

(Lecture given at a Conference in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, in 2010)

## ‘Abide in me’.

### The New Mode of Relationship Between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15)

by

Chrys C. Caragounis

The last of Jesus’ seven “I am”-sayings with complement, namely, ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα has been placed by John within the so-called “Farewell” or “Last Discourse” (usually thought to occupy chs. 13:31-16:33).<sup>1</sup> In examining the context in which the previous “I am”-sayings with complement have been placed, we note that John is careful to position each saying in a relevant setting. Thus, when the crowds following Jesus were hungry, he has Jesus appropriately present himself as “the bread of life” (6:35), and when Lazaros’ sisters were confronted with death and bereavement, Jesus presented himself as “the resurrection and the life” (11:25).

This would seem to imply that the present saying on ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή not only occupies an appropriate place in John’s account of the events surrounding Jesus but also that, occurring as it does during the last few hours that Jesus has left with his disciples, it is of strategic importance. In other words, to do justice to the meaning and significance of this saying we must view it in its literary-semantic, temporal, and theological settings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bernard, J. H., *The Gospel according to John* (ICC), 2 Vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1928, rp. 1962, Vol. I, cxiv; Brown, R. E., *The Gospel according to John* (Anchor Bible), Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 2 Vols., 1966-70, Vol. II, 581 f.; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1972, 465; Barrett, C. K., *The Gospel according to St. John*; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1978, 470.

### 1. *The Imagery of the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα*

On the level of the imagery, whatever the precise meaning of ἄμπελος and κλήματα is, the words signal the same general relation between Jesus and his disciples. However, since the details of that relation are in important respects affected by what exactly ἄμπελος and κλήματα stand for, it is necessary to address the semantic issue first.

The interpretation of ἄμπελος and κλήματα has been constant throughout the centuries in both commentaries and translations of John. The ἄμπελος has been understood of the plant *vitis vinifera*, while the κλήματα of the branches of the same plant. This understanding is squarely grounded on the literary-semantic evidence from classical times, where both words occur with precisely the meanings that are ascribed to them.

However, it is also a well known fact, that time's wheel works changes on all languages: although the meaning of some words may resist the ravages of time, other words lose their old meanings and acquire new ones. In the case of the Hellenic language, the majority of such changes transpired during a nine hundred-year period, *sc.* from Alexander (335 B.C.) to Justinian (A.D. 565), when ancient Greek emerged as proto-Neohellenic or proto-Modern Greek.<sup>2</sup> It was at the beginning of this period that our two words began to be applied—especially in popular, demotic texts—in a new way. Ἄμπελος was no longer the plant *vitis vinifera* but the plot of land on which vines had been planted, the vineyard; and κλήμα was no longer merely the branch or twig but the whole plant, the vine itself.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr, 2004; corr. pb ed. Baker Academic, 2007, 89; 95-102; 566-67.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, ἄμπελος ('vine') (> dim. ἀμπέλιον > *Byz.* ἀμπέλιν > *N* demotic ἀμπέλι) took on the meaning of ἀμπελών ('vineyard') and κλήμα the earlier meaning of ἄμπελος (i.e. 'vine'). The earlier meaning of κλήμα ('branch', 'twig') was taken by such words as κληματίς and later by κληματοβέργα and ἀμπελόβέργα. Ἄμπελών (in *N* demotic ἀμπελώνας, 'vineyard') has continued to be used side by side with ἄμπελος to the pre-

The literary evidence for this semantic shift has been presented in detail in two of my studies, to which the interested reader is referred.<sup>4</sup> Here I will confine myself to a few brief indications. The earliest literary text attesting the meaning shift of ἄμπελος would be the forty-second fable of Aisopos (VI B.C.),<sup>5</sup> if it could be assumed that this is from his time.<sup>6</sup> However, the earliest certain example of ἄμπελος = ‘vineyard’ is the classical historian Thoukydides, IV. 90. According to Thoukydides, the Athenian general Hippokrates, while fortifying Delion, had to cut down a vineyard that surrounded the precinct of a sanctuary: τάφρον μὲν κύκλῳ περὶ τὸ ἱερόν καὶ τὸν νεῶν ἔσκαπτον, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὀρύγματος ἀνέβαλλον ἀντὶ τείχους τὸν χοῦν, καὶ σταυροὺς παρακαταπηγνύντες, ἄμπελον κόπτοντες τὴν περὶ τὸ ἱερόν ἐσέβαλλον καὶ λίθους καὶ πλίνθον ἐκ τῶν οἰκοπέδων τῶν ἐγγύς “they dug a moat all around the sanctuary and the temple, setting up the earth they had dug as a wall and driving into it a palisade, and cutting down the vineyard that surrounded the sanctuary, they inserted both stones and bricks from the nearby plots of land”. There can be no doubt here that the ἄμπελος that surrounded the precinct of the sanctua-

---

sent time, esp. dialectically. Ἀμπελουργός (‘vine-dresser’) continues with unchanged meaning to the present day.

