limited in so many ways that no absolute claim to inerrancy, infallibility, or total adequacy of any human testimony can be taken seriously by anyone who understands the nature of human experience and language.

The divine-human relationship realised by μένειν fixates the mystics' eyes on the complete and glorious unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17. With his words in their heart, they live a selfless life with his final triumphal cry echoing in their ears, “τετέλεσται – it is accomplished.”³⁷³

We become mystics or contemplatives only through the grace of God at work in our lives. Contemplation and mysticism are always gifts from God (McColman 2010:123).

Soli Deo Gloria

³⁷³ Cf. John 19:17.

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Addendum 1

The Greek text of John 15 (Nestle Aland)³⁷⁴

15 Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινὴ καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστιν. ²πᾶν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν αἶρει αὐτό, καὶ πᾶν τὸ καρπὸν φέρον καθαίρει αὐτὸ ἵνα καρπὸν πλείονα φέρῃ. ³ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροὶ ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν· ⁴μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν. καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένῃ ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε. ⁵ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα. ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ οὗτος φέρει καρπὸν πολὺν, ὅτι χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν. ⁶ἐὰν μὴ τις μένῃ ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη καὶ συνάγουσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται. ⁷ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ τὰ ῥήματα μου ἐν ὑμῖν μείνῃ, ὃ ἐὰν θέλητε αἰτήσασθε, καὶ γενήσεται ὑμῖν. ⁸ἐν τούτῳ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ πατήρ μου, ἵνα καρπὸν πολὺν φέρητε καὶ γένησθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί. ⁹Καθὼς ἠγάπησεν με ὁ πατήρ, καγὼ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα· μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ. ¹⁰ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου, καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ πατρός μου τητήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.

¹¹Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ καὶ ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πληρωθῇ. ¹²Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμὴ, ἵνα ἀγαπάτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς. ¹³μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ. ¹⁴ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν. ¹⁵οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους, ὅτι ὁ δούλος οὐκ οἶδεν τί ποιεῖ αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος· ὑμᾶς δὲ εἶρηκα φίλους, ὅτι πάντα ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν. ¹⁶οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑπάγητε καὶ καρπὸν φέρητε καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὑμῶν μένῃ, ἵνα ὃ τι ἂν αἰτήσητε τὸν πατέρα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου δῶ ὑμῖν.

¹⁷ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπάτε ἀλλήλους.

¹⁸Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν. ¹⁹εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἦτε, ὁ κόσμος ἂν τὸ ἴδιον ἐφίλει· ὅτι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἐστέ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, διὰ τοῦτο μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος. ²⁰μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγου οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν· οὐκ ἔστιν δούλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ. εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν· εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν, καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν. ²¹ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ποιήσουσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου, ὅτι οὐκ οἶδασιν τὸν πέμψαντα με. ²²εἰ μὴ ἦλθον καὶ ἐλάλησα αὐτοῖς, ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον· νῦν δὲ πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν περὶ τῆς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν. ²³ὁ ἐμὲ μισῶν καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου μισεῖ. ²⁴εἰ τὰ ἔργα μὴ ἐποίησα ἐν αὐτοῖς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος ἐποίησεν, ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον· νῦν δὲ καὶ ἑώρακασιν καὶ μεμισήκασιν καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου. ²⁵ἀλλ' ἵνα πληρωθῇ ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένος ὅτι ἐμίσησαν με δωρεάν.

²⁶Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρός ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ· ²⁷καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε.

³⁷⁴ Aland et al. (1983).

Addendum 2

New International Version (NIV) translation of John 15:1-27

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not abide in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. ¹⁸ “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’^[a] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’ ²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Addendum 3

Smalley's summary (1978:91-2)³⁷⁵

	Sign	Discourse	"I am" saying
1	Water into wine (John 2)	New life (John 3)	The true vine (John 15:1)
2	The official's son (4)	Water of life (4)	The way, and the truth, and the life (14:6)
3	The sick man (5)	Son, life-giver (6)	The door of the sheep (10:7)
4	The five thousand fed (6)	Bread of life (6) and Spirit of life (7)	The bread of life (6:35)
5	The blind man (9)	Light of life (8)	The light of the world (8:12)
6	Lazarus (11)	Shepherd, life-giver (10)	The resurrection and the life (11:25)
7	The catch of fish (21)	Disciple life (14-16)	The good shepherd (10:11)

³⁷⁵ Cf. footnote 205.

