

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies
Emphasis in the New Testament

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 17:20-23 IN THE
CONTEXT OF MODERN ECUMENISM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN KENYA

Researcher: Kaindio Wilson Mung'athia

Faculty primary advisor: Prof. Sampson M. Nwaomah, PhD

Date completed: April 2023

The ecumenical movement is the movement for the amalgamation of all religions, Christian denominations and cults as the remedy to the divisions prevailing within Christian churches and other religious set-ups. The ecumenical councils, whereby the World Council of Churches is the principal promoter, are the machinery for achieving the aims of ecumenism. The membership comprises of the Protestants, the Anglicans, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics, all aiming at uniting all religious groups, Christian denominations and cultic traditions into one entity globally in terms of doctrinal agreement through their document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*. Proponents of this movement depend on their understanding of the subordinate clause, in Greek, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated, “that they all may be one” in John 17:20-23. Thus, the term, “all” presumes the collective uniting of religious bodies and Christian denominations physically, mindless of their spiritual

faith-connections with the Godhead, although their spiritual faith-connections with the Trinity should be the key factor in this unification. Its literal implication is suggested by the bringing of religious bodies as a global group to answer the prayer of Jesus, and the allegory here is presumed by the interpretation of the oneness in the passage as having the nuance of ecumenism. An allegorical or a literal interpretation to John 17:20-23 distorts the very intention of the perfect spiritual oneness among true believers Jesus implied in His prayer: “may they be brought to complete (perfect) unity” (17:23a). The challenge that arises from such an interpretation involves reconciling the differences in doctrinal truths that prevail in some of these churches pushing for ecumenical identity of Christianity.

This research sought an interpretation of this Johannine pericope linguistically and theologically. The study found that the ecumenists misread the syntax of the subordinate clause as, “that they may be all one,” instead of, “that they all may be one.” They wrest its literal meaning for an allegorical interpretation against its own context to fit a literal global church. This study concludes that John 17:20-23 focuses on the essence of divine unity among believers in Christ and this profound Christian unity emanates from the union of the Godhead. It focuses on a faith-based, spiritual unity of believers shaped by the Holy Spirit founded on the union existing between the Father and the Son. It is a spiritual unity of purpose with missiological and fellowship of love elements, founded on divine principles. The true biblical unity of the followers of Christ essentially favors their global mission. Thus, it was recommended based on the concept of unity in the passage, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya should seek this kind of unity in its internal and missiological relationships. This should strengthen fundamental hallmarks of the local and global church towards profound foundations for enduring universal unity.

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A thesis

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Primary Advisor:
Sampson M. Nwaomah, PhD

Programme Director, MABTS
Melak A. Tsegaw, PhD

Secondary Advisor:
David Odhiambo, PhD

Dean, Theological Seminary
Feliks Ponyatovskiy, PhD

External Examiner:
Michael O. Akpa, PhD

Date: April 2023

This work is dedicated to my Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ for
His glory, to the biblical researchers to rightly divide the Word
of truth, to my family, to my parents, to my siblings and my
Church organizations: East Nairobi Field and the
East Kenya Union Conference.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study owes its very completion from the great providence of the Almighty God who healed me in 2018 after an acute cardiac illness for over two months. I cannot take it for granted for knowledge and understanding belongs to Him. I acknowledge the moral support and financial contribution of my wife, Celina K. M., our children, Milcah, Betty and Abigael-Eve, my siblings and parents. Let me applaud the administrative, financial and moral support of my Field, East Nairobi Field (ENF), and Union, East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC).

My special recognition goes to my beloved primary advisor, Prof. Sampson M. Nwaomah for his patience, wisdom and fatherly instruction and guidance in this study. Let me thank my program director, Dr. Melak A. Tsegaw, for his diligent follow up to see that I completed and defended my thesis aright. I am appreciating my secondary advisor (reader), Dr. David Odhiambo and my external examiner, Prof. Michael Onyedikachi Akpa for their courageous academic observations which made my work unprecedentedly excellent. Let me appreciate the instruction of the able team of professors in the Theological Seminary plus the administrative body for their constant encouragements to complete the studies and the thesis work. The library fraternity, the editing team, and the AUA staff, your priceless help has been incomparable. I wish to congratulate my fellow MABTS students and several other cohorts for their team spirit both in the class discussions and their assistance whenever or wherever possible in the production of this work. His grace is sufficient for you all. God bless you abundantly!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

There are varying views on the meaning of the intercessory prayer of Jesus Christ on the meaning of unity in John 17:20-23. The understanding of the concept of oneness in John 17 tends to assume categories of two major issues: (1) the modern ecumenism steered by the ecumenical councils, the major one being the World Council of Churches, which the Protestant churches initiated and later on joined by the Roman Catholic Church and several Protestant faiths in the 19th century to date,¹ and, (2) the biblically-based unity of love and purpose² and fellowship of believers³ for world mission through evangelism held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church,⁴ and a few others by some scholars.⁵ Although a middle ground prevails on the

¹ National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCCC), Division of Christian Education, "The History of the Church: The Ecumenical Movement," *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York, NY: Seabury, 1969), 230, 231; John A. Radano, ed., *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism: Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 53-304, 1-37, and, Max Thurian, ed., *Ecumenism Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 116 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches (WCC), 1983), xi, ix, 1.

² Wilson Paroschi, "The Disciples' Mission," *The Book of Acts*, General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide, ed. Clifford R. Goldstein (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 30 June to 29 September 2018): 7-16, and, Denis Fortin, "That They All May Be One," *Oneness in Christ*, General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, ed. Clifford R. Goldstein (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 29 September to 29 December 2018): 29-40.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 1948), 17.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desires of Ages* (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 680.

⁵ Margaret O'Gara, *No Turning Back: The Future of Ecumenism*, ed. Michael Vertin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 42.

fellowship issue,⁶ there is no agreement regarding inter-religious conglomeration into a global entity or ecumenism as the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus in John 17.

Ecumenism also referred to as the ‘ecumenical movement’,⁷ has various scholarly definitions such as: “‘the whole church’; ‘promoting or tending toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation’, or ‘the whole inhabited world’.”⁸ It is also regarded as the “twentieth-century movement”⁹ gearing towards unity among the diverse denominations of the Christian church.¹⁰ It is also considered as the passion for unity of the church or “non-fragmented state of the modern Christian church” in the prayer of Jesus.¹¹ The recent past has regarded ecumenism as the “religious wave of the future by most pundits of religious trends,” and thus, this said movement unquestionably bears a profound impact.¹² Thus, the Ecumenical Movement is regarded as the amalgamation of all religious bodies worldwide as the remedy to the divisions prevailing within the mainstream modern Christian denominations, churches or cults as referred to by its protagonists in the petition of Jesus in John 17:20-23 that primarily appeals to unity.¹³ The ecumenical councils, with the principal one being the

⁶ NCCC, *New Catechism*, 230, 231.

⁷ M. M. Thomas and Paul Abrecht, eds., “The Structure and Work of the Conference: An Introduction to the Report,” *World Conference on Church and Society Official Report* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1967), 8.

⁸ George Thomas Kurian, ed., *The Testament Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Compendium of Christian Terms* (New York: Testament Books, 2005), 260, 261.

⁹ Kurian, *Testament Christian Dictionary*, 260, 261.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ R. David Nelson and Charles Raith II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, accessed 1 March 2019, <https://www.amason.com>Ecumenism-A-Guide-for-the-Perplexed; and, www.bloomsbury.com>ecumenism>.

¹² Bert Beverly Beach, *Ecumenism: Boon or Bane?* ed. Donald E. Mansell (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1974), 15.

¹³ Radano, *Century of Ecumenism*, 59.

WCC, are instrumentalities for propelling the objectives of the modern Ecumenical Movement. Its membership consists of the Protestants, the Anglicans, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), all of them espousing a common aim of uniting Christian denominations into one entity globally in terms of doctrinal agreement through their document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*.¹⁴ Ecumenism within Christianity aims at the conglomeration of all religions and Christian denominations worldwide to cure the factions prevailing within the modern churches while at the same time wisely initiating non-religious entities into this mega-union. For these reasons, many scholars deem the ecumenical movement as the “modern antidote to the challenge of the divisions”¹⁵ which major religions and Christian churches experience today which could probably also affect non-religious set-ups in their win-win strategy. However, the uniting of the church is not the pattern of some organization on earth or “any well-meaning intentions of any prudent human being.”¹⁶ Therefore, the amalgamating of Christians by the blood of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit is the act of the Lord God solely.

Based on the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one” in John 17, which is the premise of ecumenism, divergent views have been proposed on ecumenism.¹⁷ George Thomas Kurian opines that ecumenism is the, “Twentieth-century movement towards unity among the various denominations of the Christian church.”¹⁸ R. David Nelson and Charles Raith II thrice posit that it is the “non-fragmented Christian

¹⁴ Radano, *Century of Ecumenism*, 59.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, Holman New Testament Commentary (HNTD), ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 318, 319.

¹⁷ Thomas and Abrecht, *World Conference*, 8.

¹⁸ Kurian, *Testament Christian Dictionary*, 260, 261.

church”¹⁹ and as “a glittering word in today’s vocabulary.”²⁰ Ellen G. White describes it as the “unity of three church-state powers” opposed to, and egged on other, aims of unity in John 17.²¹ Barna supports unity for fellowship.²² Many biblical scholars deduce ecumenism as the real meaning of oneness in the prayer of Christ.²³ Its very inception was a well-calculated move to literally fulfill the prayer²⁴ though it is allegorically insinuated. Beach purports to ecumenism being strengthened both in numbers as well as in institutions²⁵ probably to portray its global immensity.

In contrast to the ideas of the ecumenists on giving John 17:20-23 a literal or an allegorical meaning, the pericope bears three fundamental tenets that underlie its interpretation in regard to unity: “the expanded unity, the multiplying witness and the revealed Jesus (Christology).”²⁶ Its literal presupposition is inferred by just amalgamating of religious bodies as a global entity to answer the prayer of Jesus, and the allegorical meaning here is presumed by the wanton interpretation of the oneness

¹⁹ “Nelson and Raith II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, accessed 1 March 2019, <https://www.amazon.com/Ecumenism-A-Guide-for-the-Perplexed>, and, www.bloomsbury.com/ecumenism.

²⁰ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 5, 23-30.

²¹ Ellen G. White, “The Impending Conflict,” *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 2005), 589.

²² George Barna, “Building Lasting, Significant Relationships,” *Being Strategic In God-Given Ministry: The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999), 74, 75.

²³ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 23-30.

²⁴ Kurian, *Testament Christian Dictionary*, 261.

²⁵ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 15.

²⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 196-200, 203, 204, and George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 36 (Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 301-304.

of the pericope as having the nuance of ecumenism.²⁷ These two presuppositions are not supported linguistically, biblically or theologically.

Statement of the Problem

The term oneness (unity) in John 17:20-23 has been treated paradoxically with a literal or an allegorical interpretation. Both nuances have caused textual inconsistencies culminating into incalculable conceptual debates. Differences in theological opinions arise on the kind of unity Jesus prayed for: whether it is ecumenism involving the visible unification of religions irrespective of doctrinal differences, or biblical-mission-oriented union in love, truth, purpose and fellowship. Hence, the challenge this text still presents to many is determining the biblical and theological meaning attached to the debated clause in Greek; *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated; “that they all may be one” (vs. 21), with an emphasis on the adjectives in Greek, *ἐν*, meaning, “one,” and *πάντες*, that is, “all”, which could have led to different interpretations. Exploring the nuance of the phrase, “that they all might be one”, is the burden of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The study intends to interpret the lexical unit, Greek, *ἐν* (one), and then exegete the clause, in Greek, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated, “that they all may be one,” in John 17:20-23 in order to arrive at its theological thrust. The frequently occurring adjective, *ἐν*, “one,” will be analyzed to derive the relationship existing within the spectrum of the clauses or the whole text for its meaning and the differing

²⁷ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 201-204.

conceptual worldviews attached. The research will also draw theological implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya.

Significance of the Study

This work is justified in that the proper understanding of the words, ‘one’ and ‘all’ in the clause, “that they all may be one” as Jesus meant in His prayer will satisfy His intended objective. Further, the result of this study would contribute to a better perspective of the ecumenism debate and Christian unity based on this passage among the Seventh-day Adventists in Kenya and its internal relationships, and with other Christian denominations.

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the discussions in this thesis only addresses the issues in John 17:20-23 pertaining to biblical unity in relation to the envisaged modern ecumenical movement, and thus focusing on the meaning of ‘one’ and ‘all.’ The research does not dwell upon exposing the trends of modern ecumenical movement. It however, provides in brief the historical and ecclesial formations of ecumenism. The study also addresses the implications for the Seventh-day Adventists only in Kenya.

Research Methodology

This thesis is primarily an exegesis with a theological interpretative focus that seeks to associate the historical-grammatical approach instead of historical criticism to study John 17:20-23. This method involves lexical study, syntactical and textual analysis and schematic structure, and also the historical and literary contexts of the Fourth Gospel and the passage to derive the meaning of the text. Theological implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya will be made. The

summary and conclusion of the tenets studied, and recommendations will wind up the study.

Overview of the Study

This research is categorized into five principal sections called chapters, each exposing certain tenets related to the topic. Chapter one is the introduction of the thesis itemized as: the background of the study; statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, research methodology and definitions of terms and abbreviations (if available or necessary) and the table of contents. Chapter two is the literature review from different writers from both the Christian circles and in Adventism. A thematic approach will be employed in the discussion.

Chapter three looks into the passage in its historical background and literary context of the book and the unit with varying connotations. Chapter four is an exegetical analysis of the pericope and the theological implications to the Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) in Kenya. Chapter five provides a summary and conclusion of the various parts of the discussions, and recommendations for the study. The bibliography and appendix with the vita appear at the close of the work.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review concerns the intercessory prayer of Jesus on the premise of unity. It thematically addresses some issues relating to two divergent schools of thought in order of persuasions, but connecting with basic time periods regarding the views on unity. The review first provides an overview of the history of the ecumenical movement and its objectives, followed by a review on the perspectives of unity and then considers some interpretations of biblical scholars particularly on the passage in focus.

A Survey of the Modern Ecumenical Movement

The Formation of the World Council of Churches and Her Aim on Unity

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded in 1948 in Amsterdam as an “outgrowth of the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburg.”¹ Its focus was to “create a visible communion of all churches,”² based on Christian beliefs for attaining its goals, so as to end any global war and unite the warring factions³ as

¹ Childs, *Theology in Crisis*, 28

² M. M. Thomas and Paul Abrecht, ed., “Structures of International Cooperation: Living Together in Peace in a Pluralistic World Society,” *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time: World Conference on Church and Society Report of Section III* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 12-26 July 1966), 123-129, 143-156.

³ *Ibid.*, 143-156.

stated in its launching document.⁴ M. M. Thomas and Paul Abrecht contend that the churches need to change “a balance of power into a community with institutions which are responsible for the common interest”⁵ in order to avert the occurrence of war by the nuclear powers. Therefore, the war issue and the prayer of Jesus seem to be parallel to each other in their focus: one aims at stopping the escalation of a large-scale battle, while the other perceives global evangelism to bring a united church in union with the Godhead.

The Ecumenical Councils: For Biblical Unity or Other Ends?

The statement of the ecumenical movement is clearly to bring together all religious groups into one unit.⁶ Max Thurian posits that the history of ecumenism since 1927 through the documents of the WCC reflects findings of previous bilateral dialogues of the church.⁷ He further observes; “it organically integrates the thoughts and actions of the churches sharing one fellowship of love and spiritual communion under the guidance of the Spirit on their way towards continuous renewal and visible unity.”⁸ The ecumenical councils later formed have endeavored to meet the aims for this preplanned move.

⁴ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Current Crosswinds: The Ecumenism,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 12:574.

⁵ Thomas and Abrecht, *Revolutions of Our Time*, 128-129.

⁶ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 295, and George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 319.

⁷ Thurian, *Ecumenism Perspectives*, ix, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The RCC leaders infer that the ecumenical movement from 1910 was “running underground counter to the splinter-tendency of the previous ages,”⁹ ultimately forming the WCC in 1948 by the Protestant churches as its great attainment.¹⁰ The encyclical letter, *Mortalium animos* by Pope Pius XI dated January 6th 1928 negatively stagnated the progress of dialogue on ecumenism.¹¹ Beach emphasizes that the acceptance by the RCC in 1964 “imperceptibly overshadowed the other key ecumenical partners,”¹² usurping the ecumenical prerogatives. In essence, some cold conflict may develop and cause more disunity than the envisaged oneness. The RCC here appears as the leading Christian denomination that is propagating the objectives of ecumenism.¹³ She is specifically mentioned “and other interested Christians” in WCC as an “efficient tool into brokering matters of ecumenical importance at local and international levels,” plus the “building and fortifying of a Christian community by intercessory prayer.”¹⁴

Her role is commendable, but indirectly, she is shifting the ecumenical equilibrium which soon or later could cause complaints or more schisms or incalculable rivalries. Some churches, who feel sidelined through the ideologies of the RCC, tend to ignore or rebel against the ecumenical trends. It seems that the focus of the councils was uniting “all Christians in their common call.”¹⁵ The aim of this

⁹ NCCC, *New Catechism*, 230.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Radano, *Century of Ecumenism*, 38, 39.

¹² Beach, *Ecumenism*, 15, and, Gaines, *WCC*, 1014.

¹³ Thurian, *Ecumenism Perspectives*, vii-xiii, 197-236.

¹⁴ Thomas and Abrecht, *Revolutions of Our Time*, 145.

¹⁵ NCCC, *New Catechism*, 230.

process is forging for a viable block for progressing the “dual ecumenical trends; the unification for spiritual, ecclesial, and other socio-political ends.”¹⁶ Thus, the Protestants and the RCC confined themselves to designated geographical zones to retain their influence and/or unity. As the movement began, these faiths demonstrated cooperation, but their power to witness has been gradually hampered.¹⁷ What the modern ecumenism expected in its commencement and progression concerns the way churches relate plus the identity and nature of the church and her doctrines.¹⁸

The RCC ecumenism working closely with WCC, has attempted to link other Christian entities through its recognition of “sister churches” in Eastern Orthodox as well as the existence of “ecclesial dimensions” in others.¹⁹ It thus involves itself in bilateral ecclesial talks for fostering links with WCC to achieve its focus.²⁰ It is agreeable that WCC through its ecumenical bodies and Faith and Order Paper, has “progressively pursued its agenda of uniting the various Christian churches around the world.”²¹ Its objective regards “common future for all through the unanimous adoption” of the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)* text.²² According to Thurian is that the historical progression of the meetings hints at successes and failures because of the “enlightened mainstream churches on the biblical interpretations.”²³

¹⁶ NCCC, *New Catechism*, 230.

¹⁷ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 177-188.

¹⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Handbook of SDA Theology*, 574, 575.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Radano, *Century of Ecumenism*, 53-304, 1-37.

²² Thurian, *Ecumenism Perspectives*, xi, x.

²³ Ibid.

The ideologies from the churches pushing for independence from ecumenical movement could be another limitation for ecumenical understanding.

Childs reports that the scriptural hermeneutical activities of the WCC in liaison with the American Biblical Theological Movement (ABTM) focused on “acceptable and agreeable” techniques of interpreting the Bible that proved “inefficient for the theological equilibrium.”²⁴ In his 1967 report, Dinckler made hopeless and regrettable conclusions.²⁵ Thus Childs views the report as culminating confidently with some understanding from the divisions while “lamenting that nothing new begins, but the report marks the end of an epoch.”²⁶ The reports reveal many imbalances in ecumenical issues that are church-state endeavors like: ecclesial, socio-religious, economic, and many more.²⁷ While a Christian scholar might concur with such credible developments towards world peace and unity, they however fail to align considerably with the biblical aims and interpretations of John 17.

The Objectives of the Ecumenical Councils and their Understanding of Unity

The ecumenical councils, whereby the WCC is the principal council, are vehicles for achieving the aims of the modern ecumenical movement.²⁸ They are

²⁴ Childs, *Theology in Crisis*, 81.