<sup>4</sup> The first study, “Vine, Vineyard, Israel, and Jesus” *SEA* 65 (2000), 201-14, treats particularly the OT background as well as more briefly the evidence for the change of meaning, while the second study, “Is Jesus the Vine or the Vineyard?”, section III “Is Jesus the Vine or the Vineyard?” of ch. V of my book, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 247-61, concentrates especially on the literary evidence for the change of meaning as well as on the exegesis of the passage. These studies complement each other and not only demonstrate the semantic shift, but also that the detailed exegesis of John 15:1-6 makes better sense when based on the new meanings of these words.

<sup>5</sup> The *Fable* speaks of a dying father, who instructed his sons that all his possessions were hidden in his ἄμπελος: ‘τεκνία, ἐγὼ τοῦ βίου ὑπεξέρχομαι· πλὴν ἅπερ ὑπάρχει μοι, ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ εὐρήσετε πάντα’. οἱ δὲ νομίσαντες θησαυρόν τινα ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν μετὰ τὴν ἀποβίωσιν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν λαβόντες δικέλλας καὶ ἀξίνας καὶ δρέπανα κατέσκαψαν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐκ πόθου. That ἄμπελος here clearly bears the sense of vineyard rather than vine, is proved beyond any possible doubt by the fact that the sons understood it so and proceeded to dig up the whole plot of the ἄμπελος in search of their father’s treasure.

<sup>6</sup> As is well-known, from the V B.C. Aisopos is attributed a large number of fables, the first collection having been made in the IV B.C. by Demetrios Phalereus, the instigator of the Alexandrian Library. Since such collections continued to early Christian times, it is not easy to date the various fables.

ry was a vineyard, not a single vine plant. The next literary evidence comes from Ailianos (A.D. 165-230),<sup>7</sup> who evidences the semantic shift for both ἄμπελος and κλήμα. The paucity of evidence in properly speaking literary works is owing to the fact that this was the time of Atticism, and as is well-known, the Atticists conformed to old usage.<sup>8</sup> However, in the popular, demotic language of the people the shifts for both ἄμπελος and κλήμα, which ran concurrently, is attested already from the third century B.C. in innumerable inscriptions and especially papyri (e.g the Zenon correspondence). Consequently, we know, that by the third century B.C. ἄμπελος was widely used in the sense of “vineyard” and κλήμα in the sense of “vine”.

This evidence does not of itself constitute proof that also the Author of the Fourth Gospel used these words in their developed sense. This issue can only be determined by a detailed exegesis of the passage in question. Such an exegetical investigation has already been carried out in my above-mentioned studies. Nevertheless, it will be appropriate here to take up a few of the salient points.

There is no doubt that the imagery of ἄμπελος—and in particular the polemical statement “the *true* ἄμπελος”—in John 15 is suggested by the OT imagery of Israel, who did not prove to be a *genuine* or *true* ἄμπελος. Now it is a highly interesting fact that in the OT Israel is portrayed not only as a יָצֵב ‘vine’ (Ps 80; Jer 2:21, Ez 15:2) but also as a כַּרְמֵל ‘vineyard’ (in the parable of Isa 5:1-7). The question then is: Which of the two is the more likely OT imagery to have influenced John 15—that of “vine” or that of “vineyard”? What preponderates in favour of the second alternative is not only the fact that the description of the vineyard in Isa 5 is far more detailed than those of Israel as vine, but also the fact that the most detailed description of Israel as vine (i.e. Ps 80:8-11) gradually passes on to describ-

<sup>7</sup> Ailianos, *On the Characteristics of Animals* XI. 32: ἐν ἀμπέλῳ<sup>7</sup> δὲ γεωργὸς εἰργάζετο τάφρον, ἵνα ἐμφυτεύσῃ κλήμα καλὸν τε καὶ εὐγενές (“a farmer was digging a trench in a vineyard in order to plant a fine, choice vine”).

<sup>8</sup> On Atticism see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, pp. 120-140 and Caragounis, “Atticism. Agenda and Achievement” in Caragounis (ed.), *Greek. A Language in Evolution*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2010, pp. 153-176.

ing Israel as a vineyard (vv. 12-13) before returning again to the idea of the vine (vv. 14-16). Thus, the Psalmist complains: “Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and the ceatures of the field feed on it” (Ps 80:12-13). It should be pointed out that walls and hedges belong to vineyards not single vines, as the elaborate description in Isa 5 also makes plain.<sup>9</sup> Now the details of John 15:1-7—as will be seen—are more in harmony with the description of the vineyard in Isa 5 than the description of the vine in Ps 80. This indicates not simply that the two images could be conflated, but that the preponderant conception of Israel in the OT is that of a “vineyard”, rather than that of a “vine”.<sup>10</sup>

But as final proof must be in the “eating of the pudding”, I shall now proceed to look at a few exegetical details in John 15:1-6, which lend their support to the new meanings for ἄμπελος and κλήματα. But first, I ought to mention in passing that another Johannine writing, Rev 14:18-19, uses ἄμπελος in the sense of vineyard, as recent commentators, too, have observed.<sup>11</sup> This is proved beyond any possible doubt not only by the appositional genitive τῆς ἀμπέλου τῆς γῆς “the vineyard of the earth”, i.e. “the vineyard, which is the earth”, but also by the fact that the author ascribes to this ἄμπελος a winepress, which together with the walls and hedges belong to the imagery of a vineyard, not of a vine.

