

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

THE MOTHER OF JESUS AS A NAMED SOURCE IN JOHN

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BY  
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Then Jesus, when he saw the mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, said to the mother, “Woman, behold your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother.” And from that hour on, the disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27).<sup>1</sup>

This is a strange passage. These two short verses, stuck between soldiers’ dividing Jesus’ clothes and Jesus’ asking for a drink before dying, seem out of place. By evaluating this text through a narrative critical lens,<sup>2</sup> however, this paper will seek to demonstrate that the Evangelist<sup>3</sup> uses these verses to cite Jesus’ mother as a major source he utilized in composing the Gospel. This passage thereby provides a foundational claim for the authority and reliability of the Gospel as a whole.

## Authorship

Modern source criticism has challenged the traditional ascription of authorship to the Apostle John.<sup>4</sup> This tradition, however, has strong attestation from ancient sources. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, among others, affirm the Apostle John to be both the

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<sup>1</sup> Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρί· γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ· ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s own from the NA27. All Greek quotations are from the NA27.

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson’s description of the current trend in Johannine studies best summarizes this paper’s approach. “Current scholarly interest on John is veering toward literary approaches that ask few *historical* questions (*i.e.* question[s] about what really happened) in favour of asking *literary* questions (*i.e.* questions about how the text hangs together and conveys meaning).” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), 33. This paper is concerned with the internal literary or narrative purpose of this passage, not in what “really happened,” or who “really” wrote or served as a source for the Gospel. Nevertheless, some understanding of the historical background is necessary for demonstrating the literary aim of the Evangelist. See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 33.

<sup>3</sup> This paper uses the term “Evangelist” to refer to the person or persons responsible for the final form of the Gospel. This practice is an imperfect method to refer generally to the Gospel’s author or final redactor while bypassing the debate over authorship as largely irrelevant for purposes of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:XXIV; see also Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 2-3.

author of the Gospel and the Beloved Disciple that appears throughout the Gospel's narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Space does not allow for a full exploration of the complex issue of authorship, and, for purposes of this paper, actual authorship of the Gospel is largely irrelevant. What matters is the authority the Gospel claims for itself.<sup>6</sup> That the Beloved Disciple is an actual historical figure seems certain. Indeed, chapter 21 would make little sense were it not seeking to explain the Beloved Disciple's death. At the very least, he was probably a "distinctive figure in the primitive Church," even if he was not the Apostle John.<sup>7</sup>

It was likely under this Beloved Disciple's authority that the Gospel was written. The matter of authorship of ancient works can be ambiguous as antiquity did not feel the need to

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<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), III.11.1; Clement of Alexandria, "Fragments," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 2:580; Tertullian, "Against Marcion," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), IV.2; Brown, *John*, 1:LXXV; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John: Revised Edition*, ed. Peter H. Davids, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), lxvi-lxvii; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 368; Carson, 26-28; C. Marvin Pate, *The Writings of John: A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 19; Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 67; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 16; Brown, *Introduction to John*, 190-91; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:91-100.

<sup>6</sup> Authorship "may contribute to a discussion of the Johannine tradition's reliability," but it is "otherwise less relevant to the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel." Keener, 1:1. This paper is more concerned with interpreting the Gospel's claim of authority for itself than with establishing its actual authority or even historical or theological reliability.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *John*, 1:XXXVIII, LXXXV; Beasley-Murray, lxxi, lxxiii; Keener, 1:88; Brown, *Introduction to John*, 192; but cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches, ed. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 484, 673 n. 2. Bultmann, while denying the historicity of the Beloved Disciple as depicted in the rest of the Gospel, *ibid.*, nonetheless affirms that the narrative in chapter 21 at least considers him to be a historical figure. *Ibid.*, 715 n. 5. He argues that the author of this chapter conflated an elderly disciple who had died and about whom such a prophecy existed with the Beloved Disciple appearing elsewhere in the Gospel. *Ibid.*, 716. "The author of vv. 20-22... identified that disciple with the figure of the beloved disciple, known to him through the Gospel he had edited, and he transferred the prophecy to him. By this means he had gained a person who was acknowledged to be a witness from the earliest time as a guarantor for the worth of the Gospel, and indeed as its author. That by this time the man had already died (and this the author could not avoid noting in v. 23) was no real obstacle to his procedure; the only thing that mattered to him was to set the present Gospel under the authority of the oldest witness." *Ibid.* Therefore, the Gospel, in its current form, claims for itself the authority of an eyewitness, regardless of whether such a claim is valid.

