A PERSPECTIVE ON JOHN 15:1-8

J C DE SMIDT

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is the interpretation of John 15:1-8. In striving to achieve this goal, perspectives offered by a combination of literary-critical, redaction-critical, historical-critical and text-immanent methods of exegesis as well as some findings derived from literary science have been used.

Existing research has identified the Johannine community as a possible and probable target group of John 15:1-8. In this paper I want to prove that this pericope contains a reflection of the historical situation of the Johannine community, namely the 'bitter conflict' between Jewish and gentile Christians and the synagogue during which the 'prayer opposing heretics' (birkat ha minim) played an important role. The evangelist uses the metaphor as a literary technique to portray inter alia the origin and the identity of the Johannine Jesus as well as the identity of a disciple of Jesus in his 'community theology'.

An important theme of the pericope is the conditions of discipleship: the call to abide (assimilate) in Jesus and to bear fruit in times of crisis. This call for assimilation must be viewed within the framework of the intense involvement of the Father and Jesus. This assimilation with God and Jesus forms the foundation of the ethical principles of the Johannine community.

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE EXPOSITION OF JOHN 15:1-8

The Gospel of John (FG hereafter) contains its own language (Greek) as well as its own world image. With a twentieth century world image, language and concept apparatus an effort must be made to establish the pivot point of John 15:1-8 (cf Deist 1984:130; u Rand 1980:43).

Research into methodological models for the interpretation of the FG reveals that viewpoints differ widely. In this research perspectives offered by an integration of methods are advocated in the interpretation of Jn 15:1-8. The methods effectively applied here are discourse analysis, the historical-critical, redaction-critical and literary-critical methods with the role of the Johannine church/community (community hereafter) as the basic component of the hermeneutical paradigm. A few findings derived from literary science are also mentioned (cf De Klerk and Schnell 1987:3).

The FG is probably the product of activities within the community. Tradi-
tional material was gathered by the author and presented in a specific situation to the community with its own theological and symbolic interpretation (cf De Smidt 1989:33). The early readers would have understood it (cf Du Rand 1990:52; Lombard 1989:59; 87:395).

In this article an effort is made to analyse Jn 15:1-8, to establish and name the mutual relationships without attempting to provide a complete exegesis by any means.

2 A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JN 15:1-8, THE MACRO CONTEXT AND FAREWELL DISCOURSES IN THE FG

2.1 A relationship between Jn 15:1-8 and the macro context of the FG

The FG is not a patchwork quilt consisting of discourses, signs, metaphors and narrative material from the Johannine traditions. The writer of the Gospel integrated his material in a very skilful way (Du Rand 1982:19; cf De Klerk and Schnell 1987:43). In the macro context of the FG Jn 15:1-8 occupies a key position.

The unifying line, which characterises the entire Gospel, serves as an example in this regard (Du Rand 1983:388). The identity of Jesus, the unity between Father and Son, the unity between Jesus and his disciples, faith in Jesus and the reinforcement of one's faith can be identified in just about every debate and event in the FG (De Klerk and Schnell 1987:278; Du Rand 1982:19,25). This unifying line and the aspects mentioned are integrated in a unique way in Jn 15:1-8. This will be outlined in the exegesis. Morris (1989:107,119) and Pamment (1985:118) both refer to the relationship between Jn 15:1-8 and the rest of the εγώ εἰμι-statements in the FG as well as the various metaphors (cf Jn 14:16; 6:56; Smalley 1983:90,91; O'Grady 1978:86; Hawkin 1975:208). Jn 15:1-8 therefore does not constitute an isolated portion of the FG. It forms part of the FG in a unique way.

2.2 A relationship between Jn 15:1-8 and the Farewell Discourses

Jn 15:1-8 is clearly part of the farewell discourses (Jn 13-17), placing emphasis on the unity and solidarity between Jesus and his own and on reassurance and bonding (Du Rand 1987:108, 109; Laney 1989:55.).

The perceptible breach between Jn 14 and 15, reflected in Jn 14:31, creates a literary problem with regard to the farewell discourses. The breach, which can be ascribed to chronological and topographical differences, has led researchers to deny the unity of the farewell discourses (Segovia 1982:115; Du Rand 1990:83). Various solutions were proposed (cf Du Rand 1990:84-86; Segovia 1982:116; Painter 1981:528; Behler 1965:133). Fierce criticism was expressed on these theories. One can not assume that the evangelist penned Jn 14:31 with the pur-
pose of continuing the discourse after a break. It is just as unlikely that Jn 15:1 could have been expressed while en route to the garden on the other side of the Cedron valley (cf Painter 1981:528; Schnackenburg 1975:100).

Painter is of the opinion that this possible contradiction (Jn 14:31) can be explained and the unity of the farewell discourses maintained on the basis of a reconstruction of the Johannine community. Such a reconstruction reveals that the FG contains various levels, which emanate from various periods in the history of the community. Different portions of the farewell discourses were written during different periods in the history of the community. The writer of the Gospel in this way provided the necessary teaching during times of crisis (Du Rand 1990:84; Painter 1981:527).

Researchers do not agree on the various phases during which the FG and the farewell discourses were written (cf Du Rand 1990:91). Moloney (1987:35) rightly comments on Jn 15 that ‘it is the result of a long literary and faith journey of a given community in the early church’.

Du Rand’s (1990:91) hypothesis is that the developmental history of the FG can be divided into four phases. The first phase concerns the establishment of the Johannine school (Du Rand 1990:91). The second phase consists of the integrated record of collected traditional materials. A Johannine first edition, which includes Jn 13-14, appeared (Du Rand 1990:92). This appeared during a time of conflict with Judaism and the synagogue. The third phase is distinguished by editing by the writer of the Gospel himself. New problems requiring new additions surfaced in the community. The conflict between the Jewish Christians and the synagogue was still fierce and this necessitated inter alia the addition of Jn 15:1-16:4a. (This occurred more or less during the late eighties of the first century.) The final redaction by the community itself occurred after the death of the bearer of tradition, the beloved disciple. (Between 90 and 100 A.D.)

