

Affectivity and the Johannine Jesus

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Abstract

The Johannine Jesus can seem a majestic yet rather cold character, mostly unaffected by human emotions. But this perspective fails to do justice to the Fourth Gospel and its narrative presentation of Jesus' character. Affectivity is much more present in the Gospel narrative than is sometimes conceded, running beneath Jesus' sense of his own vocation and his mission, and centred above all in his unique relationship to the Father. Building on the work of affect theory, both in terms of the ancient world in general and the sphere of Old Testament narrative, it is possible to demonstrate the affectivity of Jesus, not just in obvious places such as the raising of Lazarus in John 11, but also elsewhere in the Gospel. The greatest and deepest of these emotions is that of love which is the driving force behind Jesus' ministry and the determining factor in his passion, death and resurrection, disclosing the divine glory. Behind that love and glory is the Father's love for the world. Jesus in this Gospel expresses passionate emotion, including love, anger, distress, grief and disappointment. These are not extrinsic to his identity but express both the divinity and humanity of his presentation in the Fourth Gospel.

Keywords: emotion, affectivity, love, glory, narrative

1. Introduction

It is possible to read the character of Jesus of the Fourth Gospel as a somewhat aloof figure, displaying a detached composure throughout his ministry and rising above the events and turmoil of the narrative, particularly in his crucifixion. Jesus has even been characterised as a figure of majesty, of a kind of ‘naïve docetism’, who strides high above ordinary humanity, including in its experience and affectivity.¹ There are scenes in the Fourth Gospel which seem to support the assertion that the Johannine Jesus is somewhat apathetic, transcending the events unfolding around him: ‘While Jesus is not entirely lacking in human emotions, his emotional responses ... convey a sense of his being distant or aloof.’² This seems to stand in some contrast to the Jesus of Mark’s Gospel. Gethsemane is a good example where the Markan Jesus is initially overwhelmed by feelings of distress at his impending suffering and death, asking the Father to rescue him from his God-ordained fate (Mk 14:32-42/pars). By contrast, John’s Gospel contains no such scene immediately prior to Jesus’ arrest. Similarly, on the cross his final utterance does not express anguish and distress as we find in the Markan account (cf Mk 14:34/par.) but a sense of victory (Jn 19:30). In this view, Jesus is not necessarily viewed as a figure devoid of affectivity but rather heroically in control of his own emotions and never overwhelmed or directed by them; Jesus ‘faces death with the strength and courage of a superhero.’³ He embodies the power of reason over emotion and projects the ‘ideal masculinity’ so prized in the Greco-Roman world.⁴

Yet this kind of deduction only works by ignoring actual indications of emotion on the part of the Johannine Jesus which itself throws back questions on the supposedly ‘indifferent’ or ‘heroic’ texts in the Gospel. Sometimes these emotional indications may be explicit within the narrative; sometimes they are implied though not explicit; while at other times a narrative gap opens without explanation that can only make sense with an affective response. What happens therefore if we begin with those passages that present an affective Jesus and interpret other, ‘indifferent’ texts from that perspective? It may be that the latter are motivated by a more mysterious range of emotion that does not easily cohere with human expectations. The following discussion explores the narratives which articulate the affectivity of the Johannine Jesus in the plot of the Gospel.

¹ See Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of John 17* (ET; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1966), 4–26. For the arguments against this view, cf William Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), esp. 12–15, 372–377, 386–392.

² R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (F&FNT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 109–110.

³ Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 147.

⁴ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 143.

2. Emotion in the Ancient World

Study of emotions in ancient texts involves awareness of a number of factors.⁵ Affect theory has demonstrated that cultural differences need to be taken into account, avoiding the simplistic assumption that all human beings experience the same type and range of emotions across generational, ethnic, gender and cultural boundaries. Feeling and affectivity are social, shaped by culture and context. At the same time, emotions are often connected to physicality: to bodily sensations and bodily expressions (such as the face). They may be linked to different kinds of metaphorical systems and spatial metaphors, such as up and down, or vessels such as liquid containers. At the same time, drawing a sharp disjunction between reason and emotion, the cognitive and the affective, is unhelpful, since the two are closely connected and often overlap. What we believe affects how we feel and vice versa, and emotions express not only bodily sensations but also cognitive judgements; they are subject to appraisal as good or bad, positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant, which is itself grounded in culture.⁶

