



December 2009

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Daniel Becerra

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Becerra, Daniel. "Johannine and Gentile Self-Revelatory Passages." *Studia Antiqua* 7, no. 2 (2009). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol7/iss2/8>

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JOHANNINE AND GENTILE SELF-REVELATORY PASSAGES

DANIEL BECERRA

The Gospel of John contains fifteen instances, almost one per chapter, in which Jesus Christ reveals his true identity to his listeners. It is generally agreed upon among scholars that the audience of the Gospel of John consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians;¹ therefore the significance of these fifteen passages is paramount for understanding Johannine² Christology and the Jewish/Gentile perception of Jesus. Many scholars have written concerning how Jewish Christians, with a sound knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, would have understood said passages. Symbols, themes and allusions to ancient Israelite stories found in these “self-revelatory” (SR) passages, such as the manna from heaven and the “I AM,” have received much attention. But one sees the neglect of similar rhetorical and symbolic parallels found in popular Greek literature of the era, such as in the writings of Plato and Homer. My study will examine SR passages in the Gospel of John and in its contemporary, popular Greek literature in an effort to show how John used common rhetorical themes found within Homeric and Platonic SR passages to paint a different picture of Jesus for the Gentile reader/listener. It must be understood that I am focusing on the rhetoric of John, not so much looking at the words of Jesus.

I have used a comparative methodology, looking at the context, themes, motifs and significance of each SR passage. First, I have identified all the SR passages in the Gospel of John and analyzed them, searching for common rhetorical themes and motifs. I have likewise analyzed the writings of Plato and Homer and similarly identified common rhetorical themes and motifs within their respective SR passages. Finally, I have compared and contrasted the Johannine and the popular Greek literature, identifying their rhetorical similarities and differences. For both *corpora*, I have focused on those instances

1. Brown shows that a great number of the constituency would have been of Gentile stock. See Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 55–58. Also Raymond Brown, “Other Sheep Not of This Fold”: The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 14–18.

2. The word Johannine refers to the writings of John.

in which the self-revelation is significant to the story, and have chosen to leave out those SR passages that are arbitrary. An example of this might be answering “I am,” to the question “Who is going to the market?” I was also not able to search the entire body of Greco-Roman literature and since the audience of the Gospel of John would have resided in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean region,³ my research has excluded all popular Latin literature of the period. I have concentrated on texts and stories with which even unlearned Greeks would have been familiar, namely the writings of Homer and Plato.⁴ Because of the page constraints of this article, I have often only cited one or two examples of each rhetorical theme. The example cited should be considered illustrative of the rhetorical theme and, for convenience, the appendix will show further examples organized according to rhetorical theme.

What is a Self-Revelatory Passage?

A self-revelatory passage as I define it is simply a passage in which a character identifies who he or she is. The revelation is always given to another individual or group of individuals and suggests a deeper meaning than what is explicitly revealed. Such an example is found in the Gospel of John when Christ answers to those who seek Jesus of Nazareth, “I am he” (18:5–6). This passage would seem rather standard were it not for the events which ensue, namely that his accusers, upon hearing this declaration, fall down to the ground (18:6). Thus we see the revelation suggests a deeper level of meaning with regards to Jesus’ true identity. The fact that the men fall to the ground seems out of the ordinary unless who Jesus truly *is* warrants such a reaction.

SR passages can likewise be figurative declarations in which the character takes on a representative or symbolic identity to more accurately portray his or her role. For example, in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates identifies himself as the “gadfly” who constantly awakens the state. Plato describes the state as a great horse “though large and well bred, is sluggish on account of his size and needs to be aroused by stinging.”⁵ Here we see that the figurative rhetoric helps the reader to better understand Socrates’ role to awaken the state from ignorance to wisdom. Jesus also reveals himself in this manner by taking on the titles “bread of life,” “good shepherd” and “true vine.”⁶

Significance

This section will address the rhetorical importance of SR passages in the Gospel of John, as well as their potential for being understood in various ways.

3. Brown, *Community*, 56.

4. Pelikan portrays the Greek myths and stories as so common among the Gentiles that they were used for “the amusement of the children.” For evidence of the later Christian familiarity with such works. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 16–17.

5. Plato, *Apology*, 18.26–31.

6. See John 6:35; 10:11; and 15:1.

Number and Achievement of Purpose

While each individual SR passage plays its own role in its respective context, the rhetorical importance of the SR passages in the Gospel of John is seen generally in their quantity and their role in light of the author's purpose for writing the Gospel itself. John wrote his Gospel so that the reader "might believe that Jesus is the Christ; Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name" (20:31). Of the twenty-one chapters in the Gospel, fifteen contain SR passages, all of which work together to reveal who this man Jesus truly is. As a consequence of the large quantity of SR passages, the narrative portions of the Gospel contain many examples in which people persecute Jesus of Nazareth on account of their misunderstanding these self-revelations. In a book where the primary reason for the death of the Son of God was a misunderstanding and disbelief of his identity, knowing his true identity as set forth in the SR passages is of paramount significance for the believer and the theological purposes of John.

Explicit and Implicit Portrayals

A characteristic of the Johannine SR passages is John's explicit and implicit portrayal of Jesus, or "dualism." In other words, this describes what John said and what he may have implied. These dualistic revelations help to explain why Jews and Gentiles might have understood Jesus' identity differently. Through his unique rhetoric, John "communicates a profound depth of meaning,"⁷ often portraying Jesus as two different characters. For example, consider the implicit nature of the following passage.

16 And when evening was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, **17** And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. **18** And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. **19** So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. **20** But he said unto them, it is I; be not afraid. **21** Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went. (John 6:16–21)⁸

Raymond Brown noted the dual implications, saying,

The disciples in the boat are frightened because they see someone coming to them on the water. Jesus assures them "*Ego eimi*; do not be afraid." . . . however divine theophanies in the OT often have this formula. . . . John may well be giving us an epiphany scene, and thus playing on both the ordinary and the sacral use of *ego eimi*.⁹

7. Robert Kysar, "John, The Gospel of," Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 3:916.

8. All translations are mine except for those quoted in the appendix. They are from the KJV.

9. Raymond Brown, "The Gospel According to John" *AB* (New York: Doubleday,

Here we see a SR passage in which Jesus reveals himself explicitly as Jesus of Nazareth and implicitly as the God of the Old Testament. This latter interpretation obviously would have been understandable only to a reader with a firm foundation in the Israelite tradition. The question then logically arises, what about the Gentiles who would not have been familiar with Israelite history and scripture. What possible parallels might they have understood in these SR passages?

