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## The Past from God's Perspective : A Commentary on John's Gospel

Scott Gambrill Sinclair

*Department of Religion and Philosophy, Dominican University of California, scottgsinclair329@gmail.com*

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The Past from God's Perspective--A Commentary on John's Gospel

by

Scott Gambrill Sinclair

Dedicated to

the monks of New Camaldoli Hermitage, Big Sur

in

thanksgiving for their friendship

over so many years

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## Preface

This continues my series of volumes attempting to demonstrate that a critical scholar can affirm that the books of the New Testament are true and highly relevant. Most works on the New Testament seem to fall into one of two categories. First we have conservative books that fail to engage mainline scholarship. Such books simply assume the truth (usually the literal accuracy) of the New Testament. They fail to deal with the challenge of critical scholarship, or else they respond to that challenge defensively and unconvincingly. Then we have the more liberal books. A few of these attack the accuracy or relevance of the New Testament outright. Most of the others present detailed information and basically ignore the global question of whether the New Testament is true and meaningful today. I began this series a decade ago with an examination of that most difficult and abused New Testament book--the Apocalypse. In this initial study I presented a "mainline" scholarly understanding of what the book of Revelation meant when it was written. Then I argued at length that this message remains true and relevant. I subsequently produced study guides to the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Romans that made essentially the same points about these important sections of the New Testament.

The Gospel of John presents a special challenge to this series because the gospel claims to give us a trustworthy account of who Jesus was and yet critical scholars know that John is not as historically accurate as the other gospels. John's picture of Jesus--both of what he said and did--differs profoundly from that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These other gospels are earlier than John and fit much more closely with conditions in Palestine when Jesus lived. Nevertheless, the Gospel of John explicitly asserts both that its principal author knew Jesus personally and that what he wrote is true (John 21:24).

In the following book I will essentially make two points. First the Gospel of John self-consciously attempts to present history from God's perspective, and this claim is plausible *if one accepts the gospel's basic understanding of what God did to save the world through Jesus*. Thus, the gospel of John is ultimately based on historical facts, but it interprets those facts through a theology. The gospel is not concerned with what people during Jesus' lifetime thought he was doing but with what the church later concluded God had done through Jesus. If we accept this larger interpretative framework, the gospel's presentation of what "actually happened" becomes plausible, even compelling. The second point I wish to make is that thanks to the work of an editor the Gospel of John shows us step by step how we can verify in our own experience that its understanding of what God did in Jesus is true. In his 1987 book, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, L. William Countryman argued that the structure of John's Gospel parallels the structure of the ideal Christian life. Just as the Christian life ideally begins with conversion and goes on to baptism, first communion, and more advanced stages of spiritual growth, so the Gospel of John has a section on conversion, then one

on baptism, then one on eucharist, and so forth. My own work has persuaded me that Countryman's analysis is basically correct but that it was a later editor who imposed this structure on a preexistent gospel. The editor made this rearrangement so that later readers could discover in their own experience the truth of the gospel step by step. As we read it, the gospel reminds us of what we can learn in each stage of Christian life. By the time we get to the most advanced stage we achieve certainty that what the gospel claims that God did through Jesus is in fact true.

The rise of inclusive language poses special problems for a translator and writer, and I have responded to them as follows. When the original Greek of John's Gospel uses "he" inclusively, I have in the translation either substituted "they" or otherwise rewritten the sentence. In my own commentary I have likewise avoided "he" for "anyone" and instead resorted to "they." In line with the usage of John's Gospel itself, I have retained masculine pronouns to refer to God. I have elected to use feminine ones for the Spirit. The Old Testament—which John's Gospel regards as divinely inspired—uses feminine pronouns for the Spirit, since the Hebrew word for spirit is grammatically feminine. In Greek the word for spirit is neuter, and John's Gospel, not surprisingly, observes the grammatical conventions of the language in which it was written. Unfortunately, however, in English the use of "it" implies that something is subhuman and is singularly inappropriate for the Divine Spirit. It is to be noted that the images John's Gospel uses for the Spirit, such as water and dove, tend to be archetypically feminine (Gelpi 219-20).

I have also indulged in a literary inconsistency: In the translation I have chosen to use the word "student," but in the commentary I have frequently returned to the standard word "disciple." Despite the awkwardness of this shift, I think it is helpful. The word "disciple" has taken on a special meaning in religion and academia and gives a somewhat stilted feel to the Fourth Gospel. The gospel is talking about Jesus' followers or students—those who cast their lot in with him. On the other hand, the term "disciple" is standard in scholarly circles and is more appropriate when in the commentary I interact with the work of other researchers.

Finally, I ask readers to be patient with the repetitiveness of this commentary and to feel free to "skim." John's Gospel is itself repetitive. The evangelist felt that his own message was too profound for his audience to absorb it at once. Hence, repetition was essential. In commenting on the text I had to be repetitive also, in part as a courtesy to those who may consult this book solely to study a single passage. Once readers have gotten the gist of what I am claiming about the gospel as a whole, I invite them to skim. To facilitate skimming, I have summarized each paragraph in its opening sentence.

It remains my pleasant duty to express gratitude to all those who helped make

this volume possible. Donald Gelpi, S.J. read a draft and made valuable corrections and suggestions. My students have read various drafts and helped me improve the literary style. Ms. Hellen Knapp went through the entire typescript and caught typographical errors. I remain indebted to all the teachers I had as a seminarian and as a doctoral student. A special thanks must go to John Boyle, S.J., Prof. L. William Countryman, and Prof. Wilhelm Wuellner.

## Chapter 1

*(1:1) In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) This one was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into existence through him, and without him not one thing came into existence which came to exist.*

These opening words echo the opening words of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament). In Genesis, the Bible starts with “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) and goes on to describe how God created the heaven and the earth and all that is in them. The first thing God brings into existence is the light (Gen. 1:3), and God then separates the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:4). So too the Gospel of John opens with “in the beginning” and goes on to describe the creation of all things. As we shall see in a moment, John also stresses the shining of the light and emphasizes that the darkness did not swallow it up (John 1:4-5).

Consequently, the opening of the gospel makes it clear that its message is in continuity with that of the Hebrew Bible and cannot be understood apart from it. The story that the gospel tells is an integral part of the story of the Bible as a whole, and the reader must place the gospel in this larger context in order to understand what is happening.

Yet, at the same time, the opening of the gospel suggests that the Old Testament cannot itself be fully understood without the gospel. In Genesis “the beginning” is the creation of the world. By contrast, John’s Gospel starts by describing what existed even before the creation and insists that the creation depended on it. In the beginning there was the Word, and it was only through the Word that the universe came into existence. Hence, to understand the ancient scriptures--indeed, to understand the universe--we must comprehend what the gospel is saying.

The central doctrine of the Old Testament is that there is only One God, and he has made himself known by appearing in Jewish history. Thus, in the book of Exodus God appears to Moses and commands him to go to Egypt and free the Hebrews from slavery (Exod. 3:1-10). When Moses does so, God reveals his commandments to them. The first of these commandments is that the Hebrews are to worship no other God (Exod. 20:1-6).

The Fourth Gospel affirms this heritage, as is evident in these opening verses. John’s Gospel insists throughout that there is only one God, that he has revealed himself to the Jewish people, and that the subsequent revelation in Jesus is fully in keeping with what went before. Already in these opening words the gospel implies that there is only one God since the term “God” appears exclusively in the singular.

Yet, the passage also insists that there is an eternal Word who in some sense can be



distinguished from God and is himself divine. This “Word” existed “in the beginning” and was “with” God.

Accordingly, the gospel begins with a paradox. There is only one God--just as the Old Testament insists--and beside that One there is the eternal Word who is divine. The Word was “with” God; indeed, the Word was God.

The gospel insists that this paradox is the key to understanding everything else--and, especially, how salvation can be obtained. Here in the opening verses we learn that the creation itself is the product of the mysterious interaction of “God” and the eternal “Word” (whom the gospel normally calls the “Son”). Later the gospel will go on to explain that it is also only through this mysterious interaction that human beings can find salvation.

Much of the remainder of the gospel will attempt to explain how the paradox can be and how it makes salvation possible. As we shall see, the gospel will present many models to elucidate how God and the Eternal Son can be both distinct and still fully one. We shall also see that all of these models are models of how human beings can find divine life.

These opening verses use the model of communication to explain the unity and distinction between “God” and the Son and how God can save the world through him. Just as the word and the speaker can be distinguished in principle but are in practice one, the Eternal Word is distinct from God and yet so intimately connected to him as to be also divine. Just as a speaker communicates through word, so God created the world and saves it through his Son.

As the model of communication suggests, the Fourth Gospel holds that the Son is the indispensable way to God. A word derives its existence from the one who speaks it and always points back to the speaker. So too, as we shall see, Jesus in this gospel depends on the Father and always points to him. We can only know a speaker through his or her words, and the Fourth Gospel will insistently claim that we can only know God through Jesus.

It may well be that the gospel partly derived the model of the word and the speaker from Greek philosophy or Old Testament wisdom. In much of Greek philosophy the divine Word is an important concept. For example, according to Stoicism the entire universe is pervaded by a divine energy which the Stoics called the “logos.” “Logos” means reason but also means “word” and is the same term that the gospel uses in these opening verses. Stoicism was popular in the Greco-Roman world, and the author of the gospel may have known something about it. Hence, he may have gotten some part of his understanding of the “logos” from it. Wisdom is a central concern of the Old Testament. Indeed, according to the Old Testament God created the universe through his wisdom (especially, Proverbs 8:22-31). Of course, God’s wisdom includes his “reason.” The author of the gospel knew the Old Testament which he cites

frequently, and it is quite plausible that he derived much of his understanding of the “logos” from biblical wisdom.

Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel itself seems to derive the model of the word primarily from the effect of the words of Jesus which resembles the effect of God’s words in the Hebrew scriptures. The gospel itself never explicitly mentions Greek philosophy or Old Testament “wisdom.” After the first few verses, the gospel even drops the model of the divine logos. Instead, it stresses what Jesus said, and how these words led to new creation and salvation. For example, by his words Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead even though he had been in the tomb four days. Jesus shouted, “Lazarus come out” (John 11:43), and the dead man complied. In the Old Testament God’s word creates and transforms. Thus, in Genesis 1:3 God says, “Let there be light,” and the light appears. So too, Jesus saves through what he says.

Historically, Jesus undoubtedly thought that he was the “word” of God, at least in the sense of being the definitive revelation of God and the beginning of the new creation. The historical Jesus believed that he was inaugurating the kingdom of God. The small movement he had started was the foundation of the new Israel which in due course would transform the world. Indeed, he remarked that he had come to set fire to the earth (Luke 12:49). Because he was beginning the kingdom, he was definitively revealing God’s transforming word in history. Hence, he once insisted, “The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and look something greater than Solomon is here” (Mat. 12:42). In this saying Jesus clearly implies that through him God is revealing something even more profound than the exemplary wisdom of Solomon. Since the words of Solomon were themselves believed to be part of the Bible (e.g., Proverbs 1:1), what Jesus is revealing can be nothing less than the final word of God.

As its opening verses suggest, the gospel will now attempt to tell the story of Jesus from the perspective of God. Clearly the introduction of the gospel cannot simply be based on what the evangelist witnessed. The evangelist was not present with God and the eternal Word before the creation of the world. Here we get the first hint of something that will be true of the gospel as a whole. The evangelist is not primarily trying to tell us what historically Jesus said and did; rather the gospel is trying to tell us the ultimate meaning of what Jesus said and did. Or to put it in other terms, the gospel is trying to tell us *from God’s vantage point* who Jesus is and how he saved us. But, of course, in telling us about Jesus from God’s perspective, the gospel will draw on what Jesus actually did say and do. Hence, there will be a clear continuity between what the gospel claims about Jesus and what historically he claimed about himself. Jesus claimed to be the definitive revelation of God, and from God’s perspective the evangelist can attest that Jesus is God’s eternal Word.

Later the gospel will explain how the evangelist can know God’s perspective.

*(1:4) In him there was life, and the life was the light of human beings. (5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.*

From God's perspective the eternal Word is the source of life and light. The gospel insists that life--apparently, all life--comes from Jesus, and that he is also the source of human enlightenment. Of course, sinful human beings do not normally realize this--as the gospel now emphasizes. It is God alone--and those to whom God reveals the truth--who know where things ultimately originate.

In describing the world's reaction to the "light" the gospel gives us a phrase with a double meaning which I have tried to capture by the translation, "the darkness did not grasp it." On the one hand, one could translate the Greek, "the darkness did not understand it [the light]." Yet, one could also translate, "The darkness did not overcome it."

Probably the gospel wishes the reader to get both meanings. Later we will repeatedly see that in the Fourth Gospel the enemies of Jesus cannot understand him and cannot stop him either. Here the evangelist introduces these two themes. As we shall observe subsequently, the gospel often uses double meanings, and the reader must notice them in order to figure out what is happening.

The dualism between the light that comes from the eternal Word and the darkness in which the world lives is fundamental to John's Gospel. Now we see the theme for the first time. Jesus is the only source of light and life. By itself the world lives in darkness and death. Moreover, because it is in darkness and death the world is hostile to Jesus since he exposes it for what it is.

This dualism is especially disturbing today, since on the whole modern Americans are committed to religious pluralism. In our nation there are many different religions, and to live together peacefully we have learned to recognize that there are good qualities in each. Hence, we are not sympathetic to the gospel's claim that its religious perspective is true and every other perspective is false.

In part the gospel's dualism is a response to earlier tradition. For centuries Hebrew religion had constantly battled against primitive polytheism. At least from the time of Moses on, the Hebrews had understood that we must worship only one God, that this God is good, and cannot be equated with something in the natural world such as the sun or moon. This theology was a great advance over competing mythologies which posited the existence of many gods and goddesses. These deities often personified natural forces and could be petty and arbitrary. They generally had far less concern for the rights of the poor and defenseless than the god of Israel did, and sometimes demanded things that even today we would consider repulsive, such as human

sacrifice. Since the Jews were surrounded by other nations who were more powerful and often conquered them, the only way that the Jews could maintain their religious integrity was by constantly condemning other religious traditions. This negative attitude toward other faiths became a major part of the biblical heritage and was uncritically appropriated by the first Christians and by the Fourth Gospel.

Nevertheless, the gospel's stark contrast between the light of the eternal Word and the darkness of the world necessarily follows from its claim that only through Christ can people fully know God. As the gospel proceeds, it will try to show how we can know that the claim is justified.

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*(1:6) A human being came into existence who was sent from God. His name was John. (7) This one came for testimony, to testify about the light, in order that all might believe through him. (8) That person was not the light, but came to testify about the light.*

This section does not fit its immediate context well. Both before and after these verses the gospel is discussing Jesus who is the Eternal Word. The sudden introduction of an aside about John the Baptist is jarring.

It may be that this section was added after the rest of the gospel was completed. As we will see, an editor made a number of small changes, probably after the principal author of the gospel had died.

In any event, as Countryman has pointed out (13), this note about John the Baptist ties the opening of the gospel more closely together with the next section and makes them two parts of a larger unit. Thus, the first eighteen verses of the book consist primarily of theological reflections on who Jesus is and how he has saved the world. By contrast, the next section concerns the ministry of John the Baptist and how it prepared people to receive Jesus. By inserting this brief reference to the Baptist into the opening verses, the editor linked the two sections closely and made them two halves of a larger unit. As we shall see, the primary theme of this larger unit is conversion.

In line with that theme, these verses about John the Baptist stress that his role is to bring people to Jesus. John was not himself the "light"; he did not save the world. His purpose was to testify to Jesus.

The emphasis that John was inferior to Jesus was probably a reply to critics who claimed the opposite. Historically, John baptized Jesus, and we must suppose that enemies of the Christian movement tried to discredit its claims about Jesus by insisting that Jesus must have been even less significant than John. If John baptized Jesus, then surely John was more important. Consequently, Jesus could not possibly

have been the Messiah, let alone God's eternal Son.

In replying to this allegation the gospel looks at John from God's point of view. The gospel does not begin by considering what John said and did historically. Instead, the gospel begins by describing the Baptist's place in God's eternal plan. God sent John in order that others might come to faith in Jesus.

It is striking that the gospel can claim that "all" believe in Jesus through John the Baptist. Clearly in his historical ministry, John did not speak to every human being in the world about Jesus!

Probably the gospel makes the claim that all come to Jesus through John because the Baptist's testimony is preserved in this book, and everyone who reads these words continues to benefit from John's witness. Thus, in the gospel itself the Baptist continues to speak, and, of course, we hear not the limited perspectives of the historical person but the eternal message that the gospel maintains God was giving the world through him.

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*(1:9) The true light which enlightens every human being was coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world came into existence through him; yet the world did not know him. (11) He came to what was his; yet his own people did not accept him. (12) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his Name, he gave the ability to become God's children. (13) They were not born from menstrual blood nor carnal desire nor a husband's lust but from God.*

Once again we have a passage that fits awkwardly into its context and may have come from the editor. In the verse immediately after this section, the "Word" enters the world. Yet in these verses the true light is already in the world, and there are various reactions to its presence.

These verses focus on the mystery that some people perceive God at work in Jesus and become Christians, whereas others do not. Thus, the section emphasizes that the failure of so many to accept Jesus is supremely puzzling. He is himself the source of the intelligence and goodness in any human being; indeed, he is the source of the whole creation. As we read a few verses earlier, "All things came into existence through him" (1:3). Yet the very human beings who owed their enlightenment to him did not believe in him, and the very world which owed its existence to him did not recognize him. Stranger still, Jesus' own people, the Jews, did not accept him. From the gospel's viewpoint they should have been the first to acknowledge who he was. Ethnically Jesus was one of them, and in their own scriptures God had already revealed that the Messiah was to come. But, the Jews as a whole did not see that Jesus was the final revelation of God. If the unbelief of so many is mysterious, so is the belief of the few. Their faith did not come from any natural bond with Jesus. Instead, they have gone through some spiritual rebirth which can only be due to the

hidden, transforming presence of God himself.

Consequently, this section powerfully underlines the theme of conversion, and as we shall see, this will be the dominant theme until 2:12.

These verses also introduce the theme that through faith in Jesus Christians can enter into the life of God. Here we read that those who believed in him received the power to become “God’s children.” At this point, the gospel does not tell us what it means to be “God’s children.” Clearly, however, any definition must include a deep relationship with God through which we receive a profound blessing. Later the gospel will insist that through Jesus we enter into the inner life of God himself.

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*(1:14) And the Word became flesh and sojourned among us, and we saw his glory, glory like a father’s only one, full of grace and truth. (15) John testifies about him. Indeed, he yelled, “This was the one about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me existed before me, because he was prior to me.’ (16) From his wealth we all have received one gift in place of another, (17) because the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18) No one has ever seen God. The only God, he who is at the Father’s chest, that is the one who has revealed him.*

According to ancient Judaism God definitively revealed himself through Moses. Not only had Moses talked to God and received from him the Law, but Moses had also written the first five books of the Bible. Indeed, during the lifetime of Jesus the Samaritans who somehow were related to the northern Israelites held that only the five books of Moses belonged in the Bible. Most Jews, especially the Pharisees, accepted additional books, but even they held that the books of Moses were the most authoritative.

Here the Fourth Gospel suggests that its message is in continuity with that of Moses. The gospel freely acknowledges that the Law was a great gift. Moreover, in the time of Moses God sojourned among his people. For example, God had the Israelites make a sacred tent (Exod. 26), and he used to meet with Moses in it and talk to him face to face (e.g., Exod. 33:7-11). The Fourth Gospel recalls and affirms this tradition by insisting that the eternal word also “sojourned among us,” and the Greek word “sojourned” is related to the word “tent.” Hence, we could translate the first part of 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.”

Nevertheless, the gospel insists that by becoming flesh the eternal Word revealed God’s glory in a way that was not possible through Moses. The gift which God bestowed in sending Jesus was greater than anything God did through Moses. Moses was the mediator through whom the Israelites received the Law. Jesus existed from all eternity at the Father’s side, and by becoming a human being he brought grace and truth to the world. Through Jesus we can see God himself.

In this section, the gospel insists both that Jesus Christ was divine and human. Indeed, these points are made stridently. Thus, the gospel proclaims that Christ “is the only God, he who is at the Father’s chest.” This statement was so strong and so paradoxical that in ancient times many people who transcribed the gospel changed the phrase to, “the only Son.” The earliest and best copies of the Fourth Gospel, however, all read, “the only God,” and it must be original. There is no reason why anyone would have wished to change the “only Son” to the “only God.” At the same time that the gospel insists that the Christ was divine, it also insists he was human. The Word became “flesh.” Flesh is a strong term and emphasizes that Jesus had a normal, physical body. In the Bible generally “flesh” is what is quintessentially human. Whereas God is “spirit,” we are “flesh.”

Undoubtedly the reason that the gospel insists so stridently that Jesus Christ was divine is that it was battling against contemporary protests from traditional Jews. In the gospel narrative we have several stories in which Jesus suggests that he is divine and the “Jews” respond by trying to kill him (5:18, 8:58-59, 10:30-31). These stories undoubtedly reflect the situation when the gospel itself was being written. Since in Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus never says he is divine, it seems unlikely that Jesus himself explicitly made such a claim during his lifetime. Instead, Jewish Christians in the church that produced the Fourth Gospel made this claim later in his behalf, and, as a result, mainstream Judaism persecuted them. Mainline Jews were utterly committed to monotheism and could not imagine how Jesus could be divine without there being more than one God. Hence, the gospel must insist on the paradox that Jesus Christ truly is divine and yet there is only one God.

Similarly, the reason that the gospel insists that Christ had a normal physical body is that some Christians were proclaiming the opposite. The three short epistles of John, which undoubtedly came from the same community that produced the gospel, attack people who once belonged to that church but then broke away (1 John 2:18-19). These people denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3, 2 John 7). Apparently they could not imagine how God could have a fleshly body. God is not flesh, they reasoned. Hence, the gospel must insist that the eternal word became “flesh.”

As it insists that Christ is both divine and human, the gospel explains why it is essential to believe this: Only if Jesus is both God and flesh can we fully come to know God through him and share in the divine life. The text insists that through Jesus--and only through him--we can see God himself. Prior to Christ’s coming, no one had ever seen God. Now through Christ God has definitively revealed himself. Of course, if Christ were not God we could not see God fully through him. Similarly, if Christ were not human we could not know him intimately. Human beings only know other human beings well; we have at most a very limited understanding of animals and angels.

In this section of the gospel we have another awkward passage about John the Baptist

which again seems to be a later insertion from the editor. Earlier we noted that the material about John the Baptist in verses 6-8 does not fit the context. Here we have a similar problem. Between the proclamation in verse 14 that the Word became flesh and the proclamation in verse 16 that therefore God has revealed himself, John the Baptist is inexplicably crying out who Jesus is. Apparently then, the editor simply introduced the Baptist without presuming to change the literary context.

Once again the gospel views the Baptist primarily from God's perspective, and from that perspective the gospel claims that Jesus is greater than John. The gospel repeats the historical fact that the Baptist looked forward to the coming of the messiah who would certainly be greater than John was. Nevertheless, the gospel views this proclamation not primarily as a past statement but as the revelation of eternal truth. The gospel tells us that John, "testifies," namely that his past testimony continues. Moreover, John's prediction of the coming of someone greater does not mean that John was first. On the contrary, as the eternal Word, Christ existed even before John did.

Like the earlier insertion about the Baptist, this insertion especially ties these opening verses to the section that follows. Indeed, much of 1:15 is the same word for word as 1:30. There too the Baptist declares that Jesus "existed before me, because he was prior to me."

The reason that the editor did not want there to be a break is that he or she made the first section of the gospel a description of the very beginning of Christian life, namely, conversion.

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*(1:19) And this is John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent out priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He acknowledged and did not deny it, but acknowledged, "I am not the Messiah." (21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he replied, "No." (22) So they said to him, "Who are you? Let us give a reply to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He said, "I am 'a voice of someone shouting in the desert, "Make a straight road for the Lord!"' [Isa. 40:3] just as Isaiah the prophet said." (24) They had been sent from the Pharisees. (25) And they questioned him saying to him, "So why are you baptizing if you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet?" (26) In reply to them John said, "I baptize in water. In your midst there is standing someone you do not know, (27) he who comes after me. I am not worthy to untie his sandal strap." (28) These things occurred in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.*

As we have seen, this material about the Baptist does not begin a new section of the gospel. In verses 6-8 and 15 the gospel has already given us two brief previews of the Baptist and his message. Now we have an expanded treatment of the same themes.



Almost all our information about John the Baptist comes from Christian sources. John appears prominently in each of the four gospels, and there are references to him in other Christian works as well, such as the Acts of the Apostles (e.g., 1:5). By contrast, the only ancient non-Christian writer who mentions John is the Jewish historian Josephus, and Josephus devotes a mere paragraph to him. Moreover, the paragraph gives us only a very general description of John's life and message and concentrates on John's arrest and execution (Antiquities XVIII.v.2 #116-119).

Because almost all our information about the Baptist comes from Christian sources, it is difficult to know precisely what was the historical relationship between John and Jesus. Naturally, Christian writings insist that John proclaimed the superiority of Jesus. Indeed, according to Luke's Gospel, while John the Baptist was still in his mother's womb, he leapt for joy when the pregnant mother of Jesus came to visit (Luke 1:39-44)! Nevertheless, these same writings tell us other things that suggest a different historical picture. Thus, Luke and Matthew record that after John was put in prison, he sent messengers to *ask* whether Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah (Luke 7:18-20, Mat. 11:2-3). It is noteworthy that Josephus, our only ancient non-Christian source of information about John, can summarize John's message without even mentioning Jesus.

Historically, it seems likely that John the Baptist proclaimed that the prophesied Messiah was about to come but did not initially think that Jesus was the Messiah. There is no reason to doubt that John proclaimed that he was baptizing only with water but that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This proclamation appears in all the the gospels, and at least the versions in Mark and John appear to be independent of one another (Mat. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33). A Christian writer would not have invented such a statement. So far as we know, during his lifetime Jesus never even claimed that he was baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Of course, John emphasized that the Messiah was much greater than he himself was. John was not even worthy of attending to the Messiah's sandals (e.g., Mark 1:7)! It seems unlikely that when Jesus came for baptism that John hailed him as the Messiah. Nevertheless, after John was arrested and was awaiting execution, he heard reports of Jesus' ministry, including the miracles, and then wondered whether Jesus might be "the one who is to come" (Mat. 11:3, Luke 7:19).

The section of the Fourth Gospel that we are presently analyzing gives us a portrait of John the Baptist that historically is basically accurate. Here John insists that he himself is not the Messiah, that his baptism is only a preparation for "the one who comes after me," and that the latter is infinitely greater than he is. Moreover, at this point the gospel does not claim that John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. On the contrary, John the Baptist insists that his audience has no idea who the Messiah is, and in a few verses the Baptist will proclaim that he himself did not initially know who the Messiah was (1:33).

Nevertheless, we can clearly see the impact of the Fourth Gospel's own viewpoint in the Baptist's insistence that he is nothing in himself. Thus, the "Jews" ask John whether he is the Messiah or Elijah or "the Prophet." Such questions surely reflect popular speculation at the time when the Baptist was at work. People were wondering whether John might be the Messiah or the prophet Elijah who had been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind or the great prophet like Moses that some awaited (Deut. 18:15-19). The view that the Baptist was Elijah may have been especially popular since scripture explicitly states that Elijah would reappear to prepare Israel for the coming of God (Mal. 4:5). We have no way of knowing whether the Baptist himself claimed to be Elijah. The other gospels, however, assume that John the Baptist was Elijah, at least in some sense. Luke, for example, tells us that John had the Spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and in Matthew Jesus himself declares that John is Elijah (Mat. 11:13-14, 17:10-13). By contrast, here in the Fourth Gospel we have the strident emphasis that the Baptist in and of himself is nothing. Not only does the Baptist emphatically deny that he is the Messiah, Elijah, or "the Prophet." John further insists that he is only a "voice" "shouting in the desert" and is not even worthy to untie the shoe laces of the one who is coming.

As we have seen, this insistence that the Baptist was inferior to Jesus was probably a reply to people who were claiming the opposite. People outside the Christian movement were pointing out that John baptized Jesus, and, hence, was superior to him. Of course, if Jesus was inferior even to the Baptist, then Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah. Consequently, in the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist himself insists on the superiority of Jesus.

This emphasis that John the Baptist is nothing in himself also expresses the Fourth Gospel's theology that all real dignity and worth come from Jesus and should not be seen as a criticism of the Baptist. In this gospel who we really are depends on our relationship with Christ. Indeed, later Jesus himself will insist that without him others can do nothing (15:5). When we take this theology into account, we see that the gospel is in no way denigrating the Baptist by insisting that he is neither the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet. On the contrary, to prepare people to receive Jesus is the most important possible task, and the gospel has already claimed that in some sense John is responsible for bringing everyone to him (1:6-8).

We may note in passing that the gospel does not mention the baptism of Jesus. Later I will argue that the editor of the gospel wanted to restrict the theme of baptism to another section.

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*(1:29) On the next day, he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Look, here is the lamb of God who removes the world's sin. (30) This is the one about whom I said, 'After me a man is coming who existed before me, because he was prior to me' [cf. 1:15]. (31) And I did not know him myself, but I came baptizing in water for this reason, so*

*he would be made known to Israel.” (32) And John testified by saying, “I saw the Spirit coming down like a dove from heaven and she remained on him. (33) And I did not know him myself, but the one who sent me to baptize in water, that one said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit come down and stay, this is the one who is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit. (34) And I myself have seen and testified that this is God’s chosen one.’”*

We get the first indication that the Fourth Gospel is about to describe a series of events that take place in a symbolic week. Thus, we read that it is the “next day.” It is striking that gospel did not previously indicate that the earlier testimony of John the Baptist took place on a particular day. As we have seen, due to the work of the editor, the earlier testimony of the Baptist begins back at 1:6-8 and recurs at various points thereafter. Now, however, the gospel begins to supply us with a series of “days” which together add up to a week.

Much of what happens in this particular scene occurs during the baptism of Jesus in the first three gospels. Thus, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke the Holy Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus when he is baptized, and at this point God himself declares that Jesus is his beloved Son (Mat. 3:16-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22). Here in the Fourth Gospel we also read that the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. And we have a reference to God bearing witness to Jesus. The one on whom the Spirit remains will baptize with the Spirit.

The Fourth Gospel omits all reference to Jesus’ baptism, probably because the editor decided to deal with the theme of baptism later. To be sure, most scholars have hypothesized that the omission is due to the gospel’s desire to stress that Jesus is superior to John and needed no baptism for the removal of sin. This hypothesis is weak. In Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptist himself stresses that Jesus is superior to him and yet hesitantly baptizes Jesus anyway (Mat. 3:13-15). In Luke Jesus gets baptized though it is not clear that John performed the ritual (Luke 3:20-21). Hence, it would have been easy enough for the Fourth Gospel to admit that Jesus received baptism and still stress that Jesus was superior to John and did not require a baptism for the forgiveness of sin. Instead, the reason the Fourth Gospel does not mention Jesus getting baptized is that, as Countryman has argued, the order of the gospel is the same as the order of Christian life, and Christian life begins with conversion, not baptism. Consequently, as much as possible, the Fourth Gospel restricts its presentation of baptism to a later section. As we shall see, it was the editor who rearranged the gospel so it would mirror the spiritual life of the Christian reader. I suspect that an earlier version of the gospel actually included the baptism of Jesus here, and the editor excised it.

Once again, the gospel attempts to look at John the Baptist’s historical significance from God’s point of view. As we have seen, historically John the Baptist predicted that the Messiah was coming soon. The Baptist believed that this advent fulfilled ancient prophecy and had long been part of God’s plan of salvation. The Baptist

probably did not claim to know who the Messiah was but insisted that the Messiah would supremely possess the Spirit and would baptize people in her, as Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record (Mat. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16). John's mission was to get people ready. This historical material reappears here, but the Fourth Gospel uses it to insist that, therefore, John the Baptist testified that Jesus was God's chosen one and even existed before being born. Later we will see that in this gospel Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to his followers (e.g., 20:22). Apparently then, because the author of the gospel knew that Jesus had given people the Holy Spirit, the evangelist realized that Jesus fulfilled John's prophecy about the coming Messiah. Moreover, since the Baptist believed that the coming of the Messiah was part of God's ancient plan for Israel, the Baptist had even suggested that the Messiah existed from of old. Therefore, the evangelist felt free to insist that John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus, even to Jesus' pre-existence. God had prepared for the coming of Jesus through the Baptist and prophesied it. Of course, the Baptist himself was not fully conscious of what God was doing. The Baptist--as he insists in this passage--did not initially "know" that Jesus was the Messiah, but thanks to God's providence, John's prophecy allows the reader to know this.

The symbol of Jesus as the lamb of God occasionally occurs in the Fourth Gospel. It is explicitly mentioned here and in the Baptist's testimony "on the next day" (1:36). It is also implied by some of the details in the account of the crucifixion. For example, we read that when Jesus died the soldiers did not break his legs in order to fulfill the scripture, "Not a bone of it will be broken." This quotation probably refers to the Passover lamb which was to be roasted whole rather than cut up (Exod. 12:46, Num. 9:12).

The symbolism of the lamb stresses that Jesus overcomes the power of sin by his death. The symbol may allude to various lambs in scripture, such as the one that was sacrificed each morning and each evening at the temple in Jerusalem until the temple's destruction in 70 C.E. (e.g., Exod. 29:38-42). Nevertheless, the primary reference is to the Passover lamb. The Passover holiday and its rites play a major role in the Fourth Gospel as a whole, and it was the Passover lamb whose bones were not to be broken. In the Exodus account of the founding of the Passover celebration, the slaughter of the lamb saved people from death. The Jews smeared the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses (Exod. 12:3-7, 21-28). Then, when God came to kill all the first born in the land of Egypt, he passed over the houses which had blood on the doorposts and did not slay the first born in them (Exod. 12:7, 12-13). So, too, John suggests, the death of Jesus overcomes the hold of sin and death. Later the gospel will explain how Jesus' death accomplishes this. Here we get the preliminary hint that Christ's death will overcome sin by making it possible for us to receive the Holy Spirit. In this passage John prophesies that the one who is coming will baptize us with the Spirit. As we shall see later, when Jesus dies he will hand over the Spirit (19:30).

*(1:35) On the next day, John was again standing there with two of his students. (36) He looked at Jesus who was walking along and said, "Look, here is the lamb of God." (37) The two students heard him talking and followed Jesus. (38) Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" They said to him, "Rabbi," (which translated means, "teacher") "where are you staying?" (39) He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying and stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. (40) Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who were at John's side and listened and followed him. (41) This person first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah (which translated is "Christ"). (42) He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John; you will be called 'Rocky,'" which means "Peter."*

*(43) On the next day, Jesus wanted to go out into Galilee, and he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." (44) Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's town. (45) Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "The one Moses wrote about in the law--the prophets too--we have found, Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth." (46) Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good be from Nazareth!" Philip said to him, "Come and see." (47) Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him and said about him, "Look, an Israelite in whom there actually is no deceit." (48) Nathaniel said to him, "Where do you know me from?" Jesus replied by saying to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you while you were under the fig tree." (49) Nathaniel replied to him, "Rabbi, you are God's Son; you are Israel's king!" (50) Jesus replied by saying to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you underneath the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." (51) He said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, you people will see the heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the son of humanity."*

This section continues the enumeration of the days which add us to a week. The first of these brief scenes occurs "on the next day" and the following scene occurs on the following day.

In the first scene we probably have a hidden allusion to the primary author of the gospel. Thus, we read that there are two people standing at John the Baptist's side. One of them is Andrew, and he goes at once and brings his brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus. The other student is not named. Later we will see that the evangelist is never named. At most he is called "the student Jesus loved" (e.g., 20:2). A literary pattern in the gospel is that this disciple is normally one step ahead of Peter. For example, on Easter morning both Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to see the empty tomb, but the disciple gets there first (20:2-4). In the passage that we are presently considering we have the same pattern. The unnamed disciple, like Andrew, follows Jesus first. Peter comes a little later. Accordingly, the unnamed disciple may be the Beloved Disciple who was the principal author of the gospel.

Later I will argue that it was the editor who introduced at least most of the references to the “student Jesus loved.” The editor revered this disciple who had known Jesus personally and who wrote the gospel. Hence, the editor was eager to include him in the gospel itself and make him a model Christian. The editor was also eager to stress the reliability of the gospel as an eyewitness account (21:24). One way the editor did these things was to associate the Beloved Disciple with Peter and make the Beloved Disciple always a little better.

In the present passage we can see some initial evidence that the references to the Beloved Disciple come from the final editor of the gospel. Thus, the reference to a second disciple at John the Baptist’s side disrupts an otherwise smooth structural correspondence between what happens on this “day” and what happens on the next. On the next day we have Jesus calling Philip who in turn calls Nathaniel. We would have exactly the same pattern earlier, namely that Jesus invited Andrew to stay with him, and Andrew then went and got Peter, if only there was not a veiled reference to a mysterious second disciple. The hypothesis that the final editor revised the passage also may explain the odd appearance of the word “first” in verse 41. It simply makes no sense in the present context to say that Andrew “first” found Peter. I would suggest that before the editor intervened, Andrew found Peter before (“first”!) staying with Jesus, and both spent the night with him. The editor, however, wanted the Beloved Disciple to precede Peter, and, therefore, had Andrew speak to Peter subsequently.

If the unnamed disciple is indeed the author of the gospel then it seems that originally he was a follower of John the Baptist, and the Baptist’s preaching led him to Jesus. The passage we are presently considering undoubtedly condenses and simplifies the transition. It is unlikely that the Beloved Disciple made the switch from being a follower of the Baptist to being a follower of Jesus in an afternoon. However, it is plausible that as a follower of John the Baptist the Beloved Disciple listened to John’s prediction that the Messiah was coming. Then when Jesus began preaching and working miracles, the Beloved Disciple concluded that Jesus must be the one John was foretelling.

If there is any truth to these hypotheses, we can see how natural it was for the evangelist to claim that from God’s perspective the mission of John the Baptist was to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Thanks to the preaching of the Baptist, the principal author of the gospel had himself recognized Jesus. Hence, the Beloved Disciple could not doubt that God had sent John the Baptist to prepare people to receive Jesus even if the Baptist himself had not fully understood what God was doing.

In this section we seem to have information about Jesus’ early ministry prior to his return to Galilee. This passage claims that Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel first met Jesus when he was with John the Baptist.

This information is at least historically plausible. If Jesus himself left his home in Galilee and went to hear John the Baptist, there is no reason why such people as Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel might not have done the same. They could have first encountered Jesus in Judea and subsequently returned with him to Galilee.

If this information is accurate, it suggests that the Fourth Gospel had a special source of knowledge about Jesus' early work in Judea. Later we will see additional evidence that confirms this hypothesis and suggests that this source was the Beloved Disciple himself.

1:35-51 basically consists of two parallel scenes with the theme of conversion. We first have the calling of Andrew and Peter in 1:35-42 and then the calling of Philip and Nathaniel in 1:43-51. These scenes are about the same length and occur on succeeding days. They also have a similar literary structure. In each scene we have a conversion chain: Jesus calls someone who then immediately goes and brings a third person. In the first scene Jesus invites Andrew to stay with him, and Andrew immediately goes and gets his brother Peter. In the second scene Jesus invites Philip to follow him, and immediately Philip goes and brings Nathaniel. The invitation issued by the new convert is basically the same: We have found the one foretold. Andrew assures Peter that he has found the Messiah. Philip assures Nathaniel that he has found the one predicted by Moses and the prophets. In each scene we have the statement, "Come and see." Thus Jesus invites Andrew and the unnamed disciple to come and see where he is staying. Similarly, when Nathaniel protests that the one predicted by Moses and the prophets could not possibly be from the lowly town of Nazareth, Philip invites him to come and see. Finally, in each scene the stress falls on an encounter between Jesus and the last person called, an encounter in which Jesus makes a solemn pronouncement which tells Peter and Nathaniel something about themselves. The climax of the first scene is when Jesus gives Simon the new name of Peter. The climax of the second scene is when Jesus tells Nathaniel that he is not deceitful, and Nathaniel responds in amazement and proclaims that Jesus is the king of Israel. Then Jesus goes on to promise that Nathaniel and those with him will see even greater things.

From these scenes we can derive a model for how conversion ideally occurs. According to the model, conversion begins when someone testifies to the identity of Jesus and asks prospective converts to come and see for ourselves. The invitation is a challenge to our openness, and how we respond reveals our spiritual state. Thus, despite Nathaniel's snobbishness toward people from Nazareth, he is still without deceit because he is willing to suspend his prejudices about Jesus long enough to discover that they are mistaken. He does come and see, and then he changes his opinion in response to new evidence. Later when we get to 7:45-52 we will discover other Jews who refuse to come and see and instead stubbornly cling to mistaken preconceptions. These preconceptions too concern the limitations of people from

Galilee. If one chooses to come and see, Jesus reveals something about the convert's true self. Jesus gives Simon a new name which somehow reveals who Simon really is or perhaps who he must become. Simon must be a "rock." Similarly, Jesus reveals that Nathaniel is sincere.

When Jesus reveals to converts who they really are, they may become too enthusiastic, and it may be necessary to assure them that more is to come. In response to Jesus' insight into his personality, Nathaniel immediately goes from skepticism to credulity and proclaims that Jesus is the king of Israel. Jesus tries to dampen this enthusiasm by suggesting that Nathaniel does not truly know this and will receive greater revelations later.

Depending on how one reads the gospel, at least two things are to come. If one reads the gospel as a narrative, what is to come is the crucifixion and the resurrection. In the story, the newly converted disciples will not truly know Jesus until he rises from the dead. It is at that point that they will grasp that he is "God" (John 20:28). If one reads the gospel as a roadmap for stages of Christian growth—and, I believe, that is how the editor invites us to read it—then what is to come is more advanced spiritual perception.

In these conversion stories the person who tells others about Jesus is only a recent convert himself. Andrew and Philip have only just met Jesus. Yet, at once they tell Peter and Nathaniel about him and bring them.

Perhaps missionary work by recent converts was especially important in the church that the gospel originally addressed. Later we will learn that when the evangelist was alive people who were known to be Christians were being expelled from the synagogues (e.g., 16:2). Consequently, only people who had not yet made a public commitment to Christianity were still able to do evangelistic work from within the Jewish community. At least in many cases such people had probably only recently become aware of Jesus and were not entirely sure who he was. Nevertheless, they were still prepared to invite others to share their interest in him.

It remains true, however, that recent converts have special opportunities to do missionary work. Precisely because they have only recently broken with their past beliefs, they often have a special enthusiasm and a close connection to the non-Christian world which facilitate evangelism.

Another thing that is striking about these two conversion stories is that the person who tells others about Jesus makes no effort to convince them but instead invites them to "come and see." Thus, neither Andrew nor Philip cite any evidence to persuade Peter or Nathaniel that Jesus is the Messiah predicted by Moses and the prophets. Instead, they bring Peter and Nathaniel to Jesus, and it is the encounter



with the Lord himself that leads to conversion.

Unfortunately, the gospel does not make it clear how one can bring others to Jesus after the crucifixion and resurrection, but we can make some suggestions. In the stories, Jesus is still physically on earth, and Andrew and Philip can literally bring people to him. However, when the evangelist and editor were at work, the situation was different. Perhaps they would have insisted that after the crucifixion and resurrection we can bring people to Jesus by bringing them to the church where Jesus' Spirit is present; or perhaps they would have insisted that we can bring people to Jesus by getting them to read the gospel through which the past words and deeds of Jesus continue to be available.

In this section, characters use many different titles to identify Jesus. John the Baptist declares that Jesus is the "lamb of God." Andrew and the unnamed disciple (probably the Beloved Disciple) address Jesus as "Rabbi," which the gospel translates as "teacher." Later Andrew tells Peter that Jesus is the "Messiah" ("Christ" in Greek). Finally, Nathaniel addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" and "God's Son, Israel's king."

From the perspective of the evangelist all these titles are true but insufficient. Thus, the gospel certainly makes it clear that Jesus is a teacher, but he is much more than that. Even the title "God's Son" is not enough, at least in the way that Nathaniel apparently understands it. For Nathaniel, as indeed for part of the Old Testament, "God's Son" is synonymous with Israel's King (cf., especially, Psalm 2:6-7). For the evangelist Jesus is indeed Israel's true king, but infinitely more as well. As the opening verses insist, Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Word who was with the Father from the beginning and is divine.

Historically, these titles reflect the fact that initially the disciples of Jesus saw him as the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and only later concluded that he was God. In the first three gospels, Jesus never explicitly claims that he is God before the resurrection. Instead, the followers of Jesus believed that he was the Messiah (especially, Mark 8:29) who would fulfill all the aspirations that Israel had for national greatness (Luke 24:21). It was only after the resurrection that the disciples concluded that Jesus was divine (e.g., Mat. 28:18-20).

In the edited gospel, these titles suggest that at first a Christian convert has only a partial understanding of who Jesus is. When people begin to follow Jesus, they have some knowledge of who he is. For example, they may know that he is a profound teacher. However, a new follower of Jesus cannot truly know that he is the eternal Word.

In this section of the gospel, Jesus himself then declares who he really is and emphasizes that in due course his new converts will learn this. In response to Nathaniel's true but inadequate declaration that he is "Israel's king," Jesus insists

that Nathaniel and his companions will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of humanity. In scripture the opening of the heavens is sometimes the precondition for God (who dwells above the heavens) to come down to earth and make himself known (Isa. 64:1; Mark 1:10-11). “Son of humanity” is a Hebrew idiom and means “human being.” The image of the angels ascending and descending alludes to Genesis 28. In Genesis 28:12 Jacob dreams that there is a ladder between heaven and earth which the angels use to travel between the two. Jacob then declares that this ladder is the “gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). According to John’s Gospel, Jesus replaces Jacob’s ladder as the point of contact between God and humanity, as the only way to reach the Father. Hence, in the image of the angels ascending and descending on the son of humanity we have a poetic restatement of the gospel’s central claim about Jesus, namely that he is a human being through whom we fully come to know God himself.

Consequently, this climax suggests that it is only as people continue to follow Jesus that they--like Nathaniel and his companions--learn that Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Word through whom we meet God. Converts who come to Jesus thinking that he is only a teacher or only the Messiah will see greater things.

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## Chapter 2

*(2:1) Three days later there was a wedding in Cana, Galilee, and Jesus’ mother was there. (2) Jesus too was invited to the wedding, along with his students. (3) When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They do not have any wine.” (4) Jesus said to her, “Lady, your concern is not mine. My hour has not yet come.” (5) His mother said to the servants, “Whatever he tells you, do it.” (6) In accordance with Jewish purification rites, six stone water jars were lying there, each with a capacity of twenty or thirty gallons. (7) Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water,” and they filled them to the top. (8) And he said to them, “Draw it out now, and take it to the master of ceremonies,” and they took it. (9) When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (although the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of ceremonies called the groom (10) and said to him, “Every person sets out the fine wine first, and when people have gotten drunk, the inferior. You have kept the fine wine until now.” (11) Jesus performed this beginning of the signs in Cana, Galilee and made his glory known, and his students believed in him.*

*(12) After this, he and his mother and brothers and his students went down into Capernaum and stayed there for a few days.*

This story concludes the enumeration of days which add up to a week and ends the first great section of the gospel. Up to this point we have had a total of four days. On

the first two days John the Baptist testified to Jesus, but apparently his testimony did not lead anyone to convert. Then on the subsequent day, John's testimony led Andrew and the unnamed disciple (probably the Beloved Disciple) to Jesus. On the day after that Philip and Nathaniel began to follow Jesus. Now the gospel tells us that on the "third day" Jesus turned the water into wine. Since the gospel has already explicitly referred to more than three days, "the third day" here probably means three days after the previous day that was mentioned, and I have translated the phrase "three days later." Accordingly, we have a total of seven days or one week. Then we have a vague reference to "a few days" which strongly suggests that the pattern of carefully numbered days is over. Jesus along with his mother, brothers, and students went to Capernaum "for a few days." Hence, we have clear literary signals that this section of the gospel is at an end.

John's Gospel stresses that the changing of water into wine is primarily a "sign"-- that is a miracle pointing to the true identity of Jesus. The climax of the story explicitly tells us that the changing of water into wine was the "beginning of the signs." The word "sign" whether in English or in Greek suggests something that points to something else. A sign directs our attention elsewhere. The miracle of turning water into wine points us to Jesus.

Because the story is primarily about a "sign," the account is full of literary symbolism. For example, the conversation between Mary and Jesus must be understood symbolically, not literally. Jesus' reply that his hour has not yet come is not a reasonable answer to Mary's concern about insufficient wine. Nor is her command to the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them a reasonable response to Jesus' seeming rebuff. The reader will discover later that the "hour" is the hour of Jesus' death and return to the Father (e.g., 12:23-33). The servants who hear Jesus' orders symbolize Christian disciples, and the passage suggests that we must be prepared to do whatever he commands.

The primary meaning of the story is that Jesus is the one who will fulfill the traditional hopes of Israel and bring final salvation. Within earlier tradition a wedding was sometimes the symbol for final salvation, and the groom was the symbol for the Messiah. Thus, in Matthew we have a parable of a King (God) making a wedding feast for his Son (Mat. 22:1-14). Here in the Fourth Gospel Jesus himself symbolically becomes the groom at the wedding feast, since it is he rather than the nominal groom who provides the wine. In the story the six stone water jars symbolize the inadequacy of the old way to salvation. Jewish purification rites do not save us. Water will not solve the problem. Instead, Jesus provides a huge amount of wine, well over a hundred gallons, and the wine is of superior quality. Within biblical tradition an abundance of fine wine is characteristic of the final era of salvation. For example, at the end of Amos we read that a day will come when the mountains will drip with sweet wine (Amos 9:13). But, as we have seen, the miracle of changing water into wine is only a "sign." Later the gospel will emphasize that what will really lead to final salvation is the crucifixion of Jesus and his return to the Father.