Now to turn to our passage:

1. The initial saying, ἐγὼ εἶμι ἢ ἄμπελος ἢ ἀληθινὴ makes good sense whether ἄμπελος is a “vine” or a “vineyard”. However, vs 2, πᾶν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν αἶρει αὐτό, καὶ πᾶν τὸ καρπὸν φέρον καθαίρει αὐτό makes sense only if it is understood of a vine, thus: “He

<sup>9</sup> For details see C. C. Caragounis, “Vine, Vineyard, Israel, and Jesus”, *SEA* 65 (2000), 206 f.

<sup>10</sup> It is also worth of note that in the OT יַיִן occurs 55 X whereas כַּרְמִי 92 X (see G. Lisowsky, G., *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testamt*, Württembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart 1958).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. D.E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52), Nashville, TN, 1998, 790, Σ. Ἀγουρίδης, *Ἡ ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη* (Ἑρμηνεῖα Καινῆς Διαθήκης 18), Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρνάρας 1994, 351.

takes away every vine in me [sc. the vineyard] that does not bear fruit, and prunes every vine that does bear fruit”. Now, two points are in order: first, as Brown (*John II*, 660) concedes “The use of *airein*, ‘to take away’, for cutting off branches is ... awkward”.<sup>12</sup> Second, it should be pointed out that pruning is applied not to the branch but to the plant itself, the vine, by taking away weak, sickly, superfluous, or unpromising branches.<sup>13</sup> If, however, the vine stood for Jesus, then the pruning would be done to him—which is an absurd idea. A special detail here is that John does not use an ordinary word for ‘pruning’, but the verb *καθαίρει* “he cleanses”. This has a double function: to make a word-play with *αἶρει* “he takes away”, and also—as is usual in Gospel parables: fluctuating between symbol and reality—to make the application to the disciples more pertinent: they are in need not of a literal pruning, but of an inner cleansing.

2. Vs. 4 exhorts the disciples to abide in him: *καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένει ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε* “as the vine cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vineyard, so, neither can you, unless you abide in me”. This exhortation would be unnatural and superfluous if it were directed to a branch, in as much as the branch is an integral part of the vine, but it would be quite natural if directed to a vine, which is not a natural or integral part of the soil (of the vineyard) in which it is planted. And a vine that does not have its roots in the soil (of the vineyard) cannot bear fruit.

3. Vs. 6 is most decisive for the new meanings of *ἀμπελος* and *κλῆμα*: *ἐὰν μὴ τις μένη ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη καὶ συναγούσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται* “if anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a vine and is withered and men collect them and throw them into the fire and they are burned up”. The verb *ἐβλήθη ἔξω* is appositely applied to the disciple symbolized by the *κλῆμα*. A person who does not abide in Christ is driven out of Christ. Thus, on the level of the symbol the action contemplated is one of uprooting. But since

---

<sup>12</sup> Bernard, *John II*, 479, does not see the problem, but draws on Rm 11:16 f. as a parallel, failing to note that the Romans passage uses *ἐξεκλάσθησαν*.

<sup>13</sup> For the various terms used, see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek*, 257 f.

uprooting cannot be predicated of a branch, we are again driven to the conclusion that the careful choice of verb here indicates that κλήμα is a vine, not a branch! Only a vine can be uprooted from the soil and *be thrown out* (ἐβλήθη ἔξω) (*sc.* of the vineyard).<sup>14</sup> Had the author by κλήμα intended a branch, then he would have used some other verb, more appropriate, like κόπτω or τέμνω or one of their compounds: ἐκκόπτω, ἀποκόπτω, ἀποτέμνω, etc.<sup>15</sup>

4. Finally, there is here also the idea of protection. Just as on the level of the symbol, the vineyard through its walls or hedges provides protection to the plants in it, so, too, Jesus, in his capacity as the spiritual vineyard supplies not only spiritual nourishment to his disciples, but also ensures to them the protection they need and for which he prays in John 17:9-15. This brings us back to the point noted above, that Ps 80 which began by speaking of a יָצִיץ “vine”, went on to speak of the breaking down of its hedges and of the foraging of boars and other animals (vv. 12-13), that is, conditions which are appropriate to a יָצִיץ, a “vineyard” (vv. 12-13), not a יָצִיץ a “vine”.

The above brief discussion of the developed history of the terms ἄμπελος and κλήματα has hopefully made it clear that what Jesus said, was: “I am the vineyard, you are the vines”.

