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**Drawing and Transcending Boundaries  
in the New Testament and Early Christianity**

## Chapter 3

### The Philosophical-Religious Hybridity in John 6 and Its Reception in the Commentaries of Origen and John Chrysostom

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#### Introduction

When reflecting on the dynamics of drawing and transcending boundaries, one has to deal with identity and boundaries. The author(s) of John was part of his *Umwelt* and had the challenge of constructing identity in both an inclusive and an exclusive manner. The inclusive dimension of identity entails those aspects of identity which the Johannine author/group shared with their philosophical-religious *Umwelt* (inclusive dimension), but also the fine lines of boundaries between themselves and their *Umwelt*, distinguishing the group from those they considered to be part of the outgroup(s) (exclusive dimension) (Kok and Roth 2014). In the formation of early Christian identity, a complex interchange between religious and philosophical traditions occurred that resulted in new hybrid concepts. Delving deeper into the hybridity of John's Gospel and its reception by early Christian philosophers will help us better understand the dynamics of the relationship between religious and philosophical traditions in early Christianity. In the last years, we have seen a renewed interest in reflection on the relationship between John and philosophy, and this provides us with fresh perspectives on these topics which we would like to put forward and develop in this chapter.

#### The revival of interest in the relationship between John's Gospel and Hellenistic philosophy

Engberg-Pedersen recently published a new study on the relationship between John's Gospel and ancient Greek philosophy via Oxford University Press. This new publication is indicative of the revival of interest in correlation between the Gospel of John and Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-20th century onwards,

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<sup>2</sup> The schools that emerged in the period beginning with Alexander's death (323 BCE) and ending at 30 BCE, i.e. the Hellenistic era, survived into the early Roman imperial period. Such the case with Cynics, Stoics, Sceptics and Epicureans. Therefore, the term

the discovery of the Qumran writings (1947-1956) influenced the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel so significantly that the origin of the Gospel of John was claimed to have been found (Kuhn 1950:210). The Gospel of John was considered as “the most Jewish of the Gospels“ (Attridge 2012b:33). The end of the 20th century, however, has shown a new interest in John's Hellenistic-philosophical background. This increased interest is strongly related to a new view of ancient philosophy that developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Pierre Hadot emphasised in particular that schools of the imperial era grasped philosophy as a way of life that leads man to moral perfection. This does not mean that the schools of the imperial era do not reflect on physical theory and ontological problems or that they conduct exegetical and analytical exercises but they put emphasis on more tangible aspects of human life as well as on the quest for the purification and therapy of sick souls. Therefore, Hellenistic philosophy can be defined as a way of life determined by theory (*theoriebestimmte Lebensweise* according to Dihle (2008:14)). In this paper, I also take this concept of philosophy as a starting point.

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sharp juxtaposition of religion and philosophy in antiquity has been increasingly questioned. Other “classical” distinctions, such as the trichotomy between Christianity, Judaism and Paganism, are also gradually being abandoned in favour of models that better describe the Hellenistic world. This is the case, for example, with the application of the concept of hybridity (cultural hybridity and hybrid identity) for the interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and primitive Christianity to Hellenism.<sup>3</sup> This is because traditions of the ancient Mediterranean are in a dynamic state of interchange, creating new hybrid forms of cultural expression during the globalisation process in the early imperial era. Consequently, I will try to interpret John 6 against the backdrop of this new state of research.

In this context, the discussion about John's position relative to philosophical discourses of the Hellenistic environment is revived (Schnelle 2016). In 1996, the first volumes of the “Neuer Wettstein” were published, containing source material with Hellenistic parallels to John's Gospel (2001). Craig Keener's commentary on John (2003) additionally provided a vast number of parallels from ancient Greek literature, which shows the great dynamics of Johannine language for the Hellenistic world. In addition, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold (2006, 2008) reflects on the religious-philosophical aesthetics of the Fourth Gospel in several studies and presents John's points of contact with early imperial religious-philosophical literature. Harold Attridge (2012a), George Parsenius (2017) and George van Kooten (2005) also shed light on literary and genre-relevant affinities

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“Hellenistic philosophy” refers to thinkers not only from the Hellenistic time but also in the early Roman imperial era. See Adamson (2015:145-52).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of hybridity was shaped in the 1990s by the work of Bhabha (1994). Since then it has also been applied to research of Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic world and the Roman imperial period. See representatively Lyman (2003), Charles (2009), and Newman (2017).

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with ancient Greek philosophy. Finally, Troels Engberg-Pedersen (2017) and his pupil Gitte Buch-Hansen (2010) represent a radical perspective in this new period, since they try to interpret the whole Gospel of John exclusively from Stoicism.

### **The context of John 6, the traditional- and religious-historical background of 6:51-58**

The so-called Bread of Life speech, which probably interprets the practice of the early Christian communal meal, belongs to a chapter introduced by a reference that Jesus went up the mountain (cf. the allusion to Moses' role on Mount Sinai) and that it was near the Passover. The reference to Passover points out that the next miraculous feeding of the five thousand has a symbolic meaning in relation to the Jewish Pasha festival, for the first Christological title given to Jesus in John's narrative is "Lamb of God" (1:29,36). So Jesus is understood as the Paschal Lamb in the Fourth Gospel. He is sacrificed and pierced like a lamb on the day before the Passover, according to the Johannine Passion narrative. Likewise, Jesus' last supper takes place before the Pascha (13:1). Therefore, the stories regarding the miraculous feeding (6:5–13), and Jesus's walking on the sea (6:16–21), as well as the Bread of Life discourse, are put in the context of this feast and give the reader the impulse to interpret the Jewish Passover from a Christocentric perspective. The narratives regarding the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the sea occur also in Mark and Matthew but there is no clear dependence of John on the Synoptics.