Issue of Reception

Tied into the portrayal of Jesus is the issue of reception. The issue of reception deals with how different individuals would have understood the portrayal of Jesus in the SR passages. For example, in the aforementioned passage, only an individual familiar with the stories of the Torah would have understood John's rhetorical parallel to Old Testament theophany scenes. Perhaps the Gentile's mind would have been taken back to another story about a man who similarly revealed his identity while exercising control over the waters. In Homer's *Odyssey*, it is Neptune whom John's Jesus parallels. Homer writes: "And a huge blue wave arched itself like a mountain over them to hide both woman and god. . . . Rejoice! . . . I am Neptune."¹⁰ What implications might this have had on the Gentile perception of Jesus?

Similarly, titles such as "Lord," "Savior," and perhaps most famously, the rich philosophical baggage of "the word"¹¹ would have surely had different connotations to a Jew than they would to a Gentile. John's thoroughly diverse audience would have understood Jesus' self-revelations according to their particular religious affiliation, nationality, ethnic background, and education. For example, consider the title of "Son of God" (9:8–41). The Jewish interpretation of the title "Son of God," differs from that of the Gentile. Cullmann explains that this title in Judaism was understood in three different ways. He writes, "The whole people of Israel is called the 'Son(s) of God;' kings bear the title *and* persons with a special commission from God, such as angels."¹²

Conversely, we learn that in the Hellenistic context, "anyone believed to possess some kind of divine power was called a 'son of god' by others or gave himself the title."¹³ Not only that, but during the life of Jesus "the Roman Emperors were entitled *divi filius*,"¹⁴ or "sons of god." With the abundance of soothsayers and fortune tellers in the Greco-Roman world "the designation thus did not have the connotation of uniqueness which is characteristic of New Testament use."¹⁵ Therefore we have various interpretations of the same self-

1966), 533–34.

10. Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.

11. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 371.

12. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 272–73.

13. Cullmann, *The Christology*, 272.

14. Cullmann, *The Christology*, 272.

15. Cullmann, *The Christology*, 272.

revelation. The issue is thus, there are five ways to understand what Jesus meant when he revealed himself as the Son of God.

The title holds connotations to a man with divine powers, an emperor, a man from the house of Israel, a king, and a divine messenger. The Gentile reader would most likely not have been familiar with the Jewish interpretations and vice versa. Out of these five interpretations, we see one overlapping possibility for the congruent understanding of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, namely that of a man possessing royal blood. Thus we see the problem of reception and the need to more fully explore not just what was said, but who John's readers were, and how they would have understood his Gospel. Because the SR passages were subject to interpretation, it is highly likely that a Gentile Christian would have understood them in light of the stories and rhetoric with which they were most certainly familiar¹⁶ and not with the Hebrew scriptures.

The Johannine Audience

An understanding of the Gentile constituency of the Johannine audience is necessary to appreciate the relevance of this study. I accept the traditional locale for the Johannine community as being at Ephesus.¹⁷ Though there is a possibility it was not centered here, the disciples of the Apostle John, namely Papias at Hierapolis and Polycarp at Smyrna, suggest a definite Johannine presence in Asia Minor. This is sufficient for the purposes of this paper.

The Johannine community inhabited the fourth largest city of the Roman Empire.¹⁸ It housed a large majority of the Christians living in the west and was the "primary commercial and trade center of Asia Minor."¹⁹ The principal language and ethnicity of the people would have been Greek with some "Lydians, Jews and Romans."²⁰ Like any other city in the Empire, the majority of the citizens would have fallen into the lower subsistence category, while a select minority was wealthy and well educated. Though educated Greeks would have been schooled in grammar, rhetoric, and literature, even the lay citizen would have familiar with certain texts. Plato²¹ and Homer were perhaps two of the most well known authors in the history of the hellenized Near East and their respective dialogues and stories would have been well known to the Gentile Christians at Ephesus.²²

16. It is noteworthy that later Christian authors used parallels to characters in Greek stories to present Jesus to other Gentiles. See the last section and end notes concerning Justin Martyr.

17. Brown, *The Community*, 56.

18. John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 6-2.

19. Welch and Hall, *Charting*, 6-2.

20. Welch and Hall, *Charting*, 6-2.

21. Betz writes that the "the Socratic tradition, was definitely 'detectable as early as the New Testament.' See Hans Betz, "Socrates," *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:99.

22. Pelikan portrays the Greek myths and stories as so common among the Gentiles that they were used for "the amusement of the children." For evidence of the later Christian familiarity with such works. See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 16-17.

As if acknowledging this very fact, John addresses his Gospel account to those of both a Semitic and Hellenic background. Once termed as the “Hellenistic Gospel,”²³ clear signs of this dual audience can be seen throughout his Gospel. Brown, for example, writes that “the author stops to explain terms like ‘Messiah’ and ‘Rabbi’—terms which no Jews, even those who spoke only Greek, would have failed to understand.”²⁴ Similarly, the Gospel’s “usage of abstract ideas like light and truth; its dualistic division of humanity into light and darkness, truth and falsehood; its concept of the Word—all these were once held to be the product of Greek philosophical thought.”²⁵ By this period of time, it is likely that even Jews would have been familiar with allusions to Greek stories and uses of rhetoric, since Judaism itself had undergone the process of hellenization.²⁶ The Hebrew Bible had been translated in Greek some two centuries prior and Greek philosophy was already one medium by which Judaism was shared.²⁷ Substantial evidence points to the fact that John was fully aware of his Gentile readers and that the composition of his Gospel was at least in part an “effort towards comprehensibility towards non-Jews.”²⁸

Johannine Self-Revelatory Passages

As mentioned before, there are fifteen instances in the Gospel of John in which Jesus reveals his true identity to his listeners. Within these fifteen instances, there are rather consistent rhetorical themes and motifs. This section addresses the most common themes and examines how they worked independently within the Johannine context. They include an affinity with divinity, an appeal to authoritative writing, a figurative identity and qualifiers. I have italicized the parts of the SR passage which illustrate these motifs. It should also be understood that more than one motif can exist with a single phrase or sentence. For example, “I am the true vine” includes two devices, the figurative identity and qualifiers. I don’t have the space to address all SR passage rhetorical motifs; some of those I will not address include a premature abstract

23. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (ABRL; U.S.A: Doubleday, 1997), 371.