## 2. The Context of the Ἄμπελος and κλήματα Saying

As was mentioned above, our text is regularly understood as being a part of the last discourse, comprising 13:31-16:33, and having its temporal setting in the context of the last supper (ch. 13:1-30).<sup>16</sup> However the last sentence

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the similar thought in Mt 15:13: πᾶσα φυτεία ἣν οὐκ ἐφύτευσεν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ἐκριζωθήσεται.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett’s discussion (*John*, 474 f.) on these verbs being timeless aorists—obvious but irrelevant for the meaning of the verb—has missed the whole point of the significance and use of the verb ἐβλήθη.

<sup>16</sup> The material comprising the last discourse varies among commentators. Bernard, *John* I, cxiv rearranges: chs. 15, 16, 13:31-38, 14; Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Jo-*

of ch. 14: ἐγείρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν may be taken, the parable of the vineyard and the vines is closely connected with the content of the chapters surrounding it. The parable of the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα, therefore, should make sense in the light of the relevant statements within this discourse.

Throughout the last supper and the last discourse, Jesus, aware that he is about to leave his disciples behind, shows in a number of ways his concern for them and seeks to prepare them for what is coming.

The tone is set at 13:1. As Jesus contemplates his imminent departure and his consequent separation from his disciples, we are told that “he loved them to the end” (εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς).<sup>17</sup> This is a love that does not end with the physical separation, but continues unimpaired beyond it, though the contact is raised to another level. This comment of the Evangelist sets the stage for the coming farewell discourse. A little further down Jesus shows his concern for his disciples through the words directed to Peter: ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ’ ἐμοῦ (13:8). An inner washing by Jesus is the precondition to participation in him. In the farewell discour-

---

*hannes*: chs. 17, 13:31-35; 15, 16, 18:36-38, 14. Barrett, *John* 454, speaks of the possibility that 13:31-14:31 and 15-17 (16) are “alternative versions of the last discourse, while also averring that “Neither displacement theories nor redaction theories are needed to explain the present state of the gospel”. The two discourse theory (13:31-14:31 and 15:1-16:33) seems to be accepted by Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36), 1987, 224, 244, and 269. Brown, *John II*, although recognizing a complex process of composition (581 ff.), keeps to the Evangelist’s order (541): 13:31-17:26. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 56, prefers to keep to the present Gospel order. With regard to ch Ch 17, which sometimes is excluded from the last discourse or is considered to be loosely attached to it, it might be recalled that E. Käsemann called it “the testament of Jesus” (*The Testament of Jesus*, London: SCM Press, 1968, 77 f.).

<sup>17</sup> An examination of the 2,856 occurrences of εἰς τέλος in the TLG, indicated that the expression regularly has the temporal meaning “to the end”, “until the end” (so, correctly, *KJV*, *Rheims*, *NASB*, *NAB*, *NRSV*), and only extremely rarely the secondary sense of “all the way through”, i.e. “completely”. This fact and especially the clear temporal context of John 13:1 make *NIV*’s tr. “he now showed them the full extent of his love” as well as Barrett’s (*John* 438) and Morris’s (*John*, 614, similarly Lindars, *John* 448) inclination (via two examples in *MM*, s.v. τέλος) to accept the sense of “completely”, “utterly” side by side with the normal temporal sense (because John is supposed to often operate on two levels) rather improbable.

se itself Jesus assures his disciples that his Father's house has many rooms and that he goes ahead to prepare a place for them, promising to return to take them to himself (14:2-3), while in 14:18 he comforts them, saying that he will not leave them parentless but will come back to them.

Ch. 16:4 is of crucial importance for developing the present theme: ταῦτα δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὐκ εἶπον, ὅτι μεθ' ὑμῶν ἦμην "these things I did not tell you from the beginning, because I was with you" avers not only that Jesus has withheld certain important information from his disciples because his physical presence made it unnecessary, but more importantly, that he is now anxious, since the time of separation has come, to apprise them of a new form of relationship to obtain between himself and them. It is in this connection that he promises to send them his Substitute, the Parakletos. Indeed, the things that he wants to tell his disciples are so many and weighty that they will overtax their capacity to understand them (16:12), but that his disciples will be guided into all truth, when the Spirit of Truth has come.

Finally, in the great prayer to his Father itself (ch. 17), Jesus makes it clear that he prays only for "those whom Thou hast given me" (17:9), and his prayer is nothing less than that the Father will effectively preserve them, so that they will be one "as we are one" (17:11). The new conditions about to obtain are nowhere more clearly stated than when in 17:12-13 he prays: "when I was with them, I was keeping them (ἐτήρουν, impf. expressing the continuous aspect) in Thy name which Thou gavest to me, and I preserved them (ἐφύλαξα, effective aorist, indicating that his task was successfully completed) ... but now I am coming to Thee". From this it becomes obvious that a great change is coming about in the disciples' circumstances and relation to Jesus, who can no longer continue in his previous role, a role that was based on physical presence. He, therefore, requests the Father that he take care of them by a new, different means. Thus, further down he prays: "I do not ask that Thou take them out of the world, but that Thou keep them from the evil one" (17:15). Here the disciples are confronted with the threatening stance of the world and of the evil one, who is active in the world (cf. 17:14: καὶ ὁ κόσμος ἐμίσησεν αὐτούς).

