

The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1-11)

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Abstract: The leading theme of this article is the enigmatic “hour” as revealed in the account at Cana (John 2:1-11). Jesus’ words to his mother, οὐπω ἔκει ὥρα μου (2:4), are considered obscure and difficult to interpret, causing an intriguing and unresolved controversy within Johannine scholarship. Most exegetes agree that this phrase is to be taken as a denial. According to them, Jesus announces that *his hour has not yet come*, because this “hour” is bound to the hour when “the Son of Man is glorified,” alluding to his being lifted up on the Cross and raised up “on the third day.” However, there is another solution suggested by a significant number of scholars. They propose reading Jesus’ words οὐπω ἔκει ὥρα μου as a question, which better guarantees the overall coherence of the story in light of the wider OT context. This interpretation focuses specifically on the temporal indication of “the third day,” the biblical image of the wedding, and the abundance and high quality of the wine, a beginning of signs and of the revelation of Jesus’ glory which serve to stimulate the faith of his disciples. In this view, this multiplicity of themes indicates that the meaning of the “hour” lies in the motif of *fulfillment*. Jesus is the Messiah who brings to perfection all that has been foretold in Scripture. His “hour” begins “now” and continues throughout his public life until it reaches its ultimate fulfillment in the glory of his Cross and Resurrection. The present article is focused, therefore, on investigating the interrelations among the main biblical themes brought to the fore in the Cana narrative, and their meanings in relation to the “hour” of Jesus.

Keywords: the hour of Jesus, messianic time, fulfillment

The account of the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11) is one of the most enigmatic texts in the Gospel of John.¹ It impresses the reader because of its many biblical images as well as its poetic Jewish character of a wedding context and a mysterious choice quality of the wine (ὁ καλὸς οἶνος) in brimming jars (ἔως ἄνω). This is the very occasion in which the evangelist refers, for the first time, to *Jesus’ hour* (οὐπω ἔκει ὥρα μου), to the first of his signs² as ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων and to Jesus’ δόξα that stimulates the faith

¹ The narration (John 2:1-11) has often been argued in exegetical literature; the multiplicity of interpretation, both as a whole text and as singular details, is overwhelming: Christological, Mariological, sacramental, symbolic, midrashic, etc. For the investigations on the various interpretations of this text, Cf. de La Potterie, *Maria*, 180–183; Frey, “Das prototypische Zeichen,” 208–216.

² The phrase ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων can be translated as “first of the signs” or “beginning of signs.” Cf., Vistar, *The Cross-and-Resurrection*, 32. For the argument that the wine miracle is not just the first of Jesus’ signs but the key to his signs, see Collins, “Cana (Jn. 2:1-12),” 79-95; Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 50.

of his disciples. The variety of themes are indications that the main message lies in the fulfilment motif of the text. The evangelist picks up the messianic Old Testament traditions and theology and presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah whose earthly mission is the realization of “greater things” (John 1:50), and who is the fulfillment of all sacred biblical announcements. These clearly messianic themes of the Cana narrative are linked to the chain of events associated with Jesus’ ὥρα which is, during his earthly ministry, both present (νῦν ἐστίν) and future (ἔρχεται ὥρα). This ὥρα of Jesus directs the attention of the reader to the crucial themes that run throughout the entire Gospel of John. Moreover, from Jesus’ first sign, namely, “the beginning of the signs,” the narrative displays a noticeable accumulation of temporal expressions which are linked with *the hour* and indicated throughout the Gospel: οὐπω, νῦν, ἕως ἄρτι. This paradigmatic narrative serves as a *prelude* to the work of Jesus and already points to all of the temporal indications in the Gospel as a whole.³

The present article is focused, therefore, on the investigation of the meaning and interrelations among the main biblical themes, linked with the “hour” of Jesus, which are brought to the fore in the Cana narrative. The key to the correct interpretation of the text (2:1-11),⁴ within its temporal setting of Jesus’ ὥρα, is the combination of ideas present in the referenced OT passages. Thus, our recourse to the Jewish Scriptures is indispensable. An intertextual perspective on the use and reception of the Scripture in the writings of John suggests that the meanings of the Gospel cannot be disconnected from OT texts or understood in isolation, but as part of a network of other OT texts.⁵ John frequently draws attention to the witness of the Scriptures, either using repeated formulaic references to what is “written” (γέγραπται, καθὼς ἐστίν γεγραμμένον [2:17; 6:31.45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14.16; 15:25; 19:19.20]); or selecting phrases and images that demonstrate the fulfillment of what the “Scripture” (ἡ γραφή) has said or written (2:22; 7:38.42; 10:35; 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24.36.27; 20:9). Some of these references are explicit and self-evident, others are not intended to be the precise scriptural citations, but rather an appeal to the undeniable, authoritative status of the text in question.⁶ The account of the wedding at

³ Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, II, 224–226.

⁴ Most Johannine scholars agree regarding the structure of the story and maintain that, on a surface level, it has been classified as a typical miraculous story with a common structure: an exposition (2:1-2), the preparation of the miracle (2:3-5), its indirect description (2:6-8), its manifestation (2:9-10) and concluding commentary (2:11). Cf. Zimmermann, *Christologie*, 204–205; Serra, *Le nozze*, 79–85.

⁵ There is a significant number of scholars who increasingly recognize that the Gospel was written in the Jewish environment with the complex message of the OT as the background. In recent years a core issue in regard of the use of the Old Testament in the writings of John has gained considerable attention from scholars like Reim, *Studien zum Alttestamentlichen Hintergrund*; Obermann, *Die christologische Erfüllung*; Zimmermann, *Christologie*; Kubiś, *The Book of Zechariah*; Allen – Smith, *Methodology*; Hays, *Echoes*; Sheridan, *The figure of Abraham*.

⁶ In the past years, the frequent questions posed by the scholars, as to which passage(s) of Scripture the evangelist refers to, are no longer a current topic of debate. It is commonly known that, in most cases, John denotes the vast spectrum of texts or images which are connected with a particular theme found

Cana is a characteristic example in the Gospel where the reader does not find any scriptural quotations, or direct references to OT texts. Nevertheless, there are clear allusions to prophecies, metaphors, symbols and echoes of OT images that testify persuasively on Jesus' behalf. The Scriptures shape models for John's picture of Jesus and bear witness to him as "the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets" (1:45). John emphasizes the fulfilment of "old" era of God's gifts to his people, the era of the Jewish preparation, and the "new" era of Jesus' messianic gifts to the people, effected in the hour of his glorification. The gifts given by Jesus are the gifts of the eschatological era, appropriate to the time of the realization of Israel's hopes. Only against this OT background can the account in Cana be perceived and clearly understood. However, this brief text is full of questions, enigmatic textual elements and symbolic allusions.⁷ The "Scripture" – as an active and living Word of God – speaks directly to the audience with the invitation to believe.

1. On the Third Day

The opening verse contain the unfolding of the narrative with the first temporal information: τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (2:1). This reference, used at the very outset of the first statement (2:1), has puzzled many commentators.⁸ Some of them simply point to the third day after the events previously narrated (1:19-51).⁹ The majority, however, argue that the evangelist, from the very beginning of the Cana narrative, has placed a deeper, hidden message in this information. A few of the scholars suggest that τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ parallels with the Old Testament texts to indicate a beginning of a new life (Gen 42:18)¹⁰ and of God's healing and resurrection (Hos 6:2).¹¹

in the Old Testament. Citations of two or more passages in combination are common in the Gospel of John, and all of them offer a significant allusion to his theme or expression. Cf. Williams, "How Scripture 'Speaks,'" 55–56; Hays, *Echoes*, 281–345. For a recent overview of various issues concerning John's use of Scripture, see Myers – Schuchard, *Abiding Words*.

⁷ Zumstein, *L'Evangile*, I, 94.