24. Brown, *The Community*, 55.

25. This dualism refers to the symbolic usage of light and darkness and is not the same dualism which was spoken of in the “Significance” section of this paper. Also see Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 371.

26. The Old Testament was translated into Greek and was part of the primary scriptures of second generation Early Christians. The vast majority of the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are not from the Hebrew Bible but from the Greek Septuagint. Philo of Alexandria, who was very popular among early Christians, was known for his method of allegorical exegesis. He employed Greek philosophy to explain and defend the Jewish faith. These views would have funneled down into the masses, which perhaps would have used them to proselytize or to similarly defend the faith. For Jews and Christians who spoke Greek, like John and his community, they would have not only been familiar with popular Greek ideas and rhetoric, but at least in part, with this hellenized version of Judaism.

27. For an example, see Philo’s use of logos, see Eugene Boring, *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 241–42.

28. Brown, *The Community*, 55.

revelation (often in the third person), a supernatural act, foreknowledge, and the speaker as the author of life/salvation. Further examples of the SR passages discussed in this section can be seen in the appendix.

Affinity with Divinity

The most prevalent motif within the Johannine SR rhetoric is the mention of the speaker's close relationship with deity. In thirteen of the fifteen passages in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes mention of either his familial relationship or subservient status to God the Father. Alluding to his divine kinship justifies his position as one who is truly on God's errand. The following examples will be sufficient to illustrate this theme. John 8:12–20 records Jesus teaching at the treasury of the temple where he reveals himself as the "light of the world." He proclaims, "I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (8:12). Upon hearing this, the Pharisees claim that his testimony could not possibly be true because he testifies of himself and provides no other witnesses (8:12–13). John records the following exchange:

16 I am not alone, but *I stand with the Father that sent me*. **17** It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. **18** I am one that bears witness of myself, *and the Father that sent me bears witness of me*. **19** Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor *my Father*: if ye had known me, ye should have known *my Father* also. (John 8:16–18; emphasis added)

Jesus here is obviously referring to God the Father, whom he claims bears witness to his divine mission. Rhetorically speaking, mentioning his divine kinship lends Jesus authority in that a second witness qualifies his self-revelation as being true according to the law of Jews.

Another prime illustration of this common motif is found in the tenth chapter of John. Jesus here reveals himself as the "sheep door" and the "good shepherd." John writes in 10:14–18:

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. **15** *As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father*: and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. **17** *Therefore does my Father love me*, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. **18** No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. *This commandment have I received of my Father*. (emphasis added)

Once again we see the mention of a close relationship with Deity. Jesus is to lay down his life for his sheep, a mission and gift given to him from the Father. Rhetorically, Jesus' kinship with God justifies his mission to his sheep.

An Appeal to Authoritative Writing

Another prevalent motif within the body of Johannine SR passages is the appeal of the speaker to a body of authoritative literature. John's main character Jesus often draws upon the Hebrew Bible to lend credence or authority to his words, to defend himself, or to allude to prophecy to aid in his coming self-revelation. For example, in John 6:22–70, Jesus is teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum. His listeners have sought him not because they saw his miracles but because they had eaten of his bread the previous day and were filled (6:26). Jesus in this SR passage reveals himself as the “bread of life” and the “living bread” (6:35, 51). In order to help them understand his role, he references an authoritative book of the Torah, namely the book of Exodus. John 6:29–33 reads:

29 Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent. **30** They said therefore unto him, What sign do you show then, that we may see, and believe you? What do you work? **31** Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. **32** Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.* **33** *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and gives life unto the world.* **34** Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. **35** And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. (emphasis added)

Here Jesus references the story of Moses and the Exodus into the wilderness to draw a comparison between himself and the bread sent down from heaven by the Father. Rhetorically speaking, John's inclusion of an appeal to authoritative writing strengthens Jesus' self-revelation by associating it with an already familiar life-sustaining symbol in Israelite history.

Another good example of the appeal to authoritative writing can be seen in John 7:12–31. Here Jesus is teaching at the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. His listeners are antagonistically questioning his doctrine and accuse him of having a devil. Jesus claims that they seek to kill him and judge unrighteously. This whole event seems to be in the wake of Jesus' healing of an invalid on the Sabbath (5:8–9). Notice how his appeal to the authoritative law of Moses strengthens his final self-revelation of “I am from him (God), and he has sent me” (7:29). John writes:

19 *Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law? Why do you go about to kill me?* **20** The people answered and said, you have a devil: who goes about to kill you? **21** Jesus answered and said to them, I have done one work, and you all marvel. **22** *Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man.* **23** *If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?* **24** Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. **25** Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to

kill? **26** But, lo, he speaks boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? **27** Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ comes, no man knows whence he is. **28** Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, You both know me, and you know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom you know not. **29** But I know him: for I am from him, and he has sent me. (John 7:19–29; emphasis added)

Rhetorically, once again we see that Jesus' appeal to law here strengthens his claim that he is indeed sent to do the will of the Father. The appeal elevates Jesus to the status of a doer and speaker of truth. His argument is essentially that if you circumcise on the Sabbath according to the law of Moses and it is okay, healing on the Sabbath according to the will of God who sent me it is likewise okay.

