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**The TMgè e,,mi Sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel:
The Wedding of John's Christology and Soteriology**

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Introduction

The Fourth Gospel rings with the words $\epsilon, \mu\iota$ unlike any other in the New Testament. That is not to say that $\epsilon, \mu\iota$ does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, for there are several such occurrences (See Table 1 which includes only the strict formulation; instances in which the word order is reversed or interrupted by other words are not included). However, John makes far more use of this type of statement than do the other New Testament writers. This suggests that careful consideration of this phrase's meaning is important.

Table 1. Frequency of $\epsilon, \mu\iota$ statements in the New Testament

Text	Total	Matt.	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Apoc.	Other
TR*	50	5	3	4	24	7	7	0
Bzy*	49	5	3	4	24	7	6 [†]	0
NA26*	48	5	3	4	24	7	5 [‡]	0

* TR= Textus Receptus, Stephens 1550/Scrivner 1894; Bzy= the Byzantine/Majority Text and NA26 = Nestle Aland # 26/UBS 3rd Ed.

† $\epsilon, \mu\iota$ is omitted in Apoc. 22:13.

‡ $\epsilon, \mu\iota$ is bracketed in Apoc. 21:6 (and thus included in this count) and omitted in 1:11 and 22:13.

Estimation of the theological importance of these words in themselves in the Fourth Gospel varies widely. Leon Morris recognizes that these words convey the "style of deity" almost every time they are spoken (1971, 273 and passim). K.L. McKay desires instead to point out "the normality of the Greek in all such passages, and the unlikelihood of the words *ego eimi* being intended to suggest any special significance . . . (1996, 302)." While these two stand at opposite extremes of the debate, there are as many mediating positions as there are commentators.

However, whether the significance is in the words themselves or the predicates with which they are linked explicitly and implicitly, scholars are united in their estimation of the theological importance of these statements. J.C. Coetzee writes, "In the Gospel they occur as a wonderful compendium of the overflowing richness of God's grace given to us in Jesus Christ, both the Word and the Good Shepherd (1986, 170)." Morris calls them "a significant pointer to what John is telling us about the person of Jesus

(1989, 107-108)." And even McKay says "These statements give important insights into the identity and work of Jesus . . . (1996, 302)."

This paper's exploration of these statements shall be organized around Brown's classification of them into three types of usage. First there are instances of the $\mu\gamma\grave{\epsilon}\ \epsilon,\mu\iota$ formula in which there are no expressed predicates. These are called instances of the "absolute use" of $\mu\gamma\grave{\epsilon}\ \epsilon,\mu\iota$. Secondly, there are those instances when the predicate is implied, although not expressed. Typically these instances occur when someone is being sought out and the speaker replies "I am", i.e., "I am the person for whom you are looking" or "I am a person you know." Thirdly, there are instances when the predicate is explicitly stated. These are by far the most common type of use in John (1966, 1:533-534). For each type of use this paper will examine possible sources for such sayings in both Biblical and non-Biblical sources, the instances of each use in the Gospel, and the significance of each type of usage.

Type I: The Absolute Use

One of the most striking usages of the $\mu\gamma\grave{\epsilon}\ \epsilon,\mu\iota$ formula in the Fourth Gospel is the absolute use. It confronts the reader as something unusual because of its sheer awkwardness. Even Jesus' hearers were struck by the abrupt ending of these sayings.¹ Brown writes "Since the usage goes far beyond ordinary parlance, all recognize that the absolute *ego eimi* has a special revelatory function in John (1966, 1:533)."

Provenance

When searching for a precedent for an unusual Johannine turn of phrase, the three "usual suspects" are Hellenistic and Gnostic writings; the Old Testament, both in Hebrew and Greek; and first century Palestinian Judaism. Scholars agree that there does not seem to be any precedent for the absolute use in Hellenistic literature (Barrett 1978, 342; Brown 1966, 1:535; McArthur 1982, 80; Schnackenburg 1980, 84; DJG s.v. "I Am Sayings").

