Relevance of the "Εγώ εἰμι" Sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel to the Contemporary Church in Nigeria

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Abstract
"Εγώ εἰμι" phrases in the Gospel of John have been variously translated among the biblical scholars. The objective of the paper therefore, is to unearth the Εγώ εἰμι sayings of Jesus that represent a particular relationship of Jesus to the spiritual needs of humans: the bread that gives eternal life; their light in darkness, their entrance into security and fellowship, their guide and protector in life, their hope in death, their certainty in perplexity, and their source of vitality for productiveness. *The methodologies used were exegetical and historical and sociological. Data were gathered through secondary and internet sources. Therefore through lexico-semantics analysis which reveals, its root-words and word-stems and the various possible semantic categories created by the human mind, this paper claims that in these phrases, Jesus used everyday physical things to illustrate deep spiritual truths about himself. The paper contends that the church cannot claim ignorant of Jesus and his work to the world of which He came to save. Neither can she give excuse whatsoever of her failure or fruitlessness.*
Keywords: ἄρτος; φῶς; θύρα; ποιμὴν; ἀνάστασις; ὁδὸς; ἄμπελος.

Introduction

The Gospel of John, also known as the fourth Gospel, recorded seven set of self-declaration of Jesus, referred to as "Εγώ εἰμι" or "the I AM sayings of Christ". "Εγώ is a personal pronoun nominative singular. It is use to serve as an emphasis to the first person, and translated as 'I'. In the New Testament, ἐγώ acquire a religious significance in three aspects. First, in the proclamation of God which is important in the apocalypse. The second is in the self-witness of Christ especially in the John's Gospel. The third is in the self-utterances of Christians. Therefore, ἐγώ has a theological, Christological and anthropological significance. In the Christological meaning, the declaration carries the stage

of thought of the father by the son Jesus Christ. Here, the ἐγώ is characterized with the feature of the revelatory speeches of the son of God, which constitutes the major parts of Jesus preaching. This gives the sayings of Jesus a solemn and liturgical ring, and explains the relationship of the Son and the Father (John14:9) (Gerhard, 1964 823-862). This is in reference to the declaratory in Exodus 3:14 as the "I AM THAT I AM", and is showing now a reflection in the Son's "I AM" sayings.

On the other hands, εἰμι is a verb indicative present active first person singular. In the LXX, the abstract εἰμι ὁ ων is used for God self-revelation (Ex.3:14). This leads to the Greek speaking Jews to use "ὁ ὢν" as name for God. In the New Testament, 'ὁ ὢν' is a name for God in Revelation 11:17, 16:5, 1:4. The formula occurs in God's self-prediction (Rev.1:8) and worship (Rev.4:8, 11:17, 16:5). This is designed to preserve the sanctity of the divine self-designation, expressing the supra-temporarily eternity and deity of God. ἐγώ εἰμι in this sense is ascribing the consciousness of Christ in His eternity or supra-temporarily. It is a self-identification of the Son who is equal with God in a term which was used by the LXX Septuagint to distinguish the Father from false gods (Isa.43:10) (Gerhard Ibid: 823-862). The Lord in these sayings used the earthly language of earthly things, to explain an eternal truth about Himself, in relation to the world and the people thereof. This paper therefore, investigates these sayings of Jesus and their implications to the contemporary church in Nigeria are examined.

Jesus as the Bread of life (John 6:35-36)

This first "I AM" saying of Jesus is recorded in John 6:35a. This is read in the Greek New Testament as; "εἶπε δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς". The translation of