His prayer issues into the request: “sanctify them through Thy truth” (17:17).

The great finale is reached when in 17:20 he says: “I do not ask for these alone, but also for those who will come to faith in me through their word”. Here all temporal and spatial bounds are exploded. Here the physical presence of Jesus is seen as inadequate, and a new vista opens up not only for those Jesus has had as his companions during his earthly life, but all his followers, irrespective of place or time, are brought into a new relationship to him, in which time and space play no role at all; they neither hinder nor enhance that relationship.

From the above few brief indications concerning the main burden of the last discourse, it ought to have become evident where the weight of emphasis lies. If the above analysis is correct, then I would like to suggest that the parable of the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα lies at the very heart of the last discourse: it is the quintessence of Jesus’ message to his disciples as he contemplates leaving them to fulfill the final and hardest part of his calling, the cross. The relation between the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα is the key to their future relation, the secret to a life as his followers.

This seems to be confirmed in another way. How much of the material of chs. 13-16 make up the last discourse and which order this material should follow have been matters of different opinion among commentators, albeit there is agreement in general. Further, in as much as no reconstruction of the order of the text is free from difficulties, many commentators prefer to keep the text as it is.<sup>18</sup> Ch 13:1-30 has been seen as the account of the last supper, with only the last verses (13:31-38) functioning as an introduction to the last discourse, which ideally is understood to occupy chs. 14-16.

It is possible, however, to look upon the contents and structure of chs. 13-16 in another way. I give the following brief analysis of chs 13-17:

13:1-11 During the last supper Jesus washes the disciples’ feet

13:12-17 Jesus interprets his act of washing the disciples’ feet

13:18-20 Transition to new theme: hinting at the betrayal

---

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Brown, *John* I, xxxiv-xxxvii and II, 541; Barrett, *John*, 454; Morris, *John*, 56.

- 13:21-30 Jesus announces the betrayal, urging Judas to act quickly
- 13:31-38 Following Judas' exit, Jesus commences his farewell discourse
- 14:1-14 Jesus goes to prepare a place. "I am the way, the truth, and the life"
- 14:15-31 Loving Jesus means keeping his precepts. Promise of Parakletos
- 15:1-7 Abide in Me. The parable of the vineyard and the vines
- 15:8-27 Examples of abiding: (a) relation to Jesus (b) relation to the world
- 16:1-11 The world's hostile attitude to Jesus' followers
- 16:12-33 Jesus comforts his disciples. Promises Spirit, return, prayer-answers
- 17:1-8 Jesus prays the Father on behalf of his disciples
- 17:9-18 Jesus does not pray for the world; only for his own
- 17:19-23 Jesus prays for all future disciples everywhere
- 17:24-27 Jesus wants his own to be where he is.

According to this view, the last supper and the last discourse cannot be Hermetically separated from each other, but flow naturally into one another. And not without reason. In Jesus, word and deed cannot be separated, as is seen by his "prophetic" action in washing the disciples' feet, which dominates the account of the last supper and is followed by his teaching on its significance.<sup>19</sup> All that Jesus says in chs. 13-16 belong to the same theme, his final charges in view of his approaching departure. Thus, the so-called last discourse does not start first with 14:1 nor even with 13:31, but—in the view taken here—at the time Jesus gets up from the table to give an object lesson to his disciples by washing their feet.<sup>20</sup> As for ch. 17, it is not part of the last discourse. The last discourse is concerned with Jesus' last charge to his disciples. Ch. 17 comprises Jesus' final words on their behalf directed to his Father.

---

<sup>19</sup> This was not the usual Jewish welcome washing before dinner, since the dinner was well in progress when Jesus arose from his seat.

<sup>20</sup> If it is objected that ch. 13 does not have a continuous flow of Jesus's words, it is urged that similarly in chs. 14 and 16 Jesus is often interrupted by his disciples to answer their queries. There is thus no reason why Jesus' words in ch 13 should not be regarded as part of what he says in chs. 14-16.

Now from the first word that Jesus utters in ch. 13 to the last in ch 14, there are 857 words, according to our current text.<sup>21</sup> The parable of the vineyard (15:1-7) consists of 138 words. The text following the parable of the vineyard (i.e. 15:8-16:33) contains 853 words of Jesus. Thus the parable of the vineyard is preceded by 857 words of Jesus and it is followed by 853 words of Jesus. A more exact balance between the two parts is almost unimaginable. This, it seems to me, tends to confirm that the parable of the vineyard occupies the *Mittelpunkt* of the last discourse both literally and theologically.