¹ C.f. John 8:25

However, the Old Testament is replete with such statements, some of which are remarkably parallel to Jesus' words. Readers of the English versions immediately think of Exodus 3:14, where God reveals his name to Moses and instructs him to tell the Israelites that "I AM" sent him. However equating the divine name in that instance with the Greek phrase $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota$ is problematic since the LXX translates "I am" as $\theta\ \epsilon\nu$. That does not mean, however, that the Old Testament lacks instances in which $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota$ is used as the divine name. Such a use is especially prevalent in Deutero-Isaiah (cf. 41:4; 43:10, 25; 48:12; and 51:12) where the phrase *ANI HU* (translated $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota$ in the LXX) appears to be a "studied avoidance of the Name revealed in Ex 3:14 (Bernard 1929, 1:cxxi)." Particularly important is Isa 43:10 where God says ". . . $\text{\textit{Ina gn\u00e9 te ka\u00b4 pistel\u00e9shte ka\u00b4 sun\u00c4te \u00f4ti \u00e9\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota.$ " The parallels between this verse and the absolute use in John (especially 8:28) have not been lost on most commentators (Barrett 1978, 342; Brown 1966, 1:536; Coetzee, 1986 *passim*²; Morris 1971, 473 n 116; Stauffer 1960, 174-194).

Palestinian Judaism continues this pattern of usage. McArthur calls the absolute use of $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota$ a "code language" used by later rabbinic literature to identify YHWH (1982, 80). The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels cites 1 Enoch 108:12, Jubilees 24:22 and Philo's commentary on Exodus 3:14 as examples of the use of "I am" as a "code name for Yahweh" in post-biblical Judaism (sv. "I am sayings").

Instances

In John 8:24 Jesus tells the Jews ". . . $\text{\textit{\u0394\u00b9 n g\u00b4 r m\u00c4 pistel\u00e9shte \u00f4ti \u00e9\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota, \u00a3poqane\u00b4sqe \u00f4n taj j mart\u00b4ais \u00f4m\u00e9 n.$ " There is no predicate expressed in this verse, nor is there one that is easily supplied from the context. Even the Jews who are listening are confused by the statement and ask " $\text{\textit{S\u00c4 t.j e;}}$ ". Jesus makes a similar statement in 13:19 when, after washing the disciples' feet, he tells them " $\text{\textit{\u00a3p \u00c4rti l \u00e9gw \u00f4m\u00b4n pr\u00f4 to\u00c4 gen\u00e9sqai, \u00f4na pistel\u00e9shte \u00f4tan g\u00e9sbhtai \u00f4ti \u00e9\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota.$ " The statement in 8:24 immediately follows another I am saying in which Jesus reveals he is from above, not from this world. Morris suggests that this provides a hint to the Jews question--that this statement calls for faith in the "very

² J.C. Coetzee writes an entire article documenting the parallels between Isaiah 42-43 and John 8-9. There is not space here to enter into a detailed discussion of his findings, but any complete exploration of the provenience of

highest estimate of Christ's Person (1971, 447)." Bultmann, on the other hand, notes that the Jews do not react at what would be a gross blasphemy if this phrase were understood to be a self-proclamation of Christ's divinity.³ Instead, Bultmann argues that the predicates of all the other I am statements should be supplied by the reader--that in effect Jesus was calling for the belief that he was everything he claimed to be (1971, 349).

In John 8:28 Jesus says, "'Otan ðyèshte tōn uñōn toà çnqrèpou, tōte gnèsesqe ōti 'gè e,mi." It is unclear whether or not a predicate can be supplied for this statement. Are we to supply "the Son of Man" from earlier in the verse as the implied predicate of 'gè e,mi? While that is a possible answer, the strength of the parallels between this construction and Isaiah 43:10 suggests instead that 'gè e,mi is used as the divine name *ANI HU*.

In John 8:58 Jesus says, "'Amñn çmñn I •gw ðmñn, prñn 'Abra | m genšsqai 'gè e,m..." Again the field is divided as to what significance should be assigned to this statement. McKay argues that no predicate is needed, since in this instance e,mi is not used as a linking verb here, but rather to express "I have been in existence (1996, 302)." Bultmann argues that this statement should not be understood as a claim by Jesus to be God for such a view understands 'gè e,mi as a Jewish formulation of the divine name and not as part of a proto-Gnostic revealer speech (1971, 327 n 5). Harner, however, examines the reaction to Jesus' statement and notices that it is the same as the reaction to Jesus' claim to unity with the Father in John 10:31. If the reactions are the same, Harner argues, the statements must be synonymous, if not in fact at least in function⁴ (Morris 1989, 124). Brodie notes that the difference between g.nomai and e,mi is also employed in the prologue to "distinguish the being of creatures from that of the Creator Word (1993, 336)." In the following verse the Jews attempt to stone Jesus, because either

these absolute I am sayings must consider his work.

³ Although his argument makes little sense since he writes "It is no more possible, here, than it was in 8:58 to resolve 'gè e,mi into 'I am the 'I am," and to take the statement as Jesus' assertion of his identity with God." But linked as it is with 8:58, one must point out that the Jews did see this as blasphemy and did react accordingly in verse 59.