²⁵ World Council of Churches (WCC), “The Significance of the Hermeneutical Problem for the Ecumenical Movement,” *Report to the Commission on Faith and Order* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1967), quoted in Childs, *Theology in Crisis*, 81, 82.

²⁶ World Council of Churches (WCC), *From the Bible to the Modern World* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1948), 82; Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer, ed., *Biblical Authority for Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1951), 28; and, Oliver S. Tomkins, *The Church in the Purpose of God* (London: SCM Press, 1950), 43, quoted in Childs, *Theology in Crisis*, 29.

²⁷ Thomas and Abrecht, *Revolutions of Our Time*, 145-156.

²⁸ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. II, *The Reformation to the Present Day*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 438-493.

founded by delegates mainly from the Protestants and the RCC.²⁹ They focus at joining all Christian denominations into a common entity mainly on doctrines, and the contradictory matters of faith on the text of *BEM*.³⁰ The differences evinced by these ecumenical bodies is the treatment of some doctrinal truths as less binding, as *The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima* reads,³¹ but it beclouds and negates the former agreements about ecumenism based on the text of *BEM*.³²

The documents earlier quoted reveal that the stronger, bigger religions and Christian denominations appear as dominant in the ecumenical circles, especially on the place and value of the Law of God as part of the said items of faith and doctrines of the presumed united Church. It is plausible that the churches which take the Decalogue as highly binding might disagree with some of the propositions and hence create more dissensions.³³ Thus a doctrinal crisis is likely to occur leading to controversies and deeper misunderstandings, and perhaps a greater rift within the religious or Christian bodies striving to unite globally. Hence, this calls for a solemn consideration of the issues which bind and avoid those that separate; although those who support scriptural unity might feel that this is not the right meaning of unity in the prayer of Jesus in John 17.³⁴

²⁹ Gros, McManus and Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 25-28.

³⁰ Thurian, *Ecumenism Perspectives*, vii-xiii, 197-236.

³¹ Thurian, *Ecumenism Perspectives*, 197-236.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ White, *Testimonies*, 4:17.

³⁴ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 189. In referring to John 17:11b oneness, Jesus does not mean becoming one, but being one as pertains to the original Greek. The idea is not that they progressively achieve unity by their own human efforts, but simply by being a spirit-aided-unity continually (spiritual unity).

While the ecumenical movement promotes its agenda and objectives, the RCC disguises itself through its secretariat as partnering, but pushing other Christian churches and non-Christians into her side to “Return.”³⁵ The other religious bodies feel that there is an ecumenism unique for the RCC and for the rest, for it “maintains its liturgical and sacramental entities with no interference.”³⁶ With such a move, there seems poignantly that there is a fundamental challenge to the aspiration for ecumenical fulfillment which motions all other partners to one accord. In the words of Samuel M. Ngewa, I concur that the petition of Jesus to His Father to protect the disciples was focused on “unity of purpose and love, resulting into a reunion with the Godhead;” oneness whose goal is to extend to all value systems, and every language, culture, race and nation.³⁷ This kind of unity however, never embraces cliques of visible, literal, regional or global formations to attain the biblical unity intended by the Lord.

Institutional Perspectives on Church Unity/Ecumenism

Many Christian scholars attest to the interpretation of unity on biblical perspective. Ellen G. White stresses on the importance of church workers serving cooperatively by exercising “Unity in diversity,” where “we may all press together in the narrow path marked out for us.”³⁸ So, the differences in spiritual endowments and

³⁵ Gros, McManus and Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 25-28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-32.

³⁷ Samuel M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary for Pastors and Teachers* (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel, 2003), 321, 324, 325, and Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 197.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, “Sermon: A Plea for Unity,” Manuscript 52, 1904, Ellen G. White Research Centre, Review & Herald Publishing Association, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA, 1328.

ability should more cement the Christian believers, but not separate them for their varied usefulness for the Lord.³⁹

An anonymous author has observed closely on the current spirituality that generally, the “Christian world” has progressively “compromised its principles and standards with the forces of darkness.”⁴⁰ White admonishes the church leaders against joining ranks with those against God like the Protestantism and papacy and “who exalt tradition above Scripture, and reason above revelation.”⁴¹ She insists that the Adventists should never engage in these formations.⁴² The messages of White support the aims of Christ in His parting prayer for unity as “dismantling the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles to preach salvation to all mankind.”⁴³ She continues to demonstrate how this petition of Jesus was answered by the Father whereby the Spirit would refine and ennoble their simple qualities.⁴⁴ White accentuates the unity of the disciples prior to the Pentecost saying, “Putting away all differences, all desire for supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship.”⁴⁵ After Jesus gathered His little flock that were to continue with His partly completed mission, His great

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ n.a., *SDA and Ecumenism* (n.c.: n.p., n.d.), 1.

⁴¹ “No Confederacy with Those Opposing the Truth” [Isa 5:18-23], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 4:1141, 1142.

⁴² “What is a Confederacy?” [2 Cor 6:17], *SDABC*, 4:1142.

⁴³ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 17-24, 37, 45.

⁴⁴ White, *Acts of Apostles*, 37, 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

“burden before His passion was their unity as a group of faith, as He is one with the Father for His glory.”⁴⁶

White exposes that a similar problem prevails today like that of the religious leaders in the days of Israel misleading the people (Isa 9:16)⁴⁷ and so, Satan has been plotting to overpower the saints by inducing them to ally with his hosts.⁴⁸ Hence she warns:

The Seventh-day Adventists are not to liaise with the confederacy of Satan, because those who subscribe to the church of Satan persistently strive to cast off the divine law, and distort the distinction between good and evil.⁴⁹ Adventists should avoid churches and meetings where the truth is denied for their evil influences, as the faithful remnant is described as undefiled with women (Rev. 14:4).⁵⁰

She emphasizes on her warnings against the satanic wiles regarding unholy unions, stating that such groupings secretly progress “spiritualism and papal power”⁵¹ thereby arousing the anger of “Babylon against the Church”⁵² and hence, uniting under the devil for spiritualistic objectives.⁵³ The implication is that the people of God are trampling on to the ground of the arch-foe unknowingly.

Elmer L. Towns and Ben Gutierrez argue that Christ petitioned His Father to protect and unify the “disciples in the world mission during the stage of salvation” as

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desires of Ages* (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 680.

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 1962), 16.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 2005), 563.

⁴⁹ White, *Gospel Workers*, 16, and “What is a Confederacy?” [2 Cor 6:17], *SDABC*, 4:1149.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Silver Springs, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 124, 125.

⁵¹ White, *Great Controversy*, 606.

⁵² White, *Early Writings*, 272.

⁵³ White, *Great Controversy*, 588.

well as uniting the future believers as “witnesses to the world”.⁵⁴ They discard any aspect of ecumenism. Raymond E. Brown explains the unity Jesus prayed for as the oneness of the believers in Jesus.⁵⁵ He distinguishes between two groups, of those in Christ and not in Christ, for ecumenists embraces ‘all’ so as to achieve ‘unity’ outside the biblical context. Robert H. Gundry offers an interpretive nuance of oneness on the pericope, that Jesus directed His speech away from His disciples to His heavenly Father by first taking up the subject of His own glorification and that of His Father. Jesus further dealt with the “safekeeping, sanctification, and unity of believers, that is, their being kept from apostasy and its results: worldliness and division in the church.”⁵⁶ His idea promotes total togetherness of believers devoid of worldly attachments, backsliding and separating influences. Andreas J. Köstenberger corroborates that the disciples displaying their true unity provides “a compelling witness to the gospel truth.”⁵⁷ Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe assert that biblical unity must not be a literal huge amalgamation of all Christians.⁵⁸ In reference to the vine metaphor, they opine that members in the faith community progress in prosperity where they recognize themselves as part of “an organic unit.”⁵⁹ Jo-Ann A. Brant postulates that this biblical unity in Jesus is equivalent to the figure of the

⁵⁴ Elmer L. Towns and Ben Gutierrez, ed., *The Essence of the New Testament: A Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Baker Academic, 2012), 107.

⁵⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (AB) 29, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 547, 774-779.

⁵⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed., ed. Mikael C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 286.

⁵⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT); (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 498.

⁵⁸ Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, ed., *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1992), 303.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

vine,⁶⁰ that focuses “on Christ and the Father whose end is witness to the unchurched world.”⁶¹

C. E. Bradford observes that Christ revealed to His followers that He intended a union that is prevalent within the Trinity focused on the redeemed mankind⁶² for spiritual as well as missional purposes. Randy Maxwell says that “Corporate prayer” offers that opportunity for the church to “experience the power of agreement.”⁶³ Peter Uzochukwu backing notes that Jesus prayed for the oneness of His disciples for guarding the gospel credibility for “unity partly constitutes the essence of Christianity.”⁶⁴ He agrees on the unity Jesus envisioned, but argues for a supporting ministry for ecumenism.⁶⁵ He holds duo-nuances position, but it should just be one faithful to the Scriptures.

George M. Lamsa observes that scriptural unity is essentially vital for victory over evil, for the disciples must belong to that single accord which Christ share with His Father.⁶⁶ The primary aim of unity is the living harmoniously in the community of believers in emulating the oneness of the Godhead.⁶⁷ The church was certainly

⁶⁰ Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (PCNT); (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 227.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² C. E. Bradford, *Find Out About Prayer: An Urgent Call to Rediscover the Secret of Spiritual Power*, ed. Ken McFarland (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 51.

⁶³ Randy Maxwell, *If My People Pray: An Eleventh-hour Call to Prayer and Revival* (Boise, ID: Pacific, 1995), 133.

⁶⁴ Peter Uzochukwu, “Ecumenism: Mixed Marriages and Ancestral Rituals in Africa,” *Africa Ecclesial Review* 52 (2010): 132-136.

⁶⁵ Uzochukwu, *Africa Ecclesial Review*, 132-136.

⁶⁶ George M. Lamsa, *Gospel Light: An Indispensable Guide to the Teachings of Jesus and the Customs of His Time* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1964), 385.

⁶⁷ Lamsa, *Gospel Light*, 385.

characterized with closeness and harmony early in its history as the book of Acts chapters 2-6 relates,⁶⁸ a probable reference to the prospects in the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23. The past experiences of Christianity testify to a continuous disruption of unity through three vices: “personal pride, theological turmoil, and crippling compromise.”⁶⁹ The ultimate outcome was the forsaking of the apostolic faith resulting into a “different portrayal of Christianity” in the historical canvas.⁷⁰

William Barclay denounces the existence of ecumenism, for the prayer of the Lord pointed to His followers. Thus, it excludes others who do not identify as His followers.⁷¹ He argues that John 17 bears two tenets of this unity: “Real unity between all Christians that would be a ‘supernatural fact which would require a supernatural explanation’, and biblical oneness reflecting on Jesus and His Father.”⁷² In reference to John 10:16, George Eldon Ladd postulates that the bringing in of ‘other sheep that are not of this fold’ has the hypothesis of “unity in diversity.”⁷³ In reference to John 11:50-52, S. Pancaro thinks that the new saints are the united Christian believers, which is a heaven-bound-union connected with the Triune God.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Uzochukwu, *Africa Ecclesial Review*, 132-136.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, The Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1975), 2: 215-218.

⁷² Barclay, *Gospel of John*, 2: 215-218.

⁷³ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 318.

⁷⁴ S. Pancaro, “People of God in St. John’s Gospel?” *New Testament Studies* 16 (1970): 130-148; and, John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (1962): 117-120, quoted in Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 318.

D. A. Carson⁷⁵ and George Ladd⁷⁶ corroborate to the object of Christ for unity. Ladd postulates that His burden of His prayer “is for their organic church unity that finds oneness in external structures,” hence disowning any ecumenical clique contending, “is not the primary intention of the passage.”⁷⁷ Edward Earle Ellis reiterates similarly in refuting ecumenism, but leans on scriptural nuance.⁷⁸ T. E. Pollard clarifies the basics adding that the unity of the faithful compares with the “unity of the Son with the Father,”⁷⁹ connected to unity of believers on mission, not necessarily a globally structured one. Denis Fortin views John with “unique reference to the unity of the Father and the Son” by stressing that Christ refers to “a unity of love and purpose” existing between Father and Son which is a confirmation of His very intent.⁸⁰ In quoting Köstenberger, he infers for the display of real unity which will give an impact to the witnessing of the gospel.⁸¹

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim contradicts versions of unity: the genuine unity of God is biblical while that of the devil “is counterfeit, being nothing more than theological pluralism, the peaceful coexistence of truth and error.”⁸² For this reason, the ones advocating for the spurious union wantonly cause divisions and untold

⁷⁵ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 201.

⁷⁶ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 318, 319.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁷⁸ Edward Earle Ellis, *The World of St. John: The Gospel and the Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 57, 77.

⁷⁹ T. E. Pollard, “That They May All Be One,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Studies* 70 (1959), 148-150, quoted in Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 319.

⁸⁰ Fortin, *Oneness in Christ*, 30-32.

⁸¹ Köstenberger, *John*, 498, quoted in Fortin, *Oneness in Christ*, 32.

⁸² Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “True and Counterfeit Unity,” *Adventists Affirm* (Fall 2002), 53-63. He remarks that “those adopting ‘ingenious strategy’ have an ‘unbiblical agenda’.”

confusion in the churches.⁸³ Hence in John 17 Jesus mentions oneness 5 times attaching it three aspects of unity: “doctrinal, spiritual and visible.”⁸⁴ No allusion to ecumenism, but total unity founded in the Holy Writ. Bert Beverly Beach contradicts ecumenism as the meaning of John 17:20-23 as harboring crooked aims; “Ecumenism is found within churches increasingly subject to the pressures of unbelief and secularism... a symptom of the modern inclination to favour mammoth organizations.”⁸⁵ Any well-meaning Christian will embrace biblical unity through sanctification while quoting Tissington Tatlow.⁸⁶ He recommends the “Adventist point of departure—the Incarnation—and Adventist point of arrival—the Parousia. Any other ecumenism is ephemeral.”⁸⁷

A great impact on the Church on its ecclesial foundations and its financial and evangelistic progress seems evident in embracing of, and the pursuance of, the ecumenical whims.⁸⁸ It is observed that though the saints possess diverse dispositions and temperaments, they should relate in religious beliefs, while “teaming up in voice, judgment, and maintaining oneness in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁹ No traces of ecumenism for everyone, but union of purpose, love, fellowship for world evangelism by true

⁸³ Koranteng-Pipim, *Adventists Affirm*, 53-63.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 16-21, 30, 31, 295. Ecumenism promotes unity, “but tends to sideline holiness, relativize truth, and generalize mission,” so that eventually the dimension of evangelism shrinks and wanes.

⁸⁶ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 30, 31, 295.

⁸⁷ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 30, 31, 295.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 31, 295.

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 1999-2023), 124, accessed 29 May 2019, https://www.google.com/url?q=https://whiteestate.org/audio/389/historical-sketches-of-the-foreign-missions-of-the-seventh-day-adventists/sa&=U&ved=2ahUKEwjOkLSUwjz_AhVTVKQEhQMUCzAQFnoECAkQAg&usq=AOvVaw3Tvp8SOnUFDNDt-raKQrAW.

Christians. Thus, oneness with Christ and with one another must be the high purpose that Jesus envisioned in His intercessory prayer for mission.⁹⁰

The Perspectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Biblical Unity

The SDA Church in its formative period disdained any sort of organization to curb schism on the growing group of Adventists.⁹¹ Nevertheless, as the field of evangelism extended, the need ensued of uniting in diverse areas of doctrine and mission though maintaining the original title, ‘little flock’.⁹² Mark Finley agrees with this notion of church organization while quoting W. D. Frazee and White in *The Acts of the Apostles*.⁹³ Finley disowns the idea that “God’s true people must be unorganized or disorganized in order to constitute the true church” while stressing that “organization is the idea of God.”⁹⁴ White opines that after receiving the latter rain, the remnant church goes out to give the loud cry “in exact order like a company of soldiers.”⁹⁵ The increase of membership led James S. White to:

Seek unity in faith and action in establishing the Advent Movement on the New Testament principles for efficient outreach resulting into a growing unity and organizational system with service-oriented levels. The uniqueness of the SDA Church is found in its several principles and hallmarks as enumerated in this document.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ D. Arthur Delafield, “Christ’s Last Prayer With His Disciples,” *Great Chapters of the Bible*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, ed. Erwin R. Gane (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 31 December 1994 to 2 March 1995): 58-62.

⁹¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2016), 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 20-26.

⁹³ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 11.

⁹⁴ Finley, *Adventists Affirm*, 7.

⁹⁵ White, *Early Writings*, 271, quoted in Finley, *Adventists Affirm*, 7.

⁹⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Handbook of SDA Theology*, 575, 576.

Therefore, the Adventist Church appears from the above pillars, to have retained special standing globally as a universal church for all peoples, nations, tribes and tongues (Rev 14:6, 7). It does not need an ecumenical movement for it already embraces the whole world, not just by visible manifestation, but through adherence to the true unity in spirit and character as it is found in the Word of God.⁹⁷ Being just a universal global church does not translate into fulfilling the prayer of Jesus in John 17

Denis Fortin contends that the prayer of Jesus was filled with unity, and the church should teach about “Christian unity. This prayer informs on the meaningful and complete talks of church unity in Christ.”⁹⁸ The creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 portray that harmony was rampant. The original purpose of God included “the harmonious coexistence and interdependence of organisms” as Abraham was cognizant of obedience to God as “the basic element central to Christian unity.”⁹⁹ The perspectives from these Seventh-day Adventist works infer nothing of ecumenical clique. They affirm that the church is founded on scriptural hermeneutic using the historical-biblical method of textual interpretation, and spurn the historical-critical views which presumably might be the progenitor of ecumenism (which the researcher has expounded in the various discussions in this paper).

The Ecumenical Movement and John 17:20-23

Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus and Ann Riggs remark thus; “The identity of the Christian is the identification with the church, and central to Catholic identity” (including the other Protestant churches in ecumenism) “is zeal for Christ’s will for

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Fortin, *Oeness in Christ*, 3-6, 9, 29.

⁹⁹ Fortin, *Oeness in Christ*, 3-6, 9, 29.

the visible unity of the Church.”¹⁰⁰ There are more items like ‘Scripture, communion and common faith’ that are included as binding terms for the envisioned mega-church.¹⁰¹ Peter Uzochukwu supporting ecumenism posits that it requires a care-taker ministry for advancing its goals, because “schisms within mainstream churches” jeopardize oneness.¹⁰² In reference to Acts 6:1-6, he opines that a special ministry such as the ‘diaconate’ is vital for ecumenism to thrive.¹⁰³

Margaret O’Gara refers to John 17:21 as a valid claim for ecumenism in her book.¹⁰⁴ She endears it and believes that the unity implied in the passage is ecumenism.¹⁰⁵ She argues for the place of John 17 on the ecumenical dialogues she participated in in the second Vatican council, cognizant that if the unity Jesus petitioned for could be attained, then changes ought to precede it.¹⁰⁶ She stresses that the RCC decree on ecumenism taught that the “discord and disunity among Christians is an open contradiction of the will of Christ,” and thus it is a barrier to the world, and a damage to the gospel proclamation.¹⁰⁷ George Eldon Ladd presumes true scriptural unity as the intent of Jesus in His prayer, and suggests some kind of interfaith relations.¹⁰⁸ The challenge that emanates from some scholars is ambiguity of nuances that jeopardize trustworthiness of biblical interpretation, and hence risks not rhyming

¹⁰⁰ Gros, McManus and Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 1-6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Uzochukwu, *Africa Ecclesial Review*, 132-136.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ O’Gara, *Future of Ecumenism*, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ O’Gara, *Future of Ecumenism*, 42.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 319.

with the biblical hermeneutic which allows for the meaning that is faithful to the biblical text.