Therefore, in the story Jesus insists that his “hour” has not yet come. As the climax of the section that deals with conversion, the story also suggests that secret signs will confirm the initial faith of those who start to follow Jesus. It is striking that in the story the miracle has an impact on everyone who is present, but most people do not perceive that a miracle has occurred. Even the groom and the master of ceremonies, who certainly should have realized that there was no natural explanation for the new wine, do not realize what Jesus has done. By contrast, the servants who obeyed Jesus’ command and his disciples who had been following him perceive the sign. Earlier in the gospel Jesus promised that the newly converted Nathaniel and his fellow disciples would see “greater things” (1:51). Now Jesus turns water into wine, and the disciples believe in him. The point seems clear: If we begin to follow Jesus, he will give us clear “signs” that he is the savior, but these may not be noticed by the world.

To receive these secret signs we apparently must persevere in doing whatever Jesus commands. In the story the miracle occurs only because the servants repeatedly do what Jesus orders despite the seeming hopelessness of the venture. Only after the servants filled the huge jars with water and drew some of it out and took it to the master of ceremonies do we read that the water became wine.

Because it is so full of literary symbolism, it is possible that the evangelist created the story of the changing of water into wine, as John Meier has suggested (2:934-950). The other gospels do not mention this miracle. Meier has pointed out that if we omit from the story all the details that are either symbolic or historically unlikely (e.g., the conversation between Jesus and Mary), almost nothing is left. Hence, it may well be that the Beloved Disciple produced the story out of whole cloth.

The evangelist probably modeled the story on the feeding of the five thousand. He certainly knew this other miracle story since he will recount it later (6:1-15). There are, of course, many obvious similarities between them. Here we may only note that in both stories Jesus responds to a lack of provisions by producing a tremendous amount of sustenance, and we never actually see the miracle take place, only the result. Consequently, I suspect that in crafting the story of the changing of water into wine, the evangelist started with the basic framework of the feeding of the five thousand and then introduced all the symbolic elements (a marriage feast, wine, six stone water jars for purification, the theme of Jesus’ hour, etc.) that make up the first “sign” in John’s Gospel.

If there is anything in this speculation, we have another illustration of the evangelist’s freedom to reinterpret the past while not simply discarding it. The story of Jesus changing water into wine is primarily a theological interpretation of the significance of Jesus’ miracles as “signs.” When we discuss the feeding of the five thousand, we will discover that historically Jesus saw it as a “sign” of the coming of his kingdom. The evangelist then started with the feeding of the five thousand as a sign and then produced this beautiful story as a meditation on the significance of that and the other

miracles of Jesus.

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*(2:13) The Jewish Passover was near, and Jesus went up into Jerusalem. (14) And he found in the temple people who were selling oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers at their seats, (15) and he made a whip from ropes and threw them all out of the temple along with the sheep and the oxen, and he dumped out the coins of the money changers and overturned the tables, (16) and he said to those who were selling the doves, "Remove these from here; do not make my Father's house a market stall!" (17) His students remembered that there is a scripture, "Jealousy for your house will consume me" [Ps. 69:9]. (18) So the Jews responded by saying to him, "What sign are you going to show us for doing these things?" (19) Jesus replied by saying to them, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) So the Jews said, "This sanctuary was built in forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days!" (21) But he was talking about the sanctuary of his body. (22) When he rose from the dead, his students remembered that he said this, and they believed the scripture and the statement which Jesus made.*

We now begin a second major section which I believe continues until the end of chapter 6. As we saw, much of the first major section (1:1-2:12) consists of a series of days which together add up to a week. That section ended when we read that Jesus went down to Capernaum for a few days. Now we have Jesus going up to Jerusalem for the Passover, and I believe this section continues through the next Passover in chapter 6. Thus, in this gospel this second section lasts a year.

It is all but certain that Jesus actually staged a protest in the temple courts shortly before Passover. The incident is also mentioned in the synoptics (Mat. 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-46). Historically, it explains why the authorities who previously had been tolerating Jesus now felt forced to take action against him. And the early church would have invented a story of Jesus violently disrupting activities in the temple. Early Christian apologists (e.g., Luke) were anxious to show that the church was not a threat to civil peace.

The Fourth Gospel is undoubtedly correct that Jesus found the commercialization of the temple offensive. The high priestly families derived their wealth from the enormous revenues that the temple generated through such things as money changing and the sale of sacrificial animals. Throughout his ministry Jesus had sided with the poor and denounced the hypocrisy of religious leaders who exploited them (e.g., Mark 12:38-44). Hence, Jesus certainly did object to the temple functioning as a profitable business.

Nevertheless, N.T. Wright is surely correct in insisting that Jesus' demonstration primarily prophesied that the temple would be destroyed because the Jewish people was choosing the path of violent resistance to Rome (2:417-424). Six centuries earlier the prophet Jeremiah had warned the people of Jerusalem not to rebel against the

Babylonian Empire and predicted that if they did the city would be destroyed (e.g., Jer. 27). This dire prophecy came true. Jeremiah too had a confrontation with his critics in the temple and warned that if the nation did not repent God would annihilate the building (Jer. 7, 26:1-19). It would have been natural in the first century to interpret Jesus' actions in the light of Jeremiah's. In Mark Jesus states, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a bandits' den" (Mark 11:17; cf. Mat. 21:13, Luke 19:46). Would-be revolutionaries in the first century often were "bandits," and the words "bandits' den" quote Jeremiah's own protest in the temple (Jer. 7:11). In his preaching Jesus had insisted that we must love our enemies and that people who disregarded his message would ultimately be destroyed (e.g., Mat. 5:38-48, 7:24-27). His demonstration in the temple acted out this double message. Symbolically Jesus "destroyed" the temple by disrupting its normal activities. He apparently defended his aggressive behavior by insisting that the temple was no longer a place for the world to come and worship but the symbol of violent nationalism. The fact that Jesus protested against violent Jewish nationalism also clarifies several otherwise puzzling facts. It is otherwise inexplicable why it was the Jewish community that arrested Jesus, not the Romans, and why at the trial of Jesus the people of Jerusalem demanded Jesus' death, whereas the Roman governor sought to release him. It is also otherwise equally inexplicable why the governor would have freed a violent Jewish revolutionary named Barabbas. Once we realize that Jesus had demonstrated against violent revolutionary nationalism, everything makes sense. The Jews were outraged by Jesus' act in the temple, but the Roman government was initially supportive. After the high priests sent Jesus to Pilate for execution, Pilate tried to commute the sentence by proposing to have Jesus flogged and then released. This proposition further enraged the populace who were on the point of rioting. Pilate could not afford a disturbance during the explosive Passover holiday, since a riot might quickly escalate into full-scale revolt. Consequently, the governor reluctantly ordered Jesus' execution and placated the furious crowd by releasing a popular rebel.

When he predicted the destruction of the temple, Jesus also made an enigmatic statement that somehow he would replace it. In Jesus' day a Judaism without a temple was seriously defective. The temple could be destroyed--it had been in the past--but it would always have to be rebuilt. Part of God's eternal plan was to dwell with his people in his house on Mount Zion. There the Jews offered sacrifices to him; there he accepted the rituals that led to the atonement of sin. Hence, when Jesus announced that the temple at Jerusalem was doomed, he must have promised that something would take its place. Unfortunately, it is impossible to be sure precisely what he said. Mark followed by Matthew records that at the hearing before the high priest some witnesses accused Jesus of saying that he would build another temple in three days (Mat. 26:61, Mark 14:58; cf. Mat. 27:40, Mark 15:29). This testimony was probably distorted, especially since Mark insists that it was false (14:57). Still, it probably was at least a garbled version of something Jesus did say. Here in John we have another version of the same saying, and this time the version comes not from the enemies of Jesus but directly from Jesus' own lips. Jesus insists that in three

days he will build another temple. Since this prediction was never literally fulfilled, the church would not have invented it.

As the gospel looks backward, it insists that from God's point of view what Jesus meant was that his own body would replace the temple. It is noteworthy that the Fourth Gospel makes no claim that anyone at the time got this message. Quite the contrary, the gospel insists that it was only in retrospect after the resurrection that the disciples understood the true significance of what Jesus had said. At the time the disciples had only assumed that Jesus' zeal for the temple showed that he was like the supremely righteous sufferer in Psalm 69 who also was zealous for God's house. Once Jesus had been raised from the dead, however, his disciples realized that he had been speaking of the sanctuary of his own body. The new temple where God would dwell was the flesh of Jesus himself. Here again we see the evangelist claiming that he now knows what God was doing through Jesus even though at the time no one understood.

When the evangelist and the editor were at work, they had to explain how this new "sanctuary" was still available to the church. After all, Jesus' body was no longer on earth. Not even his corpse remained. Jesus had risen from the grave and returned to the Father.

It is noteworthy that the Fourth Gospel moved the protest in the temple back to a Passover at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and I believe that the editor is responsible. Historically, it is virtually certain that the protest occurred just before the last Passover of Jesus' life. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state this, and, as we have seen, the protest helps explain the arrest of Jesus and why the populace of Jerusalem demanded his death. Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel places the temple protest not at the end of Jesus' life but in chapter 2. I believe that it was the editor who made this startling alteration because.

The editor moved the protest in the temple to chapter 2 in order to introduce a section on sacraments because the body of Jesus was still available in baptism and the eucharist. Countryman has argued that the order of the Fourth Gospel parallels the order of the Christian life. As we have seen, the first great section of the gospel deals with conversion. After conversion, a Christian receives baptism followed by eucharist (see below), and, significantly, the Fourth Gospel now has a section on baptism and then a section on eucharist. By placing Jesus' prophecy that his body would replace the sanctuary, the editor is making the point that Christ's body is now available to the church in the sacraments. In the baptismal section Jesus will declare that the time to worship in the temple is over. We must now worship in the "Spirit" (4:21-26). Christ's "Spirit" is available in baptism. Similarly, in the eucharistic section Jesus will insist that we must chew his body and drink his blood (6:51-58). Of course, this cannibalistic language is to be taken figuratively and points to the presence of Jesus in the physical bread and wine of the eucharist.

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*(2:23) When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover holiday, many believed in him since they saw his signs which he was performing. (24) But Jesus did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people (25) and had no need for anyone to testify about humanity, for he himself knew what was in humanity.*

During the section on conversion, the gospel treats “signs” very positively. In response to Jesus’ apparently miraculous knowledge that he is without deceit, Nathaniel dramatically proclaims that Jesus is Israel’s king. Immediately thereafter Jesus promises that Nathaniel will see “greater things” (1:47-51). Then we have the miracle of changing water into wine, and the gospel explicitly states that this miraculous “sign” revealed Jesus’ glory and led the disciples to faith in him (2:11).

By contrast, in the verses we are presently considering, the gospel treats signs negatively. Of course, the section still acknowledges that signs produce at least an initial faith. After Jesus worked signs at the Passover holiday, many people believed. But now the emphasis is that this faith is not dependable. Jesus could not trust these recent converts. He knew their limitations.

The reason for this new skepticism about signs is that the gospel is now challenging its readers to go beyond miracles. Miracles--whether small or great--are especially helpful when someone is coming to an initial faith. However, one must move beyond a faith based on the miraculous because this kind of faith is not dependable. As we shall now see, one must go on to receive baptism.

Because the sacramental section that begins here is challenging us to go beyond miracles, it will stress that miracles are only helpful if we see them as pointers to a mature theology about Jesus. The sacramental section contains miracles, but they challenge people to see deeper dimensions of who Jesus is and to place greater trust in him. Hence, in this section Jesus repeatedly rebukes people who want a miracle but who have no interest in spiritual growth.

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### Chapter 3

*(3:1) There was a man belonging to the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. (2) This person came to him by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs which you are doing unless God is with him.” (3) Jesus in reply said to him, “Truly, truly I tell you, unless someone is born from above [again], they cannot see God’s kingdom.” (4) Nicodemus said to him, “How can a person be born when they are old? Can they go into their mother’s womb for a second time and be born?” (5) Jesus replied, “Truly, truly I tell you unless someone is born from water and Spirit,*



*they cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) What is born from flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You people must be born from above." (8) The wind [Spirit] blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes. It is this way with everyone who is born from the Spirit." (9) Nicodemus in reply said to him, "How can these things happen?" (10) Jesus in reply said to him, "You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things! (11) Truly, truly, I tell you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you people do not accept our testimony. (12) If I told you earthly matters and you people do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly ones?"*

In the Fourth Gospel Nicodemus functions both as an individual and as a symbol for a class of people. Thus, Nicodemus is a character in his own right. Not only does he appear here, but we meet him again in chapter 7 and chapter 19. Later I will argue that the gospel portrays Nicodemus as growing from initial faith to being willing to share in Jesus' death. Nevertheless, as the present passage makes clear, Nicodemus also represents a group. In the discussion between Nicodemus and Jesus both men talk as if Nicodemus is speaking for a larger constituency. Nicodemus opens the conversation by stating "Rabbi, we know," and Jesus in replying sometimes lapses into the second person plural in Greek. I have occasionally translated this plural as "you people" to emphasize that Jesus is treating Nicodemus as if he were a spokesperson for a group.

Partly because Nicodemus is both an individual and a symbol for a class of people, we must assume that the dialogue between the two men is largely the creation of the Fourth Gospel. Naturally, there may well have been a prominent Jew named Nicodemus who was sympathetic to Jesus and had an interview with him. Perhaps some of what was said still appears here. In its present form, however, the conversation that we find in these verses is a sophisticated theological construct which can scarcely be a transcript of an actual encounter. Later we will have occasion to note that in general the speeches of Jesus in this gospel are largely the work of the evangelist.

Basically, Nicodemus symbolizes people who are immature in faith and must grow. In the previous verses the gospel described a group who came to an initial faith in Jesus on the basis of his miracles but who was not trustworthy. At the end of that brief section the evangelist remarked that Jesus knew about "humanity" (literally, "a human being"). Now this section begins by describing Nicodemus as "human being" (translated above as "man"). He illustrates this type of spiritual immaturity.

More specifically, in the gospel Nicodemus represents two potentially different groups: He is both the learned Pharisee who is interested in Christianity and a convert who has not yet been baptized. Thus, on the one hand, the opening description stresses that he is a Pharisee and a Jewish leader, and later Jesus calls him a "teacher of Israel." Yet, on the other hand, Nicodemus is someone who already

believes in Jesus but who cannot understand why baptism is necessary. When Nicodemus appears in the gospel, he already knows about the miraculous signs that Jesus works and is convinced that Jesus is a teacher come from God. Nevertheless, when Jesus replies that Nicodemus must be born again by water and the Spirit, Nicodemus cannot fathom what this rebirth might be, let alone why it is necessary.

These two different roles for Nicodemus probably reflect two different contexts. Nicodemus, the sympathetic Pharisee, fits the specific period when the church and the Jewish community were not yet completely estranged but when tension between the two groups had already become severe. In the gospel account Nicodemus claims his associates (“we”) accept Jesus as a “teacher.” Of course, the fact that Nicodemus comes to Jesus “by night” (i.e., in secret) suggests that this claim is tenuous. Still, it appears that Nicodemus himself believes that Jesus is a “teacher,” and that he further believes that his associates are at least impressed by Jesus. Such attitudes bespeak the period immediately before the definitive break between what was becoming Christianity and what was becoming rabbinic Judaism. It was still possible for someone to be a Jewish leader and believe in Jesus, but tensions between rabbinic Judaism and nascent Christianity had increased so greatly that someone who had dual loyalties needed to keep this fact hidden. By contrast, Nicodemus the believer who resists baptism is a timeless figure. He no longer represents a specific historical epoch. Instead, he represents every proselyte who accepts that Jesus is at least a teacher come from God but who does not understand the need to be born again by water and the Spirit. One could easily find such “Nicodemuses” today.

I believe that these two different roles for Nicodemus reflect two different periods in the writing of the Fourth Gospel. We know from chapter 21 that a person whom the gospel calls the “Disciple Jesus loved” (e.g., 21:20) was responsible for an initial draft of the book, but that later an editor made some changes. Thus, in 21:24 we read, “This is the student who testifies about these things and who wrote them, and we know that his testimony is true.” The “student” is the Beloved Disciple. But the Beloved Disciple could not have written, “We know that his testimony is true.” An editor must have supplied that comment later.

The Beloved Disciple’s portrait of Nicodemus was probably a warning that it was now impossible to be both a rabbinic Jew and a secret Christian. Nicodemus wishes to have the privileges of being a Jewish leader and at the same time be a follower of Jesus. Before relations between the followers of Jesus and the rest of the Jewish community got to the breaking point, it was possible to be sympathetic to Jesus without losing one’s status in Judaism. Now, however, the Jewish community was expelling Christians, and the Beloved Disciple is warning his readers that they must choose. Nicodemus cannot be both a Jew and a Christian. Nor can the readers of the gospel. What comes from the flesh is flesh; what comes from the Spirit is spirit.

By contrast, the editor made Nicodemus into a proselyte who resists baptism. It is noteworthy that the word “water” occurs at only one place in the dialogue. In verse 5

we read, “unless someone is born from water and Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God.” But thereafter Jesus and Nicodemus only discuss being born by Spirit (vss. 6-8). Apparently then the editor added the reference to “water” to make the passage refer to baptism.

The editor’s portrait of Nicodemus is a warning to Christian sympathizers that it is not enough to convert; instead one must go on to receive baptism. Believing in one’s heart that Jesus is a teacher who tells us about God is only a first step. By itself it does not lead to salvation. Spiritual rebirth is necessary, and that can only take place through baptism.

One reason that baptism is essential is that it involves making a public commitment to Christ and, thereby, fundamentally changes our relationship to him. Conversion can take place in secret, and in the case of Nicodemus it does. Later in the gospel we will discover that even Nicodemus’s fellow Jewish leaders have no idea that he believes in Jesus. In Nicodemus’s very presence they will claim that no Jewish leader has believed in Jesus (7:47-52). The passage we are presently considering makes it clear that Nicodemus wants his faith to remain secret. He comes to Jesus “by night.” Here “night” not only symbolizes that Nicodemus is in spiritual darkness but also that he is not prepared to have his faith become known. Jesus responds by insisting that Nicodemus must submit to the public sacrament of baptism. By making a public commitment, Nicodemus will so change his relationship to Jesus that the experience can be compared to being reborn.

To receive baptism we must be prepared to accept the paradox that spiritual blessings come through physical ceremonies. It is unsettling that we must receive material water in order to experience spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus, despite all his learning as a Jewish theologian, cannot grasp how an adult can be reborn through water and the Spirit. As is typical of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus makes an ambiguous statement that he intends in one way but that another character takes differently. The Greek word for “above” also means “again,” just as in the motion picture industry the English phrase “take it from the top” means “do it again.” Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born “from above,” but Nicodemus’s response that we cannot reenter the womb shows that he assumes that Jesus is merely talking about being born “again.” Nicodemus cannot grasp spiritual rebirth, let alone how baptism could lead to it. Probably some of the gospel’s intended readers could not grasp this either. It is puzzling to many converts why baptism is necessary or even how it could possibly lead to spiritual benefits.

The gospel insists that this spiritual rebirth is profoundly mysterious, quite beyond the intellectual grasp of a new convert. Just as a human being can hear the wind but cannot know either its place of origin or final destination, so a new convert cannot understand baptism.

Despite its paradoxical quality, however, baptism remains a very elementary step.

When Nicodemus protests that what Jesus is discussing does not make sense, Jesus replies that they have only been discussing “earthly matters.” Later the gospel will go on to present more advanced insights.

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*(3:13) “No one has gone up into heaven, except for him who came down from heaven, the son of humanity.”*

The Fourth Gospel reminds us that the primary mystery which Christians must believe is that Jesus is the incarnation of God. In the previous verses Nicodemus the Jewish leader could not fathom the need to be reborn in baptism. Jesus replied that they had only been discussing “earthly matters” and that Nicodemus and his Jewish associates certainly could not believe if Jesus told them “heavenly ones.” Now the gospel supplies for the reader what these heavenly matters are. The central mystery is that Jesus is the link between God and humanity. He has been in heaven and descended from there and become human or to use the gospel’s biblical idiom become “the son of humanity.” Of course, the gospel previewed these claims in its opening verses.

In contrast to the Old Testament and later Jewish tradition, the Fourth Gospel insists that no one except Jesus has been with God. According to the Bible, Enoch was apparently translated into heaven (Gen. 5:24), and Elijah went up to God in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). Here in the Fourth Gospel, however, we are explicitly told that no one has ascended into heaven except for Jesus when he returned to the Father’s side after he first descended.

Of course, the insistence that no one except Jesus has been with God coheres with the Gospel’s larger claim that salvation is available only through Jesus, because through Jesus we come to know God himself.

This verse makes it particularly clear that the gospel is primarily an attempt to explain to the reader who Jesus is rather than an attempt to present an accurate account of what Jesus literally said and did in the past. Before the resurrection, Jesus certainly had not as of yet “gone up to heaven.” Hence, Jesus could scarcely have made such a claim during his lifetime. In this passage the evangelist addresses the reader and explains that Jesus is especially significant both because he came from the divine realm and because he has returned to it.

The gospel will now in a famous passage go on to explain what we learn about God through Jesus alone.

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*(3:14) “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the son of humanity must*

*be lifted up (15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. (16) This is how God loved the world: He actually gave his only Son in order that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send out the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

In the Old Testament Moses saved people from God's wrath by putting a snake on a pole. According to the Bible, the Israelites had angered God by grumbling against him and Moses. In response God sent poisonous snakes who bit the people, and many died. The people repented and asked Moses to intercede. When he did so, God commanded Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. Whoever looked at the snake would recover from the otherwise fatal bite (Num. 21:4-9).

The Fourth Gospel suggests that now people find eternal life by looking at the crucified Jesus. The Israelites looked at the bronze serpent which Moses lifted up and preserved their physical lives. By contrast, Christians look at Jesus and gain eternal life. This Jesus has been lifted up. Of course, this "exaltation" occurred when Jesus was physically hung on the cross.

The reason that the crucifixion saves us is that it reveals God's absolute forgiveness and love. God's willingness to send his own Son to die for us and the Son's acceptance of this mission make it clear that God's goodness towards us is inexhaustible. God loves us regardless; no matter what we do in response--even if we torture Jesus to death--that love will remain.

Consequently, the crucifixion reveals that God does not judge us in the way that the Old Testament suggests. In the Old Testament God often acts punitively. Thus, as John's Gospel reminds us, in Numbers 21:4-9 God responds to the Israelites' grumbling by killing them. By contrast, the cross reveals that God never desires to condemn us. Regardless of what we do, God's will is always to save us. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn anyone.

Of course, we must believe that Jesus is God's Son in order to accept this new revelation of who God is. The Old Testament certainly reveals God at least partially, and it claimed that Enoch and Elijah had actually ascended into heaven. We can only correct this revelation if a new revealer appears who is greater than Enoch and Elijah and who has seen God in a way that they have not. Hence, the Fourth Gospel insists that only those who believe in Jesus find salvation through him. "Everyone who believes in him" perceives God's unconditional love and is free to accept it and respond with love for God and for the world he created and receive eternal life.

Because the crucifixion enables those who understand its significance to find eternal life, it is the hour of Jesus' exaltation. Here, the Fourth Gospel introduces a pun which will reappear, namely that Jesus is "lifted up" on the cross (8:28, 12:32-34). Of course, this phrase points to the physical elevation of Jesus' body when he was hung

on the crossbeam. But it also points to the fact that the crucifixion is the moment in which Jesus completed his revelation of God's love and invited all who perceive it to find salvation. Therefore, the crucifixion is paradoxically the time when Jesus is glorified.

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*(3:18) "Those who believe in him are not condemned. Those who do not believe are already condemned because they have not believed in the name of God's only Son. (19) The condemnation is this, that the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. (20) All who commit what is foul hate the light and do not come to the light so that their deeds are not exposed. (21) But those who do the truth come to the light so that their deeds may be made known because they were done in God."*

In the previous verses the gospel stressed that God's love for the world is unconditional. Jesus is the supreme revelation of who God is, and Jesus did not come to judge the world. Instead, Jesus loves the world despite the fact that the world tortures him to death.

The claim that God's love is unconditional, however, invites the question of how can God judge the world. It is easy to see how a punitive God judges. If we grumble against him, he may send poisonous snakes to bite us. But can an unconditionally loving God judge?

Of course, the doctrine that God will judge the world was an essential part of Jesus' own message and is probably an essential part of any Christian proclamation. Jesus insisted that those who heard his words and rejected them would experience catastrophe. Just as a house built on the sand will collapse when the floods come, so those who refused to heed Jesus' warnings would be destroyed (e.g., Mat. 7:26-27). Moreover, even today we must ask, "If rejecting the Christian message has no negative consequences, how can that message be taken seriously?"

The Fourth Gospel insists that there is real judgment despite God's love, because those who reject the Christian message cut themselves off from God and thereby remain in darkness and death. We cannot benefit from God's love unless we are willing to believe in it and let it transform our lives. Hence, when we reject the preaching of that love, we remain separated from it and neither know the ultimate truth about the universe or the transforming warmth of God's gracious presence.

Moreover, the preaching of the Christian message even passes judgment on our previous sins. We cannot accept the message of God's love and forgiveness unless we allow it to expose all those times in the past when we ourselves have failed to be loving and forgiving. Consequently, people who have lived generous lives welcome the gospel. Those who have not find the preaching of the cross threatening. To use

the Fourth Gospel's image, they hate the light and flee from it. Accordingly, those who in the past have been cruel and thoughtless will tend to reject the gospel and remain alienated and alone. They experience judgment despite God's love.

The Fourth Gospel stresses that eternal life and death begin now. Whenever the gospel is preached, it forces us to decide whether we will accept the God it reveals or whether we will reject him. Those who accept him begin a relationship that will last forever and already experience the first taste of the blessings that this loving union gives. By contrast, those who now reject the preaching of God's love take the first step toward rejecting that love forever. Therefore, the passage we are presently considering insists that those who believe are not condemned, whereas those who do not believe are condemned already.

We may note in passing that the theology of judgment we find here corresponds to the practice of the historical Jesus. Jesus considered his preaching to be good news. God's kingdom was coming, and it was time to celebrate. Nevertheless, those who refused to celebrate by receiving God's love and forgiveness and extending it to others would miss out. Thus, at the end of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Father (i.e., God) expresses his love for the older brother and invites him to come to the party (the kingdom), but the latter pouts. Unless he changes his mind after the story ends, he will remain alone, angry, and outside (Luke 15:11-32, especially, vss. 25-32).

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*(3:22) After this, Jesus and his students came into the land of Judea, and he remained there with them and baptized. (23) John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salem, because there were many springs there, and people were coming and being baptized, (24) for John had not yet been thrown into prison.*

Historically, it is likely that Jesus himself did administer baptism in the period before John the Baptist's arrest. Jesus certainly went to see John and accepted baptism at his hands. The church would never have invented such a tradition since it made John look superior to Jesus. But if Jesus himself went to see John and received baptism from him, it is very plausible that for a period Jesus could have worked alongside John and baptized others. Once John was incarcerated, however, Jesus returned to Galilee. Mark's Gospel, followed by Matthew, records that it was after John's arrest that Jesus began preaching in the north (Mark 1:14, Mat. 4:12), and it is logical to suppose that John's arrest made it clear that preaching in Judea had become too dangerous and it would be prudent for Jesus to return to his homeland.

After Jesus began a separate ministry in Galilee, he did not baptize. The first three gospels which concentrate on Jesus' work in Galilee never suggest that he baptized anyone. Moreover, the message that Jesus was now preaching made baptism inappropriate--at least baptism as John the Baptist had understood it. John had proclaimed that a fiery judgment was imminent (Mat. 3:1-12). Baptism was a

physical sign of repentance to prepare. The physical act of washing was a sacramental sign of forsaking one's sins in order to be spared on the looming day of divine wrath. By contrast, the first three gospels make it clear that in Galilee Jesus preached that God's kingdom was now beginning to be present already. It was no longer appropriate to fast and wait as John the Baptist had done. Instead, it was time to party! Indeed, public opinion noted the extreme difference in the two men's messages and lifestyles. People dismissed John as a crazy ascetic and Jesus as a glutton and a drunk (Mat. 11:16-19, Luke 7:31-34).

The fact that the Fourth Gospel remembers that Jesus baptized alongside of John suggests once again that historically the Beloved Disciple had been a disciple of John and then began to follow Jesus. Earlier we hypothesized that the anonymous disciple in chapter 1 who stood beside the Baptist and started to follow Jesus was the Beloved Disciple. The fact that this gospel alone recalls a period when Jesus baptized alongside of John the Baptist suggests that the author had access to early information. The easiest explanation for how he got this information is that he himself had been with John and Jesus before John was arrested and Jesus returned to Galilee.

It appears that this passage was originally earlier in the gospel and that the editor moved it to its present location. The passage as we now have it has at least two odd features. First the passage begins by telling us that Jesus came "into the land of Judea." Yet Jesus has been in Jerusalem since 2:13, and Jerusalem is the capital of Judea. Hence, he did not come into Judea in this passage. As a result, some modern translations (e.g., NRSV) render the Greek word for "land" as "countryside." Aside from here, however, the word does not have this meaning in the Greek of the period. A second oddity is that the passage tells us that John was baptizing because he had not yet been put in prison. Why it is necessary to inform us of this? Surely, no reader would suppose that John was baptizing in prison! The best explanation for these problems is that originally the passage was earlier in the gospel. In this earlier position Jesus had just come into Judea. When the editor moved the passage, it was necessary to reassure the reader that John was still not in prison. Historically, by this point in the story John was indeed in jail.

The editor moved the passage to make the order of the gospel reflect the order of the ideal Christian life. The Christian life--at least for adults--begins with conversion. After conversion comes baptism. As we have seen, the editor shaped the gospel's opening section so its theme would be conversion. Then the editor produced a section about baptism. To concentrate baptismal material in this section, the editor omitted the story of John baptizing Jesus and moved the section describing Jesus and John baptizing together to the place where it now appears.

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*(3:25) An argument arose between some of John's students and a Jew about*



*purification. (26) They came to John and told him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan for whom you yourself have testified--look, this fellow is baptizing and all are going to him.”*

Purification was an important part of the Jewish tradition. Much of the Mosaic Law deals with how to remove impurity, and in the first century the different Jewish sects observed the various washings and sacrifices required by the Law. There was also much discussion and disagreement about details.

The present passage implies that Christian baptism replaces Jewish rites of purification and renders them obsolete. Together the students of John the Baptist and a “Jew” represent the old dispensation. Within the gospel the “Jews” represent the emerging rabbinic faith which opposed the church and claimed to be loyal to the teaching of Moses. The gospel sees John the Baptist as a forerunner of Jesus. Consequently, together the Jews and the disciples of John symbolize the past when it was still appropriate to observe, and, therefore, to discuss purification. The sudden announcement in the passage that Jesus has arrived and people are now flocking to him reminds us that a new dispensation has come. The gospel does not tell us the outcome of the debate between John’s disciples and the “Jew” about purification--or even what the specific disagreement was--because the debate is outmoded. Just as earlier we learned that Jesus’ body replaces the temple (2:19-22), so now we learn that Jesus’ baptism replaces purification. The only washing that really removes spiritual impurity is Christian baptism through which we become followers of Jesus.

By emphasizing that people were leaving John to seek baptism from Jesus, the Fourth Gospel may also be emphasizing that Christians must be baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. In the first-century church there were apparently two kinds of baptism. There was an older rite that followed John the Baptist’s practice and was only a baptism of repentance. Then a new rite arose partly in response to the resurrection and partly in the light of John the Baptist’s prophecy that the one who was to come would baptize with the Spirit (see the discussion of 1:32-33 above). In this new liturgy people were baptized in the name of Jesus or of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and received the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the Acts of the Apostles we read that initially the early Christian missionary Apollos used John’s Baptism but then under the guidance of Priscilla and Aquila started using the new rite (Acts 18:24-26). Similarly, later in Acts Paul encounters some Christians who have received John’s baptism but know nothing about the Holy Spirit. Paul then baptizes them in the name of Jesus and lays his hands on them and they receive the Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Hence, when the Fourth Gospel describes people deserting John the Baptist and going to Jesus for baptism, the gospel may be stressing that we must be baptized in the name of Jesus and receive his Spirit. Earlier John the Baptist himself in the gospel contrasted his own baptism in water with the Messiah’s future baptism in the Spirit and emphasized the superiority of the latter (John 1:26-27, 33-34).

*(3:27) John in reply said, “A person cannot receive anything unless it has been given to them from heaven. (28) You yourselves can attest for me that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah’ [1:20], but I was sent out ahead of him. (29) The groom takes the bride. When the bestman stands waiting and hears him, he rejoices greatly at the groom’s voice. My joy is complete. (30) He must grow greater, and I diminish.”*

The gospel again takes up the theme that the Baptist is inferior to Jesus and has only a ministry of preparation. John the Baptist reminds us that he emphasized earlier that he was not the Messiah and was only called to prepare the way (1:20-27). The relationship of John to Jesus is analogous to the relationship of the best man and the groom. The best man’s only function is to help the groom, and when the wedding is over, the best man is content to depart. So too John the Baptist has fulfilled his role now that Jesus has begun preaching, and John rejoices and prepares to withdraw.

Significantly, this is the last time John the Baptist speaks in the gospel. Later we will have references to his previous work and testimony (4:1, 5:33-36, 10:40-41), but the Baptist himself will not appear.

Historically, it is likely that John the Baptist did see himself as only preparing the way for the Messiah. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke as well as the Fourth Gospel, John contrasts his own inferior baptism in water with the superior baptism in the Spirit that the Messiah will administer, and John stresses that he himself is unworthy even to attend to the Messiah’s sandals (Mat. 3:11, Mark 1:7-8, Luke 3:16, John 1:26-27, 33).

By emphasizing that the Baptist himself was only preparing for the coming of Jesus, the evangelist is replying to contemporary critics. They were insisting that, since John baptized Jesus, John was his superior, and, consequently, Jesus could not be divine. In response the evangelist points out that the Baptist himself emphasized the superiority of the coming Messiah, and God was using the Baptist to prepare for Jesus.

In the Fourth Gospel because John the Baptist seeks the glory of Jesus rather than his own, the Baptist is exemplary. For this gospel, the primary spiritual test is whether someone truly seeks God’s glory and is content with the role God has assigned them. At various points Jesus will stress that even he does not seek his own glory only God’s and willingly lays down his own life in obedience to God’s command. Jesus also excoriates his critics for being concerned solely for their own prestige and refusing to accept the One whom God has sent (e.g., 5:41-44). Hence, John the Baptist’s behavior in this passage is ideal. He is content to accept the role God has assigned to him and rejoices that the Messiah will increase while he himself decreases. Consequently, John is spiritually mature and can rightly be called the Messiah’s (groom’s) “friend.” Later in the Fourth Gospel Jesus will insist that people who are

spiritually advanced are not his servants but his friends (15:14-15). It is noteworthy that the gospel here stresses the joy of the Baptist. The gospel will emphasize that mature followers of Jesus have the gift of joy (e.g., 15:11-12).

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*(3:31) He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth is of the earth, and he speaks of earthly things. He who comes from heaven is above all. (32) What he has seen and heard he testifies. Yet no one accepts his testimony. (33) Those who accept his testimony attest that God is true. (34) He whom God sent out speaks God's words, for he does not give the Spirit in limited quantity. (35) The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. (36) Those who believe in the Son have eternal life. Those who disobey the Son will not see life, but God's displeasure stays on them.*

This passage does not fit its context well. It is especially troubling that we do not know who the speaker is. John the Baptist has been speaking, and it is tempting to assume that he still is. But the content of the address makes this assumption difficult. The address contrasts the one “who comes from above” (i.e., Jesus) with those who are “of the earth.” The latter speak only about “earthly things.” John the Baptist surely is of the earth since he did not come down from heaven. Therefore, according to the text, he can only tell us about earthly things and will reject Jesus. But, if John is the speaker here, he certainly is telling us about the heavenly origins of Jesus and bearing witness to him. Hence, John cannot be the speaker. Then who can that be? What is said here resembles what Jesus says elsewhere, and it is tempting to assume that he might be the speaker. Yet, the text does not introduce him. Consequently, what we must have is commentary from the evangelist. But the commentary is awkward, because it sounds as if one of the characters in the narrative is talking.

I suspect that the awkwardness of the passage resulted when the editor rearranged the gospel to produce a section on baptism. As we have seen, the editor resorted to a “cut and paste” in order to make the gospel parallel the Christian life. In this particular section the editor was redistributing material to produce a unit on baptism. This redistribution inevitably produced awkward transitions.

Before the editor moved it, the passage was a brief summary of the theology of the evangelist. Jesus alone was with the Father before the creation and came down to earth. Accordingly, he alone has authority over all things and can reveal the Father and give the Spirit. Those who accept Jesus also accept the Father and receive salvation, and those who reject Jesus reject God himself and have no hope of eternal life.

In its present position this section underlines the superiority of Jesus' baptism. The editor placed this brief discussion of Jesus' superiority to every other human being in

a section devoted to baptism, both John's and Jesus'. In this context the superiority of Jesus points to the superiority of his baptism. Of course, the Fourth Gospel like the synoptics regards John the Baptist as a great human being, perhaps the greatest of those who were merely human. Hence, the synoptics and the Fourth Gospel also regard the baptism that John administered as a powerful sacrament. Indeed, it was this reverence for John and his baptism in the early church which led to that sacrament's continuance. Consequently, in this section on baptism it was essential for the editor to show that Jesus was infinitely greater than John and, therefore, the baptism that Jesus gave was greater too.

Apparently, the reason that Jesus' baptism is infinitely superior to John's is that only the former bestows the Holy Spirit and thereby gives us access to God himself. The passage tells us, "he does not give the Spirit in limited quantity." Here "he" is ambiguous. It could refer to the Father. Then the sentence would mean that God gives the Spirit to the Son fully. But "he" could also refer to the Son. Then the sentence would mean that Jesus gives the Spirit fully to those who believe in him. I would argue that both meanings are appropriate and intended. The Father gives the Spirit fully to the Son who in turn gives her fully to those who believe. By placing this sentence in a baptismal context, the editor was making the point that those who receive baptism in the name of Jesus receive fully the Spirit that Jesus gives, and this Spirit is the same one that the Father himself has. Consequently, baptism in the name of Jesus is infinitely superior to the baptism of repentance which John the Baptist administered.

The theology that Jesus' baptism is superior to John's probably addressed a contemporary debate in the early church. Some early Christians continued to administer baptism the way John had done it. Other Christians baptized in the name of Jesus (or the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit) (e.g., Acts 18:24-26, Mat. 28:19) and proclaimed that this baptism bestowed Jesus' own Spirit. Here the Fourth Gospel probably endorses this latter baptismal rite.

Once again the gospel insists that salvation and judgment occur already in the present, because now we either begin a new life in Jesus or reject it. Prior to the coming of Jesus, no one could know the final truth about God. Everyone was by necessity in spiritual darkness. Now that Jesus has come, we have a choice. We can accept the love that Jesus reveals and begin a new relationship with God through him, or we can reject that truth and remain in darkness. Either choice has eternal consequences.

In this passage the gospel alludes to a theme that it will develop later at great length, namely that salvation consists in being part of the relationship between the Father and the Son. In the Fourth Gospel the Father and the Son love one another absolutely and give themselves totally to each other. The greatest gift that they give each other is our salvation. The Father gives us to the Son, and the Son dies to reveal God's love to us. We in turn show our love for the Father by accepting his Son. In

this passage, the gospel implies these ideas by insisting that God has given everything--including us--to the Son and that by accepting the Son we confirm the truthfulness of the Father.

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## Chapter 4

*(4:1) When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more students than John (2)--even though Jesus himself was not baptizing but only his students were (3)--he left Judea and went away back into Galilee.*

This passage borders on being inconsistent on the question of whether Jesus was baptizing. The Pharisees heard that Jesus was baptizing, and earlier a similar report came to John the Baptist (3:26). Moreover, in 3:22 we ourselves read in this gospel that Jesus was baptizing. Now, however, we are abruptly told that this is not completely accurate. Jesus himself was not baptizing. It was the disciples who were.

The passage is transitional since it winds up one section and introduces another. It brings to a conclusion Jesus' trip to Jerusalem which began in 2:13 and prepares us for the next story which is the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well.

Consequently, the passage gives to both sections a baptismal context. It reminds us that the previous theological digression about the absolute superiority of the Son who alone gives the Spirit has implications for baptism. It also invites us to assume that the coming discussion between Jesus and the woman about "living water" is, in part at least, a discussion about baptism.

I suspect that the editor added the material about baptism to this passage. Originally, it may only have consisted of a note that Jesus left Judea after the Pharisees heard about his ministry. The editor expanded the note to tell us that what the Pharisees heard was that Jesus was baptizing. However, the editor also wanted to stress that historically Christian baptism--that is baptism in the name of Jesus--began with Jesus' disciples. During his own lifetime Jesus baptized only at the very beginning of his ministry, and then he administered a baptism similar to the one John the Baptist gave. Hence, the editor insists in this passage that Jesus himself did not baptize.

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*(4:4) He had to go through Samaria. (5) So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field which Jacob gave to Joseph his son. (6) Jacob's well was there. So Jesus who was exhausted from his journey sat right down at the well. It was about noon. (7) A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (8) (His students had gone off to town to buy provisions.) (9)*

*The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jewish man, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman!” (Jews do not use vessels in common with Samaritans.)*

Although their origins are not entirely clear, the Samaritans practice a religion that is closely related to Judaism. The Samaritans claim to be descended from the ten northern tribes of Israel which the Assyrians conquered in the eighth century B.C.E. This passage mentions Jacob, and a few verses later in John’s Gospel the Samaritan woman explicitly calls Jacob “our ancestor” (4:12). Of course, Jacob had his name changed to “Israel” and, according to the Bible, was the father of the twelve sons who were the founders of the twelve tribes. The Samaritan Bible consists of the five books of Moses. The Samaritans have also preserved a form of Hebrew, and in fact their script is closer to the original way of writing this language than the script used by Jews today.

As this passage from John’s Gospel makes clear, Samaritans and Jews disagree over the location of the ideal place to worship God. The Bible, especially the book of Deuteronomy, states that God has chosen a particular place to be honored. In the Jewish Bible it is clear that this place is Mount Zion in Jerusalem where the Wailing Wall still stands and which today is surmounted by the Islamic Dome of the Rock. By contrast, in the Samaritan Bible Jerusalem is not the chosen place. Instead, for Samaritans the ideal place to worship God is Mount Gerizim near the modern town of Nablus in central Palestine. In ancient times both the Jews and the Samaritans constructed a temple on their respective sacred sites, and today both groups continue to worship at these locations.

In the time of Jesus and John’s Gospel the relationship between Samaritans and Jews was bitter. Of the many insults that each community perpetrated on the other, perhaps the worst occurred in 128 B.C.E. when the Jews under John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans never forgave them. As John’s Gospel attests, it was customary for Jews and Samaritans to avoid each other. Indeed, Jews in Galilee who went to Jerusalem to worship in the temple there normally took a circuitous route so they would not have to travel through Samaritan territory.

The passage that we are presently analyzing emphasizes that Jesus takes the initiative in breaking down the traditional barrier between Jews and Samaritans and also between men and women. Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman, and in her reply she underlines the strangeness of what he has done. “How is it that you, a Jewish man, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman!” Later in the story Jesus’ disciples will also be shocked (4:27). We should not assume that Jesus’ unprecedented behavior is simply due to desperate thirst. Jesus’ thirst is merely an excuse for the conversation. In the ensuing dialogue Jesus never returns to the subject of his own thirst, and no one ever gives him anything to drink. Instead, Jesus quickly turns the tables by offering to give the woman “living” water.

The story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is probably not a record of an actual incident in Jesus' life but rather a theological reflection on the coming of the gospel to the Samaritans after the resurrection. Historically, it seems unlikely that Jesus ever attempted to convert any Samaritans during his own lifetime. According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus felt that the time to convert the Samaritans and the Gentiles had not yet come. His ministry was only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat. 15:24). Indeed, Jesus himself tells his disciples not to preach to the Samaritans (Mat. 10:5). Luke tells us that on the one occasion when Jesus was actually preparing to enter Samaritan territory, the Samaritans refused to welcome him because he was traveling to worship at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was forced to go elsewhere (Luke 9:52-56). According to Acts, it was after the resurrection that Philip first preached the Christian message in Samaria (Acts 8:5ff.). In the subsequent dialogue between Jesus and the woman, Jesus talks about a new era when people will worship in the Spirit and tells us that "the hour is coming-- indeed, it is here now" (4:23). This statement is ambiguous, but I take it to mean that the mission to the Samaritans which only occurred after the death of Jesus was based on the message Jesus had already preached during his own lifetime.

In the edited gospel the primary message of the story of Jesus and the woman at the well is that baptism overcomes religious and ethnic divisions. As we have seen, the editor made baptism the major theme of this part of the gospel and inserted a baptismal reference into this story's introduction. Jesus goes to Samaria when the Pharisees hear that he is baptizing. Hence, in the edited gospel the subsequent discussion between Jesus and the woman about "living water" is a baptismal discussion. The story's introduction stresses that in the ordinary first-century world Jews and Samaritans did not associate with one another and men did not talk with women in public. But Jesus breaks down these barriers. Here then we have another illustration of the New Testament theme that all who are baptized are one regardless of their nationality or gender. Those who are baptized into Christ are no longer divided into Jew or Greek or male and female (Gal. 3:27-29).

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*(4:10) Jesus in reply said to her, "If you recognized God's gift and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you are the one who would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (11) She said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket, and the well is deep. From where do you get the living water? (12) You are not greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself along with his children and cattle?" (13) Jesus in reply said to her, "All who drink from this water will be thirsty again. (14) But whoever drink from the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. On the contrary, the water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water welling up for eternal life." (15) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I may not be thirsty and not come over here to draw."*

As is typical of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus uses a phrase that is ambiguous and the person who is talking with him takes it in one way whereas the reader understands it in another. In this case the phrase is “living water.” In Greek “living water” can mean “running water.” The woman imagines that Jesus is offering to give her running water. In ancient times running water was often available in the homes of the wealthy. Naturally, if the woman had running water in her residence she would not need to go to a well. Hence, she is interested in the offer. But the reader realizes that what Jesus is really offering is water that gives eternal life.

To receive this superior water, we must recognize that Jesus is God’s Son. Throughout John’s Gospel, the key to salvation is recognizing who Jesus is and responding with loving obedience. Consequently, in this particular passage the discussion about “water” becomes a discussion about Jesus’ identity. Jesus tells the woman that if she only knew who he is, he would give her “living water.” She in reply notes that he does not even have a bucket and mocks him by asking sarcastically whether the thirsty Jesus thinks that he is greater than the Patriarch Jacob who provided the well. Once again we have irony. Jesus is in fact greater than Jacob, but the woman does not know this.

In the edited gospel, of course, the “living water” is the water of Christian baptism through which we receive the Holy Spirit. Earlier John the Baptist contrasted his own inferior baptism by water only with the superior baptism of water and the Spirit (1:26, 31-33), and Jesus told Nicodemus that people must be reborn by both water and the Spirit (3:5). Later in the gospel, water will explicitly be a symbol of the Spirit. In chapter 7 Jesus will invite his audience to come and drink from his water, and the gospel tells us he was speaking “about the Spirit whom those who believed in him were about to receive” (7:37-39). Hence, once the editor gave the story of the woman at the well a baptismal context, the water being discussed is “living” because the sacrament of baptism bestows the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit who in turn gives us that life that lasts forever. We may note in passing that the use of “living” water corresponded to baptismal practice when the evangelist wrote. The earliest surviving manual of Christian worship directs that baptism should ideally be done in flowing (“living”) water (Didache 7.1).

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*(4:16) He said to her, “Go and call your husband and come here.” (17) The woman in reply said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus said to her, “You said, ‘I do not have a husband.’ Right, (18) for you had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is the truth!” (19) The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. (20) Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain. Yet you people say that the place where one must worship is in Jerusalem.” (21) Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, that the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. (22)*



*You people worship what you do not understand. We worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. (23) Nevertheless, the hour is coming--indeed, it is here now--when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people as his worshipers. (24) God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." (25) The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called 'Christ'. Whenever that man comes, he will disclose all things to us." (26) Jesus said to her, "I who am speaking to you, I am the one."*

In this passage the woman with whom Jesus is speaking is an individual and as a representative of the Samaritan people. Thus, she is clearly a person, but she speaks for her community. "Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain. Yet you people say that the place where one must worship is in Jerusalem."

Consequently, her lovers must be seen on two contrasting levels. On one level her five husbands are her personal paramours. It is Jesus' knowledge of her hidden life that persuades her that he must be a prophet. Because that hidden life is embarrassing, she quickly changes the topic of conversation to theology. Yet, symbolically the five husbands stand for the apostasy of her people. Hence, from a symbolic perspective the theological discussion which ensues is entirely appropriate. The Jews believed that the Samaritans had descended from five foreign nations who had settled in Israel and had combined the worship of the God of Israel with the worship of five different sets of foreign gods (2 Kings 17:24-34). The Samaritans had committed religious adultery five times (Schneiders 138-141).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the man the woman is now living with who is not her husband stands symbolically for the religion related to Judaism that the Samaritans were practicing at the time when John's Gospel was written.

