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CONTENTS

The Meaning of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John

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Abstract

Recent trends in the study of *pistis* contribute to our understanding of belief in the Gospel of John. Beginning with one of the most recent studies on belief in John's Gospel from Nadine Ueberschaer, it is evident that Johannine belief has a propositional dimension focused on the identity of Jesus. Yet the contextual study by Teresa Morgan demonstrates that the use of *pistis* and *fides* in the Graeco-Roman world has a primarily relational focus, questioning the dominant emphasis on propositional belief. An alternative perspective on *pistis* in the New Testament comes from Matthew Bates, who argues that at times it ought to be translated 'allegiance' rather than 'faith'. While such a translation does not fit in the Johannine context, 'allegiance' is a useful term for discussing the broader concept of belief in John, which involves words and deeds, as well as trust and propositional belief.

1. Introduction

If you had to pick one word as the key word for John, it would be
πιστεύω. The whole Gospel revolves around both the question of in
whom to believe, but also what it means to believe. But answering either
of those questions requires an important clarification. What does this
word πιστεύω mean? There are two primary options when it comes to
understanding πιστεύω. One, shaped by tradition and the central role of
creeds and doctrines within Christianity, assumes πιστεύω is primarily
about propositional belief.[1] Thus with John, many have asked the ques-
tion, what does John say we need to believe? 'Believing' is understood
as being closely connected to 'knowing', albeit with a greater volitional
emphasis.[2] The alternative is to focus on πιστεύω as a relational term,
conveying personal trust and commitment.[3] In this view, the primary
goal of the Gospel of John is that the reader place their trust in Jesus.
Some have, of course, suggested that both aspects are in view.[4] What
follows is an exploration of these two interpretative options through
the lens of recent work on πιστεύω, before turning to a third option that
might prove useful in talking about πιστεύω in John.

2. Πιστεύω as Propositional Belief

The most common way to understand πιστεύω in studies focused on
John is as primarily conveying propositional belief. A recent exam-
ple is Nadine Ueberschaer's 2017 work, 'Das Johannesevangelium als

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1   Significant in the understanding of πιστεύω as propositional is the idea of a distinctly Christian
    use of the language of πίστις for 'acceptance of kerygma' as argued by Bultmann, 'πιστεύω κτλ.',
    TDNT 6.208. Others to understand πιστεύω as referring to propositional belief include: Tam,
    Apprehension, 1; Zumstein, *L'apprentisage de la foi*, 59–61; Moloney, 'From Cana to Cana';
    Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, 103–13; J. Gaffney, 'Believing and Knowing'; Hawthorne, 'Concept
    of Faith'.
2   Gaffney, 'Believing and Knowing', 240. While there may be some epistemological concerns
    connected with πιστεύω (as Gupta suggests), the primary emphasis in John is not on how one
    knows but on the acceptance of a message, whether that message is encountered through the
    signs, Scripture, the witness of Jesus, of the witness of others. See Gupta, *Paul*, 74–5.
3   A focus on the relational dimension is evident in: Koester, *The Word of Life*, 62–4; O'Brien,
    'Written', 291; Jensen, *John's Gospel*, 115; Thompson, 'Signs and Faith'.
4   Dodd, *Interpretation*, 179–85; see also Gupta, *Paul*, 74; Bultmann, 'πιστεύω κτλ.', *TDNT* 6.205–7.

Medium der Glaubensvermittlung.'[5] Her argument first tackles the use of πιστεύειν with the dative. Rather than attempting to read the different constructions used with πιστεύω as indicating significantly different kinds of belief with one being inadequate and the other indicating genuine belief, Ueberschaer instead asks what the function of the construction might be.[6] By arguing that the use of the dative has a distinct function, Ueberschaer goes against Bultmann, who sees the dative and the use of εἰς as essentially synonymous.[7] Her argument is that πιστεύω with the dative focuses on belief in Jesus as messenger of God. It is this construction that connects most closely to the title of her work, as she sees it indicating the role of John's Gospel as 'a medium of faith-transmission.'[8] The use of the dative also indicates that both the words and works of Jesus are to lead to faith. Effectively, taking this approach assumes that there is some propositional content that is to be conveyed by the Gospel.