The central theme of the parable of the vineyard and the vines—abiding in him—is intertwined with the whole discourse.<sup>22</sup> Ch. 14:2 speaks of many *μοναί* (rooms) in his Father’s house. The noun *μονή* derives from the verb *μένω* (‘abide’), which is the central idea in our parable. In 14:23 Jesus promises Judas that if anyone keeps his word, then he and the Father will come and take up their *μονή* (i.e. to abide) with him. The great prayer of ch. 17 is rounded up in vs. 23 again with the thought of abiding, when Jesus and the Father will be in them: “I in them and Thou in me” (ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί).

### 3. *Abiding as the Relationship of the New Ethics*

I should like to begin this last section by a free quotation of a relevant passage from my previous studies.<sup>23</sup>

As was intimated above, in interpreting this text, the Church Fathers and other early Christian authors observed the old Attic distinctions between *ἀμπελος* and

---

<sup>21</sup> We should not be naive to take the NA text as identical with John’s text, but as any reconstructed text is bound to be hypothetical, this text can be taken as a rough guide for our calculations.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Barrett, *John*, 474, “This is the basic thought of the chapter”.

<sup>23</sup> Caragounis, “Vine, Vineyard, Israel, and Jesus”, *SEA* 65 (2000), 211-12. See also *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 255-56.

κλήματα as vine and branches.<sup>24</sup> The reason was that the Fathers had usually acquired a classical education—not infrequently rhetorical—often in the schools of Athens.<sup>25</sup> But in the case of some of them, probably there was a theological reason as well. The author who seems to have set the tone for this was Athanasios. As an unflinching defender of the reality of the incarnation, he sought corroboration for his doctrine of the *homoousion* of the human nature which Christ took through his incarnation from the sameness of nature between the vine (= Christ) and the branches (= the Christians). He argued that just as the vine and the branches share in their nature (something that is not true of the vine and the vinedresser), so too, Christ in his incarnation came to share our nature.<sup>26</sup> This idea found favor with some of the later Fathers. For instance, Basilios of Caesarea repeats Athanasios’ argument in his book *Against Eunomios*,<sup>27</sup> while Theodoretos of Kyrhos in his *Eranistes* refers explicitly to Athanasios’ interpre-

---

<sup>24</sup> Of early Christian Authors who adhere to the old distinction, mention may be made of Klemes of Rome, Ignatios, Didache, Justinos Martys, Klemes Alexandreus, Irenaios, Hippolytos, Origenis, Eusebios, Epiphanius, Gregorios Nazianzenos, Gregorios Nysseus, Amphilochios, Chrysostomos, Palladios and Johannes of Damaskos. These authors have an aggregate of some 560 occurrences of ἄμπελος, all of which have been examined .

<sup>25</sup> See Caragounis, “Atticism. Agenda and Achievement”, in C. C. Caragounis (ed.), *Greek. A Language in Evolution. Essays in Honour of Antonios N. Jannaris*, Hildesheim: Olms 2010, pp. 153-176.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Athanasios, *De sententia Dionysii*, 10, 3: ὅτι δὲ ἀνθρωπίνως εἴρηται ταῦτα περὶ τοῦ σωτήρος, σκοπεῖν ἐντεῦθεν προσήκει· ὁ μὲν γεωργὸς ξένος ἐστὶ κατ’ οὐσίαν τῆς ἀμπέλου, τὰ δὲ κλήματα ὁμοούσια καὶ συγγενῆ καὶ ἀδιαίρετα τῆς ἀμπέλου τυγχάνει ὄντα καὶ μίαν ἔχει καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν γένεσιν ταῦτα τε καὶ ἡ ἀμπελος. ἔστι δὲ, ὡς εἶπεν ὁ κύριος, “αὐτὸς ἡ ἀμπελος, ἡμεῖς τὰ κλήματα”. εἰ μὲν οὖν ὁμοούσιος ἐστὶν ἡμῖν ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡμῖν ἔχει γένεσιν, ἔστω κατὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ἀλλότριος κατ’ οὐσίαν τοῦ πατρὸς, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ ἀμπελος τοῦ γεωργοῦ, εἰ δὲ ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς παρ’ ὃ ἐσμὲν ἡμεῖς, κάκεῖνος μὲν λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ γῆς γεγόναμεν καὶ τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἐσμὲν ἔκγονοι, οὐκ ὀφείλει τὸ ῥητὸν εἰς τὴν θεότητα ἀναφέρεσθαι τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλὰ λοιπὸν εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην αὐτοῦ παρουσίαν.