It is characteristic that John twice employs the expression "he gave thanks" (6:11,23) instead of the verb "blessed" (Mark 6:41) in the account of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, thus probably alluding to early Christian interpretations of the communal meal as thanksgiving (εὐχαριστεῖν). This miraculous feeding story also has a striking ecclesiological background<sup>4</sup> as well as literal and motivic affinities to the Pauline and Lucan traditions of the Lord's Supper. John uses the same verbs [λαμβάνειν, εὐχαριστεῖν, (δια)-διδόναι] and the noun bread (ἄρτος) that occur in the relevant Pauline and Lucan Texts. There are also etymologically (κλᾶν/κλάσμα) or semantically (σῶμα/σάρξ) related terms which link not only the miracle of feeding the five thousand but also the Bread of Life speech (v. 51) with very early traditions<sup>5</sup> regarding Christological interpretation of the communal meal (related terms are written in **bold**):

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. use of the number twelve for the baskets of leftovers and the apostles representing the eschatological people of twelve tribes 6:13,67,70.

<sup>5</sup> See also in Didache (9:1-10:1) a.o. use of the terms κλάσμα, συνάγω and ἐμπίπλημι: Περὶ δὲ τῆς εὐχαριστίας οὕτως **εὐχαριστήσατε** <sup>2</sup> πρῶτον περὶ τοῦ **ποτηρίου** **Εὐχαριστοῦμέν** σοι πάτερ ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀγίας ἀμπέλου Δαυεὶδ τοῦ παιδός σου ἧς ἐγνώρισας ἡμῖν διὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου σοὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας <sup>3</sup> περὶ δὲ τοῦ **κλάσματος** **Εὐχαριστοῦμέν** σοι πάτερ ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς ζωῆς καὶ γνώσεως ἧς ἐγνώρισας

John 6:11–13: ἔλαβεν οὖν τοὺς ἄρτους ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εὐχαριστήσας διέδωκεν τοῖς ἀνακειμένοις ὡς δὲ ἐνεπλήσθησαν, λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· συναγάγετε τὰ περισσεύσαντα κλάσματα, ἵνα μὴ τι ἀπόληται

6:23 ἔφαγον τὸν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου

6:51 ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς.

1 Corinthians 11:23-24a: ἔλαβεν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν·

Luke 22:19: λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον·

The triplet manna, communion meal and apostasy that characterises the contexts of John 6 also occurs in Paul (1 Cor 10). This affinity proves that both Paul and John understood the communal meal christologically and as a completion of God's sign given to Israel's fathers in the desert. Though the heavenly bread prevents from death, the danger of apostasy remains for both Pauline and Johannine converts:

John 6:49–50.66: οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν ἔφαγον ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τὸ μάννα καὶ ἀπέθανον· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβαίνων, ἵνα τις ἐξ αὐτοῦ φάγη καὶ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ. ... 66 Ἐκ τούτου πολλοὶ [ἐκ] τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἀπήλθον εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ οὐκέτι μετ' αὐτοῦ περιεπάτουν.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4.12: οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες ὑπὸ τὴν νεφέλῃν ἦσαν, καὶ πάντες διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης διήλθον καὶ πάντες εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθησαν ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ καὶ πάντες τὸ αὐτὸ πνευματικὸν βρῶμα ἔφαγον καὶ πάντες τὸ αὐτὸ πνευματικὸν ἔπιον πόμα· ἔπιον γὰρ ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας, ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός ... Ὡστε ὁ δοκῶν ἐστάναι βλεπέτω μὴ πέσῃ.

In the same context, Jesus is described not only as the expected Jewish Messiah or as the New Moses, but also implicitly as an ideal sage, as a new Socrates (Siegert 2008:111). Many characteristics of the text demonstrate this comparison. He renounces the glorification of men and ministries (5:34,41,44; 6:15; 7:18)<sup>6</sup> while his opponents, like the sophists, seek human recognition.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, Jesus retreats when the people want to make him king (6:15) and later he appears

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ἡμῖν διὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου σοὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας <sup>4</sup> ὥσπερ ἦν τοῦτο τὸ κλάσμα διεσκορπισμένον ἐπάνω τῶν ὀρέων καὶ συναχθὲν ἐγένετο ἐν οὕτω συναχθῆτω σου ἡ ἐκκλησία ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν <sup>5</sup> ὅτι σοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας μηδεὶς δὲ φαγέτω μηδὲ πιέτω ἀπὸ τῆς εὐχαριστίας ὑμῶν ἀλλ' οἱ βαπτισθέντες εἰς ὄνομα κυρίου καὶ γὰρ περὶ τούτου εἶρηκεν ὁ κύριος Μὴ δῶτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσί. <sup>1</sup> Μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐμπλησθῆναι οὕτως εὐχαριστήσατε (Audet 1958:24–28).

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, *Virt. prof.* 77e: καθάπερ φασὶ Σέξτιον τὸν Ῥωμαῖον ἀφεικότα τὰς ἐν τῇ πόλει τιμὰς καὶ ἀρχὰς διὰ φιλοσοφίαν (Babbitt 1927:414).

<sup>7</sup> Dio Chrysotom, *Hom. Sacr.* 55.7. Plutarch also mentions the dispute between philosophers and legislators, Plutarch, *Amat.* 763a-d.