In the ancient world, emotions (πάθη in Greek, though the term could be broader) were regarded in diverse ways.⁷ In some contexts they could be considered indications of a poor and unstable moral character, particularly among the philosophers. Stoicism, for example, distrusted the role of emotions in living well. For the true sage this meant being in harmony with nature and reason in the face of adversity, and in control of feelings and affectivity (αὐταρκεία).⁸ For Epicureanism — not as hostile as Stoicism to affectivity — the ideal state is that of ἀταραξία, which defines a position of equilibrium in which emotions exist and may even be commendable in some contexts — though they are always to be controlled.⁹

Other ancient writers take a different approach to the emotions. ‘Longinus’, for example (whose name and dating are uncertain), on his treatise περὶ ὕψους (‘On the Sublime’) sees feelings of awe as authentic responses to certain sublime passages in literature.¹⁰ Whereas for him, rhetoric works primarily on reason to persuade, the sublime gives rise to feelings of

⁵ Further on this, see esp. Mathieu de Bakker, Bauckje van der Berg and Jacqueline Klooster (eds.), *Emotions and Narrative in Ancient Literature and Beyond: Studies in Honor of Irene de Jong* (MSNG&LL; Leiden: Brill, 2022).

⁶ See the general discussion in David Konstan with particular reference to Aristotle (*The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006], 8-40).

⁷ On the origin and significance of πάθη, see Konstan, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 3-5.

⁸ See Fergus J. King, *Stoicism and the Gospel of John: A Study of their Compatibility* (WUNT 629; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 39-47.

⁹ Fergus J. King, *Epicureanism and the Gospel of John: A Study of their Compatibility* (WUNT 537; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 21-36.

¹⁰ Aristotle: *The Poetics*, ‘Longinus’: *On the Sublime*, Demetrius: *On Style* (LCL 199; Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann, 1995), 119-254. See Dorothy A. Lee, ‘Emotion, Beauty and the Sublime in the Gospel of John’ *Australian Biblical Review* 71 (2023): 3-5 (1-14).

ecstasy in the reader,¹¹ the sensation of being overwhelmed: the sublime is ‘not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves’ (οὐ ... εἰς πειθὼ ... ἀλλ’ εἰς ἔκστασιν).¹² Longinus’ study is concerned admittedly with literature and the reader’s response rather than character analysis within the text, using the tools and technique of ancient literary criticism.¹³ Yet he sees the sublime as having the potential for ethical transformation on the part of the reader or hearer, able to ‘train our minds into sympathy with what is noble (πρὸς τὰ μέγεθ) and ... impregnate them ... with lofty thoughts.’¹⁴ His work demonstrates that the attitude to affectivity is markedly diverse across the ancient world.

In the Old Testament world, affectivity is an intrinsic part of biblical narrative.¹⁵ This is true of characters whose emotions drive the plot (e.g. Jacob’s terror and Esau’s rage, Gen 27:41–45; Ruth’s devotion, Ruth 1:16–17; Hannah’s distress, 1 Sam 1:9–18; David’s lust, 2 Sam 11:2–27). But it is also true of God who shows a variety of emotions: compassion and covenant love (Isa 14:1, 49:15–16; Jer 30:18), anger (Exod 2:9–10), hatred (Ps 5:11), jealousy (Exod 20:5), grief (Jer 9:17–18) and longing (Isa 55:1–5; Hos 11:8–9).¹⁶ Such emotions can be linked to the body and bodily sensations, which is why theology sometimes argues that emotion cannot apply theologically to the divine being who is wholly spiritual and without physicality. For John C. Peckham, however, the argument is not persuasive, as God is depicted as expressing emotions in the biblical world which need not be tied literally to the body:

According to the Hebrew Bible humans were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Accordingly, it may be more accurate to say that the Hebrew Bible considers humans to be theomorphic and theopathic than to say that biblical language of God that is also used of humans is anthropomorphic ... The term theopathic itself conveys positively that God has emotions ... while qualifying these emotions as distinctly divine.¹⁷

¹¹ Further on the sublime in literature and philosophy, see Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹² ‘On the Sublime’, 1:4.

¹³ See Dorothy A. Lee, ‘The Fourth Gospel as Ancient Literary Artifact’ in R.A. Derrenbacker Jnr, D.A. Lee & M. Porter (eds.), *The Enduring Impact of the Fourth Gospel: Interdisciplinary Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2022), 43–61.

¹⁴ Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, 9:1.