⁸ For the detailed study and the various explanations of the phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (2:1) see, Serra, *Le nozze*, 85–180.

⁹ In the composition of 1:19-51, the events are narrated in a clearly temporal framework, marked by "the next day" (τῇ ἐπαύριον): the first day (1:19-28); the second day (1:29-34); the third day (1:35-42); the fourth day (1:43-51). Thus, the phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (2:1) can be regarded as indicating the seventh day.

¹⁰ Several scholars have tried to elicit a seventh day scheme to interpret the parallel to the seven days of creation. For the symbolism of the "third day" in "new creation week" see Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, II, 192–196; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 23–25.

¹¹ The context of Hos 6:2 makes it explicit that recovery from sickness is intended. The application is figurative and points to the disloyalty of Ephraim and Judah. Hosea invites the people to turn back to the Lord who will heal them and raise them up on the third day. They will be living in God's presence and know him as the fruit of his healing. Cf. Kubiś, *The Book of Zechariah*, 362; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 23–25.

Other scholars link “the third day” with the time in which God comes, manifesting himself in glory on Mount Sinai, and revealing his covenant through his Law (Exod 19:10.11.16; 24:16).¹² Most exegetes firmly maintain that the evangelist and his readers were familiar with the formulation τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ, which derives both from the exegesis of Jewish Scriptures and from the historical tradition that the resurrection of Jesus took place “on the third day.”¹³ They consider such phrase to be a common idiom used frequently in the New Testament to designate the time of fulfilment and of the glory of Jesus revealed in his resurrection “on the third day.”¹⁴ For them, in the context of the Fourth Gospel, this episode and motif of time may be seen as linked with the subsequent narrative on the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem (2:13-22) where the evangelist refers explicitly to raising up the temple of Jesus’ body “in three days” (2:19-22).¹⁵

In view of the many scholarly positions concerning this temporal detail, it is apparent that the evangelist links several motifs from both Old and the New Testament traditions, and relates them to Jesus, who fulfills the Scriptures by revealing their decisive eschatological meaning in his coming, death and resurrection “on the third day.” In him, the unfolding plan of God revealed throughout salvation history and in the various OT events, finds its continuity and escalation¹⁶ in Jesus Christ, the awaited Messiah and Son of God,¹⁷ as τέλος and πλήρωμα of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, in the same context as the Cana narrative, the temporal indication τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ is linked with the ὥρα of Jesus (2:4) and his δόξα (2:11), which are fully manifested in his passion, death, and resurrection from death. In accordance

¹² The great event of the Exodus describes God’s manifestation in his glory, his coming on Mount Sinai, revealing himself to Moses, sanctifying his people and making his covenant with them (Exod 19:10.11.16; 24:3-18). Following the account of the revelation of the glory of God on Mount Sinai “on the third day” the glory of Jesus is revealed at Cana (cf. 2:11). Cf. Zumstein, *L’Evangile*, I, 96; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 24–25; Zimmermann, *Christologie*, 211; Serra, *Le nozze*, 208–215; Manns, *Sinfonia sponsale*, 68.

¹³ Cf. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 99, 103; Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, II, 192–197; Straub, *Kritische Theologie*, 69–70; Grasso, *Il Vangelo*, 109; Keener, *The Gospel*, 497–498; Ferraro, *L’ora di Cristo*, 102–103. There are a few scholars who consider this allusion to the resurrection to be doubtful, cf. e.g., Köstenberger, *John*, 91.

¹⁴ The temporal frame τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ and τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ repeatedly occurs in connection with the verb ἀνίστημι: Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7.21.46; 1 Cor 15:4.

¹⁵ Serra, *Le nozze*, 325; Keener, *The Gospel*, 497–498; Straub, *Kritische Theologie*, 70; Grasso, *Il Vangelo*, 109; Knöppler, *Die theologia cruce*, 104. For a detailed study of the link between the mention of the Scripture and of Jesus’ resurrection on the third day, see Kubiś, *The Book of Zechariah*, 356–371.

¹⁶ According to Brian J. Tabb (“Johannine Fulfillment of Scripture,” 500) continuity means that the events of Jesus’ life are inexplicable apart from OT history. Key events such as creation, the giving of the Law, the Exodus; as well as key Jewish institutions such as Jewish temple feasts; provide the salvation-historical framework for Jesus. “Escalation” means that Jesus is unquestionably greater than the former representatives of God. Jesus not only speaks God’s word: he *is* the divine Word. His revelatory work is more comprehensive than Moses’ Law (1:17-18), his saving activity is more definitive than the Passover and Exodus from Egypt; since his Passover sacrifice accomplishes deliverance from sin, salvation of the world, and eternal life.

¹⁷ Tabb, “Johannine Fulfillment of Scripture,” 500.

with the view taken by the evangelist, the entire ministry of the Incarnate Word has the character of the “third day” of his glory¹⁸. From the very beginning of the Cana narrative, through the information τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (2:1), the evangelist invites his readers to perceive the gift of new life; of healing; of the New Covenant and glory; as the fruits of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ, summarizes and brings to a culmination all the eschatological prophecies of salvation when the Father’s saving acts are accomplished through his Son in the “hour” of his glory.

2. The Wedding

Together with the temporal reference τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ, the evangelist points out the event: γάμος ἐγένετο and the place: ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας (2:1). Many commentators perceive the poetic character of these indications, highlighting at the same time its biblical and theological significance.¹⁹ The image of a wedding is one of the characteristics rich in symbolism in the history of the OT; it is an image of the Covenant between God and his chosen people (Exod 34:10-16; Deut 5:2-10; Isa 54:4-10; Jer 2:2; 11:15; Hos 2:4-25; Ezek 16:18); of a pact by which God has called Israel into existence as his own beloved nation. Yahweh is the God of Israel, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Father; and, at the same time, the Spouse of his people who make up his faithfully-loved bride. Despite their unfaithfulness, God loves his people and calls them to return to their first love (Jer 2:2), by abandoning their adultery and sinful conduct (Ezek 16:23). The most important aspect proclaimed by the prophets is God’s faithful love for His chosen people, which is stronger than sin and is compared to the matrimonial covenant between God-bridegroom and Israel-bride. Furthermore, the messianic days are announced by the prophets as the time of the eschatological wedding feast, in which God will renew the broken bonds with His people and will remarry them in His eternal love, faithfulness and mercy (Isa 54:4-8; 62:5; Hos 2:18.21-22).²⁰ These words of the prophets overflow with the great ardor of God’s love, and high-

¹⁸ Dodd, *The Interpretation*, 300.

¹⁹ The theological importance of the term γάμος is underlined by its twofold use at the beginning of the passage (2:1-2). Besides the Cana narrative, in the Johannine writings the term γάμος occurs in the Revelation where is also used in theological sense in reference to the eschatological wedding of the Lamb (19:7.9). The term γάμος has also been applied by other New Testament authors, who use the image of marriage as a representation of the reality of salvation and of the arrival of the messianic era. In the Gospel of Matthew, this term is found nine times in this eschatological context to describe the reality of God’s kingdom (Matt 22:2-4.8-12; 25:10). In Luke’s Gospel the noun γάμος appears only twice and is used rather in the common sense of “banquet” (Luke 12:26; 14:8). In the Letter to the Hebrews, it is used literally to indicate the matrimonial relationship (Heb 13:4).