Figurative Identity

Another common rhetorical motif which John utilizes is the figurative identity. This means that Jesus identifies himself not as a person, but figuratively with a title that describes his role. For example, in John 11:1–57 Jesus reveals himself as “the resurrection and the life” (11:25). In this chapter he has come to Bethany at the behest of Mary and Martha because Lazarus, their brother, has died. Upon arriving the following dialogue ensues:

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. **21** Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother had not died. **22** But I know, that even now, whatsoever you ask of God, God will give it to you. **23** Jesus said to her, your brother shall rise again. **24** Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. **25** Jesus said to her, *I am the resurrection, and the life*: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. (11:20–25; emphasis added).

Jesus' figurative self-revelation suggests to the reader that it is he who is in control of both life and the power of resurrection, a fact he later demonstrates by raising Lazarus from the dead (11:43–44). By using a figurative title, John can show not only who Jesus is but what he can do to help others. Other examples of this usage include Jesus as the “bread of life,” “light of the world” and “way, the truth and the life” (6:35; 8:12; 14:6). Rhetorically, John does more to reveal Jesus' true identity by speaking figuratively than he could have done with a literal declaration.

Qualifiers

A very significant rhetorical element for our study is what I will term “qualifiers.” Qualifiers are adjectives which set apart the character to an idealistic status. They suggest that whatever thing Jesus claims to be, he is the ideal version of that thing. For example, Jesus is not just the shepherd but the “good” shepherd (10:11). This qualifier both portrays Jesus as the ideal and

suggests that there were likely those leaders among the flock who were not “good.”²⁹ Jesus as the “true” vine likewise reflects the ideal while suggesting that there were those who claimed to be such, but were not. We similarly see the “living” bread, set up in rhetorical antithesis to that bread which if a man eats, it will not provide him with life eternal (John 6:51). All of these qualifiers rhetorically raise Jesus’ identity status to the ideal in a world full of that which is imperfect and artificial.

Greek Self-Revelatory Passages

Throughout the SR passages in the writings of Homer and Plato, one can see similar rhetorical themes and motifs to those found in John’s Gospel. These not only appear regularly, but abound and allow for allusions and parallels to be drawn in the mind of a Gentile, much like allusions and parallels might have been drawn to the Hebrew scriptures in the mind of a Jew. Evidence of affinity with divinity, an appeal to authoritative writing, a figurative identity and qualifiers are all found within Homer and Plato’s popular works. This section will address these common themes and analyze how they work within their respective context. It should also be understood that more than one motif can exist with a single phrase or sentence. For example, “I am the true lover” includes two devices, the figurative identity and qualifiers. I will not be able to address all SR passage rhetorical motifs. Some of these include the author of truth/wisdom, supremacy, old age or very rich, reference to regional and familial origins, and the inclusion of a supernatural act. Further examples of the themes addressed in this section can be seen in the appendix.

Affinity with Divinity

Like the Johannine examples, many of the SR passages in Greek literature make reference to the main character having a close relationship with a god or being a god himself. This device is used to justify the position of the character. Consider, for example, Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*. In the *Apology* Socrates is put on trial for corrupting the youth and teaching them not to believe in the gods of the state. His defense is that he has been sent by the gods to awaken the state to its erroneous actions. If convicted for his crime, he will be exiled or put to death. Socrates responds, “If you put me to death you will not easily find another as I am. . . . *I am a kind of gift from god.*”³⁰ Socrates’ main defense is that he has been sent from god and is led by his *daemon* or “divine being” and thus is justified in his actions regardless of the state’s opinion.

Examples of the affinity with divinity are likewise prevalent in the writings of Homer. Achilles, the main character of the *Iliad*, similarly declared his relationship with deity within the context of a SR passage. In the twenty-first book of the *Iliad*, Achilles has engaged in a fight with Asteropaeus, who claims

29. P. M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God* (Cambridge: Westminster/James Clark & Co., 1991), 30.

30. Plato, *Apology*, 18.24–41

that he is “of the blood of the river Axius” and will kill Achilles.³¹ After having struck him with a fatal blow, Achilles, justifying his position as the rightful victor, makes the following self-revelation:

Lie there begotten of a river though you be, it is hard for you to strive with *the offspring of Saturn's son*. You declare yourself sprung from the blood of a broad river, *but I am of the seed of mighty Jove*. My father is Peleus, son of Aeacus ruler over the many Myrmidons, and Aeacus was the son of Jove. Therefore *as Jove is mightier than any river that flows into the sea, so are his children stronger than those of any river whatsoever*.³²

Achilles' victory over his foe is based upon the fact that he enjoys a kinship with Jove, the head of the gods. Rhetorically in the *Apology* and the *Iliad*, we see that the affinity with divinity justifies the “rightful” or “just” position the character has taken, be it legally, as in the case of Socrates, or in combat, such as the passage with Achilles.

An Appeal to Authoritative Writing

Another commonality that exists between the Johannine and Greek SR passages is the appeal to authoritative writing. The individual appeals to some type of authoritative source familiar to his listeners, in an effort to lend credence to his words. In the Gospel we saw that Jesus referred to the law of the Jews. In the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates reveals himself to Phaedrus as “a lover of knowledge.”³³ To justify his point that he doesn't have time to dabble in vain inquiries, he declares, “I must first know myself, *as the Delphian inscription says*, to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous. And therefore I bid farewell to all this.”³⁴ Socrates does the very same thing in many of Plato's dialogues. In the *Apology* he appeals to the law of the state.³⁵ In *Lesser Hippias*,³⁶ *Ion*,³⁷ and *Theaetetus* he appeals to great poets and philosophers such as Homer, Hesiod and Archilochus.³⁸ All appeals to authoritative writing lend credence and authority to the speaker's words. This rhetorical device strengthens his position and clarifies his self-revelation.

We also see the appeal to the words of the gods. In ancient Greece, the will of the gods was made know by divinatory arts such as consulting with oracles, casting lots, and examining the innards of animals.³⁹ Their revealed word became the sure authority and often was the pretext under which wars

31. Homer, *Iliad*, 21.184–91.

32. Homer, *Iliad*, 21.184–91.

33. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 230.

34. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229–30.

35. Plato, *Apology*, 18.24–41.

36. Plato, *Lesser Hippias*, 372a.

37. Plato, *Ion*, 532.5–7.

38. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 39.