MENEIN AS KEY TO A MYSTICAL READING OF JOHN 15

Summary

Amongst the most quoted verses in John is, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (John 15:4). The importance of the verb μένειν is highlighted by the fact that of the forty occurrences in the Gospel, eleven are found in John 15. Based on historical-critical exegesis it would refer to faithful fellowship with Jesus as the true vine.

However, contemporary research provided methodological and theoretical insights for a spiritual and mystical reading of John's Gospel. The ultimate aim of this thesis is to utilize μένειν as key for a mystical reading of John 15. Waaijman's description of spirituality as the ongoing and transformative divine-human relationship provided a fitting guide to analyse biblical texts. This model reveals disciples as representatives of the human pole transformed by the selfless love of Jesus in order to bear abundant and lasting fruit. The subsequent investigation into mysticism is based on seminal work by researchers such as Kanagaraj, Waaijman, DeConick, Schäfer. Some agreement exists that mysticism reflects the consciousness of an intimate relationship with God. Similarities between Merkabah mysticism and Johannine thought will be explored. The characteristics of mysticism identified by Waaijman and Kanagaraj turned out to be vital. The Johannine author confirms to be an independent thinker reworking mystical traditions in terms of his own theology.

The literary build-up of μένειν in the Gospel as well as its usage in the Farewell discourse (John 13-17) aids readers in understanding its distinctive use in John 15.

The first part of the expositional reading of μένειν in John 15 focusses on the divine. The intimate relationship with God is built on the firm belief that a life in union with God is not merely a possibility, but a reality. Jesus, as well as the Trinity, dwells in humanity. The role of Jesus reveals how John's own faith experience influenced his mystical understanding of movements like Merkabah Mysticism by pointing out similarities and major differences. Formerly concealed elements of mystical spirituality by the use of μένειν are illustrated.

The second part of the mystical reading of μένειν focusses on the human side. Those who made their dwelling in Jesus came to be known as disciples, indicating their new identity in him. The mutual indwelling of John 15 implied drastic transformation and μένειν turned out

to be crucial .Abundant and lasting fruit becomes visible through conduct in accordance with the new love commandment of Jesus. The effects of mutual indwelling are discussed with reference to concepts like the ensuing community of friendship, the words and love of Jesus, prayer, joy, witnessing on behalf of Jesus, pruning, faith and, finally, lasting impact. The counterpart of not dwelling in God leads to a life ending in destruction and hatred.

For a more complete understanding of the comprehensiveness of μένειν some mystagogical elements in the Gospel are discussed. Jesus reminds one of a mystagogue by the way he accompanies some of the main characters in the Gospel. Through personal attention, he offers them a deeper spiritual relationship with the divine. Examples include the first disciples who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Simon Peter, Thomas Didimus, and the Beloved Disciple.

The results of utilising μένειν as key for a mystical reading of John 15 confirm the validity of this project. It is in line with contemporary research and opens up exiting new avenues for the mystical reading of biblical texts. The enriching effect of such readings is self-evident.

Keywords:

John 15

Spirituality

Mysticism

Indwelling (mutual)

Opsomming

Van die mees bekende woorde in Johannes is waarskynlik “Julle moet in my bly soos ek in julle” (Johannes 15:4). Die belangrikheid van die werkwoord μένειν wat Johannes hier gebruik, is geleë in die feit dat elf van die veertig voorkomste in die evangelie in Johannes 15 te vinde is. Gebaseer op histories-kritiese eksegetiese sou die gebruik van μένειν hier ’n baie besondere verhouding met Jesus as die ware wingerdstok impliseer.