this statement in the King James Version as, “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life”. The key word in this scripture is ἄρτος ‘bread’. This word is a noun nominative masculine singular. It means bread or loaf such as the one use in the last supper (Mt.4:22). According to Hale (2007, 365), bread is the main food of the Middle East. Therefore, in the context of this chapter, bread means “food”. In the LXX, the word is use in Exodus 16:4, to talk of nourishing bread (Gerhardl 1964, 823-862). Philo does compare the manna to the θεος λογος in an allegorical sense, but this language is far removed from Philo's vagueness. In the Synoptics (Mark 14:22 ; Matt 26:26 ; Luke 22:19) Jesus uses ἄρτος**,** bread as the symbol of his body in the Lord's Supper, but here Jesus offers himself in place of the loaves and fishes which they had come to seek (John 6:24,26). He is the bread of life, “ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς”, in two senses: it has life in itself, the living bread (John 6:51), and it gives life to others like the water of life, the tree of life (Robertson, 2006). Morris L, (1989,110) interestingly, points out that the definite article, before the word bread, indicates the fact that Jesus and Jesus alone, is the one who is the bread of life. While Milne (1993,110) states that, "the bread of life also points to the satisfying nature of Jesus. The word ζωῆς , of life, is a noun genitive feminine singular and it from ζωὴ . It is used to denote the physical vitality of organic being; animal, men and also plant. ζωῆς in this usage is understood not as a thing, but as vitality, in a manner which characterizes all living creatures (Verbrugge, 2000,226 **)**.

In about 149 appearance of possession in the Old Testament Septuagint, possession of life, ζωῆς is understood as an intrinsic good which cannot be relative. It is indeed the supreme good, which is often used for fortune. In the Philistine Judaism, life is extension of natural existence, and the days of life often mean life. In this understanding, life depends on self-nourishment, and God is the source of life. In the New Testament ζωὴ, is first used in the natural life of man. It has limited existence in time, and has ability of what is alive to do things. Thus, God is the primary source of life and death, as he is the judge of the quick and the death (Gerhard 1964, 823-862). Morga n (nd.,:190) , states that, "When the Lord spoke of life here, He used the old and functional word ζωὴ , that is the simple word for life." This word is different from ψυχή, which consists meanly of the mental aspect of life. Jesus added here in John 6:35b, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty". The supplementary phrase, 'will never go hungry' translate a gnomic aorist focusing on this as a timeless truth. There will be no hunger again. The future tense 'will never be thirsty' is a predictive future. It expresses a one hundred percent certainty, assuming the condition of 'believing is met'. The Greek uses a double negative to emphasize this 'never'. The offer is open to all, but the privilege is only for those who have made the choice to 'come to him and 'believe' in him. Regardless of how they come, all will have a completely satisfying experience (Ngewa, 2003,114). ·The 'one who comes' and the 'one who believes' are both in the same case (the present middle participle nominative singular masculine for πιστευων). In this statement, Jesus is making a plain declaration about his Heavenly origin.

Jesus as the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5)

The second “I AM” saying is taken from John 8:12, written in the Greek text as; “Πάλιν οὖν αὐτοῖς ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ᾽ ἕξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς. This is translated in the Reversed Standard Version of the Bible as; “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follow s me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The key word to be noted in this saying is φῶς, light which is a noun nominative neuter singular. Light is the most widely attested of the ‘primal words’ in a phenomenology of religion that describe the archetypal human yearning for God. Out of the 23 occurrences of the word in the Gospels, John uses it 6 times.

With the feast of Tabernacles still in mind, Jesus now talked about being the light of the world. The point of contact was the emphasis on light at this feast. Every evening, four great candelabra were lit in the court of the women. These illuminated the whole temple area, and by their light Levite musicians played, the greatest, wisest and holiest men of Israel danced, and the people in general sang and watched right through the night William, (2000,11). Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world linked up with this celebration of light. It was in the hearing of the crowd that stood around him and of those who were passing bye to make their offerings that Jesus made his second great ‘I am declaration: (8:12). Carson (1991, 338) argues that "In the context of such powerful ritual, Jesus' declaration must have come with stunning force". Ngewa, (2003,152) further adds that Jesus’ claim here is that he illuminates the whole world and not just part of Jerusalem, as the light from the candelabras did during the feast of Tabernacles. Moreover, he does not illuminate only one particular activity (for example, the evening dancing during the feast), but the whole of life. He directs all aspects of human life.