²⁰ Stienstra, *YHWH*, 120–122; Collins, “Cana (Jn. 2:1-12),” 87.

light the specificity of his marriage with Israel which will be the time of great joy and salvation: “Your spouse is your Creator; Lord of hosts is his name; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 54:5; cf. Isa 61:10; Jer 33:10-11 Hos 2:18-22). This eschatological wedding of the Messiah will be a world-wide feast, because all nations will see the glory of Jerusalem as the bride (Isa 62:2-5). Additionally, it will be the time of a great banquet (Isa 25:6; 55:1-5) with an abundance of wine (Amos 9:13-14).²¹

According to many Johannine scholars, the account of the wedding feast at Cana (2:1-11), described at the outset of Jesus’ messianic mission is a very significant indication for the reader. Here, the reader is informed that Jesus’ presence at the wedding (2:2) is a sign that the eschatological messianic time has already arrived. With his coming, God’s eternal, faithful love for his people, revealed throughout salvation history, reaches its climax.²² He is the Bridegroom who fulfills, deepens, reinforces and perfects all the announcements of the Scriptures. It is reasonable, therefore, to interpret Jesus’ participation at the wedding at Cana as an indirect way of pointing out that the Bridegroom announced by the prophets is already present among his people.²³ This is strongly confirmed in the Book of Revelation, where the author sees and hears the multitudes praising the Lord God at the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9) and repeatedly mentions the appearance of the New Jerusalem as the bride adorned for her bridegroom (Rev 3:12; 21:2.9-10; 21:2; 22:17).²⁴ Here,

²¹ For a wide-ranging study of the wedding metaphor described in the OT used to portray Yahweh’s love for Israel, his spouse, see Stienstra, *YHWH*; Stauffer, “γαμέω, γάμος,” 646–655; Rusconi, *Le nozze*, 75–85.

²² Frey, “Das prototypische Zeichen,” 185; La Gioia, *La glorificazione di Gesù*, 216. For a biblical overview of the theme of “wedding” as the imagery of the messianic times and of the unity between Christ – the Bridegroom with the new, redeemed community as his bride, see, Stauffer, “γαμέω, γάμος,” 651–654.

²³ The context of the wedding indicates that, according to Jewish traditions it was a one-week celebration (Gen 29:27; Judg 14:12) and it was the bridegroom who should provide the right amount and quality of food and especially wine, which was the essential element. In such a cultural setting, the intervention of the Mother of Jesus regarding the shortage of wine (2:3), as well as Jesus’ positive reaction, suggest that he symbolically assumes the role of the bridegroom (cf. 3:29). This is confirmed by the words of the steward to the bridegroom: σὺ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι (2:10) and of the evangelist: ταύτην ἐποίησεν ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν Κανά (2:11). The text points to Jesus as the one who “did this thing,” and he is the bridegroom who has “kept the good wine until now.” For the biblical and socio-cultural context of the wedding see, Koester, “The Wedding,” 222–227. A symbolic identification of Jesus with the bridegroom is suggested by many authors: Rusconi, *Le nozze*, 89–105; Panimolle, *Lettura*, I, 219; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 61; Matand Bulembat, “Head-Waiter and Bridegroom,” 68; Stramare, “La risposta di Gesù,” 179; Klink, *John*, 161; Manns, *Sinfonia sponsale*, 82. Even these scholars who prefer to keep the title bridegroom for an anonymous spouse underline that Jesus appears to act as the bridegroom when the real bridegroom fails in a crucial aspect of his role. Cf. de La Potterie, *Maria*, 215. For the most recent and comprehensive study on the bridegroom motif in the Fourth Gospel, on the use of bridegroom metaphors in messianic prophecy, exploring Hebrew and Greek early Jewish writings and also on the Old Testament texts in which God himself is described using bridal imagery, see Zimmermann, “Jesus,” 358–386.

²⁴ The theme of the symbolic significance of spousal love and the metaphor of the wedding-supper of the Lamb in the book of Revelation has been studied. See Pedrolì, *Dal fidanzamento*, 192–215; Rusconi, *Le nozze*, 109–124; Vanni, *Dal Quattro Vangelo*, 26–29.

at Cana, the chain of elements in the whole context (2:1-11) are closely linked and support this understanding if one notes, in particular, that the evangelist indicates significant details such as the banquet, abundance of an excellent wine, the hour of Jesus and his glory²⁵ revealed in the first “sign” which is named ἀρχὴ τῶν σημείων.

Moreover, although some exegetes deny a symbolic meaning of Cana, many assume it and associate it with the Jewish root קָנָה, that denotes “to acquire,” “to establish” (e.g., Exod 15:16-17; Deut 32:6; Isa 5:1-7). Through this etymology they associate קָנָה with the theme of the election of Israel which has been “acquired-created” as the exclusive property of God (Exod 15:16-17; Deut 32:6; Ps 74:2; 139:13).²⁶ Scholars suggest that this image of the OT may be an indication that at Cana Jesus begins to “establish” the new and eternal covenant, “acquiring” all people to be “His own” (John 1:10; 4:44; 10:1ff; 13:17)²⁷ and then, drawing them all to Himself in the “hour” of His glorification, when He is lifted up the cross (12:32).

3. The Wine

The next symbolic element that occurs at Cana is that of the wine that dominates the whole scene²⁸ and links several temporal indications which remain in close correlation with it: οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4); νῦν (2:8) ἕως ἄρτι (2:10).²⁹ The mother of Jesus’ poignant announcement, “they have no wine” (2:3) points in the direction that becomes the focal point of the narrative. Although wine was a standard part of everyday life in the ancient Mediterranean world, Jewish literature makes it clear that wine was an important part of festive occasions; especially at weddings.³⁰ In the nar-

²⁵ The hour and the glory include “before and “after” Jesus’ action at Cana and culminates in the hour of His glorification. Messianic, eschatological motifs at Cana direct attention to the chain of events portrayed in the entire Gospel.

²⁶ For the significance of the root of “Cana,” see Lipiński “קָנָה,” 63–71; Stienstra, *YHWH*, 222–230.

²⁷ The symbolic allusions are noticed by, e.g., Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 151; Klink, *John*, 162; Mateos – Barreto, *Il Vangelo*, 137; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 26, 109–110; Rusconi, *Le nozze*, 52, 132. According to comments of Jörg Frey (“Das prototypische Zeichen,” 186) there is no symbolic meaning implied here in contrast to John 9:7.

²⁸ There are five occurrences of the term οἶνος (2:3^{x2}, 9-10^{x2}), and it plays an important role for a dynamic development of the entire narrative. The lack of wine, ὑστερήσαντος οἴνου, causes Jesus’ mother to inform her Son: οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν (2:3.5); Jesus indicates to his hour which “has not yet come” and orders to fill the stone jars with water (2:7); the servants bring wine to the headwaiter (2:8); who tastes the new wine and praises its first-choice quality (2:9-10); the change of the water into the fine wine is called “τὸ σημεῖον”; reveals Jesus’ glory and the reader is told that “his disciples believed in him” (2:11). Cf. Matand Bulembat, “Head-Waiter and Bridegroom,” 57–58.

²⁹ Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, II, 224–226.

³⁰ Since marriages did not involve two people, but two families, the social context was more comprehensive and intense. For this reason, the exhaustion of wine during the celebration of the wedding would have caused the loss of one family’s reputation and honor. For a broad view of theme of wedding customs and

rative at Cana, the frequent use of the term οἶνος, which appears as many as five times, has an important symbolic meaning in biblical language.³¹

The OT frequently uses the image of wine to indicate abundance, the extravagance of God's blessing and his gifts to man (Gen 27:28; Neh 9:25; Ps 4:8; 104:15)³² which will be fully realized in the expected Messiah from Judah, of whom it is written in Gen 49:10-11. The prophetic tradition utilizes the same imagery of wine to indicate the eschatological-messianic era and God's abundant blessings (Isa 29:17; Jer 31:5; Hos 2:24)³³; the restoration of Zion and of the gathering of the dispersed sheep (Jer 31:10-12); and the end-time meal of joy with "fatty foods" and "good wines" that the Lord will prepare on his holy mountain for all nations (Isa 25:6). It will be the time of salvation, when the mountains and the hills will drip with wine (Amos 9:13; Joel 4:18).³⁴

Jesus, as the bridegroom of His people, brings into fulfillment all the expectations of abundance of wine.³⁵ The good wine kept ἕως ἄρτι (2:10) and the adverb nu/n implies the inauguration of the messianic time that has *now* arrived. The fulfilment of God's plan in salvation history begins to be fully realized *now* – with the coming of Jesus into the world, the one whom Israel had been awaiting since the time of the prophets. It is the inauguration of the new covenant and the "messianic wedding" of the bridegroom who is Christ, the Messiah.³⁶ The mention of the size of the wa-

the importance of wine in biblical times see Keener, *The Gospel*, 498–499; 500–501; Klink, *John*, 163; Koester, "The Wedding," 227–231.