Meer resente navorsing het metodologiese en teoretiese insigte opgelewer wat ’n spirituele en mistieke lees van die evangelie van Johannes moontlik maak. Aansluitend daarby is die doel met hierdie navorsingsprojek om μένειν te gebruik as die invalshoek vir ’n mistieke lees van Johannes 15. Waaijman se beskrywing van spiritualiteit as die volgehoue transformatiewe God-mens verhouding blyk ’n gepaste model te wees vir ’n spirituele lees van bybelse tekste. Daarvolgens verteenwoordig dissipels die menslike pool wat getransformeer moet word op voetspoor van Jesus se selflose liefde. Vervolgens val die fokus op ’n mistieke lees in navoring van baanbrekerswerk deur onder andere Waaijman, Kanagaraj, DeConick en Schäfer. Redelike konsensus bestaan dat mistiek verstaan kan word as ’n volgehoue bewussyn van die teenwoordigheid van God. Ooreenkomste tussen Merkevah mistiek en die Johannese denkwêreld word ondersoek. Die kenmerke van mistiek soos geïdentifiseer deur Waaijman en Kanagaraj is van deurslaggewende belang. Die outeur van die evangelie bevestig sy onafhanklikheid deur ’n eiesoortige verwerking van die mistieke tradisies van sy tyd gebaseer op sy eie teologiese raamwerk.

Die literêre dekor van μένειν word ondersoek deur die opbou van voorafgaande voorkomste na te gaan, sowel as die besondere betekenis daarvan binne die Afskeidsgesprekke (Joh.13 – 17) .

Die eerste fase van die mistieke ondersoek na μένειν in Johannes 15 laat die soeklig val op die goddelike inisiatief. Dit bevestig die oortuiging dat ’n intieme verhouding met God nie net ’n moontlikheid is nie, maar ’n realiteit. Dié goddelikke inwoning is ook nie beperk tot Jesus nie, maar die volledige Drie–Eenheid vorm deel van dié misterie. Die beskrywing van Jesus se rol verrai die mate waarin Johannes se eie geloofservaring sy verstaan van bewegings soos die Merkevah mistiek gekleur het. Ooreenkomste sowel as verskille met bestaande mistieke bewegings word aangetoon. Voorheen verborge aspekte van mistieke spiritualiteit word deursigtig deur die gebruik van die Johannese μένειν.

Die tweede fase van die mistieke lees fokus op die menslike pool van μένειν. Diegene wat in Jesus 'n nuwe tuiste vind verkry terselfdertyd 'n nuwe identiteit as sy dissipels. Die wedersydse inwoning in Johannes 15 veronderstel drastiese transformasie waarin die rol van μένειν strategies is. Die dra van oorvloedige en blywende spirituele vrug word sigbaar deur 'n lewenswyse gerig deur die nuwe liefdesgebod van Jesus. Die effek van wedersydse inwoning word bespreek met verwysing na aspekte soos die totstandkoming van 'n nuwe gemeenskap van vriende, die woorde en liefde van Jesus, gebed, vreugde, getuienis aangaande Jesus en geloof - as blywende resultate. Die keuse teen inwoning lei tot 'n destruktiewe lewe gekenmerk deur haat.

Ter wille van 'n meer omvattende verstaan van die ingrypende aard van μένειν word 'n paar voorbeelde van mistagogie in die evangelie aangetoon. Jesus se rol as mistagoog ontplooi in sy begeleiding van sommige hoofkarakters in die evangelie. Tydens persoonlike ontmoetings bied hy aan hulle 'n dieper spirituele verhouding met God. Voorbeelde sluit in die eerste dissipels wat Johannes die Doper verlaat het om Jesus te volg, Nathanael, Nikodemus, die Samaritaanse vrou, Simon Petrus, Thomas Didimus, asook die Geliefde dissipel.

Die resultate van die aanwending van μένειν as sleutelbegrip vir 'n mistieke lees van Johannes 15 bevestig die geldigheid van hierdie navorsingsprojek. Dit stem ooreen met kontemporêre navorsingsresultate en baan opwindende nuwe weë vir die spirituele lees van bybelse tekste.

Trefwoorde:

Johannes 15

Spiritualiteit

Mistiek

Inwoning (wedgesydse)