⁴ i.e., John uses these statements to accomplish the same function--to identify Jesus with the Father.

by claiming "supra-temporality" (*TDNT* s.v. $\epsilon, \mu\iota$) or by using God's name⁵, Jesus is blaspheming here (Smith 1999, 189).

Significance

McKay argues that exegetes should avoid giving too much significance to the $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ sayings because as the statement of the blind man in 9:9 indicates it was not an unusual construction (1996, 302). However, one cannot claim that the absolute use was common in Greek parlance. If any special significance can be given the words themselves it is in this usage. Given the correlation between $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ and *ANI HU* a strong case can be made that Jesus' words signal his appropriation of the Name of God Himself. Brown points out that Jesus bears the Father's name, a name the Father gave to him.⁶ What is that name? Philippians 2:9-11 indicates that the name the Father gave Christ was $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$, a name the LXX associates with the Divine Name YHWH. Brown writes, "It is quite possible that John thinks of *ego eimi* as the divine name given to Jesus (1966, 1:537)." Stauffer says that in the I AM formula Jesus says "where I am, there God is, there God lives and speaks, calls, asks, acts, decides, loves, chooses, forgives, rejects, suffers, dies. Nothing bolder can be said, or imagined (1960, 194)." The absolute use of $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ seems to indicate a profound Christological truth: Jesus rightly bears the Name of God.

Type II: The Implied Predicate

Provenance

The second type of $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ statements in John do not require a significant exploration of their provenance, for it appears from the gospel itself that the use of $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ for pure self-identification was not unusual. When the Jews were debating whether or not the man standing before them was really the same beggar who had been born blind or someone else, the man replied simply " $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$." (John 9:9). In

⁵ For Blasphemy in improper use of $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon, \mu\iota$ see Eze. 28:2,9 where the King of Tyre claims "I am [a] God." (*TDNT* s.v. $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon$)

his comments on 6:20 Barrett warns, "the fact that John can use ἡγὼ ἐμὶ as a simple self-identification should be borne in mind before elaborate theories based on occurrences of the words elsewhere are accepted (1978, 281)." It is a warning one should not take lightly.

Instances

In John 4:26 Jesus is speaking with the Samaritan woman who is expecting the Messiah. Jesus informs her, "Ἐγὼ ἐμὶ, ὃ ἰαλῆν σοι." Kysar suggests that perhaps this instance belongs with the statements which have explicit predicates (1993, 45) but this seems forced. To suggest that ὃ ἰαλῆν σοι is the predicate misses the fact that this phrase is used as an adjective qualifying the pronoun ἡγὼ, not as a predicate (i.e. "I am the one who is speaking to you" which would be an absurdly self-evident statement). Instead the predicate is supplied by the woman's expectations for the Messiah. Jesus was letting her know "I who am speaking to you am he whom you expect."⁷

In John 6 the disciples see Jesus walking on the water and are frightened. Jesus speaks the reassuring words "Ἐγὼ ἐμὶ: μή φοβεσθε (v 20)." Morris and Smith admit it was the natural thing for someone to say in self-identification (Morris 1971, 350; Smith 1999, 118). Likewise when approached by the guards in Gethsemane, Jesus twice says ἡγὼ ἐμὶ (18:5, 8), similarly by way of self-identification.

Significance

How much can be made of the fact that Jesus used ἡγὼ ἐμὶ as a means of self-identification? One must be careful not to make a theological mountain out of every molehill (especially since Jesus isn't the only one saying ἡγὼ ἐμὶ). But the fact remains that this construction appears with unusual frequency in the Fourth Gospel. One hesitates to go as far as to say "This use is evidenced throughout the gospel and bears no theological importance (*DJG* s.v. "I am sayings")." Scholars have also been quick to note

⁶ "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me. . ." (John 17:11 NRSV) cf. John 5:43; 10:25; 12:23-28; 17:6, 12, 26.

⁷ For the importance of this statement and Jesus' claim to be the Messiah see Freed, yyyy.

that the reaction of the hearers⁸ to these statements indicate they were no ordinary utterances (Morris 1989, 123, 125; Schnackenburg 1980, 80; Smith 1999, 330). There are at least hints here that Ἐγὼ εἰμι carries special significance to John.