¹⁵ On the complexities of emotion in the Hebrew Bible, see esp. Paul A. Kruger, ‘Emotions in the Hebrew Bible: A few Observations and Challenges’ *Old Testament Essays* 28 (2015): 395–420. https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1010-99192015000200009&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=en. Accessed 16 June 2026.

¹⁶ Stephen Voorwinde identifies over 8000 references in the Hebrew Old Testament to the divine emotions which he sees as tied to the covenant (*Jesus’ Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* [LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2005], 31–42, 271–277).

¹⁷ ‘Theopathic or Anthropopathic? A Suggested Approach to Imagery of Divine Emotion in the Hebrew Bible’

The advantage of this approach is that it allows the biblical text to speak in its own terms. Bodily language is seen as idiomatic and metaphorical rather than literal and ‘the language of divine emotionality is theopathic, without specifying by this term the precise nature and operations of divine emotion.’¹⁸

John’s understanding of emotion need not be seen as alien to attitudes and values in the ancient world. Countless examples of ancient literature in Judaism and the Greco-Roman world display a wide range of human emotional responses, both positive and negative in both the divine and human realms. Jesus’ affectivity is real in this Gospel and not to be side-lined or underrated, any more than we would the emotions of an Achilles or Athene or Antigone. Longinus’ stress on the emotional impact of key passages in literature is often based on the Homeric epics but it includes the openings words of Genesis.¹⁹ Affect theory also belongs within the wider field of Scripture study.²⁰ In this sense, John’s Gospel and its affectivity is not necessarily alien to his wider cultural context, though it can also challenge it, especially in terms of gender expectations.

3. Ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem

According to Voorwinde, the Gospel of John contains twenty-eight references to Jesus’ emotions.²¹ Voorwinde’s sub-title indicates both divine and human emotion in the Johannine Jesus, though they are difficult to distinguish: Jesus ‘fulfills divine and human functions that intersect and interrelate in intricate and highly nuanced ways. An examination of Jesus’ emotions demonstrates this observation again and again.’²² In the end, the distinction, which is porous, lies in part between an affectivity that the reader can identify with on the basis of human experience and an affectivity that may seem absent or aloof but is really the expression of a divine mission that is wider and more comprehensive than the immediate context. Jesus’ explicit emotions, however we may want to categorize them, include zeal (ζήλος), love (ἀγαπάω, ἀγαπητός, φιλέω²³), joy (χαίρω, χάρα), tears (δακρύω), anger (ἐμβριμάομαι) and distress (ταράσσω).

Perspectives in Religious Studies 42 (2015): 355 (341–355).

¹⁸ ‘Theopathic or Anthropopathic?’ 355.

¹⁹ Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, 10.1.

²⁰ See esp. Fiona C. Black & Jennifer L. Koosed (eds.), *Reading with feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019).

²¹ *Jesus’ Emotions*, 3-4, 67-115, 299-303.

²² Voorwinde, *Jesus’ Emotions*, 267.

²³ There is no real difference between the two verbs for love in John’s Gospel. Despite attempts to differentiate them, they are used synonymously throughout the Gospel (e.g. ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’, 19:26 and 20:2); see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 2.1235–1236.

There are several indications of these emotions in the narrative of Jesus' ministry. One example is the Cleansing of the Temple, which occurs early in the Fourth Gospel (2:13-25). Though the narrator does not explicitly refer to the emotion which motivates Jesus to make the whip and clear the temple of its animals, his disciples later remember a text of Scripture: 'zeal for your house will devour me' (ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου καταφάγεται με, 2:17; cf Ps 69:9/68:10 LXX, with a change of tense from past to future).²⁴ Most English translations stay with 'zeal' as it derives directly from the Greek and the verb gives the metaphorical sense of something that overtakes Jesus: eats, consumes, devours him — though the Common English Bible translates it as 'passion'.

The reference is clearly to an intense emotion, but what is it? That anger is part of it can hardly be doubted. Both the making of the whip and Jesus' words to the traders indicate wrath at their polluting of the temple. But alongside anger is love, love of 'my Father's house' (2:16b).²⁵ Love of the Father and the Father's will is, in fact, the driving force of Jesus' ministry — a divine emotion that will lead him finally to the cross, the place of shame and dishonour, which in this case 'devour' him: 'Jesus' words anticipate his suffering and death in order to build a new temple, that is, a new community with a new life to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.'²⁶ In the Samaritan narrative Jesus speaks in similar metaphorical terms of the divine will as the 'food' he desires to eat: 'my food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to accomplish his work' (4:34).²⁷ This utterance represents the same passionate zeal for his Father and for the mission he has been given. It is ardent emotion, centered on the Father, which motivates Jesus' ministry. And behind that love for the Father and for 'his own' (13:1) lies the redemptive love of the Father for the world (3:16–17). The dominant emotion here is a divine one, reflecting the affectivity of the Johannine God.