The second part of her work addresses the use of εἰς and ὅτι with πιστεύω, which both present a similar focus upon Jesus. From these, she argues that Jesus' death and resurrection are the key event to which faith refers. While the Gospel refers to faith in the transmitted words of Jesus, she argues the use of the singular λόγος (2:22) focuses on the message of death and resurrection.[9] While πιστεύω with the dative presents the function of the Gospel in terms of transmitting faith, εἰς and ὅτι primarily convey the object of faith. The propositional content of faith is centred upon Jesus in his relationship to God, a focus of the Gospel from the prologue. Thus, Ueberschaer argues that while faith is directed at Jesus in 1:12, Jesus has been connected to God already, so all instances of πιστεύω must be read in light of this connection. Alongside the connection to God, Jesus is also presented as the one in whom messianic hopes are fulfilled. Thus for Ueberschaer, faith entails acceptance of Jesus' identity and its related

5   Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 451–71.
6   An argument for distinguishing quality of belief by the construction used is made by Hawthorne, 'Concept of Faith', 118–23; arguing against that view are Harris, *Prepositions*, 236; Painter, 'Eschatological Faith', 40.
7   Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 458; Bultmann, πιστεύω κτλ., *TDNT* 6.222.
8   Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 452–8.
9   Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 454.

soteriological meaning, with both founded in the relationship of Jesus to the Father.[10] Throughout this work, the focus is upon πιστεύω as propositional.[11]

2.1 The Problem with πιστεύω as Propositional Belief

As an investigation of the propositional content of πιστεύω in John, Ueberschaer provides a good, comprehensive analysis. It stands in a line of similar approaches, in her case particularly influenced by Schnackenburg.[12] It reflects the concern of the Gospel for the identity of Jesus, and the call for people to acknowledge that identity. Yet there are flaws in this approach, and these flaws are less an indictment of Ueberschaer as they are a shortcoming of many works addressing πιστεύω in John.[13] The two broader critiques are the absence of any definition of πιστεύω and the lack of consideration of the contextual use of the term.

In this chapter, Ueberschaer assumes both that πιστεύω is equivalent to *glaube*, and that it conveys propositional belief. There is no attempt to justify such a position, or to provide any explicit definition. This is a problem that plagues works on belief. The definitions both of 'belief' and of πιστεύω are assumed and the reader is left to figure out the definition the author is working with. There are at least two main positions in terms of the focus of πιστεύω, either on propositional belief or relational trust, and sometimes it is unclear whether an author is adopting one or the other, or the two together. The lack of any consideration of the meaning of πιστεύω in such studies as

10 Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 467–70. The extent of the information that must be believed is debated, for while most see John as highlighting the identity of Jesus, the extent to which his mission or any soteriological dimension must be believed is more contentious. See Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief*, 106–110.

11 While Ueberschaer acknowledges a personal, relational element, this is limited to a brief reference. Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium', 467.

12 Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:563–67.

13 One concern that is specific to Ueberschaer's work is the failure to interact outside the bounds of German scholarship. None of the English-language works referenced in this paper are mentioned, which means regrettably Ueberschaer does not interact with Morgan's work. Neither is there reference to important French works on the Gospel as a means of faith transmission, particularly the work of Jean Zumstein, including: 'L'évangile johannique'; 'Croire et comprendre'; and *L'apprentisage de la foi*. Ueberschaer's focus is more exegetical than Zumstein's narrative approach, yet the intersection of ideas makes the omission surprising.

Ueberschaer's is striking. The absence of a definition not only leaves the reader to make assumptions, but it also leaves open the possibility that the author is similarly making assumptions. While it may be presumptuous to begin a study with a firm definition, at the least a working definition would resolve some ambiguity, while still allowing for refining the definition as the evidence is presented.