³¹ Some authors, e.g., Beasley-Murray, *John*, 36; Charles H. Dodd (*The Interpretation*, 298) consider the wine as the symbol of joy in the messianic times and the sacrament of the Eucharist; Barrett, *The Gospel*, 188–189; Manns, *Sinfonia sponsale*, 78–80; Birger Olsson (*Structure and Meaning*, 19) refer wine to the new covenant between God and his people; de La Potterie, *Maria*, 111–113, contrasts *water of the law of Moses* with the *good wine of grace of truth* given by Jesus (1:17); Panimolle (*Lettura*, I, 221–223) considers, in a wider sense, that wine may represent the teaching of Jesus and the Spirit. For further and detailed references to the rich symbolism of wine, its figurative value and its typology, see Serra, *Le nozze*, 235–273.

³² Knöppler, *Die theologia cruces*, 105; Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1-12)," 87; Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 66; Vanni, *Dal Quarto Vangelo*, 117.

³³ Hosea interprets the lack of wine as a punishment sent by God because of the idolatry of the people of Israel (Hos 2:10-11). Their conversion can bring salvation which will be evidenced by the restitution of wine and vineyards (Hos 2:22-25; cf. Isa 62:4-8)

³⁴ Brown, *The Gospel*, I, 105; Dennis, *Jesus' Death*, 167.

³⁵ Frey, "Das prototypische Zeichen," 196.

³⁶ The hour is connected with other temporal terminology: the adverb νῦν (2:8) marks the implementation of the sign and the manifestation of glory. Therefore, according to some Johannine scholars, e.g., Giuseppe Ferraro (*L'ora di Cristo*, 115) and Albert Vanhoye ("Interrogation johannique," 160), the expression ἕως ἄρτι (2:10) has to be examined in connection with the sign at hand and its meaning – along with the manifestation of the glory and faith of the disciples – in relation to the symbol of good wine which marks the fulfillment and inauguration of the new covenant; the messianic time; the nuptial time of the bridegroom who is Christ, the Messiah. Thus, ἕως ἄρτι becomes an important temporal indication suggesting the inauguration of the "hour" of Jesus; the beginning of the "messianic wedding" of Christ – the bridegroom who pours out the good wine preserved up to this point. Dodd (*The Interpretation*, 365)

ter-pots and the unusual phrase ἕως ἄνω accentuates the great quantity of good wine and highlights the time of eschatological abundance of good wine foretold by the prophets.³⁷ To this great quantity of wine and Jesus' instruction to fill the water-pots ἕως ἄνω, correspond various phrases that refer to the "fullness" of his gifts: of the Spirit given without measure (3:34); of bread offered by Jesus in abundance (6:12-13.26); of joy in fullness (3:29; 15:11; 16:24; 17:13); of grace and truth (1:14.16); of life (10:10); and of love εἰς τέλος (13:1). Within this perspective, the choice wine kept ἕως ἄρτι and the motifs of fulfillment, fullness and newness of gifts is entirely formulated in the Jewish context as a sign of the uninterrupted history of salvation, dawning with the coming of Jesus,³⁸ the long-awaited Messiah.

4. The Phrase: τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; (2:4a)

In the light of the above phrase, Jesus' unexpected response to his mother: τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί; especially if one considers its literal sense, seems harsh and dry. It raises the question of how to understand such puzzling words. As indicated by the many opinions of Johannine scholars, this is a Semitism belonging to the literary technique of the evangelist and refers to the Old Testament phrase מַה־לִּי וְלָךְ (Josh 22:24; Judg 11,12; 2 Sam 16:10; 19:23; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 8:18; 35:21; Hos 14:9; Jer 2:19).³⁹ Although, in the time of Jesus, the question τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί; is documented frequently in both secular Greek and biblical literature, it is never used between child and mother. It is a part of diplomatic language, and generally, it has a negative impact indicating a distaste, a disagreement or some divergence between differing

argues that at Cana when Jesus manifested his glory in giving wine for water (2:11) his ὥρα had, in some sense, come.

³⁷ Six water jars containing a massive amount of water (around 600 liters) used for purification, then changed into wine also links the narrative with the motif of the eschatological change of times. This motif is characteristic throughout the immediate context, called "From Cana to Cana" (2:1-4:54), where the evangelist has chosen a variety of symbols and motifs in view of this messianic fulfillment. Jesus' words and actions inside the temple in Jerusalem suggest that God's presence is being re-located now in the person of the risen Jesus (2:13-22). The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus reveals new birth "of water and spirit" (3:1-15). In the Samaritan narrative, Jesus discloses the theme of living water welling up into eternal life (4:7-15) and the new worship "in Spirit and truth" (4:20-24). Jesus' encounter with a royal official (4:46-54), indicates His life-giving power and stresses a new universal scope of His mission. Cf. Brown, *The Gospel*, I, 104-105; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 54; Frey, "From the *Sēmeia* Narratives," 220.

³⁸ Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 110; La Gioia, *La glorificazione di Gesù*, 216; Frey, "Das prototypische Zeichen," 196.

³⁹ Brown, *The Gospel*, I, 99; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium*, 59; Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique," 163; Zumstein, *L'Évangile*, I, 97; Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 100; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 112; Stramare, "La risposta di Gesù," 183; Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium* 138; Serra, *Le nozze*, 274; Frey, "Das prototypische Zeichen," 189.

views, and a lack of relationship between the interlocutors.⁴⁰ Thus, in the context of Cana, Jesus' words seem like a harsh rejection of his mother's request.

Nevertheless, some scholars have noted the positive aspect in Jesus' words. This is the pattern in several episodes of the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus acts positively after giving a negative response to a suggestion that has been presented to him as an urgent human need (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 7:2-14; 11:1-44). This repeated pattern: suggestion – negative answer – positive action, seems to stress Jesus' independence from human suggestions and indirect invitation to absolute faith in him.⁴¹ Hence, his words τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; express a kind of dissociation from Mary, whose identity is entirely defined by her relationship with Jesus (ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ), so as to manifest the arrival of the messianic time, his unique relationship with the Father, and of the inauguration of his mission which he will fully accomplish in the "eschatological hour." It is important, therefore, to remark that in these words Jesus suggests that a change occurs in the relationship between them; he, therefore, does not call her "μήτηρ," but says to her "γύναι" expressing this transformation (cf. 19:26). Indeed, even if it is not offensive, the word "woman" is an unusual address for a mother and shows that he is no longer related to her at the family level.⁴² As far as his mission is concerned, his autonomy from all human bonds is rooted in his identity of being in total communion with his Father (John 1:18) in order to accomplish his work (4:34) and to bring Scripture and the mission for which he was sent, into fulfillment (19:30).