Following the conflict with the Temple authorities, the narrator comments on the people's response to Jesus. While 'many believed in his name' on the basis of the signs (ἐπίστευσαν, 2:23), Jesus does not respond in kind: he 'did not entrust himself to them' (ἐπίστευεν, 2:24a). No emotion is explicit here but the same verb suggests a sense of cautious concern: an affective reluctance to be taken in by people's enthusiasm, especially in relation to the signs. It reflects Jesus' intuitive knowledge of the human heart (2:24b). This concern will be reflected in his incredulous response to Nicodemus in the scene which follows: 'Are you the teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?' (3:10). These scenes indicate the divine capacity of the

²⁴ Jesus' emotional response to the trade business, which takes place in the Court of the Gentiles, may well be intended to make it possible for Gentiles to worship (so Jey J. Kangaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary* [NCCS; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013], 23–24).

²⁵ The question of whether love is in fact an emotion is a complex and disputed one. The argument that it is the behaviour of love that counts rather than the emotion is a false dichotomy; love is a complex amalgam of fleeting and permanent emotion, behaviour, and impulse, but it still an emotion. See esp. Thomas Dixon, *The History of Emotions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 103–126.

²⁶ Kangaraj, *John*, 24–25; also Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 116–138.

²⁷ Kangaraj, *John*, 21.

Johannine Jesus to see into and critically discern the human heart.

The imagery of Jesus as Sophia also has a distinctly affective aspect. The metaphor is particularly powerful in John 6 where Jesus feeds the crowds with bread and fish (1:1–15), pointing to the core symbolism of Jesus as the Bread of Life/from Heaven (6:35) who feeds the hungry and thirsty with his own flesh and blood (6:53–58). Like Sophia Jesus invites the hungry to his table and feeds them; like Wisdom he is both the host and the food itself (Prov 9:1–5; Sir 24:19–21; Wisd 7:12). There is no explicit emotion stated in this imagery but it is implied in the nurture of Jesus for those he loves. It is a distinctly feminine image of a mother giving life to and feeding her hungry infant with her own body which itself implies maternal feelings of nurturing love and care (see also 4:13–14; 7:37–38; 21:12–13).²⁸ The bodily imagery confirms the location of emotion often within bodily sensations or experiences.

There are other places which suggest emotion on Jesus' part, including in lacunae in the text: gaps in the narrative that are suggestive of a response. Take, for example, the occasion when Jesus is under attack by the Jerusalem authorities following the Parable of the Sheepfold; they attempt to arrest him (10:39), after previously trying to stone him (8:50). At this point, with the hostility escalating, we find Jesus returning to the Jordan River where John the Baptist had been baptizing. The explicit reason is that Jesus is not yet ready to allow them to arrest him ('my hour/time has not yet come', 2:4b; 7:8). At the same time, it could well be that he is returning to a familiar place, the place of John's baptizing, as an oasis before the real conflict begins (10:40)?²⁹ This very human need is suggested though not made explicit by the narrator, pointing to the affectivity of Jesus at this point in the Gospel: his very human need for consolation after an experience of hostility and rejection.

4. The Tomb of Lazarus

The most explicit and best-known reference to Jesus' emotions appears in the story of the raising of Lazarus (11:1–12:11). Here as elsewhere the narrator has access to the inner life of Jesus: his emotions as well as his responses and intentions. The opening scene presents two apparent anomalies. First is his delay in responding to the sisters' appeal for his healing presence, although the relationship between his delay and Lazarus' death is unclear and unstated (11:5): 'Jesus is shown as loving the sisters equally ... Even so, there was a point when this love seems to have been deliberately and mysteriously withheld.'³⁰ The evangelist assures the reader that Jesus is not indifferent to the suffering of the sisters (11:5) and the narrative

²⁸ See Mary L. Coloe, *John* (2 vols; Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021), 1.161–191.