In response to the Samaritan claims, the Fourth Gospel insists that in the past God worked through Judaism and but now a new era has begun in which all have equal access to God through Jesus. The gospel makes no concession to the historical claims of the Samaritan community or, for that matter, of any non-Jewish religious tradition. "Salvation is from the Jews." Historically, God chose to reveal himself

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1 Schneiders, citing earlier work by John Bligh, makes the valuable point that the woman and her lovers do stand for the Samaritans and their religious apostasy. Unfortunately, Schneiders's claim that the lovers are only symbolic is less convincing. In the Fourth Gospel something often is true both literally and figuratively (e.g., Jesus being "lifted up"), and the book's highly imaginative narratives constantly give us things that historically are incredible. In the narrative, the woman's lovers are, at least on the literal level, her actual husbands. Otherwise Jesus' knowledge about them would have occasioned no surprise. Everyone knew the Jewish claim that the Samaritans had committed religious adultery with Pagan deities. Moreover, in her subsequent comments to the villagers the woman explicitly notes that Jesus "told me all *I* did," not all that *we* did.

through the Jewish people, and, historically, the Jerusalem temple was the place where God was to be worshiped. Nevertheless, the Messiah has come and has revealed the final truth. “God is Spirit,” and we must worship him not in a special physical location but in a special spiritual relationship that is based on knowing Jesus. That relationship is equally available to all people. The ancient debate about where the physical temple should be located has become irrelevant.

In all probability this passage faithfully reflects the historical Jesus’ attitude toward the temple. Jesus certainly believed that in the past God had chosen the temple in Jerusalem. Yet, Jesus apparently also believed that once the kingdom of God which he was proclaiming came, the building would become obsolete. Jesus insisted that the edifice would be destroyed (e.g., Mark 13:1-2), and he never spoke of its reconstruction. Instead, he apparently suggested that something “spiritual” would replace it. This last claim especially enraged his critics. In the past, prophets had predicted the destruction of the temple, but they had always expected that ultimately it would be rebuilt. Mark records that at the hearing before the high priest the witnesses emphasized that Jesus not only said that he would destroy the temple but that he would provide another one “not made with hands” (Mark 14:58). Of course, this testimony was at best only a garbled version of what Jesus said, since he never claimed that he would destroy the temple himself. Moreover, we cannot be certain that the early church knew in detail what took place at the hearing before the high priest. Nevertheless, the allegation that Jesus would replace the temple with something spiritual contained an uncomfortable amount of truth and surely reflected at least what the critics of Jesus were protesting.

Hence, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well appropriately draws on the teaching of the historical Jesus to justify a later Christian mission to the Samaritans. As we noted above, during his lifetime Jesus never preached to the Samaritans or even sent his disciples to do so. Still, he did think that the kingdom that he was inaugurating would in due course reach beyond the confines of Israel. The Old Testament, especially the book of Isaiah, had looked forward to all the nations coming to worship at the temple at Jerusalem (e.g., Isa. 2:2-4). Jesus saw himself as somehow fulfilling such prophecies. He believed that he had come to set the world ablaze (Luke 12:49). And he looked forward to an era when people everywhere would eat in fellowship with Abraham as part of the “kingdom” (Mat. 8:11). After the resurrection, the early church began to implement this vision by preaching first to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles. But, there was no hope for any success in preaching to the Samaritans if the church was still proclaiming that people must worship at Jerusalem. Therefore, this meditation on the message of Jesus emphasizes that he himself believed that the controversy regarding where the temple should be was outdated. Now we must worship God in a new and better way.

In the baptismal setting provided by the editor, the message of this section is that through baptism people accept the Jewish heritage and yet transcend it. Everyone who receives baptism enters a religious tradition that stretches back to Abraham and

acknowledges that in some special way God was at work in that particular national experience. Yet, everyone who is baptized also acknowledges that the Messiah has come and all have equal access to God through him regardless of their ethnic background. The Spirit that we receive in baptism is equally available to each ethnic group. Now we must worship God in spirit and truth, and baptism itself is part of this new “spiritual” worship.

The passage does not spell out the meaning of the phrase “God is spirit,” but within the context of the book as a whole it points to the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus does not explain to the woman what he is claiming about the nature of God. The reader, however, is in a position to remember the opening verses of the gospel. There we read that God through Jesus created all things, and, this claim implies that God is transcendent and should not be confused with the physical universe. Yet, that same God entered the physical world by becoming flesh. Hence, God is indeed spirit, but we come to understand that spirit through the coming of the Messiah. Significantly, in this passage Jesus not only assures the woman that he is the Messiah that her people are expecting. He also proclaims, “I am the one,” (in Greek, literally, “I am”), and these words suggest his divinity. As Exodus 3:14 makes clear, God is the “I am.”

The woman at the well does not perceive the veiled reference to the incarnation, and her obtuseness is appropriate because faith in the incarnation comes at a later stage of spiritual growth. She realizes that Jesus is at least claiming to be the Messiah. Indeed, in a moment she will ask her fellow villagers to check out this seemingly preposterous assertion (4:29). But she does not even imagine the much greater claim to which Jesus has alluded. At baptism one does not yet have the spiritual maturity to experience the divinity of Jesus.

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*(4:27) At his point, his students came and were astonished that he was speaking with a woman. Nevertheless, no one said, “What are you seeking?” or “Why are you speaking with her?”*

Initially the surprise of the disciples seems strange in a fictional narrative. Earlier I noted that the story of the woman at the well cannot go back to the time of Jesus. The conversion of the Samaritans began later. Yet, the surprise of the disciples over Jesus talking to a woman has no literary function. Previously the story has stressed that she is a Samaritan rather than a woman, and subsequently the theme of the disciples’ surprise is dropped.

The historical Jesus, however, did shock his contemporaries by his public dealings with women. Contrary to convention, he welcomed women as his students, and they accompanied him as he traveled about (Luke 8:1-2). Such openness provoked his critics to make the thinly veiled allegation that he was a playboy, a “friend of sinners”

(Mat. 11:19, cf. Luke 7:36-50).

Once again we see that even when the evangelist invented material he remained profoundly true to history. The story of the woman at the well seems to be fiction. Nevertheless, the Jesus who appears in it remains recognizably the historical Jesus.

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*(4:28) The woman left her water jar and went away into the town and told people, (29) "Come, see the person who told me all that I did. This is not the Christ, is it?" (30) They left the town and started to come to him.*

*(31) In the meantime, the students were begging him, "Rabbi, eat!" (32) But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." (33) So the students said to one another, "No one has brought him something to eat, have they?" (34) Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and complete his work. (35) Don't you say, 'In another four months the harvest is coming'? Look, I tell you; raise your eyes and look at the fields, because they are white for harvest already. (36) The harvester receives his wage and gathers in the fruit for eternal life, in order that the sower may rejoice along with the harvester. (37) In this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another harvests.' (38) I sent you out to harvest what you did not work for. Others have worked, and you have gained from their work."*

*(39) Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, "He told me all that I did." (40) So when the Samaritans came to him, they kept asking him to stay with them, and he did stay there for two days. (41) And many more believed because of what he said, (42) and they kept saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of your talk that we believe, for we ourselves have heard and know that this man is truly the savior of the world."*

Despite the baptismal context, in this section we return to the model for conversion which we encountered in chapter 1. According to the stories in chapter 1 (see above), conversion begins when someone--often a recent convert--testifies to the identity of Jesus and invites others to come and see for themselves. When they do, they learn firsthand that Jesus is the Messiah. As a result, the testimony of the missionary ceases to be important. The elements of this model clearly reappear here. The woman is at most a recent convert. Indeed, her statement, "This is not the Christ, is it?" suggests that she is not even convinced that Jesus is who he claims to be. She just is not sure that he isn't. So she invites the rest of the town to come and see for themselves. When they do, they discover that Jesus is the "savior of the world," and pointedly tell the woman that they no longer believe because of her testimony. It is noteworthy that what they discover is far greater than what the woman said about Jesus. She had only raised the possibility that he might be the Jewish Messiah. After meeting him, the villagers conclude that he is the savior of all people. The one variation on the model for conversion is the timing of the miraculous sign. In chapter 1 Jesus gives the sign

after people come and see. It is after Nathaniel comes to Jesus that Jesus shows his supernatural knowledge of who Nathaniel is. Then subsequently, Jesus turns water into wine as a sign for all his disciples. Here in chapter 4, by contrast, the sign occurs before anyone is converted. It is only after Jesus demonstrates his miraculous knowledge of the woman's past that she begins to believe, and the miraculous sign is what she shares with the townspeople, "Come, see the person who told me all that I did."

The presence of conversion themes within the baptismal section reminds us that it was the editor who rearranged the gospel so that it would roughly resemble the ideal Christian life. The editor did not begin from scratch, but only adjusted existing material. Hence, the resulting gospel only approximates the schema that the editor attempted to impose on it.

Nevertheless, even this section remains appropriate for baptism to some extent because in the climax of the story the villagers make a confession that goes beyond what someone who has just converted can do. The villagers state that they know that Jesus is the "savior of the world." In the conversion section the most that a new disciple confesses about Jesus is that he is the "king of Israel" (1:49), and the woman's message to the villagers suggested only the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah (4:29). The villagers' subsequent confession that Jesus is "the savior of the world" comes far closer to an adequate understanding of Jesus' ultimate significance as the Fourth Gospel presents it. Significantly, this deeper understanding appears after the Samaritan villagers have been with Jesus for two days.

It is striking that the gospel emphasizes that the woman's missionary work is prior to that of the disciples. When they return from town, Jesus pointedly tells them that "others" began the labor which they are to finish. Here the "others" must be Jesus and the woman. They converted the townspeople. The disciples so far have done nothing. Now they must "harvest" what has already been "sown."

Of course, the text continues to emphasize that this primordial missionary is both a Samaritan and a woman. Indeed, on returning the disciples are startled that Jesus is talking to a woman.

Consequently, this scripture suggests that the missionary work of women in the church should have full equality with the ministry of males in the "apostolic succession."

The story about the woman at the well stresses both that Jesus has human needs and limitations and yet that he was primarily sustained by his commitment to God. Nowhere in the gospels--except perhaps in the accounts of the crucifixion--is there more emphasis on the weakness and vulnerability of Jesus. At the beginning of the story, we read that Jesus is weary. Apparently, he is thirsty as well because he asks for a drink. Now later we conclude that he must have been hungry, because the disciples

went away to buy food and are bringing some back for him. But weariness, hunger, and thirst do not prevent Jesus from converting the woman. His primary “food” is the desire to do God’s will.

The gospel suggests that we the followers of Jesus should imitate him. We too have human needs and limitations. Despite these, we must primarily be sustained by our commitment to serve God, not by physical rest and physical food and drink.

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*(4:43) After two days he left from there for Galilee, (44) for Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own homeland [cf. Mat. 13:57, Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24]. (45) When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him since they had seen all that he did in Jerusalem on the holiday, because they themselves had also gone for the holiday.*

The gospel briefly returns to one of its major themes--that Jesus was rejected by his own people. This theme already appears in the Gospel’s opening verses. “He came to what was his; yet his own people did not accept him” (1:11). There we have the theme in its largest expression. It is the “world” which was created through Jesus that did not accept him. Here, by contrast, we have the theme in miniature. Jesus’ native district will not accept him.

In developing this theme the gospel alludes to a quotation that probably goes back to Jesus. The quotation that a prophet does not have honor among his own appears in the synoptics and also in an early Christian writing known as the Gospel of Thomas (log. 31). Because of such wide attestation, the saying certainly comes from Jesus himself, though, to be sure, he may have been quoting a popular proverb.

The placement of these verses is problematic. Jesus has just been honored by the Samaritans and, as a result, we assume that having “no honor in his own homeland” must point forward to what will happen now that he is returning to his native Galilee. The problem is that on this particular trip, Jesus will in fact be honored there too. That honor begins in this very passage. We read, “the Galileans welcomed him since they had seen all that he did in Jerusalem.”

In all probability the tension arose when chapters 5 and 6 were reversed. It is a scholarly commonplace that chapters 5 and 6 were switched. In chapter 5 Jesus goes to Jerusalem and stays there. Yet at the beginning of chapter 6 we read that Jesus crosses the Lake of Galilee. Of course, one cannot cross the Lake of Galilee from Jerusalem. Then in the beginning of chapter 7 we read, “After this, Jesus went around in Galilee.” But at this point Jesus has already been in Galilee for all of chapter 6. It has long been realized that these problems disappear if we simply reverse the chapters. Once we place chapter 5 after chapter 6 then we have logical transitions. In chapter 6 Jesus is in Galilee and gets a poor reception after he claims to be “the bread

that came down from heaven” (6:41). The Galileans reflect that they know Jesus’ parents (vs. 42)! Then in chapter 5 Jesus responds to this rejection by going to preach in Jerusalem. There people seek to kill him, and subsequently he confines his work to Galilee. If chapter 6 follows chapter 4 immediately, then there is also no problem about the comment that a prophet has no honor in his own homeland. Shortly after we read this in 4:44, Jesus in chapter 6 is rejected in Galilee.

I believe that the editor deliberately reversed chapters 5 and 6 to make the order of the gospel reflect the order of the ideal Christian life. We have already seen that thanks to the editor’s work the gospel begins with a section on conversion and goes on to a section on baptism. We will see shortly that chapter 6 deals with eucharist. When the Fourth Gospel was written, it was already customary--as it would remain afterwards--that a person had to be baptized before receiving the eucharist. The earliest surviving manual of Christian worship, the Didache was written about the same time as the gospel and explicitly directs that no one is to eat the eucharistic bread or drink the wine who has not been baptized in the Name of the Lord (Didache 9:5). Hence, the editor needed to put chapter 6 after all the baptismal material. As we shall see, the material in chapter 5 was more appropriate for a section on baptism, and so the editor placed what is now chapter 5 before what is now chapter 6.

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*(4:46) He came back into Cana, Galilee, where he had made the water wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was sick in Capernaum. (47) Since he had heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was about to die. (48) Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you people will not believe.” (49) The royal official said to him, “Sir, come down before my little child dies.” (50) Jesus said to him, “Go, your son is going to live.” The person believed what Jesus said to him and started out. (51) When he was already going down, his slaves met him and said that his boy was going to live. (52) So he asked them what was the hour on which he began to get better. They said to him, “Yesterday at one o’clock the fever left him.” (53) So the father knew that it was on that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son is going to live.” And he himself became a believer along with his entire household. (54) This second sign Jesus once again did after he came from Judea into Galilee.*

The story of the healing of the royal official’s son in the Fourth Gospel has many similarities to the stories of the healing of the Centurion’s “boy” in Matthew 8:5-13 and the Centurion’s “slave” in Luke 7:1-10. In all three stories a prominent official asks Jesus to heal a sick male member of his household; in all three the official has faith in Jesus’ power to heal from a distance. There is even a reference to Capernaum in all versions of the story. Thus, in John the royal official’s son is sick in Capernaum, whereas in Matthew and Luke the Centurion or a delegation from him come to Capernaum to see Jesus.

As Meier points out (2:720-24), some of the important disagreements between the three stories could simply be due to different interpretations of common tradition. A "Centurion" in Galilee during the time of Jesus was also a "royal official," since Galilee was governed by Herod Antipas who at least in informal usage had the title of "king" (Mat. 14:9, Mark 6:14, 22), although officially he was only a tetrarch. The discrepancy that the sick person is the official's "son" in the Fourth Gospel and the centurion's "slave" in Luke could have resulted from different understandings of a Greek word. Matthew tells us that the sick person was the Centurion's "pais" or "boy" and that term could refer either to a son or a servant. The Fourth Gospel might have taken the word in the first sense and Luke in the second. In both Luke and John the Centurion even calls the sick person his "pais" (Luke 7:7) or his little "pais" (John 4:49), and later the Fourth Gospel refers to the boy as the official's "pais" (4:51).

Hence, we are surely dealing with a single historical incident. It seems most improbable that there were two miracles involving the healing of an important person's boy from a distance at Capernaum. It also seems most improbable that we could have independent versions of an incident that has been elaborated differently if the incident did not actually take place.

The theme of the story in Matthew and Luke is that the petitioner's initial faith is exemplary. It is the centurion who takes the initiative in asking Jesus not to bother coming to the house but to perform the healing from a distance. Jesus marvels and stresses to the bystanders that such extraordinary faith cannot even be "found in Israel" (Mat. 8:10, Luke 7:9).

By contrast in the Fourth Gospel, the theme of the story is the petitioner's growth in faith. The royal official's initial faith is limited, and Jesus regards it as inadequate. The official asks Jesus to come and heal the boy. Jesus challenges the man to believe without seeing signs and wonders. At first the petitioner refuses and pleads with Jesus to come and heal the child. Only when Jesus assures the official that his boy will be all right and orders the man to go, does he "believe" (John 4:50) and depart. On the way home he learns from his slaves that his son was healed at the very hour when Jesus declared that the boy would live. Then we read again that the man along with his household "believed" (4:53). Since, of course, he had already believed, the gospel must be describing a still greater degree of faith. Therefore, it is probably best to translate the passage that the man and his household became believers.

Consequently, this version of the miracle story fits well into the section on baptism. As we have seen, the Fourth Gospel, at least in its final, edited form begins with a section on conversion and then goes on to a section on baptism. In the section on conversion signs are desirable since they strengthen people's initial faith. Thus, as soon as Nathaniel initially proclaims that Jesus is the "Israel's king" (1:49), Jesus promises that Nathaniel will see greater things, and in the next story Jesus changes water into wine. At the conclusion to that story, which is also the conclusion of the conversion section, we read that because of the miracle "his students believed in him"



(John 2:11). By contrast, a theme of the following baptismal section is that we must go beyond a faith based on miraculous signs. When Nicodemus says that Jesus must be a teacher from God, “for no one can do these signs which you are doing unless God is with him” (3:2), Jesus replies that Nicodemus must be born from above. Hence, the story of the healing of the royal official’s son, as we find it in the Fourth Gospel, is appropriate for the section on baptism. Jesus challenges the man to go beyond a faith based on “signs and wonders.” The man does so. Then at the climax of the story the official and his household become believers. It is noteworthy that baptism is the sacrament by which someone formally professes faith and becomes a member of the Christian community.

The editor apparently moved this story to the baptismal section. Originally, the story must have been much closer to the changing of water into wine. There are many parallels between these narratives of which we may note a selection. The changing of water into wine is the first “sign” (2:11) Jesus works, and the healing of the royal official’s son is explicitly described as the “second sign” (4:54). Both miracles occur at Cana (2:1, 4:46), and both have a reference to Capernaum (2:12, 4:46). The second story opens with an explicit reference to the first: “He came back into Cana, Galilee, where he had made the water wine.” At the climax of both stories people believe in Jesus. Accordingly, it seems likely that originally these stories were relatively near to each other so these parallels would have their maximum effect. By distancing these stories from each other, the editor made it more difficult to notice the detailed similarities. The editor also created a contradiction. In the edited gospel Jesus works “signs” during his trip to Jerusalem in chapter 2 (2:23, 3:2; cf. 4:45). As a result, the healing of the royal official’s son is not actually the “second sign,” except in the highly technical sense that it is the second sign that Jesus worked “after he came from Judea into Galilee” (4:54).

This second sign underlines the theology that Jesus is the one who gives life. Each of the “signs” points to some particular aspect of who Jesus is and what he does. Here the symbolism especially stresses that Jesus is the one who supremely possesses life and who gives it to those who turn to him. In the opening verses of the gospel we read, “In him there was life, and the life was the light of human beings” (1:4). Now we have a narrative enactment of this truth. The child is about to die, and the boy’s father desperately seeks Jesus’ intervention. Jesus has such power over life and death that he has no need to visit the child. His word alone is sufficient. He declares that the boy will live, and subsequent events prove that he speaks the truth.

This sign also points to the fact that the mature Christian must believe without first seeing. When the royal official pleads with Jesus to come and work a miracle, Jesus promises the man that his child will live and orders him to depart. The man believes, and the miracle occurs. The implication seems obvious: Only if we first believe without seeing will we find life. Jesus’ words, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you people will not believe,” are a direct challenge to readers of the gospel, as the plural “you people” makes clear. The royal official stands for a category of people.

The theme that mature Christians must believe without seeing will provide a climax to the gospel when Jesus declares, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (20:29b).

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## Chapter 5

*(5:1) After this there was a Jewish holiday, and Jesus went up into Jerusalem. (2) In Jerusalem, by the sheep gate there is a pool which is called in Aramaic, “Bethzatha,” which has five porticoes. (3) In these there was lying a throng of infirm people who were blind or lame or paralyzed.<sup>2</sup> (5) One person was there who had been infirm for thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw this fellow lying down and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to become well?” (7) The infirm man replied to him, “Sir, I do not have anyone to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, but while I am coming, another person gets down before me.” (8) Jesus said to him, “Rise, pick up your mat and walk.” (9) At once the person became well, and he picked up his mat and walked.*

*That day was a Sabbath. (10) So the Jews kept saying to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not legal for you to pick up your mat.” (11) But he replied to them, “The person who made me well—he said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” (12) They asked him, “Who is the person who said to you, ‘Pick it up and walk’?” (13) The man who had been cured did not know who it was, for there was a crowd in the place and Jesus had slipped away. (14) After this Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have become well; do not go on sinning any more lest something worse happen to you.” (15) The person went out and reported to the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. (16) And it was for this reason that the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he used to do these things on the Sabbath.*

Here again we seem to be dealing with a historical incident. Archaeologists have excavated a double pool with five porticoes north of the temple precincts in Jerusalem. The Beloved Disciple who wrote the gospel was from Judea and probably from Jerusalem itself. He could easily have known about this miracle.

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2        Later and less reliable ancient copies of John’s Gospel insert what is traditionally known as 5:4: “For an angel of the Lord from time to time used to descend into the pool, and the water was agitated. The first person to go in after the agitation of the water became well from whatever disease they had.” This note may provide a correct explanation of local beliefs about the pool but certainly did not appear in the edited gospel. Instead 5:4 was added later to explain the otherwise puzzling words in 5:7.

Nevertheless, the evangelist has made this story a meditation on the corrosive consequences of sin. The story suggests that the man's long illness resulted from previous wickedness. Jesus' command "do not go on sinning any more lest something worse happen to you" presupposes that the man had sinned before and that this previous sin had led to his prolonged disability. Moreover, it appears that in his sinfulness the man does not even wish to be cured. Jesus' pointed question, "Do you want to become well?" receives no unambiguous answer. The man's reply that he has no one to put him into the water may be merely a rationalization. In any case, Jesus takes the initiative and performs a healing that the man never requests. Then when Jesus meets the man a second time Jesus warns him to stop sinning. But the man does the opposite: He betrays Jesus to the authorities, and, as a result, the authorities seek to kill Jesus.

Within the gospel as a whole, this story illustrates in an especially powerful way the theme that the coming of Jesus judges the world because the good willingly receive him and move toward the light, whereas the evil reject him and move further into the darkness. The Fourth Gospel insists that God did not send Jesus to judge the world but to save it. Jesus comes only in love. However, the advent of Jesus does judge the world. People who are evil reject him despite his good deeds and become more evil still, whereas people who are good rejoice in the light that Jesus brings. This theme is powerfully present in two contrasting miracle stories. In the story we are presently considering, the man who was lying beside the pool is a grievous sinner when Jesus heals him physically, and the man responds to Jesus' goodness by betraying him. As we shall see, in chapter 9 the man born blind has not sinned, and when Jesus heals him, the man defends Jesus and, as a result, suffers at the hands of Jesus' enemies.

By placing this story in the baptismal section, the editor made the story a warning to the Christian reader not to refuse to come forward for baptism and to remain faithful to Jesus after receiving it. When the Fourth Gospel was written, the synagogues were expelling people who were known to be Christians. Some Jews were choosing to remain secret Christians and not take the step of being baptized. The sinful man who lay for thirty-eight years by the pool and never got into it symbolizes this group of people. Neither he nor they truly wish for Jesus to heal them. When the editor was at work, there were also baptized Christians who believed that they were sinless and that Christ was too exalted to have a fleshly body. These heretical Christians broke away from the church. The Epistles of John attack such people in the strongest terms. The man in the story who received healing from Jesus and then betrayed him probably also symbolized these heretics.

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*(5:17) But he replied to them, "My Father has been working until now; I am working too." (18) So for this reason the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath but also was saying that God was his own father, making himself the same as God.*

John's Gospel claims to be an inspired interpretation of the actual past. The gospel insists that it is giving us a record of what in some sense actually occurred. Indeed, in chapter 21 the gospel tells us that its principal author was an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus. Yet, the gospel also insists that at the time the events took place people often had no idea what their true significance was. We have seen an illustration of this insistence already. In 2:19-22, when Jesus challenges his critics to destroy the "temple" and promises to rebuild it in three days, they do not understand him. Apparently, even his disciples do not understand. Instead, we read that it was only after he was raised from the dead that his disciples remembered what he had said and realized that through Jesus the eternal Word had been speaking about his own body. What is true in this example is true for the gospel as a whole: After the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit the author came to a new understanding of what had really been going on--namely that God himself had been uniquely present in the sayings and deeds of Jesus and was accomplishing things of eternal significance.

The passage we are presently considering mentions a series of things that are surely historical. Historically, it is clear that Jesus referred to God as his "Father," and it would appear that he was claiming that his relationship to God was somehow different from that of other people. It is also clear that sometimes Jesus performed healings on the Sabbath despite the divine prohibition of working on that day. Moreover, when Jesus broke the Sabbath, he did not think that he was sinning, but that he had a direct, "intuitive" knowledge of what God's will was. He was simply doing what God wanted him to do in this particular situation.

Looking back on these historical facts after the resurrection, the evangelist claims that they imply the divinity of Jesus. As a result of the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the evangelist and his community became convinced that Jesus was the eternal Son of God who exercised the full authority of the Father. In the light of this conviction, the evangelist saw a new dimension to Jesus' historical claims that God was his Father and that, consequently, he could heal on the Sabbath. When Jesus claimed that God was his Father, he was claiming that he shared in God's eternal being, or, to use later theological language, shared in the divine "nature." Similarly, when Jesus broke the Law by healing on the Sabbath, he did so because he had divine authority. God works on the Sabbath--otherwise the universe would collapse--and Jesus has the same privilege.

Of course, one need not agree that Jesus' words and deeds imply that he was divine. One can assume that when he called God his "father" or healed on the Sabbath, Jesus was not making any grand claims. Or one can assume that Jesus was making extraordinary claims but that he was mistaken.

But if we disagree, we do so because we have had a different experience of Jesus after his death. The evangelist and his community experienced the risen Jesus as having the power of God and being the source of the Holy Spirit. People who deny the

divinity of Jesus obviously have not had this experience and, consequently, question the reliability of those who have.

Later we will see that the editor of the gospel thinks that there is a way to experience Jesus' divinity even today and invites the reader to begin to do so.

During his lifetime, the claims that Jesus made about himself provoked hostility from other Jews. Jesus claimed that the movement that he himself was founding was the beginning of a renewed Israel. Indeed, the twelve apostles symbolized the new Israel just as the twelve sons of Jacob (who took the name "Israel") symbolized the old. Of course, the claim that Jesus was beginning a renewed Israel was objectionable to other Jewish groups. It was especially gauling to his critics that Jesus insisted that people--even despised "sinners"--could be completely reconciled to God by joining his movement, as E.P. Sanders has emphasized (235-36). Other Jews believed that people could be reconciled to God only by following the procedures required by the Mosaic Law. Consequently, during his lifetime the Pharisees who specialized in interpreting the Mosaic Law vigorously opposed Jesus, as all the gospels attest. And the High Priests who headed the Sadducees succeeded in getting Jesus executed on the charge of claiming to be the "Messiah." Apparently, the charge was basically true since all the gospels insist that Jesus did little to deny the allegation but instead accepted it as basically accurate even at his trial before the Roman governor. Jesus merely insisted that his understanding of what God's kingdom involved was not precisely what Pilate's was (Mat. 27:11-14, Mark 15:2-5, Luke 23:2-3, John 18:33-38).

After the resurrection, the followers of Jesus began to claim that Jesus was now lord of the universe, and this claim further alienated other Jews, especially since it seemed to contradict monotheism. Therefore, it is scarcely surprising that Saul of Tarsus during the Pharisaic period of his life persecuted the church.

Matters became still worse after the Jewish revolt against Rome failed, and Christians began to make the explicit claim that Jesus was God himself. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., the Pharisees became the dominant group in Judaism. Other Jewish groups, including the Sadducees who controlled the temple and the Essenes who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, did not survive the war. Meanwhile, the community that produced the Fourth Gospel began to insist stridently that Jesus was divine. To the Pharisees this was the final blasphemy, and they responded by expelling the community from the synagogues.

I believe that the controversies between Jesus and the "Jews" in the Fourth Gospel reflect the whole history sketched above. The gospel rightly portrays the fundamental controversy as going back to the historical Jesus. Even during this early period Jesus was speaking and acting with a "divine" authority which outraged the Pharisees. Yet, in the gospel the claims of Jesus and the violent response that they incite also reflect the specific controversies when the gospel itself was written. It was only during that later period that Christians were explicitly claiming that Jesus was divine and the

Pharisees as the new, undisputed leaders of the “Jews” responded by expelling them from the synagogues. Later the gospel will tell us that the “Jews” at least occasionally even killed members of the evangelist’s community (16:2). These murders are symbolically foreshadowed in the efforts of Jesus’ enemies to kill him in the passage we are presently considering.

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*(5:19) In response Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I tell you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, only what he sees the Father doing. For what the Father does, the Son also does these things likewise.”*

It appears that historically Jesus did not make explicit claims about himself. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all agree that Jesus was uncomfortable when people made claims in Jesus’ behalf or asked Jesus to say who he claimed to be. Thus, for example, Mark records that when Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus responded by ordering his disciples not to say that to anyone (Mark 8:29-30). Similarly, when Pilate at the trial asked Jesus if he was the “King of the Jews,” the reply was at best irritatingly ambiguous, “That’s what you would say” (Mark 15:2). Jesus once even refused to be called “good” (Mark 10:18), and, since the early church would scarcely have made this up, it must be historical. In the first three gospels the only title that Jesus gladly applies to himself is “son of humanity,” and whatever this title may have meant in Jesus’ mind, the common meaning was simply “a human being.”

Instead, Jesus pointed away from himself to God. He did not speak about himself but the “Father,” and he did not proclaim the coming of his own kingdom, but the coming of “God’s” kingdom. The story about Jesus refusing to be called “good” is especially instructive. The reason Jesus said that he should not be called “good” was not that other people were somehow more virtuous but that the word “good” should be reserved for God alone.

Yet, even as Jesus did not use--or accept--titles for himself and as he pointed to God, he freely exercised the power that belongs to God alone. He worked miracles that astounded his contemporaries. So convincing were his mighty works that his enemies could not dispute their genuineness but instead were reduced to charging that they were worked through the power of the demonic (Mark 3:22). Jesus also on his own authority interpreted and even altered the law that God gave to Moses. Sometimes Jesus drastically extended its demands such as when he forbade taking oaths (Mat. 5:33-37) or getting divorced (e.g., Mat. 5:31-32). Other times Jesus drastically relaxed the law, such as when he insisted that it was always legal to do good on the Sabbath (Mat. 12:12; cf. Mark 3:1-6). To be sure, the explicit statement in Matthew 12:12 that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath may be a later reflection on Jesus’ activities, but I believe that this reflection correctly interprets the implications of Jesus’ deeds. Perhaps most important of all, Jesus claimed that “sinners” could be reconciled to God simply by becoming members of the movement that he himself was initiating.

Consequently, Jesus' words and deeds which pointed to God also paradoxically pointed back to himself as someone who exercised divine authority. We see this paradox clearly in Jesus' intriguing answer when John's the Baptist sent messengers to inquire whether he claimed to be the coming savior. Jesus told the messengers to report all the miracles that Jesus was working and the fact that he was preaching salvation to the poor and let John draw his own conclusions (Mat. 11:2-6).

John's Gospel then makes the claim that it was precisely Jesus' total subservience to the Father that allowed Jesus to embody fully the power of God. Precisely because Jesus did not seek his own will but only the will of God, Jesus made God fully present.

We see this theology in the present passage. Here Jesus insists that as the "Son" he can do nothing on his own, but only what the Father does. Yet precisely because Jesus imitates the Father, Jesus acts with the full authority and power of God himself.

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*(5:20) "The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And he will show him greater deeds than these, in order that you people may marvel. (21) Just as the Father raises the dead and makes them come to life, so also the Son makes those whom he wishes come to life. (22) The Father does not judge anyone but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, (23) so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Those who do not honor the Son do not honor the Father who sent him.*

The Gospel of John holds that the primary reality is the love that the Father and the Son have for each other. Thus, in the gospel's opening verses we read that only the Father and his Son existed "in the beginning" and that these two were responsible for the creation of the universe. Subsequently, the gospel keeps insisting that the Father loves the Son and that the Son loves the Father. It is this love that leads to everything else, including the salvation of the world.

Throughout the gospel the Father and the Son show their mutual love by giving everything they have to each other. For example, just before this passage we read that the Son does only what he sees the Father doing (5:19). Later we will repeatedly read that the Son willingly suffers torture and death out of love for the Father (e.g., 14:31). The passage we are presently considering stresses that the Father entrusts all things to the Son. The Father shows him everything, and grants to him even the power to raise the dead and pronounce final judgment on them.

Because the primary reality is the love that the Father and the Son have for each other, human beings find salvation by being caught up in this mutual affection. We must let both the Father and the Son love us, and the Father loves us by giving us to the Son, and the Son loves us by giving us to the Father. When we allow the Father to give us

to the Son and the Son to give us to the Father, then we experience the fullness of the divine life that is theirs alone to bestow and that originates in their mutual love.

Hence, the Fourth Gospel emphasizes that both the Father and the Son invite us to honor the other. In the passage that we are presently considering, the emphasis is on the Father's invitation to love the Son. We honor the Father by honoring the Son.

The theology that the Father entrusts the raising of the dead and the final judgment of the world to the Son appears to have originated only after the resurrection. At that point people experienced that Jesus was divine and concluded that he would bring the deceased back to life and, depending on their worthiness, invite them into paradise or consign them to eternal destruction.

Nevertheless, it is historically likely that during his ministry Jesus himself passed judgment on others in God's name and even raised a few dead persons to life. The synoptics claim that at least on a couple of occasions Jesus explicitly forgave sins (Mark 2:5-10, Luke 7:47-50) to the shock of his Jewish audiences who noted that only God has this power. This ability to forgive sins was further implied in Jesus insistence that he could reconcile sinners to God simply by including them in the movement that he himself was starting. In God's name, Jesus also condemned whole communities, warning them of final destruction at the last judgment. Thus, for example, Jesus claimed that the villages of Chorazin and Bethsaida would experience eternal catastrophe because they had rejected him (Mat. 11:21. Luke 10:13). Since the village of Chorazin otherwise never appears in early Christian literature, this saying must go back to Jesus himself. The first three gospels also have stories of Jesus raising at least two dead people--the daughter of a man named Jairus (Mark 5:35-43) and the son of a widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-17). In reply to the question as to whether he was the savior who was prophesied to come, Jesus explicitly appealed to the fact that he was raising the dead (Mat. 11:2-6, especially, vs. 5). Recently John Meier has subjected the material about Jesus raising people from the dead to a rigorous scholarly analysis and found that there is much evidence that it is historical (2:773-837). Meier notes, for example, that the church could scarcely have made up a tale about Jesus raising someone at Nain, because this totally obscure village was never a Christian center (2:794-95, 798). As we shall see, the Fourth Gospel too records that Jesus once raised a dead man, and here too the evidence suggests that the incident actually occurred (see the discussion of chapter 11 below).

Jesus looked forward to the final triumph of God in which he and his chosen followers would be vindicated. Jesus stressed that soon God would raise the dead and judge the world, and the standard on which God would judge the present generation was whether or not it had responded to the teaching of Jesus himself. For example, he insisted that at the final judgment the ancient Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh would condemn Jesus' generation. She had come from the ends of the earth to gain wisdom from King Solomon, and they had repented at the preaching of Jonah. Jesus' audience, by contrast, had refused to listen to him even though a greater



wisdom was being proclaimed (Luke 11:31-32). This material is surely authentic because only Jesus would have dared to use the notorious men of Nineveh as an example to imitate.

We may note in passing that in the last few passages the Gospel of John has given us different models for the mystery of how the Father and the Son can be perfectly one while being utterly distinct. The Gospel started with the paradox that the Word was with God and was God and yet nevertheless, there remains only one God. In those opening verses, the gospel explained the paradox by using the model of the word and the speaker. Logically, the word and the one who utters it are distinct. Yet in reality they are one, because we only know the speaker from the words. In the last couple of passages that we have considered, we have some other models. In 5:19 we have the model of perfect imitation. The Son can be perfectly one with the Father, because whatever the Father does, the Son imitates. In 5:20-22 we have the model of perfect sharing. The Father shares all his knowledge and authority with the Son.

As the present passage suggests, all these models are dimensions of the perfect love that unites the Father and the Son. Thus, the Son imitates the Father out of love, and the same love impels the Father to share everything with the Son. As 5:20 insists, the Father loves the Son. Hence, the ultimate explanation of the paradox that the Father and the Son are both divine and yet there is only one God is the nature of love itself. Love unifies and differentiates simultaneously. Of course, as 1 John reminds us, the community from which the gospel came believed that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16).

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*(5:24) “Truly, truly I tell you that whoever listen to my words and believe the One who sent me have eternal life. They will not be judged. Instead they have passed from death to life. (25) Truly, truly I tell you that an hour is coming, indeed, it is now when the dead will hear the voice of God’s Son, and those who hear it will live. (26) Just as the Father has life in himself, so also he granted to the Son to have life in himself. (27) And he gave him authority to pass judgment because he is the son of humanity. (28) Do not be surprised at this, that an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. (29) Those who have done good deeds will come out for resurrection and life, and those who have committed wicked deeds will come out for resurrection and judgment.*

In this section verses 28 and 29 seem intrusive, and we should conclude that the editor added them. The earlier part of the section insists that resurrection has occurred already. Those who believe in Jesus “have passed from death to life.” “Now” is the time “when the dead will hear the voice of God’s Son.” By contrast, verses 28-29 look forward to a physical resurrection from the tombs in the future. If we omit 28-29 the rest of the passage flows smoothly into what follows. Verse 27 insists that God gave Jesus the authority to pass judgment as the son of humanity, and verse 30 then continues by insisting that Jesus is just precisely because he only does what God

wants.

As N.T. Wright has shown at great length (3:*passim*), the early church as a whole believed in a two-stage resurrection. At any individual's death there was a preliminary resurrection when a dimension of the self temporarily left the flesh and went to salvation or damnation. Then at some future time Christ would raise the physical remains of all the dead. He would reunite the "spirits" with their earthly bodies, pass final judgment, and transform the righteous into a more glorious form. We see an illustration of this two-stage resurrection in Luke's Gospel. At their deaths the beggar Lazarus and the callous rich man immediately go respectively to Abraham's bosom and the flames of Hades (Luke 16:19-31). Yet, Luke still expects a physical resurrection at the end of time when we will become like angels (Luke 20:27-39).

The church primarily based its faith in the final resurrection of the dead on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Within the Judaism from which Christianity came there was debate over the resurrection of the dead, since the Sadducees denied it, whereas the Pharisees affirmed it (e.g., Acts 23:8). Within the early church, however, there was unanimity because of the experience of the empty tomb. On Good Friday Joseph of Arimathea had placed the corpse of Jesus in a tomb. Then on Easter morning Mary Magdalene discovered that the tomb was vacant (e.g., Mark 15:46-16:8; for a discussion of the Johannine version of the story in 20:1ff. and a defense of the historicity of the empty tomb, see below). Obviously Jesus had lain in the tomb for a period and then God had raised up his physical remains. The church quickly concluded that the resurrection of Jesus was the means and the model for our own. Jesus would soon return with divine power and raise corpses from their graves.

Faith in a final resurrection became increasingly difficult, however, as time passed. When years and then decades elapsed and Jesus did not return to raise the dead, many people became skeptical. Indeed, 2 Peter complains about mockers who taunted conservatives by saying, "Where is the promise of his coming, for from the day our ancestors died all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation?" (2 Peter 3:4).

Perhaps in response the Fourth Evangelist insisted that even though Jesus himself had been physically raised, the faithful would experience their final transformation at the moment of death. The evangelist saw Jesus' physical resurrection not as a model for our own but rather as a "sign" (20:30), i. e., a miraculous physical pointer to a deeper spiritual truth. That deeper truth was that the risen Jesus would take us to himself at the moment of our physical demise. Our "spirits" would join him in heavenly glory, and there would be no need for a subsequent physical resurrection. We see that theology in the passage we are presently considering. Here, as elsewhere in the gospel (e.g., 2:4), the "hour" of which the evangelist writes is the time of the crucifixion and resurrection. Once that hour has come "the dead will hear the voice of God's Son, and those who hear it will live."

The position that Jesus had been physically raised shortly after his death but that the faithful would experience final transformation at the moment of death was theologically sophisticated, and the evangelist's successors were not able to maintain it. Some radical successors concluded that Jesus had not been physically raised—indeed, the Son of God never had a human body (1 John 4:2, 2 John 7). Conservatives—including the editor—reacted by affirming not only the physical resurrection of Jesus but also the physical resurrection of the rest of the dead at the end of time. We see that affirmation here. The editor insists in verses 28-29 that those presently in the tombs will one day hear Christ's summons and come out.

The present passage also offers us contrasting perspectives on when the judgment will occur and on what it will be based. The opening verses insist that judgment occurs in the present and the criterion is whether one believes in Jesus. Those who listen to Jesus and accept him have already passed from death to life and will face no further judgment. By implication those who have rejected Jesus have already begun an irreversible slide into death. The subsequent verses, however, insist that judgment is in the future and will be based on deeds. At some subsequent "hour" those who are presently buried will leave their tombs and whoever have done good works will receive life but whoever have committed evil deeds will receive condemnation.

Consequently, it may well be, as Bultmann claimed long ago, that it was the Beloved Disciple who emphasized that judgment is in the present, whereas it was the final editor who stressed that judgment would occur in the future (passim, e.g., 257-62).<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it is extremely doubtful that either the evangelist or the editor would have denied the contrasting perspective. Obviously the editor believed that judgment occurred in the present too, because the editor kept the passages in which the evangelist states this. Similarly, it is hard to imagine that the evangelist did not believe that judgment also occurs in the future. No matter how glorious it may be to know the love of God in this life and live by the Spirit of Jesus, the evangelist was grimly aware of the extreme sufferings that sometimes afflict Christians in the present age. Indeed, in the gospel Jesus insists that those who follow him will be thrown out of their communities and, at least occasionally, even be killed (e.g., 16:1-2). Hence, the evangelist also looked forward to some definitive salvation after death.

Of course, the two perspectives concerning when judgment occurs and what it is based on are complementary. By believing in Jesus in the present, we reorient our lives and allow ourselves to be transformed by his Spirit. As a result, we begin to have new peace and joy and begin to do works of love and mercy. This transformed life

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3 Bultmann especially contrasted the theology of the evangelist with that of the "ecclesiastical redactor." It was a virtue of Bultmann that he called attention to the editor and insisted that the editor had a distinctive viewpoint which helps shape the canonical gospel. Unfortunately, Bultmann's existential bias prevented him from appreciating the editor's work.

inevitably leads to vindication at the final judgment (whether at the moment of death or at the end of the world). Similarly, if we reject Jesus' preaching of God's love for us and the need for us to love others, we already experience deprivation in the present, and we fail to do works of love and mercy. Then at the final judgment we must face the truth about what we have done and the consequences that necessarily follow. The contrasting perspectives that judgment occurs in the present and is based on faith and judgment is in the future and is based on works both go back to Jesus himself. Thus, on the one hand, Jesus insisted that whenever he preached and worked miracles the kingdom of God was present already. People could enter it now if only they believed the message and responded appropriately. The kingdom of God was in people's midst (Luke 17:20-21). Therefore, it was a time of joy, and Jesus was notorious because he refused to fast. One cannot fast at a wedding party, he proclaimed (Mark 2:18-20). Yet, people who did not accept Jesus' message would certainly face a final reckoning, and on the basis of their deeds. The kingdom of God would come in power, and the master would settle accounts with his servants (e.g., Mat. 25:14-30). God would raise the dead, and those who in their former lives did not make good use of what God gave them would suffer.

Subsequently, it would become a commonplace of Christian life and thought that believers have a dual experience of "already" but "not yet." In some sense those who believe and enter the church through baptism "already" experience the blessings of the age to come. Yet, in another sense we only look forward to them and must live in expectant hope.

Although the Fourth Gospel does not belabor the point, it seems to suggest that Jesus has the stature to judge us partly because he has experienced the difficulties of a human life. In this section we read that God gave Jesus authority to judge "because he is the son of humanity." "Son of humanity" is a Hebrew and Aramaic idiom and normally means a "human being." Apparently then, Jesus has the right to judge us because he himself has been human.

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*(5:30) "I cannot do anything on my own. I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just because I do not do what I want but what the One who sent me wants."*

Here we have another model of how the Father and the Son can be distinct and yet utterly one: The Son does what the Father wants. Hence, because the Son does nothing on his own, he presents the Father perfectly and brings his will fully to pass.

This selflessness guarantees the righteousness of the Son's judgment. Partiality and pettiness distort judgment. The Son has neither because he judges in accordance with the truthfulness and mercy of the loving Father who made the world.

In John's Gospel the Son's obedience to the Father on earth is a sign of their eternal

relationship in which they share a common life, and the Son is the one through whom the Father acts. Thus, according to the gospel's opening verses, the eternal Word shares a common divinity with the Father, and the Father creates the universe through him (1:1-3).

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*(5:31) "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. (32) There is Another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony which he testifies about me is true. (33) You people sent to John, and he has testified to the truth [e.g., 1:19-27]. (34) I myself do not accept testimony from a human being, but I am saying these things so that you may be saved. (35) He was a burning and shining lamp, and you people were willing to rejoice greatly for an hour in his light. (36) But I have testimony that is more weighty than John's. The deeds that the Father has granted me to perform, these deeds themselves that I do testify about me that the Father has sent me out. (37) And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You people have neither heard his voice at any time nor seen his form, (38) and you do not have his word staying in you, because you do not believe him whom he sent out.*

As this passage illustrates, the Fourth Gospel insists that there are three basic types of testimony to Jesus. First, there is the testimony of other human beings. We have seen several instances of such testimony already: the testimony of Andrew to Peter and of Philip to Nathaniel in chapter 1 or the testimony of the woman at the well to the Samaritan villagers in chapter 4. The passage we are presently considering returns to the theme of the exemplary testimony of John the Baptist, a theme that appeared already in the gospel's opening verses and elsewhere. Here as before, the gospel treats John as the supreme human witness to Jesus. The Baptist was a "burning and shining lamp." A second kind of testimony to Jesus is the testimony of Jesus' own miraculous deeds and inspired words. The gospel insists that it is the Father who enables Jesus to perform his miracles. Jesus' miracles are "signs" that he came from the Father and is divine. Here Jesus emphasizes that his "deeds" testify for him, and in this context the most recent deed is the wondrous healing of the man by the pool. Of course, in his inspired preaching in the Fourth Gospel Jesus testifies in his own behalf, proclaiming who he is. Finally, there is a third kind of testimony, the inner witness of the Father speaking through the Holy Spirit. The Fourth Gospel will emphasize this kind of testimony later, especially in Jesus' final discourses to the disciples (chs. 13-17). But here we already have a reference to this inner testimony: "The Father who sent me has himself testified about me."

Of these types of testimony the most generally accessible is the testimony of other human beings about Jesus. Hearing what people are saying about Jesus requires no discernment. Anyone, regardless of their spiritual maturity, can receive this type of testimony. Indeed, often it is impossible not to notice what people are saying about Jesus. Thus, in chapter 4 the Samaritan villagers inevitably hear the woman's gossip about the uncanny Jewish stranger who told her all about her personal life. So too in

the present passage, Jesus can simply assume that even his enemies who are seeking to kill him know what John the Baptist said about the coming Messiah.

But if the testimony about Jesus from other human beings is easily accessible, it is also relatively unconvincing, and, consequently, is the lowest type of testimony. Such testimony does not come from God but only from fallible people. At most, the testimony of others bears witness to their own faith. Hence, such testimony cannot produce secure faith in those who merely listen. Such testimony also cannot produce a relationship between those who hear it and Jesus. For that the hearers must come to Jesus himself and allow him to change their lives. As we saw above, in chapter 1 Andrew and Philip bring Peter and Nathaniel to Jesus, and then he takes over. Consequently, the passage that we are presently considering insists that even the testimony of John the Baptist is finally of little significance. Jesus does not accept such testimony; he refers to John's witness only as a concession to the spiritual immaturity of his audience.