There are a number of authors who suggest that this phrase: τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; is an indication that, from the hour of Jesus at Cana (2:1-11), Mary is to be seen in a role other than that of her maternal relationship with Jesus. As "mother and woman," she plays a representative and universal role as the model of complete faith and trust in Jesus.⁴³ From this hour, she abandons the past level of her relationship

⁴⁰ The majority of Johannine's scholars agree that the statement: "τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί" is ambiguous since it may express a hostile or peaceful attitude. When two allies found themselves discussing a burning problem, and when agreement was at issue, they used to ask each other: "τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί." In this way, reciprocal duties were always recalled. In the Synoptic Gospels, this phrase implies clear hostility and disengagement when the demons reply to Jesus: "τί ἡμῖν καὶ σοί, υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ" (Matt 8:29; cf. Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34). Their full knowledge of Jesus' identity, mission and origin causes them to be threatened, losing their power as they are thrown out of the people they possess (Luke 8:31; Matt 8:29). Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 34; Barrett, *The Gospel*, 191; de La Potterie, *Maria*, 202; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 37–38; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium*, 59; Zumstein, *L'Évangile*, I, 97; Klink, *John*, 164; Ferraro, *L'ora di Cristo*, 114; Serra, *Le nozze*, 274; Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1-12)," 85; Simoens, *Évangile selon Jean*, 84; Koester, "The Wedding," 224.

⁴¹ Giblin, "Suggestion," 197; Frey, "D" prototypische Zeichen," 169–170.

⁴² Serra, *Le nozze*, 274–280; Giblin, "Suggestion," 197–211; Straub, *Kritische Theologie*, 68; Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1-12)," 85; Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique," 163, 167; Caba, *Teología joanea*, 115; Ferraro, *L'ora di Cristo*, 114; Van der Merwe, "ΩΠΑ," 259; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium*, 60; Morris, *The Gospel*, 159. Raymond E. Brown (*The Gospel*, I, 99) makes an explicit observation saying, that Jesus' response and the word "woman" is not a rebuke, nor impolite term, nor indication of a lack of affection, but a normal, polite way of addressing women.

⁴³ The universal and representative role of "the mother of Jesus" and the link between the sign of wine and the scene under the cross where she is addressed again as "γύναι," is emphasized by many commentators,

with Jesus and places herself on a different level – her presence is no longer exercised *on* Jesus, but *in the service of* Jesus. She believes *his word*, independent of any sign: in the sense that she surrenders to whatever *he* will ask to be done. First of all, Mary's request establishes the contrast between the time in which the wine is lacking and the hour of Jesus (19:25-27). Her designation as γύναι, allows an easier correlation with 19:25-27, so that the sign can be interpreted in the light of the salvific and revealing *hour par excellence*, the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus.⁴⁴ Moreover, her role precedes Jesus' hour at Cana (2:4), and is again clearly referred to *in the hour of Jesus' glorification*, which is his fulfillment of the mission the Father had given him to accomplish. At this peak "hour" on Calvary she becomes "the mother of all people," as she is again called by Jesus γύναι and receives from the cross "a son," the new redeemed human community (19:26-30).

5. The Phrase: οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4b)

The second part of Jesus' response to his mother: οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4b) is obscure and difficult to interpret. Considering the above-mentioned wedding context with the good wine in overflowing jars, Jesus' words raise questions as to their meaning. Can this phrase οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4b) be understood in the sense that the time for miracle-working has not yet come?⁴⁵ Such an understanding is challenged by the fact that Jesus actually performs a miracle-sign, even though, it seems that he had rejected the suggestion of his mother. The words of Jesus, and particularly the specific use of ἡ ὥρα, highlights that John did not use the term as a simple time-indication,⁴⁶ but in light of the wider OT context. How then, do the OT's af-

e.g., Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 334–335; Olsson, *Structure and Meaning*, 112; Zumstein, *L'Évangile*, I, 94; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium*, 60; Serra, *Le nozze*, 300; Vanni, *Dal Quattro Vangelo*, 117–118; Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique," 163; Caba, *Teología joanea*, 115.

⁴⁴ According to Raymond F. Collins ("Cana. [Jn 2:1-12]," 86) the similarity of language between the scene of the Passion (19:25-27) and the interpretative phrases in 2.3b-4 provides a clear indication that the evangelist is already pointing his readers towards the crucifixion-exaltation within the story of water becoming wine. Several authors, e.g., Brown, *The Gospel*, I, 107–109; Ugo Vanni (*Dal Quattro Vangelo*, 115–146), Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto (*Il Vangelo*, 139) maintain that the role of Mary, the Mother of Jesus called "γύναι" in the narrative of Cana (2:4) is clearly perceived in the scene under the cross (19:25-27) and in the Apocalypse (Rev 12:1-6). Her mission and role is uniquely great and indispensable, connected in continuity from Cana to the life of the Church where she assumes the role of a bride, is the figure of the Church, the model of the community of the new covenant. There is described again as "γύναι" and "σημεῖον μέγα" (Rev 12:1).

⁴⁵ For further details regarding the translation of this verse, see Rhodes, "What do you want from me?," 445–447; Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique," 157–167

⁴⁶ Although the term "ὥρα" is frequently used in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 21x; Mark 17x; Luke 17x); it is only in John (38x) that it assumes a particular meaning for the importance of the themes that are closely linked to it. Mathew and Mark refer, for example, to the "hour" during the agony in the garden of Gethse-

firmations reinforce the references to the “hour” in John’s Gospel? A brief survey of the word ὥρα and the main eschatological themes in the OT; particularly in the book of Daniel; may be significant for the Johannine concept of time and its theological interpretations.

5.1. Eschatological Time in the Prophetic Announcements

The Old Testament uses several words or expressions to denote an eschatological time, for example, *בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים*, *קֵץ מוֹעֵד*, and *עֵת*. However, authors are of the common opinion that the Hebrew use of *עֵת* is best translated by the Greek noun ὥρα. This word, *עֵת*, is used frequently in the Old Testament,⁴⁷ and in all cases its connotation is linked to the temporal dimension; which, in most cases, is translated as “time.” It is true that it does not have the same theological density as “the hour” of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, but it expresses a common temporal aspect and the expectation of God’s intervention to inaugurate a new era for His people. This temporal dimension of the OT is especially developed in the announcements of the prophets; and especially during the suffering of the people of Israel during the Exile. Thus, the “time of distress” (*עֵת צָרָה*) indicates the time of the judgment of God (Jer 30:7), because of the disobedience of the people. Through the prophets, God promises a time of consolation. Although Israel experiences a sorrowful time of God’s wrath, they too will experience his deliverance *in this time*. Yahweh will be their God, and they will be his people (Jer 30:24-31).⁴⁸ This indication of time is connected to the “eschaton,” which

mane when Jesus reveals his hour as the time when the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners (Matt 26:45; Mark 14:41), as “your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). In the Fourth Gospel the “hour” is in close relation to Jesus’ “lifting up,” his “exaltation” and his “glorification.” For the complex discussion concerning the relationship between John and the Synoptics see, e.g., Denaux, *John and the Synoptics*.

⁴⁷ The term *עֵת* appears 296 times in the books of the OT. We highlight the books in which this word is most frequent: in Qohelet (40 times), Jeremiah (36 times), Psalms (22 times), Deuteronomy (18 times), Ezekiel (18 times), Daniel and 2 Chronicles (16 times), 2 Kings and Isaiah (11 times); Genesis and Judges and Job (10 times) and in 1 Chronicles (9 times). Cf. Kronholm, “*עֵת*,” 467. The references to the noun ὥρα occur 53 times in the books of the OT (LXX). It is referred to 13 times in Daniel (9 of which are clearly eschatological). Other non-eschatological uses of the term: in Job (7 times), 2 Kings (5 times) and Exodus (5 times). Apart from Daniel, the word ὥρα appears in the prophets only in Hos 2:9; Zech 10:1; Isa 52:7. The first two instances refer to the “hour” of corn and rain; the latter refers to the “hour” of the blooming of the mountains as an image that denotes the coming salvation of Yahweh. The rest of the 23 uses are scattered throughout the OT books, and most of them are not used in an eschatological sense (1 time in Numbers, Leviticus, Esther, Nehemiah, Ruth, Joshua, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Isaiah, Hosea, Zechariah, Psalms; 2 times in Ezra, 1 Kings; 3 times in Genesis; and 4 times in Deuteronomy).