²⁹ Dorothy A. Lee, 'The Parable of the Sheepfold: A Narrative Reading of John 10' in A.D. Myers & L.S. Jodrey (eds.), *Come and Read: Interpretive Approaches to the Gospel of John* (Lanham; Fortress Academic, 2020), 92 (81–96).

³⁰ Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 157.

seems to suggest that Lazarus is dead by the time the message reaches him.³¹ The second is Jesus' surprising declaration of joy at the prospect of going to 'awaken' Lazarus (πορεύομαι ἵνα ἐξυπνίσω αὐτόν, 11:11), another example of divine affectivity. Clearly the joy is not occasioned by his friend's death or the sisters' grief but by the harvest of faith which his revivifying action will effect (11:45).

As Jesus encounters the Judeans in company with Mary of Bethany, he responds to Mary in a different way than to Martha as she, in company with the mourners, pours out her grief and reproach at his feet (11:32-33). Jesus' emotional response to their grief turns from joy to other emotions: ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραχεν ἑαυτόν (11:33)³² ... ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς (11:35). These descriptions include anger and emotional turbulence, as well as grief, which express themselves somatically and visibly: 'he was angry in spirit and disturbed in himself ... Jesus wept'.³³ The anger is repeated as Jesus moves towards the tomb, giving it emphasis (ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ, 11:38). The meaning of these emotions is puzzling and only the context can determine their significance. Most divergence of opinion centers on Jesus' anger. Is it frustration with the lack of faith of the mourners?³⁴ If so, does his anger incorporate Mary of Bethany as well as the mourners? Yet, at the banquet following the raising of Lazarus, Mary is depicted as the ideal disciple who, in stark contrast to Judas, comprehends the cost and significance of Jesus' action in raising her brother to life (12:1-8). There is no criticism of either Martha or Mary's reproach of Jesus so why should he be angry with anyone else? The alternative view is that Jesus is angry at Satan and the power of death, wreaking havoc in human life and giving rise to intense suffering. It would seem that the latter is the more likely explanation in Johannine terms.³⁵ Elsewhere Jesus describes Satan as a murderer who is utterly without truth and who is 'a liar and the father of lies' (ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ, 8:44).

If anything, Jesus' grief is more difficult to comprehend than his anger. At one level it is empathetic, a very human emotion that arises when people encounter the intense feelings of others, especially when it comes to grief, yet it also stands in some tension with Jesus' earlier sense of joy. Is there more to Jesus' grief than empathy? The reactions of the mourners to Jesus'

³¹ Keener, *Gospel of John*, 2.838–840.

³² There is a textual variation at 11:33 where some early manuscripts seem to soften the anger: 'he was disturbed in spirit as if angry (ἐταράχθη τῷ πνεύματι ὡς ἐμβριμούμενος or ἐμβριμώμενος), but it is unlikely to be original (see H.A.G. Houghton, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament UBS 6* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2025)).

³³ English translations tend to shie away from Jesus' anger here, translating the verb ἐμβριμάομαι as 'disturbed' (NRSVue, CEB), 'distressed' (NJB), 'moved' (ESV, NIV, RSV) or 'groaned' (KJV, ASV). Of the major English translations, only the REB has 'moved with indignation'. The Vulgate uses *fremo*, which means 'groan'. On 'anger' as the current meaning here, see Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 168–173.

³⁴ See, e.g., Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 330–331.

³⁵ See e.g. Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 173–177, Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005), 326–327, Jean Zumstein, *L'Évangile selon Saint Jean* (CNT; 2 vols; Genève: Kabir et Fides, 2007), 376–377, and Kangaraj, *John*, 118–119.

emotions are, in characteristically Johannine style, examples of misunderstanding; therefore they are in some sense misguided. One group of mourners, for example, reproaches Jesus for his absence, drawing in the healing of the man born blind and the power of Jesus' previous signs (11:37). The other group interprets them as the expression of Jesus' grief at Lazarus' death.³⁶ These responses are ironical on the way to the tomb given what Jesus intends to do (11:11).