The lack of definition leads to the second critique, since any serious consideration of the definition of πιστεύω would have to consider how the term is used not only in the Gospel, but in the wider context. An extensive survey of contextual use may not be possible in an article or chapter. Yet the absence of any reference to the meaning of the term in any literature outside the Gospel itself is a significant methodological flaw. As with the lack of definition, neglecting contextual use is a common flaw. For example, in Raymond Brown's excursus on πιστεύω in his commentary, he makes mention of the possible Hebrew background but says nothing of the use of the term in the Graeco-Roman world.[14] One of the few exceptions where, in the context of the Fourth Gospel, the Graeco-Roman use of πιστεύω is given attention is the work of C. H. Dodd. Dodd discusses both Greek and Jewish backgrounds of the term, concluding that the Greek use was more intellectual, and therefore was limited in the extent to which it could convey the personal connection entailed in the Hebrew background.[15] As will be seen, his conclusions may be flawed, but methodologically his work is an improvement over others. For when we consider the Graeco-Roman context, we find that not only is there extensive evidence for the use of πιστεύω, but the sense of propositional belief is at best an uncommon use.

14   Brown, *John*, 1:512–15; cf. Morris, *John*, 296–98; Gaffney, 'Believing and Knowing'.
15   However, this conclusion rests heavily on the use of πιστεύω in the Hermetic literature. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 179–82. A more balanced, although still at times problematic, assessment of the Graeco-Roman background is found in Bultmann's TDNT article. Bultmann, 'πιστεύω κτλ.', *TDNT* 6:222.

3. Πιστεύω as Trust

The need for definition, and the importance of context, leads to the second key work, Teresa Morgan's *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*.[16] Her work has two primary parts. The first surveys the use of πίστις and *fides*, the Latin equivalent, in the Graeco-Roman world, across all contexts, religious and otherwise. The second part then turns to the New Testament and studies the New Testament use of πίστις in light of the contextual use.

3.1 Πίστις in the Graeco-Roman world

Morgan makes the argument that the predominant sense of πίστις in the Graeco-Roman world is trust. This meaning is the core sense, although she notes that πίστις, the noun, can take reified meanings. That is, where trust might be taken primarily as a disposition, sometimes trust needs to be made more concrete, and thus πίστις can also refer to a pledge, assurance, or proof. Πίστις plays a role in the religious sphere, albeit not with anywhere near the prominence that it has in Christianity. It primarily conveys the gods as ultimately trustworthy (except Tyche/Fortuna) and thus people are to trust them. It rarely, Morgan argues, has a propositional sense, and where it does that is largely subordinate to the more relational idea of trust. Such relational trust is not abstract or merely internal, but expresses itself actively in the conduct of relationships of all kinds, whether in family, business, military, or political contexts.

Turning from the Graeco-Roman world to the biblical text, Morgan sees the New Testament as essentially fitting within its context. At a few points, she acknowledges that there may be some shifts or different nuances. These do not amount to radical differences, but rather the New Testament use opens the door for the much greater propositional focus that Morgan sees as developing in the early church. But she argues that even instances such as ἡ πίστις in Gal. 1:23–24, which is traditionally taken as a set of doctrines, can instead be read in a relational sense.[17]

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16 Morgan, *Roman Faith*. The significance of Morgan's work can be seen in the responses it has provoked, including: Watson, Seifrid and Morgan, 'Quaestiones disputatae'; Konstan, 'Trusting'; Oakes, 'Pistis'; Alexander, 'A Map'; Lieu, 'Faith'; Driediger-Murphy, 'Do Not Examine'; Howard-Snyder, 'Pistis'.

17 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 265–7.

3.2 Πιστεύω in John

When Morgan comes to John, unsurprisingly she sees the focus of John's use of πίστις as focused on the relational. Morgan aligns her conclusions with Bultmann, understanding πιστεύω in a way that minimises propositional content and focuses on relationship with Jesus. She points to two key themes around πιστεύω in John: the importance of trusting/believing Jesus, and the evolution of that trust/belief.[18]

While Morgan focuses on the relational element, the propositional aspect is not ignored. Morgan notes the close connection of πιστεύω to Christology and focuses on the question of divine equality versus subordination.[19] πιστεύω is based upon evidence, notably the signs.[20] Yet the propositional elements are constantly framed as subordinated to the relational. Thus Morgan presents trust preceding testimony, reading the later trust in Scripture or the words of Jesus as a confirmation of earlier trust, rather than as a greater understanding of Jesus.[21] While the close connection of knowing and believing is acknowledged, Morgan reads most uses of γινώσκω as relational knowledge.[22] In addition, Morgan places belief within a framework of pre-election, which also prioritises the relational over the propositional.[23] The overall picture is that any propositional elements of belief are secondary and flow out of a prior relational connection—the content is only what is necessary to evoke trust.[24]