The Interpretation of John 17:20-23 for Ecumenism or For Divine Unity

G. K. Beale in corroboration with other scholars, argue that beginning with the Synoptics to the Acts 15, the forgiven Christians boldly serve God in a reconciled “messianic community.”¹⁰⁹ The early church, with the help of the Holy Spirit, achieved that level of “consensus climaxing into peace and unity of purpose and decisions.”¹¹⁰ He, however, does not view this unity as ecumenical.

Raymond E. Brown embraces a divine unity resembling that of the Father and the Son.¹¹¹ He emphasizes on the Father providing eternal life on earth and the uniting of Christians through the ages by faith for evangelism and salvation “of His immediate disciples.”¹¹² His statements avoid any ecumenical elements.

Barnabas Lindars posits that Jesus prayed for the future church so that she maintains the unity of love (cf., Joh 13:34), “caused by the disruptions from persecution and false doctrines within and without.”¹¹³ Thus, this 21st century ecumenism is chartered in this intercessory prayer for unity.¹¹⁴ He observes that the said unity is a union with Him (Jesus), whose model is that relation of Christ to His

¹⁰⁹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 549.

¹¹⁰ Beale, *NT Biblical Theology*, 549.

¹¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, A Concise Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 84.

¹¹² Brown, *The Gospel*, 84.

¹¹³ Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, The New Century Biblical Commentary (NCBC); (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 522.

¹¹⁴ Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 522.

Father which bears common obligations.¹¹⁵ The church lifestyle should be reflect the unity of Christ with His Father. Hence, disunity portrays a denial of faith of Jesus, just as the behavior of a divided church taints its message, and so, “this unity is both eschatological and relevant at all times.”¹¹⁶ Lindars supports the biblical unity of purpose for world mission.

St. Thomas Aquinas, James A. Weisheipl and Fabian Larcher, comparing John 17:11b with vs. 20-23 agree that ‘one’ suggests “protection by being perfected in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3; Ps 133:1), emphasizing persisting in unity by voiding division (Matt 12:23).¹¹⁷ Therefore, our union in the love of God contributes to our perfection.¹¹⁸ The trio authors do not infer any cliques of ecumenism, but a faith-based, perfect, spiritual unity in the Trinity by conforming to His will and love for the world outreach.

Herman N. Ridderbos opines that John 17:20 is “a transition of Jesus” whereby He aims at sending to world mission the disciples as His Father sent Him “by His words” (17:8, 18).¹¹⁹ Ridderbos states that the ultimate objective of His mission is a progressive unity of His followers and later believers on earth as a heavenly replica.¹²⁰ He mentions ecumenism as what some scholars interpret the

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, James A. Weisheipl and Fabian Larcher, *Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 13-21*, trans. James A. W. and Fabian L. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2010), 180-192.

¹¹⁸ Aquinas, *John Chapters 13-21*, 180-192.

¹¹⁹ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 558-564.

¹²⁰ Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 558-564.

textual passage to be because of its ecclesial significance, but leans basically on unity “in us” (v. 23b), the divine oneness for the performance of the salvific work.¹²¹

D. A. Carson relates John 17:11b with verses 21a and 23 on the primacy of perfect unity of the disciples of all-time kept by God in allegiance to His gracious self-revelation in Christ, intimating that it is a unity of love and purpose that is analogous to the union of Christ with the Father.¹²² Hence, Carson suggests that the believers even though they are different, must possess common love, purpose and action as they collectively perform their mission.¹²³ He posits that this unity relates to the vine metaphor of John 15.¹²⁴ He stresses that the display of this oneness has an impact on evangelism as a world-faith-response and it has no institutional unity clique, but is purposed for the mission Jesus gave to them.¹²⁵

Craig S. Keener underlines that the prayer of Jesus focuses on the unity of believers for leading them to recognize the work of Jesus in their midst.¹²⁶ He postulates that being protected from the world is for oneness.¹²⁷ Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker believe that legislation cannot provide unity, but it is a product of faith, of love and of nature that is patterned with the Godhead for the

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² D. A. Carson, ed., *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC) (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 1991), 432-449.

¹²³ Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 432-449.

¹²⁴ Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 432-449.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 1055-1057.

¹²⁷ Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1055-1057.

global mission.¹²⁸ He emphasizes that differences in interests, backgrounds and temperaments might breed divisions hence Jesus petitioned for personal oneness and never institutional unity.¹²⁹ The three scholars distance themselves from ecumenism, but favor biblical-spiritual union with the Godhead for missional purposes.

Thomas L. Brodie accepts the scriptural nuances with powerful arguments on the subject of unity thus:

Process of making holy by the Father does not exclude the intent of unity (17:11b), implying some ideal of community based on God and mutual care to the whole world with some variation on the commandment of love. As a challenge to the world it often requires organization, but devoid of uniformity and legalism—thus tending towards totalitarianism and against mutual love. This ideal community is the regard of the discourse, of the chapter, and of the whole gospel.¹³⁰

Brodie has inclined on both biblical aspects of oneness: spiritual unity (which seems highly emphasized) and institutional organization. John Muddiman and John Barton agree that the unity that prevails between the Father and the Son is the basis for the unity prevalent amongst the disciples (John 17:20-23).¹³¹ It is a reflection of the metaphor of the vine in John 15:1-7.¹³² They state that the perfect union and glorification proceed from the “Father and the Son as a prototype of later communities” hence showing that the plea of Jesus invites the modern reader in

¹²⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, and Richard N. Longenecker, “John and Acts,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (EBC) With the New International Version (NIV)*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9:164-167.

¹²⁹ Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 9:164-167.

¹³⁰ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John, A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 432-517.

¹³¹ John Muddiman and John Barton, ed., *The Gospels*, Oxford Bible Commentary (OBC) (New York, NY: Oxford, 2001), 230, 231

¹³² Muddiman and Barton, *The Gospels*, 230, 231.

applying the petition in uniting a divided church.¹³³ Both authors do not support ecumenism.

Summary and Conclusion

The ecumenical movement promotes its agenda and objectives on grounds of global ecclesial support basing it on John 17:20-23. The literature review demonstrates lack of consensus among scholars on the interpretations of oneness on the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one.” However, three schools of thought on unity emerge. Two of them lean on either the literal interpretation of unity as ecumenism, or on the biblical nuance of spiritual unity of love, purpose and fellowship linked to the Godhead and focused on the evangelism of the unchurched world. The third opinion is a middle-ground between the two; it does not disown ecumenical claims completely nor does it embrace them fully, but is barely bent on fellowship. John 17:20-23 has received myriads of interpretations. But the major question that remains is, “Is there a biblical hermeneutic to solve the debate on unity in John 17?” Thus, certain churches including the SDA Church view these irregularities as opposed to scriptural truth and hence make reservations on many ecumenical issues like church government, ministry, the spectrum of a super-church, and its failure in world mission. Therefore, chapter three will expound on the historical context of John for clarity on the traditional nuances of unity.

¹³³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANALYSIS OF JOHN 17:20-23 IN ITS CONTEXT

Isagogical Analysis: The Historical Context of the Gospel of John

An appropriate interpretation of the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one” in John 17:20-23 depends partly upon the analysis of its historical context. A modern day reader of such a rich gospel may not understand fully the mind of the author who wrote over two millennia ago. Therefore, this chapter will create a rather closer contact between the world of the original author and that of the 21st century reader.

The historical backgrounds will consider issues like: authorship, date, provenance (place) and audience; the historical circumstances and purpose of writing in addition to the geographical, socio-political and religious setting of John. Its literary setting, like its genre, literary features, style and structural schema; the overall theme and the textual and historical backgrounds will be explored. The summary and conclusions of the issues addressed will be provided.

The Authorship of the Johannine Gospel

The Fourth Gospel leaves its author unstated.¹ Numerous perspectives of both proponents and opponents however, prevail on its authorship. Therefore, no

¹ Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., “The Introductory Notes on the Gospel of John,” *Andrews Study Bible With the New King James Version (NKJV)* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2010), 1375.

agreement prevails among many Bible scholars on the writing of John more especially on the cultural and religious background.² The authorship of John has had minimal debates in relation to the Synoptics, although when “critical scholarship began, a marked profundity in the criticism of the canonical books was experienced.”³

Speculations on whether apostle John or an outsider bearing a similar title wrote the Gospel are rampant. Those who accept apostle John⁴ as the writer agree with the Johannine tradition. There are different names that scholars use in reference to the writer of John.⁵ These designations attached to the author of John have attracted ambiguities leading to countless speculations pertaining to its origin. There are two categories of authorship evidences: both the internal and the external.

Internal Evidence of the Johannine Authorship.

The authorship of the Fourth Gospel is attributed to John, whom the other disciples referred to as, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ or ‘beloved disciple’ (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Its internal title is, ‘The Gospel According to John’ and in Greek, ‘KATA IQANNHN.’⁶ The clarity of his account of Jesus denotes that he

² Gilbert Van Belle, “Gospel of John,” accessed 2 April 2019, www.oxfordbibliographies.com.

³ Seymour Cain, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” *The Critical Study of Biblical Literature*, accessed 19 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Critical-Study-of-Biblical-Literature-Exegesis-and-Hermeneutics>; and, Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 3.

⁴ Judith Mlieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (London: Cambridge University, 1991), 32.

⁵ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286-289. Different names for the author of John are employed by scholars or general commentators: ‘the Apostle John,’ ‘the Lord’s disciple,’ ‘Elder John,’ ‘the Beloved Disciple,’ ‘the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned back on the chest of Jesus,’ ‘John,’ ‘John himself,’ ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ and many other titles.

⁶ J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament With the New Revised Standard Version*, trans. Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1990), 317.

must have been His close associate, His disciple (apostle) or perhaps one of the twelve disciples. The writer of John claims to be an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus (John 1:14; 13:23; 19:35; 20:8; 21:24; cf, 1 John 1:1-5). He entitles himself variously, but specifically; ‘John, the son of Zebedee.’⁷ Traditional consensus points out that “John is the source and writer of the Gospel bearing his title.”⁸

Some early manuscripts like codices: Codex Bezae, D (6th century AD) and the Washington Codex, W (5th century AD) arrange the Gospels as Matthew, John, Luke and Mark.⁹ Streeter opines, “The three epistles and the gospel of John are closely allied in diction, style and general outlook so that scoffers of their common authorship will bear the burden to prove.”¹⁰ However, in establishing the texts of John 17, there are older manuscripts, especially papyri that contain the Gospels, primarily; P¹, P⁴, P⁵, which are dated on the 3rd century AD which are more reliable. The Gospel writer exhibits a semitic writing style mainly in parallel statements and an accurate knowledge of: Jewish customs, earlier Palestinian topography, numerical values and particular names of individuals (John 7:37-39; 8:12; 1:45-47; 2:6).¹¹ The

⁷ John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 192-195.

⁸ “Unlearned, Ignorant” [Acts 4:13], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 6:166; Beauford H. Bryant and Mark S. Krause, *John*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1998), s.v. “Who is the Author”; “Authorship” [John], *SDABC*, 5:891, and J. H. Bernard, “Author,” *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. Alan Hugh McNeile, (New York: C. Scriber’s Sons, 1929), 2:721.

⁹ Ernest Jenni, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (IDB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 2:932.

¹⁰ Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins Treating the Manuscript Tradition* (London: McMillan & Co., 1951), 460, accessed 27 May 2019, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/4gospels_streeter/chapter-15.pdf.

¹¹ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286.

research concurs with the internal proofs that apostle John wrote the fourth New Testament work.

External Evidence of the Writing of John. More information on Johannine authorship could be derived from the unchallenged resources of the 3rd to the 18th century AD and even beyond.¹² Frank E. Gæbelein supports Stott that “traditional sources taken as the only reliable source outside the New Testament,” were written by early Christian writers.¹³ Early church tradition favors apostle John as this Gospel writer by identifying him “as John the son of Zebedee and brother of James.”¹⁴

The early Church Fathers and Christian apologetics like: Theophilus of Antioch¹⁵ and Polycarp¹⁶ call the book, ‘The Gospel According John.’ Polycarp confirmed his conversations with John and with those who saw the Lord¹⁷ to his disciple, Irenaeus,¹⁸ who holds that John published the Gospel at Ephesus in Asia Minor.¹⁹ Papias employed the title ‘elder’ in an apostolic sense used to designate the disciples of Christ.²⁰ By the end of the 1st century AD, the apostles were known as

¹² W. R. Stott, *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 308.

¹³ Frank E. Gæbelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 294.

¹⁴ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 192-195.

¹⁵ Peter Kirby, “Introductory Note to Theophilus of Antioch,” *Early Christian Writings*, trans. Rev. Marcus Dods (2001-2019), accessed 19 March 2019, <https://earlychristianwritings.com/info/theophilus.html>.

¹⁶ Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation* (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 339; Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT); (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 5; and “Authorship: Introduction” [1 John], *SDABC*, 7:623.

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1 as quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 5.20.5-6.

¹⁸ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286.

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1.

²⁰ Papias, “Fragment of Papias,” in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39 (trans. Cruse, 153).

‘presbyters’ or ‘elders’ as Brown²¹ and Barclay²² confirm. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus and Tertullian, all support Johannine authorship.²³

Jon L. Dybdahl states “that this unnamed disciple” and John were frequent companions “of Peter in the Gospel” and “in the early chapters of Acts.”²⁴ C. K. Barrett referring to Westcott corroborates with Dybdahl sentiments due to the characteristic Hebraic style.²⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley²⁶ and Frederick Dale Bruner²⁷ attribute its writing, the three Epistles, and the Apocalypse to John which Matthew Henry²⁸ accepts. Johannine authorship is further linked to two famous early documents of the early church tradition including: the Muratorian fragment,²⁹ and the Rylands papyrus fragment of John (AD 135), found in Egypt.³⁰ The question of who

²¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (AB) 30, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 28-32.

²² Barclay, *Gospel of John*, 2:127.

²³ C. Marvin Pate, *The Writings of John: A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 19-22.

²⁴ Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible*, 1375; Tyndale House Foundation, *New Literal Translation (NLT)*, The Life Application Bible (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015), 1746.

²⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism*, trans. D. Moody Smith (London: SPCK, 1975), 8.

²⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, completely rev. and reset ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988), 2:1081-1090.

²⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 3.

²⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5, *Matthew to John* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1935), 70-75, and Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, PC Study Bible (Electronic Database Copyright © 2006 Biblesoft).

²⁹ Phillip Schaff, ed., *History of the Christian Church II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910), 517.

³⁰ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286.

wrote the Fourth Gospel remains unanswered. But even though hardline positions persist, apostle John is generally accepted as its writer.³¹

The Date of Writing of John

The writing date of John is contentious owing to diverse perceptions though two project as major. Some conservatives and radicals agree on an earlier date;³² while others opt for a later date, citing its highly developed theology.³³ The Patristic writers regarded this Fourth Gospel as the latest of the four.³⁴ Modern authors put it in the last decade of the 1st century, though some prefer a date in the early 2nd century due to a reference of ‘the Jews’.³⁵ The 2nd century date is refuted and dismissed after the Rayland papyrus fragment was earlier discovered in Egypt (AD 135).³⁶

Some claiming that John might have used the Synoptics dated it at the end of the 1st century. Lack of the mention of the destruction of Jerusalem presupposes an earlier date like in the AD 50s. Some common terms used in John like, ‘disciples,’ not ‘apostles,’ and ‘the Jews’ and a reference to the pool of Bethsaida (5:2) indicate an

³¹ Biblical Archaeology Staff Society, “Gospel of John Commentary: Who Wrote the Gospel of John and How Historical Is It?” accessed 2 April 2019, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/gospel-of-john-commentary-who-wrote-the-gospel-of-john-and-how-historical-is-it/>. Countable theologians debate on who wrote John, but majority of notable scholars (which the researcher concurs) throughout history support that apostle John authored the biblical book under his name.

³² Köstenberger, *John*, 4.

³³ C. C. Torrey, *Our Translated Gospel* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1938), x, and M. S. Enslin, *Christianity Beginnings* (New York and London, 1938), 448, quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 25.

³⁴ Seymour Cain, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Biblical Literature—The fourth Gospel: The Gospel According to John,” accessed 30 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-fourth-Gospel-The-Gospel-According-to-John>.

³⁵ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

early date.³⁷ The most probable date for many theologians, though little evidence suffices for exactness, is between AD 70 and 100.³⁸ Barclay observes, “The Fourth Gospel was written about the year AD 100.”³⁹ Henry opines that John was authored before John was exiled into the Patmos⁴⁰ around AD 95.⁴¹ Towns and Gutierrez support AD 70, but up to AD 90, but “after the Synoptic Gospels and before 1-3 John and Revelation.”⁴² Those justifying the authorship of John to be dated after AD 70, but before 100 cite that it was possibly to avert the influential heresies of cerinthus and ebionites.⁴³ Any date after AD 100 would be opposed as the Apostle could have been dead by then.⁴⁴ The 21st century scholars agree that John is the latest of the New Testament narratives⁴⁵ probably written around AD 90 (81-100) according to an early Christian tradition during the reign of Emperor Domitian.⁴⁶ Some scholars allude to

³⁷ Morris, *NICNT*, 30-34.

³⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, TN: Baker Academic, 2009), 194; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1, 3.4.4 (ANF, 1.421, trans. Roberts and Rambaut); Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.2 (trans. Cruise, 182); and Beasley-Murray, *John*, lxxv.

³⁹ Barclay, *Gospel of John*, 2:215.

⁴⁰ Henry, *Henry's Commentary*, 70-75.

⁴¹ Rodney W. Francis, “John on the Island of Patmos,” accessed 2 April 2019, <http://www.gospel.org.nz/index.php/articles/articles-by-rodney/204-john-on-the-island-of-patmos>.

⁴² Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 98.

⁴³ Seymour Cain, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Ebionites: Religious Sect,” accessed 2 April 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ebionites>.

⁴⁴ National Geographic Channel, “How Did the Apostle Die?” accessed 2 April 2019, channel.nationalgeographic.com.

⁴⁵ Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible*, 1376.

⁴⁶ Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 194; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1, 3.3.4 (ANF, 1.421, trans. Roberts and Rambaut); Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.2 (trans. Cruse, 182), and Beasley-Murray, *John*, lxxv, lxxviii.

its writing date as AD 96.⁴⁷ Early church tradition favors that apostle John wrote this Gospel in the last quarter of the 1st century between AD 70 and 100 (probably AD 81-96) because most scholars argue leaning to that end. Therefore, this is the most probable dating for the authorship of the Johannine Gospel as per this study.

The Provenance of the Fourth Gospel

The place for its writing is unknown, though three places are most probable: Ephesus in Asia Minor, Antioch of Syria, and Alexandria or somewhere else in Egypt.⁴⁸ Theissen infers other locations; Ephesus, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Antioch in Northern Syria, or Samaria. He seems a loner partly in this presupposition because Irenaeus rejects it by supporting Asia Minor.⁴⁹ Most scholars and the early church tradition accept the Ephesian location in Asia Minor,⁵⁰ written by John with an “Anti-Baptist Polemic”⁵¹ after his release from Patmos.⁵² Many evidences link the Fourth Gospel to apostle John who resided and ministered to the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor, with the heretic groups mentioned in his writings.⁵³ The researcher favors the setting of John as Ephesus in Asia Minor.

⁴⁷ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Minister's Bible With the New King James Version (NKJV)*; (Madrid, Spain: General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 930, and Tyndale House Foundation, *NLT*, 1746.

⁴⁸ Morris, *NICNT*, 59-60.

⁴⁹ Gerd Theissen, *The New Testament: An Introduction, History, Literature, Religion*, trans. John Bowden (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 146-149.

⁵⁰ Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible*, 1376, and Tyndale House Foundation, *NLT*, 1746.

⁵¹ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 292.

⁵² Joel B. Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 424, 422, and, Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 194, 195; Alexander and Goodman, (1992); Hoskins (2002) and Draper (1997), 264, 265, quoted in Köstenberger, *John*, 8.

⁵³ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Commentary on the Book of Revelation, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2009), 4.