Painter (1981:542) concludes that there must have been a developmental process in the compilation of the farewell discourses, during which traditional materials were edited and reinterpreted in subsequent issues. According to this point of view there can be no breach between Jn 14:31 and Jn 15:1. The farewell discourses constitute a unity, but each of them emphasises its own nuances (cf Du Rand 1990:92,103; Smith 1988:54; Moloney 1987:40; Du Rand 1981:204; Painter 1981:526, 1980:28). This statement, however, remains hypothetical.

After this diachronical explanation of Jn 15:1-8 within the context of the farewell discourses a few remarks from a synchronic perspective may be relevant and are actually dealt with in the ensuing paragraphs. The εὐλογεῖ statement in Jn 15:1 clearly introduces a new pericope. In paragraph 4 it will be argued that Jn 15:1-8 constitutes a coherent unity. The relationship between Jn 15:1-8 and 9-26 and Jn 16-17 will be discussed in paragraph 6.5.
3 A POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORICAL SITUATION LEADING TO JN 15:1-8

In the course of the past two decades research in the Johannine field has been characterised by the emphasis placed on the relationship between the FG and the community of its day. According to this viewpoint the FG grew out of this community (cf Du Rand 1990:91; De Smidt 1989:58; Lombard 1989:59; 1987:395; Van Aarde 1985:54; Painter 1981:527).

The community constituted the mainstream in the confrontation between the synagogues and other cryptic Christian churches (Lombard 1987:395). Opposition to other heretical movements like the docetists, gnostic and montanists was also prevalent. The FG was written for the Johannine community in this milieu.

The ‘terminus ad quem’ of the FG is possibly 100-110 A D and therefore it can be accepted that the community must have been an independent and advanced community at that time, the post-apostolic period (cf Du Rand 1990:57; Kysar 1985:2463; 1975:261; Brown 1984:84). The well-being of the community was the evangelist’s responsibility (Van Aarde 1985:59). This responsibility was carried out by consistently maintaining John’s basic theological perceptions and accents.

The context of Jn 15:1-8 possibly reflects the period when the conflict between the Christian Jews and the synagogue was at its fiercest. The build-up to this conflict was probably the sporadic confrontation between the Christians and the rulers of the temple and the synagogues. This probably gradually increased until those Jews who confessed Jesus as the Messiah were cast out of the synagogues.

Du Rand (1990:45) mentions in this regard that it was part of the survival struggle of Judaism to become more orthodox. After the temple and sacrifices had assumed a measure of vagueness, greater authority had to be vested in the law to keep Judaism intact. The prayer in the synagogue, which consisted of eighteen sections (approximately 85 A D) contained a curse on heretics in the twelfth section, the so called prayer against heretics in the synagogues (Birkat ha minim) (Du Rand 1990:46,92; cf Smith 1988:54; Painter 1980:28-29). The Jewish Christians, who confessed Jesus as Messiah, were cast out of the synagogue and on occasion even killed. The Christians — and this included gentile Christians — felt like aliens in a hostile world (Smith 1988:54; Painter 1981:525). These events led to the formation of a closed Johannine community (Painter 1980:29; Kysar 1976:112).

Like other ancient schools, this community developed its own esoteric teachings, symbols and metaphoric systems, which were well understood by its members (cf Culpepper 1975:262; Du Rand 1990:30; Johnson 1978:312). Jn 15:1-8 could possibly be a reflection of the conflict between the synagogue vine (the false; Judaism) and the Jesus vine (the true; the believers). The use of the
metaphor of the vine constitutes a powerful reference to the true Israel (cf Moloney 1987:46; Pamment 1985:19).

Jn 15:1-8 is possibly one of the portions of Scripture in which the writer of the Gospel endeavoured to re-interpret the traditional Davidic Christology to Jewish believers who had been cast out of the synagogue (Painter 1980:22). He provides the community with perspectives regarding their spiritual existence at a time when Jesus would be bodily absent from them and when they would encounter conflict. Unity (assimilation) is repeatedly emphasised. The departure of Jesus and the community's consequent loneliness are place in a framework of authoritative reassurance (Du Rand 1987:125). There is a very clear appeal to abide 'in Jesus' during the time they were living in. Their way of life should ensure that they abide in the ever present Christ (ἐγὼ ἐσμήν) and bear fruit. This should happen even in times of crisis and persecution. This is the opposite of Jn 14, where Jesus goes to prepare a place and promises to return again (Winbery 1988: 106). In Jn 15:1-8 he is the present ἡ διδασκαλία ἡ ἀληθινή (Du Rand 1981:204).

4 AN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF JN 15:1-8
AND A STRUCTURAL EXPLORATION

In order to understand the coherence of the eight verses under discussion, a discourse analysis of the structure of Jn 15:1-8 as a possible working basis has been done. Conspicuous unifying syntactic markers are indicated in the analysis (Louw and Nida 1988:vi). The various signs whereby they are indicated point to their interrelationship. The most important markers are the two ἐγὼ ἐσμήν-statements (vv 1,5) καρπῶν φέρων (vv 2,4,5,8) and μείνατε ἐν ἐμὸν (vv 2,4,5,6,7).

The following cursory exegetical sketches can be made according to the discourse analysis (section 5). Jn 15:1-8 is divided into 22 cola which, in turn, are subdivided into blocks A (cola 1.0-9.0) and B (cola 10.0-22.0). The 22 cola have been made into a structural unit by the formal 'inclusio' of πατήρ (cola 2.0, 21.0) and the syntactic markers μείνατε ἐν ἐμὸν (μείνατε, cola 3.0, 6.0, 8.0, 9.0, 12.0, 14.0 and 19.9) and καρπῶν φέρων (cola 3.0, 4.0, 8.0, 12.0 and 21.0). Each block commences with a ἐγὼ ἐσμήν-statement and each contains two subexplications of the vine metaphor.