There are some aspects of Morgan's approach to πιστεύω in John that are useful. It is a corrective to approaches that simply assume πιστεύω is a matter of propositional belief. Reading πιστεύω as relational places the term more obviously in connection with other relational language in John: terms of love and friendship, receiving Jesus, being in Jesus, and abiding in him. A relational sense of πιστεύω also makes the best sense of the Johannine emphasis on εἰς. This is not to say, as Dodd argued, that John needed to use εἰς to convey a relational idea,

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18 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 433, 397.
19 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 398–400.
20 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 406–7.
21 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 411–15; for the argument that these instances reflect greater understanding, see Seglenieks, 'Faith and Narrative'.
22 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 411–12, 428.
23 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 406–7, 427.
24 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 428.

but as with 'being in' and 'abiding in', the use of the preposition intensi-fies the relational idea.[25] As de la Potterie suggests, it may even convey a dynamic sense of moving into relationship.[26] This synergy with the rest of the Gospel supports Morgan's argument that πιστεύω has a relational sense in John, and thus that the solely propositional view is untenable.

3.3 The Problem with πιστεύω as Trust

However, there are some shortcomings of Morgan's assessment of πιστεύω in John. The central problem is that she underplays the role of propositional belief, with the focus on the relational aspect leading the propositional elements to be subsumed under the relational.[27] Such downplaying of the propositional aspect begins in the Graeco-Roman material, for while the dominant emphasis of πίστις is trust, there are occasions when the Greeks talk about knowing and believing things about the gods. It may play a less significant role than it does in Christian texts, but it is present, and such propositional belief is expressed using more than just the language of πίστις.[28]

    The downplaying of the propositional aspect of πίστις is more pro-nounced when it comes to John. There are reasons why many scholars have simply assumed a propositional reading of πιστεύω in John, and it is because they are picking up on a key element within the Johannine presentation. In a response to Morgan's work, Judith Lieu raises some concerns regarding Morgan's assessment, and some of her key critiques are around a lack of engagement with Johannine scholarship, along with a failure to interact with John as narrative.[29] Some of the prob-lems Lieu highlights are different from those raised here, and her arti-cle is primarily raising questions more than giving counter arguments, but nevertheless those critiques intersect with the key problem regard-ing the propositional aspect of belief.

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25 Malatesta, *Interiority*, 60.
26 Potterie, 'L'emploi dynamique', 376.
27 Concerns with Morgan underplaying the propositional aspect in the NT are raised by Francis Watson and Mark Seifrid, in 'Quaestiones disputatae'.
28 Examples where πίστις reflects a propositional aspect in a Graeco-Roman religious context are found particularly in Plutarch (*Pyth. orac.* 18; *Amatorius* 13; *Quaest. rom.* 11) and Lucian (*Pseudol.* 8; *Philop.* 13, 30; *Icar.* 10); see further Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief*, 131–7.
29 Lieu, 'Faith', 292–6.

As a way of highlighting the effect of the two problems—the lack of scholarly engagement and the failure to treat John as narrative—we can examine Morgan's comments regarding John 8. First, Morgan refers to the use of πιστεύω with ἐγώ εἰμι in 8:24, connecting it to a call to trust Jesus as one would God.[30] Yet this overlooks the role that ἐγώ εἰμι may have either within the original discourse or for the Gospel audience. Either of these would suggest a more propositional reading of πιστεύω than Morgan makes—in the original setting it is a call to believe in Jesus' heavenly origin, while for a later audience a claim to divinity is possible in light of both the prologue and other uses of ἐγώ εἰμι in the Gospel.

Secondly, Morgan sees 8:12–20 as a case where propositional language is used to convey knowing as relational.[31] She argues that it is seeking to shift both the Pharisees and Gospel audience away from the idea of verification by human standards, that it is not about competing truth claims. The idea that the Gospel seeks to move away from truth claims clashes with the prominence of the language of witness and the courtroom motif that plays a key role in the first half of the Gospel.[32] A reading of 8:12–20 that aligns with the Gospel narrative is that the scene shows that 'knowing relationally' and 'knowing about' are entwined and the one requires the other. It is easy to see how both of Morgan's readings make sense when doing detailed exegesis of a verse or paragraph, but they become problematic when the Gospel as a wider narrative is considered.