If Jesus' grief is more than empathy then we need to find a further explanation. One possibility is that Jesus connects the tomb of Lazarus, and his journey towards it, with his own impending death. After all, the evangelist surrounds the narration with indications of Jesus' danger in returning to Judaea (10:39; 11:16, 47–53). The parallels between the tombs of Lazarus and Jesus (the stone against the mouth of the tomb, the grave clothes and the headcloth, 11:38b, 44; 20:1, 5–7), along with the use of the verb 'troubled' which is associated with the Passion (ταράσσω, 12:27a, 13:21), suggest that, in approaching the tomb Jesus comes face-to-face with his own death and responds in a deeply human way. This is what he anticipates as he walks towards the tomb of Lazarus, his grief is caused not only by empathy over Lazarus' demise as he meets the mourners face-to-face, but also by the prospect of his own: Jesus is torn 'between love for his friend and sympathy for the bereaved, on the one hand, and an all too human shrinking from death, on the other.'³⁷ His journey to revive Lazarus becomes, in a sense, his own *via dolorosa*. The narrative of the raising of Lazarus thus depicts emotions that express both the divine and human response of the Johannine Jesus: his joy, grief and anger hold these together.

5. The Hour and Judas

In the following chapters of the Gospel, emotions are twice accredited to Jesus, once in his own words and once by the narrator. In both cases the verb ταράσσω is used which is closely tied, as we have seen, to Jesus' distress and grief near the tomb of Lazarus. The first case (12:27a) is linked to Jesus' recognition of his 'hour' with the coming of the Greeks (12:20) and the prospect of his glorification on the cross (12:28). Note that most translations add the word 'No' to Jesus' questioning of himself though it is not present in the Greek: Τί εἶπω; πᾶτερ, σῶσον με ἐκ τῆς ὥρας ταύτης; ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον εἰς τὴν ὥραν ταύτην. ('What am I to say: "Father, save me from this hour?" But on account of this I came for this hour'). In other words, Jesus's distress causes him to ponder asking the Father to rescue him, as he does in similar though not identical wording in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 14:35-36/pars.). Too immediate a negation — the intrusion of 'No!' — loses any possibility of a pause to give Jesus time to stay with, and perhaps even struggle with, his own emotions of dread and grief. For some,

³⁶ So Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 248–239.

³⁷ Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding: A Reading of John's Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 196; see also Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 176–177.

however, this clause is only a blip in the narrative, a ‘small cloud’ across the sun.³⁸ Instead the focus moves immediately to his prayer, ‘glorify your name’, which functions equivalently to the Synoptic ‘your will be done’ (Mk 14:36c/pars.).

The other explicit expression of distress occurs immediately before the revelation of Judas as the betrayer and is directly linked to it (ἐταράχθη τῷ πνεύματι, 13:21). Jesus is deeply grieved as Judas’ betrayal draws near, particularly following the footwashing which itself expresses the cleansing union of the disciples in Jesus’ death (13:8). The narrative context makes the betrayal more poignant, because Judas has participated in the footwashing in an act of solidarity with Jesus, a poignancy reinforced by the reference to Judas’ departure into darkness (ἦν δὲ νύξ, 13:30), where he abandons and betrays the one who is ‘the light of the world’ (τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, 8:12; 9:5). The same is true of other references to Judas which usually occur in the context of the intimacy between Jesus and his disciples. Judas is not only ‘one of the Twelve’ but also has been explicitly chosen by Jesus (ἐξελεξάμην, 6:70-71).

Throughout his ministry Judas Iscariot has stood with Jesus among his closest disciples, never choosing to depart when given the choice along with the other Eleven (μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς θέλετε ὑπάγειν; 6:67), and despite his at times disapproval of Jesus’ actions (12:5). Yet, as readers, we are never allowed to forget that, however close to Jesus, Judas is always the betrayer, his actions revealed through a foreknowledge that goes to the extent of naming Judas ‘a devil’ (6:70) and therefore ‘unclean’ (13:10). At the Last Supper Judas makes the final journey from light to darkness, taking his stand with the soldiers and Temple authorities who come to arrest Jesus (εἰστίκει, 18:5). Whether Judas is to blame for these actions in betraying Jesus is a larger question, and the Gospel sometimes names Scripture and therefore God as the apparent inspiration (17:12) and at other times the devil (13:2), but John also gives a very human answer to the question of what motivates him: Judas is a lover of money and his sin is that of avarice (ὅτι κλέπτῃς ἦν καὶ τὸ γλωσσόκομον ἔχων τὰ βαλλόμενα ἐβάσταζεν, 12:2).³⁹ His stealing from the common purse, incidentally, is itself an act of betrayal. Whatever his motivation in becoming a disciple of Jesus, which the Fourth Gospel never explores, his greed and covetousness outweigh his devotion and explain his actions in human terms and not just in relation to divine sovereignty.