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again to offer men the “true bread”, thus to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Platonic Socrates compares physical hunger and thirst with the mental states of ignorance and folly, which can only be remedied by turning to the truth (*Resp* 9.585<sup>8</sup>; cf. Matt 5:6). It is significant that later in John 8 the Johannine Jesus summarises his protrope, i.e. his exhortation to turn to faith in Him, on the basis of the philosophical concept of liberating knowledge: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (8:32) (see further Kirchschräger (2008:251-269, 2010:45-63). According to Keener (2003:748) “Hellenistic circles spoke of wisdom or knowledge and virtue that brought such freedom, just as falsehood produced enslavement”.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, not only at the time of Plato, but also in the Roman imperial era, the longing for philosophy is compared with hunger and thirst (ἀλλὰ πείνη τινὶ καὶ δίψῃ πάθος ὁμοιον). Those who do not have this desire, according to Plutarch, give up philosophical life (τελευτῶντες ἐξέκαμον καὶ ἀπηγόρευσαν<sup>10</sup>). Apostasy from the teacher (cf. John 6:66) is a phenomenon that also occurs in philosophical traditions (Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* 5.39). The Johannine Jesus has further characteristics in chapter 6 also found in Hellenistic representations of ideal sages, e.g. Apollonius of Tyana. He breaks the laws of nature (he walks on the sea), he has power over the storm and is omniscient (6:64,70 cf. 13:18; 16:30)<sup>11</sup>. In the case of the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, a tradition referring to his divine sonship exists, but at the same time, a claim to a normal ancestry from a natural father can be found<sup>12</sup> (cf. John 1:45; 6:42). Similarly, Jesus appears as a physician in a literal (John 6:2) and metaphorical sense (12:40) for he offers his body and flesh as a medicine that prevents from dying (6:54<sup>13</sup>) in a time when

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<sup>8</sup> *Resp.* 9.585: Οὐχὶ πείνα καὶ δίψα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κενώσεις τινές εἰσιν τῆς περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἕξεως; — Τί μὴν; — Ἄγνοια δὲ καὶ ἀφροσύνη ἄρ' οὐ κενότης ἐστὶ τῆς περὶ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕξεως; — Μάλα γε. — Οὐκοῦν πληροῖτ' ἂν ὅ τε τροφῆς μεταλαμβάνων καὶ ὁ νοῦν ἴσχων; — Πῶς δ' οὐ; — Πλήρωσις δὲ ἀληθεστέρα τοῦ ἥττον ἢ τοῦ μᾶλλον ὄντος; — Δῆλον ὅτι τοῦ μᾶλλον. — Πότερα οὖν ἡγήτῃ τὰ γένη μᾶλλον καθαρᾶς οὐσίας μετέχειν, τὰ οἶον σίτου τε καὶ ποτοῦ καὶ ὄψου καὶ συμπάσης τροφῆς, ἢ τὸ δόξης τε ἀληθοῦς εἶδος καὶ ἐπιστήμης καὶ νοῦ καὶ συλλήβδην αὐτοῦ πάσης ἀρετῆς (S.R. Slings 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Keener refers to the following texts: Cicero, *Parad.* 33–41; Seneca, *Lucil.* 27.4; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 2.72; 7.1.33; Plutarch *Lect.* 1, *Mor.* 37e; 4 Macc 14:2. Marcus Aurelius, *Ad se ipsum* 8.1 cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.17.28.

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *Virt. prof.* 77a-c.

<sup>11</sup> Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.14.

<sup>12</sup> Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.6: Οἱ μὲν δὴ ἐγγώριοι φασὶ παῖδα τοῦ Διὸς τὸν Ἀπολλώνιον γεγενῆσθαι, ὁ δ' ἀνὴρ Ἀπολλωνίου ἑαυτὸν καλεῖ (Kayser 1870:5).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ignatius, *Eph.* 20.2: Ἐνα ἄρτον κλώντες ὃς ἐστὶν φάρμακον ἀθανασίας ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός (Camelot 1958:90).

philosophy is described as medicine and the philosopher as a doctor according to the Socratic model.<sup>14</sup>

The disciples are also presented as in need of instruction (6:7–9). They have the opportunity, however, to experience an ontological change, that is, a transition from death to life, from the realm of the flesh (in an ontological sense) to the sphere of the Spirit by participating in the bread of life (John 5:24; 3:36; 4:14; 6:47–51; 17:3). However, for this they must not only be attracted or inspired by God (John 6:44<sup>15</sup>), as was believed about Greek poets that they were ruled by God and seized by the Muses,<sup>16</sup> but they must also hear the Word of Jesus, learn it, and remain with Him willingly. In chapter 6, the disciples embody different types of philosophy students: some are making progress in the *paideia* of Jesus and others are returning to their former state.

The Johannine amalgam of Jewish and Hellenistic elements is not an invention of the fourth evangelist. Thomas Tobin's dissertation (1983) illustrated how Philo followed earlier Jewish Hellenistic exegetic traditions dating back to the 2nd century BCE and showing influences of Stoic and Platonic philosophy. According to Tobin, Philo pursued the same goal as the Hellenistic Jewish exegetes before him, i.e. engaging in a kind of propaganda by trying to prove the compatibility of Jewish religion with Hellenistic philosophy. However, my thesis is that Hellenistic Jewish or early Christian authors use elements of philosophy not to make religious propaganda, but to deal selectively, sometimes critically and sometimes constructively with Hellenistic philosophy and to deliver a new philosophical concept. Nevertheless, one cannot conclude that John writes a “philosophical” *Diatribē* but that he is in a dynamic relationship with diverse religious-philosophical traditions; he transforms them and creates a new amalgam. From this point of view, this paper focuses on how readers who had a Hellenistic education could understand John 6.

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<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Resp.* IV.444c–d; Plutarch, *Tu. san.* 122c–e.; Musonius, *Diatr.* 3; See also Olligschläger (2011).