3.4 The Counterargument

Given Morgan's work, we cannot simply assume a propositional focus for belief in John, and so the case that belief is propositional must be argued.[33] One of the central reasons that the propositional aspect of πίστις must be taken seriously in John is the statement of purpose in 20:31, 'these things are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God'. While Morgan asserts that ὅτι with πιστεύω

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30 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 400.
31 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 429–31
32 On the trial motif, see especially Lincoln, *Truth on Trial.*
33 I make this argument more extensively in Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief,* 106–10.

merely repeats the ideas expressed in more relational contexts, subordinating the propositional entails a failure to recognise the narrative function of expressions such as 20:31. If the purpose of the narrative can be expressed in such propositional terms, then we need substantial evidence within the text to argue that the propositional idea should be seen as subordinate to the relational. Yet at times the Gospel appears to show the relational in fact depends upon the propositional. In 16:27, the Father's love for the disciples is not based solely on their love for Jesus, but also their propositional belief that he came from God. Curiously, in Morgan's analysis she points to pieces of evidence that should lead towards acknowledging that propositional belief is significant in John. She states that πιστεύω is more often linked to titles than in the Synoptics, as well as observing Jesus' connection to key judicial and life-giving roles.[34] The awareness of such evidence makes it surprising that Morgan consistently decides to subordinate the propositional to the relational.

As noted already, Morgan sees the development of πιστεύω as one of the key features of the Johannine presentation. But she states that how πιστεύω develops is not explained, and that when characters such as the disciples have already been presented in terms of πιστεύω, subsequent instances of πιστεύω are merely confirmation of earlier trust.[35] Yet the disciples display greater understanding through the course of their time with Jesus (16:30), while the Gospel author also goes to significant lengths to show that the disciples also came to greater understanding after the resurrection (2:22; 12:16; 20:9).[36] One observation that may go further to understanding such a subordination is that Morgan reads πιστεύω in John through a framework of pre-election.[37] Morgan's framework of pre-election forces all these instances into an in/out paradigm which flattens out the development of propositional belief.[38] This overlooks the way that outside chapters six and twelve,

34 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 400–2
35 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 406–7, 413, 415.
36 On the development of the faith of the disciples see Seglenieks, 'Now You Believe', 97, 106; on their greater post-resurrection understanding see Seglenieks, 'Faith and Narrative', 29–34.
37 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 427.
38 While John does speak at times in a binary fashion regarding acceptable and unacceptable responses, the characters within the narrative display greater complexity and are not always easily categorised as in or out.

rather than a context of divine election, πιστεύω often appears in contexts that present πιστεύω as a choice (e.g. 3:16–18, 32–36; 4:39–42; 5:40–47). In this way, the complexity of Johannine belief is overlooked, and therefore the extent to which believing involves learning and understanding is wrongly minimised.

Both the propositional and the relational are prominent strands within the Johannine use of πιστεύω, and neither should be minimised by an excessive focus on the other. These two senses are related, for in order to trust someone we must know something about them. As both Matthew Bates and Gerald Downing have argued, linguistics suggests that we should not expect precision in defining between possible connotations of πίστις-language.[39] In Johannine use, πιστεύω conveys both a relational sense of trust and propositional belief centred upon Jesus' identity, and both are presented by John as essential parts of the intended response to Jesus. At this point we need to ask, however, if these two aspects together comprise all we can or should say about the meaning of πιστεύω in John? In order to answer that question, I will bring into the discussion a third work.

4. Πιστεύω as Allegiance

The third work to consider is another that addresses the topic of πίστις, Matthew Bates' *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*.[40] Bates' focus is on Paul rather than John, and thus may not be an obvious conversation partner here. However, he proposes a novel thesis regarding the use of πίστις in the New Testament, which is that at least in some cases it should be understood as meaning allegiance. He is not the first to use the term 'allegiance' in connection with πίστις, but what is new is a sustained argument that πίστις should be understood and even translated this way.[41]

Bates' argument begins with an observation that in modern use, 'belief' can have an unhelpfully limited sense.[42] We have already seen