The Johannine Jesus will again refer to the loss of Judas in his final prayer (οὐδεὶς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, 17:12) suggesting that it is a cause of distress and grief for him since his desire, above all else, is that no-one and nothing be lost; indeed, that sense of ingathering and unity lies at the core of the divine will which Jesus enacts (10:16; 17:21). Jesus’ love for Judas and his choosing of him is finally thwarted and Jesus’ grief is apparent in his gift of the morsel: ‘Jesus’ special favor done to Judas exemplifies that the loved his own until the

³⁸ Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (ET; 2 vols; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2.97.

³⁹ On the wider issue of predestination in John’s Gospel see Harold W. Attridge, ‘Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in the Fourth Gospel’ in J. Ashton (ed.), *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (AJEC; Leiden: Brill: 2014), 183–199.

end'.⁴⁰ It is also apparent in his leave-taking of Judas:⁴¹ an expression of his sadness, disappointment and yet acceptance of Judas' choice (13:26-27). Notice again that emotions express themselves in physical actions: both the footwashing and the morsel expressing love and loss.

6. Glory as Affective

The three uses of the verb *ταράσσω* in John 11 to 13 add up to an intense level of distress on Jesus' part. They connect both to Lazarus and to Judas but, underlying them, is Jesus' anticipation of his own death. Do these affective expressions mean that Jesus allows reason to overpower his feelings of disappointment, revulsion and distress? That would then make him the ideal philosopher in the ancient world, at least in Stoic terms. It may be so but, on the other hand and more significantly, there is another factor at play which alters our perceptions of what is happening in the text. The language of glory and glorify is itself affective language. Glory in John's Gospel is closely allied to love and is the primary motivation in the divine self-giving even to death (3:16-17),⁴² and in Jesus' relationship with his disciples (11:5; 13:1): '*On the cross* Jesus will make the love of God known, and the glory of God will be manifested.'⁴³ Indeed, glory is the basis of the relationship between the Father and the Son, intricately interwoven with notions of unity, intimate knowledge, sending and handing over (3:34-35; 17:1-5, 20-25). It represents honour in the Johannine worldview, in contrast to the dishonour and shame of the cross in ancient understanding.⁴⁴

This focus on glory is nowhere more apparent than in Jesus' great prayer which, as C.H. Dodd has pointed out, it itself an ascent of the Son to the Father,⁴⁵ prefiguring his death on the cross (Jn 17). In the final section, the prayer reaches its climax where the tone, as well as the theme, is that of intimacy (17:20-26), expressing a vivid sense of the sublime.⁴⁶ The language

⁴⁰ Kangaraj, *John*, 140.

⁴¹ On the morsel as eucharistic, see Moloney: 'Just as baptism is a sub-theme of the footwashing, eucharist is a sub-theme to the meal and the gift of the morsel' (*John*, 384).

⁴² Further on glory in relation to the cross, see Jörg Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (ET; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 237–258.

⁴³ See Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 87.

⁴⁴ Further on the shame of the cross, see Dorothy A. Lee, 'The Significance of the Wounds of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel' *Review & Expositor* 120 (2023). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00346373231196609>. Accessed 22 June 2026.

⁴⁵ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 417–420.

⁴⁶ Lee, 'Emotion, Beauty and the "Sublime"', 11–14.

here is deeply personal and familial and moves to the heart of the Johannine Jesus in his deepest longing, his identity and his mission. It employs repetition around the motif of oneness and union, and a kind of circular ‘logic’ in radically widening the divine circle of love. It includes also the foundational origin story — the Father’s love for the Son ‘before the foundation of the world’ (πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, 7:24), which lies at the core of the Johannine Gospel whose purpose is to draw the world into the same circle through its recognition of the sending of the Son, visible in the communion of love.⁴⁷ It also involves affective transference — I, you, them — in which Jesus transfers the love between Father and Son to the disciples and, aspirationally, to the world: ‘The community, in its communion of love with the Godhead, is to be the locus of divine love in the world, as Jesus himself as incarnate Logos has been and will be until the end (19:30) the embodiment of the same divine love.’⁴⁸