<sup>15</sup> The verb ἐλκῶ in 6:44 does not refer to predestination. This is due to the fact that John understands all human beings as object of God's will for salvation. Therefore, Jesus claims in 12:32 πάντας ἐλκῶ πρὸς ἑμαυτόν. The πᾶς formulation in 12:32 refers to the transcending of national boundaries (between Jews and Gentiles cf. 12:20–21), while the πᾶς in 5:23 and 6:45 has a more neutral sense.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Ion* 536: Ὁ δὲ θεὸς διὰ πάντων τούτων ἔλκει τὴν ψυχὴν ὅποι ἂν βούληται τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀνακρεμαννὺς ἐξ ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν ... καὶ ὁ μὲν τῶν ποιητῶν ἐξ ἄλλης Μούσης, ὁ δὲ ἐξ ἄλλης ἐξήρηται—ὀνομάζομεν δὲ αὐτὸ κατέχεται, τὸ δὲ ἐστὶ παραπλήσιον· ἔχεται γάρ. (J. Burnet 1903). Cf. Plato, *Resp.* VII.515e–516a; Philo, *Her* 69–70; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 36.34: Καὶ τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἐνίοτε, λέγω δὲ τοῖς πάνυ ἀρχαίοις, φωνὴ τις ἐκ Μουσῶν ἀφίκετο βραχεῖα καὶ πού τις ἐπίπνοια θείας φύσεώς τε καὶ ἀληθείας, καθάπερ αὐγὴ πυρρὸς ἐξ ἀφανοῦς λάμψαντος· ἃ ἔπασχον ἐκ Μουσῶν καὶ κατεῖχοντο Ὀμηρὸς τε καὶ Ἡσίοδος (von Arnim, 1:1893; 2:1896).

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It is not surprising that similar Logos-sophical speculations can also be found in Philo: The Logos comes down from heaven,<sup>17</sup> he teaches human beings,<sup>18</sup> gives them eternal life, and nourishes them through both food and drink (the relevant terms are written in bold).

The divine Logos as Manna: *Her.* 79: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀνατείνει τὰς ὄψεις πρὸς αἰθέρα καὶ τὰς οὐρανοῦ περιόδους, πεπαίδευται δὲ καὶ εἰς τὸ μάννα ἀφορᾶν, τὸν θεῖον λόγον, τὴν οὐράνιον ψυχῆς φιλοθεάμονος ἀφθαρτον τροφήν. (The one raises his eyes to the sky, beholding the **manna**, the **divine word**, the heavenly, incorruptible **food of the soul**, which is food of contemplation. Yonge 1993 cf. *Her.* 191; *Leg.* 3:175)

The soul needs heavenly foods: *Leg.* 3:162 ὅτι δὲ οὐ γήινοι ἀλλ' οὐράνιοι αἱ ψυχῆς τροφαί, μαρτυρήσει διὰ πλειόνων ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος: "ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ὕω ὑμῖν ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ". (But **that the food of the soul is not earthly but heavenly** the Holy Scriptures will testify in many passages, "Behold I will rain upon you bread from heaven". Yonge 1993).

The Logos as a metaphorical drink of the soul: *Leg.* 2:86: ἡ γὰρ ἀκρότομος πέτρα ἢ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, ἣν ἄκραν καὶ πρωτίστην ἔτεμεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεων, ἐξ ἧς ποτίζει τὰς φιλοθέους ψυχάς: ποτισθεῖσαι δὲ καὶ τοῦ μάννα ἐμπίπλονται τοῦ γενικωτάτου καλεῖται γὰρ τὸ μάννα "τί", ὁ πάντων ἐστὶ γένος, τὸ δὲ γενικώτατόν ἐστιν ὁ θεός, καὶ δεύτερος ὁ θεοῦ λόγος, τὰ δ' ἄλλα λόγῳ μόνον ὑπάρχει, ἔργοις δὲ ἐστὶν οὐ ἴσα τῷ οὐχ ὑπάρχοντι. (For the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God, which being both sublime and the first of things he quarried out of his own powers, and of it **he gives drink to the souls that love God**; and they, when they have drunk, are also filled with the most universal manna; for manna is called something which is the primary genus of everything. But the most universal of all things is God; and in the second place **the word of God**. But other things have an existence only in word, but in deed they are at times equivalent to that which has no existence. (Yonge 1993 cf. *Somn.* 2:249; *Leg.* 3:162).

It is characteristic that no exact parallel between John and Philo exists because the concept that the Logos became flesh and thus a historical person is entirely unknown to Philo. While Philo inspired by Plato<sup>19</sup> claims that humans can become immortal like God through the soul's coming out from the flesh<sup>20</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> Philo, *Opif.* 1.117.

<sup>18</sup> Philo, *Deus* 1.134: Ὡς μὲν γὰρ ὁ θεῖος λόγος εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν καθάπερ τινὰ ἐστὶαν οὐκ ἀφίεται, πάντα αὐτῆς τὰ ἔργα ἀνυπαίτια· ὁ γὰρ ἐπίτροπος ἢ πατὴρ ἢ διδάσκαλος ἢ ὅ τι ποτὲ χρὴ καλεῖν τὸν ἱερέα, ὑφ' οὗ νοουθετηθῆναι καὶ σωφρονισθῆναι μόνου δυνατόν, μακρὰν ἀφέστηκε (Wendland 1897:84–85).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the Platonic concept of assimilation to God in *Theaet* 172b–177c etc. See further Forger (2018).

<sup>20</sup> *Gig.* 31; *Her.* 71.



philosophical life,<sup>21</sup> John offers a new idea no less philosophical than that of Philo when philosophy is viewed as a path to virtue and communion with God. In John's view, human immortality results from the incarnation of the Word (1:14) as well as from humans turning to faith<sup>22</sup> (1:12–13), baptism<sup>23</sup> (3:5), sharing in his flesh (6:54) and obeying Jesus's commandments (8:51). In the Roman imperial time, mixed forms of philosophical religion and religious philosophy emerged in which participation in ritual life was interpreted philosophically and not excluded from philosophical life. Plutarch may be the most representative example of this blend. Plutarch's work evidences, among other things, the belief that one experiences a transition from death to life through the mysteries (*Fragm* 178) or that one can be fulfilled through the enjoyment of wine with the wise God Dionysus:

*Sept. sap. conv.* 150C: ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν Διόνυσον οἶδα τὰ τ' ἄλλα δεινὸν ὄντα καὶ Λύσιον ἀπὸ σοφίας προσαγορευόμενον, ὥστ' οὐ δέδια τοῦ θεοῦ μεστός γενόμενος μὴ ἀθαρσέστερον ἀγωνίσωμαι. (Babbitt 1928: 368–370) [I know that Dionysus is a mighty god with regard to the rest, and that he is called λύσιος/solver for his wisdom; therefore I do not fear that after I am filled with the God, I will fight with less courage (my own translation)].<sup>24</sup>