Blocks A and B become a unity, particularly because of the two ἐγὼ ἐσμήν-statements. The expression μείνατε ἐν ἐμὸν (assimilation) dominates (implicit, colon 3.0) and operates as a thematic bearer of structure (Louw and Nida 1988:793). Block B is a stepwise and intensifying explication of block A. According to this discourse analysis the all-embracing theme is discipleship. In this connection Du Rand (1981:210) states that the καλὴμα (colon 3.0) is semotactical related to μαθηταί (colon 22.0) and καρπῶν φέρων (cf Pamment 1985:122). The exposition and naming of the various subdivisions of the 22 cola of Jn 15:1-8 are
as follows:

MAIN THEME : DISCIPLESHIP

Block A (cola 1.0-2.0) The first \( \epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota \)-statement appears in this section. It deals with the assimilation of Jesus, the true vine, and the Father, the husbandman. The Father is the source and Jesus the donor of this assimilation.

SUBEXPLICATION A I: (Cola 3.0-5.0) This section deals with the necessity for assimilation and pureness between Jesus, the vine, and the disciples, the branches. The importance of bearing fruit by virtue of assimilation is emphasised. The Father not only effects this assimilation, he also maintains it by means of a pruning procedure. In colon 3.0 the first action of the Father is mentioned, namely \( \alpha\lambda\rho\epsilon\iota \alpha\upsilon\tau\delta \). Failure to produce fruit is judged negatively. The second action of the Father (colon 4.0) is \( \kappa\alpha\theta\alpha\lambda\rho\epsilon\iota \alpha\upsilon\tau\delta \). The Father prunes the branches that they may bring forth more fruit. Colon 5.0 contains the actions of Jesus (his word), which are closely related to the second action of the Father. The disciples were pruned by the words Jesus had spoken to them.

SUBEXPLICATION A II. (Cola 6.0-9.0.) The condition for assimilation and fruit-bearing is emphasised in this section, namely an intimate relationship between Jesus and his disciples (Cola 6.0, 7.0). Without this no fruit can be produced.

The following subthemes are dominant in Block A: the Source and Donor of assimilation, the necessity for assimilation and pureness (between Jesus and his disciples) in order to be able to bear fruit, and finally the condition for the achievement of fruitful assimilation \( \mu\epsilon\nu\chi\alpha\tau\epsilon \varepsilon\nu \varepsilon\iota\mu\iota \), colon 6.0).

Block B (Cola 10.0-22.0.) The second \( \epsilon\gamma\omega \epsilon\iota\mu\iota \)-statement is mentioned here. Assimilation between Jesus (the donor, the vine) and the disciples (the branches) is emphasised. This is a further explication of Block A. The necessity for assimilation between Jesus and his disciples is, once again, dominant. Without this it is impossible to bear fruit. Cola 12.0 and 13.0 are closely related to cola 6.0-8.0.

SUBEXPLICATION B I (Cola 14.0-18.0.) In this section the consequences of a lack of assimilation are tabulated: a lack of fruit, impotence, inefficiency and destruction. There is a relationship between cola 3.0 and 14.0-18.0 according to this analysis. Branches that do not bear fruit are judged very harshly. It contains judgements on unfruitful branches.

SUBEXPLICATION B II. (Cola 19.0-22.0.) In this section the spotlight falls on
the result of assimilation between Jesus and his disciples, namely answers to
effective prayers (colon 19.0), glorification of the Father and more abundant fruit
(colon 21.0).

Colon 22.0 contains the ‘leitmotiv’ of the vine metaphor and the pivot point
around which the discourse analysis revolves: discipleship. The source of disci­
plship is the Father (the husbandman), who enables people to become disciples
through Jesus (the donor and true vine).

Seen in this light Jn 15:1-8 becomes a unity (cf Tolmie 1990:5; Van der Watt
1989:1,5). According to this analysis discipleship, as set forth in Jn 15:1-8, em­
braces assimilation between God and his disciples. The Father is the source of
this discipleship. One becomes a disciple of Jesus through the words Jesus (the
donor) has received from the Father and spoken to us (pruning procedure). The
result of discipleship is thus, according to Jn 15:1-8, assimilation with the Father
and with Jesus, answers to effective prayers, bearing much fruit, pruning to bear
even more fruit and the glorification of the Father. The judgements on those who
are not disciples are spelt out clearly (Van der Watt 1989:6). For the spiral or
oval line of development of ideas in the FG vide Du Rand (1990:19) and Kysar

5 A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF JN 15:1-8

See addendum at end of article.

6 EXEGETICAL NOTES WITH RELATION TO JN 15:1-8.

A complete exegesis of Jn 15:1-8 is impossible because of a lack of space and
time. Only a number of important findings are indicated.

6.1 The preceding chapters: Jn 1-14

In Jn 1-14 the appearance of Jesus in public was met with unbelief and hatred on
the part of the Jews. He consequently withdrew himself from them and went into
hiding (Jn 12:36). At that stage the Jews had already decided to outlaw and kill
him (Jn 11:57; Du Rand 1980:46). Jn 13-14 reflects in broad outline the content
of Jesus’ final teachings to his disciples the night before his crucifixion. His
disciples would be left behind as orphans, as exiles. They are repeatedly encour­
gaged by the promise that they will one day be reunited with Jesus, (Jn 14:13) and
that the Father will send them the Paraclete (Jn 14:16).

In Jn 15:1-8 Jesus endeavours to strengthen the faith of his disciples and to
 teach them about discipleship, unity and service even during difficult times. The
discussion on his departure has receded into the background. The crisis has been
withstood (Laney 1989:55).
6.2 The metaphor as a literary technique in Jn 15:1-8

Due to the importance of the metaphor for the interpretation of this pericope a few notes on the metaphor as a literary technique may be relevant.

Since the earliest interpretations of Jn 15:1-8 this passage has been viewed as a metaphor (Pamment 1985:118; Bultmann 1959:406; Dodd 1970:136). The metaphor, employed as a narrative strategy, has been known in ancient literature since the days of Aristotle (Gräbe 1984:6). The Greek μεταφορά means the transfer of meaning (Van Gorp 1984:191).