<sup>27</sup> Basilios, *Against Eunomios*, 29, 697: Εἰ ἀμπελος, φασίν, ὁ Σωτήρ, κλήματα δὲ ἡμεῖς, γεωργὸς δὲ ὁ Πατήρ· τὰ δὲ κλήματα ὁμοφυῆ μὲν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, ἡ δὲ ἀμπελος οὐχ ὁμοφυῆς τῷ γεωργῷ· ὁμοφυῆς μὲν ἡμῖν ὁ Υἱός, καὶ μέρος ἡμεῖς αὐτοῦ, οὐχ ὁμοφυῆς δὲ ὁ υἱὸς τῷ Πατρί, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πάντα ἀλλότριος. Πρὸς οὓς ἐροῦμεν οὐ τῆς θεότητος αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῆς σαρκὸς εἰρηκέναι ἡμᾶς κλήματα.

tation.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of the venerable origins of this theological interpretation it must be rejected on exegetical grounds. The new relationship of the disciples to Christ (to obtain after he “has gone away”) illustrated by the imagery of the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα is not based on the relation that once existed between the disciples and the incarnated Jesus, but is thought of as a future relationship to obtain between the disciples and the pneumatic Christ. The whole question of “abiding in Christ” sets the relationship between the believer and Christ on a transcendental, almost mystical plane, which has nothing to do with the incarnated state of the Logos, even though it was precisely the incarnation of the Logos that made this pneumatic relationship possible. For this reason it is not possible to argue that this parable illustrates the sameness of nature which the believer shares with the Logos following his incarnation. But it is important to emphasize that this “abiding” is not a mystical union of the kind which some find in the Eucharist<sup>29</sup> or in the sense of mere passive contemplativeness, but an active every day abiding and utter dependence on Christ that issues into fruitbearing. This emphasizes the distinctiveness rather than the sameness between Christ and the believer, between the vineyard and the vines.

Thus, the exegesis by the Fathers of ἄμπελος as vine and κλήματα as branches has no more to commend it than that these authors used these terms in their old, well established distinctions, and that they took no account of the semasiological shifts that had been at work for several centuries before the Fourth Gospel.

---

<sup>28</sup> Theodoretos, *Eranistes*, 101: Τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀθανασίου ἐπισκόπου Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ ὁμολογητοῦ ... “Ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα· ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστίν”. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ τοῦ κυρίου κατὰ τὸ σῶμα συγγενεῖς ἐσμεν· ... Καὶ ὡςπερ εἰσὶ τὰ κλήματα ὁμοούσια τῆς ἀμπέλου, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς, οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὁμογενῆ σώματα ἔχοντες τῷ σώματι τοῦ κυρίου. ... “Ὁ δὲ πατήρ εἴρηται ὁ γεωργός· αὐτὸς γὰρ εἰργάσατο διὰ τοῦ λόγου τὴν ἄμπελον, ἣτις ἐστὶ τὸ κυριακὸν σῶμα. ... Ἄμπελος δὲ ἐκλήθη ὁ κύριος διὰ τὴν περὶ τὰ κλήματα, ἅπερ ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, συγγένειαν σωματικὴν.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Brown, *John II*, 672-74 on the “Vine as a Eucharistic Symbol”, an interpretation which R. Bultmann rightly dismisses.

This pneumatic relationship between the exalted Christ and his followers may be exemplified by the parable of John 15:1-7 in the following ways:

1. The softly polemical statement “I am the *true* vineyard”, implies the failure of the old vineyard, Israel, to bear fruit. This failure was on account of the external contingencies that obtained in the case of Israel, where God’s law was written on tables of stone. The “true vineyard”, on the other hand, provides the necessary internal conditions for the believers’ relation to Christ, conducive to bringing forth the desired fruit.

2. Through the elegant wordplay between *αἵρει* and *καθαίρει*, vs. 2 sets forth the conditional existence of the believer in Christ, which depending on his actions may lead to judgment or to approval. A disciple who does not bear fruit is uprooted and thrown out of the vineyard (15:6). This recalls Jesus’ saying in Mt 15:13: *πᾶσα φυτεία ἣν οὐκ ἐφύτευσεν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ἐκρίζωθήσεται*,<sup>30</sup> and finds an apt illustration in the NT in the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). Similarly here, such a disciple, is symbolized by the uprooted vine which is dried up and thrown into the fire. But a disciple who does bear fruit, like a fruit-bearing vine which is pruned and dressed in order to bear more fruit, is disciplined, tended, and ‘cultivated’ so that he may produce more abundant fruit.<sup>31</sup>

3. The declaration in vs. 3 that the disciples are clean (*καθαροί*) through Jesus’ word does not have cultic but ethical significance. The emphasis is placed on an inner cleansing and an inner spiritual condition. This is shown by Jesus’ request to the Father: “sanctify them through the truth” (*ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*, 17:17). And it is for this very reason, too, that Jesus says “I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified in the truth” (17:19).

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Barrett, *John*, 473, “This seems to have been the earliest Christian interpretation of the vine-symbolism, and it may have been at the back of John’s mind”.

<sup>31</sup> On fruit-bearing see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 273 and his quotations from R. Bultmann and E. C. Hoskyns.

4. Finally, vs 4 gives the weighty injunction: μέννατε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν. But how is this text to be understood? It has often been translated literally as “abide/remain in me and I in you”.<sup>32</sup> The form μέννατε is an imperative, but it is impossible to understand an implicit imperative in connection with the second clause “and I in you”. One cannot command oneself. Therefore, the *NIV* has turned the second clause to a condition /promise: “remain in me, and I will remain in you”. This is quite possible. The *NRSV* and the *NAB* have translated the second clause as a factual statement: “Abide/remain in me as I abide/remain in you”. This is rather questionable, since it overturns the logical order: it first assumes that Christ is factually abiding in them and then he exhorts them to abide in him.