Type III: Ἐγὼ εἰμι with an explicit predicate

Provenance

While it is difficult to find instances of non-Biblical examples of the absolute use, the Ἐγὼ εἰμι with explicit predicate is frequently found in Hellenistic sources. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament calls it "a slogan in [Hellenistic] religious propaganda. The most diverse saviours seek to win adherents with the claims made in I proclamations (s.v. Ἐγὼ)." Examples can be found in the Isis aertalogy, the Poimandres revelation in the Hermetic Corpus and in the 16th century Mandaean literature (Barrett 1978, 292; Bultmann 1971, 225 n 3; McArthur 1982, 81-81, 85; *TDNT* s.v. Ἐγὼ ; *DJG* s.v. "I am sayings"). The *TDNT* adds "Nor are such addresses confined to writing. Every street corner prophet or sectarian preacher sought to outbid his predecessors or competitors in impressive self-proclamation (s.v. Ἐγὼ)." The Greek world was well familiar with divine revealers speaking in I-formulae.

It is also not difficult to find this third type of Ἐγὼ εἰμι saying in the Old Testament. God is not the only one who speaks in I-statements⁹ but He frequently prefaces revelation with an I-statement.¹⁰ Furthermore, many of the images incorporated in the Johannine Ἐγὼ εἰμι statements have their roots in the Old Testament (c.f. Schnackenburg 1980, 85). However, it is difficult to find instances when the divine I statements are linked with this imagery. Schnackenburg suggests that when Jesus uses the Ἐγὼ εἰμι revelation formula he uses these images of salvation prophecy to indicate that these expectations have been fulfilled in the divine person of Jesus (1980, 85). He sums up his understanding of how these two sources contribute to the Ἐγὼ εἰμι statements of the Fourth Gospel in these words:

⁸ The disciples had a sudden epiphany in chapter 6 and the Guards fell back in fear in chapter 18.

⁹ C.f. 2 Samuel 11:5 where Bathsheba sends this message to David: 'Egè e.mi šn gastr' œcw.

¹⁰ C.f. Gen 15:1; Ex 3:6, 14, 15:26, 20:2; Hos 13:4, Isa 27:3, 43:11

In sum the self-presentation which is vital to a saying of the revealer, $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$, that is, in the absolute form was probably taken over from the revelation formula used by Yahweh in the Old Testament and the imagery too probably comes mainly from the Old Testament and Judaism, while the formal structure of the revealer's utterance was probably influenced by the soteriological type of discourse current in Eastern Hellenism. It is also possible that this source also influenced the choice of images . . . (1980, 86).

Instances

Fourteen times the words $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$ appear on the lips of Jesus. From these statements seven primary metaphors have been identified. In John 6:35, 41, 48 and 51 Jesus claims to be the bread of life which comes down from heaven. In 8:2 Jesus claims to be the light of the world. In John 10:7 and 9 Jesus claims to be the door for the sheep. In 10:11 and 14 the image is that of the Good or Beautiful Shepherd. In 11:25 he is the resurrection and the life. In 14:6 Jesus announces he is the way the truth and the life. And in 15:1 and 5 he claims to be the true vine. One instance of a type III $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$ statement from Jesus is omitted in these lists of seven primary metaphors--John 15:5 where Jesus says " $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota\ \delta\ \mu\alpha\tau\upsilon\rho\hat{\iota}\ \eta\ \pi\epsilon\rho\ \mu\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\alpha$." Furthermore there is one variation of the type III $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$ formula on the lips of someone other than Jesus when Pilate asks Jesus " $\mu\lambda\eta\tau\iota\ \mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon\ \iota\omicron\upsilon\delta\alpha\delta\omicron\jmath\ \epsilon,\mu\iota$;".

Significance

There is a marked contrast between the source of significance for the type I statements and these type III statements. Whereas the type I sayings draw their significance from the fact that only God rightly speaks in this way, many people speak in type III sayings, even people like Bathsheba and Pilate who are making no divine claims. The $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$ construction may be used by John to alert the reader to a significant insight, but the real significance for the type III sayings lies in the predicates themselves.

Brown states, "The $\mu\gamma\epsilon\epsilon,\mu\iota$ with a predicate does not reveal Jesus' essence but reflects his dealings with men (1966, 1:269)." This may be an overstatement, but it will serve as the starting point for this paper's investigation into the significance of the Type III predicates. How does Jesus as the bread,

the light, the door, the Good Shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life, and the true vine deal with humans?

Schnackenburg noticed that all seven metaphors relate to life. This connection is obvious in the metaphors of the bread of life; the resurrection and the life; and the way, truth and the life. When claiming to be the light of the world, Jesus adds ">xei tō fī j tĀj zwĀj." When describing himself as the door, Jesus points out that the others came to kill and destroy. However, Jesus says "'ḡè Āl qon ĩna zwĳn œcwsin ka' perissōn œcwsin." And in Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd he twice points out that he lays down his life on behalf of his sheep. Schanckenberg argues that Øp•r refers to the life of his sheep. And finally, when describing himself as the true vine Jesus repeatedly instructs his disciples to stay connected to the life-source by remaining in him. Schackenberg concludes "All the images, in other words, are interpreted as referring to the significance of Jesus Christ for believers, in terms of the basic soteriological formula: 'Whoever believes in me has eternal life' (cf. 3:16 and passim) (1980, 80; See also McArthur 1982, 88-89)."