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39   Bates, 'The External-Relational Shift', 188–92; Downing, 'Ambiguity', 139–62.
40   Bates, *Salvation*, see also *Gospel Allegiance*, 57–83.
41   Others to recently use the language of 'allegiance' in connection with faith include Gupta, *Paul*, 88; Wright, *Paul*, 90; Bennema, *Mimesis*, 27.
42   Bates, *Salvation,* 15–25.

that belief can be understood by some as limited to the idea of propositional belief or intellectual assent, a position rendered untenable in view of Morgan's work. Rather than focusing, as Morgan does, on relational ideas of trust, Bates highlights some contextual examples which he argues use πίστις in the sense of allegiance.[43] From there, he argues that the same meaning fits within some contexts in the New Testament. Bates also suggests that the idea of allegiance aligns with a broader understanding of the gospel and πίστις as a response to the reigning king Jesus.[44] Bates then goes a step further in his argument to say that not only is allegiance an appropriate translation of πίστις, but that allegiance is also an ideal term for representing a more comprehensive picture of the response that is required for salvation.[45]

4.1 Allegiance as a Translation for Πιστεύω

Bates' thesis has proved to be provocative, and in response Will Timmins argues that Bates' idea is untenable.[46] Timmins marshals a long list of critiques, and those relating to the exegesis of Pauline texts will be not be taken up here. Additionally, some of the objections are less than compelling. For example, Timmins points out that the contextual examples that Bates uses do not show πίστις used with prepositions, when in the NT ἐν, ἐπι and εἰς are commonly used. Morgan, and others previously, have shown that there is no significant difference in meaning between the use of the dative and the use of those prepositions with πίστις/πιστεύω.[47] However, several of Timmins objections are significant, including the assertion that Bates does not provide sufficient contextual evidence, and that he fails to recognise the distinction between a word study and a concept study.

Timmins argues that Bates fails to give sufficient contextual evidence for πίστις as allegiance. As a result, Timmins alleges there is the impression that Bates is trying to resolve problems rather than

43 Bates, *Salvation,* 5–6, 79–80.
44 Bates, *Salvation,* 78.
45 Bates, *Salvation,*
46 Timmins, 'A Faith'.
47 Morgan, *Roman Faith,* 425–6; Harris, *Prepositions*, 236; Painter, 'Eschatological Faith', 40; Bultmann, *TDNT* 6:222.

presenting an argument that is the best fit for the data. The section on contextual examples is relatively short, and limited primarily to instances from Maccabees (1 Macc. 10:25–27; 3 Macc. 3:2–4; 5:31) and Josephus (*Ant.* 12.47, 12.147, 12.396; *J.W.* 1.207, 2.341).[48] It raises questions around whether 'allegiance' was a standard use of πίστις in the wider Graeco-Roman context instead of merely within Jewish settings. However, while limited, the evidence does show that πίστις was used to indicate the sort of loyalty to a sovereign which could equally be termed allegiance. Bates also demonstrates this use in literature that is closely connected to the New Testament (in the case of the LXX) or coming out of the same socio-cultural context (Josephus). Morgan similarly provides examples where πίστις conveys loyalty to a superior, including military contexts of a soldier's loyalty to the commander.[49] While Timmins argues that allegiance, loyalty, and faithfulness are not synonymous, they have significant semantic overlap.[50] Thus, while faithfulness or loyalty may not imply a status differential in the way that allegiance does, there may be cases where those terms can function synonymously. Such is the case with the gospel context of Jesus as king, along with the imperial context into which the gospel was proclaimed.[51] Thus, while more evidence may be desirable, Bates raises the plausibility of πίστις being translated as allegiance in a first-century Jewish context.

One particular area where there is a lack of evidence adduced by Timmins is with regard to the use of the verb πιστεύω.[52] This is a critical problem when applying Bates' arguments to John, as John only uses the verb. As Morgan identifies, the verb has a more limited range of meaning than the noun. It is more focused on the core meanings of trust/believe, with the occasional use as 'entrust', in contrast to the noun which can also be used for deferred and reified meanings, such

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48 Bates, *Salvation,* 79–80.
49 Morgan, *Roman Faith,*
50 Timmins, 'A Faith', 609.
51 Bates highlights both of these contexts. Bates, *Salvation,* 67–72, 87–9.
52 Bates refers to the presence of the verb in Josephus, *Ant.* 12.396. However, the use of the verb refers to entrusting one's self to someone in the context of physical protection, using the same construction as in John 2:24.

as assurance, persuasion, pledge, and proof.[53] Thus, in the absence of further evidence we cannot extend Bates' argument to suggest that πιστεύω in John might be translated as 'give allegiance'. While it is possible that there is contextual evidence that would open up 'give allegiance' as a possible translation of the verb, at this stage that the evidence has not been presented.