39. Flaceliere, R., “Divination,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 487–88.

were begun and battles were fought. Homer's *Iliad* illustrates the authority of the word of the gods in book 7 as Helenus attempts to convince Hector to engage in single combat. He pleads with Hector, saying, "I am your brother, let me then persuade you."⁴⁰ After divining the will of the gods, he makes his appeal, saying, "Bid the other Trojans and Achaeans all of them take their seats and challenge the best man among the Achaeans to meet you in single combat. *I have heard the voice of the ever-living gods, and the hour of your doom is not yet come.*"⁴¹ Helenus being a blood relative suggests that he is one in whom Hector can trust and who would not knowingly send his brother to his death. His appeal to the authoritative words of the gods strengthens his self-revealed position as brother and lends authority and truthfulness to his words.

Figurative Identity

The figurative identity is very prevalent in the popular Greek literature, especially in the works of Plato. Socrates, like Jesus, often identifies himself figuratively to emphasize his role in relation to his listeners. This device paints a more accurate picture of how Socrates can help others. In Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, Socrates declares "you are the person who is in labor, and I am the barren midwife."⁴² The image of a barren midwife leads the mind to the nurturing role of a woman who can no longer bear children but finds joy in helping other women do so. Plato used this device in order to emphasize Socrates' role as one who is "thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man bears is a false image or a noble and true birth."⁴³ The figurative identity strengthens the comprehension of the self-revelation by illustrating not just who the character claims to be but what he does for his listeners.

Similarly in his *Apology*, the man Socrates proclaims, "For if you put me to death you will not easily find another as I am . . . as a gadfly who attaches himself to the city."⁴⁴ He is one who constantly awakens the state which is as a great horse "though large and well-bred, is sluggish on account of his size and needs to be aroused by stinging."⁴⁵ Though superficially the image of a gadfly seems somewhat negative, in the context of the story it becomes a very positive figure. The state was in a position of stagnant ignorance, and Socrates the means by which it was awoken to wisdom and knowledge. Socrates is much like a man who yells in your ear because the house is burning down.

Qualifiers

Much like John's Gospel, qualifiers are abundant in Greek literature. As mentioned before, qualifiers are adjectives which set apart the character to

40. Homer, *Iliad*, 7.47–55.

41. Homer, *Iliad*, 7.47–55.

42. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 151.

43. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150c.

44. Plato, *Apology*, 18.24–41.

45. Plato, *Apology*, 18.26–31.

an idealistic status. For example in Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades*, Socrates is in engaged in conversation with Alcibiades concerning the nature of the "true" lover. At the conclusion of the dialogue, Socrates finally declares, "I am he."⁴⁶ The qualifier "true" sets the lover apart from false lovers who, as Socrates says, "love not Alcibiades, but the belongings of Alcibiades," and "go away when the flower of youth fades."⁴⁷ Similarly, Socrates is figuratively described as the "true midwife" and "the purple in a garment."⁴⁸ He is unique and serves as not just any color but the most excellent of all colors. He is the excellence of the state and essentially the "salt of the earth."

The ideal in the works of Homer takes on the mask of age and birthright. Older men and individuals of noble birth are seen as the ideal. The qualifiers include "older" and a host of other words which suggest the privileged upbringings of a royal son. Phrases such as "*I am older* than either or you; therefore be guided by me,"⁴⁹ and "in counsel I am much before you, for *I am older* and of greater knowledge"⁵⁰ are common throughout Homer's *Iliad* and establish an authoritative precedence. In the *Odyssey*, the portrayal of the ideal man is seen in statements such as "*I am by birth a Cretan*; my father was a *well-to-do man*"⁵¹ and "*I too was a rich man once*, and had a *fine house of my own*."⁵² The qualifiers in both these instances strengthen the self-revelation and elevate the main character to an ideal status in the eyes of the listener.

Jesus through Gentile Eyes

How might Gentile Christians reading or listening to the Gospel of John have seen Jesus of Nazareth differently from their Jewish brethren? The striking rhetorical similarities found in the SR passages of both bodies of literature allowed for a uniquely Greek view of Jesus of Nazareth that eventually filtered down into later Christianity. The parallel rhetorical themes of affinity with divinity, an appeal to authoritative writing, figurative identity and qualifiers, work to place Jesus within the Greek concept of perfection and idealism. Jesus truly was who he claimed to be in a world of those who were not. He was a speaker of truth and one who could assist others in reaching a more ideal or perfect state.

The portrayal of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John fits firmly into the Greek concept of the ideal and perfection. For Plato and Aristotle, this world and all in it are a shadow of a higher, more perfect, or "ideal" world. Perfection has its own independent existence even within an imperfect world. For these early Greek philosophers, this perfection and ideal represent that which *truly is* rather than that which appears to be. For them, the possession of wisdom and

46. Plato, *Alcibiades*, 1.131.

47. Plato, *Alcibiades*, 1.131.

48. Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae*, 3.23.

49. Homer, *Iliad*, 1.25.

50. Homer, *Iliad*, 19.215–20.

51. Homer, *Odyssey*, 14.200–205.

52. Homer, *Odyssey*, 19.74–75.

knowledge is the way to understand perfection and ultimate happiness. Perfect or ideal objects also had the capacity to elevate others to a more idealistic and perfect state. For example, Plato compared the ideal with the sun, which shines upon all plants and animals, enabling them to grow and reach their fullest potential.⁵³ The ideal or perfect object was likewise seen as unchanging and original in form.

The affinity with divinity and qualifiers *rhetorically present Jesus as one who was who he claimed to be in a world of those who weren't*. The characters Jesus, Socrates, Achilles and Ulysses all claimed to have a special relationship with Deity. For Jesus it was the Father, for Socrates it was his *daemon*, while Achilles and Ulysses held kinship with Jove and Minerva.⁵⁴ At closer rhetorical examination one sees that these declarations of kinship are used in an effort to portray the character as being the rightful, true, or “ideal” form of what they reveal themselves to be. For example, Achilles’ claim to divine sonship was the reason for which he was the rightful or true victor of the battle between him (Achilles) and Asteropaeus.⁵⁵ In the story of Ulysses and the *Odyssey*, it is Ulysses’ help from the goddess Minerva which finally allows him to exact judgment on those who had wronged his family and take his place as the rightful king of Ithaca. Finally, it was Jesus’ claim to divine affinity which added God’s testimony to the truthfulness of his words, “I am the light of the world,” thereby establishing him not just as one who claimed but one who truly was (8:12).