⁴⁸ The “time of distress” depicts Israel’s eschatological hardships, and results in a time of eschatological blessings: namely, the salvation of Israel and the reign of David’s descendant (Jer 30:7-9). Isaiah refer to the time of distress as the “second Exodus” and they use the image of a woman in labor (Isa 26:16-17; 66:7-9). This image conveys the notion that suffering is integral to deliverance. Distress is God’s way of bringing about new life. Daniel 12:1-2 similarly shows that the resurrection to new life follows distress and persecution.

implies both judgment and future salvation: that is, in the time established by God in history, the reality of his people will be transformed. In this “eschaton” – “in this time” (בְּעֵת הַהִיא) – God will save his people; establishing peace, renewing his covenant and bringing forgiveness of their sins. Considered within the broader context, the motif of time can be understood as an apocalyptic expression of “the day of Yahweh” (יוֹם יְהוָה) which was utilized in the prophetic and apocalyptic proclamation to announce the coming of the Messiah as a powerful and awe-inspiring historical and eschatological event (e.g. Isa 13:6; Joel 3:4; Amos 5:18-20).⁴⁹

5.2. Eschatological ὥρα in the Book of Daniel

In line with this use of eschatological “time,” the Greek version of the book of Daniel, considered a biblical apocalypse, translates the Hebrew word עֵת with ὥρα; which refers to a future moment in history (8:17-19; 11:35.40.45; 12:1).⁵⁰ More specifically, it places the emphasis of the word ὥρα on an eschatological time (12:1.4); namely, “the hour of the end,” “the time of distress” (12:1; cf. Jer 30:7). In the account of the visions of Daniel, it is in this eschatological “hour” that God’s final adversary will stand in opposition to Him. He will destroy the sanctuary (8:11-13.24; 9:26; cf. 12:11), persecute God’s people (8:25; 11:35.41), oppose the Prince of princes (8:25; 9:26-27) and will exalt himself as god (8:11.25; 11:36). However, he will be defeated and his power will come to the end without any human intervention (8:25; 11:45). His defeat will evidently be definitive and irreversible (7:26) and will take place within the period of the “hour.” The coming of the Son of Man (7:13-14) or Michael (12:1) will establish God’s kingdom forever (7:14.18.22.27) and will accomplish the eschatological resurrection of the dead (12:2; cf. Is 26:19): some to eternal life and others to eternal disgrace.⁵¹ This end-time period not only implicates judgment, persecution, and the defeat of God’s final opponent, since the Messiah will ap-

⁴⁹ For further investigation on these expressions, see Kronholm, “עֵת,” 471–482 and Zimmermann, *Christologie*, 298, 519–520.

⁵⁰ For a detailed study of the of Johannine use of the *Danielic Hour*, see the comprehensive research of Stefanos Mihalios (*The Danielic Eschatological Hour*).

⁵¹ In chapter 5, Jesus’s discourse on judgment and resurrection-life explicitly connects the hour to Danielic themes, thus directing the reader to view the coming hour in connection to the end-time prophecies. Jesus associates himself with the Son of Man (5:27) who has been given authority to judge (5:22.27) and to give eternal life (5:24); who should receive honor as the Father (5:23); and will bring about the resurrection from the dead (5:25.28-29). All these are characteristically Danielic themes (Dan 7:13-14; 12:1-2). The association of the hour with the above allusions and themes from Daniel shows that John perceives the hour to be the eschatological moment when the Danielic Son of Man will exercise judgment, give spiritual life, and resurrect the dead from their graves. Cf., Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour*, 171–172.

pear; but it will bring new life and thus, inaugurate ἡ ὥρα τῆς συντελείας (11:40.45), which is a new epoch (9:25-26).⁵²

The Danielic concept of the eschatological hour is picked up in early Judaism. This is evident in the Jewish literature which alludes to the Danielic “hour,” to “the time of the end,” to “judgement” and “resurrection.” Therefore, within the Jewish thoughts, there is an anticipation of the fulfillment of the Danielic eschatological hour. In some cases, there is even an inaugurated notion of this eschatological era: *already-and-not-yet fulfillment*. This use of the hour, in some parts of Jewish literature, illustrates that the connection between the ὥρα and other Danielic eschatological themes was familiar to the Jews, and therefore, the similar use of ὥρα by John, especially in relation to the themes of glory; resurrection and life; judgment and persecution; would not be perceived as unusual.⁵³

5.3. Duality of the “Hour” in the Gospel of John

The large number of scholars have recognized the presence of eschatological language in the writings of John. They agree that the author clearly expresses a duality of the hour which is *already, but not yet* realized.⁵⁴ The evangelist deepens and refines this notion by showing that the prophecies are reaching their fulfillment in Jesus. He evidently perceives that Jesus is the messianic figure like the “Son of Man,” ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (Dan 7:13), a title which is frequently used in the Fourth Gospel, along with the simple notion of the “Coming One,” ὁ ἐρχόμενος.⁵⁵ His coming already inaugurates the hour of fulfillment, the hour of realization of all the eschatological expectations announced by the prophets. The realization of God’s plans concerning His special intervention and His saving activity is clearly visible in this eschatological motif throughout the Gospel and the Letters of John. Here this apocalyptic horizon becomes evident in the use of the adjective ἔσχατος that is closely connected with the prophetic announcements of the “hour” and of the “day of Yahweh.” In the Letters of John, the “last hour” (ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν) is indicated by the coming of the so-called: “antichrist” ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται (1 John 2:18^{x2}; cf. 2 John 1:7).⁵⁶ In the Gospel, ἔσχατος is linked with ἡμέρα in the frequent expression ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ

⁵² “The hour” is generally that of the time of the end (Dan 11:40.45) and is expressed through the noun *sunteleia*, pointing to the end of time; end of the age; “the moment” of the final fulfillment and of completion (Dan 12:4). Cf. Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour*, 35–36; de La Potterie, *Maria*, 205; Simoens, *Évangile selon Jean*, 84; Caba, *Teología joanea*, 117.

⁵³ Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour*, 78.

⁵⁴ John’s eschatology has become the locus for much discussion and profound studies. See especially Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, I–III; Frey, *Die Herrlichkeit*; Thyen, *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, 512–527; Zimmermann, “Eschatology and Time,” 292–310.

⁵⁵ There is a frequent use of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the Gospel of John (1:51; 3:13–14; 6:27.53.62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23.34^{x2}; 13:31). Cf. Zimmermann, “Eschatology and Time,” 292.

⁵⁶ Frey, “Eschatology,” 663–665, 680–681.