Jesus’ deepest longing in this Gospel is thus to glorify the Father and to do his will, completing the Father’s work, as the one whom he loves above all else, and it is this driving emotion of love which eclipses his distress in the crucifixion story. On the cross his thirst indicates, not only the physical approach of death but also the overpowering desire to obey and return to his beloved Father, even if it means the cross (19:28; cf. 4:34). The cross itself is the somatic symbol of Jesus’ love and longing experienced in the body. That this desire is fully and finally achieved is apparent in his last utterance on the cross, ‘It is accomplished’ (τετέλεσται, 19:30). The love of God has been revealed to the world in all its depth: ‘for the evangelist there is nothing more fundamental than love, either as a theological or an anthropological category.’⁴⁹

7. Broader perspective

From this perspective, it is evident that Jesus’ affectivity is present in far more narrative contexts than would initially seem to be the case. Taking into account love as the catalyst for his ministry throughout the narrative, including his death and resurrection, the emotions of the Johannine Jesus, both human and divine, are a significant driving force for the plot of the Gospel. The Good Shepherd knows and names, and therefore loves, his sheep, even to the point of laying down and taking up his life again in order to bestow eternal life on them in abundance (Jn 10:1–18). This is the linguistic and metaphorical expression of love. Those places where Jesus seems ‘distant or aloof’ belong within the framework of love: not just love for human beings but, more essentially, Jesus’ love for the Father and the Father’s for the world which dictate the nature and timing of his ministry. It is this dominant emotion that overcomes others, such as grief and distress, and are demonstrated in bodily expression and action, as affect theory maintains. Jesus acts at the behest and timing of the Father rather than human beings;⁵⁰ this is

⁴⁷ Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 129–133.

⁴⁸ Byrne, *Life Abounding*, 291.

⁴⁹ Attridge, ‘Determinism,’ 199.

⁵⁰ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek*

a very different kind of affectivity to what we may expect, representing divine affectivity. The divine perspective underlies Jesus' response to his mother at Cana (2:4) and other occasions when he seems aloof or indifferent. In fact, he is entirely attuned to the Father's voice and the Father's affectivity. Despite the initial sense of distance, such scenes end with the revelation of divine glory which is constituted by redemptive love (2:11; 11:40). All this suggests a distinct mysticism to the Fourth Gospel which embraces both the imagination and the emotions.⁵¹ There is a divine inscrutability and mystery to Jesus' character, which points to divine as well as human emotions that may not always or easily correspond to human experience or understanding.

The affectivity of Jesus — shared also by the Father and the Spirit-Paraclete in a warm and nurturing abiding both among and within disciples (14:16–17) — also has the capacity to challenge gendered notions of masculinity from the ancient (and modern) world. Love leads Jesus to undergo the ultimate experience of shame and dishonour on the cross. The love he expresses is neither dominating nor exclusive but sets disciples free (8:32) making them part of an ever-widening circle of love that attracts and draws others in (13:35; 17:23). Despite the androcentric language, Jesus' affectivity creates friendship in place of master-slave relations, undermining the patriarchal and exclusive ordering of relationships based on status and gender (15:14–15). His capacity to experience not only love but also grief, sorrow, suffering and friendship attests to an affectivity that can speak as much to women's experience as men's, beyond gender or other boundary markers.⁵²

8. Conclusion

What is apparent in this discussion is the importance of recognising the reality and strength of Jesus' emotions throughout the Gospel, whether human or divine. The struggle of the Johannine Jesus is not between reason and emotion but between different kinds of emotion, so that his love and longing for the Father far outweigh other affective responses. For John, the expression of Jesus' emotions has the capacity to reflect the authenticity which he embodies in this Gospel, an authenticity that encompasses the affective as well as the cognitive and which cannot be translated into simple gender categories. The phrase 'grace and truth' in the revelation of the incarnation (χάρις καὶ ἀληθεία, 1:14) perhaps best captures the sense of a truth that is closely allied to beauty, joy and delight with all they imply about the divine theopathic nature. Far from compromising his exemplary role, the emotions of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel reveal the nature of the Johannine God as the source and origin of love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7–8). They also demonstrate how it is possible for disciples to live authentically and affectively in the

Text (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1978), 191, 312.

⁵¹ See Gabriel-Mary Fiore, *Spirituality in John's Gospel: Historical Developments and Critical Foundations* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 281–359.

⁵² On gender and God in John, see Dorothy A. Lee, 'Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]iliation in the Fourth Gospel' *Religions* 13 (2022). <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/7/647>. Accessed 16 June 2026.

transfiguring presence of divine and human love.

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