distinguish between author and writer or to provide proper credit following modern Western sensibilities.<sup>8</sup> “Sometimes the ‘author’ of a book is simply a designation for the *authority* behind it.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, even if the Beloved Disciple did not physically write the Gospel, early audiences would have understood him to be the authority behind it, making the Gospel’s claims of authority believable (at least to them).<sup>10</sup>

### The Passage

In verse 25, Jesus’ mother makes her first appearance since the miracle at Cana in chapter 2 and her only other appearance in the Gospel.<sup>11</sup> It is unlikely that the Evangelist intends to convey that she had not had any contact with Jesus in the interim.<sup>12</sup> Her sudden reappearance in the narrative, however, suggests there is a connection between the two passages.<sup>13</sup>

The significant parallels between the Canaan wedding account and 19:25-37 suggest the

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<sup>8</sup> Brown, *John*, 1:LXXXVII; Brown, *Introduction to John*, 189-90. “Therefore, in considering biblical books, many times we have to distinguish between the *author* whose ideas the book expresses and the *writer*...If a particular author was surrounded by a group of disciples who carried on his thought even after his death, their works could be attributed to him as author...” Ibid., 190.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *John*, 1:LXXXVIII; Brown, *New Testament*, 368. For a more extended exposition on the locus of authority behind writing in the ancient world, see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013). “Authority was not connected to a document but to the person of authority behind the document when that person was known, or to the tradition itself.” Ibid., 27.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *John*, 1:XCVIII, CI; Beasley-Murray, xli, lxxii, 354; Pate, 22-23; Brown, *Introduction to John*, 197-98; Keener, 1:83.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *John*, 2:925; Ritva H. Williams, “The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (January 1997): 679; Carson, 613, 616.

<sup>12</sup> While the mother disappears from the narrative after chapter 2, the text implies that she continued to accompany Jesus. In 2:12, Jesus goes to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples, but there is no suggestion that they all did not continue to accompany him. Williams, 690; but cf. Brown, *New Testament*, 340. After all, Jesus’ brothers make another appearance in chapter 7, and the Evangelist makes a point there to state they departed from him (7:10). If his mother had too departed, chapter 7 would have been a natural place to say so. See Williams, 692.

<sup>13</sup> “It is almost universally recognized that Mary’s role at Cana cannot be understood by itself, but only in relationship to the coming hour of Jesus’ death and glorification, of which he spoke (2:4).” Joseph A. Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel: A Reappraisal,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 1986): 67; see also Keener, 2:1143.

later passage should be considered a coherent unit.<sup>14</sup> Verses 26 and 27, therefore, are not merely squeezed in as an aside—a reader would be unlikely to notice if an account of Jesus’ providing for his mother were missing from the passion narrative—but rather serve as an interpretive key for the entire unit by connecting the passage back to chapter 2.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the parallels between the two passages are extraordinary.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus’ mother is present only at these two events (2:1; 19:25).<sup>17</sup> At Cana, Jesus attends a wedding, a symbol for the messianic age (Isa 54:4-8; 62:4-5).<sup>18</sup> At the cross, Jesus is “lifted up,” following his redefinition of messiahship.<sup>19</sup> At Cana, Jesus is asked to provide drink for a thirsty crowd (2:3). At the cross, Jesus himself is thirsty and asks for a drink (19:28). At Cana, Jesus provides wine of the highest quality (2:10). At the cross, Jesus receives cheap wine (19:29).<sup>20</sup> At Cana, Jesus receives water and gives back wine (2:7-9). At the cross, Jesus receives wine and gives back water and blood.<sup>21</sup> At Cana, Jesus’ hour has not yet come. At the cross, his hour has

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, *John*, 2:923.