The combination of philosophy and participation in the rituals can also be observed in the Epicurean tradition:

Philodemus, *Piet.* (pars i), 776-772: ἐν δ[ἐ] ταῖς ἑορταῖς μ[ά]λιστ' εἰ[ς] ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς βαδίζοντα διὰ τὸ τοῦνομα πάντα ἀνὰ στόμ' ἔχειν π[ί]σ-]τει σφοδ[ρο]τέρως κατα[σχεῖ]ν (Obbink 1996:158) [Especially at festivals it is the case that he <i.e. the sage> comes to a knowledge <of the nature of the divine> by having his name on his lips all the time. (my own translation)].

### John 6:51–58<sup>25</sup>

Against this religious-historical backdrop, it is not necessary to prefer only one interpretation of John 6:51–58<sup>26</sup>, either in relation to practice of the Lord's Supper

<sup>21</sup> *Opif.* 77 Ὅθεν τὸ φιλοσοφίας ἀνεβλάστησε γένος, ὅφ' οὗ καίτοι θνητὸς ὢν ἄνθρωπος ἀπαθανατίζεται. (Cohn 1896:26).

<sup>22</sup> See on the correlation of the ideas of the incarnation of the Logos and human divinization in John 1:12–14, Byers (2017).

<sup>23</sup> See discussion and bibliography regarding John 3:5 in Despotis (2018).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ignatius, *Magn.* 14:1: Θεοῦ γέμετε (*Sc* 10:106); see further evidence in Heilmann (2014:68-69).

<sup>25</sup> Many exegetes hold the view that vv. 51–58 are a later redactional insertion. However, this study explores the final form of John and does not challenge the unity of chapter 6.

<sup>26</sup> See a brief overview regarding the long debate on the literal versus the metaphorical understanding of Jesus's words in 6:51–58 since the Reformation in Weinrich (2015:740-53).

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(the communal meal) or in relation to the faith or teaching of Jesus, for the Johannine approach combines both aspects (ritual and philosophical). John finds himself in an environment where religious spirituality blends with philosophical speculation, deals constructively with this overlap and develops his own approach. Just as John moves on the borders between philosophy and religion, in his texts he continually plays with both literal and metaphorical language, as well as with the spiritual and material dimensions of the perception of God's revelation, transforming common philosophical and religious concepts. Examples of this are terms such as ζῶν ὕδωρ (the "living water"), which can have both a literal and a metaphorical meaning. John uses such concepts to emphasise the importance of accepting Jesus's teaching or the Spirit's power on the one hand, and to present the ritual practice of Early Christianity as a transition to a new ontology on the other. Similarly, in the Bread of Life discourse, the author uses ambivalent language and revises common metaphors. The reason for John's use of such creativity is not that he intends to show off his talent, but the contra-intuitive concept of the incarnation of the Logos, which breaks with all conventions, including logical and linguistic ones.

Jesus identifies himself in v. 51 with the "living bread that has come from heaven". However, his statement has not only a metaphorical but also a revelatory-historical dimension; for Jesus is on the level of the Johannine narrative the "one who has come from heaven". In the next verse, Jesus identifies bread with his flesh. However, John already describes the human body of Jesus in the prologue as flesh. According to the characteristic structure of revelatory discourses (revelation-misunderstanding-further revelation), the misunderstanding of the Jews in v. 52 causes further revelation.<sup>27</sup>

No other Greek author before John shows evidence of the metaphorical use of the Johannine combination of eating flesh and drinking blood. While food and drink or hunger and thirst, flesh, bread and wine can be used metaphorically e.g. for access to wisdom or truth, nowhere does a similar constellation and repetition occur. However, our text and its context are very close to the Pauline and Lucan traditions of the institution words as well as to relevant formulations<sup>28</sup> that occur in *Didache* 9 (see fn 12). The structural equality between v. 53 and John 3:3,5 also indicates that the author sees participation in the communal meal as a

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jesus's revelatory dialogues with Nicodemus (John 3:1–12) and the woman from Samaria (John 4:1–26).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Jos. Asen.* 8:5a οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ, ὃς εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα καὶ ἐσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς καὶ πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ ἀφθαρσίας; *Jos. Asen.* 16:8 διότι τὸ μέλι τοῦτο πεποιήκασιν αἱ μέλισσαι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐσθίουσι, καὶ πᾶς ὃς φάγεται ἐξ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀποθάνειται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (Burchard 2003: 116).

requirement for entry into the eschatological life, similar to baptism.<sup>29</sup> In John's view both baptism and communal meal prevent from eternal death.

6:53 **ἐὰν μὴ** φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πῖντε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.

3:3 **ἐὰν μὴ** τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>30</sup>

John reflects on the sense of v. 53b (unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you) in the following four verses, and the meaning of these verses can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Participation in the flesh and blood of the Son of Man brings about immortality, v. 54.
- 2) The flesh and blood of Jesus are the true food, v. 55.
- 3) This practice unites man with Christ, v. 56.
- 4) The union of human beings with Christ also unites human beings with God the Father, v. 57.

The heavenly bread is finally equated with the flesh of Jesus, v. 58.<sup>31</sup>

As already mentioned, John deliberately uses ambivalent language, so that his text remains open to various interpretations. Therefore, in the direct context of chapter 6, the evangelist provides explanations that move the text in a spiritualising direction. Thus, a remarkably Hellenistic-Jewish sounding maxim<sup>32</sup> indicates that salvation is only from the Spirit, "It is the Spirit that gives life": τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν. (6:63 cf. 6:68). According to these statements, salvation is transmitted through the Spirit and the teaching of Jesus. Thus, reference to the flesh and blood of Jesus that echoes incarnational theology withdraws in favour of a pneumatic concept related to the teachings of Jesus.