The testimony of Jesus' own deeds and words is more reliable. The Fourth Gospel emphasizes that the Father gave Jesus the power to perform miracles and, as a result, Jesus' miracles are unprecedented. Naturally, the evangelist knows that prophets in the Old Testament, particularly Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, worked miracles too. But the evangelist stresses that the wonders of Jesus are especially great and are "signs" that Jesus is divine and came from the Father. In the section we are presently considering, Jesus heals a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years. Later Jesus will heal a man who was blind from birth, and the man himself will insist that no one in all history ever performed such a feat (9:32-33). Then in chapter 11 Jesus will raise up a man who has been in the grave for four days. So too the words of Jesus have no precedent because they too ultimately come from the Father. The Father speaks through Jesus. Later in the gospel even the police who are sent to arrest Jesus will proclaim, "No human being ever spoke like this!" (7:46). The words of Jesus are especially convincing because, as the Fourth Gospel emphasizes in various places, Jesus does not seek his own glory and does not testify in his own behalf. Of course, this last statement must be taken as a statement about the Jesus of history. The Jesus in the Fourth Gospel does in fact testify in his own behalf. But the historical Jesus concentrated on proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom and did not even accept the compliment that he himself was "good" (Mark 10:17-18, Luke 18:18-19).

Historically, it certainly is the case that Jesus' miraculous deeds and astonishing words impressively substantiated his claim that God was inaugurating the kingdom through him. From the unanimous testimony of the gospels--to say nothing of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus (Antiquities 18.3.3 #63)<sup>4</sup>--it is clear that Jesus did wonders that astounded his contemporaries and made him a public figure. So

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4 For a discussion of this passage in Josephus and a vindication of its authenticity see Meier 1:59-69. Josephus states that Jesus was a worker of "strange deeds."

convincing were his miracles that his enemies did not deny that he worked them but only claimed that he did so by the power of Satan (e.g., Mark 3:22). The words of Jesus also had a fundamental impact. The synoptics emphasize that Jesus startled his contemporaries by speaking with “authority” (Mat. 7:28-29, Mark 1:27, Luke 4:32). Sometimes, for example, he made pronouncements that extended the Law of Moses to extreme lengths, or set it aside. Yet, he did not appeal to the scriptures to justify his pronouncements or even appeal to God.

If the testimony of Jesus’ deeds and words is a more reliable type of testimony, people must also have more spiritual maturity to benefit from it. In John’s Gospel miracles are only signs, and unless we see them as pointing to Jesus, the miracles ultimately do us little good. After healing the man by the pool, Jesus warns him not to sin again, but the man betrays Jesus to the authorities by becoming an informer. Later we will note that after feeding the five thousand, Jesus rebukes the crowds for returning for more physical bread. What they need to do is see the miracle as a sign that Jesus provides heavenly bread (6:26-27). Unless someone is advanced enough to understand the miracles as signs, the testimony of the miracles does not truly help. Similarly, in John’s Gospel the testimony of Jesus’ words only benefits people who have reached a certain spiritual level. To the spiritually immature, what Jesus says is incredible, because, as his enemies point out, it primarily consists of a human being claiming to be God (10:33).

Hence, in John’s Gospel people who lack this spiritual maturity cannot believe in Jesus despite his signs and words. In the passage we are presently considering, the hostile audience to which Jesus is speaking rejects him out of hand. Jesus in response insists that this rejection itself shows that his hearers have no real knowledge of God. Despite what they may claim, they have never truly seen God or listened to him. If they had, they would respond to Jesus with faith.

We may note that it also required spiritual maturity to accept the preaching of the historical Jesus, and he also frequently excoriated his audiences for lack of perception. Despite his miracles and striking words, Jesus’ message was difficult to believe. He was a vagabond preacher with a ragtag bunch of disciples. Yet, Jesus was claiming that God was inaugurating the new age through him, and how one responded to him would determine how one fared on the day of judgment. This message seemed ridiculous to the undiscerning. In response Jesus freely admitted that at present his kingdom was hidden, like a little yeast in a mound of flour (Mat. 13:33). But he insisted that people with eyes to see could perceive that he was changing history. The problem was that his audience was blind, and he warned people that the light that was in them might be darkness (Mat. 6:22-23)--that their very sense of what was reasonable or proper might be radically mistaken.

As the present passage suggests, the final type of testimony—the inner witness of the Father speaking through the Spirit—is the most certain but also requires the most maturity to receive. The Father does testify to us about Jesus, and God’s testimony is

definitive. Most people, however, lack the ability to perceive it. Like Jesus' audience here, most people do not hear God's voice or see his form or have his word abiding in them. Therefore, the edited gospel concentrates on this type of testimony in the sections on the higher stages of Christian development (see below).

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*(5:39) "You search through the scriptures, because you think that you will gain eternal life by them, and they testify about me. (40) Yet you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.*

*(41) "I do not accept honor from human beings, (42) but I know you--that you do not have God's love in yourselves. (43) I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in their own name, you will accept them! (44) How can you believe when you accept honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that is from the only God! (45) Do you suppose that I myself will bring an accusation against you to the Father? The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have put your hope! (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"*

In the first century various Jewish sects claimed that the Hebrew Scriptures (which Christians subsequently labeled the "Old Testament") predicted in detail the events of their own day and, especially, key developments in the sects' own histories. Of course, the New Testament in general and John's Gospel in particular make this claim in behalf of Jesus and Christianity. The passage we are presently considering insists that Moses wrote about Jesus even though the latter would not be born for more than a thousand years. The Jewish community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls made similar claims. The ancient prophecies of the Bible were fulfilled by the coming of the "Teacher of Righteousness" who founded the community.

Today it is difficult not to be skeptical about such claims. Modern biblical studies have concluded that the authors of the Old Testament simply were not concerned with what would happen centuries later. Much of the Old Testament did not deal with the future at all. Thus, the psalms were sometimes written for a special occasion--such as a coronation or wedding of a particular king (see Psalms 2, 45, 110)--and were not intended as prophecies of a distant Messiah. Even the sections of the Old Testament that clearly were predictions originally--such as the warnings of Jeremiah--were normally forecasts of the short-term future. They were promises or warnings about what could happen during the lifetimes of the people who heard them. Then as now people were concerned about their own situations--not about what would happen in five hundred years.

Still, it remains the case that all the different sects in first-century Judaism--including Christianity--rightly saw themselves as the heirs of the Old Testament. Each arose out of a culture that directly descended from ancient Israel, and each sought guidance



from Old Testament texts.

Each sect, of course, interpreted the Old Testament differently. The Samaritans and perhaps the Sadducees restricted the Old Testament to the five books of Moses, and both groups apparently emphasized the privileges that these books reserve for priests. Nevertheless, these two sects disagreed over which location God had chosen for sacrificial worship. The Sadducees following the standard text concluded that God had chosen Jerusalem as the place for his temple, whereas the Samaritans following a revised text concluded that God had chosen Mount Gerizim for this honor. The Pharisees by contrast focused on spelling out in minute detail the requirements of the Old Testament Law and also accepted a much larger collection of Biblical books than the Mosaic canon. Both the Essenes and the Christians also accepted this larger canon, and these two sects claimed that the Old Testament had specifically prepared for the appearance of their respective founders.

Today we must recognize that there is no objective basis for determining which interpretation was correct. The Old Testament contains diverse perspectives. Each sect of first-century Judaism drew on different material, and even when they used identical texts, they saw different dimensions of meaning in them. It would be arbitrary to say that one school of interpretation was true to the Old Testament and another was not.

Hence, the breakdown in communication between Jesus and his critics in the passage we are presently considering is entirely understandable--and surely reflects the inability of the Pharisees and community that produced the Fourth Gospel to appreciate each other's views about scripture. To Christians it seemed obvious that the books of Moses helped prepare for the coming of Jesus, whereas to the Pharisees it seemed equally obvious that the books of Moses prepared for their own movement. So it is scarcely surprising that there is no dialogue in this section of John's Gospel as it deals with the true interpretation of scripture. Instead, Jesus simply asserts that Moses prepared for his coming and freely acknowledges that his enemies are in no position to understand--let alone accept--these assertions.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the Fourth Evangelist is claiming that he has discovered what God was saying through the Old Testament--not what the text "objectively" means. John's Gospel does not say that any disinterested observer--let alone that a modern academic scholar--would conclude that the Old Testament bears witness to Jesus. Instead, the claim is that from the beginning of its history God had been preparing Israel for the coming of Jesus and that properly understood the texts of ancient scripture testify to this preparation.

Therefore, to determine whether what the Fourth Gospel says about the Old Testament is fundamentally true, we must determine whether the gospel's claim that the coming of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan for salvation is true. If we once conclude that from the beginning of time God had been preparing for the

incarnation, and that as part of this preparation he had somehow been guiding the history of Israel and the writing of its scriptures, then, of course, that history and those texts point to Jesus.

The passage we are presently considering primarily reflects debates when the Fourth Gospel was written but is also in continuity with debates between the historical Jesus and his critics. It is probable that what we are reading here is a highly condensed summary of disagreements between the Johannine community and the Pharisees at the end of the first century. There is also every reason to believe that very similar debates had occurred during the lifetime of Jesus. Jesus had proclaimed that he was himself inaugurating God's kingdom, the beginning of a new era of blessings. He insisted that this "kingdom" was the fulfillment of God's promises. Naturally, his critics did not agree. Consequently, there was debate about what those ancient promises meant, and, as we noted above, in this debate there was probably more confrontation than true dialogue.

In its comments on the debate the Fourth Gospel makes the valuable point that religious disputes are insoluble unless the participants are seeking God's glory. The passage we are presently considering complains that Jesus' critics will not believe because they seek worldly glory. Alas, the same problem has bedeviled many disputes in subsequent Christian history. Often theological debates (e.g., about the proper role of the Papacy) have been mere pretexts in jockeying for earthly power and prestige. As long as parties are really competing for money or status while pretending to be discussing God's will, the debates never come to a satisfying conclusion.

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## Chapter 6

*(6:1) After this Jesus went away across the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.*

We have come to another piece of evidence that the final editor of the gospel reversed what are now chapters 5 and 6. In the gospel as we presently have it, this transitional verse is troubling. At the beginning of chapter 5 Jesus went to Jerusalem, and he apparently has remained there for the entire chapter. Now we suddenly read that Jesus crossed the Lake of Galilee! Geographically, one cannot cross the Lake of Galilee from Jerusalem. If chapter 6 once preceded chapter 5 then the geography becomes logical. Near the end of chapter 4 Jesus returns to Galilee where we read that he will suffer rejection. At the beginning of chapter 6 Jesus crosses the Lake, and as we shall see, he will soon receive a cool reception.

The editor reversed chapters 5 and 6 in order to make the material about baptism in the gospel precede the material about eucharist. As we noted above, the story of the paralyzed man by the pool works well as the last story of the baptismal section. The

man could not be saved by natural water. Even though he had been by the pool for thirty-eight years, he could never get into the water soon enough to be healed. Jesus heals him and warns him not to sin again lest he end up even worse off. Yet, the man does sin again--and grievously, since he informs against Jesus to the authorities. Accordingly, the baptismal section ends appropriately with a dire warning about the dangers of getting baptized and then forsaking Jesus. Now because the editor reversed the chapters we have the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and, as we shall see, this story was already understood eucharistically when the editor was working.

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*(6:2) A large crowd was following him, because they were seeing the signs which he was doing on those who were infirm. (3) Jesus went up on the mountain and sat there with his students. (4) The Passover, the Jewish holiday, was near. (5) When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread so these may eat?" (6) (Now he was saying this to test him; he himself knew what he was about to do.) (7) Philip replied to him, "Two hundred days' wages of bread would not be enough for them so each would get a little." (8) One of his students, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, (9) "There is a little boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But for so many people--what good are these?" (10) Jesus said, "Make the people get down." There was a lot of grass in the place. So the men numbering about five thousand got down. (11) Jesus took the loaves and, after he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who had gotten down, and likewise the fish, as much as they wanted. (12) When they were filled up, he said to his students, "Gather the leftover pieces so nothing is wasted." (13) So they gathered them, and filled twelve baskets with the pieces from the five loaves of barley bread, the leftovers from those who had eaten. (14) When the people saw the sign which he did, they started saying, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." (15) Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and seize him to make him king, withdrew back up the hill by himself all alone.*

The feeding of the multitude is one of the most attested events in the life of Jesus. The miracle occurs in all four gospels, and in Matthew and Mark we even have two versions of it, a feeding of five thousand and a feeding of four thousand (see Mat. 14:13-21, 15:32-39; Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10; Luke 9:10-17).

There is every reason to assume that the event actually happened. The widespread attestation constitutes powerful proof for authenticity. In addition, it is not clear how a legend could have taken the form of the story we find in the gospels. To be sure, there are various miracles in the Old Testament involving bread. God gave the Israelites the bread from heaven in the desert (e.g., Exod. 16), and the prophet Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44), and these miracles have colored the account in John. Indeed, the gospel itself refers to the manna in its commentary on the feeding, and the parallels between Jesus feeding five thousand

and Elisha feeding one hundred are obvious. Nevertheless, as Meier has rightly argued (2:960-61), the feeding of the five thousand cannot be a spin off of these tales because it contains fundamental elements that are new. In particular, there seems to be no precedent for a miraculous feeding involving fish (Meier 2:965), but, of course, historically many of Jesus' own meals must have involved fish. Some of his most important followers were fisherman, and much of his ministry occurred in communities around the Lake of Galilee where fish was a staple. Consequently, Meier is surely correct in saying that historically the feeding of the five thousand must have been an actual meal involving at least bread and fish that Jesus served to his disciples and a crowd of well wishers (2:966). Once we concede the possibility that Jesus could work miracles, there is no reason to question that the original meal occurred after Jesus performed a wonder.

The original event symbolized the blessings that Jesus expected would come with the arrival of God's kingdom. Throughout his ministry Jesus had looked forward to a new age in which God's will would be done, and in which the poor and the hungry would have plenty (e.g., Luke 6:20-21). Jesus' parables use the image of a great banquet to symbolize this blessed future (e.g., Luke 14:15-24).

Later Jesus' celebration of the Last Supper anticipated similar blessings. Indeed, at the last supper in the synoptics Jesus insists that the next time he will eat with the disciples will be in the kingdom (Mat. 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:16). This saying must go back to Jesus himself because it was never literally fulfilled and does not fit well with the various resurrection traditions in which Jesus does eat with his followers (e.g., Acts 10:41). Hence, the church would not have invented it.

As we might expect, the eucharistic narratives influenced some of the details in the accounts of the miraculous feeding, including the version that we find in John's Gospel. The early Christians celebrated the eucharist weekly and must have been totally familiar with it. Naturally the eucharistic ritual affected how they remembered and recounted a miraculous meal that also looked forward to the abundance of the coming age. For example, taking the bread, giving thanks, and handing it over occur in the accounts of the institution of the eucharist in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and in 1 Corinthians (Mat. 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:23-24) and must have constituted part of the liturgy. These same elements also occur in the various versions of the feeding of the multitude, including the one here in the Fourth Gospel. Consequently, we can assume that these gestures have a eucharistic origin. Other details in John's account (e.g., gathering fragments) parallel the eucharist as it is described in the earliest surviving manual of Christian worship, the Didache (9-10; Brown, *The Gospel* 1:248).

As we shall see in a moment, the editor strengthened the eucharistic dimension of the story by adding a commentary about the need to chew Jesus' flesh and drink his blood.

Already in the passage that we are presently considering, we have a strong hint that in

the Fourth Gospel the primary meaning of the feeding is not physical nourishment. When the crowd realizes that Jesus has multiplied the bread and fish, it proclaims that he must be the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18; John 1:21, 7:40) who was to come. They desire to make Jesus their king, but Jesus thwarts their efforts by withdrawing. This sequence suggests to the reader that the crowd has misunderstood the primary significance of what has happened. The crowd sees the miracle as the beginning of an age of physical blessings, whereas Jesus intended the “sign” to signal something more. Later events will confirm that there is indeed a gap between the crowd’s expectation and the true meaning of the wonder Jesus worked.

It is noteworthy that here the gospel continues its pattern of turning the historical events of the final Passover of Jesus’ life into three separate Passovers. Historically, it is likely that around the last Passover of his life Jesus first staged a protest in the temple, then ate a final meal with his closest followers, and shortly thereafter was crucified. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all attest this scenario, and historically, it is logical. The protest in the temple alarmed the authorities who quickly decided to have Jesus killed. Jesus then celebrated a solemn last meal with his followers when he realized that his death was imminent. As we noted above, at the meal he insisted that the next time he would eat and drink with them would be in the kingdom. The Fourth Gospel by contrast turns this one Passover into three, but keeps the order of the events the same. Thus, the cleansing of the temple occurs just before a first Passover (2:13). Here just before a second Passover we have the feeding of multitude which the editor makes stridently eucharistic. Of course, as we shall see later, the Fourth Gospel also remembers that Jesus died on the eve of yet another Passover.

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*(6:16) When it became evening, his students went down to the sea (17) and got into a boat and started to come across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already fallen; and Jesus had not yet come to them. (18) A strong wind was blowing, and the sea was becoming rough. (19) After they had rowed twenty-five or thirty stadia [three or four miles], they saw Jesus walking on the sea and getting near the boat, and they became afraid. (20) But he said to them, “I am the one, do not be afraid.” (21) So they wanted to take him into the boat; yet at once the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

Like the feeding of the five thousand, the story of Jesus walking on the water is well attested and must go back to the earliest period of Christian tradition. The story appears not only here but also in Matthew and Mark (Mat. 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-51). The Fourth Gospel lacks many of the details that Matthew and Mark include. For example, in Matthew and Mark Jesus makes the disciples start across the lake (Mat. 14:22, Mark 6:45), whereas in John they act on their own initiative. Hence, John’s version seems to be independent, and the story must have existed long before the gospels themselves.

In each version the basic outline is the same for the first part of the narrative. After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus withdraws from the crowds and his disciples and goes up on a mountain. The disciples start to sail across the Lake of Galilee, but the wind makes the trip difficult. At this point Jesus appears walking on the water. The disciples become alarmed, and Jesus identifies himself with a pregnant phrase. In Greek this phrase is literally “I am,” but usually means, “It is I.” I have tried to preserve the ambiguity by translating it, “I am the one.” Jesus then tells the disciples not to be afraid.

The story’s conclusion, however, differs in each gospel. In Matthew Peter asks permission to walk on the water; Jesus agrees and Peter starts out. Then Peter doubts and begins to sink, and Jesus pulls him up. Jesus comes into the boat, the wind ceases, and the disciples worship him as God’s Son. In Mark Jesus also enters the boat and the wind ceases, but the disciples respond with uncomprehending astonishment. In John, by contrast, the disciples want to take Jesus into the boat but cannot because at once the boat arrives at the destination.

Despite these differences, the basic theme of all the accounts is the same, namely that Jesus exercises the sovereignty of God himself. In the Old Testament, God alone controls the sea. It was God who divided the sea so the Israelites could escape from Egypt, and the book of Job (in words that echo those of the passage we are presently considering) stresses that God walks on the sea (Job 9:8, 38:16). Accordingly, when Jesus walks on the sea he does so with divine power. He then identifies himself as God. In response to the disciples’ alarm, he tells them, “It is I.” In Greek these words are literally, “I am,” and remind us of how God identifies himself to Moses at the burning bush. In that passage when Moses asks what is God’s name, God responds, “I am who I am” (Exod. 3:14). Later in Isaiah God also identifies himself using similar words (e.g., Isa. 43:10).

All the accounts of the walking on water suggest that the Jesus we encounter in the eucharist is divine (Meier 2:914-19, 922-23). In Matthew, Mark, and John the walking on water occurs immediately after the feeding of the five thousand. As we have seen, that story has eucharistic symbolism in all the gospels. The fact that John agrees independently with Matthew and Mark in placing the walking on water after the feeding suggests that this association goes back to the origin of the two stories. Hence, both in the gospels and the tradition underlying them, the walking on water somehow interprets the eucharist. The message seems to be that the one who gives himself to us in the bread of the sacrament is none other than God himself.

Because the walking on water helps interpret the eucharist, it is difficult to decide on whether the miracle actually occurred. It is possible that Jesus did walk on water. Certainly the story is early and, as we have seen, is independently attested in John and the synoptics. Nevertheless, it is equally possible that the early church created the story to express its experience that through the eucharist we meet the Christ who is divine. Jesus taught by making up stories and telling them. The early church

sometimes did the same. Perhaps we have an instance here.

In the final version of the Fourth Gospel, however, we find the contrasting theme that we have only limited access to the divine Jesus through the eucharist. Even as the story of the walking on water emphasizes the divinity of Christ, it stresses that the disciples did not at this point make full contact with him. They wanted to take him into the boat but were not able to do so. The boat suddenly arrived at the land. As we shall see, the edited gospel insists that receiving the eucharist is only an elementary step and does not enable us to recognize that Jesus is divine. That recognition comes only with further growth.

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*(6:22) On the next day the crowd who had stayed on the other side of the sea realized that no other boat had been there--there had only been one--and yet that Jesus did not go into the boat along with his students but his students had left by themselves. (23) Other boats came from Tiberius near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. (24) So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there nor his students, they themselves got into the boats and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. (25) When they found him across the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you arrive here?" (26) In reply to them Jesus said, "Truly, truly I tell you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate the bread and were filled up.*

In this passage, as in the miracle of changing water into wine, people who are affected by the miracle do not clearly perceive that it has taken place. In the story of the changing of water into wine, the master of ceremonies notices the excellent new wine and is puzzled and mentions it to the groom. Yet neither man perceives that a miracle has occurred (see 2:1-11). We have a similar situation here. The crowd realizes that Jesus crossed the lake despite the fact that no boat was available and are puzzled. Nevertheless, they do not realize that he walked on water.

The theological message seems to be that Jesus' miracles make no sense unless we see them as "signs" that point to who he is. If we do not see that Jesus is the incarnation of God who comes to save the world, then the miracles he performs are merely puzzling. We either do not realize that they take place at all, or else we assume that they are mere physical wonders to gratify our material needs. The crowd makes the first mistake about the walking on water--they do not even realize that Jesus did something miraculous, although they have no explanation for how he got to the other shore of the lake. Jesus accuses the crowd of making the second mistake about the feeding of the five thousand. They did not see the wonder as a "sign" of who Jesus is. All they saw was a free lunch, and they have returned for an encore. Hence, in the following verses Jesus emphasizes who he is.

It appears that the editor strengthened the eucharistic symbolism in this passage by

adding to verse 23 the words, “after the Lord had given thanks.” The passage is superfluous in its immediate context, and the gospel does not normally refer to Jesus as the “Lord.” “Giving thanks” in Greek is similar to the word for eucharist (literally, “thanksgiving”) and reminds the reader of the sacrament. Of course, this strengthening of the eucharistic symbolism fits in with the editor’s larger program of making this section of the gospel eucharistic.

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*(6:27) Do not work for food that spoils but for the food that lasts to eternal life, which the son of humanity will give you. God the Father has given him a seal of approval.” (28) So they said to him, “What shall we do to perform the works God requires?” (29) In reply Jesus said to them, “This is God’s work: You are to believe in the one he sent out.” (30) So they said to him, “What sign are you going to do so we can see it and believe you? What work are you going to perform? (31) Our ancestors ate the manna in the desert, as it is written in scripture, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’ [cf. Exod. 16:15, Psal. 78:24]. (32) Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven; rather my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. (33) For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

*(34) They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” (35) Jesus said to them, “I myself am the bread of life. Those who come to me will not be hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty. (36) But I said to you that you have seen and you do not believe. (37) All that the Father gives me will come to me, and those who come to me I will not throw out, (38) because I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him who sent me. (39) This is the will of him who sent me that I not lose anything of all that he has given me, but instead raise it up on the last day. (40) For this is the will of my Father that all who perceive the Son and believe in him have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”*

*(41) The Jews grumbled about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” (42) and they kept saying, “Isn’t this fellow Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we ourselves know? How can he say now, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (43) In reply Jesus said to them, “Stop grumbling among yourselves. (44) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up on the last day. (45) It is written in the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God’ [cf. Isa. 54:13]. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father is going to come to me.” (46) --Not that anyone has seen the Father, except for him who is from God; this one has seen the Father. (47) Truly, truly I tell you, those who believe have eternal life. (48) I am the bread of life. (49) Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert; yet they died. (50) This is the bread that is coming down from heaven so that whoever eats from it will not die. (51a) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread, they will live forever . . .*



This section continues the theme that Moses and the prophets point forward to Jesus who surpasses them. This theme appears already in the gospel's opening verses which tell us that Moses gave the law but grace and truth came through Jesus (1:17). Later in chapter 1 Philip tells Nathaniel that Jesus is the one whom Moses and the prophets foretold (1:45). The theme is perhaps especially pointed in chapter 5 where Jesus warns his enemies that Moses will ultimately condemn them because they trust in Moses but in fact Moses wrote about Jesus (5:45-47)! The passage we are presently considering emphasizes that the gift of the manna was a prophetic sign of the ultimate coming of Jesus. When the Israelites had nothing to eat, they grumbled against Moses. In response God rained down miraculous "bread" from heaven which the Israelites called "manna" [literally, "What is it?"] (Exod. 16). Now in this section of John's Gospel Jesus insists that he is the true bread from heaven. Just as the Israelites grumbled against Moses, so in this passage the "Jews" grumble against Jesus. Jesus responds by claiming that the prophecy, "They will all be taught by God," also points to him.

It is likely that historically Jesus saw himself as a new Moses. Jesus believed that his own ministry was bringing God's final blessings to Israel. Just as of old Moses had freed Israel from slavery in Egypt by working miracles so Jesus too worked miracles that delivered people from the power of Satan. Indeed, in a surely authentic quote, Jesus once remarked that he cast out demons by the "finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Here we have a clear reference to Moses, since in the book of Exodus, the magicians of Egypt exclaim in alarm that a miracle of Moses was due to the "finger of God" (Exod. 8:19). More specifically, it is likely that historically Jesus regarded the feeding of the five thousand as similar to Moses providing the manna. In Exodus the manna is both a sign of God's care for his people in need and a foretaste of God's promise that the Israelites would come into a land flowing with milk and honey. So too, the feeding of the five thousand must have been both a sign of God's compassion for the hungry and a foretaste of the coming of the kingdom when those who were presently hungry would always have plenty to eat. Jesus saw himself as beginning the final fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, and he surely believed that all the previous preliminary fulfillments, including those through Moses, somehow pointed to him. That final fulfillment included the resurrection of the dead which Jesus expected would take place in the relatively near future.

The passage we are presently considering insists like the rest of the gospel that Jesus is divine and we must believe this in order to find salvation. Jesus may be the new Moses, but he is much more. He is the one who came down from heaven and gives life to the world. To receive this life we must believe that Jesus is God's eternal Son. The primary "work" that God requires of us is faith in Jesus whom he sent.

Such faith comes through God's grace, and he gives this grace only to some. Outwardly Jesus appears to be a mere human being. Hence, his critics can dismiss him as a nobody whose plebeian father and mother they know. To believe in Jesus we

must perceive God working through him. God alone can give us such insight. We must be “taught by God.” God does not teach everyone about Jesus. The passage we are presently considering explicitly insists that the Jewish critics of Jesus and of the early church are not among the chosen. All that the Father gives to Jesus will come to him, but the Father does not give everyone.

Naturally, the passage that we are presently considering is the result of that gracious faith. The author looks back on Jesus’ life and reflects on the fact that Jesus saw himself as a new Moses, whereas his critics dismissed him as a country hick whose lower-class parents they knew (e.g., Mark 6:3). The author stresses that Jesus’ claim that he was fulfilling the hopes of Israel implied that he was far greater than Moses. He was the one who would give life to the dead, and, since only God does that, Jesus was divine. In the light of this gracious faith, the author constructed the dialogue between Jesus and the crowd in this passage.

In the edited gospel this section suggests that it is through the eucharist that we perceive that Jesus gives life to the dead. As we shall see again in a moment, the editor greatly strengthened the eucharistic symbolism that was already present in the feeding of the five thousand. Consequently, in the edited gospel the claims that God himself must lead people to faith and that those who have faith will rise on the last day take on a eucharistic dimension. Those who receive the eucharist will perceive through it that Jesus gives life to the dead and will themselves rise from the dead.

The eucharist enables us to perceive that Jesus gives life to the dead because the eucharist proves that God can sanctify matter. Much of Greek philosophy (e.g., Platonism) taught that human beings consist of a soul and body and that the soul is inherently eternal. By contrast, biblical religion held that human beings are inherently material and, when the body decays, the spirit does also. Within a biblical framework, we can only believe in life after death if we can believe that somehow God will raise (and transform) our material core. To believe this, we must hold that God can sanctify matter. The eucharist vindicates such faith, because in the eucharist the physical bread and wine become vehicles for the presence of the risen Christ.

In the edited gospel, this passage—like the rest of the sacramental section—insists that Jesus will raise the dead corporally. Jesus will raise us up on the last day.

We may note that the editor probably added the refrain about “raising” “on the last day.” In each passage where it occurs, we can omit the relevant clause and the larger passage still makes perfect sense. Verses 39-40 provide an example. In the edited gospel we read: “This is the will of him who sent me that I not lose anything of all that he has given me, but instead raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father that all who perceive the Son and believe in him have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.” If we now omit the refrain we have, “This is the will of him who sent me that I not lose anything of all that he has given me. For this is the will of my Father that all who perceive the Son and believe in him have eternal life.”

Of course, this section continues to be smooth and coherent.

Two thousand years later we may question the editor's claim that God will raise the dead at the end of time, but I think we still have to affirm that there must be some continuity between our physical bodies and our risen selves. Life after death remains a mystery. As centuries have passed, it has become more and more difficult to believe in a resurrection "on the last day." Indeed, as we noted above in dealing with 5:24-29, the evangelist had already abandoned belief in a physical resurrection at the end of time and instead had opted for the transformation of the self at the moment of death. Out-of-body experiences seem to show that the evangelist was correct. The self does go to God at the moment of death. However, it remains the case that human beings are inherently physical. Hence, at the moment of death God must raise something up. People who have had out-of-body experiences report that even in their risen state they still had some sort of body (Moody 46-47).

In the edited gospel this section also continues the theme that we must go beyond miraculous signs and receive the sacraments. We saw this theme earlier in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus hails Jesus as a teacher from God because only such a teacher can work miracles. Jesus responds by challenging Nicodemus to receive baptism (3:2-5). In the present passage we have a parallel. The crowd asks for a renewal of the miraculous manna that God gave through Moses. Jesus responds that they must instead eat the "true bread from heaven," and in the edited gospel that bread is the eucharist.

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*(6:51b) "and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."*

*(52) The Jews started to quarrel among themselves by saying, "How can this fellow give us his flesh to eat?" (53) So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of humanity and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. (54) Those who chew my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. (55) For my flesh is true food, and I my blood is true drink. (56) Those who chew my flesh and drink my blood, stay in me and I in them. (57) Just as the living Father sent me out and I live because of the Father, those who chew me will live because of me. (58) This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like what the ancestors ate and died. Those who chew this bread will live forever." (59) He said these things as he was teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum.*

This stridently eucharistic passage does not fit its context well and appears to come from the editor. Up to this point, the dominant symbolism (of Jesus being the bread of life) has been general. Jesus himself is the one who came down from heaven, and by the whole of his ministry he brings life to the world. Now, by contrast, the symbolism becomes exclusively and aggressively eucharistic. We must chew Jesus'

flesh and drink his blood. Jesus' flesh is actual food; his blood is actual drink. It is noteworthy that the surrounding material reads more smoothly if we omit this section. The half verse that precedes it, "if anyone eats from this bread, they will live forever," would make an admirable climax and conclusion of Jesus' remarks. Similarly, the verses that follow this section also clash with it. In the following material Jesus denigrates the "flesh" by saying that it "is of no use" (6:63), but here Jesus insists that we cannot have life unless we eat his "flesh." Accordingly, it seems likely that the editor added this section and so produced the awkwardness.

Later I will argue that the editor did not actually compose this material but instead transferred it from its original position at the last supper in chapter 13.

By transferring this explicitly eucharistic section, the editor continued making the gospel a review of the Christian life. As we have seen, the editor rearranged the gospel so it would parallel the ideal Christian life. Christian life begins with conversion and logically continues with baptism, the sacrament by which one becomes a member of the church. So too the edited gospel begins with conversion and baptism. In the late first century when the gospel was written, a person could not receive the eucharist before baptism and normally did receive it shortly after. The earliest surviving liturgical manual, the Didache (which comes from around the same period as the gospel) directs, "Let no one eat or drink from your eucharist but those who have been baptized in the Lord's name" (Didache 9.5). Hence, when the editor was alive, eucharist was the next step in the Christian life after baptism. Accordingly, the editor produced a eucharistic section. As we have noted previously, the editor reversed what are now chapters 5 and 6 so that the feeding of the five thousand which had eucharistic symbolism would follow the healing of the man by the pool with its baptismal symbolism. Then at the end of the discourse about Jesus being the living bread the editor added a section about the need to chew Jesus' flesh and drink his blood. By adding this section the editor made the entire discourse explicitly eucharistic and underlined the eucharistic symbolism already present in the feeding of the five thousand.

In insisting that we must partake of the eucharist, the passage uses the most graphic and offensive language possible. The eucharist sounds like cannibalism. We must "chew" Jesus' flesh and drink his "blood." Of course, the Old Testament explicitly forbids consuming blood (e.g., Gen. 9:4), and the early church apparently continued this prohibition (e.g., Acts 15:20).

One reason that the gospel uses such extreme language is to remind us that the eucharist--like the body of Jesus that it symbolizes--is a paradox. It seems so much more logical and comfortable to assume that we must receive spiritual realities through our spiritual faculties. It is a paradox that we must receive the spiritual through the material. The supreme expression of this paradox is the incarnation itself. We see the eternal God through the physical face of the Galilean carpenter Jesus. The eucharist perpetuates this paradox. Now that Jesus himself is no longer physically

present, we experience his bodily presence through the physical elements of bread and wine. The cannibalistic language reminds us that the eucharist is a physical symbol of a fleshly body. No matter how we “spiritualize” the eucharist, we must never forget what it basically is.

In a moment we will see that the cannibalistic language that the gospel uses also addressed a contemporary crisis in the church.

Even though Jesus’ words in this section come from the evangelist and the editor, the gospel places them in an authentic historical context. We read that Jesus was speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum. Capernaum was a center of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Mark hints that Jesus lived there (2:1) and records that he taught in the local synagogue (1:21).

By placing Jesus’ words about being the bread from heaven in an authentic historical context, the evangelist (and the editor) remind us that this discourse is at least a faithful interpretation of what Jesus once said. Historically, Jesus claimed that through his ministry God was giving the world the blessings of the kingdom. The evangelist and editor extended this message to claim that, therefore, Jesus himself is God’s life giving bread.

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*(6:60) When they heard, many of his students said, “This saying is tough! Who can listen to it?” (61) Since Jesus knew inwardly that his students were grumbling about this, he said to them, “Does this offend you? (62) What if you saw the son of humanity going up where he was originally! (63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no use. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*

From its beginning John’s Gospel insists that we can only discover the truth through God’s leading, and we return to that theme in this passage. Already in the gospel’s opening verses we learn that even though Jesus came to his own people they did not recognize him, and everyone who did recognize him only did so by being born “from God” (1:13). Here in chapter 6 Jesus insists that only the Holy Spirit can teach people that he is the life-giving bread.

In the edited gospel, this section has the additional meaning that receiving the eucharist is an elementary step and we must be prepared to go on to a deeper spiritual maturity. Earlier we saw that the edited gospel made a similar point about baptism. In chapter 3 after Nicodemus protested that he could not re-enter the womb, Jesus insisted that so far they had only been discussing “earthly matters” (3:12). Now after people protest that Jesus’ talk about chewing his flesh and drinking his blood is “tough,” Jesus insists that they have scarcely begun the spiritual pilgrimage. The end of the spiritual pilgrimage is to see Jesus as he is in his eternal glory. The eucharist is a mere physical sign. Soon the gospel will go on to describe the next step, namely

becoming a committed Christian disciple.

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*(6:64) "But there are some of you who do not believe." From the beginning Jesus knew who were those who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. (65) And he said, "For this reason I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father grants it to them [cf. 6:44]."*

*(66) Because of this, many of his students deserted and no longer went around with him. (67) So Jesus said to the twelve, "You don't also want to leave?" (68) Simon Peter replied to him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, (69) and we ourselves have believed and come to know that you are God's Holy One." (70) Jesus replied to them, "Did I not myself pick you, the twelve? And one of you is a devil." (71) He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, for he was to betray him, one of the twelve.*

We have another preview of the passion and death of Jesus. For the Fourth Gospel the center of Christ's work--the hour of his glory--is his death. Indeed, the first half of the gospel is in many ways a mere introduction to the passion. Throughout the first twelve chapters we have forecasts of what is to come. Here we have a preview of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, and, of course, this betrayal will lead to the crucifixion and resurrection.

Because the evangelist looks at history from God's perspective, the gospel insists that Jesus always knew that Judas would betray him. We may wonder whether the historical Jesus knew this. The evangelist, however, sees the betrayal as part of God's eternal plan. Only those whom God chooses can truly believe in Jesus. God did not choose Judas to have faith but to play a very different role, as subsequent passages will stress (13:18, 17:12).

In the edited gospel this section attacks people who denied that Jesus had a real body and, as a result, left the church. The First Epistle of John tells us that there was a group of Christians who originally were part of the community but subsequently broke away (1 John 2:19). These schismatics denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7). The passage we are presently considering tells us about people who abandoned Jesus because they could not accept that they must find salvation through chewing his flesh and drinking his blood. When the editor was writing, readers would have instantly identified the people Jesus criticizes here with the schismatics.

The edited gospel suggests that the eucharist implies that Christ had a real body, and, therefore, we cannot receive the sacrament and pretend that he was merely a "spirit." The eucharist is itself a physical act, since it involves eating bread and drinking wine. The eucharist also points to another physical act, God becoming flesh in Jesus. The blessed bread and wine of the eucharist demonstrate that God can sanctify matter, and

they symbolize the ultimate sanctification of matter, namely the Word becoming flesh. Hence, whenever we receive the eucharist we affirm the incarnation. Those who deny that the eternal Word became flesh should logically stop taking the sacrament.

This section also reminds us that there is judgment at each stage of the Christian pilgrimage because at each point one can desert. Conversion is not enough; one must go on to baptism and eucharist. But one can refuse to do so and, consequently, fall away.

Despite the pervasive theology of this passage, we also seem to have a remembrance of an actual historical incident in the life of Jesus. In the synoptics, after the feeding of the multitude, Peter, speaking for his fellow disciples, proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus responds by criticizing Peter and the others for a lack of willingness to suffer and grow (Mat. 16:13-28, Mark 8:27-9:1, Luke 9:18-27). Matthew and Mark record that Jesus even called Peter “Satan.” We have a similar pattern here in the Fourth Gospel. Peter in behalf of the twelve proclaims that Jesus is “God’s Holy One.” Jesus is not impressed. Even one of the twelve will betray him and is a devil. Of course, in the Fourth Gospel Judas rather than Peter is the demon. Since the synoptics and the Fourth Gospel seem to be giving us independent accounts, we must assume that at least the core of the incident actually occurred.

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Up to this point the stages in the Christian life that the editor highlighted have obvious external manifestations. At conversion someone begins to “follow” Jesus. During Christ’s lifetime, such following was publicly visible. The convert physically listened to Jesus and perhaps even accompanied him from place to place. During the period of the early church, such “following” included physically attending the Christian assembly. Similarly, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are rituals which anyone who is present can see.

It was easy for the editor to underline such stages. The gospel that the Beloved Disciple composed already had material about conversion, baptism, and eucharist. All the editor needed to do was to expand that material and rearrange it so that the structure of the gospel would parallel that of the ideal Christian life.

By contrast, more advanced stages of spiritual growth are less externally obvious. There are no external rites to mark the transition from being an immature Christian who receives the eucharist to becoming a mature Christian who does the same.

Consequently, it was far more difficult for the editor to make the rest of the gospel conform to later stages in the Christian life. The gospel that the Beloved Disciple wrote probably did not attempt to define such stages in any detail. The editor could not simply amplify and rearrange material.

One result is that the indications of later stages of Christian life are not as obvious in the edited gospel. Nevertheless, as we shall see, they do occur.

## Chapter 7

*(7:1) After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go around in Judea, because the Judeans were seeking him to kill him. (2) The Jewish holiday of booths was near. (3a) His brothers said to him, "Move from here and go off to Judea . . .*

As we have noted already, this passage originally came immediately after chapter 5. In chapter 5 Jesus is in Judea, and the people there do indeed seek to kill him. Hence, in the gospel that the Beloved Disciple composed, the introductory sentence in chapter 7 notified the reader that Jesus moved to Galilee to avoid the threat. Of course, this notice is awkward in the edited gospel. Jesus has already been in Galilee for a considerable period, and it takes the reader a moment to recall that the Judeans had earlier been attempting to destroy him.

In the edited gospel chapters 7-10 constitute a single unit describing Jesus' trip to Jerusalem. In this introductory passage Jesus' brothers challenge him to go to Judea for the Feast of Booths. Subsequently he does, and he remains in Jerusalem for Hanukkah. Only at the conclusion of chapter 10 does this unit end when Jesus withdraws across the Jordan. As this introductory passage suggests, a further unifying theme in this section will be the recurring attempts to kill Jesus. Thus, in chapters 7 and 8 the Jews first attempt to arrest Jesus (7:32) and then to stone him (8:58). In chapter 10 we have the mirror image, since the Jews first attempt to stone Jesus (10:31) and then to arrest him (10:39). Throughout this section these attempts will consistently fail because it is not the Father's will that Jesus die on this trip to Jerusalem. We will keep reading that Jesus' time has not yet come (7:6-8, 7:30, 8:20).

It is historically plausible that Jesus did go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This holiday along with Passover and Pentecost was one of the three pilgrimage feasts for which all Jewish males were supposed to travel to Jerusalem (e.g., Exod. 23:16-17). During this feast the Jews lived in temporary shelters to commemorate the desert sojourn after the Exodus from Egypt and to celebrate the autumn harvest. In the first century the Feast of Booths seems to have been an especially popular holiday. Therefore, Jesus had every reason to attend the celebration in Jerusalem, and we may suppose that he actually did so, perhaps more than once. Since the Beloved Disciple who wrote the gospel apparently lived in Jerusalem, he could have actually witnessed Jesus' activities there.

Still, as we shall see, the description in the gospel of what Jesus did at the festival primarily reflects the theology of the evangelist and the editor rather than the details of an actual trip.



*(7:3b) "... so that your students may also see the deeds that you are performing. (4) No one does anything in secret who is seeking to become a public figure himself. Since you are doing these things, make yourself known to the world." (5) (Not even his brothers believed in him.) (6) So Jesus said to them, "My own time has not yet come; your time is always here. (7) The world cannot hate you, but it does hate me, because I testify about it that its deeds are evil. (8) You go up yourselves for the holiday. I am not going up for [on] this holiday, because my own time has not yet arrived." (9) After he said this, he himself stayed in Galilee.*

It appears that the editor added this opening challenge that Jesus reveal himself to his disciples. Certainly this challenge from Jesus' brothers is odd. We have no explanation as to why the disciples have remained in Judea when Jesus himself has traveled to Galilee. Elsewhere the disciples follow Jesus wherever he goes. The subsequent demand that Jesus not work in secret does not follow logically since, obviously, Jesus could give his own students private instruction. Moreover, we can only wonder why Jesus' brothers who do not believe in him are concerned with the disciples who do. Hence, the editor probably inserted this little note about the disciples. Originally in the passage the brothers of Jesus only challenged him to reveal himself to the world.

As this addition already suggests, the editor made chapters 7-10 a description of committed discipleship. In this section we discover what we must do to become a committed disciple and what we gain as a result.

This opening section already hints that one thing we gain is an ability to understand the true meaning of who Jesus is. In the edited gospel the brothers insist that Jesus should help the disciples see and should reveal himself to the world. The implication appears to be that when Jesus reveals himself publicly the disciples will perceive who he truly is, whereas the world may not. Such will indeed be the case.

It seems to be a historical fact that the brothers of Jesus did not believe in him during his lifetime. Mark records that Jesus' relatives thought that he had lost his mind and tried to seize him (Mark 3:20-21). Since the early church would never have made up such a distressing fact, it must be authentic. Jesus himself insisted that his brothers and sisters were not his biological relatives but those who followed his teaching (Mat. 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35). Only when Jesus appeared to his brother James (1 Cor. 15:7) after the resurrection did the siblings of Jesus become his followers (Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 9:5).

In the Fourth Gospel the disbelief of Jesus' brothers illustrates the theme that the world who should accept him cannot because of its wickedness. We see this theme already in the gospel's opening verses where we read that even though the eternal Word created all things, his own people did not accept him (1:10-11). The darkness

cannot grasp the light (1:5). In the passage we are presently considering, this theme recurs. His brothers should be the first people to have a natural knowledge of Jesus. Nevertheless, they do not realize that he is the incarnation of the Word. They are part of this world, and they long for Jesus to be a worldly success. Jesus, however, regards the world and its standards for success as evil and says as much. This condemnation of the world incurs the world's hatred. Therefore, the world--symbolized by his own brothers--cannot believe in him.

The passage hints, however, that ultimately the crucifixion will give the world another chance to have faith. As Jesus refuses his brothers' invitation to accompany them to the festival, he notes that his own time is still to come. That time is, of course, the crucifixion. The cross will demonstrate the folly of the world and what it considers to be success, and through the cross Jesus will invite even the wicked world to believe in him and find salvation.

This passage gives us another instance of a double meaning in which Jesus talks on a spiritual level but his audience hears him on a material one. When Jesus insists that he will not go up for this festival, his words are ambiguous. The superficial meaning is that Jesus will not go to Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday. We assume that his brothers hear this superficial meaning, because they depart without him. Yet, since Jesus does go to Jerusalem in the subsequent section, the reader assumes that these words must have a different meaning. Jesus' statement that his time has not yet come makes this meaning clear. Jesus will not ascend to the Father on this occasion. That "going up" will occur later.

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*(7:10) When his brothers had gone up for the holiday, then he himself also went up, not publicly but in secret. (11) The Judeans were looking for him on the holiday and were saying, "Where is that fellow?" (12) There was a lot of whispering about him among the crowds. Some people were saying, "He is a good person"; but others were saying, "No, on the contrary, he is misleading the rabble." (13) No one, however, was speaking openly about him because they were afraid of the Judeans.*

*(14) When the holiday was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple and started to teach. (15) The Jews were amazed and said, "How does this fellow know so much since he has never been a student?" (16) In reply to them Jesus said, "My teaching is not my own but his who sent me. (17) If anyone wants to do his will, they will know about my teaching--whether it is from God or I am speaking on my own. (18) Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him, this person is true, and there is no evil in him.*

This passage stresses that only those who choose to do God's will can know who Jesus actually is. The crowds regard Jesus only as an interesting topic of gossip and cannot come to any conclusion about him. Some people think he is a good fellow, whereas

others condemn him as a rabble-rouser, but neither group wins the argument, let alone arrives at any genuine comprehension. Even when Jesus' uncanny knowledge suggests that he must have divine wisdom, his audience merely puzzles over the fact that Jesus did not get an education. In response Jesus emphasizes that only those who put seeking God ahead of their own selfish agendas will discover who he is and where his wisdom originates. Those who want to do God's will and seek God's glory will recognize that Jesus does likewise and will perceive Jesus' true identity.

In the edited gospel, this section suggests that it is only as we become committed disciples that we will know from our own experience that Jesus is divine. Once we go beyond being mere members of the church and put God's will ahead of our own, we will learn in our own lives that Jesus is God infleshed.

It seems to be a fact that Jesus did not seek his own glory but God's. We can see his attitude in the well attested saying that those who blasphemed him would find forgiveness but those who blasphemed the Spirit would not (Mat. 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-30, Luke 12:10; cf. Didache 11.7, 1 John 5:16-17, Thomas 44). In Jesus' eyes it was no grave matter to insult him; what was unforgivable was to insult God's Spirit.

Still precisely because Jesus was seeking God's glory rather than his own, he had a singular virtue. To use the words of the Fourth Gospel: "There is no evil in him."

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*(7:19) Didn't Moses give you the Law? Yet none of you obeys the Law. Why are you seeking me to kill me?" (20) The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking you to kill you?" (21) Jesus in reply said to them, "I performed one deed and you all marvel (22) because of it. Moses gave you circumcision--not that it originated with Moses but with the Patriarchs--and on the Sabbath you circumcise a male. (23) A male receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, and you are mad at me because I made a whole person well on the Sabbath! (24) Do not judge on appearances, but judge rightly."*

*(25) Some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were saying, "Isn't this fellow the one they are seeking in order to kill him? (26) And, look, he is speaking openly, and they say nothing to him. Could it be that the authorities actually know that this is the Messiah-- (27) but we know where this fellow is from. But when the Messiah comes, no one is going to know where he is from." (28) So Jesus shouted as he was teaching in the temple, "And you know me and you know where I am from? I have not come on my own, but he who sent me is true--him you do not know. (29) I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me out." (30) They were seeking to arrest him; yet, no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. (31) Many from the crowd believed in him and kept saying, "When the Messiah comes will he do more signs that this person did?"*

*(32) The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent out officers to arrest him. (33) So Jesus said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going away to him who sent me. (34) You will seek me and you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come." (35) The Jews said to one another, "Where is this fellow about to go that we will not find him? He isn't about to go to the Diaspora among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? (36) What is this statement which he said, 'You will seek me and you will not find me, and where I am you cannot come'?"*

*(37) On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted, "If any are thirsty, let them come and drink, (38) if they believe in me, just as scripture said--rivers of living water will flow from their guts [perhaps Psal. 78:15-16; see 1 Cor 10:4]." (39) (He said this about the Spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit was not yet available, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.)*

*(40) Some of the crowd who heard these words kept saying, "This is truly the Prophet." (41) Others kept saying, "This is the Messiah." But some said, "Then is the Messiah coming from Galilee! (42) Has not scripture recorded that the Messiah is coming from the descendants of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was [Mic. 5:2; cf. Mat. 2:6]?" (43) So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. (44) Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him.*

In this section we repeatedly have the irony that the crowds and the enemies of Jesus know far more of the truth than they realize. They know that under certain circumstances it is appropriate to work on the Sabbath. It is appropriate--even mandatory according to the Mosaic Law--to circumcise a male infant on the Sabbath. Yet, they condemn Jesus for healing someone on the Sabbath when delaying this action would cause far greater harm than postponing circumcision. Similarly, the crowds guess that when Jesus talks about his coming departure that it somehow involves preaching to the Greeks overseas. Of course, this guess contains some truth. Thanks to the crucifixion, the message about Jesus will ultimately reach the Greeks.