A variety of theories exists about the metaphor (Gräbe 1984:6). This research refers to it in a cursory fashion only. Webster (1990:42) considers a metaphor to be '...the application of a name or term to an object to which it is not literally applicable'. Spangenberg (1980:7) identifies an explicit, an implicit and an extensive metaphor. The last-mentioned contains a number of individual metaphors (Spangenberg 1980:11).

The FG employs metaphors and symbols extensively as literary techniques to lend structure to certain values and perceptions and to unite spiritual and material spheres (Du Rand 1990:64; Culpepper 1975:262). Discipleship and the vine with its branches are an example of this (Du Rand 1990:30; Newman 1976:234). Jn 15:1-8 is in all probability an explicit and extensive metaphor, because the object and the image are clearly indicated. (I am the true vine.) Jn 15:1-8 contains about five metaphors (cf vv 1, 2, 3). Pamment refers to v 3b as a residence metaphor.

The aim of the multiplicity of metaphors is inter alia to render explicit the scopus or 'leitmotiv' in a progressive and intensive way (cf Deist 1984:93, 152). In this exercise the paratactical καὶ performs the function of a gradual addition of information and the intensifying of the idea (Du Rand 1990:17; Poythress 1984:324).

Various theories exist about the origin of the true vine metaphor. The majority of Bible scholars favour an Old Testamental source, where Israel was known as Yahweh's vineyard (cf Du Rand 1990:30; Morris 1989:120; Smalley 1983:90; Kysar 1975:126).

Pamment (1985:19) believes that the metaphor can be traced back to the Old Testament, the writer’s own Bible, and that the community would have been familiar with it. 'Just as any community has its “in” jokes, so it has its “in” metaphors, which help to give it a sense of separate identity. Quoting Scripture serves two purposes: it identifies Jesus as Lord, who will save his people and it presents the...metaphor as an authorised perceptive device' (cf Van Aarde 1985:59).

6.3 Exegetical notes with relation to block A (Cola 1.0-9.0)

In colon 1.0 the identity of Jesus is indicated metaphorically. The ἐγώ ἐμ...ἡ ἀληθινή refers us to the ‘...revelation of God that Jesus brings or what he actually
is as the revelation of God' (Louw and Nida 1988:673). Jesus is the pre-existent Son of God who, in very fact, is the mediator for the entire creation (De Klerk and Schnell 1987:97). Through him the Father sustains and maintains everything. He is the source of real life (Hartin 1991).

The definite article with the adjective \( \lambda \nu \tau \omega \nu \sigma \varsigma \) is an indication of the fact that Jesus is the true or genuine vine. The degenerate vine, unbelieving Israel, contrasts unfavourably with Jesus, who has fulfilled the expectations of God for his people (Laney 1989:56; Lea 1988:18). This motive coincides with one of the main reasons why the Gospel was written, namely a reaction against the synagogue (Morris 1989:107; Culpepper 1983:36; Schnackenburg 1975:109; Bultmann 1959:408).

The expression \( \gamma \varepsilon \omega \gamma \varsigma \varsigma \) (colon 2.0) draws our attention to yet another metaphor and contains a humble title for God (Bultmann 1959:407; Harrison 1962:90). The evangelist assumes that God rejects the unproductive vineyard of Judaism, which lives on in the synagogue by means of new 'agricultural methods' (cf Brown 1978:675).

**SUBEXPLICATION A I (Cola 3.0-5.0).**

A central point in the modern debate about Jn 15:1-8 is encountered in colon 3.0, namely God's dealings with the unfruitful branches. (A 'crux interpretum', Deist 1984:39.) The cardinal question is: what is meant by the concepts \( \pi \alpha \nu \kappa \lambda \eta \mu \alpha \) and \( \alpha \iota \rho \varepsilon \iota \alpha \nu \tau \omicron \omicron \), the first activity of the Father. The concept \( \kappa \lambda \eta \mu \alpha \) does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament (Newman and Nida 1980:479; Bernard 1963:479). According to the latter the \( \mu \tau \) emphasises a hypothetical possibility. The hypotheses of researchers about who the \( \pi \alpha \nu \kappa \lambda \eta \mu \alpha \) are, differ widely. These hypotheses indicate inter alia the following: believers in general (Harrison 1962:90); unbelieving Jews (Barrett 1978:473); the disciples of Jesus (Bruce 1983:308); Jewish Christians, who had remained in the synagogue (Brown 1978:675; Hawkin 1975:212); Jewish and gentile Christians (Painter 1981:525), et cetera. Researchers who have assiduously joined the debate are Laney (1989:56) and Segovia (1982:120). Segovia is of the opinion that one can deduce from either the context or the content who the \( \pi \alpha \nu \kappa \lambda \eta \mu \alpha \) are. They represent the twelve disciples of Jesus with the exception of Judas, who has left (Jn 13:30; cf Pamment 1985:122; Sanders and Mastin 1975:337; Tenney 1975:356). 'It means those, who have accepted Jesus', Segovia claims (Segovia 1982:120). They have been cleansed, because they have fully believed in him (colon 5.0.).

The problem which, according to Segovia, is addressed in Jn 15:1-8 is first and foremost an 'inner Christian' problem (Segovia 1982:121). There is no indication here of an ongoing debate or of a controversy with the synagogue. The traumatic experience of being cast out of the synagogue which permeates the rest
of the FG, is completely absent here.

The second problem addressed here, is of a christological nature. It becomes clear because of the emphasis placed on the adjective ‘true’ (colon 1.0). The dispute within the Christian community revolved round an incorrect concept of Jesus, which was docteic by nature (Segovia 1982:126). Some of the co-believers of the apostle rejected the true vine, 'i.e. adopted a different understanding of Christ' (Segovia 1982:121).

This christological and ethical conflict within the Christian community uncouples Jn 15:1-8 (9-17) from the generally accepted ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the FG and ‘thrusts them directly into the thought-world and the “Sitz im Leben” of 1 John’ (Segovia 1982:126). Jn 15:1-8 was written by the same author as 1 John or by someone in a similar situation, and later added to the FG after Jn 13:31-14:31, according to Segovia (1982:126,128).