However, this is only partially true because the evangelist will recall the importance of Jesus's literal blood later in the passion narrative (19:34). Greek readers of John believed that the blood of the gods, i.e. the ichor, was immortal (ἄμβροτον αἷμα),<sup>33</sup> therefore gods neither eat bread nor drink wine and that man

<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the first centuries, baptism was not separated from the Lord's Supper, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:2–5.

<sup>30</sup> Similar negative conditional sentences (ἐὰν μὴ ... οὐ) are also documented in the Hellenistic context of the NT *Inscription from Philadelphia* 14–15; 38–41 Text in Barton and Horsley (1981). See also SEG IG XII,1 789; ID 2529. See further Kloppenborg (2013:215–28).

<sup>31</sup> Theobald (2009:475–83).

<sup>32</sup> Philo *Opif.* 30; Wis 15:11.

<sup>33</sup> Homer *Il.* 5.339–342.

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could achieve immortality by drinking divine nectar and ambrosia.<sup>34</sup> In John, water and blood that flow from Jesus's side make humans immortal.

Now that we have examined John's relationship to philosophy from our late modern academic point of view, it is worth also considering ancient philosophers. We now turn to two ancient Christian philosophers, i.e. Origen and Chrysostom, who have cultural-historical proximity to the context of John and can help the modern exegete better to interpret the phenomena of hybridity between religion and philosophy in late antiquity.

### **The spiritualising interpretation of Origen in the Caesarea of the 2nd and 3rd century**

The commentary of Origen (185–254) [See further (Ehrman et al. 1992; Heine 2010; Martens 2012) with rich bibliography] offers a unique discussion of the Gospel of John against the background of ancient Greek philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Middle-Platonists. This commentary shows how the Fourth Gospel could be interpreted in a 2nd and 3rd-century philosophical school (cf. Löhr 2010, 2017; Trapp 2017). During this period, the diverse Christian movement also defined itself as philosophy and converted philosophers ran small schools in which they reflected on theological and hermeneutic questions, conducted canon debates and also interpreted the relationship between the Christ Movement and competing schools of philosophy (Löhr 2000). Origen's commentary consists of at least 32 Tomoi (i.e. books), of which only nine have survived.<sup>35</sup> Origen worked on the first five Tomoi in Alexandria and the remaining 27 in Palestine between 225 and 231 (according to his own statements<sup>36</sup>), where he moved in 231. Origen founded his own school in Caesarea, where he offered a Christian philosophical education. His biblical commentaries were probably connected with his teaching and the lectures he gave to his students (Jacobsen 2012:155). They follow the tradition of commentary literature on the works of Plato and Aristotle (Heine 1995:12) and other Hellenistic philological conventions (Neuschäfer 1987; Mansfeld 1994:10-57; Runia 2003:43-47; Martens 2012:41-87). The hermeneutics of the Alexandrian scholar in his commentary and especially his "anagoge" (the so-called allegorical interpretation) is a way of philosophising (ἐν ὑπονοίᾳ φιλοσοφεῖν<sup>37</sup>) and ties in with great exegetical traditions that were also in use in Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pind *Pyth.* 9.63.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the disputed fragments of Origen's commentary, see Heine (1986); Thümmel (2009).

<sup>36</sup> *Comm. Jo.* 5.1.

<sup>37</sup> *Cels.* 4,38.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the Stoic allegorical interpretation of tales regarding Gods (similarly Gal 4,24). Tobin (1990); Bienert (1995).

Origen regards the Gospel of John as the metaphysics of Christianity, as the Scripture that provides the actual theology, leading to the vision of the mysteries of God, while the other Gospels address historical and physical dimensions of Jesus's life and moral-practical aspects of His teaching (Kobusch 2014). Unfortunately, the Tomos (book) with the interpretation of chapter 6 has not been handed down to us in order to determine how Origen unfolds all aspects of the Johannine amalgam. But one can reconstruct his exegesis from other parts of his commentary and assume that the Alexandrian exegete knew the so-called sacramental interpretation of the text, but perhaps grasped it as the first stage, the common understanding of the Johannine text.<sup>39</sup>

For Origen, however, there are also some more prudent views, according to which one goes beyond the body and blood of Jesus and becomes a participant of the Logos. In these cases, bread, flesh and wine are spiritualised and interpreted in relation to ethical and metaphysical truths. However, it would be wrong to play the two interpretations off against each other; for in the works of Origen, it is difficult to draw the line between the liturgical participation in Christ in the narrow sense and spiritual participation in the divine Logos, for example through the medium of Scripture (Buchinger 2015). He is generally very hesitant in his remarks about the Eucharist, perhaps because of the situation of Christianity in the second and third centuries.

The first of the two following relevant quotations shows that Origen distinguishes between the flesh and blood of the Lamb (Christ the man) and the Word (the divine Logos), because he cannot conceive of the human nature and deity of Christ together (Lies 1978:342). Thus, there is a Christological background for Origen's spiritualising interpretation. Similarly, Origen favors the theoretical (contemplative) way of life. Eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ characterises the first level of spiritual life (the practical life or "the time of the world"):

*Comm. Jo.* X.17 (98). But we must say that if the Word became flesh, and the Lord says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves; ... perhaps this is the flesh of the lamb which takes away the sin of the world, and perhaps this is the blood from which one must put some on the two doorposts and on the lintel in the houses in which we eat the Pasha. And perhaps we must eat of the meat of this lamb in the time of

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Comm. Jo.* 32.24.310: Νοεῖσθω δὲ ὁ ἄρτος καὶ τὸ ποτήριον τοῖς μὲν ἀπλουστέροις κατὰ τὴν κοινοτέραν περὶ τῆς εὐχαριστίας ἐκδοχὴν, τοῖς δὲ βαθύτερον ἀκούειν μεμαθηκόσιν κατὰ τὴν θειοτέραν καὶ περὶ τοῦ τροφίμου τῆς ἀληθείας λόγου ἐπαγγελίαν (Blanc 1992:320); *Hom. Num.* 16.9: Et utique, qui haec dicebat, >vulneratus est< pro hominibus; »ipse« enim »vulneratus est pro peccatis nostris«, sicut Esaias dicit, >Bibere< autem dicimur >sanguinem Christi< non solum sacramentorum ritu, sed et cum sermones eius recipimus, in quibus vita consistit, sicut et ipse dicit: »verba quae ego locutus sum, spiritus et vita est« (Baehrens 1921:152).