<sup>15</sup> See Grassi, 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. Her presence is not incidental. “Her name and presence open and close the first sign at Cana, as well as the last sign on the cross.” *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 77; Brown, *John*, 1:104; Carson, 172; Pate, 63-64.

<sup>19</sup> Beasley-Murray, 344; Carson, 171; see also Brown, *Community*, 119. In contrast to the “Synoptic line of tradition, the crucifixion in John is Jesus’ triumph.” Keener, 2:1133.

<sup>20</sup> Grassi, 69. “The term *ῥῆμα* [*homes*] was used of vinegar, but the Greek rendering of it *ὄξος* [*oxos*] denoted a drink, whether a watered-down vinegar or cheap wine, which was popular among soldiers.” Beasley-Murray, 351; see also Morris, 719; Carson, 620; Keener, 2:1147.

<sup>21</sup> Grassi, 69; Keener, 2:1147. Physicians have debated how blood and water could pour forth from the wound and have proposed various theories. Beasley-Murray, 355-56; Carson, 623. Such theories, however, are irrelevant to the Evangelist’s point, which is to recall the event at Cana and to emphasize the actual death of Jesus. See Beasley-Murray, 356-57.

come, and, “It is finished” (19:29).<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the last thing his mother says before her appearance in chapter 19 is, “Do whatever he might tell you” (2:5).<sup>23</sup> Then, the next words Jesus speaks to her are a command. The mother’s order to the servants in 2:5, therefore, become an admonition to herself in 19:26. She and the Beloved Disciple are, therefore, themselves identified as servants in service of the now exalted Messiah. That both the wedding at Cana and the commendation of the mother exist independently of the Synoptic tradition further enhances the connection between the two passages.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Commission**

It seems strange that Jesus would commend his mother to the Beloved Disciple if he had brothers who would presumably be responsible for caring for her (2:12, 7:1-10).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the command would only be necessary if it were to bypass the standard support system for his mother. Jesus’ brothers, however, had rejected him (7:5). Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, in which

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<sup>22</sup> Grassi, 69; see also Beasley-Murray, 34-35. τετέλεσται. The “hour” is an important concept in John (cf. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus first mentions the concept in a conversation with his mother in Cana in 2:4, and its last allusion is here in 19:27 in connection with “that hour,” the time from which the Beloved Disciple took in the mother. Lilly Nortjé-Meyer, “The Mother of Jesus as Analytical Category in John’s Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 43, no. 1 (2009): 133-34.

<sup>23</sup> ὅ τι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν ποιήσατε

<sup>24</sup> See Brown, *John*, 1:101; Bultmann, 671.

<sup>25</sup> Whether Mary had other biological children of her own is a contentious issue. The Greek word for brothers, ἀδελφοί, “normally refers to blood brothers,” but the Hebrew equivalent, πρ, can refer to a varying degree of masculine relatives. The Septuagint, however, uses ἀδελφοί to translate πρ with all of these varying degrees of meaning. Brown, *John*, 1:112. The Roman Catholic Church holds that the word refers to “close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.” Passages referring to Jesus’ brothers, therefore, do not refer “to other children of the Virgin Mary.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 126. There is something to be said for the argument that it would have been difficult for the belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary to have arisen in the early church if Jesus had had blood brothers holding prominent leadership positions, including, in the case of James, the bishopric of Jerusalem. Brown, *John*, 1:112. Whether Jesus had blood brothers, however, is not important for purposes of this paper. The narrative is concerned with Jesus’ selecting the Beloved Disciple to take his place in his relationship with his mother over more obvious candidates, not with the virginity of Mary.

he states the world hates them because they do not belong to the world (17:14), contrasts with his statement to his brothers that the world cannot hate them (7:7). It would, therefore, make sense that Jesus would want to disassociate his mother from his brothers, just as he had disassociated himself.<sup>26</sup>

Some scholars have attempted to soften the peculiarity of Jesus' admonition by suggesting that Jesus' unnamed aunt was the mother of the Beloved Disciple so that the Beloved Disciple was a cousin of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Such speculation, however, is both unnecessary and counterproductive. Because of the similarities with the Cana account and the contrast between Jesus' brothers and disciples, this passage makes the most sense if the Evangelist understood Jesus as having brothers whom he rejects as caregivers for his mother. The commending of his mother to the Beloved Disciple is not something to explain away; it is the point.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Mary's previous admonition to obedience (2:5) makes more sense if the command is unusual.