In addition to the immediate association of light with the four great candelabra, the Jews would also associate it with the teachings of the Old Testament., where light was closely associated with Yahweh. For example: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation' (Ps. 27:1). 'The Lord will be your everlasting light' (Isaiah 60:19); Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light' (Mic. 7:8b). In all these passages, the word LORD is the Jewish way of writing Yahweh. In essence, therefore, Jesus was equating himself with Yahweh. He was claiming to illuminate the lives not just of Jews or of Gentiles but of both—of the entire world (Ngewa 2003,152).

Κόσμου is a noun genitive masculine singular and is from κόσμος which basic meaning is arrangement and order, signifying that of the world or universe. The word κόσμος appears 186 times in the New Testament. Out of this number, John's literatures used it 78 times in both the Gospel and the Epistles, but the synoptic Gospels have only 15 times. In the time of Plato, κόσμος took the central meaning of the world or universe, as a central term for Greek philosophy. In the LXX, κόσμος is used in the totality of everything created by God, including all that is created and transitory. Κόσμος therefore, has a beginning that has been established by God (Mtt.13:35,Lk. 11:50, John 17:24) (Horst and Gerhard 1993: 311). Thus, when Jesus says, ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, he means, He from the beginning gives light, and He is still the one lighting the world. More to that, the Lord says; "he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". This portrays the world as a place characterizes with darkness, invented by sin. He who accepts and follows the Lord Jesus will have salvation and light of God which Christ alone gives.

Jesus as the Gate for the Sheep-10:7,9

The third 'I AM' saying is recorded in John 10:9 which reads in the Greek New Testament text as; "ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ θύρα· δι᾽ ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ σωθήσεται καὶ εἰσελεύσεται καὶ ἐξελεύσεται καὶ νομὴν εὑρήσει. This is also translated in the New International Version of the Bible as; "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture". The major key word in this verse is θύρα, which is a nominative feminine singular. It literally means, any kind of door, gate or entrance (Mk. 1:33, 2:1 Mtt.6:6; Lk. 11:7).

In this section, Jesus takes the familiar sight of a gate at the entrance to a sheepfold and uses it to communicate a central truth about himself as the Gate. In doing this, Jesus made the third 'I am' statement in this Gospel. In Palestine at that time, flocks spent the greater part of the year in the open air. According to Wright (1953, 151), at night, they might be herded into any one of the following types of enclosures.

a) An area fenced in by thorn bushes or woven branches or plant stems. Such simple shelters were all that was needed during good weather and when the sheep would not be there long.

b) A cave, which would be preferred during stormy weather

c) An area enclosed by loose stones piled up in a circular wall with thorns arranged on top. A more permanent enclosure such as this would often be built in front of a cave's mouth, making the cave available for shelter when the weather was bad, while having the enclosed area as a sleeping place in fair weather.

d) A low roofed building with open arches along the front. Attached to the building would be a wall, four to six foot high, enclosing an outdoor area. Sharp thorns were put on

the top of the wall to protect the sheep from wild animals and robbers. Such structures were common in the sheltered valleys. During bad weather, the sheep could spend the night in the interior part of the fold, protected by a roof and walls.

Whether the sheepfold was a temporary or a permanent structure, it always had a gate. The gate enabled the shepherd and the sheep to move in and out of the fold. When Jesus spoke about the characteristics of shepherds and thieves, he had in mind a sheepfold into which several shepherds had brought their sheep for the night. The shepherds would take turns guarding the gate. Sheep are easy to steal and stock theft is a common problem in any agricultural society where animals represent wealth (Wright, 1953, 188). Any shepherd approaching the sheepfold would come to the gate (10:2) and would be recognized as the shepherd of one of the flocks inside. The watchman would readily open the gate for him (10:3a).

A thief or robber would want to avoid being seen by the watchman and would try to find some other way into the sheepfold, usually by climbing over the wall or fence (10:1). Any observer who saw someone approaching the gate and being let in by the watchman would assume that the person must be a shepherd or the owner of some of the sheep within the fold. However, some one seems climbing over the fence or the wall would automatically be judged to be a thief. Thus the use or non-use of the gate clearly distinguished shepherds and thieves.