A second issue that Timmins raises is the blurring of the distinction between a word study and a concept study. This is a confusion that has long plagued biblical studies and can particularly be an issue in discussions of 'faith'.[54] Yet Timmins overstates the problem, for Bates differentiates between talking about translation and talking about a concept.[55] Word and concept are connected, as it is words which convey concepts, and thus it is to be expected that Bates would move from discussing individual instances of πίστις to their broader significance. A greater methodological clarity would be useful, but it is not a fatal flaw in the logic of his case. Nevertheless, the issue is important to consider here because of how we might appropriate his work in the context of John's Gospel. While the evidence that Bates provides is not sufficient to suggest that 'give allegiance' is an appropriate contextual sense for πιστεύω in John, nor is there an exegetical basis for such a translation in any specific instances within John, we can still consider whether allegiance conveys the concept of the response required for salvation, or in Johannine terms, to receive eternal life.

4.2 Allegiance and the Johannine Concept of Belief

While the question of translating πιστεύω as 'give allegiance' has been ruled out, there remains the possibility of allegiance playing a role as conceptual terminology. The shift from talking about a word to a concept is justified on account of the way πιστεύω is used in John. Far more than in the other Gospels, πιστεύω has a prominent conceptual role in John. That is, πιστεύω is used to summarise the intended response to

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53 Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 6, 20–23, 395–96. Cf. Williams, 'Faith', 349.
54 The classic critique calling for distinguishing word and concept studies is Barr, *Semantics*, 206–62. Highlighting the issue in the context of faith is Campbell, *Quest*, 190. Both Timmins and Bates refer to the discussion in Campbell.
55 Bates, *Salvation,* 78.

Jesus which the Gospel seeks to evoke in the audience. The prologue sets up πιστεύω as the intended response to witness (1:7), initially in terms of the witness of John the Baptist, but also echoing with the role of the Gospel itself as witness (21:24). Πιστεύω is also presented as the ideal response to the incarnation (1:12–13), tied to other important ideas of receiving Jesus and birth from God. The statement of purpose in 20:30–31 summarises the goal of the Gospel to evoke πιστεύω which leads to life. Throughout the Gospel πιστεύω is used frequently, in significant passages, and in close connection to all the other important aspects of responding to Jesus which the Gospel encourages (ἀγαπάω, γινώσκω/οἶδα, μένω, ἔρχομαι, ἀκολουθέω).[56] Thus we can talk about a concept of belief in John, which centres on πιστεύω but is conveyed through a range of related terms.

The question then is, when talking about the Johannine concept of belief, whether allegiance might be an appropriate and even helpful term to use. To answer the question would require a definition of the concept of belief in John. I have recently argued elsewhere that Johannine belief entails a cognitive aspect, centred on Jesus identity, a relational aspect that involves a close personal connection of trust and love with Jesus, an ethical aspect, in terms of right conduct in adherence to Jesus' commands and example, a witness aspect, both confessing one's faith but presenting such faith in order that others might also believe, and an ongoing aspect, as all the above aspects are to be continuous.[57] If we take the idea of 'saving allegiance' as Bates defines it, there is some alignment with the concept in John. Bates' definition is 'mental affirmation that the gospel is true, professed fealty to Jesus alone as the cosmic Lord, and enacted loyalty through obedience to Jesus as the king.'[58] It reflects the cognitive, ethical and witness aspects. As such, it could be a helpful term to convey something of the breadth of the concept in John. One shortcoming is that Bates' definition is not explicit about the relational aspect that might be conveyed by the idea

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56 For a detailed analysis of these interconnected terms, see Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief*, 17, 31–105.

57 Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief,* 106–18.