Laney (1989:56) is of the opinion that the πάντα κάμηλα does not refer to the disciples of Jesus, but to other disciples like those we encounter in Jn 6:60: interested readers who have departed from Jesus because of his strict teaching and have consequently borne no fruit (Laney 1989:57). The fate of these branches is indicated as αἱρέται αὐτῷ, which will means that God remove them (Laney 1989:58,60).

Laney (1989:60) presumes that, because there are two types of branches in the analogy, the branches in cola 14.0-18.0 should be connected to the branches in colon 3.0. The idea of ‘remove, sever’ is directly related to cola 14.0-18.0, where the branches wither, are cast into the fire and burnt. In colon 14.0 Jesus declares that the unfruitful branches will be cast away (ἐβλητη ἐξω). Jesus has, however, promised that he will never do this to his own (cf Jn 6:37, ἐκβάλλει ἐξω — not cast out). This view is also consistent with John’s theology of progressive belief. In John’s writings belief begins, continues, is strengthened and finally consummated in an abiding faith (Laney 1989:62; cf Tenney 1975:357). Thomas can, in this connection, be cited as an example (Jn 20:28).

Laney (1989:62) concludes that the evangelist in this instance refers to people who have not developed a genuine faith. ‘The view that best fits the immediate context and the theological themes of John’s Gospel is that the fruitless branches represent disciples, who have had an external association with Christ, that is not matched by an internal spiritual union by personal faith and regeneration’ (Laney 1989:61; Morris 1989:21). This verdict on superficial or short-lived faith does not offer proof that true believers will backslide (Morris 1975:669).

The problem with artificial faith is its object. It was probably primarily based on miracles and not on a clear concept of the person of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, the Saviour (Laney 1989:63).

The strongest criticism of the point of view that the fruitless vines refer to the unbelieving is the phrase ἐν ἐν οἷ (colon 3.0). With due consideration for various
points of view Laney (1989:64) concludes that this phrase should be used adverbially and not adjectivally. Translated adjectivally, the phrase would read as follows: 'Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, is cut off'. Interpreted adverbially, it would read: 'Every branch that does not bear fruit in me, is cut off.' The bearing of fruit takes place in the sphere of Christ — by his influence and his enablement. "In me" emphasises not the place of the branch, but the process of fruit-bearing (Laney 1989:64). There is, according to Laney, (1989:64) strong internal proof in the FG to use εν ευωλ, a 'terminus technicus' (Segovia 1982:121), adverbially. The phrase εν ευωλ appears no fewer than six times in Jn 15:1-8, and in each of the other five instances it is used adverbially and not adjectivally.


The ταύτα καθημα and αἵρεται αὐτῷ, the first activity of the Father, do not indicate believers who have become unfaithful and severed their bonds with Jesus. This would be contrary to the belief that nobody who belongs to Jesus will ever be plucked out of his hand (Jn 6:39-40). This reference is to interested 'disciples' who, however, refuse to accept Jesus; unbelievers who persist in their resistance against Jesus. It is self-evident that such a person must needs be a branch severed from the vine and incapable of fruit-bearing (Schnackenburg 1975:110).

The meaning of φέρον καρπῶν is interpreted in different ways by different researchers. It is defined as the '...qualities of Christian character, Gal 5:22...' (Lea 1988:18) as well as the 'production and development of the spiritual life with all its normal manifestations, through the strength of Christ living in us.' (Godet 1980:854.) For Groenewald (1980:34) fruit-bearing means a virtuous life, characterised by good works.

After this portrayal of the vine Jesus provides a practical application of what is meant by being a branch. It means a vital relationship with Christ, the true vine (Laney 1989:64).

The second activity of the Father (colon 4.0) is outlined by another metaphor, namely καθαιρεῖν αὐτῷ. Louw (1986:9) is of the opinion that καθαιρεῖν could have two meanings, namely to prune or to cleanse. The use here is figurative. 'Yet both meanings are perfectly applicable and perhaps intended as such by the author, since cleansing may be interpreted as an implication of pruning' (cf Haenchen 1980:482). The Father's responsibility is to see that the vine produces fruit (Barrett 1978:473; Morris 1975:669.) The vine can bear fruit only when it is clean and only where fruit appears, does God purge it so that it may bring forth more fruit (Van der Watt 1989:6). The ινα (colon 4.0) indicates that this cleansing process is a condition for discipleship and that it is directly related to colon 5.0 (Newman and Nida 1980:480).
The concept καρπὸν πλείονα φέρῃ (colon 4.0) is also a 'crux interpretum'. Brown (1978:676) considers it to be a metaphorical expression for the possession of divine life. It presupposes growth in this divine life as well as assimilation with Jesus. The urge to draw others into the community of believers was particularly strong in the course of the first century and there can be no doubt that the disciples were anxious to win over people for Christ (Laney 1989:64; Schnackenburg 1975:113). Bultmann (1959:410) feels that 'genug ist nie genug' for God. The life of faith is a growing and vital activity ('lebendigen Bewegtheit'). For this reason God never allows his disciples to become passive (Laney 1989:64). New assignments are continually entrusted to them and new strength to complete these assignments is constantly provided.

The disciples have already been pruned and purged by the words of Jesus, to which they have been privileged to listen and which they have accepted. (colon 5.0). For this reason colon 3.0 is not applicable to them (Morris 1989:121; Culpepper 1983:195). The 'word' (τὸν λόγον, colon 5.0) '...is used collectively for the whole of what Jesus said to his disciples and to the world, his “message”, conceived as a revelation and as a “command” to be obeyed' (Dodd 1970:265). This word contains an active cleansing agent and the disciples are consequently clean. The source of their cleansing is not within themselves. This is related to cola 8.0-9.0. The branch can do nothing by itself.