The reason that the crowds and the enemies of Jesus cannot benefit from their own knowledge is that they are desperately trying to avoid having to face the truth about Jesus. As a result, they repeatedly deny what they apparently know. At the beginning of the section the crowd denies that anyone is seeking to kill Jesus. Indeed, they claim that Jesus is raving when he suggests such a thing. But the fact that the authorities are trying to kill Jesus is well known--so well known that many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are discussing it. In an especially disturbing evasion of the truth, the crowds give inconsistent explanations of why Jesus cannot be the Messiah. At first they argue that Jesus cannot be the Christ because the origins of the Christ must be unknown. Then they argue that Jesus cannot be the Christ because the Christ must come from Bethlehem! Jesus himself points out that ultimately he has come from God. However, the crowd cannot accept this despite the miracle Jesus has performed.

The crowd judges by “appearances,” and such judgments are not due to mere ignorance but instead to unrighteousness that blinds them to the deeper significance of what they see.

Because the Judeans are unwilling to face the truth, they will be unable to perceive Jesus once he is gone, and Jesus warns them that their time is running out. Perceiving Jesus after he has departed from this world will require spiritual maturity. People who avoid the truth lack such maturity. Hence, Jesus warns his audience that he will soon be leaving and that subsequently they will be unable to find him even if they try.

By contrast, Jesus insists that in the future those who do believe in him will enjoy greater opportunities than they do now. Believers will have a mysterious inner source of life-giving water. The evangelist explains that Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit who would be available once Jesus was crucified.

In the edited gospel this promise especially applies to those who go on to committed discipleship. Christians who reach such maturity will have a deep source of life in themselves and will through their own experience behold Jesus after he has departed from this world. In chapter 13 Jesus will repeat to the disciples his declaration to the Judeans here that where he is going they cannot come. Nevertheless, the departure of Jesus need not trouble his mature followers because they now are in a position to love one another as he loves them (13:33-35).

The promise that those who believe in Jesus will have a source of living water in themselves has a double meaning since the original Greek lacked punctuation. To render the ambiguity in English, I have been reduced to producing a run-on sentence. In the Greek it is unclear whether “if they believe in me,” goes with the previous or the following clause. Accordingly, I have translated the section, “If any are thirsty, let them come and drink, (38) if they believe in me, just as scripture said--rivers of living water will flow from their guts.”

The ambiguity is deliberate and indicates both that those who believe in Jesus will receive the life-giving presence of his Spirit in their own lives and will also be a channel for others to receive the Spirit.

We may note in passing that the setting for this discourse is especially appropriate. At the feast of booths it was customary to pray for rain and look forward to the coming of the Messiah and a glorious future when water would well up from underneath the temple. Here Jesus appears as the Messiah and promises that he will give to those who believe in him a constant source of spiritual moisture. As so often in the Fourth Gospel, the scriptures and the hopes of Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus.

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*(7:45) The officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, “For what reason did not bring him?” (46) The officers answered, “A human being never*

*spoke like this!” (47) The Pharisees replied to them, “You have not been misled too, have you? (48) None of the rulers believed in him, did they, and none of the Pharisees! (49) But this rabble who do not know the Law are accursed.” (50) Nicodemus who came to him earlier and was one of them said to them, (51) “Surely our Law does not condemn a person without first giving him a hearing and finding out what he is doing?” (52) In reply they said to him, “You aren’t from Galilee too, are you! Search and see that a prophet is not arising out of Galilee.”*

In chapter 1 John’s Gospel gives us a model of conversion. Conversion begins when someone bears witness to Jesus and invites potential converts to come and see for themselves. If the potential converts are open to receiving the truth, they do come, and Jesus tells them something about who they truly are. Thus, Philip tells Nathaniel that Jesus is the one about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote, and when Nathaniel objects that nothing good can be from Nazareth Philip challenges him to come and see. When Nathaniel does, Jesus tells him (and the reader) that Nathaniel is sincere and soon will see greater things (1:43-51).

The passage we are presently considering gives us the opposite of conversion: People refuse the invitation to come to Jesus and, as a result, they move further from belief in him and further from love. In the passage we have all the elements that elsewhere lead people to conversion. The officers bear witness to Jesus as the one who speaks as no one else does, and Nicodemus challenges the chief priests and Pharisees to investigate for themselves what Jesus is saying and doing. But they refuse. This refusal reveals them as evil, and it makes them more evil still. They decline to give Jesus an audience because they cannot risk hearing the truth, and to avoid hearing it they withdraw into deeper darkness. They proudly berate both the officers and the general populace as ignorant and in doing so show their own blindness to the truth. Even though the Law which they claim to uphold requires them to give someone a hearing before issuing a condemnation, they refuse to comply, and when Nicodemus points out this lapse, they berate him. Then they retreat even farther from the truth because they make the specious claim that prophets do not come from Galilee, whereas in fact Jonah did (2 Kings 14:25), as these specialists in the Law surely must know.

Despite its concern with the theme of conversion, however, this passage is primarily about committed discipleship because here Nicodemus bears public witness to Jesus and suffers condemnation. In the edited gospel, Nicodemus is an illustration of someone who passes through the stages of Christian life. When we first meet him, Nicodemus is a new convert. On the basis of the miraculous signs, he believes that Jesus is a teacher from God. In response Jesus challenges him to come forward for baptism. Nicodemus balks, and the narrative abandons him (3:1-12). Here in chapter 7 Nicodemus reappears and takes another step forward. He confesses Jesus publicly. Previously he had kept his faith secret to avoid censure. He first came to Jesus by night, and the gospel now recalls this meeting. Moreover, it is clear that subsequently, Nicodemus never revealed his faith, because the chief priests and Pharisees

confidently assert that none of the Jewish rulers or Pharisees have believed in Jesus despite the fact that Nicodemus himself belongs to both groups (3:1)! Significantly, the present passages stresses that Nicodemus was “one of them.” At this point though Nicodemus demands that his colleagues give Jesus a hearing and emphasizes that if they refuse they themselves will be in violation of the Law. As a result, Nicodemus must bear their reproach, since they retort that he is no better than an ignorant Galilean.

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#### [Woman Taken in Adultery]

*[(7:53) And they each went to their own house. (8:1) But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (2) At dawn he came back into the temple, and all the people began to come to him, and he sat down and was teaching them. (3) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery and made her stand before them. (4) They said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the very act of committing adultery. (5) Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women [e.g., Lev. 20:10]. So what do you say?” (6) They were saying this in order to trap him so that they might have a basis to bring an accusation against him. But Jesus bent down and doodled on the ground with his finger. (7) But when they persisted in questioning him, he got up and said to them, “Let the man among you who has never sinned be the first to throw a rock at her.” (8) Once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. (9) When they heard it, they went away, one by one, starting with the elders, and he was left alone with the woman still before him. (10) Jesus got up and said to her, “Lady, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (11) She said, “No one, sir.” Jesus said, “I don’t condemn you either. Go, and from now on, do not sin anymore.”]*

The story of the women caught in adultery was not originally part of the edited gospel. Whereas all surviving copies of the John include the various changes that the editor made, the best and most reliable manuscripts omit this section. In addition, a number of manuscripts that do include it have some sort of notation (e.g., asterisks) indicating that the copyist doubted whether the passage belonged there. A few manuscripts place the story elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel or even in Luke. The section has a very different literary style from the rest of the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, this brief passage contains fifteen words not found elsewhere in John (Kubo 98). Moreover, if we omit the story of the woman taken in adultery, the plot flows smoothly. Hence, there can be little doubt that later copyists added the section to some ancient manuscripts, probably to keep the story from being forgotten.

The passage appears to record an authentic incident in the life of Jesus. The Mosaic Law mandates death for both parties committing adultery (e.g., Deut. 22:22-24). Even today in some parts of the Middle East, stoning remains a common punishment for the crime. The Pharisees often attempted to discredit Jesus. Jesus was especially

vulnerable on issues involving sinful women, since he scandalized public opinion by having women disciples and associating with females of dubious sexual morality.

This story is an especially powerful illustration of Jesus' notorious ability to defend sinners by exposing the hypocrisy of others. Here Jesus forces the woman's accusers to admit publicly by their actions that they have sinned no less than she.

In its present context, the story also points forward to and illuminates Jesus' comments about judgment in the subsequent verses (Brown, *The Gospel* 1:336). In 8:15-16 Jesus insists that he does not judge anyone. Others judge by external appearances. Jesus does not. Nevertheless, Jesus also insists that in some sense he and the Father do judge. The story of the woman caught in adultery explains how all these seemingly contradictory claims can be true. Jesus does not condemn the woman or her accusers. Yet, Jesus' words and actions expose the hearts of her accusers, and Jesus warns the woman not to sin again. Here as in the "authentic" parts of the gospel, Jesus' judges us by exposing who we are and challenging us to change our lives and grow spiritually.

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## Chapter 8

*(8:12) Jesus again spoke to them. "I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will not walk in darkness, but will have the life-giving light."*

Here as elsewhere in chapters 7-8 we have symbolism that is especially appropriate for the setting of the feast of booths. During the lifetime of Jesus when the temple was still standing, the ceremonies for this holiday included both water and light. This autumnal harvest festival occurred at the approximate beginning of the rainy season in Palestine, and the liturgy celebrated the transition. Each morning for seven days the priests drew water from the Pool of Siloam and brought it in silver bowls to the altar where they poured it out. At night huge lights burned in the temple court of the women. Hence, it is appropriate that at the holiday Jesus first invites people to come and drink from the "living" water he will give them (see above, 7:37-38) and now in the passage we are presently considering declares that he himself is the world's light.

The Fourth Gospel suggests that the rites of Judaism point to him and that somehow he replaces them. The water and light ceremonies which were part of the feast of booths foreshadow the coming of Jesus. He gives the real water and is himself the real light. The theology that Jesus provides the substance of what the Jewish holy days celebrate also appears in the three Passovers mentioned in this gospel. While the temple still existed, the priests sacrificed the lambs in the temple and then the worshippers ate the lambs with unleavened bread. So too in John's Gospel on the first Passover Jesus cleanses the temple (2:13-22); on the second he provides miraculous



bread and then declares that he himself is the “bread of life” (6:48); finally, as we shall see, on the third Passover Jesus dies as the true lamb (see the discussion of 19:36 below).

The theme that Jesus fulfills the rites of Judaism may have reassured Jewish Christians who could no longer attend the synagogues. About the time the evangelist was writing, the synagogues expelled Jewish Christians, and Jewish members of the evangelist’s community could no longer participate in their own traditional religious ceremonies. Of course, the Bible mandated such ceremonies and insisted that the failure to keep them would compromise one’s relationship with God. In response to this problem the gospel gives reassurance. The ceremonies of the Old Testament are only prefigurations of Jesus. Anyone who follows Jesus has the water and light of the holiday of booths and the bread and lamb of Passover.

In the edited gospel the theme that those who “follow” Jesus will have light fits well into the section on committed discipleship. As we have seen, the section begins when his brothers challenge Jesus to reveal himself both to his disciples and to the world. Jesus does so, but only his disciples perceive who he is. Although Jesus is the light of the entire “world,” only people who are prepared to “follow” him as committed disciples will perceive this and come to know God through him. Others will continue to walk in darkness. It is noteworthy that in the original Greek the tense of the word “follow” here suggests continuing action.

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*(8:13) The Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying in your own behalf. Your testimony is not dependable.” (14) Jesus replied by saying to them, “Even if I testify in my own behalf, my testimony is dependable, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I come from or where I am going. (15) You judge by outward appearances; I do not judge anyone. (16) Even if I do judge, my own judgment is true, because I do not judge by myself, but I and the Father who sent me. (17) Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two people is dependable [Num. 35:30, Deut. 17:6]. (18) I am testifying about myself and the Father who sent me testifies about me.” (19) So they said to him, “Where is your father?” Jesus replied, “You do not know me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.” (20) He spoke these words by the treasury as he was teaching in the temple. No one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.*

This passage continues the theme that only Jesus can reveal the truth about himself and about God. Already in the opening verses of the gospel we read that no one except Jesus has ever seen God. Hence, only Jesus can reveal him (1:18). That theme reappears here. Jesus alone knows where he has come from and where he is going. He has heard the Father’s testimony about him and understands both who the Father is and who he himself is.

Because the Pharisees do not follow Jesus, they cannot comprehend ultimate spiritual realities. In the previous verse we read that those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness. The Pharisees do not follow him, and have no basis for knowing who he is or even who God is. They judge by outward appearance, and by that standard Jesus is merely a human being making preposterous claims. Only Jesus' disciples have the spiritual maturity that enables people to perceive the Father bearing witness to Jesus.

Superficially, this passage contradicts itself over whether or not Jesus judges his enemies. He claims that he does not judge anyone and then notes that he does judge.

Nevertheless, properly understood the passage is consistent for two reasons. First, as the passage itself emphasizes, Jesus never judges arbitrarily. He only announces the judgment of the Father, and this judgment corresponds to the truth. Second, as we saw earlier in dealing with 3:17-21, people in fact pass judgment on themselves by their response to Jesus' proclamation. Those who accept Jesus find the life-giving presence of God through him. Those who reject Jesus reject the only path to true salvation. Whether we accept the message of Jesus depends in large part on whether we are good or evil. If we ourselves are loving, we gladly accept the revelation of God's love and the revelation of our own character. If we ourselves are wicked, we cannot bear Jesus' revelation of who God is and who we are.

Although what we are reading here is surely a literary dialogue produced by the evangelist, its theology of judgment does correspond to that of Jesus himself. The historical Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. His proclamation primarily concerned what God was doing, not what Jesus was doing, and this proclamation was good news. God was overcoming physical sickness, social division, and death. Nevertheless, those who rejected this message would not be able to enter the kingdom. Thus, for example, at the end of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the older brother has a choice. He can accept the Father's plea to come to the party and be reconciled to his wayward younger brother, or he can reject the plea and remain outside (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus was saying to his listeners that if they chose not to come to the heavenly banquet that he was announcing they too would remain in the outer darkness.

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*(8:21) He spoke to them again. "I am going away and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." (22) The Jews kept saying, "Surely he will not kill himself?--because he says, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'"*

Once again Jesus warns his hearers that time is running out. In chapter 7 Jesus told his audience that later they would seek him without success (7:33-34). Here he repeats the warning.

As before, their response illustrates that they are deliberately avoiding facing the truth. Earlier they sarcastically speculated that Jesus was planning to preach his message overseas to the Greeks. Ironically they were partially correct. Jesus' message of salvation will come to the Greeks. Jesus' audience knows the truth--or, at least, some of it--but refuses to accept what it knows. Similarly, here Jesus' audience also knows more than it admits. It sarcastically suggests that Jesus will have to kill himself to go where they cannot come. In fact, Jesus will voluntarily lay down his life in order to return to the Father. Yet this willing self-sacrifice does not change the fact that his enemies murder him.

The reason that time is running out is that after Jesus' death only his committed disciples will be able to perceive him. Those who love God and Jesus will experience their presence after Jesus' physical departure. His enemies will not.

The threat that Jesus' critics will die in their sin probably has two dimensions. First, it emphasizes that everyone who rejects Jesus rejects the primary path to knowing God's love and forgiveness. Such people will never escape sin in this life and also will suffer in the life to come. Second, the threat reminds us that the Jewish nation that rejected Jesus' message of non-violence revolted against Rome forty years later. The Romans crushed the revolt, and, as a result, the enemies of Jesus did indeed die because of their sin (see 11:48 and the related discussion below).

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*(8:23) He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world. (24) I said to you that you would die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am the one, you will die in your sins." (25) They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I even speak to you to begin with? (26) I have many things to say about you and to judge, but he who sent me is truthful, and what I heard from him, I speak these things to the world." (27) They did not know that he was talking to them about the Father.*

By modern standards the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel often sounds arrogant and rude. To us it is insufferable when Jesus in this passage brusquely declares that he is from above in contrast to his audience and that if they do not believe this they will die in their sins. In a few verses Jesus will become more acrimonious still as he berates his hearers, calling them children of the devil.

However, Jesus' belligerent rhetoric in this book was unexceptional at the time and probably in part corresponds to the rhetoric that the historical Jesus actually employed. Cultures like our own that normally rely on written communication tend to produce carefully nuanced statements. We can study a written document and appreciate subtleties. By contrast, in an oral culture one must greatly exaggerate in order to make a point clear, since one normally retains only the thrust of a communication. The first-century Roman Empire was primarily an oral culture.

Consequently, in religious or philosophical debate, people commonly made the most extreme charges against their opponents--charges that seldom seem to have had much substance. Such (to us) brutal and even slanderous accusations pervade the New Testament. For example, in Romans Paul assures his readers that the Pagans are "full of all wrongdoing, wickedness, greed, vice; pervaded with jealousy, murder, quarreling, treachery, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent and arrogant fellows, braggarts, contrivers of evil, disobedient to parents, stupid, disloyal, unloving, merciless" (Rom. 1:29-31). In 2 Corinthians Paul makes equally strong statements about other Christian preachers, calling them "dishonest workers, disguising themselves as apostles" just as "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:13-14). Often in the first three gospels Jesus says things that are nearly as extreme. Thus, in chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus condemns the Pharisees as "hypocrites," "fools," "blind," and so forth. Because Jesus lived in a world that accepted such rhetoric as standard, I suspect that he actually used it. Today when we encounter such polemics in the Fourth Gospel we should remember that they were unexceptional in their own time and not take them too seriously.

In addition, the searing rhetoric in the Fourth Gospel expresses the bitterness that the evangelist's community felt over being expelled from the synagogues. As we shall see later, the Fourth Gospel keeps referring to the fact that the mainstream Jewish community excommunicated people who believed in Jesus. Not surprisingly, Jewish Christians were bitter over being dismissed from their native communities. The evangelist shared these feelings and vented them in what Jesus says about the Pharisees or the "Jews" in the gospel.

Nevertheless, the passage also expresses the theology that salvation comes through Jesus alone and that, therefore, those who reject him face judgment. Jesus alone is from above and shares the divine nature. He alone can reveal the Father. Consequently, if we do not understand who Jesus is, we cannot understand God, and, if we reject Jesus, we reject God himself. Such rejection necessarily cuts us off from the life that can only come through knowing the creator and judge of all.

It seems to be a historical fact that Jesus claimed that he himself was inaugurating a period of final salvation and that those who rejected him would suffer at the judgment. Thus, in Matthew 12:41 Jesus says, "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and look something greater than Jonah is here." At least in substance these words must go back to Jesus himself. Only he would have dared to make the notorious men of Nineveh an example for us to imitate, and if the church had made up this passage we would read that someone (i.e., Jesus)--not "something"--greater is present.

There was little room for dialogue or even understanding between Jesus and his critics, because each side had such radically different claims about ultimate authority. The Pharisees felt that the final revelation of God's will was to be found in the Mosaic Law. They specialized in its interpretation, and their social status depended on the

primacy of the Mosaic code. Jesus' claim that his own teaching about God was the final authority undercut that status. Hence, as all the gospels attest, the Pharisees attacked Jesus, and he in turn defended himself by attacking them.

I believe that the passage we are dealing with here interprets faithfully the historical impasse between Jesus and his critics. His critics simply could not know that he was speaking with the authority of God.

Of course, that impasse continued into the era in which the evangelist wrote, and so the passage also reflects the contemporary crisis between the community that produced the gospel and their opponents, the Pharisees. Both sides claimed to have the ultimate truth, and both sides based their claims on different presuppositions. True dialogue was impossible.

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*(8:28) Jesus said, "When you lift up the son of humanity, then you will know that I am the one, and I do nothing on my own, but just as the Father instructed me I speak these things. (29) And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him."*

The Fourth Gospel suggests that it is only thanks to the crucifixion and the resurrection that we can believe Jesus is divine. Even though Jesus repeatedly insists that he is divine throughout the gospel, it is only after the resurrection that the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed" (20:8) and Thomas proclaimed that Jesus was "Lord" and "God" (20:28). The crucifixion and resurrection are the supreme revelation, and we can only know who Jesus is thanks to them.

We have this theme here. Jesus proclaims that he is divine. Indeed, he uses "I am," the same "I am" that God speaks in Exodus 3:14 to identify himself. Yet, even as Jesus reveals who he is, he insists that his audience will not perceive this until he is lifted up. The hour in which Jesus is hoisted on the cross and, through dying on the cross, returns to the Father is the same hour in which Jesus will reveal his divine glory to the world.

The crucifixion especially reveals the total obedience of Jesus to the Father, and it is precisely through such obedience that Jesus fully reveals him to us. By accepting torture and death Jesus showed to the world that his obedience to God was complete. If Jesus was totally obedient to God, then his entire life mirrors God's will and makes it known to us. Hence, the crucifixion verifies the ministry of Jesus. Of course, the resurrection makes it clear that God accepted that ministry as especially pleasing to him.

This passage softens somewhat the harsh condemnation in the previous verses. There

we get the impression that no hope remains for Jesus' critics. They are from below; they do not know who Jesus is; they will die in their sin and then suffer condemnation at the last judgment. Here, by contrast, Jesus does give hope. After the crucifixion and the resurrection even his harshest critics will have the opportunity of discovering his identity and find salvation.

Historically, the Fourth Gospel is correct in insisting that it was only as a result of the crucifixion and resurrection that early Christians concluded that Jesus was divine. In the first three gospels Jesus never even claims to be divine during his ministry. He even hesitates to accept the title of "Messiah" (e.g., Mark 8:29-30). The realization that he was divine came to the disciples later. But once they realized that he was divine, they realized further that his obedience to God during his ministry revealed God to the world.

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*(8:30) As he was speaking these things, many believed in him. (31) Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my students, (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

It appears that the editor composed these verses or, at least, contributed to them. As they stand, they do not fit their context. Jesus' previous comments suggest that his audience is presently incapable of belief. Jesus' hearers are from "below" and are in danger of perishing in their sin (8:23-24). At best, they will only believe after Jesus is lifted up on the cross. The verses after this passage contain a similar perspective expressed in even more extreme language. Jesus' hearers are children of the Devil who do not believe (8:44-45). Yet in the passage we are presently considering, we read that many of Jesus' audience do in fact believe in him.

More specifically, the editor apparently added at least the material about continuing in his word and becoming truly his disciples. In the larger context, this challenge makes little sense. His audience seems totally unready to go on to committed discipleship.

By adding this challenge to go on to committed discipleship, the editor continued remolding the gospel so it would parallel the ideal Christian life. As we have seen and will see, chapters 7-10 in the edited gospel concern committed discipleship. The previous chapter concerns the eucharist and the following chapter concerns martyrdom. After beginning to receive the eucharist, the ideal Christian goes on to a life of committed service, and that life may culminate in dying for Jesus. In this passage the editor stresses that we cannot know the truth and become free until we advance to committed discipleship. Here we may especially note that the editor apparently felt that getting baptized and beginning to receive the eucharist do not yet produce true spiritual enlightenment and liberty. It is as we persevere in following Jesus that we obtain them.

The editor's insistence that we only learn the truth and gain freedom by persevering in following Jesus was probably a warning to Christians in the Johannine community who were making excessive claims for the sacraments. Especially in the three epistles of John we encounter the theology that anyone who has joined the church and received the sacraments has attained spiritual perfection. Apparently, some Christians whom the letters attack especially held this inflated view, but the letters themselves share it. Indeed, 1 John claims that the anointing in baptism "teaches you about everything" (1 John 2:27; cf. 2:20) and that anyone who in baptism has been "begotten from God does not sin" (1 John 5:18). Yet experience taught otherwise. 1 John also must stress "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8).

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*(8:33) They replied to him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free?'" (34) Jesus replied to them, "Truly, truly I tell you that everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. (35) The slave does not stay in the household forever; the son stays forever. (36) So, if the Son sets you free, you will actually be free. (37) I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you are seeking to kill me, because there is no room for my word in you. (38) What I have seen in my Father's presence I speak; and you do what you heard from the father." (39) In reply they said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would perform Abraham's deeds. (40) But now you are seeking to kill me, a person who has spoken to you the truth which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do. (41) You are doing the works of your father." They said to him, "We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, God." (42) Jesus said to them, "If God were your father, you would love me, for I proceeded from God and have come. And I did not come on my own, but he sent me out. (43) For what reason do you not understand my way of speaking? It is because you cannot listen to my words. (44) You are from your father, the Devil, and you wish to do your father's desires. That one was a murderer from the beginning, and he does not stand fast in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks naturally because he is a liar and the father of liars. (45) But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (46) Who among you can convict me of sin? If I tell the truth, for what reason do you not believe me? (47) Those who are from God hear God's words. This is the reason you do not hear: You are not from God." (48) In reply the Jews said to him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*

Once again we hear the extreme rhetoric that was typical of this period and should not be taken seriously today. As we noted above, it was customary in the first century to make the most aggressive assaults on the good character of one's opponents in religious debate. We see that again here. Jesus accuses his opponents of being inspired by the Devil, and they reply by claiming that he is a hated foreigner and possessed by a demon.

It is likely that these accusations and counter-accusations reflect the confrontations between Christians and rabbinic Jews when the evangelist wrote. As we shall note when we consider chapter 9, “orthodox” Jews expelled Jewish Christians from the synagogues around the period when the Beloved Disciple was producing the gospel. That expulsion must have led to ugly confrontations and bitter polemics. Presumably, each side accused the other of having no knowledge of what God wanted and being agents of the devil. If so, we have an example of such language here.

In the debate an especially frequent area of dispute was whether the members of the synagogue or of the church were the true descendants of Abraham. Early Christians like Paul insisted that only those who shared Abraham’s faith were Abraham’s true children, and this faith pointed to Christ (e.g., Gal. 3:6-29). Jews who were physically descended from Abraham but who rejected Jesus were not Abraham’s true offspring. We find a similar claim in the passage we are presently considering. Those who oppose Jesus cannot rightly claim to be truly Abraham’s children since they are not imitating Abraham’s obedience to God.

As this passage illustrates, there was no possibility of mutual understanding, because the Rabbinic and Christian communities were arguing from different presuppositions. The Rabbinic community regarded the scriptures as the final authority, and they used their own tradition to deduce what the scriptures had to mean. By contrast, the Johannine community believed that Jesus was the final authority and that it was only through Jesus that the scriptures could be correctly understood. So even though both sides might appeal to Abraham for support, they necessarily interpreted him differently. Consequently, in the passage we are presently considering, Jesus and his Jewish critics mostly exchange charges.

Nevertheless, the gospel makes the valid point that in the evangelist’s day the enemies of the church could not rightly deny the good character of Jesus and, as a result, their accusations often expressed bad faith. Jesus’ critics could not convict him of sin. Perhaps we should add that in the evangelist’s day the enemies of the church could not rightly convict Jesus’ followers of immoral behavior either. Hence, the Beloved Disciple pleads that Jesus must be taken seriously.

Even though the accusations and counter-accusations we read here reflect the situation when the evangelist wrote, they also go back to the ministry of Jesus. We see them clearly, for example, in Mark 3:22-30. There the Scribes cannot deny that Jesus actually has worked miracles, and must resort to the desperate claim that he did so by being in league with the prince of demons. Jesus in turn replies that his critics are sinning against the Holy Spirit and can not receive forgiveness. The church would not have made up the charge that Jesus was in league with a demon. The claim that there is an unforgivable sin has continually caused problems and is widely attributed to Jesus in early Christian writings (Mat. 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-30, Luke 12:10, Thomas 44, etc.). Both must go back to Jesus himself.



During his ministry, Jesus also seems to have replied to his critics by pointing out that his actions were actually helping people. His critics suffered from bad faith. If Jesus was curing the sick, his enemies had no right attack his character.

In the edited gospel the passage we are presently considering suggests that to become a committed disciple we must acknowledge that we are still in slavery, and this challenge causes some Christians to desert. Thanks to the work of the editor, the people Jesus addresses here are the same ones he challenged in 8:31-32 to remain in his word and learn the truth and become free. They, however, cannot admit to being in slavery. Therefore they reject Jesus' challenge and will in just a couple of verses attempt to kill him. The implication seems clear. It is after we join the church by getting baptized and beginning to receive the eucharist that we discover the shattering truth that we are still in slavery to sin and will only escape from it by patiently following Jesus. Many people respond to this discovery by giving up on Christianity.

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*(8:49) Jesus replied, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. (50) I do not seek my glory; there is someone who seeks it and judges. (51) Truly, truly, I tell you, if anyone keeps my word, they will never experience death." (52) The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets died! Yet, you say, 'If anyone keeps my word they will never taste death.' (53) You are not greater than our father Abraham who died? And the prophets died! Who are you claiming to be?" (54) Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, whom you say that he is our God. (55) Yet you have not known him; I know him. If I say that I do not know him, I will be a liar like you. But I know him and I keep his word. (56) Abraham your father rejoiced greatly that he would see my day, and he saw it and was glad." (57) So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" (58) Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am." (59) So they picked up stones to throw at him. Jesus hid and went out of the temple.*

This passage brings the section to a climax with the public revelation of Christ's divinity and his enemies' attempt to slay him. At the beginning of chapter 7 the brothers of Jesus challenged him to reveal himself to the world. Now for the first time in the gospel Jesus declares his divinity openly. He proclaims that he was alive even before Abraham was born, and in making this claim uses the divine "I am." In response his enemies seek to stone him for blasphemy. This attempt on Jesus' life culminates the confrontation that has been escalating for some time. Jesus' subsequent departure from the temple signals that the section--or as we shall see shortly, the first half of the section--is over.

Probably this scene reflects the fact that contemporary Christians were declaring that

Jesus was divine and, as a result, were suffering from mob violence. To “orthodox” Jews the claim that a human being was divine constituted blasphemy. Yet, this was precisely the claim that those who sided with the evangelist must have been making. Consequently, they faced great hostility and sometimes got stoned. In chapter 16 Jesus warns his disciples that the people who kill them intend to do God a favor (16:2).

The gospel insists that because Jesus is divine, those who believe in him cannot die. Earlier the text reminded us that life comes from God, and, hence, life belongs to Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus are open to the power that comes from him and will live forever. This theme appears already in the gospel’s opening verses (1:4) and occurs in various places thereafter (e.g., in Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well in chapter 4). Now the gospel uses Abraham as an illustration. The critics of Jesus assume that Abraham has died. Jesus retorts that Abraham believed in him and, consequently, lived to see his day. Of course, Jesus and his critics understand death differently. Physically, Abraham has indeed perished, as Jesus’ critics insist, but spiritually Abraham is alive and dwells with the Father (cf. Luke 16:19-31).

To defend the claim that Jesus is divine, the gospel points out that Jesus did not seek his own glory. We normally distrust people who make great claims about themselves, because we assume that the motive is vanity or power. Precisely because Jesus did not try to glorify himself but obeyed the Father and accepted the cross, it is plausible that he truly is divine.

I believe that the claim that Jesus did not seek his own glory must be understood as a claim about the historical Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel itself Jesus does to some extent seek his own glory. Certainly, he often insists that he is divine. The present passage provides an illustration. By contrast, as we have seen, the historical Jesus did not claim to be divine. It was his followers who made the claim after the resurrection. To use the language of the Fourth Gospel, at the resurrection the Father “glorified” him.

In the edited gospel, this section promises that the committed disciples of Jesus will find life. This passage talks about those who keep Jesus’ word, and in the larger context these must be those Christians who continue to be faithful after baptism and their first eucharist. The gospel promises that these committed followers will never experience death.

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## Chapter 9

*(9:1) As he was passing by, he saw a person who was blind from birth. (2) His students asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this fellow or his parents that he was born blind?” (3) Jesus replied, “Neither this fellow sinned nor his parents. It happened so the deeds of God would become known in him. (4) We must perform the deeds of him who sent me while it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work. (5) As long*

*as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (6) When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud from the saliva and smeared the mud on his eyes (7) and said to him, “Go away, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means “sent out”). So he went off and washed and came back able to see.*

As it introduces another story, the gospel reminds us that the passion of Jesus is approaching, and, therefore, time is running out. Earlier Jesus declared that he was the light of the world (8:12). He also warned his enemies twice that he was going away and that subsequently they would seek him without success (7:34-36, 8:21). We find essentially the same themes here. As long as Jesus is in the world, he gives it light, but night is coming. Once Jesus is crucified, the world will no longer be able to see the incarnate God.

It seems to be a historical fact that Jesus healed blind people. In Mark we have two different stories of Jesus performing such miracles: a two-stage healing of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26) and the healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). As Meier has pointed out (2:686-698), each story has odd details that appear to go back to incidents in the actual life of Jesus. Thus, for example, the first story records that the miracle took place in Bethsaida and preserves the disturbing detail that Jesus' initial attempt to work the miracle did not fully succeed. The man's sight was still so poor that he could not distinguish people from trees. The second story tells us the name of the sufferer and that the miracle took place outside of Jericho. Jesus himself referred to such miracles when he told the emissaries of John the Baptist to report to their master that the blind were receiving their sight (Mat. 11:2-6).

The story here in the Fourth Gospel apparently also preserves some memory of a miracle that Jesus actually worked. Once again we have the location where the wonder occurred, namely the Pool of Siloam. As we have noted before, the Beloved Disciple almost certainly lived in Judea, probably Jerusalem, and had special knowledge of Jesus' activities there. The narrative preserves the odd detail that Jesus used saliva to effect the healing, a practice that is attested in two miracle stories in Mark's Gospel (7:31-37, 8:22-26). Therefore, the basic miracle is probably historical, but, as we shall see, the evangelist used the miracle as a vehicle to express a rich and complex theology.

Historically, Jesus proclaimed that such miracles showed that God was ushering in the kingdom through him. Thus, in a famous saying Jesus once insisted, “If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). The healing of the blind especially implied the coming of the kingdom because the physical miracle could also symbolize the spiritual enlightenment that Jesus' preaching produced. Hence, as we noted above, Jesus specifically mentioned his healing of blind people in his reply to the question from John the Baptist as to whether Jesus claimed to be the “one who is to come” (Mat. 11:3).

The Fourth Gospel builds on the symbolism already present in the historical miracle

by proclaiming here that the miracle shows that Jesus is the “light of the world.” The healing of bodily blindness is a sign that Jesus heals spiritual blindness.

The story of the healing of the blind man has parallels with the healing of the lame man in chapter 5, and apparently the evangelist intended for the reader to compare these narratives. Both miracles concern men who had been disabled for a long period. In chapter 5 the man had been unable to walk for thirty-eight years. Here the man has been blind from birth. In both stories Jesus takes the initiative and heals the sufferer even though there has been no request for help. In both stories Jesus initiates the healing process by ordering the victim to go and do something. In chapter 5 Jesus tells the lame man to pick up his bed and walk. Here he tells the blind man to go and wash. Both miracles involve a well known pool: in chapter 5 the large pool by the sheep gate and here the famous pool of Siloam. Both miracles take place on the Sabbath and incite opposition from religious leaders. Such pervasive parallelism invites us to compare and contrast the stories.

A comparison makes it clear that the story here symbolizes advancing to spiritual maturity because the blind man goes from innocence to committed discipleship, whereas in chapter 5 the lame man goes from sin to apostasy. Earlier we noted that chapter 5 implies that the lame man’s sufferings resulted from sin. After the healing, Jesus warned him not to sin again lest something even worse occur. Then despite the healing the man sinks further by informing the authorities that Jesus violated the Sabbath. In the edited gospel the man symbolizes Christians who receive baptism and subsequently fall away. In the present story the evolution is precisely the reverse. The story begins with the assurance that the blind man’s condition did not result from sin. Neither the man nor his parents sinned. Instead his blindness is providential since it provides an opportunity for God to manifest his glory. Then, as we shall see, the man goes on to ever greater devotion to Jesus and ever greater spiritual wisdom.

Hence, the story fits well into the section on committed discipleship. To be sure, the introduction to the story probably alludes both to conversion and baptism. By following Jesus’ order to go away, the man symbolically allows Jesus to direct his life. Indeed, the story stresses the man’s obedience by noting that the name of the pool literally means “sent out.” The original readers of the Fourth Gospel would probably have understood the man’s washing and receiving his sight as an allusion to baptism. Nevertheless, the bulk of the story is about what happens next. Significantly, the man will have to suffer for being Jesus’ committed disciple.

To set the stage for the man’s growing enlightenment about Jesus, the story begins with the odd detail that the man received his sight without actually seeing Jesus. Thus, Jesus does not immediately heal the man but smears mud on his eyes and sends him off to the pool of Siloam. There the man washes. As a result, he has not actually seen Jesus. Instead, as the story advances, the man will gradually perceive who Jesus is, and then at the climax of the plot will see Jesus and worship him.

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*(9:8) The neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar kept saying, "Isn't this the fellow who used to sit and beg?" (9) Some kept saying, "He's the one;" others kept saying, "No, but he looks like him." He said, "I am the one." (10) So they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" (11) He replied, "The person called Jesus made mud and smeared my eyes with it, and he told me, "Go away to Siloam and wash." So I went off, and after I washed, I could see." (12) They said to him, "Where is that person?" He said, "I do not know."*

As elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel, people who do not know Jesus merely debate the truth or deny it, whereas someone who follows Jesus advances toward it. Thus, the people in the story who have previously seen the blind man discuss futilely whether the man they now behold could possibly be the beggar they once knew. Some insist it is the same individual; others deny it. No conclusion is reached. By contrast, the man himself knows and confesses Jesus.

Here we have the first of three instances when the man admits ignorance, and these admissions will be crucial to the larger story. When the bystanders ask where Jesus is, the man born blind confesses that he does not know. Later the man will admit that he does not know whether Jesus is a sinner (9:25) and that he does not know who the "son of humanity" is (9:36). These confessions demonstrate both the man's humility and his openness to learning the truth. As we shall see, the Pharisees lack these virtues, and the climax of the story will contrast those who are ignorant and are willing to learn with those who are ignorant and unwilling.

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*(9:13) They brought the man who was formerly blind to the Pharisees. (14) Now it was the Sabbath on the day Jesus made mud and opened his eyes. (15) So the Pharisees also questioned him how he could see. He told them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed and see." (16) Some of the Pharisees kept saying, "This person is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." Others kept saying, "How can a person who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a split between them. (17) They spoke to the blind man again. "What do you yourself say about him, because he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."*

*(18) The Jews did not believe about him that he was blind and gained his sight until they summoned his parents (19) and asked them, "This is your son whom you say was born blind? How does he see now?" (20) His parents replied by saying, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. (21) But we do not know how he can see now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is of age. He will speak in his own behalf." (22) His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already decided that anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. (23) For this reason his parents*

said, "He is of age; question him."

(24) So for a second time they summoned the person who was blind and said to him, "In God's name tell the truth! We know that this person is a sinner." (25) He replied, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. The one thing I know is that I was blind and can see now." (26) They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" (27) He replied to them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become his students too, do you?" (28) They reviled him by saying, "You are that fellow's student, but we are students of Moses. (29) We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this fellow, we do not know where he's from." (30) The person replied by saying to them, "There is something amazing in this that you do not know where he's from, yet he opened my eyes. (31) We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is godly and does his will, that's the one God listens to. (32) Since time began, it was unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone who was born blind. (33) If this person was not from God, he could have done nothing." (34) In reply they said to him, "You were born completely sinful, and you are teaching us!" And they threw him out.

(35) Jesus heard that they threw him out and found him and said, "As for you, do you believe in the son of humanity?" (36) In reply he said, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" (37) Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and he is the one speaking with you." (38) He said, "I believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. (39) Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

(40) Some of the Pharisees were with him and heard this and said to him, "We are not blind too, are we?" (41) Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

As its closing verses make clear, this story basically describes how the blind come to sight and how those who see become blind. The man born blind gradually recognizes who Jesus is and then actually sees him and worships him. By contrast, the Pharisees retreat farther and farther into hypocritical denial and cruelty. Initially, the man simply declares that Jesus healed him. The Pharisees admit that a miracle has occurred and merely debate whether or not Jesus is a good man, since he violated the Sabbath. The man moves one step closer to the truth by declaring that Jesus is a prophet. In response, the Pharisees now refuse to believe that a miracle occurred and insist on interrogating the man's parents. When the parents do not say what the Pharisees wish to hear, they confront the man again. They threaten him and demand that he tell the truth, insisting that Jesus is a sinner. In response the man refuses to recant and the dialogue turns ugly. The Pharisees berate Jesus as a nobody, and the man born blind defends him as someone from God who worked an unprecedented miracle. The man's declaration that Jesus is "from God" reminds the reader of the great truth that Jesus came from the Father. The Pharisees denounce the man as sinful since the moment of his conception and throw him out. This denunciation makes the escalating hypocrisy and wickedness of the Pharisees especially evident.

The man has done nothing sinful in the story, and, according to Jesus, neither the man nor his parents sinned before he was born. Then the man completes his pilgrimage toward the light by seeing Jesus, believing in him, and worshiping him.

The end of the story makes it clear that the primary sin of the Pharisees consists in their refusal to admit the possibility of ignorance, and this theme pervades the dialogue. The man born blind freely acknowledges his ignorance. Thus, at one point he confesses that he has no idea whether Jesus is a sinner. The only thing he knows is that he used to be blind but can see now. Similarly, at the climax of the story the man asks Jesus to tell him who to believe in. By contrast, the Pharisees repeatedly insist on what they know. We read that they know that Jesus is a sinner and know that God spoke to Moses. Ironically, they insist that they do not know where Jesus came from. They intend this as an arrogant slight. They are in effect claiming that they know that Jesus is a nobody. Yet these words contain more truth than the Pharisees realize. The Pharisees do not in fact know where Jesus comes from, since he comes from the Father. As the dialogue proceeds, it becomes more and more clear to the reader that the reason the Pharisees do not know the truth is that they are desperately evading it. Not only have they hypocritically discredited the miracle, but their very attack on Jesus proves who he actually is. They say that they do not know where he comes from, and earlier the gospel reminded us that when the Messiah comes no one will know where he comes from (7:27). The story's closing line summarizes the problem. The sin of the Pharisees consists of their foolish claim to see.

Here we have another illustration of the gospel's continuing theme that we pass judgment on ourselves when we come to the light or refuse to do so. Earlier in the gospel Jesus insisted that he judges no one. Instead, judgment occurs because those who are evil refuse to come to him lest their wickedness be exposed, whereas those who are good gladly come and receive life (3:17-21). In this story the man was born without sin and ends up seeing and worshiping Jesus. By contrast the Pharisees are wicked, and this wickedness forces them to flee from the truth by denouncing both Jesus and the man born blind. Hence, at the end of the story Jesus insists that he has come into the world to judge.

The portrayal of the Pharisees in this story, as elsewhere in the gospel, expresses the bitterness that the evangelist and his community felt over being expelled from the synagogues. When the Pharisees throw the man out, their actions symbolize the coming general expulsion of Jewish Christians from their ethnic community. Indeed, the story explicitly looks forward to the excommunication. We read that the parents of the man born blind refused to be frank with the Pharisees because the "Jews" had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus would be expelled from the synagogue. Expulsion from the synagogues probably made Christian gatherings illegal in the larger Roman world. As long as Christians were officially a Jewish sect, they belonged to a licit religion. Once Christians lost their institutional connection to Judaism, they no longer enjoyed legal sanction. The evangelist and his supporters were understandably bitter, and unfortunately that bitterness pervades the Fourth

Gospel.

The expulsion from the synagogue also explains the puzzling and pejorative use of the term “Jew” in the Fourth Gospel. To the modern reader the use of label is confusing. Jesus in the gospel often talks about the “Jews” as if he were not one himself. Once the Pharisees had managed to consolidate their power, they controlled the Jewish community as a whole and *de facto* simply became the spokesmen for the “Jews.” The term “Jews” now comes to have the meaning of a Hebrew religion that, among others things, totally rejects both Jesus and his followers. The Fourth Gospel normally accepts this meaning for the term and, accordingly, portrays the “Jews” very negatively.

In a post-holocaust world we should note that the anti-Semitism in the Fourth Gospel is only religious, not ethnic, let alone, “racial.” Ethnically Jesus and his first followers were Jewish. And the Fourth Gospel clearly recognizes this fact, since both the Samaritan woman at the well and the Roman ruler Pontius Pilate call Jesus a “Jew” (4:9, 18:33-35).

In the edited gospel the man born blind symbolizes the committed disciple who willingly suffers rather than deny Jesus and who, as a result, gains an ever clearer knowledge of who Jesus truly is. The man born blind experiences the same fate--being expelled by the Pharisees--that committed disciples of a later day experienced. The Pharisees put increasing pressure on him to deny Jesus and ultimately demand that he acknowledge that Jesus is a sinner. The man refuses and suffers as a result. Significantly, the Pharisees accuse the man of being Jesus’ “disciple.” Of course, as we noted above, by defending Jesus, the man comes to an ever greater insight about Jesus’ true identity. Initially, the man declares that Jesus is a prophet, but by the end of the story the man sees and worships him. Earlier in the section on committed discipleship we read that those who continue in Jesus’ word will know the truth (8:31-32). The man born blind illustrates this process. Of course, by illustrating the process, the man challenges the readers to imitate him, especially in confessing Jesus despite the danger of being expelled from the synagogue.

Once again we have the theme that we can only advance to committed discipleship by acknowledging that we are ignorant. In chapter 8 when Jesus promised that those who continued in his word would know the truth and become free, these potential disciples could not admit their ignorance and slavery. Consequently, they immediately rejected Jesus and attempted to murder him. Here by contrast, the man born blind repeatedly admits his ignorance and, as a result, discovers the truth about Jesus.

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## Chapter 10

(10:1) *“Truly, truly I tell you, he who does not enter into the sheepfold through the*



*door but climbs up from elsewhere is a thief and a bandit. (2) But he who enters through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. (5) They will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” (6) Jesus used this figure of speech in talking to them, but they did not know what it was that he was saying to them.*

The famous sermon about the good shepherd that begins here probably does not go back to the historical Jesus but comes from the evangelist. As we shall see, the sermon reflects perfectly the evangelist’s theology that Jesus is divine and the sole way to God.

In the gospel the sermon functions as a timeless discourse. The gospel leaves the date and place and audience of the homily vague. All we know is that the feast of booths (7:2, 14, 37) has ended and the feast of the rededication of the temple has not yet arrived (10:22) and that Jesus must be somewhere in Jerusalem. This vagueness suggests that the evangelist wants the reader to view the sermon as a timeless theological statement.

Ancient Christian readers would have understood this opening passage on two levels, as a literal depiction of ancient sheep herding and as a symbolic description of God. The description of the shepherd entering the fold through the gate, calling out his own sheep by name, and leading them to pasture is an accurate description of how shepherds actually worked. Nevertheless, an additional dimension of meaning is clearly present. In the Bible God is the supreme shepherd, and his people are the flock. For example, Psalm 80 begins, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.” Jesus himself used such symbolism for God, especially in the famous parable of the lost sheep (Mat. 18:12-14, Luke 15:4-6).

The theme that those who reject Jesus cannot even understand him continues here. We read, “they did not know what it was that he was saying to them.” To be sure, the gospel does not yet identify the audience Jesus is addressing. Still, the reader naturally suspects that Jesus is once again speaking to skeptics. Verses 19-20 will confirm this suspicion by telling us that at least some of the “Jews” who hear his remarks think that Jesus is possessed.

In the edited gospel, the incomprehension of Jesus’ audience fits the theme that only his committed disciples can know that he is God. As we shall see, the discourse goes on to claim that Jesus is the “door” and the “good shepherd,” and both these images suggest that Jesus is divine. Yet, as this introduction to the discourse already indicates, his audience is in no position to accept these claims. I have already argued that the overall theme of chapters 8-10 in the edited gospel is committed discipleship and a subsidiary theme is that only committed disciples can perceive the divinity of Jesus. Hence, we are not surprised that an audience composed of critics and mere

bystanders cannot fathom what Jesus is proclaiming.

Already this introductory passage makes it clear that the followers of Jesus have a special relationship with him that allows them to distinguish him from anyone else. Jesus calls his sheep by name. They follow him because they recognize his voice.

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*(10:7) So Jesus spoke again. "Truly, truly I tell you that I myself am the door for the sheep. (8) All who came before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters by me, they will be saved and will come in and go out and will find pasture. (10) The thief comes only to steal and slay and destroy. I came so they would have life and have it abundantly. (11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12) The hired hand who is not the shepherd and to whom the sheep do not belong sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. (13) He is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep.*

In response to the incomprehension of his audience, Jesus clarifies his earlier remarks. He himself is both the door and the shepherd.