The Evangelist pushes a subversive narrative. Uniting his mother with the disciple whom he loved, over and against his brothers, was meant to surprise.<sup>29</sup> Just as crucifixion as glorification is counterintuitive, so too the commendation is subversive, pointing to a new order of reality in which kingdom relations are more significant than blood relations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Williams, 691.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *John*, 2:906; Beasley-Murray, 348; Morris, 717; Carson, 616; Pate, 201.

<sup>28</sup> Morris, 718; see also Keener, 2:1144-45.

<sup>29</sup> There is a myriad of ancient sources that suggest a disciple's or good friend's caring for another's mother was not unusual. Keener, 2:1144. Therefore, the rejection of the brothers, rather than the commendation of the mother, is what is so unusual here.

<sup>30</sup> 19:27 states that the Beloved Disciple took the mother into his home "from that hour," ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας. The use of "hour" here suggests a connection with the ushering in of Christ's new age, supporting this act as consistent with the new kingdom ethic. See note 57 below.

The exact nature of the commission itself has also been a matter of debate. Some scholars have argued that the emphasis is on the mother's taking the Beloved Disciple under her care.<sup>31</sup> Others have argued it was the other way around.<sup>32</sup> Such a binary viewpoint, however, is overly simplistic. Intimate relationships are complex, and the parent-adult child relationship is often a two-way street. Here, both characters assume obligations as a result of Jesus' command. Otherwise, why would he need to charge them both the same? The disciple became responsible for the mother, as an adult son would be for his own mother, but the mother also became responsible for the disciple as a son. Although a mother's responsibilities to her son may change when he comes of age, they do not cease. Even if the Beloved Disciple is to care for the mother, the mother nonetheless acquires responsibility for the disciple.

What is clear is that this is more than Jesus' simply commanding the Beloved Disciple to provide for his mother. The phrase "into his home," εἰς τὰ ἴδια, could alternatively be translated, "into his own." "Home" is an appropriate translation in light of the word's appearance with the article in the substantive form, but the expression entails more than just taking her into his house to give her shelter.<sup>33</sup>

The remaining context drives this point home. The word for "woman," γύναι, can also mean "wife," (e.g., Matt 5:31; 14:3) and the word for "he took," ἔλαβεν, also appears in the context of "taking" a wife (e.g., Mark 12:19-21; Luke 20:28-31).<sup>34</sup> In addition, the "Behold, your son," and "Behold, your mother," phrases utilize adoption language to emphasize the new

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<sup>31</sup> Beasley-Murray, 349; Grassi, 77.

<sup>32</sup> Beasley-Murray, 350; Carson, 617; see also Morris, 718.

<sup>33</sup> BDAG, s.v. "ἴδιος"; Morris, 718.

<sup>34</sup> BDAG, s.v. "γυνή," "λαμβάνω."

familial connection the mother and the Beloved Disciple now share.<sup>35</sup> The Beloved Disciple takes her into his home as part of his household, that is, as his own mother.

This spirit of subversiveness, of the redefinition of relationships in light of “the hour” having come, is essential for understanding what is happening here. At first blush, Jesus appears to be presumptuous and heavy-handed in this passage. After all, what if Jesus’ mother did not like the Beloved Disciple and did not want to live with him? What if she did not want to accept him as a son? The passage appears to rob the mother of her agency.

In addition, Jesus appears to put his mother in a subordinate position, not just to himself, but to the Beloved Disciple as well. Indeed, Nortjé-Meyer argues that “the initial almost independent status of the mother of Jesus fades away when she is given to a male supervisor to be taken care of.”<sup>36</sup> This, however, is to misread the text. While the passage is important for establishing the status of the Beloved Disciple, he is not the primary of the two. Indeed, Jesus addresses his mother first.<sup>37</sup> The text’s purpose is not to subordinate the mother but rather to establish the Beloved Disciple as an authority based on the *mother’s* authority on which Jesus has permitted him to draw.