Bultmann points out that these statements are more than just comparisons, but rather titles for Jesus. He writes:

For here [10:11] as in the statements about the bread of life and the light of the world (6:35; 8:12), we have a title and not a comparison. He *is* the good shepherd. Just as all the waters of earth point to the one living water, and as all bread on the earth points to the one bread of life, and as all daylight points to the light of the world, just as every earthly vine is contrasted with the 'true' vine, so too every shepherd in the world is contrasted with the 'good' shepherd (1971, 364).

Referring to 15:1 Bultmann writes "With the words ḡè e,mi the Revealer presents himself again as the object of the world's desire and longing (1971, 529)."

Both commentators see the significance of these sayings in their existential content. Whether they are understood as an answer to humanity's sinful condition or a fulfillment of their deepest longings, Jesus makes these statements because our very existence cries out for these things. So Smith writes:

. . . Jesus describes himself in familiar terms that designate basic and universal human needs or desires. While Jesus is the fulfillment of traditional messianic hopes in John, he is also the fulfillment of universal human necessities and longings (1999, 118).

Conclusion

Finally, one question remains: What is the primary significance of these statements as a whole? Several have suggested answers to this question. Some suggest they are to be read as statements of John's christology. Others look to soteriology. How are these to be understood?

G.M. Burge in his article on the "I am sayings" in the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels writes:

The principle theological contribution of the "I AM" sayings is therefore christological. It buttresses Jesus' divine status by showing that he can work, speak and act in the Father's stead. He is no mere human. He is the Word of God dwelling in human flesh. But as such, he is also the Father's emissary--and more--the "I AM" title he bears is simply one more of his many credentials (*DJG*, s.v. "I am sayings").

For those like Burge who see christology at the heart of the $\epsilon\mu\iota$ sayings of Jesus, the most important aspect of the formula is the connection between $\epsilon\mu\iota$ and *ANI HU*. In saying $\epsilon\mu\iota$ Jesus clearly claims to be God. Burge writes "In the many 'I AM' sayings Jesus is publicly applying the divine name of God--and God's authoritative presence--to himself. . . . For Judaism it is the most severe christological affirmation of all, leading audiences in the Gospel either to believe in Jesus or accuse him of blasphemy (*DJG*, s.v. "I am sayings")."

Jesus' relationship with the Father is just one aspect of the christological importance of $\epsilon\mu\iota$. Edwin D Freed reads the $\epsilon\mu\iota$ sayings as a claim by Jesus to be the Messiah. Freed points out that the first two occurrences of $\epsilon\mu\iota$ in the Fourth gospel are explicitly connected to Jesus' identity as the Messiah (1979, 288-291).¹¹ And, according to Freed, in 8:24 Jesus calls for faith that he is the Christ since the stated object of faith in the Fourth Gospel is faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1982, 163-164; cf John 20:31).

Others, like Brown as quoted above, point out that the predicates of the $\epsilon\mu\iota$ sayings deal more with Jesus' relationship with humanity than his essence (1966, 1:269). Scholars like Schnackenburg, McArthur and Bultmann look to the existential significance of the predicates, noting that their importance rises out of the hungers of the human experience. Schnackenburg traced the OT history

of the ἄγιος εἰς,mi predicates. He finds such images as "streams of living water, bread and wine in abundance, the fruitful vineyard, [and] the light of God's glory" in Old Testament prophecy but points out that these were not used to describe God or his messiah, but rather the promise of future salvation (1980, 85). Soteriology, not christology, seems to stand behind the predicates of the ἄγιος εἰς,mi sayings.

It appears that the significance of the ἄγιος εἰς,mi sayings lies not in its christology or its soteriology, but in the way the two are wed. The Type I usage points clearly to Jesus' relationship with the Father for the resurrection demonstrates that he was justified in using the divine name. Type III points to humanity's deepest longing--the longing for eternal life in the face of the certainty of death--and reaffirms God's promises of salvation. But no longer are the promises of salvation grounded in future events, but rather in a person. And that person is the eternal ἄγιος εἰς,mi. The ἄγιος εἰς,mi sayings teach us Jesus is one with the Father and Jesus is salvation.

¹¹ cf. John 1:20 where John the Baptist says 'Egē oũk εἰς,mi ὁ Χριστὸς and John 4:25.

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