The Audience of John

Several presuppositions on Johannine audience emanate from both proponents and dissidents. The recipients of John are unclear in the first chapters, but in 20:30, 31, and 21:24b, presumably his audience was his Christian associates in faith (John 1:28; 1:40–42; 1:43–51).⁵⁴ Towns and Gutierrez contend that John indirectly identifies his addressees unlike Luke.⁵⁵ Bruner infers his recipients as non-Christians, and the in-word-growing Christians.⁵⁶ Leon Morris recommends both new and mature believers and the hellenized Christians.⁵⁷ The later disciples of Jesus are the modern Christians (17:20). Edward Earle Ellis prefers non-Christian than Christian readers.⁵⁸ John probably addressed the early Christian church castigated by the Romans and Jews.⁵⁹ After his expulsion, John likely ministered to Greco-Roman-Jewish congregations at Ephesus.⁶⁰

A general presumption prevails of a “universal readership,”⁶¹ of Christian Jews and Gentiles.⁶² Daniel B. Wallace infers the second generation Gentile

⁵⁴ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 327.

⁵⁵ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 98.

⁵⁶ Bruner, *Gospel of John*, 1194-1199.

⁵⁷ Morris, *NICNT*, 7, 38-39

⁵⁸ Ellis, *World of John*, 33, 34.

⁵⁹ Green, *Dictionary of Jesus*, 424, 422, and Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 194, 195.

⁶⁰ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Christ*, 4; Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible*, 1375, and Tyndale House Foundation, *NLT*, 1746.

⁶¹ Köstenberger, *John*, 8.

⁶² Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 183; Keener, *IVP Commentary*, 261, and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1942), 7.

Christians with traces of Jews⁶³ whereas Barrett thinks of threefold addressees.⁶⁴ Spong presumes the rejecting, cursing Jews⁶⁵ and the excommunicated Jewish Christians⁶⁶ regarded as ‘heretics’ in John 7:49⁶⁷ and non-adherents to the Roman customs.⁶⁸ John primarily addressed the Christian believers; the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles were his secondary recipients. His audience comprised both Jews and Gentiles; the largest of them being the Gentiles.

The Purpose of the Johannine Gospel

Some scholars cite ‘acute’ or ‘bewildering’ problems in determining the environment, readership and purpose of John;⁶⁹ internal and external sources can address the issues. The chief purpose of the gospel is explicit in the last two chapters⁷⁰ which Robert H. Gundry⁷¹ and Towns and Gutierrez⁷² provide as the value of faith in

⁶³ Daniel B. Wallace, “Introduction, Argument, Outline,” *The Gospel of John*, accessed 2 April 2019, <https://bible.org/seriespage/4-gospel-john-introduction-argument-outline>

⁶⁴ Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 8.

⁶⁵ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 201, 202, and B. Talmud, *Berakhot*, 28b-29a.

⁶⁶ Green, *Dictionary of Jesus*, 424.

⁶⁷ Theissen, *The New Testament*, 147, 148.

⁶⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Christ*, 6.

⁶⁹ Brook Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to John* (London: Eerdmans, 1882); James Drummond, *An Inquiry into the Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903), and William Sanday, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: HardPress, 2012), quoted in Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 1.

⁷⁰ A. E. Harvey, *The New English Bible: Companion to New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1970), 300.

⁷¹ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 285-328.

⁷² Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 97-109, 239.

Christ for attaining eternal life⁷³ which Donald Guthrie upholds.⁷⁴ Others presume that “he wanted to supplement the Synoptic gospels” and to “counteract the pervading heresies” of doceticism, gnosticism, dualism and arianism,⁷⁵ and to “encourage the expelled Jewish Christians.”⁷⁶ Unnik maintains three purposes.⁷⁷ Robert A. Spivey corroborates, but adds a christological intent;⁷⁸ John Shelby Spong backs it.⁷⁹

Gundry states, “Preeminently, John writes to engender believing”⁸⁰ which Barrett in quoting Moffatt supports.⁸¹ The gospel seems to render primacy to “Christology through the logos”⁸² whereby the “Stoics attach a divine nuance.”⁸³ Cullmann asserts that John uses the term Christology to clarify the actual logos⁸⁴ to

⁷³ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 97, 98, and Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (London: Tyndale, 1970), 239.

⁷⁴ Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, 271-282.

⁷⁵ Morris, *NICNT*, 5, 36.

⁷⁶ Johannine Pollard, *Christology in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1127.

⁷⁷ Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 8.

⁷⁸ Spivey, *Anatomy of NT*, 428; Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932), xx, xxi; “Theme” [John], *SDABC*, 5:891; Warren W. Wiersbe, *John*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (WBC) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991); Apostolos Makrakis, *The Four Gospels*, vol. 1, *Interpretation of the Entire New Testament*, trans. Albert George Alexander (Decatur, GA: Bowen, 1949), 832, and Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 184.

⁷⁹ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 207.

⁸⁰ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 291; Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible*, 1376; and Tyndale House Foundation, *NLT*, 1746.

⁸¹ Barrett, *John and Judaism*, 2, quoted in Moffatt, James. *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*. 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1927), 522.

⁸² “Word” (John1:1), *SDABC*, 5:897.

⁸³ Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, 1025.

⁸⁴ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 249.

settle its conflicting perceptions.⁸⁵ Therefore, the central purpose of John is Christology through an evidence-based-faith in Jesus as the Christ for attaining eternal life.

This overriding thrust of Christology through faith in Christ is related to the subordinate clause, “that they all might be one.” This is because the spiritual unity actuated by the Holy Spirit through the oneness existing between the Father and the Son is only realized by those who settle in a faith-relationship with Christ. The purpose is revealing to the unbelieving world the salvific efficacies of the Lord Jesus through their message and united lives. The evangelistic product of the work of the apostles emanates from the pastoral prayer of Jesus which focuses on the eventual perfect unity by the believing saints whom Christ also will make ready to meet Him in His second advent.

The isagogical analysis of the historical context is important to this study for it enlightens the modern addressee on the foundations of the gospel of John and other fundamental issues that anchor on its authenticity as a canonical work. With these facts fully clarified, it is safe and prudent to engage in an exegetical exposition with the assurance that what is being handled is a credible, inspired scriptural material. And after having settled completely on the canonicity of the Fourth Gospel as an authentic biblical book, then any analytical endeavor in the works of John can faithfully be dealt in by any researcher without any reservations to its origins.

⁸⁵ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 202.

The Four Major Occasions Necessitating the Writing of John

The Historical Circumstances

John as a Jew was conversant with the Old Testament scriptures in Hebrew, Aramaic and the Septuagint (LXX), as he relates on the good shepherd and the true vine.⁸⁶ He has roots in the Old Testament⁸⁷ bearing allusions to the Jewish literature.⁸⁸ There are historical backgrounds of the Hebrews with the Old Testament references regarding Jesus and the Jews.⁸⁹

The use of logos in John leads to claims of some influences from the rabbinical teachings from unorthodox Judaism and Jewish apocalyptic thought, the Qumran scrolls and the Hellenistic philosophy. The emergence of heretic groups like the: Gnostics, Docetists, Cerinthus, Ebionites, Hermetic Corpus, and Mandaeists perhaps actuated it.⁹⁰ The impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70; the Roman persecution of Jewish Christians⁹¹ and the approaching death of John, were other vital factors. The expulsion of Jews from Rome and Palestine because of the AD 66 Jewish revolt caused John, evangelist Philip and his daughters to relocate to the city of Ephesus.⁹² Ephesus is famous for its interesting long history of existence, linked to the Ionian confederation.

⁸⁶ Morris, NICNT, 60.

⁸⁷ "Some of the OT Prophecies Fulfilled in John's Gospel," accessed 24 May 2019, <https://www.agapebiblestudy.com/charts/Old%20Testament%20prophecies%20concerning%20the%20Messiah%27s%20death%20fulfilled%20in%20John%27s%20Gospel.htm>

⁸⁸ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 40-76.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹⁰ Pate, *Writings of John*, 24-26.

⁹¹ Frank Wheeler, "The Historical Background to the Gospel of John," accessed 2 April 2019, www.york.edu.

⁹² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 1979), 121, 122, and Douglas, J. D., ed., "Ephesus," *The New International Dictionary of Church History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

The city of Ephesus in Asia Minor was an ancient Greek city on the coast of Ionia, three kilometers southwest of present day Selcuk in Izmir province, Turkey. The Romans colonized it in 129 BC,⁹³ ranking it the second city after Rome. It had a high population and monumental buildings including: the temple of Artemis, etc. Revelation cites Ephesus as one of the seven churches of Asia where, John was written and Christian councils were held.⁹⁴ This paper delimits to a brief historical outlook of Ephesus up to AD 100 in relation to the place and date of writing of John.

The Geographical Situation

Joshua J. Mark cites that John resided in Ephesus in his old age.⁹⁵ Ephesus was the Asian provincial headquarters as one of the largest and prominent cities in the New Testament.⁹⁶ It is on the western edge of modern Turkey, 135 miles from the Aegean Sea and adjacent to Selcuk and its harbor at the Great Sea.⁹⁷ This study only accounts for the location relevant for where this Fourth Gospel was written.

Religious Setting

The prevalent controversies between Jesus and Jews on Christology allude to the presence of Gnosticism and Doceticism, or even Dualism and Arianism.

1978), s.v. "Ephesus," accessed 5 June 2022, https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://covers.openlibrary.org/b/id/8037125-L.jpg&imgrefurl=https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22386177M/The_New_international_dictionary_of_the_Christian_Church&h=500&w=319&tbnid=GMfnKL74DcdN0M&q=j.+d.+Douglas,+the+new+international+dictionary+of+church+history.

⁹³"Ephesus," Wikipedia, accessed 14 May 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephesus>.

⁹⁴ Bill De Giulio, "Visiting Ancient Ephesus, Turkey," accessed 14 May 2019, <https://wanderwisdom.com/travel-destinations/Visiting-Ancient-Ephesus-Turkey>.

⁹⁵ Joshua J. Mark, "Ephesus," accessed 14 May 2019, <http://www.ancient.eu/ephesos/>.

⁹⁶ F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (ODCC)*; (New York, NY: Oxford University, 1997), s.v. "Ephesus."

⁹⁷ Mark D. Roberts, "Ancient Ephesus and the New Testament," accessed 14 May 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/ancient-ephesus-and--the-new-testament/>.

Misunderstandings on signs as evidences of power and fame prevailed (14:5, 8; 10:38-42; 20:30, 31; 1 Cor 1:18-25). The religious phenomenon outside the Jewish territory was pagan worship in Ephesus⁹⁸ represented by the temple of Artemis (Diana).⁹⁹ Barclay summarizes this global idolatry and immorality with a never-smiling Heraclitus.¹⁰⁰ Emperor worship was practiced in Asia Minor.¹⁰¹ Ephesus attracted Christian leaders like Paul and John. Some believe that Mary the mother of Jesus lived there (John 19:25-27). Paul likely planted the Christian church here where he orated at the Areopagus at Athens on Mars hill.¹⁰² Christianity was well established by AD 100 in Asia Minor as its mission center.¹⁰³

Socio-Political Setting

By 190BC, the Romans controlled Ephesus city; its economy being boosted by its harbor adjacent to the Great Sea¹⁰⁴ between AD 1 and 4, in the new Asian capital when emperor Caesar Augustus ruled.¹⁰⁵ Social life of all citizens was similar regardless of one's social status.

⁹⁸ Roberts, "Ancient Ephesus and the NT."

⁹⁹ Cross, *Dictionary of Christian Church*, s.v. "Ephesus."

¹⁰⁰ William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1976), 123-125.

¹⁰¹ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Christ*, 2.

¹⁰² Nikos Loukas, "Full Day in Athens and Corinth," Private Greece Tours, https://privategreetours.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=123.

¹⁰³ Bruce, *Epistles of John*, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, "Ancient Ephesus and the New Testament."

¹⁰⁵ North, "Ephesus" accessed 31 May 2019, <https://www.oc.edu/academics/bible/resources/ephesus/greece-turkey-biblical-locations/ephesus.html>

The government expected loyalty from all its citizens, the emperor worship being the highest form of allegiance with lethal implications¹⁰⁶ in the dominions of emperors: Domitian,¹⁰⁷ Trajan and Hadrian.¹⁰⁸ Historical tradition confirms that the Jews were temporarily exempted.¹⁰⁹

The Literary Setting of the Gospel of John

The broader context will concentrate on the entire gospel and the immediate context will narrow on the pericope from John 16:33-18:1. Its literary style, genre, structure plus the textual and historical background of John 17:20-23 will be handled.

The literary setting will clarify some of the perspectives for or against ecumenism. The understanding of the literary traditions of the times of the apostle John the Beloved will have much to address in terms of the ecumenical debate in the pericope. In accordance with the recipients of the Fourth Gospel, it is fully clear that John did intend to guide in the amalgamation of the faithless and believers into a world church just to appear seemingly to be united. His message in the intercessory prayer of Jesus for them to understand, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3, NKJV; cf, 20:30, 31; 21:24, 25).

¹⁰⁶ C. R. Taylor, “Emperor Worship: The Divinity of the Roman Emperor,” in *Jewish Virtual Library* (1998-2019), accessed 24 May 2019, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/emperor_worship; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:262; Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 2:184; Philo, *De Legatione ad Galium*, 188, 207, 208; Tacitus *Historiae* 5:9 (trans. Clifford F. Moore and John Jackson).

¹⁰⁷ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Christ*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ North, “Ephesus”.

¹⁰⁹ Tessa Rajak, “Was There A Roman Charter for the Jews?” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (1984), 107-123, accessed 24 May 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/299011>.

Style of Author: Johannine Theology

John was the last of the gospels written in a simple style, but with deeper theology than the Synoptics.¹¹⁰ Apostle John writes in a figurative, indirect, and phrasal-idiomatic language. The use of metaphors, dualistic structures (dualism)¹¹¹ as Ladd observes many,¹¹² and the ‘I am’ utterances of Jesus are unique with John.¹¹³ He portrays the Jewishness of Jesus as the Dead Sea Scrolls affirm.¹¹⁴ His language is paratactic Greek which prefers eternal life to the Kingdom of God in the Synoptics. Hebrew or Aramaic is rampant in John.¹¹⁵ Spong observes his use of the Old Testament¹¹⁶ for many Old Testament references appear.¹¹⁷

The unique motifs and teaching ascribed to Jesus¹¹⁸ in John creates differences¹¹⁹ with the Synoptics with a few similarities. Ellis agrees that he “blends the *story* of Jesus with its *theological meaning*.”¹²⁰ Towns and Gutierrez support Ellis.¹²¹ He generally specializes on Christology¹²² as George R. Beasley-Murray

¹¹⁰ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 286.

¹¹¹ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 109-129.

¹¹² Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 259-272.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹¹⁴ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 292.

¹¹⁵ Theissen, *The New Testament*, 142.

¹¹⁶ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 195-203.

¹¹⁷ Ellis, *World of John*, 34, 35.

¹¹⁸ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 1996), 602.

¹¹⁹ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 186-189.

¹²⁰ Ellis, *World of John*, 46-51.

¹²¹ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 97.

¹²² Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 186.

depicts.¹²³ Even though John knew the Synoptics, he resolved rather to author a distinctive biography of Jesus (20:30, 31; 21:24, 25).¹²⁴ John is not a copy-paste-piracy Gospel. His human interactions and sameness to some non-canonical material or the Synoptics does not exclude the authorial inspiration.

Genre Analysis of the Fourth Gospel

John evinces the elements of a typical gospel genre including: a prologue, narratives, discourses and an epilogue.¹²⁵ However, mixtures of genres are depicted,

¹²³ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 387.

¹²⁴ Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 196-198.

¹²⁵ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 271.

mainly prophecy, poetry¹²⁶ and symbols with no parables, but metaphors.¹²⁷ Scholars have conceived different messages in John.¹²⁸ The Gospel is divided into five Passovers.¹²⁹ Jesus always celebrated the Passover.¹³⁰ No traditional Christianity is embraced.¹³¹

Thematic Information: Overall Theme and Motifs in John

There are several themes in the Fourth Gospel.¹³² Powell gives eight themes¹³³ and Gundry twelve¹³⁴ while Theissen provides twenty motifs.¹³⁵ Some core themes in the Synoptics are missing in John.¹³⁶ Ellis provides several themes in John.¹³⁷ The Gospel of John has other theological themes¹³⁸ like spiritualism.¹³⁹ The overall motif is

¹²⁶ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 251.

¹²⁷ Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 303. Some examples of acceptable renditions (abbreviated): AB; NASB; NIV and TNG-EINT.

¹²⁸ Ellis, *World of John*, 49.

¹²⁹ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 252.

¹³⁰ Stephen Armstrong, "The Gospel of John," accessed 24 May 2019, <https://www.versebyverseministry.org/bible-studies/the-gospel-of-john>.

¹³¹ Theissen, *The New Testament*, 149.

¹³² Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 181.

¹³³ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 181-188.

¹³⁴ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 290.

¹³⁵ Theissen, *The New Testament*, 150, 151, 183-185.

¹³⁶ Powell, *Introducing NT*, 87, 88, 89.

¹³⁷ Ellis, *World of John*, 35-45.

¹³⁸ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 289, 290.

¹³⁹ Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, 263, 264.

Christology.¹⁴⁰ The focus of the signs and discourses of Jesus is basically for proving the theme of Christology.¹⁴¹

The overall theme of the gospel of John is Christology. This is well established at the beginning of the Gospel in chapter one where the deity and mission of Christ are revealed. In this discourse in chapter one especially verses 1-3, we can also note the oneness or unity between the God the Father and God the Son. This unity was expressed in creation. The concept of spiritual unity therefore, which John expresses between the Father and the Son, this He commands the believers to demonstrate. In John 17:20-23 is founded on this divine unity as in John chapter one.

Schematic Structure of the Johannine Gospel

There is no scholarly consensus on the structure of the Gospel.¹⁴² Some divide the gospel into two,¹⁴³ three,¹⁴⁴ four, five,¹⁴⁵ or six, sections or more¹⁴⁶ identities.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 298; Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB)*; (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 9:496; and, Robert A. Spivey, *An Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to its Structure and Meaning*, 2nd ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1974), 428.

¹⁴¹ Charisma Book House Group, *Spiritual Warfare Bible With The New King James Version* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2012), 1707-1709.

¹⁴² Harold W. Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (Spring 2002): 3-21, accessed 1 April 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3268328>.

¹⁴³ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 99.

¹⁴⁴ Marshall et al., *New Bible Dictionary*, 597.

¹⁴⁵ Ellis, *World of John*, 54-57.

¹⁴⁶ Powell, *Introducing NT*, 170. His schema he regards: "Two Books in One."

¹⁴⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. Marion L. Soards (Yale, London: University Press, 2016), 116-132.

Davidson, Stibbs and Kevan provide eleven.¹⁴⁸ Lincoln divides it into lawsuits.¹⁴⁹ Gundry has a detailed schema.¹⁵⁰ Bauckhan highlights historiographical characteristics.¹⁵¹ Brown mentions the terminologies used by others.¹⁵² The schema of Powell, Brown, Towns and Gutierrez resemble each other, but with brief notes.¹⁵³ Some scholars above omit some structural details.¹⁵⁴

Theissen posits that “John was not composed as one document.”¹⁵⁵ Some later Syriac manuscripts add, ‘Pericope Adulterae (PA),’¹⁵⁶ beginning from 7:53-8:11.¹⁵⁷ Several witnesses of early Christian manuscripts confirm its (PA) inclusion.¹⁵⁸ Morris backs its (PA) omissions and inclusions in the Canon and particularly in John.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁸ F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan, *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 866.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 138-182.

¹⁵⁰ Gundry, *Survey of NT*, 293-295.

¹⁵¹ Bauckhan, *Testimony*, 93-122.

¹⁵² Burge, Gary M, ed. *John: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. The NIV Application Commentary. Edited by Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 41, 43.

¹⁵³ Powell, *Introducing NT*, 170-173.

¹⁵⁴ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 99.