The qualifiers specifically add the element of the outside world by portraying the ideal character in contrast to others. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates as the “true midwife”⁵⁶ is separated in rhetorical antithesis from those midwives who know nothing of childbearing from personal experience.⁵⁷ The characters in Homer’s *Iliad* are “older” and therefore the rightful orators among an audience of younger, less experienced men. I wonder if this Homeric ideal echoed in the mind of the Gentiles who read Jesus’ words “before Abraham [ca. 2800 B.C.E.] was I” (8:58). We see Jesus as the “good shepherd” and the “true vine” in contrast to those who offered only lip service.⁵⁸ He similarly reveals himself as the “light of the world,” which as Brown wrote, was “probably by way of contrast with the festal lights burning brightly in the court of the women at the temple.”⁵⁹ And thus we see Jesus is likewise portrayed as the ideal in a setting of that which is not.

The appeal to authoritative writing establishes the character Jesus as a speaker of truth and wisdom. By drawing upon the words of the Torah, Jesus establishes himself as the speaker of truth according to the law of his listeners. By quoting scripture and aligning himself with the law of Moses, his listeners

53. Plato, *Republic*, 2.

54. Homer, *Odyssey*, 16.155–75.

55. Homer, *Iliad*, 21.184–91.

56. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150a.

57. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150.

58. Brown, *John*, 534.

59. Brown, *John*, 534.

were unable to challenge his self-revelation without challenging the law, or “truth,” by which they themselves were governed. The same holds true in the stories of Helenus and Hector, and Socrates. Hector cannot question the words of Helenus without doubting the gods themselves. Similarly, Hippias cannot challenge the words of Socrates without challenging the Oracle at Delphi. The appeal to authoritative writing rhetorically sets these characters as speakers of that which is right and true.

Finally, the figurative identity illustrates Jesus’ ability to help the listener approach a more ideal or perfect state of existence. Within both the Greek and Johannine *corpora* of SR passages, there are no examples of negative figures such as “I am death” or “I am hunger.” Titles such as the “bread of life,” “living water,” “gadfly,” and “midwife” all seek to improve the situation of the listener and bring them into a more ideal state of existence. Consider the logic of Jesus’ figurative self-allusion to bread and water. The reason a person eats and drinks is so that they might not hunger or thirst. Within the context of the pericope, this is the ideal state. Jesus is the living bread and water to whom which if a person should come, they “shall never hunger . . . and shall never thirst” (6:35). Similarly, Socrates is the god-sent facilitator of wisdom and truth, who not only awakes people to their ignorance but offers knowledge much as a caring midwife “soothe[s] . . . and offer[s] you one good thing after another.”⁶⁰ Each figurative identity allows Jesus to both be the ideal and offer the listener more idealistic existence.

Evidence for the reception this Greek understanding of Jesus can be seen in the writings of later Christian authors like Justin Martyr, St. Basil, Origen, and Gregory of Nazianus.⁶¹ Their writings reflect this unique Gentile understanding of Christ. For example, Gregory described Jesus of Nazareth as the “model of the original form” and “the image of God in person.”⁶² Justin Martyr, who was likewise of Gentile stock, often made allusions and comparisons to the works of Plato, Homer, and other Greek authors. He even went so far as allude to the similarities between Jesus and Socrates writing that Christ was “partially recognized in Socrates.”⁶³ In his *Second Apology*, he wrote of the truthfulness and grandeur of Jesus’ words, speaking of such as “greatest of all human teaching” and describing Christ as the “perfect rational being in body, reason and soul”⁶⁴ and the “instrument of human reason.”⁶⁵

Finally, Origen wrote that Christ was “in all respects incapable of change or alteration, and every good quality in Him being essential, and such as cannot be changed and converted.”⁶⁶ These ideas of wholeness, originality and

60. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 151.

61. Gregory wrote that Christ was the “model of the original image.” See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 286.

62. Pelikan, *Christianity*, 286.

63. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 10 (ANF 1:191).

64. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 10 (ANF 1:191).

65. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 10 (ANF 1:191).

66. Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.10 (PG 11).

completeness all relate to the concept of the ideal and perfection and reflect the uniquely Gentile understanding of Jesus.

Conclusion

I have shown in this study that the interpretation of SR passages in the Gospel of John widely varied among individuals and was primarily based upon each person's respective ethnic background and religious affiliation. Just as Jewish Christians would have been rhetorically drawn to the Old Testament when reading certain passages in the Gospel of John, Gentiles would have similarly had a unique view and understanding of the man Jesus based on the stories of Socrates, Achilles, and Ulysses. Common rhetorical themes such as the affinity with divinity, an appeal to authoritative writing, a figurative identity, and qualifiers found in the SR passages of the Gospel of John and the various works of Homer and Plato, worked together to paint a uniquely Gentile view of Jesus.

With the propagation of Christianity accomplished primarily by Gentiles to Gentiles, it is easy to understand how this idea stayed in Christian theological literature. Jewish convert Christians in the years after Jesus' death were notably less in number than those of a Gentile background and the early Fathers and prominent writers of the growing church were virtually all of Gentile stock. Evidence can be seen for the concept of Jesus as the ideal in later Christian circles, as well as comparisons between Jesus of Nazareth and Greek idealistic characters such as Socrates. Thus we see that many Gentile Christians understood him as one who is who he claims to be among those who aren't (affinity, qualifiers), a source of truth/wisdom (appeal to authoritative writing), and one who could help others reach a more perfect or ideal state.

APPENDIX

This appendix organizes the most illustrative Johannine and Greek SR passage examples according to rhetorical motif. Due to the length of some of the passages, I will include only selections that demonstrate the rhetorical device in question and will designate it in italics for further clarification. After the verse reference I will note who the character reveals himself to be, but will not always show it in the passage cited. At the conclusion of the appendix, I have listed some less common rhetorical devices mentioned but not prevalent enough for the purposes of this paper.