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<sup>35</sup> Beasley-Murray, 349. “An example of the formula-like language, not applied to real adoption is seen in *Tobit*, when Tobit is engaged to Sarah; to him it is said, ‘From now on you are her brother, behold she is your sister’ (7:12).” Ibid. Brown argues, however, that the phrasing is an example of the Evangelist’s revelatory formula, such that what Jesus accomplished with his mother and Beloved Disciple “are of value for God’s plan and are related to what is being accomplished in the elevation of Jesus on the cross.” He argues that the following verse (Μετὰ τοῦτο εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἤδη πάντα τετέλεσται, “After this, Jesus, knowing that now all things had been fulfilled,”) bolsters this claim. Brown, *John*, 2:923. This, however, is to overread the point. The Evangelist is not stating that the fulfillment of all things was connected to the commendation of his mother to the Beloved Disciple, but rather that the two of them were there to witness the fulfillment together. Seeing Jesus’ words as the language of adoption is therefore the better reading.

<sup>36</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, 141.

<sup>37</sup> Schnelle, 16; Brown, *John*, 2:923.

## The Mother of Jesus as Disciple

Jesus' commending his mother to the Beloved Disciple endows the Gospel of John with a higher claim of reliability. This claim is enhanced by the special status of the mother in John's Gospel, taking on an almost partnership status where she appears.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it is important to note that "Jesus does not reject his mother in John's Gospel as he does in the Synoptics (Matt 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)."<sup>39</sup>

It is true that the Evangelist never names Jesus' mother, but that does not mean she holds a low position.<sup>40</sup> She is not a mother or his mother. She is *the* mother. As discussed below, even though John lacks a birth narrative, the Evangelist affirms Jesus' human birth by references to "the mother." Bringing Jesus into the world "is something the 'mother of Jesus' shares with God as father because the only begotten son of God is born from the father."<sup>41</sup> The narrative, therefore, pairs the "mother of Jesus" with the "father of Jesus."<sup>42</sup>

In this light, the namelessness of Jesus' mother takes on more considerable significance. Both Jesus' mother *and* Jesus' Father are nameless. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the divine name, יהוה (traditionally, "Yahweh"), was never pronounced. Consequently, the Septuagint

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<sup>38</sup> But cf. Nortjé-Meyer, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, 690; Bultmann, 672. "According to the Synoptics the Mother of Jesus does not appear at the cross, for in them she does not belong at all to the group of Jesus' followers: Mk 3.31-35 parr. rather suggest the contrary conclusion." Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, "in the ancient world the names of respectable women were never mentioned in public." Williams, 685 n. 22. Even today among Arab people, "the 'mother of X' is an honorable title for a woman who has been fortunate enough to bear a son." Brown, *John*, 1:98; Keener, 1:501-02. For the significance of a son in an ancient Mediterranean woman's life, see Williams, 682.

<sup>41</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, 139.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

represents appearances of the divine name in the Hebrew text with the generic title, κύριος (“Lord”). Jesus’ mother receives a similar reverence.<sup>43</sup>

This special status of the mother can be seen in Jesus’ interaction with her at Cana in chapter 2, a passage that has been the subject of great confusion.<sup>44</sup> His response to his mother when she tells him about the wine’s running out is a strange one. “What is that to you and to me, woman? My hour has not yet come” (2:4).<sup>45</sup>

Translators have struggled with this phrase.<sup>46</sup> The KJV, for example, renders it, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine [sic] hour is not yet come.” The RSV similarly provides, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” These translations imply that Jesus is rebuffing his mother.<sup>47</sup> In keeping with this view, Brown suggests that Jesus only grants his mother’s request because of her persistence and that she is not fully incorporated into discipleship until Jesus commends her to the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This point should not be taken too far. There is no indication of the equality between Jesus’ Father and mother, and, in fact, Jesus seems to exercise authority over his mother. This may explain the use of γύναι instead of μήτηρ when speaking to her. The text pairs the mother and the Father without equalizing the two—thus Jesus calls his Father, “Father,” but his mother, “woman.” Ibid. She is his mother, but, unlike his Father, she, like everyone else, is subordinate to him. Keener, 1:505. Besides, the Beloved Disciple is also unnamed. The natural pairing of mother and father as concepts, however, suggests there is a significance to the mother’s unnamings distinct from that of the Beloved Disciple. Indeed, given the connection between the mother and the Father, the unnamings of the Beloved Disciple may serve to connect his authority to the mother’s.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, 679.