According to Du Rand (1990:52) the Johannine community enjoyed unity in spite of many crises, much conflict and rejection by the world. This is attributed to their study of the Scriptures as well as their adherence to the sayings of Jesus. This not only endowed them with power, it also rendered the community clean, because in the word it possesses the power that is continually moving, life-creating (cf Bultmann 1968:408). In this way their confession and lives served as a testimony to the world (Morris 1989:64; Culpepper 1983:195; Barrett 1978:474).

**SUBEXPLICATION A II (Cola 6.0-9.0)**

In cola 6.0 and 7.0 the meaning of the metaphors is progressively developed. The meaning is applied directly and demandingly to both the disciples and the community (Schnackenburg 1975:112). The concepts καὶ and μετά are functional terms in this regard and relate to the metaphor(s). The truth that surfaces so prominently in the metaphor is defined here: a person can only be a fruit-bearing branch if he remains in Christ and Christ in him. Schnackenburg (1975:112) calls this mutual inhabiting the 'reziproke Immanenzformel.'

The imperative μείνατε καὶ μετά appears both at the beginning of colon 6.0 and at the end of colon 9.0 and in this way cola 6.0-9.0 become a minor unity. As the Father and Jesus are one, in like manner should the disciples and Jesus be one (assimilated) (cf Louw and Nida 1988:656,729; Arndt and Gingrich 1971:238). This assimilation between Jesus and the believer is a unique relationship. There
is nothing similar to it in this mortal world (Schnackenburg 1971:94).

There is a close relationship in the FG between assimilation and the 'misterium fidei', the mystery of faith. He who believes in Jesus, remains in Jesus (De Smidt 1989:195). The process of assimilation takes place through faith. In this way the strange absence of faith in this section is explained. Like the unique relationship between the Father (husbandman) and Jesus (vine) a similarly unique relationship exists between Jesus (vine) and those who believe (branches). Someone who believes, receives the sap of life from the vine and bears fruit. ‘Belief is the connection that unites the vine and branches. Without belief there is no abiding’ (Laney 1989:65).

The whole issue boils down to assimilation, to an intimate, constant, ever-present relationship between Jesus and his disciples. This occurs through pruning by the cleansing word of Jesus, which must be accepted in faith. This is the condition for assimilation: faith in Jesus. Although it is a relationship for the present, it is also a continuous (everlasting) relationship, in which Jesus abides in the believer and the believer in him (Louw and Nida 1988:656,729). This is confirmed by the divine giver of the assimilation. This is true life, divine life.

The καθός (colon 8.0) refers to the preceding metaphor with a further explanation. The ἐὰν indicates a limited possibility (Louw and Nida 1988:786). ‘It is an error to think that in the energy of the flesh the disciples are able to do anything that pleases the Father. For that they need the strength that he alone can supply. The condition of fruitfulness in Christian service and true Christian life is vital contact with Christ. On their own they can do nothing’ (Morris 1989:121; cf Haenchen 1980:482).

Block A, as already mentioned, forms a unity. It is clearly indicated that assimilation between Jesus and a disciple can be achieved only through faith. This is the condition for becoming a disciple and for leading a power-filled Christian life. By making use of the words καὶ ὅπως ἐὰν ἐὰν (colon 7.0) Jesus promises to remain faithful to his disciples; they could depend on that.

6.4 Exegetical notes with relation to block B. (Colon 10.0-22.0).

The discourse analysis reveals a clear and logical exposition. Jesus continues his discourse with a second ἐὰν ἐὰν statement (colon 10.0). The basic image is again that of a vine with branches that either bear fruit or do not. The consequences of a lack of assimilation, the result of assimilation and the ‘leitmotiv,’ discipleship, can be clearly distinguished.

Seeing that Block B is a progressive and intensive exposition of Block A and that repetition does occur, only certain important aspects will receive attention. What was previously only assumed is clearly stated here: ‘you are the branches.’ Laney (1989:65) comments: ‘There is no fruit without faith, and there is no faith without fruit.’
In contrast to the imperative μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί (col. 6.0) a conditional participle ὅ μενων ἐν ἐμοί (col. 12.0) is used here and this is followed with a negative construction (col. 14.0) by a conditional clause. These are linguistic variations of a kind that the Gospel uses quite frequently. The antithetic mode of expression (positive in cola 10.0-12.0, followed by a negative statement in col. 14.0) is also typically Johannine (Schnackenburg 1975:113). With the immanence formula ‘...Jünger sind nicht zu mystischer Versenkung, sondern zu einem reichen Fruchtbienen gerufen, allerdings aus der Kraft der ihnen geschenkten Gemeinschaft mit Christus’ (Schnackenburg 1975:114; cf Bultmann 1959:412). This is a fundamental statement for the disciple’s understanding of himself and his function and activity.

SUBEXPLICATION A I. Cola 14.0-18.0 focuses on the consequences of lack of assimilation. The first and foremost consequence of a lack of assimilation as well as of a shallow and spurious faith is inefficiency (col. 9.0). Man is a created being and owes his existence to God. He is not his own master, nor can he make any new beginning for himself (Bultmann 1959:413).

Cola 14.0-18.0 are, as already mentioned, a further exposition of col. 3.0. We find here a progressive development of the negative side of the matter. What happens to those who have no faith in Christ, who are not disciples and whose faith is shallow and of a transitory nature? According to Laney (1989:65) six things could happen to those branches that do not bear fruit. They are cut off or taken away (αἱρομένων), cast out (βάλλοντας ἐξω) they wither (ξηραίνοντας) are gathered together (συνάγων) cast into the fire (εἰς τὸ πῦρ βαλλομένων) and burnt (καίεται).

Both Schnackenburg (1975:114) and Bultmann (1959:413) are of the opinion that cola 14.0-18.0 do not refer to hell, but to excommunication from the community. Du Rand (1990:209) goes along with Laney (1989:65) in agreeing that the judgment by fire is an aspect of futuristic eschatology (cf Louw and Nida 1988:178, ‘the process of burning’). Bernard (1963:481) agrees with this point of view and observes that the aorists seem to look forward to the future judgment of mankind and treat it as already past, so certain and inevitable is it (cf Newmand and Nida 1980:482). Such a destiny awaits only unbelievers (Laney 1989:65). This form of judgment does not again appear in the FG (Schnackenburg 1975:114). Brown (1978:679) poses a possible explanation for the evangelist’s strange reference to eschatological punishment. It might have been suggested by the frequent use of this description in other known ‘eschatological’ descriptions of his time (cf Hendriksen 1969: 301; Bouma 1964:102).