Jesus therefore, went onto the spell out in clear terms the spiritual truths behind the illustration. In doing this, he made the third ‘I am’ statement in this Gospel. ‘I am the gate’. Jesus contrasts himself as the Gate with those who came before him, whom he identifies as ‘thieves and robbers’. He adds that ‘the sheep did not listen to them’ (10:8). Who is Jesus talking about here? Definitely not the Old Testament prophets or John the Baptist. These came in order to lead the sheep in God’s way. Most likely, he is referring to false teachers,

or even self-proclaimed ‘Messiahs’ who had come before him. They were not gates, offering safety to the Jews as they were led in and out of the fold. Judging from the general practice of thieves, they came to steal and kill and destroy’ (10:10). Jesus, however, is a gate who provides the following blessings: salvation-(10:9a) security (10:9b) and satisfaction—and find pasture (10:9b) (Beasley-Murray 1987, 168-169).

Jesus as the good Shepherd -10:11,14

The fourth ‘I AM’, is recorded in John 10:14, reads in the Greek text as; “Εγώ είμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς καὶ γινώσκω τὰ ἐμὰ καὶ γινώσκουσί με τὰ ἐμά," This is translated in the New International Version of the Bible as, “I am the good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”. In this saying also, the key word is ποιμὴν, Shepherd. Is a noun nominative masculine singular. This word occurs 18 times in the New Testament, in both the Gospels and the Epistles. The verb ποιμαίνω of this word occurs 11 time, with only 3 in the Gospels (Matt.2:6, LK.17:7, John 21:16).

The passage at hand (10:10-21) is a continuation of the preceding one (10:1-9). The audience is still the Pharisees of 9:40. Whereas in 10:1-9 Jesus had focused on his ministry as the gate into God’s presence, in this passage the focus shifts to Jesus as the shepherd. Once again Jesus uses familiar things to teach spiritual truths. Observing both the noun and the verb concept of the word Schneider wrote; “because of the economic in biblical Palestine, live-stock breathing with sheep and goats herd was important reality alone with agriculture. A small livestock herder enjoys a respected vocation. In the entire Orient, the people were referred to as ‘herds’, and the kings as shepherds”(Gerhard 1978:3). It is in that understanding, Jesus proclaims Himself. He is the shepherd, not the herd, and not just the shepherd, but the good shepherd.

The center of the passage is Jesus' fourth 'I am' saying. In 10:11 he says, 'I am the good shepherd'. This point is repeated in 10:14. Jesus contrasts his role as shepherd with that of others who claim to have an interest in God's sheep, his people. Unlike the thief, who comes to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus is the good shepherd who has come so 'that they (the sheep) may have life, and have it to the full' (10:10). Unlike the hireling, who is more concerned for his own safety than that of the sheep, Jesus 'lays down his life for the sheep' (10:11). Jesus goes on to describe the qualities and acts that characterize him as the good shepherd. Jesus is not just a shepherd but the shepherd. There is also an article before the adjective 'good'. John is giving equal emphasis to the adjective and the noun, the 'good' and the 'shepherd'. Jesus is not only the shepherd and a good one, but the shepherd who is also the one-that-is good (Dana and Mantey, 1927**:** 152). Jesus is not only the efficient shepherd, but also the gracious one. (Richard C. Trench, 1976: 1880)**.** He lovingly cares for his sheep.

His familiarity with his sheep is another quality of Jesus. 'I know my sheep and my sheep know me' (10:14). A shepherd's knowledge of his sheep was very important in Palestine, especially in situations where several flocks of sheep grazed together or spent the night in the same fold. Shepherds knew the needs of each sheep, and the sheep knew the voice of their shepherd. Jesus' knowledge of his sheep enables him to address each group or individual at their particular level of spirituality. He knows the hearts of all. In return, his sheep know him as he actually is, the one sent from above. Ngewa, 2003:194).