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the world, which is night. And we must eat the meat roasted with fire with unleavened bread (Heine 1989:276).

On the contrary, the sharing of the Bread from Heaven, i.e. the Logos, portrays the life of perfect believers who are devoted to contemplation, i.e. to nourishment through the vision of truth (τρεφόμενοι ἀπὸ τῶν εὕρισκομένων τῆς ἀληθείας θεωρημάτων).<sup>40</sup>

The second quotation points out that Origen considers the Gospel of John as Christian metaphysics and believes that it leads to the vision of the mystical truths of God (contemplation-θεωρία). However, Origen does not use exclusively platonic knowledge-metaphysics but pursues an update of Middle Platonic, Stoic and Anaxagorean principles (see further Tzamalikos 2016).

*Comm. Jo.* I.30 (208) But see if, perhaps, it is like this. As bread nourishes and strengthens and is said to sustain the heart of man, but wine pleases and cheers and confounds, so the ethical teachings, since they preserve life for the one who learns and carries them out, are the bread of life (these would not be said to be the fruit of the vine), but the esoteric and mystical doctrines come from the “true vine” and are called “wine” because they cheer and produce ecstasy, being present in those who delight in the Lord and desire not only to be nourished, but also to revel in him (Heine 1989:75).

It is striking that Origen uses his exegetical methods to lead his students to a transition from practical to contemplative life. That was also his task as a teacher in Caesarea. Gregory the Thaumaturge and Eusebius of Caesarea, who were educated in Origen's schools, testify that Origen's philosophical-theological education, which focused on John's allegorical interpretation, was the culmination of a philosophical curriculum (Gregory the Thaumaturge, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica*, 13–14; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.18-19). This curriculum began with teaching physics and ethics. The last stage was Christian metaphysics, the unlocking of the mysteries of God. Thus, the spiritualising interpretation of John 6:51–58 is not to be understood as the only correct interpretation of the text, but as the climax of an interpretative process to which only educated and mature believers or students have access.

### The medico-philosophical approach of John Chrysostom

The commentary of one of the more productive authors of ancient Greek literature, John Chrysostom, also shows a dynamic relationship to philosophy. In his 88 homilies on John, he refers 116 times to the term philosophy in a positive sense<sup>41</sup> because he intends to present the Gospel of John as a guide to “true” or “Christian philosophy” and to compare it with the other (ἕξωθεν) philosophical schools. Chrysostom is the first author to use the term χριστιανική φιλοσοφία for

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<sup>40</sup> *Comm. Jo.* 10.17.102. (Blanc 1970:442).

<sup>41</sup> I refer to all three etymologically related terms: φιλοσοφία, φιλοσοφέω, φιλόσοφος. See Malingrey (1961); Bastiaensen (2004).

both a Christian interpretation of the world and a Christian way of life (Schmidinger 2007:886) and to apply it to his criticism of the Greek philosophical schools (χριστιανική φιλοσοφία vs. ἑλληνική πλάνη).<sup>42</sup>

An increasing number of scholars (Mayer 2015; Wilson 2015) describe John Chrysostom's profile as that of a moral philosopher who conceives of philosophy as a kind of care for the soul (according to the Socratic model, Plato, *Alc. maj.* 146e). His moral-philosophical techniques and strategies for soul-healing can also be found in his homilies on John. While the philosophical interpretation of Origen captures the Fourth Gospel as Christian metaphysics, Chrysostom represents a view of philosophy that emphasises the practical aspect and defines itself as an art of living, τέχνη περὶ βίον<sup>43</sup>. In the Chrysostomic view, the Johannine Christ is a masterful teacher and philosopher who tries to heal and transform the souls of his listeners.<sup>44</sup> In the context of this medical-philosophical psychagogy, Jesus reveals great teachings, but in a way that can also be understood by his sick listeners. The condition of the listeners requires a kind of medical care. The Antiochian exegete describes this kind of revelation on behalf of the concept of divine accommodation or condescension (συγκατάβασις).<sup>45</sup>

Against this backdrop, Chrysostom understands John 6:51–58 mainly as a reflection on the mystery of Eucharist. Regarding Jesus's introducing reflections on the Bread of Life the Antiochian exegete underscores that Jesus progressively guides His weak Jewish listeners to moral development<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, Chrysostom comments on John 6:36, that Jesus promises his listeners who were spiritually dead (νενεκρωμένοι) a different life (ζωὴν ἑτέραν τινὰ καὶ ἐνηλλαγμένην) and gradually reveals His divine identity.

“I am the bread of life”. He was now about to plunge them into the revelation of the mysteries. So first he spoke of His Godhead in the words: “I am the bread of life”. He was not saying this of his body (for with reference to the body he said at the end: The bread that I will give is my flesh John 6:52), but for the moment (by the “bread of life”) He meant His Godhead. This is so because the Godhead is “bread” through God the Word, just as this bread likewise becomes bread from heaven because of the Spirit coming upon it (*Hom. Jo.* 45.2; Goggin 1969:452-453).

<sup>42</sup> John Chrysostom, *In Calendas*, 3; PG 48:956. That is why he opens his interpretation of John with a fierce criticism of Plato, Pythagoras and other Greek philosophers.

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 613b.