The fate of those who are not disciples of Jesus (the consequence of a lack of assimilation) is described in a very negative way. They are incapable of bearing fruit. They miss the true life and their end is eternal perdition.
SUBEXPLICATION B II Cola 19.0-21.0 focus on the positive result of assimilation between Jesus and the disciples. In contrast to the judgment of assimilation between Jesus and the disciples. In contrast to the judgment of unbelievers, discipleship here merits a promise.

Colon 19.0, καὶ τὰ ῥήματα μου ἐν οὐ̂μίν μελένη is a variation of the immanence formula: ‘you in me and my words in you.’ Schnackenburg (1975:115) draws attention to the fact that, after having consistently employed the third person in order to stress the fundamental character of the statement, the discourse returns here to the second person plural and the disciples are addressed directly (cf Bouma 1964:102). Bruce (1983:309-310) thinks that τὰ ῥήματα reflects the plural form of τὸν λόγον (colon 5.0). The logos is the teaching of Jesus in its entirety. The ῥήματα are the individual utterances which make it up. Jesus himself is the living embodiment of all his teaching. Yet faith in Jesus in the FG is more than belief in his message, or fitful attraction to his person; it is a continual abiding ‘in him’ (Bernard 1963:482).

The words ἐὰν θέλετε αἰτήσασθε καὶ γενήσεται οὐ̂μίν (colon 19.0) are petitions prompted by the indwelling words of Jesus and can not fail to be in harmony with the divine will. A disciple who abides in Jesus asks habitually ‘in his name.’ He asks as Christ would ask, and so his satisfaction is sure (cf Bernard 1963:482; Hendriksen 1969:302). An answer to prayer (colon 20.0) which will satisfy every request of the supplicator is not what is meant by this, because when the believer remains in Jesus and the words of Jesus remain in him, self-will is excluded. His prayers will, however, always be heard (Groenewald 1980:325; cf Barrett 1978:475; Brown 1978:679; Morris 1975:673). The Father also hears this prayer in order to guarantee and increase the yield of fruit (Schnackenburg 1975:115; Sanders and Mastin 1975:338).

Colon 21.0 concludes the metaphor the vine and the branches by a reference to the Father (cf colon 2.0). The γεωργὸς is always glorified, if the trees of his planting are fruitful. All good works are ‘ad maiorem Dei gloriam’ (Bernard 1963:483). Colon 21.0 may also be related to colon 4.0. In this sense ἐν τούτῳ functions retrospectively (cf Bernard 1963:482). God the Father is glorified in the preceding aspects of assimilation between the vine and its branches.

The concept ἐν τούτῳ may also be linked to ίνα in colon 21.0. The marker ίνα indicates the underlying purpose of the action expressed in the main-clause, namely the glorification of the Father. But since cola 2.0 to 21.0 constitute a formal ‘inclusio’ on the grounds of πατήρ the ίνα may also be taken as a reference to the result of the preceding vine metaphor (cf Du Rand 1981:209). In that case the essence of discipleship lies in abundant fruit-bearing and abundant life (cf Louw and Nida 1988:783).

Colon 22.0 is to many researchers also a ‘crux interpretum’. Metzger (1975:246) draws attention to a text-critical variant in Jn 15:1-8, namely γένησθε

In accordance with this discourse analysis colon 22.0 forms the ‘leitmotiv’ of the metaphor, namely discipleship. Everything said up to now leads to this final conclusion in colon 22.0 (Bultmann 1968:414). All the positive elements contained in cola 1.0-22.0 can be summarised as follows: these are the conditions for a disciple of Jesus. To be a disciple means that one ‘remains in Jesus’ and simultaneously ‘bears much fruit.’ For this reason the word as proposed by the UBS can be retained (Metzger 1975:246). The difference in meaning is hardly perceptible (Barrett 1978:475; Brown 1978:680).

Block B, as already mentioned, constitutes a unity. It is clearly indicated here that assimilation between Jesus (the donor of assimilation) and the disciples (the branches) is an absolute necessity. This represents a further exposition of Block A. A lack of this assimilation is catastrophic. The result of assimilation has, on the contrary, far-reaching consequences.

6.5 The relationship between Jn 15:1-8, 9-17, 18-26 and Jn 16-17
A number of researchers agree that an intimate relationship exists between Jn 15:1-8, 9-17, 18-26 and Jn 16-17 (Tolmie 1990:5; Van der Watt 1989:6). The assimilation between Jesus and his disciples is basic to the ethics abovementioned. Assimilation leads to fruit-bearing, and, implicitly to love with the love of, implicitly, Jesus. Union between Jesus and the believer is basic to this ethical principle (Van der Watt 1989:6). Jesus has elected them, the disciples, to bear fruit, to receive whatever they ask in his name and to love one another as he commanded them in this world (Tolmie 1990:6; Winbery 1988:12).

7 CONCLUSION
Sustained interest and research into the possible meaning of Jn 15:1-8 remain the responsibility of theologians. This investigation was conducted with that in mind.

As indicated by numerous researchers the FG is an occasional document composed for a specific community with a definite objective in mind (cf Lombard 1989:59; Van Aarde 1985:54). Because the community provided the socio-logological and religious background from which the FG emanated, the theology of the evangelist was directed at (De Smidt 1989:248). It was rooted in the particular situation obtaining in this particular community and deals with their unique
religious and theological problems (De Smidt 1989:248; Culpepper 1975:262). By means of inter alia their metaphorical systems the writer of the Gospel was able to communicate to them the Johannine Jesus and discipleship in Jn 15:1-8 with his own theological intentions. The theme of this fertile Gospel is formulated in a nutshell, namely Jesus is the Son, the donor of the new order of life (Coetzee 1988:39,55).