Jesus as the Resurrection and the life (11:25)

The fifth 'I AM' saying is taken from John 11:25, where Jesus saying in the Greek text reads; "εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή. This is translated in the Reverse Standard Version of the Bible as; "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he lives". Another key word in this

expressing of Christ is ἀνάστασις. This is a noun nominative feminine singular. It means, a rising up, a rising from seat, and rising from death

Following more than two months' ministry in Jerusalem, Jesus went across the Jordan to a place called Bethany or Bethabara in the KJV. The Bethany beyond the Jordan (10:40 and 1:28) is different from the Bethany near Jerusalem that was the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha (11:1). The Bethany beyond the Jordan is more than one hundred and eighty stadia cover twenty miles, or thirty-two kilometers (Miller and Miller, 1973, 813) from Jerusalem.(Finegan, 1969, 9). The other Bethany was more like a suburb of Jerusalem, a mere fifteen stadia (one and three-quarter miles, or about three kilometers) from Jerusalem, around the shoulder of the Mount of Olives.

At the Bethany near Jerusalem, Lazarus was ill (11:1). His sisters, one of whom was the Mary "who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair' (11:2), sent a message to Jesus, who was at least eighteen miles (twenty-nine kilometers) away: 'Lord, the one you love is sick' (11:3). Before this event, there is no mention of Jesus' friendship with Lazarus, Mary and Martha, but it seems that Jesus had established a good relationship with them in the course of his ministry in Jerusalem and its suburbs. John tells us that 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus' (11:5). After receiving this message, Jesus 'stayed where he was two more days' (11:6). The reason for this is tied with his comment when told that Lazarus was sick: 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it' (11:4). The two more days plus the days needed for the eighteen-mile journey allowed enough time for Lazarus to die and be buried.

Healing Lazarus would not bring appropriate glory to God's son at this time. What was called for was an act of resurrection. John tells us that 'on his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (11:17). The Jewish practice was to bury

the dead immediately, usually no more than eight hours after death (Daniel-Rops, 1980, 333). Thus, the four days in the tomb (11:39) would be about the length of time Lazarus had been dead. If we allow two days for the messengers from Mary and Martha to travel the eighteen miles from Bethany near Jerusalem to Bethany across the Jordan (11:3) and two days for Jesus to travel to Bethany near Jerusalem. These four days plus the two days of 11:6 gives a total of six days. Thus, it appears that Lazarus died no later than two days after the message was dispatched, since he had been dead four days, when Jesus arrived (11:39). When Jesus assured Martha that her brother would rise again (11:23), Martha was thinking of things within life's experience but not of a movement from death to life. It was at this point that Jesus made the declaration which forms his fifth key 'I am' sayings in John's gospel-'I am the resurrection and the life'. This declaration contains at least three key ideas:

a) The identity of Jesus: Jesus identified himself as 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25). Resurrection is subsequent to death. Where death has struck, Jesus brings life.

b) Jesus and the believing dead. Jesus says that the one, who believes in him 'will live, even though he dies' (11:25). This is a clear statement that those who believe in Jesus will be raised from the dead. This promise applied to all the believing dead, no matter how long they have been in the realm of death. They will rise in the same future resurrection. Martha talked about it in 11:24. In terms of the present situation, however, Jesus was not saying that Lazarus would rise on the last day. Jesus could give life immediately if he chose, for he is life.

c) Jesus and the believing living: Jesus says that 'whoever lives and believes in me will never die (11:26a). This echoes his words to his disciples in 11:11. 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep'. The physical death of the believer is not death, for a believer possesses eternal life (a gift given, immediately upon believing) and will later enjoy the reality of the resurrection of the body. One who possesses eternal life cannot go through an experience

that can be called ‘death’. Where there is death, there is no life; and where there is life, there is no death. The believer only sleeps waiting for the awakening of the sleeping body in order to continue with life. Life is not interrupted. Jesus declaration here was not just a comfort for the people of Lazarus, but confirmation of the reality of His eternal power over death. The confirmation of this assertion was seen in the resurrection of Lazarus from the death. The people of Lazarus on seeing this miracle would not had just rejoice for the resurrection of Lazarus, but also for the certainty of their own resurrection’s proof by that miracle.

Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life 14:6

The sixth ‘I AM’ declaration of Jesus is recoded again by John in John 14:6, reads in the Greek text as; “λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή·οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι᾽ ἐμοῦ”. The same text is translated in the New American Standard Version of the Bible as; “Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me”.

The important key word in this declaration is ὁδὸς. This Greek word is a noun nominative feminine singular, which means way or street in many possible forms. This also means the way which someone takes, a course, or journey. In the LXX, the word appears 880 times, in which case signify the divine purpose to which it should be accomplished (Gen.28:14, Deut. 1:14). In the New Testament, ὁδὸς is used in both literal and metaphorical senses. For example, Jesus uses it in Matthew 7:13 and Luke13:24 to teach on the narrow road that leads to salvation, and the broad road that leads to death. The declaration of Jesus as the way, signified His salvation offered to humanity, which leads to eternity with God. This is so because, He is the Son who possesses the ultimate right to the father’s house, and

give access to whoever believes in Him (Friedricck 1972:70). Those who therefore want to get to the father must 'walk' on Jesus (the 'way' or road) as the one who died for them.

Jesus also embodies all that is true, ἀλήθεια. This Greek word is a noun nominative feminine singular. The word occurs about 126 times in the LXX (Septuagint), uses absolutely to denote a reality, which is regarded as firm, solid or abiding. This signifies what is true. In legal circle, the word describes what the actual truth of a process or cause is. (Deut. 22:20), as such, referred to the word of God. (Gen. 42:14, Jer.2:21). In the New Testament, the word is used as that which has certainty and force. This is in the line of the rabbinic conception of God, and the demand incomparable with the Torah. Thus, Jesus speaking of Himself as the ἀλήθεια, connote first of all, the formal meaning of truth, and also bringing the revelation of God in the word. (John 8:40, 45-46) (Gerhard 1964: 232). It is then means that those who follow his teaching follow what is true, for 'the truth' cannot bring forth falsehood.

Again, Jesus is also 'the life', and as such he gives life, ζωὴ as in the bread of life. When Jesus speaks of himself being the life, He speaks of the divine vitality He possesses, that was also transferred to man at creation (Gen.2:7). Those who want to reach the rooms he spoke about are to walk on him as their way to salvation. Those who want to remain in the truth are to be taught by him, for he is the truth. Those who want to possess eternal life must get it from him, because he is life. All these truths are meant to emphasize the fact that Jesus himself is the way to the destination.

Jesus as the True Vine 15:1,5

The seventh "I AM" of Jesus is recorded in John 15:1, and reads in the Greek text as "Εγώ είμι ή ἄμπελος ή ἀληθινή, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστι." This is translated in the

New International version of the Bible as "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. The word to note about Jesus declaration here is ἄμπελος. This Greek word is a noun nominative feminine singular, which means vine, or grapevine. The grammatical structure of this saying is the same as that of the fourth 'I am' saying ('I am the good shepherd'). In both, Jesus combines a noun (vine, sheep) and an adjective (true, good), each of which has an article in front of it. The literal translation of 15:1a is therefore 'I am the vine, the true one'. While the meaning is the same as the translation 'I am the true vine', the literal translation captures the equal distribution of emphasis between 'the vine' and 'the true'. Jesus is not just the vine. He is equally the true one. (The same distribution of emphasis was noted in 10:11: 'I am the shepherd, the good one).

The Greek word ἀληθινὴ translated 'true' here is an adjective nominative feminine singular from ἀληθινος It means more than just truthfulness as opposed to falsehood. It is use with the sense of sincere (Heb. 10:20), upright, true or correct. (John4:37, 19:35,8:16). It is also use in reference to an attribute of God, such as truthful, righteous, and trustworthy. However, in the time of Hellenism, ἀληθινος, does no longer means genuine in the general sense, but as that which truly is, and eternal. In relation to human conduct, it signifies a contact with the divine. (Gerhard 1964:342-343). Thus, when Jesus says "I AM" the true vine, he is saying, "I AM" the real, dependable and eternal vine. Jesus was not saying that he is the true vine and that all others are false, but rather that he is the dependable vine. Jesus is the dependable one and the only dependable way. As the true vine, Jesus has at least two main functions that are mentioned here. They are that a) he enables the branches to bear fruit (15:4-5) and b) he is the means whereby the disciples' prayers are answered (15:7,16b). This concludes the seventh 'I AM' sayings of Jesus.