ἡμέρα and is directly associated with the final resurrection and judgment (12:48). Jesus announces several times that he himself will “raise up” believers ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ (6:39.40.44.54; 11:24). Simultaneously, however, Jesus corrects Martha’s expectation that her brother would be resurrected “in the resurrection on the last day” (11:24-25). Faced with the death of Lazarus, Jesus reveals the fact that the resurrection does not happen only at the end of time, but is realized in the encounter with him here and now. This is expressed explicitly in the “I am” of Jesus who declares: “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). This revelation not only indicates a future event, but also a reality that is already happening concretely now.⁵⁷

The meaning of the hour in John is particularly significant and stated in all of his writings (John 2:4; 4:21.23; 5:25.28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23.27; 13:1; 16:2.4.21.25.32; 17:1; 1 John 2:18^{x2}; Rev 3:3.10; 14:7.15). The hour is directly associated with the glory of Jesus and of the Father (2:11; 17:1); worshiping the Father in Spirit and Truth (4:23-24); the judgment and the resurrection (5:25); the lifting up and glorification of Jesus as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (12:23), the sufferings of the disciples (16:2.25.32); and “it is the last hour” ἐσχάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐστίν (1 John 2:18^{x2}); it is the hour of the second coming of Jesus (Rev 3:3) of trial and of judgment (Rev 3:10; 14:7.15; 18:10.17.19).⁵⁸

In his Gospel, John indicates that while on the one hand, the hour is still to come in the future; on the other hand, that this hour has already come and it is here. Among the passages that speak of the “hour,” he specifies that *the hour has not come* (2:4; 4:21.23; 5:25.28-29; 7:30; 8:20), that *the hour is coming* (16:2.25.32), and that *the hour has come* (12:23.27; 13:1; 17:1).⁵⁹ Other statements offer this *not yet* but *coming* (4:21; 5:28) in a tension-filled pairing with *already now* (4:23; 5:25; cf. 16:32). These descriptions of the hour signify that the evangelist viewed the eschatological era as having been inaugurated with Jesus, yet still awaiting its consummation in the future.⁶⁰ As indicated above, in the account at Cana, at the very outset of Jesus’ public ministry the evangelist links the hour with various biblical images echoing the fulfillment of eschatological expectations in the Old Testament: the third day, the wedding, the abundance of good wine and, in particular, the “sign” of Jesus which is called “the beginning of signs” and linked to the revelation of the glory of Jesus which stimulates the faith of his disciples (2:11). How, then, can one understand the words of Jesus: οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4)?

There is an intriguing disagreement within current scholarship regarding these words of Jesus; since, from the textual-critical point of view, this text proposes two alternative readings: *negative*; “my hour has not yet come”; or *interrogative*; “has not my hour come?” For this reason, throughout the years, there has been much schol-

⁵⁷ Zimmermann, “Eschatology and Time,” 299.

⁵⁸ Frey, “Eschatology,” 674–676.

⁵⁹ Vistar, *The Cross-and-Resurrection*, 81–82.

⁶⁰ de La Potterie, *Maria*, 205; Zimmerman, “Eschatology and time,” 298.

arly controversy concerning the translation of this phrase. Most scholars prefer to render the translation as a denial: “my hour has not yet come.”⁶¹ They agree that here the evangelist announces *the hour of Jesus which has not yet come* (2:4) for the first time, because it is immediately bound with Jesus’ being lifted up on the cross as an allusion to his death. It is true that the death of Jesus is also *the hour* when “the Son of Man is glorified” (cf. 12:23.27.31-32; 13:31f; 17:1), and when he departs from the world to the Father (13:1). However, a significant number of scholars, on the contrary, argue that if *the hour* refers *only* to the exaltation and glorification of Jesus on the cross, it would mean that it is *only* the hour of his death which brings about the revelation of his glory.⁶² In fact, the evangelist points out explicitly that Jesus has already revealed his glory through his incarnation (1:14) and by the sign performed at Cana (2:11) at the very beginning of his public ministry. In addition, according to these exegetes, the negative reading of this statement contradicts the fact that Jesus acts positively on the request of his mother. Consequently, the reading of Jesus’ words οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου as a question better guarantees the overall coherence of the story in its various connections.⁶³ These scholars also suggest that the interrogative form is better fitted to the context of the whole Gospel than an affirmation.⁶⁴ Furthermore, they argue that the patristic tradition chose to translate this sentence as a question of Jesus, indicating the hour of his adulthood and at the beginning of his public ministry.⁶⁵

61 This formulation is supported by the most numerous and authoritative manuscripts and the principle of *difficilior lectio potior* is suggested as applicable to the text. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 32. There are various additional reasons for this: Some scholars, considering the indicative present mood of the verb ἤκει, prefer to render the translation as a negative statement; some others indicate that this reference to ὥρα (2:4) should be understood in the same way as 7:30 and 8:20 because of the adverb οὐπω. Among the many biblical scholars who translate Jesus’ phrase as a negative statement are: Keener, *The Gospel*, 507; Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 121; Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 101; Zumstein, *L’Évangile*, I, 97; Frey, *Eschatologie*, II, 218; Ferraro, *L’“ora” di Cristo*, 113; Barrett, *The Gospel*, 191; Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 156; Serra, *Le nozze*, 286–288.

62 For several reasons and arguments against this position, see Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 332–336.

63 Vanhoye, “Interrogation johannique,” 160.

64 Yves Simoens (*Évangile selon Jean*, 84) and José Caba (*Teología joanea*, 117) propose the translation: “Do you think that I don’t know that my hour is already coming?” Vanhoye (“Interrogation johannique,” 164, 167) proposes that Jesus’ double question may be paraphrased: “Woman what is the nature of our relationship? Has my hour not yet come?” Tarcisio Stramare (“La risposta di Gesù,” 179–192) suggests that in the given context, the correct translation would be: “Ciò che è mio è tuo. Donna, è giunta la mia ora!” Though this translation of Stramare contradicts the majority of the translations, it is grammatically correct and fits well into the context.

65 In the patristic tradition, the question of Jesus is a reference to his human maturity, to the time of autonomy, when one has finished the period of being subjected to maternal care. Some of the Fathers, e.g., Tatian the Syrian (c. 120 – c. 180), Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373) Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395); Theodore the Interpreter, bishop of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428), point to Jesus as supremely autonomous in relation to time for whom *the hour* to act is constantly open and knows no barriers or limits. Cf. Collins, “Cana (Jn. 2:1–12),” 85; Serra, *Le nozze*, 281–282.

In this line, Albert Vanhoye has carried out a precise philosophical study on this phrase, οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου, to demonstrate in a rather convincing way that the phrase must be read as a question, so that Jesus' answer would take this form: "Has not my hour come?"⁶⁶ From the syntactical-literary point of view, interrogation is both possible and reasonable.⁶⁷ Furthermore, according to Vanhoye, a double question is characteristic of the Fourth Gospel⁶⁸ and so it could be the case also for Jesus' answer here (2:4). Besides, these words of Jesus pointing to his hour have the characteristic Johannine touch: the end illuminates the beginning and the beginning illuminates the end. The evangelist describes the whole life and mission of Jesus as sealed by *the hour* and therefore there is no need to wait only for the last events of Jesus' life; his hour shines in all its glory from the moment of his Incarnation. His hour assumes its glorious weight also at Cana, where Jesus manifests his glory and the disciples believe in him (2:11).⁶⁹

At Cana it is *the hour* of Jesus' messianic manifestation, of the one whom Israel had been waiting since the time of the prophets. The entire Johannine narrative is dominated by this hour, the decisive time in the two stages of Jesus' work: the one linked with his ministry; the other with his glorification in which the evangelist sees a unit. It begins "now" and continues throughout Jesus' public life until reaching its total fulfillment in the mystery of his Cross and Resurrection.⁷⁰ So, *the hour* of the end, indicated here at the beginning, is the inauguration of the apocalyptic hour *coming to its fulfilment*. At Cana it serves as a *prelude* to the hour of Jesus' glorification and already points to *the fulfilment of the Scripture* (19:28) and Jesus' triumphant last word from the cross, τετέλεσται (19:30), to his Resurrection on the "third day," to the new messianic wedding between the divine Bridegroom and his redeemed people.

⁶⁶ Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique," 157–167; Among the other biblical scholars who take the interrogative reading are: Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 334; de La Potterie, *Maria*, 205; Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1-12)," 79–95; Panimolle, *Lettura*, I, 214; Stramare, "La risposta di Gesù," 94–96; Caba, *Teología joanea*, 116; Simoens, *Évangile selon Jean*, 84; Van der Merwe, "ΩΠΑ," 260.