According to Du Rand (1990:54) the way in which discipleship is portrayed in the FG (about 78 times in the FG), indicates that it must have lived in the very heart of the community. They might have looked upon themselves as a continuation of the very first disciples of Jesus (the embryo community), and for this reason the FG was narrated in such a way that the self-image and quality of discipleship, even in critical times, should constitute a projection of the early disciples who had walked with Jesus himself. Great emphasis is placed on the exclusivity of the community of believers. Outsiders had formed a very negative view of the social identity of the community, but the members thereof had a very high regard for one another because of their common interpretation of the Jesus event (cf Schnelle 1989:71).

The primary requirement for membership of the Johannine church was to have been a disciple of Jesus. According to Jn 15:1-8 a disciple is someone who has assimilated with Jesus and the Father. This is achieved through acceptance in faith of the Word of Jesus (διὰ τοῦ λόγου, colon 5.0) and consequent cleansing thereby (colon 4.0-5.0). One then becomes a disciple (μαθητής, colon 22.0), a pupil and a follower of Jesus (Louw and Nida 1988:328,471; Winbery 1988:104). Assimilation between Jesus and his disciple leads to an intimate, ever-present, everlasting and vital relationship. The disciple’s faith grows to such an extent that he not only bears fruit, but that he does so abundantly and grows to full spiritual maturity. He then lives a godly life, characterised by virtue, good deeds and the preaching of Jesus to unbelievers. A disciple may lay claim to answered prayers, should these prayers be in line with the will of Jesus. The Father will discipline such a disciple. The life of such a disciple will glorify the Father. The glorification of God should be his uppermost aim. Winbery (1988:104) makes mention of the fact ‘that the early disciples’ relationship never attained to the perfection of the relationship of God and Jesus, but the relationship was seen as being similar to that relationship and patterned after it.’

The conclusion is that Jn 15:1-8 contains ‘community theology,’ in which discipleship plays a prominent part (cf Velanickal 1980:132). The faith community owed their origin and existence to God. The evangelist presents Jesus to his readers, whether they be Jews or gentiles, as the answer to Israel’s and the synagogue’s most ultimate questions. He perfectly fulfilled all that the Jewish people were promised, were taught and hoped for through his utterly unique relationship to God, his unexcelled teaching of divine life and his saving ministry among and
to them. He alone is qualified to be the Founder and Lord of a renewed ‘people of God,’ a new faith community. The new community consists of disciples who actively persevere in prayer and who are able to glorify (worship, colon 21.0) God the Father, as he wishes to be worshipped. The community, instituted by Jesus, is also one which is characterised by a dynamic service to God and man, through bearing much fruit in the workaday world of humankind. They possess true life, and constitute a community that is totally dependent on Jesus. Without him they are not able to carry out their assignment as a community of believers. This community experiences a firm bond of unity among themselves and with Jesus. A final indirect feature of the new community is its distinctive mission to the world. The community must be a continuation of the mission of Jesus.

On the final destination of the Johannine community the evangelist says relatively little in Jn 15:1-8. The true life is already a present reality (realised eschatology) through the abiding relationship between Jesus and his new community. Giesbrecht (1986:118) is of the opinion that ‘this new community of Jesus is firmly anchored in the heavens, as it were, and ever draws its sustenance and inspiration from the Father, who has founded it and who himself guarantees its safe final destination through a hostile world.’ A dreadful future judgement awaits those who are not disciples (Winbery 1985:106; Giesbrecht 1986:119).

The evangelist had to lead and motivate his people and had to solve their problems in spite of a multitude of currents, crises and persecutions.

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Dr J C de Smidt, Department of Biblical Studies, Vista University, Private Bag X641, PRETORIA, 0001 Republic of South Africa.
ADDENDUM
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF JOHN 15:1-8

1.0 Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή.
2.0 καὶ ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστιν.
3.0 ἡ πάν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοι μὴ φέρει καρπὸν, αἱρεί αὐτὸ ἐκεῖ
4.0 καὶ πάν τὸ καρπὸν φέρει καθαίρει αὐτὸ ἐκεῖ

5.0 ἢ δὴ ἴμεις καθαροὶ ἔστε διὰ τοῦ λόγου ὑμῶν λελάθηκα

7.0 καὶ ἐξιπνοοῖ ἐν ὑμῖν.

8.0 καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μενέῃ ἐν τῇ ἀμπελώ.

9.0 οὕτως οὐδὲ ἴμεις ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μεῖντε.

10.0 Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος.

11.0 ἴμεις τὰ κλῆματα.

12.0 ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοι καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ οὕτως φέρει καρπὸν

13.0 οὕτως ἐμοὶ οὐ δύνασθε πολεῖν οὕτως.

14.0 ἢ αὐτὸ μὴ μενέῃ ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἐκώ ὡς τὸ κλῆμα

15.0 καὶ ἐξηράνθη.

16.0 καὶ συνάγοικαν αὐτὰ

17.0 καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βαλλοῦσιν

18.0 καὶ παύεται.

19.0 ἢ αὐτὸ μὴ μενέῃ ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ τὰ ἴμητα μου ἐν ἑαυτῷ μενεῖ,

20.0 καὶ γενήσεται ἴμην.

21.0 ἐν τούτῳ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ πατὴρ μου, ἐνα καρπὸν πολιν.

22.0 καὶ γενήθη ἐμοὶ μαθητὴ.
Cola 1.0-2.0: The source and donor of assimilation

A I (cola 3.0-5.0): Subexplanation: The necessity of assimilation and pureness for fruit-bearing

A II (cola 6.0-9.0): Subexplanation: The condition of assimilation and fruit-bearing

Cola 10.0-13.0: The donor and receivers of assimilation

B I (cola 14.0-18.0): Subexplanation: Consequences of lack of assimilation

B II (cola 19.0-22.0): Subexplanation: Results of assimilation

Colon 22: 'Leitmotiv': Discipleship.