Superficially, the gospel is inconsistent when it claims that Jesus is both the door and the shepherd, but in fact this paradox merely expresses the deeper paradox present throughout the gospel that Jesus is both the way to God and is God himself. It is at best awkward when the same passage claims that Jesus is the door through which the shepherd enters and the shepherd himself. Perhaps we could picture Jesus as a shepherd who guards the flock by occupying the gate (Bishop, cited in Brown, *The Gospel* 1:386). Nevertheless, as so often in the John, literary awkwardness challenges the reader to look for a deeper significance. Already in the opening verses of the gospel we read, "No one has ever seen God. The only God, he who is at the Father's chest, that is the one who has revealed him" (1:18). We have a similar paradox here. Jesus is the door, that is the way to salvation, and in this gospel salvation comes from knowing God. Jesus is the way to the Father. Yet, Jesus can be this way only because he is himself divine. We can see God through him because Jesus is God. Here Jesus insists that he is the shepherd, and, as we noted above, in scripture the true shepherd is God. Later the imagery of the shepherd will climax when Jesus asserts that he and the Father are one (10:30).

As Jesus talks about his own roles, he makes vague allusions to competitors and enemies. In contrast to the good shepherd, there are hired hands who abandon the sheep, there are thieves and bandits who slaughter the sheep, and there are wolves who scatter the flock.

In the context of the gospel, these competitors and enemies must include the Pharisaic establishment who dominated Judaism when the gospel was written. As Matthew, Mark, and Luke attest, Jesus and the Pharisees attacked one another even during

Christ's own lifetime. Jesus' claim that he knew the will of God directly clashed with the Pharisees' claim that the Law of Moses was the definitive revelation of God's will and that they as the interpreters of the Law could tell other people what to believe and do. After the Romans responded to a Jewish revolt by destroying the temple, the Pharisees took control of Judaism and, as John's Gospel notes so often, expelled Jewish Christians from the synagogues. The Christian community was bitter, and the Fourth Gospel frequently expresses that bitterness by denouncing the "Jews" who are clearly representatives of a Mosaic religion that persecutes Christians. The hired hands, thieves, and wolves in this passage must include them.

Nevertheless, the competitors and enemies are really anyone who proclaims a different way to salvation than the gospel does. In this passage Jesus insists that "all" who attempt to supplant his role are bandits. Consequently, we have here another variant on the continuing theme that Jesus alone is the way to God.

The reason that Jesus alone is the way to God is that his selfless love reveals once and for all the selfless love of the divine Father. Jesus willingly laid down his life, and that self-sacrifice definitively demonstrates God's will to save us, but we can only benefit from that revelation if we believe that God became incarnate in Jesus. Because the love of Jesus is none other than the love of God, it differs qualitatively from all other love. Hence, in comparison to the good shepherd, even the best of religious teachers are analogous to a "hired hand" who has no true commitment to the welfare of the flock.

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*(10:14) "I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me, (15) just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep.* A theme in the Fourth Gospel is that only the Father knows who Jesus truly is and only Jesus knows who the Father is. Thus, for example, in chapter 8 Jesus declares that his audience does not know God but Jesus himself does (8:55). We see that theme again here.

Now, however, Jesus goes on to insist that his own followers share in such perfect knowledge and know Jesus as surely as the Father does. The Father and the Son know each other fully. So too Jesus the good shepherd and his disciples know each other fully. The reader cannot help adding that since we know Jesus perfectly we know the Father as well.

In the edited gospel this passage continues the theme that when we become committed disciples we acquire an inner knowledge that Jesus is divine. We recognize his voice and know who he truly is.

The theme that Jesus and the Father know one another and, therefore, we can only fully learn about the Father through Jesus has deep roots in earlier New Testament

theology and ultimately goes back to the historical Jesus himself. We find the same theology in a saying attributed to Jesus in Matthew 11:27: "All things have been given over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." This particular quotation may not go back to Jesus himself, since it seems to reflect theological developments that occurred after the resurrection. Nevertheless, the whole ministry of the historical Jesus was predicated on the claim that God had called him to begin a renewed Israel, and that only through Jesus could people come to know what God's will now was.

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*(10:16) "I also have other sheep that are not from this fold. I must also bring those. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd."*

Old Testament Judaism was an ethnic religion. The Jews worshiped a national god who had rescued them as a people from slavery in Egypt and given them a homeland in Palestine. Indeed, their national god had driven out the original inhabitants in order to provide a territory for his people. Through Moses God had given the Jews a Law that made them visibly different from other peoples. That Law required a special dress, special diet, and the observance of special holidays. In addition, God decreed that he would accept sacrifices only in the privileged temple at Jerusalem, the Jewish capital.

Once the Jews lost their national independence and many Jews took up residence outside of Palestine, they found their unity primarily in the Mosaic Law and the Jerusalem temple. Jews living in Rome or Egypt preserved their identity by keeping the Mosaic rules and by supporting the Jerusalem temple and making pilgrimages to it as often as possible.

Partly because of its monotheism Old Testament Judaism looked forward to a time when the entire world would honor the God of Israel and become Jewish. The prophets--especially, Isaiah--envisioned a time when the whole world would acknowledge that only the God of Israel existed and would come to Jerusalem to worship him (e.g., Isa. 2:2-4). Psalm 87 even goes so far as to foretell that everyone would claim to have been born in Jerusalem. Such exalted hopes followed inevitably from the claim that the God of Israel was the only God. He created everyone and yet had only revealed himself to the Jews. Hence, at some point everyone would have to join the people of Israel in order to know their creator.

The passage we are presently considering insists that the Pagans will come to know the God of Israel through Jesus. Earlier in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus proclaimed that salvation had to come from Judaism but that with him a new era was dawning when people would worship in spirit and truth (4:19-26). Here the theme that the world will come to know God through Jesus

continues. Jesus has other sheep--namely, the Gentiles. He must bring them and unite them to his Jewish followers.

Implicit in this passage is the claim that the world cannot be united through adopting the Mosaic Law or by worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem but only through acknowledging that Jesus is God incarnate.

In subsequent centuries, the spread of Christianity throughout the world would, at least in part, verify the wisdom of this claim.

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*(10:17) "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order that I may take it back. (18) No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it back. I received this commandment from my Father."*

Here we have another illustration of a major theme of the Fourth Gospel, namely that Jesus foresaw his death and freely chose it. No one else had the power to kill Jesus against his will. He deliberately allowed the world to execute him.

Of course, this theme necessarily follows from the claim that Jesus is divine. If Jesus is God, then no human being could possibly do anything to him without his consent.

Because Jesus freely chooses his death, it is an expression of love and, therefore, pleases the Father and challenges the world. The Father asks the Son to sacrifice himself to save the world, and the Son complies. By complying the Son demonstrates his unspeakable love both for the Father whom he obeys and for the world that he dies to save. Such love inspires love from all who perceive who Jesus truly is.

In this passage we see clearly why John's Gospel refuses to be satisfied with the view that Jesus was simply a very virtuous human being. If Jesus had merely been a good person, then at some point his death would have been involuntary. At least by the time of his condemnation, he would no longer have been able to escape. Perhaps his whole passion would have been against his will. The two bandits who were crucified alongside him did not choose to suffer and die! If Jesus' death was not freely chosen, then it would no longer express God's love. Instead of revealing to us the face of the Father, it would merely be--like other executions--a pathetic example of human vulnerability.

Because Jesus was divine, his death inevitably resulted in the resurrection. The world which could not kill him against his will also could not keep him from rising. Jesus had the power to lay down his life and to take it up again.

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*(10:19) Because of these words, division again arose among the Jews. (20) Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is raving. Why listen to him?" (21) Others were saying, "These words are not those from someone who is possessed. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"*

Once again we see that those who reject Jesus cannot even make sense of what he says and does. Some people claim he is insane and in league with the devil. Others recognize that his miracles make this claim impossible. They argue with each other and come to no resolution.

In the edited gospel, the inability of bystanders and critics to make sense of who Jesus is and what he does emphasizes again that we can only know Jesus by becoming committed disciples.

From the literary perspective, this passage helps tie together the larger section on committed discipleship which I argue extends from chapter 7 through chapter 10. Here in the material on the good shepherd we have a reference back to the healing of the man born blind. Hence, both the miracle in chapter 9 and the discourse in chapter 10 belong to a single literary unit in the gospel. As we have seen, the theme of that more extensive unit is committed discipleship.

Nevertheless, this passage remains a faithful portrait of the historical Jesus. Historically, Jesus did perform miracles, including curing the blind. His enemies responded by claiming that he worked his wonders by being possessed (Mark 3:22). Even his family and friends thought that he was beside himself (Mark 3:21). Since the church would never have invented such charges, they must be historical. Of course, these charges did not result from the miracles themselves. No one objected to Jesus healing people. What people objected to was Jesus' claim that he was inaugurating the kingdom of God—or to use the image of the Fourth Gospel that he was the Shepherd of Israel. However, as the present passage suggests, many "Jews" remained supportive because they could not believe that an insane man was able to do miracles.

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*(10:22) Then the feast of the Rededication came in Jerusalem. It was winter, (23) and Jesus was walking in the temple, in Solomon's Porch.*

Despite the change in time these verses do not begin a new unit. To be sure, it is now winter, and the Jewish nation is celebrating the rededication of the temple. (The modern name for this festival is Hanukkah.) Nevertheless, Jesus is still in Jerusalem, still disputing with his critics, and, as we shall see in a moment, still talking about his "sheep."

Perhaps the reason that the gospel mentions the rededication is to remind us that

Jesus himself is the true temple. Throughout the gospel the cultic observances on Jewish holy days point to Jesus who fulfills them. Thus, for example, in Passover perhaps the two most important symbols are the unleavened bread and the lamb. On the second Passover in this gospel Jesus insists that he is the real bread, and as we will note later, on the next Passover he dies as a lamb. Earlier Jesus told his critics that if they destroyed the “temple” he would rebuild it in three days. They did not understand, but the evangelist informed the reader that Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body (2:19-21). The message is clear: The true temple is Jesus’ own flesh in which the eternal Word became incarnate. Because we already know that Jesus is himself the temple, the celebration of Hanukkah in the gospel has a new dimension of meaning. The feast not only looks back at Judas Maccabaeus regaining the temple from the Pagans and restoring it to its former purity. The feast points forward to Jesus who himself is present at this celebration.

This passage provides yet another piece of evidence that the evangelist was an inhabitant of Jerusalem during the period when Jesus was alive and could have seen him there. Only an early inhabitant of Jerusalem would have known the information contained in these verses. The Rededication was a minor holiday during the winter, and pilgrims did not visit the city to celebrate it. Yet the author apparently knows that the Portico of Solomon would be a logical place for Jesus to frequent at that time. As Brown points out, this knowledge is extraordinary because only this portico would have provided shelter from the chilling east wind which sweeps into Jerusalem at the time of year when this holiday is celebrated (*The Gospel* 1:405). Moreover, since the temple was destroyed in the year 70, the evangelist must have been living in Jerusalem prior to then.

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*(10:24) The Jews encircled him and kept saying to him, “How long are you going to tease us? If you are the Messiah, tell us openly.” (25) Jesus replied to them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The deeds that I am performing in my Father’s name, these testify about me. (26) But you do not believe, because you are not from my own sheep. (27) My own sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, (28) and I am giving them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them from my hand. (29) What my Father has given me is greater than all things, and no one can snatch anything from the Father’s hand. (30) I and the Father are one.”*

These verses bring the section on committed discipleship to a climax by summarizing its major themes. The section on committed discipleship began when Jesus’ brothers challenged him to reveal himself both to his disciples and the world. He then did so: He revealed his divinity openly both through word and miraculous deed. He declared that before Abraham came into existence Jesus was, and he then demonstrated the truth of these claims by healing the man born blind. Jesus also promised that those believed in him would find lasting life. The world responded to these declarations

with confusion and rejection. Some even tried to stone him. By contrast, the committed disciples--whether the man born blind or the "sheep" who followed Jesus--perceived who he was. Here near the conclusion of the section we revisit these themes. The enemies of Jesus demand that he state clearly who he claims to be. This demand makes their inability to comprehend manifest because Jesus has already repeatedly done this. In the next verse Jesus' enemies again try to stone him. Unless one is a committed disciple, one cannot know who Jesus truly is. By contrast, Jesus reminds us that his sheep who follow him--i.e., his committed disciples--listen to his voice. He will give them life. He can do this because he is divine. Once again he reveals his divinity openly and reminds us that his miracles ("deeds") confirm who he is. He and the Father are one.

These verses also reflect the historical fact that during his lifetime Jesus frustrated his hearers by refusing to state clearly whether or not he was claiming to be the Messiah. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus proclaims his exalted status openly. The historical Jesus, by contrast, did indeed "tease" his hearers by refusing to clarify who he thought that he was. His audiences realized that in proclaiming that the kingdom of God was present in his own preaching and miracles Jesus was implicitly making some assertion about his own identity. But it was not clear precisely what the assertion was. Hence, as the synoptics record, such diverse people as John the Baptist, Peter, and Pontius Pilate pressed for clarification: Was Jesus claiming to be the Messiah? Jesus' answers were ambiguous. To messengers from John the Baptist he said to tell their master about what Jesus was saying and doing and not to be offended (Mat. 11:4-6). To Peter Jesus said not to *tell* people that he was the Messiah (Mark 8:29-30). To Pilate Jesus said that Pilate would probably consider him to be the Messiah ("That is the way you would say it." [Mark 15:2]).

Looking back at this puzzling behavior, the evangelist suggests that from God's point of view Jesus was inviting people to realize that he was divine, but we could only learn this by following him. Jesus "teased" people in order to get them to be open to a new and unexpected truth. That truth was that Jesus was the incarnation of God, and we can only discover this by becoming one of his "sheep."

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*(10:31) The Jews again picked up rocks to stone him. (32) Jesus responded to them, "I showed you many good deeds from the Father. For which of them are you stoning me?" (33) The Jews replied to him, "We are not stoning you for a good deed but for blasphemy, and because you who are a human being are making yourself God." (34) Jesus replied to them, "Isn't it written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods [Ps. 82:6]'"? (35) If it said that those were gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be annulled), (36) are you saying, 'You are blaspheming,' to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent out into the world because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"*

The violent confrontation between Jesus and his critics here probably reflects later



confrontations between supporters of the Fourth Gospel and supporters of the Pharisees. As we have noted previously, it is unlikely that historically Jesus explicitly claimed to be God. Instead, Jesus' extraordinary authority was implicit in his activities such as his miracles and his freedom to interpret the Mosaic Law. It was only at the resurrection that the followers of Jesus experienced him as divine and recognized that he was the source of God's own Spirit. Then guided by that Spirit, the evangelist attempted to retell the story of Jesus from God's point of view. People who agreed with the evangelist's interpretation also began to proclaim publicly that Jesus was divine. In response more traditional Jews expelled Christians from the synagogue and even killed some of them. The attempt here to stone Jesus for claiming to be God portrays the violence which the "orthodox" Jewish community visited upon the Christians who proclaimed the divinity of Christ.

In reply to charges that saying that Jesus was divine was blasphemous, the gospel stresses that those who believe in Jesus not only experience his divinity but come to share in it. The claim that Jesus is divine is not simply a claim about him. It is also a claim about who others become through him. Those to whom the word of God came can be legitimately called "gods." Eastern Christianity, which regards the Fourth Gospel as especially authoritative, has rightly based the doctrine of deification on it. As Christians we become by adoption the sons and daughters of God himself and share in his divine being.

In the edited gospel, this section suggests that when we become committed disciples we begin the inner transformation that assimilates us to God.

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*(10:37) "If I am not performing the deeds of my Father, do not believe me. (38) But if I am performing them, even if you do not believe me, believe the deeds so that you may find out and continue to know that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."*

In response to the disbelief of his enemies Jesus falls back on the testimony of his actions. His enemies have little spiritual perception. Hence, they are unable to understand--let alone accept--more advanced spiritual experiences. As a result, they cannot entertain Jesus' claim that through him one can enter into the very life of God. Jesus resorts to the more elementary witness of his "deeds." Presumably, Jesus is referring both to his loving actions and his miraculous signs. A little earlier when his enemies were seeking to kill him, Jesus pointed out that he had done many good works (10:32). The implication is clear. Someone who normally does what is right is probably not guilty of blasphemous mendacity. Accordingly, Jesus' critics should believe his claims. Jesus' miracles confirm his divinity, because through them the Father powerfully testifies to him.

In the edited gospel this section reminds us that committed discipleship is a relatively advanced stage in the spiritual life and that many other steps must precede it.

Normally, we begin the Christian pilgrimage by being attracted by the loving deeds of Jesus or by being astounded by the miracles or by assuming that such a good person probably told the truth about his mission to reveal God and change the world. Only much later do we become committed disciples and begin to experience in our own lives the truth that though Jesus we enter into the very life of God, and, therefore, Jesus must himself be divine.

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*(10:39) They again sought to arrest him; yet he escaped from their hands.*

*(40) And he went away back across the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and he stayed there. (41) Many came to him and were saying, "John performed no sign, but all that John said about this person was true." (42) And many believed in him there.*

This passage finally brings the section that began at 7:1 to a close. At the beginning of chapter 7 Jesus' brothers challenged him to go to Jerusalem and reveal himself both to his disciples and the world. Now that journey and revelation are complete. Jesus has proclaimed his unity with the Father. His committed disciples have responded with faith; his enemies have responded by attempting to murder him. He now flees, and the unit ends.

It is very likely that originally this passage marked the completion of Jesus' public ministry and was a transition to the passion. Certainly, this passage would have been very appropriate as such a marker. Jesus' ministry in the gospel begins with the testimony of John the Baptist in chapter 1 which inspires people to become Jesus' first disciples. The passage we are presently considering reminds us of these beginnings and ties the first ten chapters together. Jesus returns to the location where John the Baptist first worked, and people remember John's testimony to him and believe.

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## Chapter 11

*(11:1a) A certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, from the village of Mary . . .*

The dramatic story of the raising of Lazarus does seem to be based on a noteworthy miracle that Jesus actually worked. As John Meier points out (2:821-22, 831), unlike most miracle stories in the gospels, this one records the name of victim whom Jesus helped and even the name of his sister. The story also records the specific location where the miracle occurred, i.e., Bethany. We have already seen a lot of evidence that the Beloved Disciple lived in Judea, probably in Jerusalem, and, as a result, was aware of certain things that Jesus did there that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not record.

Bethany is near Jerusalem, and it seems that we have one of these special traditions. Consequently, the fact that this story does not appear in Matthew, Mark, or Luke is not evidence that it did not actually take place. On the contrary, if one is willing to concede the possibility that Jesus could raise the dead, there is no reason to doubt that he did so on this occasion.

Jesus probably saw his miracles of restoring people to life as symbols that people could have eternal life by following his teaching. Certainly, Jesus interpreted his miracles--perhaps especially the restoration of people to life--as signs of the coming of the kingdom and of his own special role in announcing that coming. Thus, in a surely historical story, when John the Baptist was in prison and sent a message asking if Jesus was the one who was to bring the messianic age, Jesus responded by listing the miracles he was performing: "The blind recover their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised . . ." (Mat. 11:5, Luke 7:22). Of course, Jesus believed that those who heeded his words would find everlasting life (e.g., Mat. 12:41-42). Hence, we must suppose that Jesus saw his miracles of raising the dead to life as signs of the even greater miracle that those who accepted his teaching would have final resurrection and eternal life.

As we shall now see, the Fourth Gospel in retelling the story of the raising of Lazarus makes this symbolism explicit.

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*(11:1b) . . . and her sister Martha. (2) Mary was the one who rubbed the Lord with ointment and wiped off his feet with her hair whose brother Lazarus was sick. (3) So the sisters sent word to him, "Lord, look he whom you love is sick." (4) When Jesus heard, he said, "This sickness will not end in death. It is for God's glory, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (5) Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) Consequently, when he heard that he was sick, then he stayed for two days in the place in which he was. (7) Then after this he said to the students, "Let's go back into Judea." (8) The students said to him, "Rabbi, just now the Judeans were seeking to stone you, and you are going back there?" (9) Jesus replied, "Aren't there twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks in the day they do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. (10) But if anyone walks in the night, they stumble because the light is not in them." (11) He said this, and after that he said to them, "Lazarus our friend has fallen asleep, but I am going in order to wake him up." (12) The students said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be safe." (13) Now Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that he was speaking about the sleep of slumber. (14) Then Jesus said to them openly, "Lazarus has died, (15) and I am glad for your sake that I was not there in order that you may find faith. But let us go to him." (16) Thomas (whose name means "Twin") said to his fellow students, "Let us also go that we may die with him."*

It appears that the editor made major changes in the story about the raising of

Lazarus. The text we have is full of oddities. To begin with, although Martha plays a major role in the story, she is not mentioned in verse 45 which tells us “many of the Jews had come to Mary.” Perhaps then, as Meier suggests (2:816-17), originally the story concerned only a man named Lazarus and his sole sister Mary. Next, the opening comment that Mary was the one who anointed Jesus is strange, because in the gospel as we have it, Mary does not anoint Jesus until the next chapter! There are also disturbing twists in the plot. The opening section assures us that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Yet, when Jesus hears their urgent plea to come and help, he waits for two days. Apparently during that period Lazarus dies. Later in the story Jesus weeps when he sees the tomb of Lazarus, despite the fact that Jesus deliberately allowed him to die and now plans to raise him from the dead! Finally, the theological motifs of the rest of the gospel pervade this section.

It may well be that the entire story of the raising of Lazarus was added or moved after the rest of the gospel was already complete (Brown, *The Gospel*, 1:xxxvii, 414, 427-430). As we noted above, the end of chapter 10 would have been an admirable conclusion for Jesus’ ministry prior to his passion.

In any event, the gospel makes the raising of Lazarus the greatest of signs. The gospel basically arranges the miracles so that the greater ones come later. In the penultimate miracle, the healing of the man born blind, we read, “Since time began, it was unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone who was born blind” (9:32). This miracle symbolizes the essential fact that Jesus is the one who gives us spiritual enlightenment. The final miracle in the gospel--the raising of Lazarus from the dead--is the greatest physical feat and the greatest pointer. Lazarus has been dead for four days; yet Jesus raises him, and this miracle points to the fact that Jesus is the one who can give us unending life. Because the raising of Lazarus is the greatest of signs, the gospel emphasizes that Jesus was glad that he was not present to save Lazarus from death. Raising Lazarus from the dead will give people faith. Jesus also stresses that this stupendous wonder glorified both him and his Father.

In the edited gospel, the story of Lazarus begins a section that continues until the end of chapter 12. Thus, the otherwise puzzling opening reference to Mary anointing Jesus must come from the editor, and its purpose is to tie these chapters together. The review in chapter 11 of an action that will not occur until chapter 12 unifies. In addition, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha all appear in both chapters, and much of the action occurs at their home.

The theme of this section in the edited gospel is that we must die with Jesus so that we may also rise with him. We see that theme announced in Thomas’s statement, “Let us also go that we may die with him.” To be sure, in the narrative these words are ironic, because Thomas will not have to die with Jesus at this time. Nevertheless, as so often in this gospel, a statement that is false in one sense is profoundly true in another. As these chapters will repeatedly insist, Jesus must first die for us, and then in response we must be prepared to die for him. If we die with Jesus, we will also rise with him, as

the resurrection of Lazarus suggests.

In the edited gospel then, these chapters stress that martyrdom is one ideal way to complete the Christian life. As we have seen, the editor arranged the gospel so it would reflect the stages of the exemplary Christian biography. We go from conversion to baptism to eucharist to committed discipleship. Some Christians then make the supreme sacrifice and willingly die for Jesus. In the edited gospel Lazarus acts as a martyr. Indeed, Lazarus gives up his life for Jesus twice. In the passage we are presently considering Jesus initially refuses to save Lazarus but deliberately waits for him to die. Then in the next chapter the Jewish authorities will decide to kill Lazarus because people are believing in Jesus because of him. We now understand why the edited gospel tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus and did not prevent his death. From the editor's perspective martyrdom is a great privilege. Those who die with Jesus immediately rise with him to eternal life. Jesus' love for Lazarus symbolizes his love for all who give up their lives for the gospel.

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*(11:17) On coming, Jesus found that he had already been in the tomb four days. (18) Bethany was near Jerusalem about two miles away. (19) Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them over their brother. (20) Martha when she heard that Jesus was coming met him, but Mary was sitting at home. (21) Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) Even now I know that whatever at all you ask God, God will give you." (23) Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." (24) Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." (25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even if they die will live, (26) and all who are alive and believe in me will not die ever. Do you believe this?" (27) She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, God's Son, he who was to come into the world."*

It appears that the editor added the material about Martha. As we have seen, the story of the raising of Lazarus contains a lot of oddities that suggest that the original miracle story has gone through a long history of theological reflection. The material about Martha seems to be an especially recent addition. In verse 45 we read only that the Jews had come to see Mary. Martha's name does not appear. Hence, when the evangelist wrote the story down, it apparently only concerned Lazarus and Mary. The editor subsequently inserted material about Martha. Perhaps the editor assumed that the "Mary" mentioned in the story corresponded to the "Mary" mentioned in Luke 11:38-42. In that story she has a sister named "Martha."

Like other early Christians, the editor believed in a two-stage resurrection. As N.T. Wright has shown (3:passim), the early church as a whole held that at death some dimension of the deceased departs and experiences preliminary salvation or damnation. Then on the last day Jesus would return in triumph, raise and gloriously transform the physical remains of the dead, reunite the "spirits" with their bodies, and

the righteous dead would reign with Christ on earth.

Depending on the pastoral situation, an early Christian writer could emphasize the preliminary fulfillment at death or the glorious final fulfillment at the physical resurrection. Thus, in 1 Corinthians Paul expresses concern about the sexual abuse of the body. Consequently, he emphasizes that our physical selves will be resurrected and omits all mention of the departure of the “spirit” at death (1. Cor. 6:13-20; ch. 15). By contrast, in Philippians Paul wishes to comfort his readers who will understandably be dismayed when they receive word that Paul may be executed. To instill joy in this grim situation, Paul emphasizes that he will experience preliminary fulfillment at death. Indeed, he insists that he would prefer “to depart and be with Christ, for that would be far better” than continuing on in this life (Phil. 1:23).

As we saw earlier, the editor emphasizes bodily resurrection in the sacramental section, since the sacraments themselves are physical realities that convey spiritual power (see the discussion of 5:24-29, 6:27-59 above).

By contrast, here in the section on martyrdom, the editor emphasizes preliminary fulfillment at death. Of course, if there is no preliminary fulfillment at death, martyrs are at a temporary disadvantage. Whereas the rest of us continue to enjoy our earthly lives, those who made the supreme sacrifice must wait for resurrection. Hence, here the editor stresses that death does not interrupt the lives of those who trust in Jesus. When Martha only expresses faith that her brother will rise on the last day, Jesus corrects her. Those who live and believe in him will never die. Through faith we begin an eternal relationship. God himself dwells in us, and God cannot die.

In this section Martha makes one of the great confessions of faith in the gospel. She declares not only that Jesus is the Messiah but also that he was the one who was sent into the world. In the larger context of the gospel this second confession must be a reference to the incarnation. Therefore, we should take the declaration that Jesus is “God’s Son” not merely as a claim that Jesus is the Messiah but as an allusion to his divinity and his eternal relationship to the Father.

Once again we see the pattern that women disciples in this gospel often play leadership roles. In chapter 4 the woman at the well brought people to Jesus, and he subsequently remarked to his disciples that they were merely harvesting the crop that the woman had sown (4:37-38). In the passage we are presently considering, a woman makes a major statement of faith.

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*(11:28) When she had said this, she went away and secretly called her sister Mary saying, “The teacher is here and is calling you.” (29) When she heard, she rose quickly and started to come to him. (30) Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still at the place where Martha met him. (31) When the Jews who were with her in the house and were consoling her saw that Mary rose quickly and went out, they*

*followed her thinking that she was going off to the tomb to weep there.*

*(32) When she came where Jesus was and saw him, Mary fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (33) When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became inwardly alarmed and troubled. (34) He said, "Where have you put him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." (35) Jesus cried. (36) So the Jews began to say, "See how much he cared about him!" (37) But some of them said, "Could not this fellow who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so this person would not have died?"*

This section repeatedly underlines the fact that Jesus deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. As we noted above, when Jesus received the urgent message from Mary and Martha that Lazarus was sick, he waited for two days and then informed his disciples that Lazarus had died. Subsequently, when Jesus did arrive Martha pointed out that if he had come sooner, Lazarus would not have died. Now in the passage we are presently considering, the complaint that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying appears two more times. Mary echoes Martha's words by reminding Jesus that if he had only been present Lazarus would still be alive. The crowd of mourners wonder why someone who healed a blind man could not have kept Lazarus from dying.

Yet, even as the text emphasizes that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus's death, it also continues to emphasize that Jesus loved Lazarus. This emphasis already appears at the beginning of the story. The message from Mary and Martha is that the person Jesus loves is sick. Then as the text stresses that Jesus deliberately waited before coming, it claims that Jesus did so because he loved Lazarus. Now Jesus' love for Lazarus becomes so visible, that even the other mourners remark about it. When Jesus sees Lazarus's tomb, he weeps, and the bystanders are moved to say, "See how much he cared about him!"

In the gospel, one reason that Jesus allows Lazarus to die despite this love is that Jesus needs to work the supreme sign of raising him from the dead. This sign will help produce faith both in the disciples and in the reader. Hence, Jesus tells the disciples that for their sake he is glad he was not present to prevent Lazarus from dying. Raising Lazarus from the dead will glorify God and help them believe.

As we have noted already, the edited gospel gives an additional reason why Jesus deliberately allowed Lazarus to die: Lazarus symbolizes the martyr, and martyrdom is a privilege. Those who die for Jesus will immediately rise to eternal life, and the raising of Lazarus symbolizes this fact.

The section we are presently considering introduces the disconcerting theme that Jesus was disturbed, and this emphasis will recur in other places in the section on martyrdom. Here we read, "he became inwardly alarmed and troubled," and a little later in the verse 38 we have, "Jesus again became alarmed inwardly." In chapter 12

Jesus will express similar emotions. Yet, to the reader this sense of alarm and struggle seems strange. Previously Jesus was always supremely confident, and subsequently he will return to this unflappable tranquillity.

In the edited gospel, one reason for this unexpected turmoil is that Jesus cannot give life to Lazarus without giving up his own. Thanks to the work of the editor, it is the raising of Lazarus that will force the authorities to kill Jesus (see the discussion of 11:47-53 below).

Here we have a theology of the atonement. Jesus can only give life to those who believe in him by dying himself and thereby demonstrating definitively the love of God. The bystanders remark that Jesus' tears show how much he loved Lazarus--and, by implication, the reader. But Jesus loved Lazarus and us more than they knew. As so often in this gospel, people express more truth than they intend.

The disquiet that Jesus shows in this passage may also be an admission from the editor that martyrdom is never easy. Jesus is the primordial martyr, and his death is the model that all Christian martyrs must imitate. We, at least, can never be fully prepared to die, because we have never died previously. Hence, when we prepare for martyrdom, we will inevitably be in turmoil. The gospel reassures us by recording that Jesus was in turmoil too.

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*(11:38) Jesus again became alarmed inwardly and came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay on it. (39) Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to him, "Lord, there is a stench already; it has been four days." (40) Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see God's glory." (41) So they removed the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you because you have heard me. (42) I myself knew that you always hear me, but I spoke on account of the crowd who are standing around so that they may believe that you are the one who sent me." (43) When he had said these things, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (44) The dead man did come out, his feet and hands tied in bandages and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go home."*

*(45) Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and had seen what he did believed in him. (46) But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*

The story now climaxes with dramatic details. Jesus orders the removal of the stone, and, after some hesitation, the bystanders comply. Then Jesus thanks God and commands Lazarus to come out. He immediately obeys even though he has been dead for four days and is still bound in the grave clothes. Jesus tells the bystanders to release him.



Despite all the drama, however, we see here the familiar theme that signs increase initial faith. Earlier we noted that in the Fourth Gospel signs help lead to conversion but only if some initial faith or, at least, openness is present. Thus, in chapter 2 the changing of water into wine confirmed the faith of the disciples, whereas the groom and the master of ceremonies did not even notice that a miracle had occurred. We see the same theology here. Jesus works the miracle to inspire faith. Yet, he only works the miracle after demanding at least some openness to the possibility that he can raise Lazarus from the dead. Martha and the other witnesses must be willing to remove the stone. Without that initial act of confidence in Jesus, they will not see God's glory. Of course, when they comply and Jesus raises Lazarus, many people believe. The miracle has produced conversion. But it has not done so in everyone. Others betray Jesus to the authorities, and, as we will see in a moment, the authorities then decide to kill him. The theology is clear: No sign--not even raising someone who has been dead for four days--will convert those who are already closed. On the contrary, the sign that inspires faith in those who are open to the truth will lead the enemies of Jesus to greater efforts to destroy him.

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*(11:47) Hence, the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled the Council and kept saying, "What are we doing, because this person is working many signs. (48) If we let him go on like this, everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and nation." (49) But one of them, Caiaphas, who was that year's high priest said to them, "You know nothing. (50) Do you not suppose that it is better for you that one person die for the people and not the whole nation perish!" (51) He did not say this on his own, but as that year's high priest he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, (52) and not for the nation only but also to gather the dispersed children of God together. (53) So from that day, they resolved to kill him.*

It is likely that this scene is basically historical. To be sure, the Fourth Gospel exaggerates the role of the Pharisees here. They had less power during the time of Jesus than when the evangelist was writing. Of course, we have no idea what was the source of information that the evangelist used. Presumably he was not himself present at a closed meeting of the Council. Perhaps he knew people who were. In chapter 18 the gospel will tell us that the disciple who gained Peter admittance to the courtyard of the high priest's palace was an acquaintance of the high priest himself (18:15-16). This disciple may even have been the evangelist. Perhaps the evangelist relied only on gossip. We should remember, however, that in an oral culture gossip tends to be accurate. When there are no written sources to consult, people make a great effort to keep oral information reliable. Perhaps, the evangelist had no source of information but was only making an educated guess concerning the Council's deliberations. Even so, the educated guess--if that is what we are reading--remains highly plausible. Before Jesus came to Jerusalem, the authorities would primarily

have known about him through reports based on popular rumors and perhaps informants. Such reports would have emphasized that Jesus was impressing people by working miracles, and he was proclaiming the coming of God's reign. The Council would have feared that Jesus would use his growing popular influence to incite a revolt and make himself king. The Roman government would respond by crushing the revolt, and in the process destroy the temple and the Jewish nation. If the Council members reasoned at all like this, they would have concluded that it might be necessary to get rid of Jesus at some point.

The evangelist attempts to describe the deliberations from God's perspective. The gospel does not only record what was discussed and decided at the meeting. The gospel also claims that the high priest unwittingly spoke prophetically. When Caiphas said that one man should die for the welfare of the whole people, he thought he was merely giving sage--we would say, cynical--political advice. Nevertheless, the evangelist insists that God inspired these words and that they primarily indicated that Jesus' death would bring atonement to the world.

When the gospel was written, this scene had an especially deep irony because from its perspective the decision to kill Jesus helped produce the catastrophe it was intended to avoid. The Jewish leaders had feared that Jesus would promote a revolt that would incite Rome to destroy the nation. Therefore, they resolved to kill Jesus. In fact, however, Jesus had been preaching love, and it was the rejection of that message that ultimately caused the Jews to revolt against Rome. That revolt ended with the temple being destroyed in the year 70. When the evangelist and editor wrote, the disaster had already occurred.

In the edited gospel this scene makes it especially clear that Jesus can only give life to others by giving up his own. Historically, it is likely that the violent demonstration in the temple forced the Jewish authorities to demand the death of Jesus, and the Romans complied. As we noted above in dealing with chapter 2, the editor moved the temple demonstration to an earlier part of the gospel. In the edited gospel, it is the raising of Lazarus from the dead that causes the authorities to decide to kill Jesus. The symbolism is clear. Lazarus is one of the people Jesus "loves" (11:3-5, 35-36), and Jesus can only give life to those he loves by dying on the cross.

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*(11:54) Hence, Jesus no longer went about openly among the Judeans but went away from there to the region near the desert, to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his students.*

The brief paragraph that we have here resembles the concluding paragraph to chapter 10. In both paragraphs Jesus responds to danger by withdrawing to a distant location. In chapter 10 this location is across the Jordan to the place where John the Baptist had initially worked. Now the location where Jesus takes refuge is a town named

Ephraim, perhaps in the vicinity of Bethel.

It may be that the editor added this paragraph after inserting the story of the raising of Lazarus. As we have seen, in the first draft of the gospel, chapter 10 probably concluded Jesus' ministry prior to the passion. The editor then added chapter 11. To conclude chapter 11 the editor imitated the end of chapter 10.

Be that as it may, in both paragraphs Jesus acts so that his death will occur at the hour appointed by the Father. He does not withdraw to escape death permanently. He has already repeatedly announced that he must die. His death, however, must occur at the proper hour, and that hour has not quite arrived.

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*(11:55) The Jewish Passover was near, and many went up from the countryside into Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. (56) They were seeking Jesus and kept saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think, that he will not come for the holiday?" (57) Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was must report it so they could arrest him.*

## Chapter 12

*(12:1) Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was whom Jesus had raised from the dead. (2) They made a dinner for him there, and Martha was serving. Lazarus was one of those who were eating with him.*

In the original gospel which the evangelist produced, this section must have introduced the passion and thus signaled the beginning of the book's climax. "Six days before the Passover" clearly draws our attention to the coming week that will culminate with the holiday. On the eve of the holiday Jesus will suffer crucifixion. As we saw above, the gospel opens with an initial week that climaxes with the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast. In the first draft of the gospel the opening and closing weeks balanced each other. The concluding verses of chapter 11 prepare us for the bold coming of Jesus to Jerusalem and all that will transpire subsequently. The crowds debate whether Jesus will dare to come for the celebration, and the authorities have already decided to kill him.

The editor all but eliminated the dramatic transition. To be sure, we still read that it is six days before the Passover and that people in Jerusalem are wondering if Jesus will come. Now, however, Jesus does not come into Jerusalem immediately, but only to nearby Bethany, and he is returning to where he was in the previous chapter. Once again he is with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The editor pointedly reminds us that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.

Earlier I suggested that the editor added Martha to material that was originally only about Lazarus and Mary, and that to do so drew on Luke 10:38-42. We see the same now. In this section Mary is the only one of the sisters who plays a significant theological role. She anoints Jesus. All Martha does is serve dinner, and in Luke 10:38-42 Martha also is serving dinner. Perhaps then the editor added a reference to Martha here by borrowing the motif of her serving from Luke.

In any event, by softening the transition between chapters 11 and 12 and explicitly reminding us that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the editor makes it clear that the section on martyrdom continues.

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*(12:3) Mary took a pound of ointment, nard in pistachio oil, very expensive and rubbed it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet off with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. (4) Judas Iscariot, one of his students, the one who would betray him, said, (5) "For what reason was this ointment not sold for three hundred days wages and the money not given to the poor?" (6) He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and kept the money box and used to take what was put into it. (7) Jesus said, "Let her be; let her keep it for the day of my burial. (8) You always have the poor with you; you are not always going to have me."*

All the gospels tell us about an incident in which a woman anointed Jesus, but there are many differences in detail (Mat. 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50). Luke places the incident during the early days of Jesus' ministry when he was still in Galilee. The woman is a sinner, and she anoints him not only with perfume but also with her tears. Her actions prompt Jesus to comment on her great love and declare that her sins are forgiven. On the whole, Mark, followed by Matthew, agrees more closely with John. All three gospels record that the incident occurred at Bethany during the last days of Jesus' life and that the woman was criticized for wasting expensive perfume that could have been sold to benefit the poor. Matthew, Mark, and John further agree that Jesus defended the woman by saying that the poor could be helped on another occasion, whereas the woman had anticipated his coming burial. Nevertheless, Mark followed by Matthew records that the woman anointed Jesus' head, whereas John agrees with Luke that the woman anointed Jesus' feet and then wiped them with her hair. John alone claims that the criticism of the woman came from Judas and that the incident occurred at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The other gospels state that Jesus was at the house of a man named Simon who was either a Pharisee or a leper.

It seems likely that historically a woman did anoint Jesus with perfume and that Jesus had to defend her. To some extent at least, the different accounts in the gospels must be independent and, therefore, the basic tradition is very old and goes back to something that actually occurred during the lifetime of Jesus. All the accounts agree

that a woman anointed Jesus, suffered criticism for her action, and Jesus defended her. This core must be historical. Of course, it may be that two incidents occurred and people later had difficulty remembering which details happened on which occasion.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, it seems at least likely that the woman's actions somehow resulted from the rashness of love and provoked very different reactions. Certainly, the act of pouring perfume over Jesus' head (or less probably, his feet) showed deep devotion. It may also have expressed the woman's conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. Literally, the Messiah is the "anointed." In any event, the anointing was an aggressive gesture. The bystanders questioned the prudence of what the woman did, but Jesus defended the motive.

The Fourth Gospel integrates this story into its introduction to the death of Jesus. The gospel places the event just before Jesus' dramatic entry into Jerusalem where he will suffer crucifixion. The conclusion of the story pointedly reminds us of what is to come by emphasizing that Jesus will not always be with us. The gospel tells us that the person who anointed Jesus was in fact Mary, Lazarus's sister and that the person who criticized her was none other than Judas. Moreover, Judas's comments only expressed greed, not genuine concern for the poor. Jesus defends Mary by referring to his own burial. Hence, the story previews themes, self-sacrificing love and self-serving hypocrisy, the perfidy of Judas and the burial of Jesus, that it will enlarge on in the coming narrative of the passion.

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*(12:9) The great crowd of Jews learned that he was there, and they came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he raised from the dead. (10) The chief priests resolved to kill Lazarus also, (11) because many of the Jews were deserting and believing in Jesus on account of him.*

Historically, it seems unlikely that the Jewish or Roman authorities intended to kill any of the followers of Jesus when they decided to execute Jesus himself. On the contrary, the gospel accounts suggest that the rulers wanted to avoid causing a commotion. The authorities hoped that if they could quickly kill Jesus his followers would melt away. Therefore, when they arrested Jesus, they did not detain any of his disciples. Even when Peter followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest and was recognized (despite his denials) to be a disciple, no one attempted to seize him.

Instead, it was after the resurrection that the authorities began to take action against Christians. Once it became clear that the Christian movement had not only survived the death of its founder but was rapidly growing, the authorities felt they must

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5        Brown, ( *The Gospel* 1:450-452) argues that Luke is referring to a different anointing than the other gospels are but that the oral tradition confused the details.

respond forcefully. Such action was especially imperative because the movement emphasized that the Jewish and Roman leaders had murdered its hero (e.g., Acts 5:27-28).

In the passage we are presently considering, Lazarus symbolizes the Christian missionary-martyr when the gospel was written. As we shall see later, in chapter 16 Jesus warns that his followers will suffer expulsion from the synagogue, and some will even be killed. Apparently these predictions had come true when the evangelist wrote. We must suppose that the Christians who got killed were primarily people who were converting others and posed a special threat to the church's enemies. Hence, the intended readers of the gospel would have seen the plot against Lazarus as a prefiguration of the tragic events of their own time. Just as in the past the chief priests had attempted to kill Lazarus for leading people to believe in Jesus, so they were attempting to kill Christian missionaries in the present.

In the edited gospel Lazarus symbolizes one culmination of the Christian life--dying for Jesus. As we have seen, the editor rearranged the gospel so that it would parallel the stages of the ideal Christian life. We have now come to martyrdom, and Lazarus illustrates this supreme conclusion to the spiritual pilgrimage.

The edited gospel suggests that the reason that we can die for Jesus is that he has already died for us. Christian martyrdom is a response to and an imitation of Jesus' own death. Earlier we noted that in the edited gospel Jesus can only give life to Lazarus by dying himself. It is when the Jewish authorities hear about the miracle that they decide to kill Jesus. Jesus weeps before raising Lazarus because Jesus knows what the consequence will be for himself. Now in the passage we are presently considering, Lazarus must die for Jesus. The theology is plain. If Jesus loved us enough to suffer torture and death to give us life, then we must love him in return--love him enough to suffer and die if that is what our witnesses to Jesus finally requires. Perhaps to emphasize the theology that the Christian martyr imitates Jesus, the description of the plot against Lazarus here has verbal parallels with the description of the plot against Jesus in 11:53.

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*(12:12) On the next day the great crowd who had come for the holiday heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem. (13) They took palm fronds and went out to meet him, and they kept shouting, "Hosanna! 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' [Psal. 118:26], even the king of Israel!"*

*(14) Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, (15) "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt" [cf. Zech. 9:9]. (16) His students did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus had been glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and that they did these things for him.*

There is every reason to believe that the incident recorded here actually took place, and John's version of it may in some respects be even more accurate than the versions found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Toward what was to be the end of his life, Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem and confront the nation with his message. That message was that God's kingdom was coming and that this rule had already begun in the miracles and preaching of Jesus himself. Consequently, in some sense Jesus was the expected Messiah, though he was not the military conqueror whom many expected. To dramatize both his messianic claims and to distance himself from the militaristic expectations that normally went with them, Jesus chose to enter (or, at least, approach) the city on a donkey. Earlier Solomon had ridden to his coronation on a mule (1 Kings 1:32-40), and Solomon's name means "man of peace," and traditionally he was seen as such. Subsequently, the prophet Zachariah had looked forward to the coming of the Messianic king who would be humble and bring universal peace. That king would enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech. 9:9-10). Hence, it was logical for Jesus to stage a demonstration in which he approached Jerusalem on a donkey as his followers acclaimed him, and all the gospels record that in fact he did so (Mat. 21:1-9, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:28-40). John adds the detail that crowds also went to meet him, and this detail is credible. Jesus could not have approached the city without causing a stir. He was known to be a miracle worker and rabble rouser. The populace would naturally have been curious as to what he intended to do, and at least some people would have come to see. It is also at least plausible that even though Jesus was deliberately acting out Zechariah's prophecy, his followers were not conscious of this fact at the time. A consistent feature of Jesus' personality as recorded in all the gospels is that he often acted prophetically but rarely explained what he was doing. Nevertheless, after the fact, his disciples could have easily realized that Jesus had deliberately acted to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy (cf. Mat. 21:5).

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*(12:17) The crowd who had been with him when he summoned Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead was testifying about this. (18) That was the reason the crowd came to meet him, because they had heard that he had done this sign. (19) The Pharisees said to each other, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has become his followers."*

In this brief passage the edited gospel continues the major themes and motifs that hold together the section on martyrdom and resurrection. We again have a reference to Lazarus--even though Jesus is no longer with him--and a reference to the "sign" that Jesus raised him from the dead.

The gospel now introduces the complementary theme that through his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus will bring salvation to the entire world. For the most part John's Gospel views the "world" negatively. The world is the realm of darkness which rejects Jesus and persecutes his followers. By contrast, here the world appears positive. To

the dismay of the Pharisees, the “world” (“cosmos” in Greek) starts to follow Jesus. The subsequent paragraphs will develop the idea that Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection bring new hope to the cosmos.

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*(12:20) Among those who were coming up to worship on the holiday were some Greeks. (21) These approached Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and made the request, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” (22) Philip came and spoke to Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and spoke to Jesus. (23) But Jesus in reply to them said, “The hour has come for the son of humanity to be glorified. (24) Truly, truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains all by itself, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

This passage continues the theme that through his death and resurrection Jesus will bring salvation to the world. Some “Greeks” wish to see Jesus. Apparently, these Greeks are also Jewish proselytes, since they have come to Jerusalem to observe Passover. Still, as “Greeks,” their arrival symbolizes the spread of Jesus’ message beyond the confines of Israel. Because salvation can only come to the world after the resurrection, these Greeks fail in their efforts to see Jesus. Philip and Andrew bring the request, but Jesus brushes it off. Like a grain of wheat, he must first be buried before he can bear fruit.

This passage contains a number of literary allusions to the conversion section which opens the gospel. Thus, in chapter 1 we first read about Andrew (1:40) and Philip (1:43) and that they both came from Bethsaida (1:44). In chapter 1 we saw examples of a conversion chain. Jesus calls someone who in turn summons a third person. Here in chapter 12 we have something like a conversion chain in reverse. The Greeks speak to Philip who in turn speaks to Andrew, and together they contact Jesus.

The reason that this passage alludes to the opening of the gospel is that we are now making a major transition from the ministry of Jesus to his death and resurrection. The gospel roughly falls into two halves. The first deals with the public ministry of Jesus and serves as a preface. In it we repeatedly read that Jesus’ “hour” has not come (e.g., 2:4). The second half of the gospel, beginning at 13:1 deals with the crucifixion and resurrection. In this section we repeatedly read that the hour has come (13:1, 17:1). The section that we are presently considering begins the transition. It directs our gaze backward by alluding to chapter 1 and by doing so ties the first half of the gospel together. But the passage also points us forward. For the first time Jesus announces that his hour has come.

We may note in passing that historically Christianity seems to have spread from the Jews to the Samaritans to the Gentiles and that at least symbolically the Fourth Gospel honors this fact. The Acts of the Apostles records that the first followers of Jesus were all Jews. Then thanks to the missionary work of Philip, many Samaritans joined the



church ( Acts 8:4-25). Finally, due to the preaching of Peter and, especially, Paul, Gentiles flocked to the faith. We find the same progression in the Fourth Gospel, though to be sure it is projected back into the ministry of Jesus. In the opening chapters everyone who believes is Jewish. Then in chapter 4 Jesus converts the woman at the well and her fellow Samaritans. Now in chapter 12 “Greeks” become interested in Jesus, and he looks forward to mass conversions (“much fruit”) after his death.