The force of the statement is rather: “Abide in me, so that I, too, may abide in you”, or giving it a more expressly conditional force: “If you abide in me, then I, too, will abide in you”.<sup>33</sup> This injunction, then, is the pivot on which the whole parable turns, making fruit-bearing possible (15:8).

The apparently innocuous phrase “Abide in me” receives a deeper meaning when seen in the light of Adolf Deissmann’s claim that this technical concept, “den Lieblingsbegriff der religiösen Sprache des Apostels” (i.e. Paul), envisaging a person being in another person, did not occur in Greek thought before the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> Deissmann was of the opinion that such a concept became meaningful when the person in question was not the earthly Jesus but the pneumatic Christ. Irrespective of details and how the subsequent discussion has developed,<sup>35</sup> the basic presupposition here is that a pneumatic relationship is postulated,<sup>36</sup> in which, the believer is envisaged as having his sphere of existence in the Risen Christ. What this implies can be appreciated when compared with the relation between Jesus and the Father: “If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my

---

<sup>32</sup> ‘Abide’ is used by the *KJV*, *Rheims*, *NASB*, *NRSV*. ‘Remain’ is used by *NIV* and *NAB*.

<sup>33</sup> Taking it conditionally does not rule out mutuality, as Barrett, *John*, 474, seems to think.

<sup>34</sup> Deissmann, A., *Die Formel ‘in Christo Jesu’*, Teil II, Diss. Marburg 1892, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> The post-Deissmannian discussion of the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ, etc. is treated in Chrys C. Caragounis. *The Ephesian Mystery. Meaning and Content* (CB: NT Series 8), Lund 1977, 152-157.

<sup>36</sup> The idea of the new covenant in Jer 31:31-34 is not irrelevant here.

love, as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (15:9-10). Even rejecting Deissmann's mystical interpretation, the force of ἐν still seems to be local in metaphorical sense.

Such an abiding in Christ is not to be confused with the inceptive salvific faith in Christ, since it is not a question of becoming a Christian but of staying a Christian,<sup>37</sup> *i.e.* living out and acting the Christian life.<sup>38</sup> This implies an inner commitment with reciprocal obligations: the believer abides in Christ and Christ and his words abide in the believer. This definitive *modus vivendi* of the believer is made possible through the operation of Parakletos.

We thus see that the parable of the vineyard and the vines is used to illustrate the relation that is to obtain between Christ and his followers following his physical departure from them. As the new arrangement for the future relation between the disciples and the departing Jesus, the injunction "abide in me" seems to form the basis of the new ethics that the post-resurrection, exalted Christ demands of his followers.

## Bibliography

### I. Primary Sources

Ailianos, *On the Characteristics of Animals*  
 Aisopos, *Fables*  
 Athanasios, *De sententia Dionysii*  
 Basilios, *Against Eunomios*  
 Theodoretos, *Eranistes*

### II. Secondary Literature

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 272, "To 'remain' in Jesus has a deeper significance than simply to continue to believe in him".

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Barrett, *John*, 474, "The Christian life is unthinkable except in union with Christ. It is not however a static condition that John has in mind".

- Άγουρίδη, Σ., *Ἡ ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη* ( Ἑρμηνεία Καινῆς Διαθήκης), Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρνάρας 1994
- Aune, D. E., *Revelation 6-16* (WBC), Nashville, TN, 1998
- Barrett, C. K., *The Gospel according to St John*, Philadelphia: 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Westminster Press, 1978
- Beasley-Murray, G. R., *John* (WBC), Waco, TX: Word Books 1987
- Bernard, J. H., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (ICC), Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928
- Brown, R. E., *The Gospel according to St John* (AB), 2 Vols., Vol. I, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971; Vol II, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. 1977
- Bultmann, R., *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEKNT), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1950
- Caragounis, C. C., *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 76), Tübingen: Mohr 2004, corrected pb rp, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007
- Caragounis, C. C., “Vine, Vineyard, Israel, and Jesus” *SEÅ* 65 (2000), 201-14
- Caragounis, C. C., “Atticism. Agenda and Achievement” in Caragounis, C. C. (Ed.), *Greek. A Language in Evolution: Essays in Honour of Antonios N. Jannaris*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2010
- Caragounis, C. C., *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content* (CBNT: 8), Lund, 1977
- Deissmann, A., *Die Formel ‘in Christo Jesu’*, Teil II, Diss. Marburg 1892
- Käsemann, E., *The Testament of Jesus*, London: SCM Press, 1968
- Lindars, B., *The Gospel of John* (NCBC), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972
- Lisowski, G., *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament*, Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958
- Moulton, J. H., & Milligan, G., *The Vocabulary of the New Testament. Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, rp. 1972
- Morris, L., *The Gospel according to St John* (NICNT), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1971