Affinity with Divinity

John 4:4–42 (The Messiah): **9** Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.” **10** *Jesus answered and said unto her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”* **11** The woman saith unto him, “Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?”

John 6:22–70 (Bread of life/living bread): **36** “But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. **37** All that *the Father giveth me* shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. **38** *For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.* **39** *And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.* **40** And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” **41** The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.”

John 7:12–31 (from God): **15** And the Jews marvelled, saying, “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” **16** Jesus answered them, and said, “*My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* **17** If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. **18** He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. . . . **29** *But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.*”

John 8:12–20 (Light of the World): **16** “And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but *I and the Father that sent me.* **17** It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. **18** I am one that bear witness of myself, and *the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.*” **19** Then said they unto him, “Where is thy Father?” Jesus answered, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known *my Father* also.”

John 8:21–31 (Son of Man): **23** And he said unto them, “Ye are from

beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.” **25** Then said they unto him, “Who art thou?” And Jesus saith unto them, “Even *the same* that I said unto you from the beginning. **26** I have many things to say and to judge of you: *but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.* . . . **29** *And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.*”

John 8:33–59 (I am): **38** “*I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.*” **39** They answered and said unto him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus saith unto them, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. **40** But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. **41** Ye do the deeds of your father.” Then said they to him, “We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.” **42** Jesus said unto them, “If God were your Father, ye would love me: *for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*”

John 9:1–7 (Light of the World): **2** And his disciples asked him, saying, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” **3** Jesus answered, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but *that the works of God should be made manifest in him.* **4** *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*”

John 10:1–40 (Sheep door/Good Shepherd): **15** “*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.* **16** And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. **17** Therefore *doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.* **18** No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. *This commandment have I received of my Father.*”

John 11:1–57 (Resurrection and the life): **21** Then said Martha unto Jesus, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. **22** But I know, that even now, *whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*” **23** Jesus saith unto her, “Thy brother shall rise again.” . . . **41** Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, “Father, *I thank thee that thou hast heard me.* **42** *And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.*”

John 13:12–19 (I am he): **19** “Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. **20** Verily, verily, I say unto you, *He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*” **21** When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.”

John 14:1–6 (Way, truth, and life): **1** “Let not your heart be troubled: ye

believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

John 15:1–25 (True vine): **1** "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2* Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. **3** Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

Plato, *Apology*, 18.24–41 (Gift from god): "For if you put me to death you will not easily find another as I am . . . *I am a kind of gift from God!*"

Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150–151 (Barren midwife): "And like the mid-wives, I am barren, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to answer them myself, is very just—the reason is, that *the god compels me to be a midwife*, but does not allow me to bring forth. And therefore I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but those who converse with me profit."

Homer, *Iliad*, 5 (Of a fearless race): Diomed looked angrily at him and answered: "Talk not of flight, for I shall not listen to you: I am of a race that knows neither flight nor fear, and my limbs are as yet unwearied. I am in no mind to mount, but will go against them even as I am; *Pallas Minerva bids me be afraid of no man*, and even though one of them escape, their steeds shall not take both back again." . . . With this he hurled his spear, and *Minerva guided it on* to Pandarus's nose near the eye.

Homer, *Iliad*, 21.184–91 (Great and goodly): "Patroclus fell, and he was a better man than you are. I too—see you not how I am great and goodly? I am son to a noble father, and *have a goddess for my mother*, but the hands of doom and death overshadow me all as surely. The day will come, either at dawn or dark, or at the noontide, when one shall take my life also in battle, either with his spear, or with an arrow sped from his bow."

Homer, *Iliad*, 19.215–20 (Seed of Jove): Then Achilles set his foot on his chest and spoiled him of his armour, vaunting over him and saying, "Lie there—begotten of a river though you be, it is hard for you to strive with the offspring of Saturn's son. You declare yourself sprung from the blood of a broad river, but *I am of the seed of mighty Jove.*"

Homer, *Odyssey*, 14.200–205 (A Cretan): "*Mars and Minerva made me doughty in war*; when I had picked my men to surprise the enemy with an ambuscade I never gave death so much as a thought, but was the first to leap forward and spear all whom I could overtake."

Homer, *Odyssey*, 15 (Son of Ulysses): They set the mast in its socket in the cross plank, raised it and made it fast with the forestays, and they hoisted their white sails with sheets of twisted ox hide. *Minerva sent them a fair wind that blew fresh and strong to take the ship on her course as fast as possible.* Thus then they passed by Crouni and Chalcis.

Appeal to Authoritative Writing

John 6:22–70 (Bread of life/Living bread): **44** “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. **45** *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.* Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. **46** Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.”

John 7:12–31 (From God): **19** “*Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?*” **20** The people answered and said, “Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?” **21** Jesus answered and said unto them, “I have done one work, and ye all marvel. **22** *Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man.* **23** If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?”

John 8:12–20 (Light of the world): **16** “And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. **17** *It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true.* **18** I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.”

John 10:1–40 (Sheep door/Good shepherd): **33** The Jews answered him, saying, “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” **34** Jesus answered them, “*Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, Ye are gods?’* **35** If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the *scripture cannot be broken.*”

John 13:12–19 (I am he): **17** “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. **18** I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but *that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.* **19** Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.”

John 15:1–25 (True vine): **24** “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. **25** But this cometh to pass, *that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’*”

John 18:1–9 (I am he): **8** Jesus answered, “I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: **9** *That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.*”

Plato, Apology 18.24–41 (A man): “My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not of wood or stone, *as Homer says; and I have a family, yes, and sons.* O Athenians, three in number, one of whom is growing up, and the two others are still young; and yet I will not bring any of them hither in order to petition you for an acquittal.”

Plato, Ion, 532.5–7 (Speaker of truth): *Soc.* “*And you say that Homer and the other poets, such as Hesiod and Archilochus, speak of the same things, although*

not in the same way; but the one speaks well and the other not so well?” *Ion*. “Yes; and I am right in saying so.” *Soc*. “And if you knew the good speaker, you would also know the inferior speakers to be inferior?” *Ion*. “That is true.”

Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229–30 (Lover of knowledge): “Now I have no leisure for such enquiries; shall I tell you why? *I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says*; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous. And therefore I bid farewell to all this; the common opinion is enough for me.”

Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150–151 (Barren midwife): “*But great philosophers tell us* that we are not to allow either the word “something,” or “belonging to something,” or “to me,” or “this,” or “that,” or any other detaining name to be used, in the language of nature all things are being created and destroyed, coming into being and passing into new forms; nor can any name fix or detain them; he who attempts to fix them is easily refuted.”

Homer, *Iliad*, 7 (Brother): Minerva assented, and Helenus son of Priam *divined the counsel of the gods*; he therefore went up to Hector and said, “Hector son of Priam, peer of gods in counsel, I am your brother, let me then persuade you. Bid the other Trojans and Achaeans all of them take their seats, and challenge the best man among the Achaeans to meet you in single combat. *I have heard the voice of the ever-living gods*, and the hour of your doom is not yet come.”

Figurative Identity

John 6:22–70 (Bread of life/Living bread): **34** Then said they unto him, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” **35** And Jesus said unto them, “*I am the bread of life*: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

John 8:12–20 (Light of the world): **12** Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, “*I am the light of the world*: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” **13** The Pharisees therefore said unto him, “Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.”

John 9:1–7 (Light of the world): **4** “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, *I am the light of the world*.”

John 10:1–40 (Sheep door/Good shepherd): **7** Then said Jesus unto them again, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, *I am the door of the sheep*. **8** All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. **9** I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. **10** The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. **11** *I am the good shepherd*: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. **12** But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. **13** The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. **14** *I am the good*

shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

John 11:1–57 (Resurrection/Life): **24** Martha saith unto him, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” **25** Jesus said unto her, “*I am the resurrection, and the life*: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: **26** And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

John 14:1–6 (Way/Truth/Life): **5** Thomas saith unto him, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” **6** Jesus saith unto him, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

John 15:1–5 (True vine): **1**. “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman*. **2** Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Plato, *Apology*, 18.24–41 (Gadfly): “For if you put me to death you will not easily find another as I am . . . *as a gadfly who attaches himself to the city*.”

Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150–151 (Barren midwife): “You forget, my friend, that I neither know, nor profess to know, anything of! these matters ; you are the person who is in labour, *I am the barren midwife*; and this is why I soothe you, and offer you one good thing after another, that you may taste them.”

Qualifiers

John 6:22–70 (True bread): **32** Then Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the *true* bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. . . . **51** I am the *living* bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

John 10:1–40 (Good Shepherd): **13** “The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. **14** I am the *good* shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

John 15:1–25 (True vine): **1** “I am the *true* vine, and my Father is the husbandman. **2** Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Plato, *Alcibiades*, 1.131 (True lover): *Soc.* “But he who loves your soul is the *true* lover?” *Alc.* “That is the necessary inference.” *Soc.* “The lover of the body goes away when the flower of youth fades?” *Alc.* “True.” *Soc.* “But he who loves the soul goes not away, as long the soul follows after virtue?” *Alc.* “Yes.” *Soc.* “And I am he.”

Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150–151 (Barren midwife): “Certainly not; but midwives are respectable women who have a character to lose, and they avoid this department of their profession, because they are afraid of being called procuresses, which is a name given to those who join together man and woman

in an unlawful and unscientific way; and yet the *true* midwife is also the true and only matchmaker.”

Homer, *Iliad*, 1.25 (Older): “Of a truth,” he said, “a great sorrow has befallen the Achaean land. Surely Priam with his sons would rejoice, and the Trojans be glad at heart if they could hear this quarrel between you two, who are so excellent in fight and counsel. I am *older* than either of you; therefore be guided by me.”

Homer, *Iliad*, 19.215–20 (Much before you): Ulysses answered, “Achilles, son of Peleus, mightiest of all the Achaeans, in battle you are better than I, and that more than a little, but in counsel I am much before you, for I am *older* and of greater knowledge. Therefore be patient under my words.”

Origins

John 7:12–31 (From God): **27** “Howbeit we know this man *whence he is*: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.” **28** Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, “*Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not.*” **29** But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.”

John 8:12–20 (Light of world): **13** The Pharisees therefore said unto him, “Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.” **14** Jesus answered and said unto them, “Though I bear record of myself, *yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.*” **15** Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.”

Homer, *Iliad*, 21.184–91 (Of the blood of the river Axius): When they were close up with one another Achilles was first to speak. “*Who and whence are you,*” said he, “who dare to face me? Woe to the parents whose son stands up against me.”

Homer, *Odyssey*, 15 (Son of Ulysses): “Friend” said he, “now that I find you sacrificing in this place, I beseech you by your sacrifices themselves, and by the god to whom you make them, I pray you also by your own head and by those of your followers, tell me the truth and nothing but the truth. *Who and whence are you?* Tell me also of your town and parents.” Telemachus said, “I will answer you quite truly. *I am from Ithaca, and my father is ‘Ulysses, as surely as that he ever lived.’*”

Supernatural Act

John 6:16–21 (I am he): **18** And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. **19** So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see *Jesus walking on the sea*, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. **20** But he saith unto them, “It is I; be not afraid.”

John 9:1–7 (Light of world): **6** When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, **7** And said unto him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” (which is by interpretation, Sent.) *He went his way therefore, and washed, and*

came seeing.

John 11:1–57 (Resurrection/Life): **42** “And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” **43** And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come forth.*” **44** *And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.* Jesus saith unto them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

Homer, *Odyssey*, 11 (Neptune): Neptune, disguised as her lover, lay with her at the mouth of the river, and *a huge blue wave arched itself like a mountain over them to hide both woman and god*, whereon he loosed her virgin girdle and laid her in a deep slumber.

Homer, *Odyssey*, 16.155–75 (Your father): “You are not my father, but some god is flattering me with vain hopes that I may grieve the more hereafter; *no mortal man could of himself contrive to do as you have been doing, and make yourself old and young at a moment’s notice, unless a god were with him. A second ago you were old and all in rags, and now you are like some god come down from heaven.*”