¹⁵⁵Theissen, *The New Testament*, 148.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen A. James, “The Adulteress and the Death Penalty,” *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 46; Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 2:721; Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke Commentary* (Electronic Database: Biblesoft, 1996), John8:11, and, Zane C. Hodges, “The Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 8: The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): The Text,” *The Historicity of the “Pericope Adulterae”*(PA) in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 544 (October 1979), 318, accessed 24 May 2019, https://www.academia.edu/7928058/The_Historicity_of_the_Pericope_Adulterae_John_7_53-8_11_.

¹⁵⁷ Allen Paul Wikgren, “The Lectionary Text of the Pericope, John (7:53-8:11) 8:1-11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (July 1934): 188-198, accessed 24 May 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i364320>=<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3259885>, and, Hodges, *Historicity of PA*, 318-322.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Aland et al., “KATA IQANNHN”, *The Greek New Testament with Dictionary*, 4th rev. ed. (Edmonds, WA: United Bible Societies, 2010), 347, 348.

¹⁵⁹ Morris, *NICNT*, 17-22.

Summary and Conclusion

Internal and external evidences primarily from early church tradition attest to the inspired author of the Fourth Gospel as apostle John. He wrote it in the last quarter of the 1st century between AD 70 to 100, and not later. The early church tradition and scholars confirm the location for the writing of John as Ephesus in Asia Minor probably after John returned from Patmos exile in AD 96. The unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are the secondary recipients of the Johannine Gospel. The primary addressees are generally the believers both Jewish and Gentile Christians. The audience of John composed of both Jews and Gentiles, the largest being the Gentiles.

The purposes of authoring John varies like: one, to curtail the pervading heretic influences of doceticism, Gnosticism, Dualism and Arianism; two, as an evangelistic instrument, and finally, as a counterattack against the Jews. Many views presume that its main focus was Christology which this study affirms. Thus, his main thrust was affirming the faith of his audience in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God through His signs, and strong utterances, fruitioning into eternal life now and hereafter (John 20:30, 31). The setting of John has four elements: historical, geographical, religious, and socio-political. Several circumstances seem influential to the authorship of John though many scholars agree on the four aforementioned.

John is unique in comparison to the Synoptics with his use of paratactic Greek, capturing only materials which introduce and confirm Jesus as the pre-existent, divine Son of God and Savior (Christology). John excludes parables and the Transfiguration in highlighting His deity, but rather exalts His words and signs as sufficient in confirming His God-Man natures. The theology in John is profound, but so simple to be comprehended easily even by the new believers. Hence, John is for all peoples for a faith focused in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30, 31).

CHAPTER 4

EXEGESIS: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 17:20-23

Introduction of the Exegetical Work on the Pericope

This chapter exegetically analyzes John 17:20-23 to establish the Messianic meaning of the general Christian understanding of the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one” deemed as ecumenism. The exegesis seeks to establish the interpretation of this clause as informing what Jesus really meant as opposed to the literal amalgamation of all churches into one unit. The passage reveals some allegorical interpretation that translates into the ecumenical movement. It discusses in a narrowed sense the theological anecdotes connected with the passage to give meaning for the modern-day Seventh-day Adventists living within the African context, particularly in Kenya. It is sensible to assert that every biblical text applies to a certain setting.

Establishing the Limits of the Textual Passage

The pericope John 17:20-23 is surrounded by several other units in both its immediate and broader contexts.¹ There are some passages in the Scriptures like the Pericope Adulterae (PA) in John 7:53-8:11, which many scholars oppose as non-

¹ Theissen, *The New Testament*, 148.

existent in the biblical canon,² but this pericope has no debate upon its presence in the Bible and has majority scholarly affirmation. Hence, it is established as an authentic canonical passage for discussion.³

The Larger Literary Context of John 17:20-23

Several major discourses, narratives and episodes prevail in the entire Gospel of John. This is possible due to the natural dividing marker like: “After he had said these things,” or, “And it came to pass when he had finished,” and the like. The phrasal or subordinating clauses and statements which depict where the passages begin or end are categorized in numbers to shorten long ones and create clarity. (1) “There was.” (2) “Now the/this is/there were certain/when He was in/as Jesus passed by/a certain man was.” (3) “The next/following/on the third/last day/now after the two days/early in the morning/it was/before the Feast.” (4) “These things were done in/words Jesus spoke in/I have spoken to you.” (5) “After these things/this, there was.” (6) “Then, there arose/most assuredly, I say to you/Jesus spoke to them again/many of the Jews/six days before the.” (7) “Therefore, when the/many.” (8) “So Jesus came again to/but Jesus went to/and everyone went to/He went away/many believed/the Passover of the/truly Jesus did/there are also many other things.” (9) “Let not your hearts...” (10) “I am the...” (11) “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes....,” and; (12) “When/After Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with...over the.” In the clause 11 and 12 is the location for the pericope, John 17:20-23. These natural dividing markers appear over 19 times mainly for showing the

² Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994), 187, 188, and, Gary M. Burge, “A Specific Problem in the New Testament Text and Canon: A Woman Caught in Adultery” (PA), *Journal of the Evangelical and Theological Studies* 27 (June 1984): 140-143.

³ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 317; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 285-287, and Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 188.

beginning or the end of passages in the entire John, thus setting the demarcations of the discourses and the narratives of Jesus.

There are some signals that indicate certain elements in determining a new unit such as: change in time and setting primarily for narratives and transitional conjunctions or adverbs (then, that, therefore, however, truly, now, there, today, etc.). Therefore, the major subordinate clause, “that they all may be one” in John 17:20-23 as its immediate context falls into the larger literary context of John 16:33-18:1.⁴ This marks the culmination of the upper-room discourses of Christ with His disciples, commencing in 13:12 to 16:33, and climaxing it with His pastoral prayer in 17:1-26.⁵ Gangel calls this, “The ‘real’ Lord’s Prayer.”⁶ And immediately, His passion narrative begins in 18:1ff,⁷ which was interrupted in the Last Supper episode in chapter 13.⁸

The broader context is indicated by how Jesus finishes His dialogue with the Twelve the night before His passion. The signals showing the beginning and end of this larger portion include: repeated terms, phrase and clause, and a change in tense, mood and an aspect of the main verb. This is as follows; in Greek, *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν*, translated, “I have spoken these things to you” (16:33a), and/or, in Greek, *Ταῦτα ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς*, meaning, “(After) Jesus spoke these things” (John 17:1a), both determining the beginning of the new unit. And the end of the passage is portrayed by the same repetitive element plus a transitional adverb of time, and a change in place or setting, thus; in Greek, *Ταῦτα εἰπὼν Ἰησοῦς ἐξῆλθεν σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ*,

⁴ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 325.

⁵ Makrakis, *Four Gospels*, 1058, 1072.

⁶ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 309-325.

⁷ Ellis, *World of John*, 56, 57, 76-79; and, Theissen, *The New Testament*, 148.

⁸ Ellis, *World of John*, 74, 75.

translated, “(After) Jesus spoke these things He went away with His disciples” (John 18:1a).⁹ According to the United Bible Society (UBS), Greek New Testament, 5th edition, chapter 17 is a huge unit with diverse pericopes constituting the groups-focused petitions of Jesus to His heavenly Father.

The Immediate Literary Context of John 17:20-23

John 17 is part of the Upper-room discourse I generally refer to as the ‘monologue’. When Jesus ends His various ‘general’¹⁰ conversations with His disciples theologically called, ‘discourses’ or ‘dialogues’, He now begins His long monologue to His unseen Father, but audible to His disciples about aims for groups Jesus had in mind. This discourse is named variously in the scholarly circles.¹¹

The contextual outline from 16:33 through 18:1 establishes its treatment singly or collectively as a pericope, in relation to the focus revealed from the mind of Christ. Ngewa states, “In the prophetic perfect tense, Jesus spoke as if He has already won with viable results continuing, His historical factual victory.”¹² Christ finishes His discourse and starts His intercession “with an aorist imperative that expresses an entreaty to the Father.”¹³ John 16:33—Jesus ends His dialogues climaxing with a tone of victory.¹⁴ John 17:1-5—“Relationship of the Father to the Son,”¹⁵ which Gundry

⁹ J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Greek-English Interlinear NT*, 376-392.

¹⁰ Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 161.

¹¹ *SDABC*, 5:891-894, 1051; Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones, “Gospel of John,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1950, 17:340, and, Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 161.

¹² Ngewa, *Gospel of John*, 318, 319.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 308, and, Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 166-170, 173-175.

¹⁵ Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 161-163, and, Köstenberger, *John*, 485-490.

supports as a pericope,¹⁶ while Burge contradicts it, linking it to verses 1-8.¹⁷ John 17:6-19—Jesus Prays for His Immediate Disciples;¹⁸ on which Gundry¹⁹ and Gangel²⁰ differ. John 17:20-26—Jesus Prays for Believers of All Ages. On John 17:20-26, some scholars such as: Gangel,²¹ Nichol,²² Tenney and Longenecker,²³ Alexander Maclaren,²⁴ and Gundry,²⁵ vary. John 17:20-23 is recognized as an exclusive pericope as it stresses on unity of believers in Christ (ecclesiology), besides verses 24-26, which presume Parousia (eschatology).²⁶ However, some scholars treat it as a connected, expansive pericope from verses 20-26,²⁷ while Maclaren and Apostolos Makrakis divide the pericope into various exposable texts.²⁸

¹⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Verse-by-Verse Explanations With a Literal Translation*. Commentary on the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 440, and, Maclaren, *St. John*, 188-191.

¹⁷ Burge, *John*, 461-465.

¹⁸ Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 163-166, and, Maclaren, *St. John*, 191-202.

¹⁹ Gundry, *Verse-by-Verse Explanations*, 440.

²⁰ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 325.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *SDABC*, 5:1051.

²³ Tenney and Longenecker, *EBC*, 166-168.

²⁴ Maclaren, *St. John*, 191-202.

²⁵ Gundry, *Verse-by-Verse Explanations*, 440.

²⁶ “No Destruction of Personality,” [John 17:20-23], *SDABC*, 7:1148, and, Köstenberger, *John*, 499-502.

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 363-372.

²⁸ Maclaren, *St. John*, 203-219, and, Makrakis, *Four Gospels*, 1067-1072.

Textual Criticism: Analysis of Textual Problems in John 17:20-23

The textual analysis seeks to identify possible variants within the pericope. Such should aid in analyzing the passage and could establish any impact on this study. Two Greek New Testament texts: the *Greek New Testament (GNT)* by the United Bible Societies (UBS), 3rd, 4th and 5th revised editions, and *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA)*, 26th, 27th and 28th revised editions, are used alternately.

The *Greek New Testament (GNT)* manuscripts render some possibilities where four textual variants feature: 1. ἐν ᾧσιν; 2. ᾧσιν (v. 21); 3. ἡγάπησας and, 4. ἡγάπησα (v. 23).²⁹ Their corresponding crucial textual apparatuses or witnesses will be written against each of them according to their variant readings though in brief. It is vital to observe that verses 20 and 22 have no textual variants, thus an evidence of acceptability by the textual critics in early renditions, and their adoption within the original Greek text.

1. John 17:21, ἐν ᾧσιν, *Greek New Testament (GNT)*, UBS⁵; variant; ἐν ᾧσιν and ᾧσιν.
 - A. Witnesses of {B} ᾧσιν; φ^{66vid} B C* D W I547 it^{a, b, c, d, e, (rl)} vg^{ms} sy^s cop^{sa, pbo, boms, ach2} arm geo Eusebius^{1/2}; Cyprian Hilary^{5/6}; Vigilus//
 - B. Witnesses of ἐν ᾧσιν; ⋈ A C³ (Δ)³⁰ L Θ Ψ O141 f¹ f¹³ 28 33 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892^{supp} 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342

²⁹ Barbara Aland et al., ed., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1983), 390; Barbara Aland et al., ed., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 2001), 391; Zondervan, *The Greek-English New Testament With The New International Version (NIV)*, United Bible Society (UBS), 5th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 759, 760; Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA)*, 26th rev. ed. (Münster: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1976); Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA)*, 27th rev. ed. (Münster: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), and, Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA)*, 28th, rev. ed. (Münster: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 360-362.

³⁰ Aland et al., *Greek NT*, 4th rev. ed., 379, 380.

1424 1505 Byz [E G H N] Lect it^{aur, f, q} vg syr^{p, h, pal} cop^{bo} eth slav
 Clement Origen^{gr, lat} Eusebius^{1/2} Athanasius Basil Gregory-Nyssa
 Didymus Evagrius Cyril; Hilary^{1/6} Ambrose Jerome Augustine
 Varimadum^{vid}

2. John 17:23, ἡγάπησας, *Greek New Testament (GNT)*, UBS⁵; variants;
 ἡγάπησας and ἡγάπησα.

A. Witnesses of ἡγάπησας; κA B C L (Δ)³¹ W Θ Ψ f¹ f¹³ 33 157 180 205
 565 579 597 700 1006 1010 1071 1241 1292 1342 1505 Byz [E G H
 N] Lect it^{c, e, f, q} vg syr^{hmg} cop^{sa, pbo, bopt} slav Clement Eusebius Gregory-
 Nyssa Cyril; Ambrose Jerome^{1/2} Augustine//

B. Witnesses of ἡγάπησα; D 0141 892^{supp} 1243 1424 l 387^{1/2} l 1016^{1/2} l
 1552^{1/2} it^{a, aur, b, d, rl} vg^{mss} syr^{p, h, palms} cop^{bopt} arm eth geo Chrysostom;
 Jerome^{1/2}.

A textual study of John 17:20-23 in the *Koinḗ Greek New Testament (GNT⁵)*, UBS by Barbara Aland et al., reveals a few problems pertaining to the meaning and grammar of some four textual variants, thus informing the exposition of the respective terms in Greek in two verses, 21 and 23. The variants are three verbs of different tenses ἡγάπησας, ἡγάπησα, and ὧσιν, and one adjective of number, ἕν with a numerical quality in the nominative case, which is attached to a verbal form, ὧσιν, its root, εἰμί (present, subjunctive, active, third, plural).

However, the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA²⁸)* revised edition, has fewer different variants in relation to the *Greek New Testament (GNT⁵)*, UBS, where *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA²⁸)* provides more textual variations

³¹ Aland et al., *Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., 379-381.

than those in the *Greek New Testament (GNT)*, UBS⁵.³² The mentioned textual variations feature prominent in John 17:20-23 in the *Novum Testamentum Graece (NA²⁸)* in comparison with those in the *Greek New Testament (GNT⁵)*, UBS, conveying the most acceptable and probable renditions of the *Greek New Testament (GNT)* text:

1. John 17:20, πιστευόντων (*GNT⁵*); variant; πιστευσόντων (*NA²⁸*); supports this variation, but adds some witnesses.
2. John 17:21, πάτερ; πιστεύη (*GNT⁵*); variants; πάτηρ; ἐν; πιστεύση (*NA²⁸*), agrees with the variants and adds witnesses³³.
3. John 17:22, δέδωκάς; δέδωκα (*GNT⁵*); variants; εδέδωκάς; εδέδωκα; (ἐν) εσμεν (*NA²⁸*), provides more or omits witnesses.
4. John 17:23, καὶ; καὶ ἵνα; ἠγάπησας (*GNT⁵*); variants, και; και ινα; ἠγάπησα (*NA²⁸*), gives other witnesses while omitting others.

Explanations from the Manuscripts Readings Using Critical Textual Apparatus as Witnesses for Textual Variants Discovered

These are the key textual variants in their order and their respective witnesses in the paradigm. They include all the significant materials informed from reliable and acceptable original manuscripts and critical textual apparatuses. In accordance with manuscripts readings conducted, *GNT* agreeably provides four textual variants in only

³² Nestle-Aland, *NA²⁸*, 361. It is plausible that additional information from other sources including archaeological, may have contributed to the increased supportive witnesses to this work.

³³ Aland et al., *Greek NT*, 5th rev. ed., 137, and, Aland et al., *Greek NT*, 4th rev. ed., 379, 380. The Greek, πάτηρ, πατήρ, is a noun, nominative, masculine, singular. Its form appears feminine, but it is reasonably masculine, in the first declension of nouns. The Greek, πάτερ which *GNT*, UBS, uses could be bearing a similar meaning that might slightly differ basically based on a more intimate relationship than mere fatherhood, between Christ and His Father. The change from η to ε or vice-versa could suggest the deep and close affinity. John intentionally omits η for ε, to supply this affection gap for meant for disciples of every ages.

two verses: ἐν ᾧσιν and ᾧσιν (vs. 21), and, ἠγάπησας and ἠγάπησα (vs. 23).³⁴ *NA* records ten variations in all the four verses, where verse 20 has one variant while verses, 21, 22 and 23, bear three variants each, as projected above in the paradigm.

Only two common textual variants are found in both lists of *GNT* and *NA*: ἐν and ἠγάπησα, while seven of them appear only in the *NA* books and only one variation, ᾧσιν, occurs in the *GNT*. The ones that appear in numerous manuscripts with earlier, harder and many stronger witnesses may not pose a challenge to this study because they bear majority acceptance into the original Greek text. If they perhaps cause an effect, then addressing the type of impact that arises is imperative. It is not clear however, which manuscripts of the *NA* or *GNT* the proponents of the literal application to the pericope that favors the ecumenical movement used, as their literature does not indicate. The ecumenical protagonists probably used textual renditions of very late manuscripts beyond the 5th century AD, which have undergone a great deal of corruption in the translational process.³⁵ The interpretation into ecumenism was as a result of translational manipulation to agree with the preference of the interpreters.³⁶

When compared with the words in the *GNT*, the various textual variations, ἐν ᾧσιν, ᾧσιν, and ἠγάπησας, have no significant problem in this exegetical work. Three of them have been adopted into the original *Κοινή* Greek text. Only ἠγάπησα, an aorist indicative active first person singular, was unacceptable into the text for its effect on the context and textual meaning, contrary to the aorist indicative active second person

³⁴ Aland et al., *Greek NT*, 3rd rev. ed., 390, 391; Zondervan, *Greek-English NT*, 759, 760; and, Nestle-Aland, *NA*²⁸, 306, 361.

³⁵ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 214.

³⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford, 1992), quoted in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 10-16.

singular which ἠγάπησας satisfies. Bruce M. Metzger observes some scribal status of the variants: ἐν, ὧσιν, and ἠγάπησα in John 17:

17.21 ὧσιν (2) {B} The better attested reading is ὧσιν... The pedantic addition of ἐν before ὧσιν, which comes from ἐν ὧσιν earlier in the verse, clouds the thought more than illuminates it. 17:23 ἠγάπησα (1) {A} The Western reading, 23 ἠγάπησα, arose either through scribal inattentiveness or as a deliberate accommodation to (John) 15.9.³⁷

Remarkably, the variants Nestle-Aland (NA) lists do not appear in the Barbara Aland et al. (GNT) renditions apart from the two, ἐν and ἠγάπησα. The text types of the variants 1, 2, 3 and 4 emanate from the more reliable, earlier, harder, shorter and stronger readings of the Alexandrian text-type family, followed by the Western text-type family. Both are possibly closer to the original Κοινή Greek New Testament text.³⁸

The Style of the Author in Regard to the Κοινή Greek New Testament Variant Readings

In John 17, the use of the phrase, ἐν ὧσιν, and the subjunctive verb, ὧσιν, in verses 21 and 23, both denote the elements of unity in the prayer of Jesus. It is probable that John preferred the phrase, ἐν ὧσιν, that is, “they might be one,” and the subjunctive verb, ὧσιν, equals, “they may be,” alternately for the petition. The usage of the aorist verbs; ἠγάπησας and ἠγάπησα varies. The word ἠγάπησας, “you loved” is used thrice: twice in verse 23, and once in both, verses 24 and 26. It is in the second aorist second person singular, while ἠγάπησα, “I loved,” is found nowhere in the passage because it is in the first aorist first person singular (cf, John 13:34b). The

³⁷ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 214.