58 Bates, *Salvation*, 92.

of trust.[59] In John 6:68–69, believing that Jesus has the words of life may indicate an affirmation of his message, but in the context it also conveys a trust in the person of Jesus despite incomplete understanding. The ongoing aspect of Johannine belief may be entailed in Bates' definition, but it is not made explicit. These problems do not require the rejection of the idea that allegiance may be a helpful term when it comes to discussing the concept of belief in John's Gospel.

One benefit of such terminology would be that 'allegiance' is less prone to a reductionistic understanding than 'belief'. Popular use of the term 'belief' is primarily cognitive, which as we have seen is too limited a sense in light of both the sense of πιστεύω in John and the broader Johannine concept of belief.[60] It can also have connotations of opinions that are counterfactual or unsupported by any form of evidence. As Morgan argues in her work, πιστεύω in John does have an evidential basis, as the signs and works of Jesus are presented as evidence that supports belief (John 10:38; 20:30–31).[61] Using allegiance in talking of the Johannine concept of belief could avoid some of these limitations in the English term 'belief'. Additionally, in contemporary thought both propositional belief and trust are often conceived of as primarily internal and attitudinal. In contrast, the Johannine concept of belief incorporates active elements, which could be construed as acting in alignment with, or in imitation of, the king. Thus, allegiance is a helpful term to include in our vocabulary as it reduces the chance of assumptions that limit the idea of what is entailed by Johannine belief.

The use of 'allegiance' as a descriptor of Johannine belief will not resolve all the problems noted here. Popular understanding of allegiance still does not equate to the Johannine concept of belief, so it cannot be as simple as simply replacing one term with another. Most modern definitions of allegiance focus on ideas of loyalty and commitment. These are directed, in more traditional usage, towards the

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59   While there is an acknowledgement that trust is involved, that is subsumed within allegiance, see Bates, *Salvation*, 90. Bates is clearer that πίστις is often trust in *Gospel Allegiance*, 64.

60   Bates observes the potential problems in the English terms 'faith' and 'believe', *Gospel Allegiance*, 59–60; see also Bates, 'External-Relational Shift', 176–7; Gupta, *Paul*, 2–5.

61   Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 403–18.

state or sovereign, and so it can entail some sense of obedience.[62] But it can be used more broadly to indicate loyalty and support for a group or cause. We can speak of allegiance to a political group, or a football team. It is always used in a sense of open commitment—someone who wears the team colours, goes to the game, the vocal supporter. Similar to Bates' definition, the common use of allegiance does not emphasise the relational aspect of belief. Therefore, rather than replacing other terms, speaking of allegiance alongside trust could go further towards conveying the breadth of the Johannine concept of belief, rather than merely relying on 'belief' or 'trust' alone.

5. Conclusion

We are now in a position to return to where we began and give an answer, in light of recent work on the subject, to the question of what πιστεύω means in John. In terms of the word itself, it has two senses that work together in John. It conveys a sense of relational trust, a trust that is directed towards the person of Jesus. This is a close, relational trust, with the use of εἰς emphasising the relational connection. Alongside the relational sense, there is a propositional sense. In particular with ὅτι, πιστεύω is used to convey information about Jesus which is presented as needing to be accepted. These two senses are both present throughout the Gospel, and neither is clearly subordinated to the other. Thus, we ought not speak only of knowledge that enables relationship, nor of relationship that is the means to knowledge. To believe in Jesus is to both know and accept his identity as the Christ, the Son of God, and to trust in him.

If we extend our focus to consider the concept of belief, which in John is centred upon but not limited to the term πιστεύω, we see both those aspects continue. The propositional aspect is reflected in use of 'know', as well as narrative features such as the prevalent confessions. The relational aspect is extended through language of love, friendship, and abiding. This concept, however, goes beyond these

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62 Bates understands John as including obedience in the '*pistis* action' based on John 2:23–24; 3:36. *Gospel Allegiance*, 89.

two dimensions, including ethical actions and bearing witness to one's faith. Thus, while we do not have the evidence to make the case for 'allegiance' as a translation for πιστεύω, the idea of allegiance is helpful to convey the breadth of the Johannine concept of belief. It overcomes some of the limitations of popular conceptions of belief, and even of trust, and thus ensures that the richness of the Johannine concept is not obscured by modern English usage.

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