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*(12:25) “Those who love their lives lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will preserve them for eternal life. (26) If anyone serves me, let them follow me, and where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor them.*

The gospel exhorts its readers to imitate the suffering and death of Jesus in order to receive Jesus’ reward. By accepting crucifixion, Jesus himself will obey the Father’s summons, convert the world, and go to heavenly glory. The gospel exhorts us to do the same. If we resist God’s call to lay down our lives, we will finally come to eternal death. By contrast, if we follow Jesus by giving up our lives, we will join him in eternal life and share in his honor.

Of course, in the edited gospel this emphasis is especially appropriate here in the section devoted to martyrdom.

We may note in passing that this passage is a johannine meditation on a saying of the historical Jesus. In the synoptics Jesus frequently proclaims that those who save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives will save them (Mat. 10:39, 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 17:33). This widespread attestation all but guarantees that some version of the saying comes from Jesus himself. The form in Luke 17:33 (“whoever seek to gain their lives will lose them, and whoever lose their lives will keep them”) seems especially close to what Jesus must have said, since it had no explicit reference to dying for Jesus or the gospel. Instead it has a paradoxical ring which fits well with Jesus’ regular style of speaking. The Fourth Gospel has then assimilated this basic saying to a larger theology by contrasting losing life in this world to gaining eternal life. In this gospel eternal life comes from being with Jesus. The Father honors those who follow Jesus by giving them life.

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*(12:27) “Now my soul is troubled, and what am I to say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? On the contrary, it is for this that I came to this hour. (28) Father, glorify your name.” A voice came from heaven, “I both glorified it and will glorify it again.” (29) The crowd, who was standing by and heard it, began to say that there had been a clap of thunder; others began to say, “An angel has spoken to him.” (30) Jesus in*

*reply said, "This voice was not for my sake but for yours. (31) Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. (32) And if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." (33) In saying this he was revealing figuratively what sort of death he was about to suffer.*

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that immediately prior to his arrest Jesus prayed that he would not have to suffer and die, but he also prayed that God's will would be done (Mat. 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:41-42). According to Mark, Jesus first said, "'Abba' (Father), 'all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me'", but then he added, "Nevertheless, do not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36).

Even a skeptic will concur that historically Jesus must at least have asked to be spared, since the church would not have invented such a request. The church subsequently concluded that Jesus' gruesome fate had brought salvation to the world and had been part of God's eternal plan. Writing only two decades or so after the crucifixion, Paul took it as an indisputable foundation of Christian faith that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). The memory that Jesus had asked to be spared stood in stark contrast with this later faith and must be historically accurate.

In the passage that we are presently considering, we have John's version of the tradition that Jesus prayed that he would not have to suffer but also prayed that God's will would be done. John later omits the tradition that immediately before Jesus' arrest he made such a prayer. At that time Jesus accepts the "cup" of agony without hesitation (18:11). Here, however, the words "what am I to say, 'Father save me from this hour'? on the contrary, . . . Father, glorify your name," follow the pattern of Jesus seeking to avoid suffering but nevertheless accepting God's will. Hence, these words surely are a remembrance of the agonizing request Jesus later makes in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Because it looks back at the incident from God's point of view, John's Gospel makes Jesus' decision to accept suffering a triumphant victory over the world. Historically, Jesus' plea to escape suffering expressed terrified hesitation over the agony that appeared to be coming and reflected uncertainty over what the Father's will might be. The gospel, however, looks back at the event with the faith that through the death of Jesus God overcame the forces of evil. God always intended for Jesus to die, and the Eternal Word who became incarnate always accepted this fate without demur. Consequently, in this passage there is no hint of any agonizing indecision. Jesus expresses only momentary hesitation and then immediately glorifies the Father and proclaims the defeat of the world. To help make it clear that it is writing from God's point of view, the gospel employs the literary device of a heavenly voice. In ancient Jewish writings, a heavenly voice often expresses the writer's own viewpoint about what God's perspective is.

This passage continues the theme that the death of Jesus overcomes the world and destroys the power of Satan. By his death Jesus will be "lifted up." Of course, we have a pun. Jesus will be physically raised on the cross. The passage points forward to the

manner of Jesus' death. Jesus will also be lifted up in the sense of "exalted." By his death, Jesus will draw all people to himself.

It is not easy to reconcile the statement here that Jesus will draw all people to himself with the pessimism about the "world" in the rest of the gospel. Elsewhere John's Gospel stresses that even after the crucifixion and resurrection the world will despise and persecute his followers (e.g., 15:18-16:2). Indeed, just a couple of verses before this very passage we read that we ourselves must hate our "lives in this world" (12:25). Yet here Jesus claims that his "exaltation" (i.e., his death and resurrection) will somehow draw "all" people, and this statement appears to mean that ultimately everyone will turn to him and find eternal salvation.

Perhaps the passage is simply asserting that every human being always has the freedom to accept the love that the cross reveals. The cross demonstrates that there is nothing—absolutely nothing—that we can do that will keep God from loving us. As the Fourth Gospel repeatedly insists, God did not send Jesus to condemn us (3:17, 12:47). Therefore, the only question is whether we will respond to that love. But past hardness of heart never forecloses the possibility of future repentance. Jesus is always inviting all people to come to himself, and everyone always is free to accept the invitation.

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*(12:34) The crowd replied to him, "We ourselves heard from the Law that the Messiah is going to stay forever. How it is that you are saying that the son of humanity must be lifted up? Who is this 'son of humanity'?"*

Literarily this misunderstanding plays a dual role. On the one hand, the misunderstanding expresses the evangelist's own thoughts on why people in Jesus' day (and the evangelist's) did not accept Jesus. On the other hand, the misunderstanding challenges the reader to come to a deeper perception of who Jesus is.

The evangelist suggests that Jesus' contemporaries could not accept him because he was both the triumphant Messiah and the suffering son of humanity. The crowd protests that the Messiah must remain forever and expresses bewilderment that Jesus is talking about the son of humanity being lifted up. Here "the crowd" represents Jesus' Jewish contemporaries and, by implication, the orthodox rabbinic community of the evangelist's own time. They could not accept Jesus because he was not a worldly success. According to them, Jesus as the "Messiah" should have played a superhuman role in history, probably by liberating the Jews from Roman rule and reigning forever. In fact, however, Jesus suffered and died as a vulnerable human being, and the basic meaning of the idiom "son of humanity" is a (mere) human being.

The evangelist invites the Christian reader to recall that it was precisely through suffering and dying as a human being that Jesus conquered the world and will eternally reign over it. At his death Jesus was “lifted up,” and, as we noted above, “lifted up” has the double meaning of physically suspended from the cross and exalted as ruler over all. By accepting crucifixion as a vulnerable human being, Jesus revealed God’s love for the world, returned to heavenly glory, gave us his followers a model to imitate, and, as we shall see, bestowed the Spirit. Hence, through his death he truly fulfilled the role of Messiah and even satisfied the crowd’s demand that he must reign “forever.”

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*(12:35) Jesus said to them, “The light is going to be among you a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness does not grasp you. Those who walk in the darkness do not know where they are going. (36) While you have the light, believe in the light so you become children of light.” Jesus said these things and went away and hid from them.*

This section brings to a conclusion the theme that time has run out for Jesus’ contemporaries to believe. Jesus has already given several warnings that his audience must accept his proclamation soon. For example, in both 7:33-34 and 8:21 Jesus warned that he was about to go away and that subsequently his audience would no longer be able to find him. Now Jesus issues a final warning. The light will remain only a little longer, and his hearers must believe immediately. Then Jesus hides, and this hiding symbolizes that the real Jesus will remain hidden from this group. The reader suspects that the opportunity for Jesus’ original audience to believe is over. The evangelist’s subsequent reflections over why Jesus’ audience could not accept him (see below) confirm the reader’s suspicion.

The reason it is now too late for Jesus’ original audience is that his death is imminent and subsequently only those who are able to perceive him in the Spirit will be able to believe. Since his original audience could not even believe when Jesus was physically visible, there is no hope that they will believe when only his Spirit remains.

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*(12:37) Although he had done so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. (38) It was so the word that Isaiah the prophet spoke would be fulfilled, “Lord, who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the power of the Lord been revealed?” [Isa. 53:1].*

*(39) This was the reason that they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, (40) “He has blinded their eyes and closed their mind, so they would not see with their eyes and understand in their mind and turn back that I might heal them” [Isa. 6:10]. (41) Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him.*

A major problem for any missionary community is to explain why so many do not accept the message. The fact that outsiders--especially, if some of them appear to be sincere, intelligent, and well informed--do not find the message convincing inevitably raises the question of whether the community of faith itself should continue to believe. Hence, the community must come up with some rationale as to why outsiders are blind to the truth.

One way the early Christians tried to explain why so many Jews rejected the gospel was to claim that this rejection was part of God's mysterious plan and Isaiah had predicted it. Thus, near the end of the Acts of the Apostles Paul summons the Jewish community to his residence and preaches, but some remain skeptical. Paul then cites one of the same passages from Isaiah that we have here (Acts 28:23-27; Isa. 6:9-10). The implication is obvious: The unbelief of many Jews does not undermine the reliability of the Christian proclamation because Isaiah had foreseen it.

Of course, in making the same point here, the evangelist was not merely explaining the unbelief of Jesus' contemporaries but also the unbelief of people when the gospel was written.

Today we may doubt whether Isaiah foresaw what would happen centuries later. It now seems clear that biblical prophets--like most prophets in all times and places--were primarily concerned about their own present and immediate future. Isaiah, for example, was struggling with the unbelief of his contemporaries.

Nevertheless, Isaiah's problems with his contemporaries illustrate the perennial truth that most people initially fail to appreciate the spiritual breakthroughs of their time. Prophets, as Jesus pointed out elsewhere (e.g., Mark 6:4; for John 4:44 see above), seldom have honor in their own town. To this we might add, prophets seldom have honor in their own era. Normally it is only in retrospect that people generally recognize the validity of an important new spiritual perspective. Today it is undeniable that the unbelief of so many in the first century did not ultimately discredit the gospel. On the contrary, Christianity is now the largest religion in the world. The theme in this section of the gospel that Jesus would draw the world to himself has in large measure proven to be true.

By stressing that the time has run out for outsiders to believe, the evangelist signals that the first half of the gospel is now ending. In the first twelve chapters Jesus spent much of his time preaching to the world. In the second half of the gospel Jesus will preach to his disciples and prepare them to continue his work after his death.

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*(12:42) All the same, even many of the leaders believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not admit it lest they be expelled from the synagogue. (43) For*

*they loved the approval of human beings more than the approval of God.*

These verses probably do not describe the situation during Jesus' own lifetime. Matthew, Mark, and Luke never suggest that a large group of Jewish *leaders* sympathized with Jesus. It was only after the resurrection that a number of priests converted to Christianity (Acts 6:7). Moreover, during Jesus' lifetime the Pharisees while popular among the common people did not control the Jewish community. Therefore, the "leaders" would not have been afraid of them. As John's Gospel itself makes clear in the subsequent account of the death of Jesus, it was the high priest and his supporters who were in charge, especially in Jerusalem. The high priest and his supporters were Sadducees (Acts 5:17).

Instead, these verses address the situation of the Jewish community when the evangelist wrote. After the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt and destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 70, the highpriesthood collapsed. Thereafter the Pharisees gradually assumed control over the Jewish community. In the process they began excommunicating Jewish Christians. Apparently, to avoid excommunication, some Christians--including ones who were prominent in the synagogues--chose to keep their faith secret.

Here the evangelist issues a warning to all who might be tempted to hide their loyalty to Jesus. Such people value human approval more than God's. The reader cannot help adding that it is God who will be our final judge.

We may note in passing that in this passage, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the primary choice each person must make is whom to follow. Modern Americans often talk as if our primary choice is whether or not to obey our own consciences. Such rhetoric reflects the individualism of our culture. Even in our culture, however, what employer, pastor, or relative we normally obey is probably much more important than whether we are listening to our consciences. In any case, the first century emphasized community rather than individualism. In keeping with this emphasis, the gospel insists that its readers must choose between being part of the synagogue and obeying its leaders or being part of the church and obeying its leaders. Of course, the evangelist presupposes that God favors the church.

We may also note in passing that this passage suggests that as human beings we must have approval but can choose whose approval we value. Because of our individualism, Americans often talk as if we do not need approval. Ironically, we say such things hoping that people will approve. By contrast, first-century Mediterranean culture taught people to be sensitive to public opinion. Hence, the evangelist simply assumes that even Christians must constantly have approval, but they can choose to seek that approval from God and from fellow Christians.

*(12:44) Jesus shouted, "Those who believe in me do not believe in me but in him who sent me, (45) and whoever sees me sees him who sent me. (46) I have come as light for the world so that everyone who believes in me may not remain in darkness. (47) If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not pass judgment myself. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. (48) Those who disregard me and do not accept my words have their judge. The word that I spoke will itself judge them on the last day. (49) For I did not speak on my own. On the contrary, the Father who sent me has himself given me a command as to what I am to say and to speak. (50) And I know that his command is eternal life. What I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me."*

This section does not fit its context and was surely added by the editor. In the larger context, Jesus has just hidden himself, and the evangelist just commented on the impossibility of further conversions. Yet in the passage itself, Jesus is shouting to some group, presumably with the hope of converting it. I suspect the final editor did not actually compose the text but instead took it for some other document (a sermon?) by the evangelist. This hypothesis would at least explain why the passage is in the same literary style as the remainder of the gospel.

In its present context, the passage serves to bring the first half of the gospel to a conclusion by summarizing its principal themes. Thus, this brief section reminds us that Jesus came not to judge the world but to save it. He is the light because he obeys the Father, and it is the Father who speaks through him. Therefore, Jesus reveals the Father perfectly. Those who disregard Jesus disregard God himself. At the last judgment they will have to explain their conduct. By contrast, those who see Jesus and listen to his words in fact see and hear the Father. Consequently, they begin a new and deeper relationship with God and have already entered into "eternal life." It would be difficult to produce a more concise and comprehensive summary of the major points we have seen so far.

By ending with a reference to eternal life, the passage also brings the section on martyrdom and resurrection to a close. As we have seen, in the edited gospel chapters 11-12 comprise a section with the theme that those who die for Jesus will immediately rise to eternal life. That section begins with the death and resurrection of Jesus' friend Lazarus. The reference to eternal life in the summary passage we are presently considering helps tie the entire section together and also suggests that the section is over.

Even this summary of the gospel's distinctive thought, however, is based on a saying of the historical Jesus. In Matthew 10:40 Jesus says, "Those who receive you receive me, and those who receive me receive the one who sent me," and we have an independent version of the saying in Luke 10:16. The saying also appears later in John's Gospel itself (John 13:20). When the passage we are presently considering insists that those who believe in Jesus or who see him actually believe in and see God, it is simply extending the meaning of what Jesus himself taught.

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## Chapter 13

*(13:1) Before the Passover holiday Jesus knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, and, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

This verse serves as the introduction to the second half of the gospel. In the gospel's first eleven chapters we read repeatedly that Jesus' hour has not yet come. This refrain appears first in the story of the changing of water into wine. When Mary points out the shortage of wine, Jesus makes the enigmatic comment, "Lady, your concern is not mine. My hour has not yet come" (2:4). We have similar passages elsewhere. For example, in 7:30 we read, "They [the Jewish authorities] were seeking to arrest him; yet, no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." Then in chapter 12 we start a transition. Andrew and Philip tell Jesus that some "Greeks" (apparently Greek-speaking Jews from overseas) are seeking to speak to him. Jesus solemnly announces, "The hour has come for the son of humanity to be glorified" (12:23). Yet, this announcement is still preliminary. Only a few verses later Jesus declares, "The light is going to be among you a little longer" (12:35). Now in the passage we are presently considering the transition occurs. Jesus knows that his hour has come.

This introduction makes it clear that his hour--which we know to be the crucifixion--will have two dimensions. It will be the occasion for Jesus to leave the world and return to the Father, and it will be the occasion on which he will show the full extent of God's love. The Greek which I have translated loved them "to the end" implies both dimensions since it can mean "to the last possible moment" and "to the greatest possible degree."

In the subsequent chapters the evangelist will explore the implications both of Jesus' return to the Father and definitive revelation of God's love.

Jesus will now concentrate on his students and save the world through them. The previous chapter stresses that the world finally rejected Jesus' own preaching. This introductory verse to the second half of the gospel stresses that it is to the disciples ("his own") that Jesus will manifest the full extent of God's love. Subsequently, the world will have to learn about that love through them.

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*(13:2) When supper was going on and the Devil already had it in mind that Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, would betray him, (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come forth from God and was going*



away to God, (4) rose from supper and removed his clothes and took a linen towel and tied it around himself. (5) Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the students' feet and to wipe them off with the linen towel which was tied around him. (6) He came to Simon Peter who said to him, "Lord, you are washing my feet!" (7) Jesus in reply said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now; you will know afterwards." (8) Peter said to him, "You will not wash my feet ever!" Jesus replied to him, "Unless I wash you, you are not going to have any share with me." (9) Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and head!" (10) Jesus said to him, "Those who have bathed have no need to wash anything except their feet but are completely clean. And you people are clean, but not every one of you." (11) He knew who was betraying him. For this reason he said, "You are not all clean."

(12) When he had washed their feet, he put on his clothes and again took his place and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? (13) You call me 'teacher' and 'lord,' and rightly, for that I am. (14) Hence, if I, the lord and teacher, washed your feet, you too should wash one another's feet. (15) I have given you an illustration that, just as I did for you, you also are to do. (16) Truly, truly I tell you, slaves are not greater than their masters nor are apostles greater than him who sent them. (17) If you understand these things, you are going to be blest if you do them. (18) I am not talking about all of you. I know whom I chose. But it was so the scripture would be fulfilled, 'He who chewed bread with me lifted up his heel [as an insult] against me' [Psalm 41:9]. (19) Now I am telling you before it happens so that when it does happen you may believe that I am the one. (20) Truly, truly I tell you, whoever receives anyone I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

It seems unlikely that Jesus washed his disciples' feet at the last supper. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe Jesus' final meal with his disciples in some detail. Yet, none of these gospels records that Jesus washed feet on that occasion.

Nevertheless, I think it is likely that Jesus did wash his disciples' feet at some point. The gesture of a teacher washing his student's feet was shocking. Indeed, there is a Jewish tradition that one thing a Jewish slave could not be expected to do was wash the master's feet. When, thanks to the resurrection, the early church concluded that Jesus was the Lord of the universe, the thought that he washed people's feet became even more shocking. The historical Jesus, however, loved to shock people in order to reveal the startling depths of God's love. Whether Jesus was touching a "leper" (Mark 1:40-42) or telling a story honoring a hated Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus revealed God's compassion and call in astounding ways. As we have repeatedly noted, John's Gospel seems to have access to information--especially about Jesus' early ministry in Judea--that Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not possess. Consequently, it seems more likely that Jesus actually washed his disciples' feet than that someone made up the story. The fact that subsequently at least Christian widows were expected to have "washed the feet of the saints" (1 Tim. 5:10) suggests that the early church

remembered and imitated what Jesus himself did.

I suspect that before the editor intervened, the Fourth Gospel included an account of the institution of the eucharist at this point. Of course, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that at his final meal with the disciples Jesus said that the bread and wine must now represent his physical body and be the way he would remain present to his followers after his death (Mat. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20). Paul knew the same tradition (1 Cor. 11:23-25). We must assume that the early church as a whole was well aware that Jesus had instituted the eucharist at his last meal with the disciples and the church regarded this fact as of utmost importance. Moreover, there is specific evidence that the Fourth Gospel once had an account of Jesus here at the last supper declaring that the bread and wine were his body and blood. In John's narrative of the last supper we have a quotation from a psalm, "He who chewed bread with me lifted up his heel against me" (Psal. 41:9). John's version of the quotation is strange because it includes the striking and rare Greek word for "chew" or "munch," whereas the original Hebrew and the standard ancient Greek translation have the normal word for "eat." Elsewhere in John's Gospel the verb "to chew" occurs only at the climax of the bread of life sermon in chapter 6 (6:54, 56, 57, 58). That climax emphasizes that we must munch Christ's flesh and drink his blood and is stridently eucharistic. Earlier we saw that this climax does not fit with the rest of the sermon. Hence, I would suggest that in an earlier edition of the gospel it appeared in the account of the last supper and the evangelist inserted the rare word "chew" into Psalm 41 to blend in with this material.

In line with the overall goal of rearranging the gospel to mirror the Christian life, the editor apparently removed explicitly eucharistic material from the account of the last supper and transferred it to the bread of life sermon in the gospel's eucharistic section.

In the unedited gospel both the footwashing and the institution of the eucharist probably occurred together. The evangelist apparently wanted to have a section on sacraments. Therefore, before an account of Jesus instituting the eucharist the evangelist inserted an account of Jesus washing feet. The story is full of baptismal symbolism. A bath that we must undergo to have a "share" with Jesus can only be baptism. It is especially noteworthy that Jesus strips and ties on a towel. We know that in the second and third centuries Christians took off their clothes and were baptized naked (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21). I suspect, however, that in the first century when the evangelist wrote, Christians tied on a temporary covering immediately after undressing. The first-century church was still predominantly Jewish, and the ancient Jews found nakedness far more embarrassing than the Gentiles did. In chapter 21 of John's Gospel Peter also is naked and ties on a garment. As we shall see, that scene too symbolizes baptism.

To suppress the baptismal symbolism, the editor added a section which reinterpreted the footwashing as an invitation to serve one another as Jesus served us. Thus, in the edited gospel, immediately after the footwashing we have a section in which Jesus tells

his disciples that since he has washed their feet, they must wash each other's feet. This section clashes with Jesus' previous comment that not all the disciples were clean. Moreover, this immediate explanation of why Jesus washed feet does not fit well with his solemn declaration that Peter would only understand "afterwards" (i.e., after the crucifixion and resurrection).

It is probable that the editor also added the words, "Truly, truly I tell you, whoever receives anyone I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." This passage too clashes with the surrounding material, all of which concerns the betrayal, and if we omit the saying, the text reads smoothly. The saying that whoever receives one of Jesus' disciples also receives him appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Mat. 10:40, Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48; 10:16), and other early Christian tradition echoes it (e.g., Didache 11:4). Because of such wide attestation, it certainly goes back to Jesus himself. Hence, the editor felt free to add it.

The editor's additions make it clear that the theme of this section in the final version of the gospel is that we must take Jesus' place in the world. As we have already seen, chapter 13 begins the second half of the gospel, and in this section Jesus returns to the Father. The opening of chapter 13 sets the literary tone, and here the editor added passages that insist that we must take Jesus' place in this world. Since Jesus washed our feet, we now must wash one another's. Anyone who receives those Jesus has sent out receives Jesus himself. As we shall soon have occasion to note, the rest of the second half of the gospel--and especially, the material that the editor added--also insists that because Jesus has departed we must now become Jesus for one another and the world.

The gospel stresses, however, that we cannot take Jesus' place in the world until we first accept the unmerited gift of his dying for us. Our self-sacrifice in washing one another's feet can only be a response to Jesus' prior manifestation of God's undeserved love for us. The passage we are presently considering underlines the greatness of God's gift and the unworthiness of those who receive it. Before narrating the footwashing, the evangelist reminds us that Jesus is Lord of all things and even knew that Judas would betray him. Yet this same Jesus washes his disciples' feet. Understandably Peter is shocked and protests. Nevertheless, Jesus insists that unless he washes Peter's feet, Peter cannot share in his ministry. For the reader the point is obvious: Unless we accept God's undeserved love for us, especially as that love was revealed on the cross, we will never be able to become Jesus for others.

The edited gospel makes it clear that becoming Jesus for one another is an alternative--and even better--conclusion to the ideal Christian life than martyrdom. Of course, dying for Jesus is one exemplary conclusion to our lives. But God only calls some people to be martyrs. God calls the rest of us to live for Jesus to such an extent that we in effect become Christ in this world. By placing the section on becoming Christ for one another after the section on martyrdom, the editor seems to be claiming that dying for Jesus may be glorious, but living for Jesus is more glorious still.

Contrary to the editor's intention, the passage we are presently considering actually enriches the sacramental theology of the gospel by suggesting that both baptism and eucharist point forward to taking Jesus' place in this world. The editor intended to suppress the sacramental symbolism here but did not succeed. Jesus stripping and washing his disciples' feet remains baptismal, and Jesus' final meal with his own remains eucharistic. Instead, the edited passage suggests that even if baptism and (first) eucharist occur at the beginning of our Christian life, they also find their logical fulfillment in its climax.

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*(13:21) When he had said this, Jesus was inwardly troubled and testified, "Truly, truly I tell you that one of you will betray me." (22) The students looked at each other in doubt about whom he was talking. (23) One of his students, the one Jesus loved, was leaning by Jesus' chest. (24) Simon Peter signaled to him to inquire who it might be he was talking about. (25) So, since he was lying by Jesus' breast, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?" (26) Jesus replied, "He is the one for whom I will dip a piece of bread and give it to him." He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. (27) And after he ate the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do it fast." (28) None of those who were eating knew for what reason he spoke to him. (29) Some thought, since Judas kept the money-box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy what we need for the holiday" or that he was to give something to the poor. (30) When he had taken the piece of bread he left at once. It was night.*

It is a historical fact that one of Jesus' inner circle betrayed him. All the gospels as well as the Acts of the Apostles record that Judas went to the authorities and guided the party who arrested Jesus (e.g., Mat. 26:47-50, Mark 14:43-46, Luke 22:47-48, John 18:2-5, Acts 1:16-17). These same sources insist that Judas was a member of the "twelve," a core group who apparently served as symbolic heads of the twelve tribes of the New Israel which Jesus was creating. The tradition that one of Jesus' closest followers had turned against him was no credit to the church, and Christians would not have invented it.

The details of the betrayal and its aftermath remain unclear, probably because the early Christians did not know them. Thus, the gospels give us no explanation as to why Judas decided to go to the authorities, and we have conflicting accounts of what Judas did with the money which they ultimately paid him. Matthew claims that Judas returned the silver and committed suicide (Mat. 27:3-10), whereas the Acts tells us that Judas used the funds to buy a piece of land and shortly thereafter perished in a bizarre accident (Acts 1:18-19). All the accounts agree that Jesus somehow announced the betrayal at the last supper (Mat. 26:21-25, Mark 14:18-21, Luke 22:21-23) but differ on the specifics. In Mark and Luke Jesus never singles out Judas as the betrayer, whereas in Matthew he does (Mat. 26:25).

Perhaps at the last supper Jesus only announced that any one of the disciples might betray him. After the demonstration in the temple, Jesus clearly was doomed. One purpose of the last supper, including the institution of the eucharist, was to prepare his followers for the horrors to come. Under such circumstances it would have been logical for Jesus to warn that each of them might be tempted either before or after his death to disown him. All of the gospels record that Jesus said something like this and that, not surprisingly, those who were present asked themselves whether they might possibly be the one.

As we would expect, the Fourth Gospel tells the betrayal from God's viewpoint. God realized from the very beginning that Judas would betray Jesus, and God always intended to use that betrayal to save the world. Already in 6:64 we read that Jesus knew who would betray him.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in John's account of the last supper Jesus is fully in control. He identifies Judas and even tells him not to delay. Of course, the disciples do not initially understand. Judas then literally and symbolically abandons the light and journeys out into the darkness. The arrival of the darkness fulfills Jesus' earlier predictions (9:4, 11:9-10).

The passage we are presently considering explicitly introduces the Beloved Disciple, and this figure will play a major role in the gospel. Previously the Fourth Gospel never identified him. At most there is a veiled reference to him in chapter 1. The unnamed disciple who shared with Andrew the honor of being the first to follow Jesus is probably the Beloved Disciple (1:35-40; see above). Now, however, we have an explicit reference. The person next to Jesus' chest is the disciple Jesus loved, and it is to him that Jesus reveals the betrayer. Subsequently, as we shall see, the Beloved Disciple will turn up at several major points of the narrative, including the crucifixion and the finding of the empty tomb (19:26-27, 20:2-10).

In my opinion, the primary reason why the Beloved Disciple only appears in the second half of the gospel is that historically he lived in Jerusalem. He probably became a follower of Jesus when Jesus himself was in Judea working alongside John the Baptist (see the discussion of 1:35-42 above). When the Baptist was arrested and Jesus returned to Galilee, the Beloved Disciple remained behind. Then when Jesus went to Jerusalem for the final time, the Beloved Disciple rejoined his old teacher. Because the Beloved Disciple lived in Judea, the Fourth Gospel which he wrote records far more about what Jesus did in the South than what he did in Galilee.

An additional reason that the Beloved Disciple appears only in the second half of the gospel is that he symbolizes taking Jesus' place in the world. In the edited gospel, the second half of the book describes the highest stage of the Christian life, namely,

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6        The fact that in the edited gospel the betrayal first appears in chapter 6 is another indication of the possibility that the editor transferred eucharistic material from the last supper to that chapter.

becoming Jesus for others now that Jesus himself has returned to the Father. The Beloved Disciple models this role. Thus, at the cross the Beloved Disciple will become Mary's son in place of Jesus (19:25-27), and in chapter 21 Jesus will declare that the Beloved Disciple must abide in this world until Jesus himself returns (21:20-23). The fact that the gospel never names the Beloved Disciple but instead identifies him by his relationship to Jesus fits his role as the ideal follower who ultimately replaces him in this world.

It seems likely that it was the final editor who added the explicit references to the Beloved Disciple. In each scene where the Beloved Disciple explicitly appears there are literary or historical problems (see below). Here we may only note that historically it is unlikely that the Beloved Disciple played such an important role at the last supper. Naturally, he may well have been present, but we may doubt that he was next to Jesus and it was to him that Jesus identified the betrayer. All the other gospels describe the last supper, and none of them mentions a figure who can plausibly be identified with the Beloved Disciple. By contrast, it was the editor who rearranged the gospel so it would mirror the stages of the ideal Christian life. Hence, it seems likely that the editor introduced the Beloved Disciple and by doing so caused the literary and historical problems.

In introducing the Beloved Disciple the editor idealized a real person. The Beloved Disciple must have been a historical personage and not merely a literary symbol. In chapter 21 the editor will tell us that the Beloved Disciple wrote (the first version of) the gospel and implies that his unexpected death shocked the community (vss. 23-24). Literary symbols do not write gospels and die unexpectedly.

One way that the editor idealized the Beloved Disciple was by constantly portraying him as one step ahead of Peter. We see that pattern in the passage we are presently considering. The passage pairs the two individuals since together they ask who the betrayer will be. Peter signals to the Beloved Disciple to inquire, and the Beloved Disciple complies. Nevertheless, the superiority of the Beloved Disciple is evident. The Beloved Disciple lies next to the heart of Jesus.

Together the Beloved Disciple and Peter symbolize respectively the ideal disciple and the typical one. In the gospel the Beloved Disciple serves as our role model. We are to strive to imitate his exemplary conduct. He represents what we are called to become. By contrast, Peter represents us as we already are with our aspirations and our weaknesses. Therefore, we learn from Peter's mistakes as well as his triumphs.

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*(13:31) When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the son of humanity is glorified, and God is glorified in him. (32) If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once.*

At the time, the crucifixion seemed like a catastrophe to the disciples. Luke captures their reaction well. When shortly after the crucifixion an apparent stranger asks two of them about Jesus, they become sad and express extreme disappointment. They had vainly hoped that he would redeem Israel (Luke 24:13-21).

Of course, as a result of the resurrection experience--including the coming of the Holy Spirit--the church quickly concluded that the crucifixion was part of God's eternal plan to save the world. Thus, in 1 Corinthians Paul quotes a statement of faith which he himself had received from the earliest Christians. According to it, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

John's Gospel brings this triumphalism to a climax by holding that the crucifixion was the supreme moment of glorification both for the Father and for Jesus. The subsequent chapters will spell out in detail why the cross is so glorious.

Here we may only note that, as usual in John's Gospel, the Father and the Son glorify each other and invite the believer to enter into that relationship. Thus, this passage stresses that Jesus by his death will glorify the Father and in response the Father will glorify Jesus. Of course, as we will soon learn, the mutual glorification includes bringing people into proper relationship to the Father through Jesus.

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*(13:33) Little children, I am going to be with you only a little longer. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going you cannot come' [7:34, 8:21], I now say to you as well. (34) I give you a new command, to love each other, just as I loved you. You are to love each other too. (35) By this all people will know that you are my students if you have love for each other."*

*(36) Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later." (37) Peter said to him, "Lord, for what reason can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!" (38) Jesus replied, "You will lay down your life for me? Truly, truly I tell you, the rooster will not crow until you deny me three times."*

There is a literary problem in these verses. The saying about a new commandment interrupts the flow of the larger passage. If we omit the saying, Peter's question as to where Jesus is going follows directly from Jesus' declaration that where he is going Peter and the others cannot come now.

I would suggest that the editor added the saying about the new commandment to help emphasize that the final stage of the ideal Christian life is to become Christ for each other. As we have already seen, the editor added similar material earlier in the chapter. Thus, in the footwashing scene the editor inserted the saying that since Christ washed their feet, the disciples must wash one another's feet. In the passage we

are presently considering, we have the same thought, only expressed more globally. Since Jesus is going away, the disciples must take his place by loving one another as he loved them.

Later we will consider the possibility that the editor took the saying about a new commandment from a sermon the Beloved Disciple once gave, a sermon that now appears in chapters 15-16. There too we read that Jesus commands us to love one another (15:12, 17)

In keeping with the larger structure of the gospel, this passage emphasizes that it is through the love that the disciples have for each other that the world will see the love of God. In the first half of the gospel Jesus often preaches to the world but has only limited success. During that preaching he repeatedly warns his audiences that he will soon go away and they will no longer have direct access to him (7:33-34, 8:21), and this passage reminds us of those warnings. Near the end of chapter 12 the evangelist emphasizes that at least Jesus' compatriots basically rejected him (12:37). Nevertheless, the evangelist also stresses that Jesus will ultimately draw all people to himself (12:31-32). Jesus then turns his attention to the disciples. Now we learn that it is through the love that Jesus' followers have for one another that he will reveal who God is and convert the world.

It is historically certain that shortly after Jesus' arrest Peter denied being one of his followers. This disturbing incident appears in all the gospels (Mat. 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-62, John 18:25-27). It was no credit to the church that one of its principal leaders temporarily disowned Jesus, and Matthew and Luke elsewhere glorify Peter. Early Christians could not have made up the story.

The gospels all claim that Jesus at the last supper predicted that Peter would disown him (Mat. 26:33-35, Mark 14:29-31, Luke 22:31-34), but it is hard to know whether the prediction is historical. Thus, on the one hand, as Jesus faced imminent arrest due to his protest in the temple, he may have warned his disciples of the dangers to come. Peter may have responded by boasting of his future faithfulness regardless of what might happen. Jesus then may have insisted that it was precisely this arrogant self-confidence that would be Peter's undoing. On the other hand, since it knew of Peter's subsequent denial, the early church could easily have imagined that Jesus foretold it.

The passage we are presently considering continues the theme that before we can serve Jesus we must accept his undeserved love for us. This theme appeared in the footwashing. There Peter was also unwilling to let Jesus take the initiative by giving him unmerited help. Peter protested when Jesus came to wash his feet, and in response Jesus insisted that unless Peter first allowed Jesus to serve him, Peter could not be part of Jesus' community. Here we have a similar thought. Jesus in effect tells Peter that Jesus must suffer and die first. Only then can Peter "follow" with a similar self-sacrifice. Peter in reply insists that he is already prepared to die for Jesus. Jesus predicts Peter's denial. Since, as we noted above, Peter serves as a symbol of the



typical disciple, the point is obvious. In our lives too, we must accept God's undeserved love revealed in Jesus. Only through that love can we begin to live as Jesus did.

Because accepting God's love as revealed in Jesus allows us to love more fully, Jesus can insist that he is giving a "new" command in telling us to love each other. Strictly speaking, the command to love is not new. The Old Testament commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). What is new is that Jesus--especially by his death on the cross--allows us to begin to love others as completely as Jesus himself did.

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It would appear that the evangelist himself wrote the long speeches that fill chapters 14-16. To be sure, the gospel places this material in the mouth of Jesus. Nevertheless, both Greek historical writing and the Biblical tradition customarily composed speeches and attributed them to characters in the narrative. Since the speeches here in John's Gospel are in the same style as the rest of the book and differ greatly from the way Jesus speaks in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we must assume that the evangelist himself composed them. Of course, as we saw earlier, the same basically holds for the previous speeches in the Fourth Gospel.

The speeches we will now be considering undoubtedly express the heart of the evangelist's theology. As we have seen, the gospel falls into two halves. In the first half we keep reading that Jesus' "hour" has not yet come, and in the second that it has. This organization suggests that the first half is basically a preface. The core of the evangelist's message concerns Christ's hour. The discourses we are now going to consider interpret that "hour" and are "farewell" speeches. Farewell speeches were a staple of ancient histories and remain important today. Such speeches typically attempt to interpret both the past and the future and concentrate on what is crucial.

The speeches here will especially attempt to draw out the implications of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

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## Chapter 14

*(14:1) "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. (2) In my Father's house there are many resting places. If there were not, I would have told you, because I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am going to come back and take you along to my home that where I am you too may be.*

In his preaching, the historical Jesus emphasized that God would soon vindicate him and his message, but Jesus did not specify the details. For example, in Mark 9:1 Jesus declares, "There are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power." Jesus obviously predicts that within the lifetime of his original followers God would do something dramatic to demonstrate that what Jesus said was true. The kingdom he preached would come "in power." But Jesus gives no specifics. We get a similar message in the parables about the master returning (e.g., Mat. 25:14-30). Something dramatic will occur, and people will be rewarded or punished on whether they followed Jesus, but the details remain vague.

What is clear is that Jesus expected that somehow his preaching and the movement he began would both change subsequent history and help people have life after death. By his preaching he was inaugurating a new Israel (see below), and, naturally, this new Israel would continue to exist in this universe. Yet, Jesus also looked forward to some sort of salvation for the dead. The dead would be judged on whether they had been faithful to his message. Thus, Jesus warned that the Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh would be relatively well off at the judgment because they listened to Solomon and Jonah. By contrast his hearers faced the danger of final condemnation because they were rejecting Jesus' proclamation even though "something greater" was present (Mat. 12:41-42, Luke 11:31-32).

After Jesus' resurrection, however, the church concluded that soon he would return and physically restore the dead to life and visibly reign on earth. At present, the spirits of the dead are with Jesus and experience some preliminary fulfillment. Nevertheless, they await final resurrection on earth, and this resurrection is imminent. We find this heady vision in much of the New Testament. For example, in 1 Thessalonians--perhaps the earliest book in the New Testament--Paul assures his readers that at any moment, and certainly within their own lifetimes, Jesus would return, raise the dead, and then "we the living" would be caught up with them and meet Jesus in the clouds (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Subsequent events proved that this more specific hope was at best drastically premature. Decades, centuries, and millennia passed, and Jesus did not return to raise the dead and visibly inaugurate his kingdom.

What did happen was that Christians continued to feel empowered by the Spirit of Jesus and continued to convert the world and make their mark on history. Even as the hope that Jesus would return faded, Christianity went on to become the dominant religion of the Roman Empire and ultimately the largest religion on earth. Church history has been chequered, and often Christians have committed crimes of various sorts. Yet many Christians have followed the leading of Jesus and done wonderful things and transformed history in positive ways.

John 14-17 is one of the first attempts to rethink what the church should claim about

eternal life in light of the failure of previous hopes that Jesus would soon return physically. Of course, as we saw, in the sacramental section the gospel itself repeats the earlier hope that “at the last day” Jesus would raise the dead (5:28-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54). The editor apparently still clung to the old expectation. The evangelist, however, was moving on to a different vision of eternal life—a vision that would be closer to subsequent Christian teaching that we leave our bodies at death and go to be with God forever in “heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

The passage we are presently considering emphasizes that Jesus will indeed give his followers eternal life in communion with himself but that life is not on earth. Jesus has gone ahead of us to get things ready. In due course, he will bring us into final blessedness, including his own life-giving, loving presence. Where he is, we will be. To be sure, we continue to read about Jesus’ return, but now that return is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit we will have a new relationship with God that is the beginning of “eternal life.” The present passage makes it evident that this salvation will not culminate in some post-mortem rising to physical life on this earth. Jesus will instead take us away to the resting places in his Father’s house.<sup>8</sup>

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*(14:4) “And you know the way to where I am going.” (5) Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (6) Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one is coming to the Father except through me. (7) If you people have come to know me, you will also know my Father. And from now on you do know him and have seen him.” (8) Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content.” (9) Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you people for so long and you have not known me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to*

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7 Of course, in theory classical theology continued to affirm that there would also be a physical resurrection on judgment day. In practice, however, the church focused on the individual “soul” going to heaven or hell (or purgatory) at the moment of death.

8 It is true that literally “resting places” are temporary abodes. On the basis of this meaning Wright argues that the present passage implies a future physical resurrection (3:446). In this context, however, I would prefer to see the literal meaning of “resting places” as a linguistic fossil of an earlier faith that the evangelist has quietly dropped. We have an analogy in the contemporary convention of continuing to say “going to heaven.” Literally, this phrase means entering a physical location above the stratosphere. In the distant past that literal meaning reflected what people actually believed about where people’s souls went at death. The fact that we continue to use the phrase, however, does not imply that we still endorse its literal content. Of course, I agree with Wright that the canonical (i.e., the edited) gospel of John does affirm future physical resurrection on earth at the “last day.”

*you people I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*

The gospel now summarizes its principal theme, namely that we can come to know the Father through Jesus because Jesus is the self-expression of God. Of course, this theme appears already in the opening of the gospel. There we read that Jesus is the Word of God who became incarnate and made God himself known. In the passage we are presently considering, Jesus returns to this theme. Those who have seen him have in reality also seen the Father since the Father dwells in Jesus and works through him. Hence, Jesus is the way to the Father.

In the larger context, this passage suggests that we know we have eternal life because we know who Jesus is. Jesus in the previous verses assured his followers that he was going to his Father's house, and now he assures them that they know the way. When Philip protests that they do not know it, Jesus replies that he himself is the way. The theological implication is evident. We do not first believe in eternal life and then believe in Jesus. Instead, we first have a relationship with Jesus, and, when we discover who he truly is, we realize that through him we have eternal life. Since Jesus is divine, he is eternal; therefore, our relationship with him must be eternal also.

One reason that the gospel can claim that we only know about eternal life through Jesus is that the gospel believes that the primary blessing of eternal life is being with Jesus in the Father's love. Later the gospel will describe this blessing in more detail.

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*(14:11) "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or else believe on account of the works themselves. (12) Truly, truly I tell you, those who believe in me will do the works that I do, and they will do even greater ones than these because I am going to the Father.*

The historical Jesus claimed that he was inaugurating the kingdom of God. Thus, in a famous saying, Jesus declared, "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). By the "kingdom of God" Jesus meant a new era in which Israel and then the world would know God more intimately and serve him more faithfully. The Old Testament prophets had sometimes looked forward to an era of justice and peace in which everyone would obey God from the heart and be filled with the Spirit. In that glorious time people would know God fully (e.g., Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus believed that this wonderful day was beginning with him. Hence, he chose the twelve who were the symbolic heads of the renewed Israel, and he probably believed that ultimately the entire world would join this community (Mat. 8:11).

Of course, during his lifetime Jesus' ragtag movement did not appear to be the beginning of a new era. His critics ridiculed Jesus as a "glutton and drunk, a friend of

tax-collectors and sinners” (Mat. 11:19) and dismissed his followers as nobodies. In response to such skepticism, Jesus offered three pieces of evidence to substantiate his startling claims. First, there was the proclamation itself. Just as the preaching of Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the preaching of Jesus was a sign to the people of his generation (Luke 11:29-30). Next, there were the miracles that Jesus performed. These confounded his critics who were reduced to making the implausible claim that he worked them by the power of Satan (Mark 3:22). Since the church would never have invented that charge, it must be historical. Finally, Jesus pointed to his followers. Whoever received his disciples received him (e.g., Luke 10:16).

At the resurrection the early church experienced Jesus as Lord of the universe and in his name began to do marvels. The risen Jesus whom the disciples met was not merely the human being they had once known. Instead, he was filled with a mysterious divine power and exercised the very authority of God. Then in the name of Jesus the disciples began to speak in tongues, work miracles, and convert the world.

To justify the gospel’s claim that in Jesus we see God, the passage we are presently considering looks both backward and forward. It invites us to consider what Jesus himself claimed and to consider the things he did, perhaps especially the miracles. We should believe in Jesus both because of his words and his works. The passage also invites us to believe in Jesus because of what his followers later do in his name. Those who believe in Jesus will do even greater works than he performed and thereby demonstrate that he has gone to the Father and reigns at his side.

The claim that the followers of Jesus do even greater works than he did fits in well with the editor’s theology that at the highest spiritual level we become Jesus for each other in this world.

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*(14:13) “Whatever at all you ask in my name, I will do it in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.*

The historical Jesus liked to speak in extremes. He would say things like, “If your eye causes you to fall into sin, throw it away” (Mark 9:47). “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move” (Mat. 17:20). “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom” (Mark 10:25).

It is difficult to know how to interpret such wild statements. The gospel accounts suggest that even at the time people were puzzled. Thus, according to Mark, after Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to squeeze through a needle’s eye than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom, the disciples protested and Jesus explained that with God all things were possible (Mark 10:26-27). Subsequently, Christians have continued to struggle with Jesus’ “hard” sayings and come up with various

explanations of what Jesus was claiming and how we should attempt to respond to such claims.

My own view is that Jesus formulated his extreme statements by concentrating on what God was like rather than on what was practical for human beings. Jesus believed that through his own ministry God was revealing his final will for human beings and at least starting to give us the power to perform it. Hence, through Jesus we are to begin being perfect as God himself is perfect (Mat. 5:48).

To apply such statements to this imperfect world, we too must concentrate on God. We certainly should not attempt to implement the extreme statements by some superhuman effort on our own part. Rather, we must see them as God's final goal for our lives and ask God to begin to transform us. Then we should surrender to the transformation as it occurs.

One of the extreme statements Jesus made was that God would give us whatever good thing we request. Thus, according to Matthew, Jesus insisted that just as a father would always give his children food if they asked, so God will always give us the "good things" we request (Mat. 7:7-11).

It is noteworthy that Luke tries to explain this statement by substituting the "Holy Spirit" for "good things" (Luke 11:13). Apparently, Luke realized that God does not always give us whatever good things we request. Luke explained the statement by insisting that God will at least always respond positively to our sincere prayers by deepening his own saving presence in our personal and communal lives. As Luke emphasizes in the Acts of the Apostles, the gifts of the Holy Spirit include joy and peace and the ability to endure hardship.

The passage we are presently considering shares much of Luke's perspective. Here as in Luke we have an adaptation of Jesus' declaration that God will give us whatever we ask. John's Gospel, however, transfers the promise to the period after Jesus' departure. It is as Jesus prepares to return to the Father that he now pledges that whatever the disciples ask in his name he will give them. In a moment the gospel will go on to discuss the coming of the Holy Spirit and how she will mediate the presence of Jesus himself. Later the gospel will insist that the Holy Spirit will give the disciples peace and joy and the ability to endure hardship (see below). Clearly then John like Luke feels that regardless of whether God gives us the specific things we request in prayer, he always responds by deepening his loving, empowering presence in our lives.

What is a special emphasis in John's Gospel is that the Father and the Son glorify each other when they answer our prayers. The verses that we are discussing now stress that Jesus will glorify the Father by giving us what we ask. Elsewhere the gospel will make the contrasting point that the Father will glorify the Son by giving us what we ask in Jesus' name (15:7-8, 16:23-24).

*(14:15) "If you love me, you will keep my commands. (16) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, (17) the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not perceive her or recognize her. You are going to recognize her, because she will live with you and will be among you. (18) I will not leave you to be orphans. I am coming to you. (19) In a little while the world is going to perceive me no longer, but you are going to perceive me, because I am alive, you will be alive too. (20) On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am among you. (21) Those who have my commands and keep them are the ones who love me. And those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." (22) Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said to him, "Lord, how is it that you are about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" (23) Jesus in reply said to him, "If anyone loves me, they will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make for ourselves a home with them. (24) Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words, and the word which you hear is not from me but from the Father who sent me.*

The edited gospel invites us to read this passage on two levels. On the one hand, the passage looks forward to the experience of the early church that after Jesus' physical departure his "Spirit" came to those who remained faithful to his teaching. With that Spirit these early believers received new wisdom and vitality. On the other hand, the passage concerns the final stage of spiritual maturity in which Christians are fully one with Jesus through the Spirit and take his place in this world now that he has departed.

Regardless of which level we are considering, the key to what happens is love. Thus, it was through love that the early church received Christ's Spirit. The Fourth Gospel emphasizes that during his earthly lifetime both the supporters and enemies of Jesus heard him and understood at least who he was claiming to be. During this period Jesus warned that he was going away and that subsequently his critics would no longer be able to find him. Now we read that after the resurrection only those who love Jesus will welcome his Spirit and recognize her for who she is. The world which could not recognize who Jesus truly was even when he was physically present will see him no more. By contrast, through the Spirit Jesus and the Father will come and dwell in anyone who still loves them. Hence, through the Spirit the church continued to know Jesus after his physical departure. Yet, at the same time it is through love that a disciple can reach the final stage of spiritual growth in which we take Jesus' place in this world. If we love him, he will dwell in us.