⁶⁷ One of the reasons given by Vanhoye ("Interrogation johannique," 160) is that from the syntactical-literary point of view, the interrogative reading is possible because the adverb οὐπω is not accompanied by any conjunctive particle and is in an independent and autonomous position: οὐπω ἦκει. In all of its other eleven occurrences in the Fourth Gospel it is combined: οὐπω γάρ (3:24; 7:39, 20:17); οὐπω δέ (11:30); καὶ οὐπω (6:17), ὅτι οὐπω (8:20) or it is inserted in the sentence itself (6:6.8.30.39; 8:57). The same word οὐπω is used to indicate an interrogative sentence, e.g., in Mark 8:17; Matt 16:9. Cf., Serra, *Le nozze*, 284–285, Caba, *Teología joanea*, 116.

⁶⁸ John 1:21; 3:4; 4:11-12.27; 6:30.42.47; 8:46; 9:19.26.27; 11:56; 12:27.34; 20:15.

⁶⁹ Simoens, *Évangile selon Jean*, 84; Caba, *Teología joanea*, 117.

⁷⁰ de La Potterie, *Maria*, 206; Dennis, *Jesus' Death*, 166–167.

6. The Sign

The inauguration of a new time is further confirmed by the evangelist as he indicates that Jesus' action at Cana was τὸ σημεῖον, and the revelation of Jesus' glory. Throughout the Gospel, σημεῖα are related to persuade the reader of Jesus' identity as the expected divine Messiah of Israel, describing his mission as true life-giver.⁷¹ The concept of sign (סֵמָּה, שֵׁמַיָּה) is familiar in the OT, where it is used for events that demonstrate the truth of God's word as both proclaimed through his prophet (1 Sam 10:1-9) and authenticating the prophet himself (Exod 3:12; 4:1-9). This word evokes, above all, images of the powerful acts of God in the Exodus: actions that lead to the liberation of his people and to the recognition that only Yahweh is the true and living God (Exod 3:12; 6:7; 10:2; 12:12; Ezek 12:15.16.20; Jer 51:29). At the same time, σημεῖον indicates an eschatological reality (Isa 7:10-16), viewing the fulfillment of all prophetically foreseen events *as the sign itself*. Isaiah foresees that a rod out of the stem of Jesse will be raised to gather the scattered remnant of Judah from all four corners of the earth (Isa 11:1-12; 62:10). This theme culminates in, and is linked to, the final fulfillment of all God's promises concerning the gathering of his scattered people, both Jews and Gentiles, as well as showing God's glory to all the nations (Isa 66:19).⁷²

The first sign at Cana is not only the first (πρῶτος) in a series, but is explicitly named ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων: *the beginning of signs* (ἀρχή); the opening act of a much larger work; the foundation and pattern of everything that follows.⁷³ It is considered, therefore, as the "prototypical sign" of Jesus or the "foundation" and "model" of all that follows; or as the "hermeneutical key" and the "paradigm" to discover the sig-

⁷¹ Throughout the Gospel, every miracle of Jesus is termed as τὸ σημεῖον and not as δύναμις "miracle," or "act of power." The noun σημεῖον occurs seventeen times in the Fourth Gospel: it appears 16 times in the first part of the Gospel (2:11.18.23; 3:2; 4:48.54; 6:2.14.26.30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18.37) and only once in the second part (John 20:30). The reference to σημεῖα as the purpose of the book (20:30-31) indicates the importance and centrality of the word.

⁷² In the Septuagint, translation of the term σημεῖον occurs 125 times. The majority of occurrences are in the Pentateuch and in the prophetic literature. For the broader investigation of the use of the term in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Greco-Roman world Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 18–45, Beasley-Murray, *John*, 33.

⁷³ Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 50; Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1-12)," 89; Deolito V. Vistar Jr., in his recent dissertation (*The Cross-and-Resurrection*) argues that the first "sign" is closely connected not only with the eight major signs recounted in the Gospel, but is best understood as introducing and anticipating Jesus' ministry as whole. Jesus' mission includes his miracles (called "signs"), his words and other revelatory acts – such as, for example, his cleansing of the temple (2:13-22); his triumphal entry to Jerusalem (12:1-8); the washing of the disciples' feet (13:1-17) – which equally reveal his true identity and role as the Messiah and the Son of God: the Revealer of the Father. Based on this broad meaning of "the sign," the author further argues that the cross-and-resurrection is the supreme "sign." All of the previous signs lead to the "sign" *par excellence*; where Jesus, in the highest way, reveals who He is, fulfills all the prophesies of the Scriptures, and accomplishes the salvation of the world.

nificant meaning for all of the other signs of Jesus.⁷⁴ This indication of a symbolic, prophetic meaning for the sign is reinforced by the statement that Jesus “revealed his glory” (2:11). By mentioning the “glory,” the reader is taken back to the prologue of the Gospel where they are informed that glory consists in the contemplation of the Word made flesh, and dwelling among us: καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ. John explains this glory in terms of Jesus’ divine identity: δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας (1:14).⁷⁵ In the Cana narrative, the explicit link between sign and glory (2:11) is used to highlight the glory that identifies the Son as the unique, divine representative of the Father. It is the glory of the Son of God who possesses the same glory as the Father. That is why the sign of Jesus at Cana, linked to the revelation of his divine glory, once again indicates the fulfillment of God’s promises and the inauguration of his salvific acts effected through the Son. Here, the particular phrase ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων directs attention to the chain of Jesus’ salvific “signs” and “works” portrayed throughout the entire narrative.⁷⁶ Hence, the subsequent reference to *the sign* (2:18), which takes place in the context of the purification of the temple (2:13-22) indicates the destruction and reconstruction of the temple ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις. The glory of Jesus, revealed in his death and resurrection, is the ultimate, the climatic sign in the Gospel or rather, *the sign of signs*.⁷⁷

Conclusion

In the account of the wedding feast at Cana (2:1-11) the evangelist, referring to Jesus’ ὥρα, picks up many biblical images, themes and theology, presenting Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah whose earthly mission is the fulfillment of all Scriptural announcements. In this context the evangelist does not refer to only one situation described in the text (2:1-11), but links the “hour” with other textual references such as “the third day,” “the wedding,” “the bridegroom,” the abundance of “good wine,” the “beginning of signs,” and the “glory” of Jesus which stimulates the disciples’ faith-response. All of these themes express and summarize the real meaning of

⁷⁴ Frey, “From the *Sēmeia* Narratives,” 217; Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 50. Zumstein, *L’Évangile*, I, 94; Köstenberger, *John*, 99.

⁷⁵ The phrase “full of grace and truth” is often associated with the revelation of God who is “full of mercy and truth,” by giving the Law and making the Covenant through Moses (Exod 33:18.22; 34:6). The Sinai theophany becomes the archetypal-theophanic model for articulating the significance of the revelation of the incarnate Word, now embodied in Jesus, who himself is the fullness of grace and truth (John 1:14).

⁷⁶ Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, I, 340.

⁷⁷ Several authors explicitly go beyond the seven narratives usually linked with the term σημεῖον and consider the death and resurrection of Jesus the greatest and the climatic sign. See, e.g., Vistar, *The Cross-and-Resurrection*, 191–253; Salier, *The Rhetorical*, 142–172; Straub, *Kritische Theologie*, 72, 76; Collins, “Cana (Jn. 2:1-12),” 89.

the entire event (2:1-11) and strongly suggest that the episode at Cana should be read within the framework of Jesus' whole ministry and its ultimate effects of the eschatological salvation fulfilled in his death and resurrection.⁷⁸ By means of this information the evangelist portrays the concept of *Jesus' hour* and provides the background for the interpretation of Jesus' words: οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4). There is only one "hour" of Jesus, in the fullest theological sense of the word, which sums up all other temporal terminologies by looking towards the supreme act of Jesus' self-revelation on the cross. It is *the hour* of fulfillment; *his hour par excellence*: the hour of his exaltation on the cross when he fulfills all the prophecies of the Scriptures and accomplishes the salvation of the world.

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⁷⁸ Frey, "From the *Sêmeia* Narratives," 221–222; Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 156.

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