<sup>45</sup> τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου.

<sup>46</sup> R. B. Woodworth, “The Marriage at Cana in Galilee: John 2:4,” *Interpretation* 1, no. 3 (January 1947): 372; Beasley-Murray, 34.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *New Testament*, 340; Carson, 170-71; Williams, 679; Keener, 1:504-05. This translation choice is not without significant support. Similar wording appears in the Hebrew Scriptures “to protest unjust treatment (e.g., in Judg 11:12; 2 Chr 35:21; 1 Kg 17:18) or to disassociate oneself from the issue at hand (e.g., in 2 Kgs 3:13; Hos 14:8). In the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28) the phrase occurs only on the lips of the possessed, as a protest to their imminent destruction by Jesus. On the basis of these verbal parallels, Jesus’ words are interpreted as a negative response signifying a rebuke, a protest, or a sign of dissociation.” Williams, 686-87; see also Brown, *John*, 1:99; Bultmann, 116 n. 4. This translation, however, fails to consider the context of this particular passage. Williams, 687.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *New Testament*, 340.

This understanding, however, misses the message. Jesus' statement is not a rebuff to his mother.<sup>49</sup> His words do not separate himself from her, and, in this, the NRSV is most faithful to the text. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Simply put, Jesus asks here, "What's that to us?"<sup>50</sup> That's the groom's problem.<sup>51</sup> There is a suggestion of partnership—or at least a bold discipleship—between Jesus and his mother.<sup>52</sup> After all, she approaches him with the expectation that he could do *something* about the situation with the wine,<sup>53</sup> and she responds to his cryptic answer with a statement to the servants indicating her confidence that he will, in fact, act.<sup>54</sup>

Jesus's words, "My hour has not yet come,"<sup>55</sup> suggest that Jesus recognizes his acting here will "start him on the road to his hour, the cross."<sup>56</sup> And that is precisely what happens. This is the first sign, setting him on the path toward Calvary, and the mother pushes him to take that first step to fulfill the Father's purposes. She is there at the beginning, and she will be there at the end. At Cana, she is present when Jesus "revealed his glory" (2:11). At the foot of the cross, she is present for Jesus' "lifting up," his glorification to which he alluded and toward which she

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<sup>49</sup> Woodworth, 372-73.

<sup>50</sup> "What's that to us?" "What concern is that of ours?" or, more colloquially, "So?" as a matter of fact question is the best understanding of the phrase. *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, 688.

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, "[i]n both of her appearances in John, Mary is associated with Jesus' disciples." Brown, *John*, 1:108-09.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, 686; Brown, *John*, 1:98-99; Morris, 158; Carson, 169-70; Bultmann, 116; Keener, 1:503.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, 690; Brown, *John*, 1:100; Morris, 160.

<sup>55</sup> οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου

<sup>56</sup> Keener, 1:506. Keener suggests Jesus' response indicates that his mother does not understand this to be the case. While it is important not to assign anachronistically the awe the "Mother of God" would inspire in later Christian thought, there is nothing to suggest confusion or ignorance on the part of the mother. Indeed, she appears confident throughout the text.

pushed him at Cana.<sup>57</sup> The mother's influence and activity in the Fourth Gospel are, therefore, much more significant than the subtleties of the narrative initially suggest, which, as discussed below, is essential for establishing this Gospel as an authoritative text.

### **The Mother of Jesus as a Source**

There has been much speculation about the symbolism underlying Jesus' commending his mother to the Beloved Disciple, some of which strain credulity.<sup>58</sup> There is, however, no need to search for symbolism here.<sup>59</sup> What is important is the connection between the Beloved Disciple and the mother of Jesus. This becomes particularly important in 19:35. "And the one who has seen these things now bears witness, and his testimony is true. And that one knows that he speaks the truth, in order that you might believe."<sup>60</sup> In context, the "one who has seen these things" is most certainly the Beloved Disciple.<sup>61</sup> How does he know "that he speaks the truth"? Not only did he see it firsthand, but he has within his household the very mother of Jesus. He can, therefore, testify to Jesus' birth, his death, and everything in between.