<sup>44</sup> See Mayer (2015:140–164). According to Chrysostom, John 6 points to the exact philosophy (ἀκριβῆς φιλοσοφία *Hom. Jo.* 43.2, PG 59:246). However, philosophy does not mean only a contemplative way of life. This is a misunderstanding both of philosophy and Christianity. *Ibid.* 59:248: Ὅλον γὰρ, ὡς εἰπεῖν, διαβάλλουσι τὸν Χριστιανισμόν, καὶ ἐπὶ ἀργία κωμωδεῖσθαι παρασκευάζουσι.

<sup>45</sup> *Hom. Jo.* 45.1 PG 59:252 πολλὴ ἦν τῶν ἀκούοντων ἡ ἀσθένεια.

<sup>46</sup> *Hom. Jo.* 45.2 PG 59:252 Ἀνάγων αὐτοὺς μικρὸν κατὰ μικρὸν ἐπάγει.

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Chrysostom does not distinguish between the body of Jesus and the body of the Logos, as is the case with Origen. Consequently, he believes that believers participate in the one divine Logos through the Eucharist. But even this interpretation does not exclude the spiritualising exegesis of Origen. According to the Antiochian exegete:

He called himself “living bread” because he welds together for us this life and life to come. Therefore, He added: “If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever”. Surely, “bread” here means the teachings of salvation, and faith in him, or else His Body, for both strengthen the soul (*Hom. Jo.* 46.1; Goggin 1969:465).

But for John Chrysostom, participation in the body of Jesus through the gifts of the Eucharist has a unique function: it unites man in his material dimension with God and perfects the revelation of God's love for man.

Therefore, in order that we may become of His Body, not in desire only, but also in very fact, let us become commingled with that Body. This, in truth, takes place by means of the food which He has given us as a gift, because He desired to prove the love which He has for us. It is for this reason that He has shared Himself with us and has brought His Body down to our level, namely, that we might be one with Him as the body is joined with the head. This, in truth, is characteristic of those who greatly love (*Hom. Jo.* 46.3; Goggin 1969:468).

Indeed, the Gospel of John also deals with the topic of love between Christ and the believer, for Jesus is explicitly called the bridegroom (3:29). Christ is also implicitly presented as the bridegroom of the church in his dialogue with the woman from Samaria because this encounter occurs at a well like the well stories of the OT referring to the wives of Israel's Patriarchs, Rebekah, Rachele and Shiphrah (Gen 24, 29; Exod 2:15–22). Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman also takes place at the sixth hour, i.e. the hour which is otherwise mentioned only at the passion (19:14). On the cross, water and blood flow from the bridegroom's wounded side (19:34; 1 John 5:6).<sup>47</sup> Jesus on the cross manifests God's love for the world (3:16) and is presented as the new Adam from whose side flows life eternal, and this side is the origin of the new Eve's life.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the new era of the resurrection (John 20) begins in a garden, an allusion to the garden of Eden.

It is no coincidence that for John Chrysostom, the concept of love becomes the central category for the interpretation of Jesus's reflections in John 6:51–58. The mystery of the Eucharist is a mystery of love, revealing God's love for human beings and satisfying the love of those seeking God. From this perfect love relationship results the healing of human souls and bodies. According to Chrysostom, the blood of Jesus transmits a great power (μεγάλην τινὰ δύναμιν ἐμποιεῖ) to the human soul and gives eternal life to the believer.

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<sup>47</sup> The Greek readers of John could compare this image with Greek myths about wounded deities that bled a kind of immortal blood. With Keener (2003:1152).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1154.



It can be concluded that Chrysostom not only prefers the Eucharistic interpretation of Jesus' words but also has a much more positive understanding of the body of Jesus and the material aspect of the Eucharistic gifts than Origen. Likewise, the manna is a type of the material body of the one Christ and not of the body of the Word, as is the case with Origen. The latter assumes a knowledge-metaphysics<sup>49</sup> alien to the Chrysostomic approach.

### Conclusions

In summary, the first conclusion to be drawn is that although the theology of the Fourth Gospel has deep Jewish biblical roots, John's Gospel can also be read as an amalgam of religion and philosophy and a blend of ritual life and theosophical reflection in the early Roman Empire. John participates in a broader cultural discourse and his masterpiece results from a complex process of transcending boundaries between different philosophical and religious traditions in the ancient Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel does not function only as a mixture of Hellenistic-philosophical and Biblical-Jewish views as well as spiritual and material aspects of the perception of God's revelation in Christ. The fourth evangelist also develops a new approach, according to which he transforms both biblical Jewish and Hellenistic philosophical elements from the perspective of faith in the incarnation of the Logos.

Second, early Christian exegetes and philosophers attest to the fact that the Gospel of John can be read as a foundation of a new kind of philosophy or "Christian philosophy". Thus, Origen favours the spiritual interpretation of John 6:51–57, not because it is the only correct one, but because it fits better with his intention to lead Christian souls to contemplative life. Likewise, this interpretation reflects Origen's Christology, i.e. the division between the humanity of Jesus and the deity of the Logos. The fact that this interpretation is addressed to philosophically educated students and serves their exercise in philosophical-theological speculation cannot be overlooked either.

Chrysostom also perceives the Gospel of John as a philosophy, however, not as Christian metaphysics. The Antiochian exegete in his constructive exegesis takes up elements from the moral-philosophical tradition of ancient Greek philosophy and approaches Jesus as a psychagogue who heals human souls. In the Christian philosophy of Chrysostom, however, it is not the philosophical-theological vision, i.e. the contemplative life, but the healing of man as well as love and union with God through mysteries that play the central role.

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<sup>49</sup> Origen, *Comm.* 10.18.110: Οὐ γὰρ νομιστέον τὰ ἱστορικὰ ἱστορικῶν εἶναι τύπους καὶ τὰ σωματικὰ σωματικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ σωματικὰ πνευματικῶν καὶ τὰ ἱστορικὰ νοητῶν. (Blanc 1970:448).

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