³⁸ Metzger, *Text of New Testament*, quoted in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 10-16. The criteria used in choosing among conflicting readings in the New Testament depends on the principal categories of criteria that aid an editor in evaluating the comparative worth of variant readings including the: external evidence of the manuscripts themselves, and internal evidence. These are based on transcriptional probabilities relating to scribal habits, and the intrinsic probabilities on the authorial style.

scribe opted to employ the word, ἠγάπησας, as he refers to God loving His Son Jesus and His disciples. The scribal style suggests that the variants: 1, 2, and 3 are the most probable renditions.

In the whole unit, the four possible readings of the text, variants: 1, 2, and 3 (ἐν ᾧσιν, ᾧσιν and ἠγάπησας) are the possible renderings because they are the earlier, harder, shorter and stronger readings, all being supported by strong manuscripts: ⋈ A B C, and P⁶⁶, and dated by the 4th century AD. The textual variation 4 could not be adopted probably because it is of a later date, 5th century AD and beyond, and for its conflicting tense form (John 13:34b). When compared, the three with the earlier, harder, shorter and stronger, readings were weightier than the fourth. Hence the textual critics preferred adopting them into the *Koinḗ* Greek New Testament text and into later translations. The dates of the variants; 1, 2 and 3 render them as the possible renditions of the text because they belong to the category of shorter, harder readings, and are earlier in their dating, by the 4th century AD.³⁹

It is plausible that some divergences arose from quite accidental causes such as mistaking a letter or a word for another that looked like it during the copying process. Letters with a similar pronunciation could have been confused (itacism). Homoeoarcton or homoeoteleuton (the inadvertent scribal skipping or omitting of a group of letters to the second), hence some part of the text (dittography), may have occurred. Other possible scribal variations could be; smoothing out grammatical or stylistic harshness, or eliminating real or imagined obscurities of textual meaning as evinced in the Byzantine text-type. Translations from the original Greek could further testify to the remarkable divergencies such as paraphrases like the Western text-type.

³⁹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 14-16.

Related Translations of the Pericope Comparing Different Bible Versions

The subject being studied on ecumenism requires that the original meaning of the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one,” should be sought through comparing several Bible translations. At least five translations and a provisional one by the researcher are considered. These versions further provide the necessary information regarding the ecumenical movement or other biblical interpretation appropriate for the original writer and the text. These are related with the *Koinē* Greek New Testament text already supplied.

John 17:20-23 in Koinē Greek New Testament

²⁰Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ, ²¹ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ γὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ᾧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας. ²²καὶ γὰρ τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν. ²³ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ᾧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν, ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας.

Related English Translations of the Pericope: John17:20-23

A. John 17:20-23, the New Revised Standard Version

²⁰I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (NRSV).

B. John 17:20-23, *The New King James Version*

²⁰I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (NKJV).

C. John 17:20-23, *Young's Literal Translation*

²⁰And not in regard to these alone do I ask, but also in regard to those who shall be believing, through their word, in me; ²¹that they all may be one, as Thou Father *art* in me, and I in Thee; that they also in us may be one, that the world may believe that Thou didst send me. ²²And I, the glory that thou hast given to me, have given to them, that they may be one as we are one; ²³I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, and that the world may know that Thou didst send me, and didst love them as Thou didst love me (YLT).

D. John 17:20-23, *The Greek-English New Testament With the New International Version*

²⁰My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one—²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (GENT-NIV-UBS⁵).

E. John 17:20-23, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*

²⁰But not concerning these only am I making a request, but also concerning those who believe on me through their word, ²¹in order that all might be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, in order that they themselves also might be in us, to the end that the world may be believing that you sent me on a mission. ²²And as for myself, the glory which you have given me, I have given them, in order that they might be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, in order that they, having been brought to the state of completeness with respect to oneness, may persist in that state of completeness, to the end that the world might be understanding that you sent me on a mission and that you loved them even as you loved me.⁴⁰

F. John 17:20-23, *The New Jerusalem Bible*

²⁰I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. ²¹May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. ²²I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. ²³With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me (NJB).

Provisional Translation of John 17:20-23

²⁰However I do not pray on behalf of (for) these alone, but (emphatic) also concerning the ones who believe in Me on account (because) of their word, ²¹so that they all might (may) be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, so that

⁴⁰ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 256, 257. This translation is not fully interpreted or paraphrased. The translator has held very closely to the original text, that is, to the earliest and most accurate Greek text. In isolated instances he has found it necessary to include interpretation or paraphrase in order to bring out clearly a very difficult passage.

they also might be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You have given Me I have given them, so that they may be one just as We are One; ²³I in them and You in Me, so that they might be perfected into one (oneness/unity), so that the world may know that you sent Me and that you loved them just as you loved Me (PT).⁴¹

Observations from the Comparative Translations

Through the elapse of time, translations have caused several differences, however minor, which have affected the original nuance of the texts. These diversities hence necessitate an analysis in order to settle for the most acceptable translation and/or interpretation of the text under study, and thus provide its genuine application.

It is vital to provide a comparison of the translations within their spectrum divide: either formal translations (KJV, RSV, ESV, ASV NKJV, YLT, NRSV, NAB, RWB, and the like), or functional/dynamic translations (NIV, GENT, MIT, NLT, NJB, name them). In reference to the various translations, the most recent functional versions portrayed a bloated paraphrasing of the passage rather than literally translating the text like the formal versions. For instance, *The New Jerusalem Bible* has the largest number of diversities in: punctuations, faithfulness to the grammar like tenses, and not following the text of the original Koinē Greek, but wild paraphrasing, which is also evident in NIV, GENT, MIT and other related dynamic translations. Besides these versions already mentioned, the following formal translations; NKJV, YLT, NRSV, NAB, and RWB, have generally remained faithful to the literal translation of the text, following the grammatical principles evaded by some of the other related functional versions.

⁴¹ The Provisional Translation in this study was made by me (The Researcher).

The remarkable aspect in the diverse translations in relation to the phrasal clause under study, “that they all may be one,” is the interchange of wording which seems to shift the meaning of the idea of the prayer of Jesus on unity. Some translations that were considered in this discussion tamper largely with word order, thus placing the; ‘all’ and ‘one’ either adjacent to each other or far apart as follows: “May they all be one” (NJB); “that they all might be unified” (MIT); “that they may all be one” (NRSV); “that they will all be one” (NLT); “that they may be all one,”⁴² and, “so that they all might be one” (PT). The word arrangement might be one reason for the claim by the ecumenical proponents on ecumenism in place of the unity of love, truth and purpose, fellowship and world evangelism as the core meaning of the petition of Christ. Where the term, ‘all’ appears may either mean ecumenism for all religious groups coming together, or unity of love, truth and purpose, and fellowship for world evangelism. Some of these translations appear to a great deal creating some difficulties in the correct interpretation of the subordinate clause, Greek, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, that is; “so that they all might be one”. It is for this reason therefore, that the translators are required to be faithful to the literal translation from the original Greek text to avert the countless discrepancies or disparities in the modern versions.

The Analytical Study of John 17:20-23

This study focuses on the analysis of words and phrases, and which may be recurring within the spectrum of this discussion. Lexical semantics of the pertinent terms or texts in the prayer of Christ are considered. The study analytically exegetes the clause, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, translated as, “so that they all might be one,” in John 17:20-23 to get its interpretation, while considering other related repetitive items for

⁴² O’Gara, *Future of Ecumenism*, 42.

clarity in the pericope. The exegesis demystifies its ambiguity leading to a proper and harmonious comprehension of the intent of Jesus in His prayer.

Some Significant Questions to Consider for the Analytical Study

There are certain questions that arise in the clause under study. Could the phrase be connected with other clauses like; *ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν* and *ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἐν*; where some repeated phrases and words feature in the unit? What is the meaning of the words in the clause?

Who are “they all?” What kind of “may be one” did Jesus envisage in His prayer—Himself, the Father, His disciples, believers, non-believers, religious bodies, Christian churches or the whole cosmos? Or what exactly was His burden in His prayer? Could it be the sentiments of His followers before and after the resurrection from which Jesus noticed divisions among them? Was Jesus expressing the Trinity or His equality with the Father in prayer? How is the oneness of the Father and the Son significant for the ultimate unity of His church for mission leading to the Parousia?

Syntactical, Lexical and Grammatical Analysis of the Pericope

The Syntactical Structure of John 17:20-23

²⁰ Οὐ περὶ τούτων
δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον,
ἀλλὰ
καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων
διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ,

²¹ ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσιν,
καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν σοί,

ἵνα
καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὧσιν,

ἵνα
ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ
ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

²² κἀγὼ τὴν δόξαν
ἦν δέδωκάς μοι
δέδωκα αὐτοῖς,

ἵνα
ὥσιν ἕν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἕν·

²³ ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς

καὶ
σὺ ἐν ἐμοί,

ἵνα
ὥσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἕν,

ἵνα
γινώσκη ὁ κόσμος
ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας

καὶ
ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς
καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας.

Observations on the Syntax of the Text

There are major clauses that are related through repeating of key words. The subjunctive of John 17:21a, *ἵνα πάντες ἕν ὧσιν*, is connected to the participle of verse 23c, *ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἕν*, that is, whose aim is to bring to the end (goal) proposed. Verse 22b has some key words, being subjunctives, found repeated similar to the clause under study as stated, Greek, *ἵνα ὧσιν ἕν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἕν*, meaning; “that they may be one, even as we are one” (KJV). The clause and its connected phrases, clauses and sentences portray a significant percentage of the subjunctive mood. The clause in the participle, *ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἕν*, is translated differently like; “that they may be made perfect in one” (KJV), or “that they may be perfected in unity” (NASB), or “that they may be perfected into one” (YLT), and/or, “so that they might be perfected into oneness (unity)” (PT). As a perfect passive participle, it is best rendered as: “so that they having been made perfect into oneness” or “so that they

after having been perfected into one (in unity)”—Provisional Translation (PT) by me. The clause suggests a certain objective from the mind of Christ in His prayer; “after they have been made perfect in oneness,” the results being, “so that the world may know that you sent me and that you loved them just as you loved me.” This envisaged unity on His faithful followers will get into mission and eventually enter His glory (the Parousia), verse 22.

The readings portray no determined conditional statements: protasis or apodosis, since the pericope is a petition. However, there are several undetermined conditioned sentences with rare and implied shades of protasis (if) and apodosis (then) in the petition and also since the presence of the subjunctive mood is a mode of doubtful assertions or of probability or of possibility, “found in the protases of the undetermined conditions.”⁴³ It is remarkable that the three tenses (present, perfect and aorist), three moods (subjunctive, indicative and participle), and two voices (active and passive), that reveal the absence of such determined conditional statements prevail.

The clause, *ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν*, reveals the key word in the pericope and most probably the whole chapter. Hence, the Greek term, *τετελειωμένοι*, meaning, “to be perfected,” or “having been made perfect,” ties the statement being researched. It covers the repeated terms, *ἐν ὧσιν*, where the participle, *τετελειωμένοι*, presumably sums up the intent of Jesus Christ for His present disciples and the eschatological church which is perfection. And this perfectness is not only in unity, but in all other aspects of spiritual life, namely: sanctification in faith, truth and in word focused on

⁴³ William Douglas Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1961), 195.

eternal life, in purpose, fellowship of love and in global evangelism, and ultimately in the Parousia.⁴⁴

The clause in verse 21a, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὅσιν*, realizes its fulfillment when all believers in Christ learn the basics of unity to curtail divisions causing strife and disunity in the church (1 Cor 3:1-9; 6:1-8). Jo-Ann A. Brant observes; “The prayer ends with a petition that God makes the complete unity described in the metaphor of the vine a reality.”⁴⁵ Jesus prays that this perfect oneness corresponding to that which exists between Him and the Father will speak for His faith-based mission in the world (John 17:20, 21). The theme of abiding emphasized in John 15:1-10 features in this pericope through the clauses in John 17:21b and 23a.⁴⁶ Carson calls it, the “Spiritual intimacy with Jesus.”⁴⁷

Lexicography and Grammatical Analysis of John 17:20-23 in Relation to the Key Word and Other Clauses

Lexicography means the study of individual words or terms in Greek to arrive at their meanings. The words used in the pericope have various meanings and grammatical connotations in the Lexicons, Exegetical Bible Dictionaries, and Exegetical Commentaries plus the Greek New Testament (GNT) texts by the United Bible Society (UBS), 3rd, 4th and 5th editions and the Bible software called the Bible Works (BW⁸). A few of these words deem vital to be discussed briefly for their place of significance in this study. The links of the principal subordinate clause, *ἵνα πάντες*

⁴⁴ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 196-201.

⁴⁵ Brant, *John*, 227.

⁴⁶ Ladd, *Theology of NT*, 313-314.

⁴⁷ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 89-111, 195-199.

ἐν ᾧσιν, with the key word of the unit, τετελειωμένοι, should be delved in through a lexical analysis.

The section on lexical analysis that accounts for standard lexicography establishes the following significant items: (a) the total number of occurrences of each relevant word in the *Koinḗ* Greek New Testament text; (b) the general spread of the use of the words; (c) the various shades of meaning in the various contexts of use, and, (d) the possible meaning of the words, in the passage under study. Therefore, each facet of the lexical study is treated in its own manner with an emphasis on the words in the subordinate clause, Greek, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, translated, “so that they all might be one.”

The *Koinḗ* Greek New Testament text records the four words in the clause under discussion with varying occurrences in regard to each of the 27 books. The subordinating conjunction, ἵνα, is a subordinating conjunction referring to, “so that” (of purpose), “that” (indirect statement) or “in order that” (of result) or “because (reason). Ἰνα is the commonest in all the New Testament works appearing in different contexts purposely for joining subordinate clauses. Walter Bauer et al. (BAGD) points out in this connection:

In many cases purpose and result cannot be clearly differentiated, and hence ἵνα is used for the result which follows according to the purpose of the subject or of God. As in Jewish and pagan thought, purpose and result are identical in declarations of the divine will... The weakened ἵνα with the subjunctive (or indicative future), denotes something one wishes to be done by another.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (ESNT) With Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, 474; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), trans. and adapted by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (1957), s. v. “ἵνα”; Mounce and Mounce, *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament*, 432; Rudolph Bultmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:367, 368, and, James Hope Moulton, and George Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, Greek Dictionary (Cambridge, Baker Academic, 1930), 304.

The purpose-result *ἵνα* clause is used for both purpose and result in the New Testament. It is mainly used after verbs with the sense of ‘wish,’ ‘desire,’ or ‘strive.’ That is, it indicates both the intention and its sure accomplishment. Sometimes differentiating clearly purpose and result is difficult. It signifies or denotes aim, goal or purpose. Likewise, Moule points out, “the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence.”⁴⁹

In a nutshell, the New Testament “writers use the language as a reflection of their theology: what God purposes is what happens.”⁵⁰ Consequently, *ἵνα* is employed for expressing the divine purpose as well as the result. Hence, each of the mentioned examples in John 17:20-23 can possibly be treated as simply purpose-result *ἵνα* clauses in which there is evidently no doubt about the fulfillment from the viewpoint of the speaker (Christ). Hence, ‘in order that’ and ‘so that’ “is an acceptable gloss.”⁵¹

The cardinal adjective or as an adverb of number, nominative, singular, neuter, *ἓν*, that is, “one”, joined to a noun or used substantively as a noun, features prominently mainly in the Gospels. In comparison to the other three Greek terms in John 17:21a, *ἓν* bears the highest frequency, 15 times in John, followed by Matthew (12 times), Mark (7 times) and Luke (6 times). In the book of Acts, *ἓν* appears 6 times as it is in Luke. In the Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians records *ἓν* 16 times, and once as *ἕνα*; in 14:31, while in Ephesians, it appears 8 times, with its cognates: *εἷς* and *μία* (4:5, 6) plus *ἕνα* in 2:15, each occurring just once. The rest of the letters of Paul have different number of occurrences of *ἓν*: Romans, once; 2 Corinthians, nil; Galatians, 2

⁴⁹ Bauer, BAGD, s. v. “*ἵνα*,” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 474, and Mounce, *Interlinear NT*, 432.

⁵⁰ Bauer, BAGD, s. v. “*ἵνα*,” and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 474.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

times (once as εἷς in 3:28); Philippians, 3 times; Colossians, none; 1 Thessalonians, once as ἕνα, in 5:11; 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, nil, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, only once. The General or Pastoral Letters indicate the ranges of ἕν in a few counts in comparison with the works of Paul. In 2 Peter and 1 John, ἕν is found only once. The other epistles do not record the adjective, ἕν or its cognates. The Apocalypse (Revelation) has ἕν twice in the whole prophecy in 4:8. The total number ἕν occurs in the entire *Greek New Testament* is 1,750 times probably in relation to the Greek texts and English or other related translations. Thus, ἕν occurs 1,750 times in the New Testament bearing a sole idea of oneness or unity, and 345 times as numeral “one”,⁵² while as εἷς occurs 337 times in the New Testament with no special frequency in any particular text,⁵³ though the qualities provided below suffice: its basic idea is showed by ἐνότης that “means ‘unity’ or ‘one’ virtually by union.”⁵⁴

Ἐν, its cognates are, εἷς and μία, which mainly appear in the nominative case of cardinal numbers. It is a cardinal adjective, nominative, neuter, singular; a numerical term, ‘one.’ It often means a single thing or person, focusing on the quantitiveness of ‘one’—contrasting it to more than one. The term we are treating in this study is in the accusative case which may refer to basically a qualitative aspect. It is often used substantively, and universally, and added to nouns as an adjective, may be a reference to unity of the New Testament church. Also “aided with the

⁵² William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, ed., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1051.

⁵³ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, ed., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:399, 400.

⁵⁴ Moises Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDNTTE)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 2:122.

monotheistic formula in the Pentateuch, the gospel of John develops the idea of the unity of God and Christ, while the Pauline epistles incorporate Christology”.⁵⁵

The other two words in John 17:21a and the key word in 17:23a, have certain numerical dimensions in the Greek New Testament text: πάντες and ὅσιν as well as τετελειωμένοι. The indefinite adjective πάντες occurs 1243 times in accordance with Bible-works Greek New Testament (BNT) text in various forms to fit different contexts. In John 17:21a, it appears only once preceded by a subordinating conjunction, ἵνα with another adjective, ἐν in the plural without the article as, “all people” or “everyone.”⁵⁶ Πάντες as used in John 17:21a, means, “(they) all” or “everyone.” The absence of a definite article would not suffice for it to be, “All of them.” So, the Greek New Testament agrees with the Septuagint translation of terms.⁵⁷ This unity Jesus petitioned for should be visible to persuade the world of the gospel truths by noticing love, fellowship and unity among the saints who have built up a faith-based relationship with Christ.

The present active subjunctive third person plural verb, ὅσιν, root, εἰμί, appears 2462 times according to BNT. The participle verb τετελειωμένοι is found 44 times in the Bible-works Greek text (BGT) in the exact form or root or in other extant forms in varying tenses that also affect their meanings. Thus, τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν in John 17:23b should be translated: “having been perfected into one” or “having been made perfect (in unity).” Thus otherwise read, “in order that in the end they might

⁵⁵ Horst Balz, and Gerhard Schneider, ed., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT)*; (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:399, 400.

⁵⁶ Aland et al., *Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed., 137, and, Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel and Katrin Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), 474. Πάντες is an indefinite adjective, nominative case, masculine, plural. Its root is, πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν, and as an adjective, it means, “all,” or “every” (with no article, when used alone or collectively).