This is where the significance of verses 26 and 27 comes into view. The Evangelist likely

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<sup>57</sup> Bultmann, 121, 632-33. "For the Evangelist this 'hour' is the hour of the passion, which is however the hour of the *δοξασθῆναι* of Jesus." Ibid., 121.

<sup>58</sup> Such examples abound. The mother of Jesus in John has been said to represent: (1) Eve or the new Eve; (2) Mother Zion; (3) Judaism; (4) Jewish Christianity; (5) prototype and executer of faith; (6) the Church; and (7) (with the Beloved Disciple) the family of faith at the cross. Nortjé-Meyer, 127-29; see also Pate, 204; Brown, *John*, 2:925-26; Beasley-Murray, 350; Grassi, 79; Bultmann, 484-85, 673; Addison Hodges Hart, *The Woman, The House, and The Garden: A Study of Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 32-33. Such Philonean hermeneutical schemes, however, obscure the message that the Evangelist is attempting to convey. See Keener, 2:1143.

<sup>59</sup> See Beasley-Murray, 350; Nortjé-Meyer, 130-31; Carson, 618; Keener, 1:505.

<sup>60</sup> καὶ ὁ ἑωρακὼς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία, καὶ ἐκεῖνος οἶδεν ὅτι ἀληθῆ λέγει, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς πιστεύ[ε]τε.

<sup>61</sup> Carson, 71; Keener, 2:1154-55; Schnelle, 16, 18, 209-10. Even Bultmann, who denies authorship by an eyewitness, acknowledges that, at least to the redactor, this verse affirms that the Beloved Disciple, who witnessed these things, is the Gospel's author. Bultmann, 679.

considered Docetism a threat at the time of the composition of John.<sup>62</sup> He was, therefore, particularly concerned with demonstrating “the reality of the death of Jesus, and so the reality of his humanity as a man of flesh and blood (cf. 1:15: ‘the Word became flesh’).”<sup>63</sup> In an account unique to John, the Evangelist, therefore, makes it a point to state that a soldier pierced Jesus’ side and that the wound gave forth blood and water.<sup>64</sup> The ancient view in both the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds was “that man consists of blood and water.”<sup>65</sup> This detail is, therefore, an important affirmation of the full humanity and real human death of Jesus. Even his expressing his thirst demonstrates his fleshly existence (19:28).<sup>66</sup>

The mother’s presence plays an important role. Juxtaposed next to proof of Jesus’ human death—the outpouring of blood and water—stands the proof of his human birth: his mother. In addition, she raised him and thereby knew him like no other.<sup>67</sup> She brings to the narrative a depth

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<sup>62</sup> Beasley-Murray, 356; Carson, 623; Pate, 202-03; Brown, *Introduction to John*, 176-77, 177 n. 65. Docetism was “the teaching that Jesus was fully God but only *appeared* to be human (taken from the Greek *dokeō*, ‘to seem or appear’).” Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 40. Early Christian leaders, including Polycarp, Ignatius, and Irenaeus, wrote against it. Polycarp, “Epistle to the Philippians,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), VII; Ignatius, “Epistle to the Trallians,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), X; Irenaeus, III.11.1; see also Ignatius, “Trallians,” IX; Ignatius, “Epistle to the Smyrnaeans,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), I, V; Schnelle, 64-65. Schnell goes so far as to claim that John “appear[s] to be, in some essential ways, a reaction to docetic Christology.” *Ibid.*, 228. There has been much debate over the presence of more developed gnostic elements in the Gospel of John, but that debate is largely irrelevant for purposes of this paper. See Keener, 1:162-63; Bultmann, 8-9, 487.

<sup>63</sup> Beasley-Murray, 356 (italics removed); see also Carson, 623; Schnelle, 18; but cf. Keener, 2:1152-54.