The implication of the "I AM" sayings of Jesus to the contemporary church in Nigeria

Having examined "*Εγώ εἰμι" phrases in the Gospel of John*, the next assignment here is the implication each phrase has on the contemporary church. Below is the discussion:

1. Just as physical bread, nourishes the physical body, the contemporary Nigerian Church has only Jesus as her giver, nourisher and sustainer of her live. Just as the Jewish depended on manna in their wilderness journey, so Church needs to similarly depend on Jesus to be nourished and sustained in her wilderness journey of this world. The predicate has the definite article 'the', which means the only bread." That means that, the church in Nigeria has no any bread that could depend on for her life's existence, rather than Jesus Christ the Bread of life.

2. The victory of contemporary church in Nigeria over the darken power of Satan, depends on her relationship with Jesus the light of the world. Satan's power operates where there is darkness, but having Jesus as the light of the church in Nigeria, defeats the power of Satan in all aspects. Just as someone who walks in the light has direction to where he goes, the Nigeria church walking in the light of Jesus, cannot be lost in darkness and confusion of this world of evil.

3. Jesus as the Gate enabled the shepherd and the sheep to move in and out of the fold. The implication of Jesus' claim here is that whatever the contemporary Nigerian church does must be through Jesus, to be saved, secured, and satisfied and to find pasture.

4. The Church having Jesus as the good shepherd concretizes her salvation and security from the harm of every satanic wolf and danger of the enemies. The church therefore has nothing to fear, if she submits to the shepherding grace of Christ. As the shepherd has concern for the sheep because they belong to him, so is Jesus concern for the church in Nigeria, which is also, belonging to Him.

5. Jesus claiming to be the resurrection and the life fortifies a concrete hope of life with Jesus after his death to the contemporary Nigeria Church. In this hope, the danger of eternal death to the church is abolished. The church can now trust to live her life in hope and joy of victory over death which has been secured for her by the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself. Just as Paul rightly said in one of his letters to the Corinthians, "O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:55), can also be said by the Nigeria church, if she firmly believe in Jesus.

6. The declaration of Jesus to be the Way, Truth and Life is a claim of having solution to all man's perplexities. It is also implies that Jesus as the way to the father will take the church to His heavenly aboard. As the truth, he guides the church into all truth. As the life, He sustains the church from the corruption and death of this age.

7. For the church to identify with Jesus as the true Vine, she must be united and abide in Christ the true Vine. Without that, the church can do nothing, as declared by Jesus. That means that, Jesus is the true Vine who supplies nourishment to believers who are vitally connected to Him. There may be many branches to a vine, but the act of bearing fruit to any branch depends on its active connection to the vine. In the same vein, there may be many churches in the world, but the bearing of fruits of any church, particularly the contemporary Nigerian church, is in the abiding in Christ the true vine. God the Father, the vinedresser, prunes the branches that bear fruits, so that they will bear more fruits, and cut down those that are fruitless. This means that, as a church remains in Christ the true vine, she also has the time of pruning by the father, to enable more fruitfulness.

Conclusion:

Reading John's Gospel, one cannot ignore the fact that the "I am" sayings represent a significant feature of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus in the "I am" sayings used the ordinary things to explain the extra-ordinary, the physical for the spiritual, the temporal for the eternal, the

now for the hereafter, the earthly for the heavenly, the limited for the unlimited, and finite for the infinite. This was to enable a quick and better understanding of life and ministry of Jesus to the world of which He came to save. In this case, the Nigerian church in particular, and the human race in general cannot claim ignorant of Jesus and his work to the world. In the same vein, church has no excuse whatsoever of failure or fruitlessness, whose power and Grace is declared and known in Christ. It is for this reason; John through the power of the Holy Spirit recorded all the declaration of Jesus, so that the church will take cognizant and live therein.

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