⁵⁷ Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, *Lexicon of Septuagint*, 474.

become one;” or “to become completely one”.⁵⁸ It denotes an intimate relationship between God and believers and vice-versa.⁵⁹

The preposition ἐν is in the dative case, primarily meaning “in.” ἐν is the most common preposition in the New Testament occurring 15 times in chapter 17 alone, and more than 2752 in the whole of the BNT Greek text. However, it should not be confused with ἐν because the former has a smooth breathing mark only while the latter has both a rough breathing mark and accent mark (the acute). ἐν is used with the greatest variety of meanings: of place: “in,” “on,” “at,” “near,” “to,” or “among.”⁶⁰

The Meaning of the Subordinate Clause, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν for the Original Readers

This study delves in the subordinate clause, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, with an emphasis on the adjective of number, ἐν, (one) and πάντες (all), which bear diverse interpretations according to their bearings in the translations of the subordinate clause. The adjective, ἐν, occurs about 6 times in John 17, but 5 times only in verses 21-23. πάντες appears only once in this particular declension, though other declensions apply in the variety of the NT books, but a related meaning seems to cut across. ἐν, its cognates, εἷς and μία, is used in contrast to the parts, of which a whole is made up, as in case of the man and woman in Genesis 2:24 becoming one flesh in marriage. Paul infers; οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σῶμά ἐσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, ‘we, though many form one body in

⁵⁸ Bauer, BAGD, s.v. “τετελειωμένοι.” τετελειωμένοι, is from the root verb, τελειοῶ. It is a verb, perfect, participle, nominative, masculine, plural; meaning, “to attain a state as a goal.”

⁵⁹ Bultmann, TDNT, 213. ᾧσιν, from the root verb, εἶμι; it is a verb, present, active, subjunctive, third person plural. It means; “they may be” or “they might be.” The subjunctive does not have to be interpreted in any literal or allegorical manner. Forcing the word to mean what it does not is an injustice to its focus. This can never suffice the real intent of the prayer of Jesus Christ for His Church as the subordinate clause stipulates; ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, translated, “that they all may be one.”

⁶⁰ Balz and Schneider, EDNT, 1:447-449.

Christ' (Rom 12:5), pointing to union through a common aim in Jesus.⁶¹ The subordinating conjunction, ἵνα, "so that," appears 19 times, and the subjunctive, ὅσιν, that is, "they may be," occurs about 23 times in the whole of chapter of John 17 in different grammatical forms. The apostle observes; "you are all one," and it is Christ "who has united the two divisions" (Eph 2:15, 14). All these show that the use of 'one' is not just numerical, but situational with qualitative elements inferring some state of affairs indicating result from a divine purpose when attached to the subordinating conjunction, 'so that'.⁶²

The preceding indefinite adjective, πάντες, meaning, "all" seems in this context as used attributively in relation to the cardinal adjective, "one," and to the present active subjunctive third person singular, ὅσιν, that is, "they may be." The subordinating conjunction, "so that," or "in order that," or "that," narrowed from the many translational meanings is a continuation from verse 20. The term, "one" does not bear a quantitative aspect, but a qualitative one with "focus on uniformity or oneness for a specific objective of the Lord."⁶³ The emphasis is on having a common goal, whereby Luke in Acts 4:32 opines; "those who believed were of one heart and one soul...they had all things in common" (NKJV). The apostle Paul in Philippians 2:2 counsels: "that ye may mind the same thing, having the same love, of one soul—minding the one thing" (YLT). Bauckham stipulates that the "prophetic thought of becoming completely one corresponds to the intercessory prayer of Jesus as the climatic (perfect) target of the believing people of God."⁶⁴ Erik Waaler contends that

⁶¹ Bauer, BAGD, s.v. "ἐν".

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bauer, BAGD, s.v. "ὅσιν", "ἐν".

⁶⁴ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 29-32.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:1-6 “sustains a relatively high Christology in relation to Jewish monotheism through the Shema.”⁶⁵ He argues that the statement that “there is no God but one (8:4a) is a combined echo of Shema” and “the first commandment, and vs. 4a might be associated with the second commandment.”⁶⁶

A general grammatical problem is observable, particularly with the Greek adjective, πάντες, translated variously, “all” “every,” “all (of them),” “everyone,” or “(we, they) all.” And if it attaches with a noun in the plural without the article as,

⁶⁵ Erik Waaler, *The Shema and the First Commandment in First Corinthians: An Intertextual Approach to Paul's Re-reading of Deuteronomy*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (WUNT) 2/253 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 125-205.

⁶⁶ Waaler, *The Shema*, 125-205.

πάντες ἄνθρωποι, it is, “all people,” or “everyone.” The adverbial adjective of number, *ἓν* (a neuter), meaning, “one,” whose concepts are, “number,” or “only,” or with *ἐνότης*, means, “unity.”⁶⁷ The placement of the above grammatical cliques has different effects. The indefinite adjective, *πάντες*, meaning, “all,” or “every,” or “all things,” or when used, individually or collectively, before or after the subordinating conjunction, *ἵνα* or before the cardinal adjective, *ἓν*, a numerical term, “one,” denotes a single person or thing, with focus on qualitative aspect, ‘one’ (oneness)—in contrast to more than one or many (as a reference to unity of the church in the New Testament). These aspects determine the resultant meaning to the clause; either for ecumenism or against it. Thus the “all” at different placements or uses informs of a particular idea whether a quality or quantity. The exemption of the simple nuance of this verb, *ᾗσιν*, a present subjunctive active third person plural from *εἰμί*, meaning, “they may be” or simply, “may be,” “might be,” or “to be,” “to exist,” the ecumenists kind of forces the verb to mean, “must be” or “should be” (which is an imperative).

These elements thus far delved in could translate into the endeavors by the mainstream churches to begin and coordinate strenuous efforts to woo the whole religious world into the ecumenical movement as a literal attempt to force a wrong interpretation of the text of John 17:21a. This, in relation to the other terms in the clause and the pericope, could be the main cause of the theological problem leading to the interpretation of the whole subordinate clause, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾗσιν*, translated; “that they all might be one,” as ecumenism. However, the two terms, *ἓν* (one) and *πάντες* (all) have created this baggage of religious conglomerations due to their placements in the syntax during the translation processes, or through wanton supplying of unbiblical

⁶⁷ Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 2:122, 123.

interpretations hence arriving at wild meanings which give credence to the modern ecumenical movement. In connection to the verb perfect passive participle, Gr., *τετελειωμένοι*, that is, “having been perfected (made complete)”, the real meaning for the subordinate clause in question is realized. “One” and “all” are probably the key words although “having been perfected (made complete)” appear strongly in the total union of the believers in Christ. Therefore, this relationship is to be completed in total unity of those who have already chosen Christ as the Lord and Savior of their lives through faith, but it should not be an organizational entity of all religious groups globally though their faith attachments with the Godhead should be the key factor in this unification. The ecumenical trend was claimed to be based on Christ’s prayer, “that they might be all one” when misread, but which in the original Greek reads, “that they all might be one.” These steps missed the very objective of Jesus because, instead of stressing the oneness (one)⁶⁸ of believers in Jesus Christ, the ecumenists emphasize the universal unifications of the majority (all), even though the emphasis would be whether they possess the faith in and of Christ or not.

John 17:17-19 has a close bearing with the pericope under study, whose aim is to strengthen the quest for doctrinal and missiological unity of the believers in Christ in the succeeding prayer in John 17:20-23, and is also devoid of the intention for ecumenism. Beasley-Murray, in reference to John 17:11b, asserts that the attribute expressed as ‘holy Father’ found only here in the entire gospel, portrays “the elements of otherness, awesomeness, and splendor... combines the two notions of transcendence and intimacy characteristic of Jesus’ personal attitude to God and his teaching about God (cf., Matt 11:25).”⁶⁹ Moreover, he posits, “Its use here befits the

⁶⁸ Balz and Schneider, *EDNT*, 1:400.

⁶⁹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 298, 299.

petition introduced, as also that in John 17-19 (sic), but the precise meaning of the petition is variously construed.”⁷⁰ The disciples ought hence to continue in the truth as a way of participating in the sanctification of Christ and in His redemptive ministry, and so through them to the unbelievers.⁷¹ Samuel M. Ngewa cites the need of, the pattern for, and the means for, sanctification, all pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, the petitioner, “all geared towards doctrinal sameness for missional purposes.”⁷² D. A. Carson suggests in line with John 17:11b that the “Greek rendition is not to ‘become one,’ but rather ‘to be one,’” reasonably admitting that it is not a progressive effort to gain unity for which Christ petitioned, but “that they might be a unity continually through faith.”⁷³ In this regard, the motif of unity is revisited numerous in His final prayer as a way of emphasizing its importance (John 17:21-23).

It is significant to note that Jesus prayed for His disciples to be “protected from the evil forces so that they can remain one in the virtues of love, purpose, truth and holiness, in order to curb the contrary catalog of vices which endanger or destroy the good fruit: unity in love, in purpose, in holiness and in truth.”⁷⁴ Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians contends that real unity that believers in Christ must seek to attain is “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13, NIB). The Psalmist attests to the same notion that most New Testament

⁷⁰ Ibid., 288, 299.

⁷¹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 299-301.

⁷² Ngewa, *Gospel of John*, 321-325, and Makrakis, *Four Gospels*, 1066, 1067.

⁷³ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 189.

⁷⁴ Carson, *Final Prayer of Jesus*, 190.

authors allude to in the Septuagint rendering of unity. This is the Septuagint (Greek) rendition of Ps 133:1: ῥῶδὴ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν ἰδοὺ δὴ εὐλογεῖτε τὸν κύριον πάντες οἱ

δοῦλοι κυρίου οἱ ἐστῶτες ἐν οἴκῳ κυρίου ἐν ἀλλαγῆς οἴκου θεοῦ ἡμῶν (BGT). These are the various translations: “See now! What is so good, or what is so pleasant, as for brethren to dwell together? (Ps 133:1, LXA). Look! How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together! (Ps 133:1, NET). How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together! (Ps 133:1, NJB). Oh, how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in harmony! (Ps 133:1, CJB). Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Ps 133:1, NASB). In accordance with these Septuagint renditions and translations, the term, “harmony” or “unity” is implied rather than being translated literally. The preceding word, “together”, basically in the NJB version, could probably be the ground upon which the ecumenical proponents lay their claims of a global mega-church of all believing and non-believing partners. It is clear from the Septuagint textual translation, “For it was there that *Adonai* ordained the blessing of everlasting life” (Ps 133:3, CJB), that there is a clique of blessing and life eternal attached to the harmonious living in a faith-relationship of which terminology is evident in the works of the evangelist John (John 20:30, 31; 21:24, 25).

Inter-textual Analysis in Relation to John 17:20-23

Early Jewish Background on the Pericope

The ordinary word ‘one’ was a potent theological term for the second temple milieu “Jews for its occurrence in the Shema” as being the closest item to the creed of the Jews which they recited morning by morning and thus probably the commonest than the rest of the biblical texts.⁷⁵ In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21, the words of the Shema, “the LORD our God is one LORD” or “the LORD our God, the LORD is

⁷⁵ Waaler, *Shema in First Corinthians*, 125-205.

one!” (NKJV) occurred in the “second temple Jewish literature.”⁷⁶ The late second temple period also contain writings with echoes of the Shema for the “belief that there is one God was the central distinctive aspect of Jewish faith in the religiously pluralistic world of the time.”⁷⁷ The Shema stressed loving the Lord God with the whole being through obedience to the Torah. The literature of the Jews with time appropriated the term ‘one’ as referring to the globally scattered and divided Israel whom God would gather back under the dominion of the “new king David” to the holy land (Isa 62:1ff; Dan 9:2; Mic 5:2ff; Rev 5:5).⁷⁸

Several key Old Testament passages provide an antecedent to aid in understanding the use of ‘one’ in John: Ps 133:1-3; Ezek 34:23; 37:15-24; Mic 2:12; Hos 1:11a; 2:2a, and Isa 45:20a. They apply the Hebrew words, *'echad* and *yachad*, that is, “one” with related terms with the sense of “together (togetherness),” or “coming together into one.” Whether *'echad* and *yachad* are linked is debatable.⁷⁹ Duane L. Christensen emphasizes this oneness has informing of the specialty of YHWH through different translations to the meaning of the Shema: “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!” or “Yahweh our God is the Unique!” or “Yahweh is ‘One’!”⁸⁰ The explanation supplied presumes a closely related meaning, “The *yachad*

⁷⁶ Waaler, *Shema in First Corinthians*, 125-205.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 23-41.

⁸⁰ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 6, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 143. Deut 1-2:9 is being studied for information on scriptural unity.

in the text of the Shema speaks of ‘oneness’ of God, for the doctrine of monotheism is implicit in this brief creedal statement.”⁸¹

Moises Silva corroborates to this argument by thus referring to the Septuagint where the term ‘one’ indicates “the unity of God, a truth particularly stressed in the Shema, Deut 6:4.”⁸² He observes that the Shema has been variously translated from Hebrew to render diverse meanings though all referring to the singularity of the Godhead.⁸³ However, the Septuagint reads: *ἀκουε Ισραηλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν* (BGT), translated as, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one {Or The LORD our God is one LORD; or The LORD is our God, the LORD is one, or The LORD is our God, the LORD alone}” (NIB),⁸⁴ still emphasizing the same truth. This “unique reality of God was firmly anchored in the faith of Israel” and so, “the basis for the call to unity among the people (Mal 2:10).”⁸⁵ The Shema became the daily confession for the oneness of God, the fundamental “creed of Judaism against idolatry”.⁸⁶

Telford Work observes in essence, pointing out three tenets of “God’s unity”; faith, hope and love as aspects that are imbedded in “the three articles of the creeds: its soteriology is its ecclesiology is its theology.”⁸⁷ He submits that sin is a huge dilemma of judgment versus mercy for God, which was only solved by His Son who

⁸¹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, WBC, 143.

⁸² Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 2:123.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 2:123.

⁸⁷ Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (BTCB), ed. R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 95.

freely offered Himself for accomplishing salvation, the “loss of fellowship with God. Through this unity with the Father for the world, God can truly become ours, we can become God’s... and we can become one as the Son and Father.”⁸⁸ He further postulates in regard to the pericope of study; “In John 17 the indicative verbs of divine unity in 17:11 and 17:21 are also implied rather than stated—and delivered in a context as futuristic as it is present.”⁸⁹ The Shema thus suggests an affirmation of the Church doctrines like the: Trinity (theology, pneumatology and Christology), soteriology, hamartiology and ecclesiology, actuated by faith, unity, hope and love.⁹⁰

The New Testament Emphasis

The kingdom aspirations caused disunity amongst the disciples that led to a deep concern for Jesus concerning their future life and service, of which John 17:20-23 is a miniature reflection of the envisioned turn of events which likely could hinder their divine mission.⁹¹ Christ consistently warned them over jealous and this kingdom-preconception. And to curtail this rush, Jesus instead predicted His Passion and the Advent of the Holy Spirit who would unify them for evangelism as His witnesses (Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; Luke 24: 48, 49; Acts 1:8).⁹²

The Johannine picture of Christian unity with its eschatological and vertical elements has much in common with the Qumran *yachad*. This notion that involves

⁸⁸ Work, *Deuteronomy*, BTCB, 95.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ John Kessler, “The Theology of Divine Accessibility,” *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2013), 403-406.

⁹¹ Michael J. Gorman, ed., *Scripture and its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical and Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 389, 390.

⁹² Gury M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, ed., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary (BIBC)*; (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 988-992, 1033, 1109, 1170.

community is suggested also when we probe for the situation in the life of early Christianity that may have provoked the stress on unity in John 17:20-23.⁹³ John dissociates two groups; those in Christ and not in Christ, for ecumenists embrace ‘all’, to achieve “unity” outside the biblical context. The Acts of the Apostles by Luke, that White calls, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,”⁹⁴ has numerous references to unity. These sacred records attest to the expectation of Jesus Christ for His early church in His recent prayer. Acts 1 through 4 reveal the kind of fellowship, love and unity that grew and attended the gospel proclamation about the resurrected Lord. Acts portrays zealous endeavors to maintain unity in the bond of love that Christ petitioned for.⁹⁵

Apostle Paul has contributed immensely to Christian unity in most of his letters, though a great deal of emphasis is found especially in the First Corinthians and the Ephesians. He relates unity with peace and love as mutual qualities leading to perfect oneness; the source of all unity being Christ Jesus, thus supporting the Johannine argument of divine unity as the source and climax of true unity of believers. 2 Corinthians 13:13 has the most famous and universally recited statement of grace, love and fellowship (unity) ever with a stamp of the Godhead. Neither Paul nor the New Testament writers purport to ecumenism, but focusing on unity of believers in Christ.⁹⁶ Paul, in one of his prison letters urges the Philippians to maintain an attitude of spiritual sameness anchored in Christ in different areas of life. He even counsels some leaders to reconcile as an admonition to portray the common spirit that

⁹³ Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 777-779.

⁹⁴ White, *Acts of the Apostles*, v, vi, 49-70.

⁹⁵ Burge and Hill, *BIBC*, 1170-1206.

⁹⁶ Burge and Hill, *BIBC*, 1264-1267, 1276-1307, 1326, 1355-1372. 1 Corinthians 10-14 emphasizes the unity of worship of God, indicated in celebrating the fellowship meals or Lord’s Table and in using the spiritual gifts.

should be embraced by “the rest of my fellow gospel workers, whose names are in the Book of Life,” verse 3c (Phil 1:27-30; 2:1-13; 4:2, 3).⁹⁷

The Synopsis of the Findings of the Exegesis and Its Theological Significance

Over the centuries, the subordinate clause, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated; “that they all might be one,” has been alluded to in uniting, through an ecumenical union, all religious bodies including Christian denominations, political entities and even heathen cults worldwide. The clause however, must be understood as the spiritual unity of the faithful saints with the Godhead and which is demonstrated not in the unification of the body of believers with divergent theological views. Rather, the foundation of this spiritual unity is the truth which sanctifies those who would believe in Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 20). Further, this spiritual unity would be expressed in love amongst the fellowship of believers as John indicates in verses 20-23. The goal of this spiritual unity is fellowship for the accomplishment of the Great commission since it will be a witness to the world of the Person and mission of Jesus Christ (John 17:20, 21c; cf., Matt 28:18-20). The clause however, based on the exegetical findings in the preceding section, must be understood as the spiritual unity and not ecumenical movement. Thus spiritual unity is the focus of John 17:20-23. It is thus for evangelizing the world as a testimony of the mission and great love of Jesus Christ as this study affirms.

Ecumenism exalts formal, external, visible, unity, but tends to play down other key ingredients; holiness, while relativizing truth, and generalizes mission, so that the evangelistic dimension begins to shrink and seriously wane. Thus, unity should be viewed as a fruit not the root. Beach quoting Archbishop Michael Ramsay notes that

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1376-1392.

unity in truth and holiness “should be prayed and worked for, because a movement which concentrates on unity as an isolated concept can mislead the world.”⁹⁸ Silva

⁹⁸ Beach, *Ecumenism*, 17-19.

reveals that those who support the idea of the ecumenical movement as the primary interpretation of the enigmatic clause in John 17:21a alludes to the “universal Gnostic presuppositions on disunity with regard to their understanding of unity.”⁹⁹ He posits in regard to the notion of Gnosticism thus;

The goal of the cosmic drama is the collecting and returning of all the scattered fragments of the spiritual and divine into the unity of God. The marks of the divine, true, and good are unity, calm, peace; those of the evil, worldly, and physical are manifoldness, scattering, lack of peace.¹⁰⁰

Apparently, the proponents of ecumenism have no biblical basis for their claims concerning a global parish. The position of Nichol suffices in line with John 17:21 that the diversity of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 must equitably rhyme with unity in beliefs, objectives and in spirit.¹⁰¹ So, the comparative earlier seeds of division and rivalries for supremacy that had shortly teased the Twelve (Luke 22:24-30) would be “supplemented by the unity emanating from the blended lives of Christians to impress the world of the divine origins of the Christian church.”¹⁰² It hence emphasizes the intimate unity between the believers and the Triune God. This oneness is inferred in its growth leading to perfection that is practical only when a believer abides in Christ (Matt 5:48; John 15:1-5). This unity of all believers in Christ translates into the fulfilling of the intended mission of Jesus in verse 20, “through their preaching, teaching, and writing.”¹⁰³

The unity Jesus refers to is a unity of love and purpose as it is between the Father and the Son (John 10:30; 13:35; 14:7-13). Manifesting this unity in love will

⁹⁹ Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 2:123.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *SDABC*, 5:1053.