<sup>64</sup> Beasley-Murray, 344; Grassi, 69; Carson, 623-24; Schnelle, 209.

<sup>65</sup> Beasley-Murray, 356-57; see also Carson, 624; Schnelle, 209.

<sup>66</sup> Keener, 2:1145. Bultmann writes, “It is hardly likely that we are to understand that Jesus, who himself offers the water of life that stills all thirst (4.10ff), here reaches the deepest point of fleshly existence.” Bultmann, 674 n. 2 (citation omitted). This is the exact type of docetic understanding—a spiritual Jesus not actually suffering the physical sensation of thirst—that the Evangelist seeks to expel.

<sup>67</sup> In first-century Palestine, as is often the case today, “The most significant person in a boy’s early life [wa]s his mother.” In turn, to the mother, the son was “of primary importance.” Williams, 682.

of knowledge about the person and life of Jesus that no one else had.<sup>68</sup> Unlike Matthew and Luke, John does not need a birth narrative because the mother *is* the birth narrative.<sup>69</sup> The one who was present at his birth is also present at his death. She is proof of his humanity.

However, it is more than this. To limit the significance of the mother's presence to an attack on an ancient heresy is to miss the bigger picture and to fail to account for this passage's connection to chapter 2. The mother's presence in these verses has reverberating implications for the entirety of the Gospel. In the Beloved Disciple and the mother, there is a comprehensiveness of witness. Jesus' brothers and the other disciples had abandoned him.<sup>70</sup> The mother and the Beloved Disciple together, however, can testify with authority that Jesus had an actual human birth, lived a human life, and had a human death. They can further testify to the trustworthiness of the entirety of the Gospel account. It would not be too great a stretch, therefore, to refer to this Gospel as the Gospel according to John *and* Mary. Indeed, the affirmation that the Beloved Disciple took the mother into his home from "that hour" forward (v. 27) implies that she is in his home when he composes the Gospel. It is that access to Jesus' mother that provides such tremendous value and authority to this Gospel.

What is important is not only that the disciple saw these things, but that he is the same disciple that took the mother "into his own." There is something subversive here. The validity of the Beloved Disciple's authority resides not so much with his association with Jesus or his position as his adopted brother, since Jesus had other disciples and brothers, but with his association with the mother. A woman was the source of authority for the Beloved Disciple. It is

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<sup>68</sup> Grassi, 74; Nortjé-Meyer, 139; see also Ignatius, "Trallians," IX.1.

<sup>69</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, 131.

<sup>70</sup> See Carson, 29; Keener, 2:1141.

based on his association with her that he is to be revered and his account believed.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, just as there was a correspondence between the mother and the Father, there is now a pairing between the mother and the Beloved Disciple. It is therefore significant that she, along with the Beloved Disciple, is “the only other anonymous person in the Gospel,”<sup>72</sup> because she, along with the Beloved Disciple, is the authority underlying the text.

### **Conclusion**

John is a highly theological work.<sup>73</sup> There is a reason Clement of Alexandria referred to it as the “spiritual Gospel.”<sup>74</sup> There is, therefore, a natural tendency to discern complex symbolism where none exists. John 19:26-27 seems like an out of place text, unnecessary for the flow of the narrative. These two verses, however, credit the mother of Jesus as a source in the Gospel’s composition.

Whether the Beloved Disciple is the actual writer of the Gospel is irrelevant. The text suggests that he is or that he is at least the authority behind it. Behind his authority, however, lies the mother of Jesus. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mary does not make a brief narrative appearance only to fade in importance as the story progresses. These two verses cite the mother of Jesus as an additional source to all those things to which the Beloved Disciple attests. It is, therefore, her Gospel as much as his. For, as a member of his household, she stands behind him in every assertion and bolsters his testimony through her intimate knowledge of the Savior that she and she alone possessed.

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<sup>71</sup> “Jesus committed his mother to the Beloved Disciple, so the followers of Jesus should resort to him for knowledge of him.” Beasley-Murray, lxxi.

<sup>72</sup> Hart, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, *New Testament*, 364.

<sup>74</sup> Clement of Alexandria, 2:580.

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