¹⁰² *SDABC*, 5:1053.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

give public confirmation, both of their relationship with Jesus and the Father. The display of their genuine unity provides a compelling witness to the gospel truth. John 17:21 in particular, throughout the Scriptures, has been frequently quoted to corroborate to the ecclesial union. Nevertheless, what is stressed in this textual passage is not organizational unity, but strictly spiritual unity. Gangel posits that oneness must be understood in the light of John 10:30, “I and My Father are one.” This means that the unity of the church must first be understood on the basis of unity between the Son and the Father.¹⁰⁴ Those scholars who force this verse or other texts related to this idea to mean otherwise are merely wresting the message against its real intent.

In a nutshell, the unity prevailing within the church ought to be patterned after the unity of the Godhead. This will in turn convince the world on how believers dwelling in the Lord Jesus and He in the Father appear. Thus, “body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it could be summed up from the biblical-theological discussion that John 17:20-23 is a canonical pericope fully supported scholarly and theologically. No question suffices on its inspiration, authenticity, canonicity or its location in the Johannine tradition. The ecumenists misread the subordinate clause in John 17:21a, as, “that they may be all one,” instead of; Greek, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν, translated, “that they all may be one.” These aspects lead to misinterpreting the clause either for ecumenism or against it. Even though the passage has been interpreted with various shades of meaning to give credence to the whims and the intents of the ecumenical

¹⁰⁴ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 318, 319.

¹⁰⁵ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 318, 319.

protagonists on the formation of a global parish, nevertheless, the exegetical analysis does not warrant a glimpse of this manner of an interpretation leaning toward ecumenism. It is recognized through the diverse titles focusing on the essence of divine unity, qualifies the believers into profound Christian unity emanating from the union of the Godhead.

The ecumenical councils, the WCC being the chief one, were or are viable instruments into achieving the goals of the modern ecumenical movement. They aim at joining all Christian denominations plus political and cultic leaders into a unified entity in terms of, basically, doctrinal agreement as the level playing ground. Certainly, most of the contradictory issues especially on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* have not been fully addressed and settled. In accordance with the text interpreted through this study, the unit does not analyze ecumenism, but a divinely-oriented, faith-based unity shaped by the Holy Spirit after that union existing between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity. Conversely, the focus is not just doctrinal correctness, but a unity of purpose with missiological and fellowship of love elements, founded on divine principles, whose goal is the Parousia.

Spiritual Unity versus Ecumenism: An Application for Modern Readers

The ecumenical councils, whereby WCC is the principal council, are vehicles into achieving the focus of the modern ecumenical movement. Their membership consists of Protestants, the Anglicans, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics, all aiming at uniting Christian denominations as well as politicians and cultic leaders into one entity globally in terms of doctrinal agreement through their document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*. However John 17:21a is twisted to mean otherwise, certainly, the “union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or

any well-meaning intentions of humanity,”¹⁰⁶ but rather, “it is God who joins Christians through the Holy Spirit through the strong bonds of the blood of Jesus that is thicker than human bonds.”¹⁰⁷ An allegorical or a literal interpretation to John 17:20-23 distorts the very intention of the perfect spiritual oneness among true believers Jesus implied in His Prayer; “May they be brought to complete (perfect) unity” (17:23a, NIB). The challenge that arises from such an interpretation involves reconciling the differences in doctrinal truths that prevail in some of these churches pushing for ecumenical identity of Christianity. It is plausible that the churches which take the Decalogue as binding will oppose the reference to the first day of the week, Sunday, as ‘the Lord’s day’. Thus a doctrinal crisis is likely to occur leading to controversies, deeper misunderstandings and even a greater rift within the Christian bodies striving to unite globally. Sections that support unity not based on ecumenism deem that this is not the right meaning of the prayer of Jesus in John 17. Towns and Gutierrez state that Jesus petitioned the Father “to protect and unify His immediate and future followers as He sent them out for the world mission of salvation” (John 17:11-23).¹⁰⁸ Brown biblically states that the unity Jesus prayed for “was for those who believe in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰⁹

This search for unity is one answer church leaders and theologians are giving to the attacks and questionings to which Christian civilization has become exposed in recent years. Gangel on John 17:22, 23 postulates that Christian oneness is “facilitated by imparted glory,” to Christ first and thereafter to the “disciples in which body unity

¹⁰⁶ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 318, 319.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Towns and Gutierrez, *Essence of NT*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 547, 774-779.

witnesses to the world.”¹¹⁰ So, the unification of believers motions the worldly observers to recognize the hand of God in the church on earth. The focus of this unity is on the glory of God, and then believers living harmoniously among themselves as they imitate that unity in accord prevailing within the Trinity.¹¹¹ Therefore, some ecclesial entities including the Seventh-day Adventist Church do not require ecumenism for she has retained special standing globally as a united, universal church for all peoples, nations, tribes and languages. Hence, it already embraces the whole world primarily through its missiological influence (Rev 14:6, 7). This is an apologetic statement on the global extent of its mission through evangelism. On the basis of this perspective, each denomination that has attained global standing, embracing the whole world, does not need ecumenism, for the ecumenical aims are unbiblical.

What the Unit Informs on the Remnant Import As Pertains to Missiology and Eschatology

The reference by the Evangelist Matthew in Matt 24:14 and 28:18-20 regarding the global evangelism, resonates with what the apostle John tends to relate in John 17:20-23 and in Revelation 14:6, 7. It regards the importance of disseminating the gospel to the entire globe as a precursor to the Parousia (the appearing of Jesus Christ or His second advent or His second coming). Thus, the global impact of the Great Commission of the united-believing saints is the intent of the Lord in His intercessory prayer. The implication of the worldwide gospel preaching is in line with the unity that Christ envisaged which would make a people ready to meet their God (Amos 4:12).

¹¹⁰ Gangel, *John*, HNTD, 318, 319.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Missiology and eschatology are inseparable. The former prepares and makes the Church ready for the latter. The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is “to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angel’s messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to unite with His Church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.”¹¹² This aspect of unity is rampant within the church documents themselves as well as the pericope of study. Hence, as the Seventh-day Adventist Church progresses in the accomplishment of her missiological task, the aim is to unite the church to complete this great commission of Matt 28:18-20. As a united body of believers, the Church can powerfully tell the world of a soon coming Savior as her missional climatic event.

Theological Importance of John 17:20-23 for the Seventh-day Adventist Church Doctrines

The Seventh-day Adventist Church doctrines bear a theological importance in regard to John 17:20-23 for its global mission. As it is, prayers are focused on certain vital issues in life, and primarily the petition of Jesus for Himself, His Disciples and for later believers where He outlines His burden for a united-latter-day church. In John 17, Jesus intercedes as He outlines His mission statement for the immediate and hereafter vision of His work for the world. Christ in the unit, John 17:11, 21-23, foresees some traits of unidentified disunity and strife as precursors of mission-injuring traits among the disciples whom He expected to have been transformed by His long-time presence. So His petition was for oneness so that this vice might be

¹¹² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2016), 68-71.

contained and therefore that realized unity should act as a global witnessing tool of His first Advent.

The current 28 Seventh-day Adventist Church Fundamental Beliefs are summarized into five doctrines as: theology (comprising theology, Christology and pneumatology), hamartiology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. They are the hallmarks of the Seventh-day Adventist Church message for unity of all believers worldwide. Their doctrinal importance for the Church cannot be overemphasized. For over a century, they have united the Adventist Church through their sound biblical expositional messages. All these doctrines will thrive in the Church of God if missional unity, which emanates from divine love and leads to peace, is sought zealously and maintained aggressively.

The petition of Jesus for Himself, His disciples and for later believers outlines His burden for a united-latter-day church. John 17:1-26 records Jesus outlining His immediate and latter mission statement of His earthly work in a petition. In the unit, 17:21-23 (cf., vs. 11), Christ particularized His anticipation and vision for a purpose-united, spirit-filled, mission-oriented church. However, He was deeply pained as He foresaw seeds of division and rivalry among His expected-missional-volunteers, the disciples, later the apostles. He thus interceded for them that those mission-stagnating traits among His followers might blossom faith and unity focused on His work for the unchurched world. The purpose of this prayer for unity is the disintegrating of the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles for preaching salvation to all mankind. After Jesus gathering His flock who would continue His work among men, He prayed for them before His sufferings that they might be a unified group, as He and the Father are one. The pericope does not encourage any informal unification in religious

spheres to attain unity, rather He admonishes on the biblical union of believing brethren in Christ Jesus for purposes of evangelism and faith-fellowship building.

Unity is essential to the worldwide church of the Lord. It is the design of our Lord that His church should reflect to the unchurched world the full efficacy of salvation from Him. She should hence impart the same and so represent and present to the world the love and beneficence of Christ. The importance of oneness cannot be overemphasized because it enables the church to reach her intended missional objectives. Without unity the church will fail to accomplish its sacred mission. The church can accomplish her mission, through the collective contribution of each member. Believers in Christ must strive to maintain the bond of unity by avoiding attitudes that might breed trouble (Rom 15:5, 6; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11). Jesus did not pray that churches should unite in ecumenism, but collectively by each member avoiding things that would cause dissension, disunity or divisions in the church of Christ (Heb 12:14-16). Each believer must seek oneness and peace within and without the church (Rom 12:3-8, 16).

The church of today should carry the mission which Jesus set down. Hence through her unity in her ranks on a common knowledge of God, her testimony will astonish the world. The affirmation is that this is spiritual unity where God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit. Certainly, having a single visible church does not translate into a congregation that lacks division or enjoys full unity, but its life can be rent by internal strife and divisions. Even as the Father and the Son are one while remaining separate persons, so the unity of the church must allow for outward distinctions. Unity does not mean uniformity. This is how the world will know that Jesus is the Savior. In other words, this unity Jesus prayed for cannot be invisible. The

world must be convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel by seeing the love and unity among the believing people of God.

The Implications of John 17:20-23 in Relation to Ecumenism and the Prayer of Christ of Oneness to the SDA Church in Kenya

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that divisions are satanically influenced which commenced since the fall of Lucifer in heaven (Ezek 28:12-19; Isa 14:12-20; John 8:44; 10:10). Disunity is not leaving humanity or the church soon, but continues up to the end when God restores this original unity. Oneness is also to be realized as a gift of God.¹¹³ Love can exist only in relationship with others as the nature of God is love. Where love prevails there is harmony, peace and unity. The harmonious co-existence vanished as a consequence of the fall through sin whose ultimate impact was the separation of humanity into numerous cultures, races and languages (Gen 3:1ff; 11:1ff).¹¹⁴ There are several highlights pointing to the significance of Church unity. Unity reflects how strong the Church is and the unraveled reality of the Kingdom of God. Unity will definitely stabilize the endeavors of the church most effectively leading to great efficiency of her varied efforts. Thus Benjamin F. Reaves observes, “Unity in the body of Christ means blending the instrument of my life in the great orchestra of the called-out ones, under the baton of the divine Conductor....(hence) we have the privilege of performing for mankind the symphony of God’s love.”¹¹⁵ However, for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in

¹¹³ Fortin, *Oneness in Christ*, 5, 6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin F. Reaves, “What Unity Means to Me,” *Adventist Review*, December 1986, 20.

Kenya, our study of the concept of unity in John 17 has some implications, some of which are discussed in the latter section.

John 17 and Internal Church Unity

The concept of internal unity or unity of brethren in truth could motivate the Seventh-day Adventists in the Kenyan context to embrace and sustain the long-held common *Nyayo* philosophy of peace, love and unity, which captures in a way the Christian call to harmonious living through love and peace (though being a mere political statement with its progenitor being a stooge Christian worshipper, Bible reader and political leader). God wills that His Church in Kenya, while embracing the global arena, would reveal the unity of feelings, thought, and action. This does not imply uniformity, but it regards her being united in diversity and in common faith (1 Cor 12:12-27). This will disdain the biases based on tribal or ethnic lines, majority representations in the church system, class of affluence, or levels of education, name them. We understand the impact of unity especially in the speedy dissemination of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the world over. Unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Kenyan context should be aided by the common faith in their Church doctrines and the worldwide church mission and vision. The Church in the country should embrace the call by the leadership from the local church through the General Conference to team up in the propagation of its mission.

Further, disunity and bickering that have come to be associated with the Church in Kenya does not reflect the prayer of Christ for perfect unity as it is with the Godhead. In this regard, understanding the general and specific aims of unity in John 17 will mitigate the differences that breed into ecclesial divisions. Focused labor geared towards common goals could facilitate a unity in diversity where each individual matter for the entire body. The church should delve at developing a global

perspective to make the whole world the parish of the Church as Jesus prayed for strong spiritual unity in John 17:20-23 (YLT), and as John prophesies that the redeemed will constitute all tribes, peoples, languages and nations (Rev 7:9; 14:6). It is hence required that diverse peoples within the church community to intermingle through service to attain unity of judgment, purpose and action. Averting attitudes that cause dissensions and divisions such as lust for power, self-seeking, pride, elitism, and criticism, could contribute to the unity of believers. Therefore, every believer in Jesus Christ ought to set a precedence that allows the Spirit of God to impact them positively for unity endeavors.

The Church and Participation in Interdenominational Meetings

The SDA Church could continue to be involved in interdenominational meetings, evangelistic endeavors, clergy conventions and other attempts through the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Interfaith Council in steering common interdenominational issues and even on political matters. The SDA Church clergy has as well been invited to participate in national prayer days which compose of various religious groups such as Christians, Muslims, Hindus, traditional religions, and so on. Some recent interdenominational and national issues in which the SDA clergy were incorporated include: (i) the national prayers for the peaceful elections of 2017, and (ii) the current Interfaith Council on the National Response to Corona (COVID-19). The Church has also been highly involved with other religious organs and Christian denominations in advocating for religious liberty with its Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) arm.

However, the SDA Church needs to exercise caution in joining these conventions for common national objectives were they to endanger the faith of the

body. It needs not be privy to these, but has even spurned any meetings which could interfere with the fundamental pillars of its faith. Such caution is significant because interpretations of John 17:20-23 as referring to the modern ecumenical movement is contrary to the meaning of the text and the intent of Christ in His prayer for unity as this study has shown. Therefore, the Church, in its participation with other denominations to promote common good, should not collectively liaise with them to form a union that does not coincide with the clear biblical interpretation of the passage in question.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The literary works of diverse authors reveal two views in the meaning and the interpretation of the subordinate clause, in Greek, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated, “that they all might be one” in John 17:21a. The biblical-theological analysis for the pericope, John 17:20-23, speaks for a connection of spiritual unity of believers and not merely general professed Christianity. The participle aorist, “being made perfect” or “having been perfected” has a profound link with the subordinate clause, “that they all may be one.” Thus, the complete unity which Christ petitioned for His immediate and future disciples is a divinely-oriented oneness, imbedded in the perfect union between the Father and the Son. It depends on the Godhead for the believers to meet the expectations of heaven, which is the purpose of the prayer of Jesus, through evangelism and loving-fellowship. Therefore, unity cannot be forced or zealously sought for. It needs a co-operation with the Spirit of God to realize it in totality.

Jesus prayed that His disciples would be spiritually united to God and to one another that the world would be drawn to Him and prepared for His ultimate glorification at the Second Advent. Its keynote is the victorious union between

believers and God and between Christian brothers and sisters. Thus, oneness with Christ and one another is the purpose He envisioned in His intercessory prayer.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the interpretation of the subordinate clause, in Greek, *ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσιν*, translated, “so that they all might be one” (Joh 17:21a), is not ecumenism, but rather the spiritual unity of believers through the Holy Spirit based on the strong union of the Father and the Son. The ecumenical protagonists do not use the literal meaning of the clause, but they wrest the text allegorically so as to fit a literal unification of religious bodies worldwide. Ecumenists neglect the authentic syntax of the clause so that it might read, “that they may be all one.” The “all” to them suggests, religions or denominations physically joining together as one without considering their spiritual connections with the Godhead. Misplacing the “all” and being adjacent to “one” in translations by some scholars, has created some theological debate on the interpretation of the text.

A lot of disservice has been progressively committed onto the text thereby completely distorting its real and intended meaning. Serious scholars denounce any relation of the passage with ecumenism of professed religious groups and/or others, but back divine and spiritual unity of God with the true Christian believers. The central concern of the Savior is the unity of His followers in love, spirit and truth as it is Christ as Paul stipulates (Eph 4:21). It is worth noting that the Christian community must be grounded in none other than in God, whereby unity essentially favors its mission which they obey.

Those adopting ingenious strategy have an unbiblical agenda. Therefore true unity is biblical, while false unity entails unbiblical ideologies and practices. Thus divine oneness must impact the unity of the believing humanity in Christ Jesus based

on the Godhead for transforming the world on the true Christian values, which is the preaching of the truth as it is Christ (Eph 4:21).

Therefore, this study concludes that John 17:20-23 focuses on the essence of divine-spiritual unity among believers in Christ, and this profound Christian unity emanates from the union of the Godhead. It focuses on a faith-based, spiritual unity of believers shaped by the Holy Spirit founded on the union existing between the Father and the Son. It is a unity of purpose with missiological and fellowship of love elements, founded on divine principles. The true biblical unity of His followers essentially favors their global mission as preparatory for the ultimate event, the Parousia.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study on the proper understanding of the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17, the following recommendations for mission and practice for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya are made:

1. First, the SDA Church should continue to cooperate with other Christian denominations and even the government on areas of common good to humanity. These could include: religious liberty, education, development and implementation of social policies, citizenry and societal wellbeing. However, when and where such co-operations and collaborations affect the biblical teachings of the Church, and are not in conformity with the appropriate theological understanding of the prayer of Jesus in John 17, then the Church should refrain.
2. Second, the SDA Church should also continue in its mission of disseminating the gospel to the entire nation and beyond as a precursor to

the Parousia in line with the global impact of the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12.

3. Third, on the prospects and sustenance of internal and spiritual unity according to the prayer of Christ in John 17, the Adventist Church in Kenya should have strategies on promoting biblical unity and fellowship amongst its laity, clergy and administrative organs. Such will testify of the truth and witness for Jesus nationally and globally.

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VITA

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: Kaindio, Wilson Mung'athia

Nationality/Citizenship: Kenyan

Place & Date of Birth: Meru, Kenya, September 11th 1971

Gender & Marital Status: Male, Married

Designation: Pastor/Gospel Minister

Languages: English, Kiswahili, KSL, Kimeru & African Dialects

Contact Address: P. O. BOX 308–00519, Mlolongo (Nairobi), Kenya

Phone/Email: (+254) 0720050624/0735091440; kaindiow@gmail.com or
kaindiow@aua.ac.ke.

EDUCATION, TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

2016-2023: Graduate degree, Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies (MABTS), with Emphasis in the New Testament, Adventist University of Africa (AUA), Nairobi, Kenya.

2021-2022: Professional certificate in Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) with the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), Nairobi, Kenya.

2013: Ministerial credential–Ordination as a Minister of the Gospel, Central Kenya Conference (CKC), EKUC, Nairobi, Kenya.

2007-Present: Candidate, Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), University of Eastern Africa Baraton (UEAB), Nairobi Campus, Kenya.

2002-2006: Bridging certificate, Mature-age Entry Examination Scheme (M.E.E.) & Bachelor of Theology (BTH), Bugema University (BU), Kampala, Uganda.

1988-1991: Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), Gikumene Secondary School, Meru, Kenya.

1980-1987: Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, Maanthi Primary School, Karii Primary School and D. E. B. Township Primary School, Meru, Kenya.

WORK EXPERIENCE: DENOMINATIONAL & NON-DENOMINATIONAL

2020-Present: District pastor, East Nairobi Field (ENF), East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), ECD, Nairobi, Kenya.

2009-2020: District pastor, Central Kenya Conference, KUM/EKUC, Nairobi, Kenya.

2007-2009: Teacher, Adventist schools & Public schools: Kambia Adventist Academy, Kianjai Secondary School and St. Angela's Girls Nguthiru Secondary School, Meru, Kenya.

1994-2002: Teacher, Adventist schools, Kiirua Primary School, Meru, Kenya.