The gospel makes it clear that the love that the gospel requires includes both self-sacrifice and faith. Jesus emphasizes that the love he is discussing inevitably includes keeping his commands. Basically, the Fourth Gospel has only two commands. The first is to believe in Jesus as the incarnation of God. The second is to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Such love includes serving one another as Jesus did when he

washed his disciples' feet and laying down our lives for one another as Jesus did when he died on the cross.

By emphasizing that we can only know the truth by loving Jesus, the gospel reassured its original readers. They were a persecuted minority and, according to their opponents, were sadly deluded. Therefore, the readers needed an explanation as to why they rather than their critics had the truth. The evangelist reassured them by insisting that the truth can only be had by those who love Jesus.

In the edited gospel this passage explains why people at the highest stage of spiritual growth achieve certainty. Through love the Father and the Son dwell in believers. Mature Christians know God as directly and fully as they know themselves.

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*(14:25) "I have spoken these things to you while I was staying with you. (26) The helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, she will teach you all things and will remind you of all that I said to you.*

After the resurrection the early church saw the teaching of Jesus in a new perspective. Jesus himself had preached that God's kingdom was coming, and he looked forward to some decisive event that would vindicate his message. At the resurrection the first Christians met Jesus again, but the Jesus they met was Lord of the universe. The church concluded that God had already begun the vindication of Jesus by raising him from the dead and making him ruler of the cosmos. Hence, in its proclamation the church emphasized that Jesus was the universal savior rather than that the kingdom of God was coming.

This reinterpretation of Jesus' message took place in the power of the Spirit. The early church believed that even though Jesus himself had risen from the grave and was now with the Father in heaven he still abided with his followers on earth through the Holy Spirit. In the power of that Spirit the early church spoke in tongues, worked miracles, thought about the future--and thought about the past, especially the life of Jesus and its significance.

The passage that we are presently considering emphasizes that it was also the Spirit who led the church to reinterpret who Jesus was. Jesus--speaking for the evangelist--declares that the Spirit will teach the church all things and remind it of what Jesus said. The implication is clear: Only through the Spirit did the church understand fully and accurately what God had done in Jesus.

Of course, in this passage the gospel is also implicitly telling the reader how it came into being. The passage claims that the Spirit would teach the disciples about everything, and later the gospel will emphasize that one of the disciples who was with Jesus at the time wrote this book (21:24). Consequently, the book is now revealing to



us how its own understanding of Jesus originated.

One implication is that readers will only be able to evaluate the truth of the gospel if they themselves have the Spirit. The gospel is not claiming that what it reports about Jesus accords with what anyone at the time could have verified or even what anyone could have noticed in retrospect. It is insisting that the Spirit guided the gospel's own interpretation. Hence, to accept that the gospel is true, we must also accept that the Holy Spirit can indeed lead people to discover the truth both about what happened in the past and about God. Such faith in the Spirit normally only comes to people when they themselves welcome her into their own lives. Accordingly, the gospel suggests that only readers who have received the Spirit (or at least are willing to receive her) will be able to know that what the book claims is true.

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*(14:27) "Peace I leave for you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (28) You heard that I said to you, I am going away and I am coming to you [14:2-4]. If you loved me, you would have been glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.*

This passage looks forward to two different situations. First, as it clearly states, it previews what would happen to the original disciples in their immediate future. Jesus will go to the Father and then return to the church in the Spirit. So the first Christians did not need to be afraid when the crucifixion took place. Second, the passage comments on the situation in the evangelist's day and in all subsequent Christian centuries, including our own. The Jesus who has returned to the Father abides with us in the Spirit. So we too need not be afraid.

The passage makes the bold claim that we are in a much better position to know Christ than the disciples were during his own ministry. Jesus emphasizes that the disciples should be glad that he is going away. Once he goes to the Father, he will assume a new authority. The Father, Jesus declares, is greater than he. The implication is evident. By going to the Father Jesus will play an even greater role in subsequent history. He will also become more present in his disciples' lives. He will come to them. Since Jesus' Spirit remains among those who continue to love him, the gospel seems to claim that two millennia later we too can know Jesus more deeply than his disciples did when he was on earth.

The passage stresses that through this intimate knowledge we will have a unique peace, one that exceeds anything that the world can give.

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*(14:29) "And now I have told you before it happens, that when it does happen you*

*may believe.*

The historical Jesus believed that he was inaugurating the kingdom of God and that soon this kingdom would come in power. He insisted that at present the kingdom was hidden but active and growing. It was like yeast in a mound of flour (Mat. 13:33) or like a seed that grows by itself (Mark 4:26-29). Soon God would do something dramatic. Like a master returning from a journey (e.g., Mat. 25:14-30) God would take charge, and a new era of history would begin.

It seems likely that Jesus predicted that with the coming of the kingdom the Holy Spirit would be available to his followers in a new way. Some of the Old Testament prophets had looked forward to a dramatic outpouring of the Spirit (e.g., Joel 2:28-29). Jesus' own teacher John the Baptist predicted that the coming Messiah would baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit (e.g., Mark 1:8). There is every reason to assume that Jesus shared such expectations. Certainly in the gospels Jesus predicts that the Holy Spirit will one day speak through his followers (e.g., Mark 13:11).

It also seems likely that Jesus shortly before his death looked forward to being reunited with his disciples. Matthew and Mark record that at the last supper Jesus declared that he would no longer drink wine again until the day when he would drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25, Mat. 26:29).

The passage we are presently considering emphasizes that Jesus' prediction of the Spirit's advent came to pass, and, therefore, provides additional evidence that God was at work in him.

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*(14:30) "I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world is coming. He has no hold over me, (31) but it is so the world may know that I love the Father, and just as the Father commanded me, so I do. Rise, let us go from here.*

Before the editor intervened, this passage must have concluded Jesus' farewell speeches and been a crucial expression of the evangelist's thought. In this brief section Jesus insists that he will no longer talk much. He then refers to his coming arrest and tells the disciples that it is time to get up and leave. Surely, at this point Jesus stopped speaking in an earlier version of the gospel. Since conclusions normally recapitulate central ideas, this brief passage must encapsulate an important dimension of the evangelist's theology.

In this climactic passage the evangelist, speaking from God's viewpoint, emphasizes that the crucifixion expressed Jesus' triumphant love for the Father. Of course, at the time when the crucifixion occurred, it appeared to be total defeat for Jesus. The rulers of this world--such as the high priest Caiaphas and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate--had swept Jesus away, and all his claims had come to nothing. Behind these

earthly rulers stood the Ruler of this wicked world, Satan. It seemed that Satan had won. The original conclusion to the farewell discourses stressed the opposite. Since Jesus was God incarnate, Satan had no power over him. Instead, Jesus deliberately chose to suffer and die. The Father had asked him to do so. Such obedience definitively revealed both Jesus' love for the Father and their love for the world. The evangelist felt certain that this triumphant love would in the end overcome both the fallen cosmos and its demonic lord.

Obviously, it was only subsequent Christian preaching and this very gospel that made the world aware of the love that the cross expressed. The bystanders and enemies of Jesus who saw his death did not at the time perceive his total love for God shining through the crucifixion. But the Beloved Disciple and his community subsequently did, and they began to proclaim the true meaning of the cross to the world. This book itself then helps fulfill its own prediction that through the cross the world would come to know Jesus' total self-giving to the Father and the implications of that self-giving for all subsequent human history.

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Even though the editor added chapters 15-16, the evangelist may have written them. That the editor inserted this material is clear. As we noted above, the farewell discourses must once have ended with Jesus declaring that he would not have much more to say and with his command to rise from dinner and go. Nevertheless, the style of chapters 15 and 16 resembles the remainder of the gospel. Therefore, the editor either succeeded in imitating the rest of the book or--perhaps more likely--took material from other writing by the Beloved Disciple. One attractive guess is that the writing in question was a sermon.

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## Chapter 15

*(15:1) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser. (2) Every branch on me that does not bear fruit, he removes, and every one that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will bear more fruit. (3) You are already pure because of the word that I have spoken to you. (4) Stay in me as I stay in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit on its own but only if it stays in the vine, so neither can you unless you stay in me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches. Anyone who stays in me, as I stay in them, bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not stay in me, they will be thrown out as a branch and will wither, and people will gather the branches and throw them into the fire, and they will burn. (7) If you stay in me and my words stay in you, ask for whatever you want, and it will be yours. (8) By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my students. (9) Just as the Father loved me, I also have loved you. Stay in my love. (10) If you keep my commands, you will stay in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and stay in his love.*

Within the biblical tradition the vine and the vineyard symbolize the people of Israel and the Holy Land. For example, in Psalm 80 we have a long allegory about God removing a “vine” from Egypt, replanting it among the nations, and so forth (Psalm 80:8-16). Similarly, in Isaiah 5:1-7 we have a song about a vineyard. Toward the end of the song we read that the “vineyard of the Lord” is the “house of Israel.” The same symbolism occurs in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus told a parable about a man who planted a vineyard and leased it out to tenants who then ultimately killed the owner’s son. Here we have another allegory in which Jesus predicts his own violent death, and in the allegory the vineyard is Israel and its land (e.g., Mark 12:1-9).

As the inaugurator of the new Israel, Jesus probably would have had no problem with the image of himself as the vine and his followers as branches, even if the present passage comes from the evangelist. Jesus chose twelve followers who symbolized the heads of the twelve tribes of the renewed Israel which he was bringing into being. It is noteworthy that Jesus did not include himself in the twelve. Instead, he apparently stood outside--and above--those he had chosen. To use the language of the passage, he was the vine, and they were the branches. That said, it is clear that the evangelist--not Jesus himself--wrote the passage, since it fits his style and resembles the many other “I am” sections in the gospel.

The passage emphasizes that after the resurrection we will bear fruit but only if we allow the Spirit of Jesus to continue to work through us. He is the vine; we are the branches. If we remain in him, he will accomplish great things in us. We will bear much fruit. Jesus will give us everything we need to insure that we do so. If, however, we forsake Christ, we will accomplish nothing positive and begin the path to eternal ruin. We will wither and ultimately burn.

By allowing Jesus to work through us, we will take his place in this world. After the resurrection Jesus no longer bears fruit on his own. He bears fruit through his disciples. It is now through us that Jesus will glorify the Father.

Once again the gospel emphasizes that we bear fruit by accepting God’s love for us and extending that love to one another. The Father loves Jesus, and Jesus then passes that love to us. We must abide in that love. The way we abide in that love is by keeping Jesus’ commandments. Of course, one of these is to love others as Jesus loved us.

The claim that without Jesus we can do nothing seems exaggerated today but accords with the gospel’s larger claim that Jesus is the primary revelation of God’s love and that we honor the Father by honoring Jesus. Today, at least in the United States, we increasingly embrace religious pluralism. As our own society becomes more diverse, we recognize more and more the virtues of non-Christian faiths and philosophies. We must also admit that non-Christians often express the love that John’s Gospel itself makes the hallmark of knowing God. Still, the exclusivism of John’s Gospel in many ways continues to make sense. By becoming human and suffering death by torture,

the eternal Son revealed the Father's love in an unparalleled way, and to honor the Father fully we must accept that most costly gift and let it transform our lives.

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*(15:11) "I have spoken these things to you so that my joy may be among you and your joy may be made full. (12) This is my command that you love each other, just as I loved you. (13) No one has greater love than this, to lay down their life for their friends. (14) You are my friends if you do what I am commanding you. (15) I no longer say that you are slaves, because slaves do not know what their master is doing. I have said that you are friends, because all that I heard from my Father, I made known to you. (16) You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you would go and bear fruit and your fruit would last, so that whatever at all you ask the Father in my name he will give you. (17) This is what I am commanding you, to love each other.*

This passage stresses that no love can be greater than that which the Father through Jesus has shown for us. Among human beings no one can show greater love for friends than dying for them. Jesus showed that complete love for us. And Jesus' love has a dimension that even such exemplary human self-sacrifice lacks. As the gospel emphasizes elsewhere, the love of Jesus is a direct expression of God's own love.

Such love tells us everything that we need to know about God. In this passage Jesus insists that "all" that the Father revealed to him he in turn has revealed to us. Of course, this "all" does not include a knowledge of nuclear physics or auto mechanics. Such things, while valuable, do not tell us who God is. "God is love," the First Epistle of John insists (1 John 4:8, 16). Once we know that God is love, we know many other things about him and his plans for us. For example, we know that he will bring us to eternal life, because God's own love for us will never end.

The passage insists that through the knowledge that God's love reveals we become God's "friends." A servant labors in ignorance, simply obeying the master's orders. As a result, a servant can never share fully in the master's life. By contrast, friends relate as equals, and in principle there is nothing that they cannot share.

In the edited gospel, this section suggests that the final stage of Christian growth and the ultimate goal of every Christian life is to become the friends of God. We must begin our Christian lives as servants or students. As noted above, we start by answering Jesus' call to come and see. Then we go on to accept the humbling fact that God's grace must now come to us through the physical signs of sacramental water and bread and wine. Ultimately, though, we come to know God fully through love, and in that love we relate as partners. We become God's friends. In Christian history such perspectives from John's Gospel led to the doctrine of deification--through Jesus we become divine.

As God's friends we take Jesus' place in this world. We love others as he loved us.

In response to such gifts and such a call, we have the fullness of joy. Such joy is not something that we deserve or even achieve. We did not choose Jesus--he chose us. He has supreme joy--the joy that comes from knowing God fully in love and revealing that love to the world. We can share in that joy by surrendering to God's love and allowing it to transform us into God's friends and into Jesus' substitutes in this world.

Perhaps because we are filled with joy, our embodiment of the gospel will bear lasting fruit. At least much Christian witness does not produce enduring benefits. One reason for this failure is that many Christians do not have true joy. Such joy cannot come from the mere affirmation of dogma but only from surrendering to God's unmerited love, the love shown on the cross. True Christian joy is supremely attractive, and those who manifest it have an enduring impact on the world.

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*(15:18) "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were part of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not part of the world, since I called you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you, 'Slaves are not greater than their masters' [13:16]. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they had kept my word, they would keep yours also. (21) But they will do all these things to you because of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

For the Gospel of John, the "world" consists of those social forces that dominate the present age. The "world" is not primarily the physical universe. The gospel has little to say about matter and does not regard it as evil. Indeed, the gospel declares that the eternal Word became flesh (1:14). Instead, the "world" consists of the human beings and, especially, the institutions that control everyday life in the present.

As such, the world has the potential of accepting the gospel, and, consequently, the Gospel of John sometimes regards it positively. The gospel insists that God loves the "world," Jesus died for it, and through that death everyone has the possibility of becoming his followers (3:16, 12:31-32). Sometimes in the gospel even large crowds, even the leaders of society, seem interested in Jesus and enthusiastic about him. At one point the Pharisees lament "the world has become his followers" (12:19), and at another the gospel claims that many of the "rulers" believed (12:42).

Nevertheless, the experience of the community from which the gospel came was that the world persecuted it. In the passage we are presently considering, Jesus predicts this persecution. Since the evangelist tried to write the farewell speeches from God's point of view, we must assume that this prediction corresponds with the experience of the church to which he belonged. Earlier passages make it clear that this persecution included expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogues (9:22, 12:42). In a

moment we will see that tragically it also included murder.

Because of this frightening experience, the gospel usually regards the world as fundamentally evil, and the present passage illustrates this viewpoint. Here the gospel claims that the world will inevitably hate Christians. The world loves only its “own.” Christ called his disciples out of the world. Therefore, the world will almost of necessity hate and persecute them, just as it hated and persecuted Jesus.

To mainstream Christians living in the United States today, such pessimism and negativity can sound strange. Naturally, we know that Christians suffer rejection and persecution in many other places. In the United States, however, Christians often control much of the “system,” and when we do not, the power structures normally treat the church with respect and sometimes with deference. Even when the church takes unpopular stands, the authorities usually at least go through the pretense of taking our concerns into account.

Still, it seems to me that the Gospel of John’s pessimism about the world is basically justified. The structures of earthly power--whether political or economic or military--will always discriminate against those at the bottom. The under-represented and the poor and the weak will never enjoy full access to social resources. Hence, to a lesser or greater extent, the world will mock God’s love for every person, and, especially, mock God’s particular love for the disadvantaged.

If the church bears witness to the love which we believe led to the incarnation and the cross, we will be an offense. On occasion--as in some contemporary non-Christian settings--the offense will be the belief itself. People will bridle at the thought that God would so degrade himself as to become human and suffer crucifixion. On other occasions, the offense will be the implications that the faithful draw from such beliefs--namely, that God demands that every human being receive both justice and mercy. Inevitably, the world will reject us for the same reason that it rejected Jesus--because it did not truly know the love that led to the incarnation and ultimately the cross.

The gospel reassures its readers down through the centuries that such persecution demonstrates our faithfulness to Jesus. In the face of rejection it is only natural to wonder whether we are somehow at fault. The gospel reminds us that just as the suffering of Jesus showed his devotion to the Father, so our suffering shows our fidelity to Jesus. If the “world” did not recognize God working through him, we can scarcely expect that the world will recognize Jesus working through us.

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*(15:22) “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have any sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin. (23) Those who hate me also hate my Father. (24) If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. (25) It is to fulfill the*

*word written in their law, 'They hated me without cause' (Psal. 35:19, 69:4).*

The historical Jesus thought that his preaching brought salvation to those who accepted it and condemnation to those who did not. Those who accepted the message came to a deeper knowledge of God and began to do things that were more pleasing to him. Those who rejected the message rejected both who God was and what God wanted. Jesus warned his audiences that those who refused to respond to his appeals would suffer greater condemnation at the last judgment than previous sinners who had never had an opportunity to hear the good news. At the final judgment even the notoriously wicked “men of Nineveh” would arise and condemn Jesus’ audience (e.g., Mat. 12:41). Jesus especially warned people who witnessed his miracles and did not believe. If the miracles Jesus worked in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had occurred in Sodom, even the Sodomites would have repented. Consequently, at the judgment the Sodomites would fare better than Jesus’ hearers (e.g., Mat. 11:21-24).

In the passage we are presently considering, John’s Gospel repeats Jesus’ condemnation of those who rejected his preaching and miracles and by implication also applies that condemnation to the evangelist’s time. Jesus definitively revealed who God was, and those who rejected him ultimately rejected the Father. Hence, they have no excuse for their sin. Like the persecutors that the Psalmist decried (Psalms 35, 69), they hated Jesus for no justifiable reason and in hating Jesus they hated God himself. By implication, the same applies to those who refused to listen to the message of the evangelist’s own community and persecuted the church.

One comforting corollary of this severe theology is that those who have never heard the gospel do not face condemnation. They may not have accepted the Christian message and received the blessings it brings. But they have not rejected it either. The Fourth Gospel is explicit, they do “not have sin.”

Here again we see how the gospel can insist that Jesus does not condemn anyone and yet there is divine judgment. Jesus reveals God’s love, but those who reject that message reject God, and apart from God there is no salvation.

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*(15:26) “When the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes out of the Father, she will testify about me. (27a) You are going to testify too . . .*

This passage provides a thumbnail sketch of the evangelist’s theology of the Holy Spirit. We have here reflections both on her role and her nature. Indeed, for a New Testament text, this passage is surprisingly “dogmatic.”

The Spirit’s role is to help us. The Greek word which I have translated “helper” is “parakletos.” Outside the Fourth Gospel, the word occurs rarely, but the



related verb is common and the etymology clear. “Para” means “beside” (as in *parallel* lines), and “kletos” means “called.” The general idea is someone whom we summon to assist us. The common cognate verb has the same broad range of meaning, and, depending on the context, can be translated, “encourage,” “exhort,” “request,” and “console.”

The primary way that the Holy Spirit “helps” us is by telling us the truth about Jesus and his relationship to the Father and encouraging us to share this truth. Thus, this passage calls the helper the “Spirit of Truth” and emphasizes that she will testify about Jesus. Within the larger context of the gospel, this testimony must include the fact that Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Word and the definitive revelation of the Father. By making this truth known to us, the Spirit allows us to share it with others. Hence, the passage moves immediately from the testimony of the Spirit to the testimony of the disciples.

The reason that the Spirit can reveal this truth to us is that she herself has an eternal relationship with the Father and the Son. She comes from the Father, and the Son sends her to us.

Because the Spirit primarily reveals the truth to us and encourages us to share it, the Spirit acts as a witness against a sinful world and as a witness for faithful disciples. The word “parakletos” sometimes even means attorney. Later the gospel will describe the “legal” function of the spirit as a witness in more detail.

This passage continues the theme that the disciples replace Jesus in this world, and, of course, in the edited gospel becoming Jesus for one another is the final spiritual goal. The Spirit herself is the other helper (see 14:16) who bears witness to Jesus now that he has returned to the Father. The Spirit will speak through the disciples.

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*(15:27b) “because you have been with me from the beginning.”*

This brief clause reminds us of something that is easily forgotten: The Fourth Gospel intends to interpret the actual life of the historical Jesus. It is easy to assume that the gospel is only about theology or mystical experience and has little relationship with the human being Jesus of Nazareth. Whole schools of modern scholarship have tried to explain John by positing the influence of foreign ideas on a later Christian community. The gospel itself makes a very different claim. It insists that it is simply an inspired interpretation of what actually took place. Therefore, the gospel holds that the original disciples of Jesus had a unique authority because they had seen and heard him.

The gospel insists that its principal author was an eyewitness who had been with Jesus, perhaps from the “beginning.” As we noted above, there is good reason to

suspect that the Beloved Disciple who wrote most of the book became a follower of Jesus when Jesus was still working alongside John the Baptist (see, for example, the discussion of 1:35-41 above). In any event, as we shall see, the editor emphasized that the evangelist had known Jesus personally (21:24).

Nevertheless, as the material preceding the present passage makes clear, the principal author did not simply record what had happened, but instead recorded what the Spirit of Truth had taught him about the significance of Jesus.

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## Chapter 16

*(16:1) "I have spoken these things to you so that you will not be shocked and fall away. (2) They will expel you from the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when all who kill you will think they are offering a service to God. (3) And they will do these things because they did not know the Father nor me. (4a) But I have spoken these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them.*

It is difficult for a historian to know in any detail what Jesus predicted. Our primary sources about his prophecies come from his followers decades later. At that time Christians were trying to understand their later situation in light of what Jesus taught. It would have been easy for them to imagine Jesus foretold what was going on, even if in fact he had not. Therefore, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy in the gospels. Indeed, skeptical scholars sometimes sound as if they are claiming that the only prophecies we can be sure Jesus uttered were the ones that did not come true! At least the church would not have invented those.

Nevertheless, it seems almost certain that Jesus did predict a period of intense crisis and suffering which would engulf his disciples before the salvation that he preached would come. By the time that Jesus conducted the demonstration in the temple, he must have known that he would be killed. This knowledge in turn suggested that his followers might have to suffer for their loyalty to him. Moreover, Jesus also foresaw a vast political crisis that included the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans. Whatever else Jesus was, he remained a devout Jew who believed in the inspiration of the Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) and saw his own ministry as being in continuity with them. The Old Testament prophets had always predicted that if Israel rejected their message, disaster would inevitably follow. Perhaps most often the disaster would take the form of foreign invasion culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, especially its temple. The invading power was normally the dominant Pagan nation at the time. Thus, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had foreseen such a disaster at the hands of Babylon. Indeed, the primary reason that these severe and unpopular prophets were remembered was that their ghastly predictions had been fulfilled. Jesus saw himself as being in continuity with such prophets. Hence, there is

no good reason to doubt that once the nation as a whole rejected his message, Jesus responded by predicting disaster, including the devastation of Jerusalem and its temple, presumably by Rome. Such predictions appear in all the gospels (e.g., Mat. 24:1-28, Mark 13:1-23, Luke 19:41-44; cf. John 11:48) and, apparently, a garbled version of them was even used as evidence against Jesus at the informal hearing before the high priest (Mat. 26:60-61, Mark 14:57-58). Of course, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple necessarily would lead to suffering by his followers.

As a result, Jesus warned his disciples that they would face tribulation. Indeed, the Lord's Prayer presupposes that warning. The model prayer that Jesus gave his followers climaxes with a plea to be spared from the time of trial that was coming (Mat. 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4).

The passage we are presently considering makes it clear that when the evangelist wrote his church had recently experienced severe persecution from the leadership of the Jewish community. The passage foresees that the Jewish authorities will expel Christians from the synagogues and that some Christians will even be killed. The evangelist is writing from God's point of view and trying to comfort his readers. So, we may be sure that this prediction had come true in their own experience.

In response to these tribulations, the evangelist reassures his church by emphasizing that Jesus predicted such sufferings. Christians need not be shocked. Their Lord had foretold that calamity was coming. Now it had come. God's mysterious plan had not failed. On the contrary, it was hastening to its glorious fulfillment.

From this passage, as well as other material, we can surmise that the evangelist wrote after the Jewish War (66-70), probably toward the end of the first century. Prior to the war, Judaism was pluralistic. The Christian movement was only the youngest part of a diverse religion which included Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes (the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls). Within such a diverse environment, it would have been difficult to excommunicate one faction, and we have no evidence that any expulsion occurred. On the contrary, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul preached in the synagogues, though to be sure, his aggressive championing of the Christian cause often provoked severe opposition. After the Jewish War against the Romans ended in catastrophe, the situation changed completely. Once the Romans destroyed the temple and the great monastery at Qumran, the Sadducees and the Essenes (who respectively had their headquarters in these places) disappeared from history. Among Jewish groups, only the Pharisees and the Christians survived the war relatively intact. The Pharisees then gradually consolidated their hold over the Jewish community and forced the Christians out. Matthew wrote about a generation after the war, and his hostility toward the Pharisees (especially, Mat. 23) reflects an era in which the Pharisees were pressing Jewish Christians hard. The Fourth Evangelist wrote a little later when the Pharisees controlled Judaism almost completely and Christianity had *de facto* become a separate and competing religion. The evangelist characteristically distinguishes Christians from "the Jews." Perhaps the evangelist

wrote around the year 90. The editor must have written even later, perhaps around the year 100.

Although we may question whether Jesus specifically predicted the expulsion, the evangelist was correct to insist that Jesus had foreseen the disaster that befell the community. Matthew, Mark, and Luke never record that Jesus spoke about his followers being excommunicated from the synagogues. Still, Jesus had predicted that the Romans would destroy the temple and that this was only one of the catastrophes to come. Historically, the destruction of the temple ultimately led to the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues (see above). Therefore, it was not unreasonable to claim that Jesus in some sense had foretold it.

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*(16:4b) "I did not tell you these things at the beginning, because I was with you. (5) But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' (6) But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. (7) Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is to your advantage that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you, but if I go, I will send her to you. (8) When she comes, she will demonstrate that the world is in the wrong about sin and about justice and about judgment. (9) About sin, because they do not believe in me (10) and about justice, because I am going away to the Father and you are going to see me no longer, (11) and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*

The section contains an embarrassing discrepancy which reminds us that the editor added this material, though it was probably taken from other writing by the evangelist. Here Jesus insists that none of the disciples have asked him where he is going, but in chapter 13 Peter explicitly asked, "Lord, where are you going?" (13:36) and in chapter 14 Thomas implicitly did the same (14:5).

It seems to be a historical fact that at the last supper Jesus did speak about his departure. Mark followed by Matthew records that on that occasion Jesus remarked that he would not drink wine again with his followers until the "kingdom" came (Mark 14:25; cf. Mat. 26:29). This prediction with its language of the "kingdom" fits better with Jesus' vision than it does with post-resurrection preaching about Christ's return. So the church would not have invented the saying. The saying clearly implies some final meal which included wine (normally reserved for formal occasions among poor Jews of the first-century). The gospels insist that Jesus planned the last supper in advance (e.g., Mark 14:12-15). Consequently, it is hard to imagine any other setting for this saying other than the one we find in the gospels--namely, the last supper itself.

From this saying it is evident that Jesus predicted his own death and yet insisted that subsequently he would somehow be with his disciples again. As was typical of Jesus, he did not spell out the details. He only made it clear that he would not again dine with his disciples in this life, but in due course he would somehow be in intimate

fellowship with them once more.

In the years immediately after the resurrection, the church interpreted such sayings to mean that Jesus would soon return physically to inaugurate his kingdom of earth. Thus, in his earliest letter, Paul proclaimed that soon Jesus would descend from heaven and raise the dead (1 Thes. 4:16). This apocalyptic event would come unexpectedly like a thief in the night (1 Thes. 5:2) and would occur during some of his readers' lifetimes. "We the living" would still be around to witness it (1 Thes. 4:15).

The editor of John's Gospel apparently also believed in the physical return of Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. In the sacramental section we read that those in the tombs will hear Jesus' voice and come out on the day of judgment (5:28-29).

The evangelist seems to have opted for a different theology, namely that Jesus' physical departure would be permanent and his only return would be in the Spirit. We see that theology here. The world will perceive Jesus no more. Only those who are able to receive the Spirit will experience him.

Nevertheless, the return in the Spirit would vindicate the disciples and judge the world. There is no need to await some final day of reckoning. The Spirit will convict the world and its ruler, at least in the eyes of the disciples. Thanks to the coming of the Spirit, the followers of Jesus will clearly perceive the bankruptcy of the powers of this age, including Satan himself. Moreover, with the coming of the Spirit the disciples will be closer to Jesus than they were when he was physically present. Hence, it is indeed to their advantage that he goes away now.

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*(16:12) "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (13) When she comes, the Spirit of truth, she will guide you in all truth. For she will not speak on her own, but she will speak all she will hear, and she will tell you what is to come. (14) She will glorify me because she will receive it from me and tell it to you. (15) All that the Father has is mine. Therefore, I said that she is going to receive it from me and tell it to you.*

Here the gospel almost explicitly tells us that it was only at the resurrection that Jesus clearly revealed his divinity to his followers. He told his followers some things when he was physically present on earth, but there were "many things" which they could not yet receive. We may add that in a monotheistic Jewish culture one of those other things was surely that God became incarnate. Instead, it was the Spirit of truth who glorified Jesus by guiding his followers into all truth. Naturally, for this gospel the most important truth of all is Jesus' divine unity with the Father, or to use the language of this very passage, that everything that the Father has also belongs to him. Such knowledge was Jesus' supreme gift to the church through the Spirit.

This passage once again implies that the gospel itself is an inspired reinterpretation of

the actual past. The Spirit of truth guided the evangelist himself into all truth and thereby glorified Jesus--the same Jesus the gospel describes.

As Brown suggests, this passage also promises readers of every generation that the Holy Spirit will apply Jesus' message to their unique situations (*The Gospel* 2:716). The Spirit will guide us by interpreting the timeless teaching of Jesus to shed light on our own times. So in one sense she will teach us new things. As the passage insists, she will tell us what is to come.

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*(16:16) In a little while you will see me no more, and a little later you will see me.” (17) So some of his students said to each other, “What is this that he is saying to us, ‘In a little while you will not see me, and a little later you will see me,’ and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” (18) So they kept saying, “What is this ‘little while’? We do not know what he is saying.” (19) Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them, “Are you inquiring about this with each other that I said, ‘In a little while you will not see me, and a little later you will see me?’ (20) Truly, truly I tell you that you will weep and mourn, but the world will be glad. You will grieve, but your grief will become joy. (21) When a woman is giving birth, she has grief, because her hour has come. But when she has borne the child, she no longer remembers the suffering because of her joy that a human being has been born into the world. (22) And you have grief now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be glad, and no one is going to take your joy away from you. (23) On that day you will not question me about anything. Truly, truly I tell you, whatever you ask the Father for, he will give you in my name. (24) Until now you asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive so your joy may be made full.*

This passage places extraordinary emphasis on the prediction that in a little while the disciples will not see Jesus and in a little while they will. Jesus first makes the prediction (vs. 16). The disciples try to figure out what the prediction might mean, and as they ponder, they repeat it twice (vss. 17-18). Jesus responds to their confusion by repeating the prediction yet again (vs. 19) and only then explains it. From a literary perspective these repetitions are so frequent and emphatic that they become monotonous and border on being comical.

The extraordinary emphasis signals that now the central mystery of the Christian life is not the second coming of Jesus to judge the world but the return of Jesus to the church in the Spirit. In the earliest days of Christianity the basic proclamation was that Jesus would return soon. It was the contemplation of this good news that gave the disciples joy and peace. The presence of Jesus already in the Spirit was important primarily because it pointed to the apocalyptic second coming that was imminent. Now by contrast the source of joy is that Jesus has returned already in the Spirit. Just as the birth of a child begins a new life of joy and maturity to a pregnant woman, so the coming of the Spirit inaugurates a lasting change in the church. With the Spirit came a joy that the world can never take away and the assurance that God will give us

whatever we ask in Jesus' name.

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*(16:25) "I have spoken these things to you in enigmas. An hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in enigmas but will tell you plainly about the Father. (26) In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will petition the Father in your behalf. (27) For the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came out from God. (28) I came out from the Father and have come into the world. I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." (29) His students said, "Look, now you are speaking plainly, and you are not talking in any enigmas. (30) Now we know that you know all things and have no need that anyone question you. By this we believe that you came out from God." (31) Jesus replied to them, "Do you believe now? (32) Look, an hour is coming, indeed, it has come, that you will be scattered each to their own home and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

As Jesus is about to conclude his farewell speeches, he summarizes the basic theology of the Fourth Gospel. He came from the Father and entered into this world, and he is about to return to the Father. Those who believe this message honor the Father who sent him. Hence, believers will have a deeper relationship with the Father through Jesus, and from that relationship untold blessings will come.

From a strictly literary point of view Jesus' claim that he has spoken in enigmas is untrue. Of course, the reader has known from the beginning what Jesus was saying. The prologue already clearly stated the theology that we find here. To be sure, sometimes Jesus confused various characters in the gospel narrative (e.g., the woman at the well), often by using words that have more than one meaning. For the most part, however, his speech has been painfully clear. Even his enemies understood his claims only too well. Already in chapter 5 they figured out that he was "making himself comparable to God" (5:18) and attempted to kill him. Later Jesus publicly stated his divinity, and the violent response of his audience indicated that everyone understood. Thus, for example, in chapter 10 Jesus insisted, "I and the Father are one." His audience immediately attempted to stone him for blasphemy and justified this aggressive behavior by pointing out that Jesus was making himself God (10:30-33).

Instead, this section must be making a historical claim: The historical Jesus spoke in enigmas while he was on earth, but subsequently the Spirit explained the meaning to the church. The gospel makes it evident that it is indeed making a historical claim by the way it treats the disciples' faith in the passage under consideration. Even though they claim that they now believe, the passage indicates that this faith will only become a reality later. As soon as they insist that now they know that Jesus has come from God, he corrects them. They will soon be scattered. Only the Father will remain faithful to Jesus. It will be at a later hour that Jesus will tell them "plainly about the Father." Only then will there be no need for anyone to raise further questions.

Of course, once again this claim includes an explanation of how the gospel itself was written. After the resurrection the Son through the Spirit explained the real meaning of the “enigmas” of the historical Jesus. The evangelist then retold the story of Jesus to order to reveal this wisdom, or to use my language, the evangelist attempted to tell the story of Jesus from God’s point of view.

Whether or not one agrees with the gospel’s interpretation of Jesus, it is an undeniable fact that historically Jesus did talk in “enigmas.” His language was full of exaggeration and paradox. For example, he told a story about a shepherd who abandoned ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness and searched for one (Mat. 18:12-13, Luke 15:4-7) and another story about a landowner who paid all his harvesters the same even though they had worked very different lengths of time (Mat.20:1-15).

Surely one reason Jesus used this strange rhetoric was that he believed that the final truth would only be clear when the kingdom came. Jesus could point to the strange ways of how God acts in history or the absolute demands of perfection that God’s nature demands. However, what all this would mean in practice could not be foreseen. It would be revealed later.

The evangelist believed that thanks to the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, he had received this revelation that Jesus had implicitly promised and could now share it.

As this passage indicates, at the heart of this revelation lies the mysterious unity and diversity of the Father and the Son, thanks to their total love for one another. Jesus is never alone because the Father is with him. And we are never alone because the Father loves us. And the Father loves us because we have believed that Jesus came from him.

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*(16:33) “I have spoken these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you are going to have affliction; but have courage; I have conquered the world.”*

These words about peace in the midst of worldly affliction address both the situation of the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking and also the situation of the evangelist’s community and all subsequent Christian communities. Even though the evangelist, rather than Jesus, wrote these words, they clearly were appropriate to the historical situation of the disciples as Jesus looked forward to his death. Jesus at the last supper did try to prepare his followers for the uncertain period ahead by in effect saying that henceforth they could be at peace. Henceforth, he would be with them in bread and wine and ultimately he would dine with them again. These words equally applied to the era of the evangelist when Christians had recently been driven out of the synagogues and, at least occasionally, were murdered. Despite all these sufferings, they should remain at peace. Naturally, these words continue to apply today.



The reason that Christians can remain at peace despite crushing affliction is that Jesus has “conquered the world.” The verb “conquered” in Greek is in the perfect tense which indicates that something occurred in the past and continues to have impact in the present. Jesus conquered the world in the past, and that conquest continues with all its implications for the church.

Of course, as the larger context makes clear, this conquest occurs through the crucifixion, because the crucifixion conquers the world in three ways. First, it definitively reveals God’s love for those who follow Jesus. Even if the world hates them, the cross reveals God’s love, and God is greater than the world. Second, the cross reveals that those who follow Jesus need not surrender to the hatred that surrounds them. Jesus triumphantly endured rejection and death because he was not alone. The Father was with him. So too the disciples when they suffer can be at peace because they imitate Jesus himself and, through the Spirit, Jesus and the Father are with us. Finally, the cross was the way that Jesus returned to the Father’s glory and reveals that our suffering and death will lead to eternal life.

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## Chapter 17

*(17:1) Jesus said these things and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, (2) because you gave to him authority over all flesh that everything that you gave to him, he might give to them eternal life. (3) Eternal life is this: To know you the only true God and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ. (4) I glorified you on earth by completing the work that you gave me to do. (5) Now, you Father, glorify me at your own side with the glory which I had in your presence before the world existed.*

The great prayer that follows the farewell speeches is in many ways a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer in the light of the subsequent experience of the Spirit leading the community into all truth. Thus, the evangelist, not Jesus, surely wrote the prayer in chapter 17. Matthew, Mark, and Luke make no mention of this long outpouring to the Father at the Last Supper, and the prayer clearly is in the literary style of the evangelist and expresses his theology. Nevertheless, the prayer has many contacts with the Lord’s Prayer (Brown, *The Gospel* 2:747). We can see some of these already in the opening words. The Lord’s Prayer starts with an address to God as “Father,” and asks that God would hallow his own name. So too here Jesus begins by addressing God as Father and asks him to allow the Son to give him glory.

Jesus asks that the Father glorify him in two phases. First Jesus requests that he may glorify the Father by revealing him through the cross. By his death, Jesus will complete the work that the Father has given him to perform. Then Jesus asks that the Father will glorify him by welcoming him back to the eternal splendor he enjoyed before the incarnation.

Once again the gospel emphasizes that Jesus' mission to the world is an outgrowth of his eternal relationship to the Father. Jesus does not save the world solely for its own sake, but also to glorify the Father. Similarly, the Father does not send the Son into the world solely to redeem it, but also to glorify the Son himself.

Indeed, as this passage emphasizes, salvation itself consists in being brought into the eternal relationship that the Father and the Son have with each other. They alone possess "eternal life" by nature. We human beings gain eternal life by first perceiving the Father and the Son and then receiving their gracious presence into our own lives. Eternal life, this passage reminds us, comes from knowing the only true God and the One he has sent.

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*(17:6) "I revealed your name to the people whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (7) Now they know that all that you have given to me is from you; (8) because the words that you gave to me, I have given to them, and they have accepted them and know truly that I came out from you, and they believed that you are the one who sent me out."*

The evangelist points the reader forward to the situation after the resurrection when people would understand that Jesus definitively revealed God because he came from God. The evangelist himself wrote the prayer, and it looks backward on Jesus' work as though it had already been completed. Thus, Jesus declares that he has revealed God's Name. (Here as often in the Bible "Name" is simply a synonym for God himself). Actually, in the narrative all the previous revelations are preliminary. To some extent Jesus has revealed the Father by his words and deeds. Nevertheless, the definitive revelation---the crucifixion and resurrection--is still to come. Similarly, Jesus states that the disciples "know" that he has come from the Father. In fact, the disciples' present knowledge remains tentative. Certainty will only come later. The evangelist wishes us to look into the future after Jesus is "glorified."

The passage also reflects the evangelist's faith that God always knew what the outcome of the incarnation would be. Today we may wonder whether the historical Jesus always foresaw what would happen. Jesus' surely historical prayer that God would remove the cup of suffering (Mark 14:36) suggests that at one point anyway he hoped he would be spared the worst. The evangelist, however, writes from God's perspective. The Eternal Son always knew that his earthly life would end in crucifixion and definitively reveal God's love and that through this love the church would understand who God essentially is.

The passage stresses to its Christian readers that they themselves are the gift that the Father and the Son offer each other. In the prayer Jesus emphasizes that the first disciples belonged to the Father and the Father gave them to the Son. The Son in turn revealed the Father to them. As a result, they knew the intimate truth about who God is. In a moment Jesus will declare that what was the case for the first disciples

remains the case for all their descendants.

Here we seem to have another echo of the Lord's Prayer. After addressing God as "Father," the prayer goes on to ask him to "hallow" his name. So too in the passage we are considering Jesus goes on to emphasize that he has revealed God's "name," and, as a result, his disciples now know the supreme truth that the Father sent out Jesus.

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*(17:9) "I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, because they are yours. (10) All that are mine are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. (11) I am going to be in the world no longer; yet they are going to be in the world; I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given to me, so that they may be one, just as we are. (12) When I was with them, I kept them in your name which you have given me, and I guarded them, and none of them perished, except for the one who had to perish so the scripture would be fulfilled. (13) Now I am coming to you, and I am saying these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. (14) I have given them your word, and the world hated them, because they are not from the world, just as I myself am not from the world. (15) I am not asking that you remove them from the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. (16) They are not from the world, just as I myself am not from the world. (17) Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. (18) Just as you sent me out into the world, I too sent them out into the world. (19) And for their sake, I consecrate myself, so that they themselves may also be consecrated in the truth.*

The Lord's Prayer originally climaxed with a plea that God would save us from the power of evil. It would appear that the prayer Jesus taught his followers concluded with the words, "Do not lead us into temptation," since this is how the prayer ends in the best ancient copies of Luke 11:4. The meaning of the petition is that God would spare us from tribulation, and perhaps especially, that God would spare us from being so beset by spiritual assault that we might surrender to it. At an early date, some Christians added the petition "but deliver us from evil" to make the meaning clear (Mat. 6:13). The Greek for "evil" also means "the evil one" and may refer specifically to Satan. In any event, both Jesus and the early church believed that Satan lay behind the evil that besets us.

The passage from John's Gospel that we are now considering clearly reflects on this petition in the light of Jesus' coming departure. While Jesus was physically present with the disciples, he gave them guidance and support. He occasionally even supplied their physical needs by working miracles. Now he is returning to the Father and begs the Father to continue to protect the disciples. In the course of making this request, Jesus almost quotes the longer version of the Lord's prayer. "Keep them from the evil one," sounds like a variation of, "Deliver us from evil." Much of the rest of this section reflects on how the Father will keep the disciples safe from evil now that Jesus will no longer be available in the flesh.

Specifically, the evangelist claims that God protects us from evil by inviting us to share in the spiritual unity that the Father and the Son have with each other. Here as elsewhere in the gospel, our relationships with each other depend on the Eternal relationship that the Father and the Son have. We belonged to the Father, and he gave us to the Son. Now the Son is returning us to the Father. Since the Father and the Son are perfectly one, we can remain one with each other by abiding in them. Of course, if we abide in them and love one another, this unity keeps us from surrendering to temptation.

The section makes it clear that the primary threat to the disciples comes from the world. The world hated and persecuted Jesus. Indeed, in this passage, Jesus “consecrates” himself, and I believe that here this word means that Jesus is offering himself as a sacrifice. The world will kill Jesus. So too Jesus “consecrates” his disciples. The world will kill some of them. Of course, by being a sacrifice, Jesus and his followers glorify God. Nevertheless, the world continues to be a danger, because there is always the threat that the disciples will surrender to its values and give up their commitment to Jesus and to the love that he expressed.

The theology of this passage undoubtedly reflects that fact that the evangelist’s own community was suffering persecution. Elsewhere the gospel indicates that its first Christian readers faced expulsion from the synagogues and, occasionally, even murder (e.g., 16:2).

Still, the disciples have a mission to the world. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so he in turn sends us into the world. By loving God and one another we will call into question the self-serving ethics of others and reveal the way to the Father. Jesus does not--and cannot--ask that God would remove the disciples from the world. On the contrary, it is only through the disciples that the world can come to know God and his love.

Therefore, even though Jesus cannot pray for the world directly, he does pray for it indirectly. He cannot pray for it directly, because the “world” is, by definition, evil. The “world” in this gospel is the social forces opposed to God and Jesus and the church. However, by praying for the mission of the disciples to the world, Jesus is asking that the rest of humankind will find salvation.

This passage once again emphasizes that the followers of Jesus must now take his place here on earth. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus now sends us. He consecrates himself in order that we may be consecrated.

In the face of persecution the evangelist reminds the reader that by supporting one another through the love of God we can endure and call into question the values of the world. Only by being united in God’s love can Christians remain impervious to the assaults of a world which hates them because in the final analysis it hates Jesus.

*(17:20) "I am not praying for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. (21) My request is that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us in order that the world may believe that you are the one who sent me out. (22) As for me, the glory that you have given me, I have given them, that they may be one, just as we are one, (23) I in them and you in me, that they may be made perfectly one so that the world will know that it is you who sent me out and that you loved them, just as you loved me.*

This passage suggests that the primary glory of God is the perfect unity of the Father and the Son with one another and their desire to extend this unity to include us. Jesus emphasizes that the Father has given him glory, and he has passed it on to us. This glory is the perfect oneness that the Father and the Son have with each other in love. God invites us to share in this glory. The Father has loved us just as he loved Jesus.

Because the primary glory of God is oneness in love, it is through such love that the disciples will reveal the Father and the Son to the world. If we are perfectly one with one another in God, then the world will recognize both that God sent Jesus and that God continues to dwell among his disciples. Such love is the church's primary missionary statement.

Since we can be perfectly one through Jesus, we have the same relationship with him that the original disciples had after the resurrection. Having prayed for his original disciples, Jesus now prays for all their successors, including the readers of the gospel, whether in the ancient world or the modern one. We are not farther from Jesus than Peter or the Beloved Disciple were. All who love can be fully united.

Accordingly, in its own way the Fourth Gospel here provides us with the definitive meditation on the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come."

In the edited gospel this passage emphasizes the final stage of Christian growth in which we become so united with Jesus that we can take his place in this world. Jesus is departing to the Father, but those who have reached spiritual maturity remain perfectly unified with them. The Father and the Son dwell within such saints. Indeed, they are as united to Jesus and the Father as Jesus and the Father are united with one another. Consequently, when the world looks at these disciples, the world sees Jesus and the Father, and mature Christians can fully take Jesus' place in this world. By showing Jesus to the world, the saints glorify him and glorify the Father who sent him.

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*(17:24) "Father, I want for those you have given me to be with me where I myself am, so they will see my glory that you gave me because you loved me before the world was founded.*

A major issue in religion is whether there is life after death and how we can know. Of course, some religions--including most of the religion of the Old Testament--have

denied that there is any meaningful personal survival after death. Other religions, such as Hinduism have insisted that the soul is inherently immortal. By its very nature it is indestructible and the dissolution of the physical body does not compromise it.

Here the Fourth Gospel claims that we can be certain that we have eternal life because we know that we will see Jesus as he truly is. Thus, Jesus asks the Father that one day we may be with him so that we may see his eternal glory. A similar reflection occurs in the First Epistle of John, "It has not yet been revealed what we shall be; we know that when he is revealed we will be like him, because we shall see him just as he is" (1 John 3:2).

This claim accords with the gospel's larger claims that eternal life consists in knowing God, that Jesus is one with God, and that our salvation is the gift that the Father and the Son bestow on one another.

Once again the evangelist emphasizes that our final fulfillment will come not when Jesus returns to earth but when we join him in heaven. We must go where he is and see the glory that preexisted the creation. Presumably, individual Christians make this transition at death.

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*(17:25) "Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these knew that you sent me out. (26) And I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, in order that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

The climax of the prayer summarizes the principal themes of the book. Indeed, much of what we read here also appears in the opening verses of the gospel. Thus, in the first verses of John we read that the light shines in the darkness but the darkness did not grasp it (1:5) and that the world did not recognize Jesus even though he was its creator (1:10). Similarly, here we read that the world did not know God and, by implication, did not recognize who Jesus truly was. Later in the gospel's opening verses we read that through Jesus Christians have received grace and truth. Jesus alone dwells beside the Father and has now made him known to us (1:14-18). Similarly, here we read that Jesus has made the Father known to the disciples because Jesus has passed on the very love with which the Father loved him. Elsewhere in the gospel we read that through the Spirit Jesus will continue to reveal the truth (16:7-13), and this passage ("I will make it known") presupposes that promise.

This climax makes it especially clear that the central message of the gospel is that through the love which the Father and the Son have for one another we can become one with them. The very love with which the Father loves the Son can be in us, and when that love is present, Jesus himself is present as well.

Such love is also the explanation for the origin and evolution of the universe. From the beginning the Father and the Son loved one another. That love led them to create all things; that love led to the incarnation; and that love points to the everlasting glory we can have in them.

Of course, in the edited gospel we have once again a description of the final state of Christian maturity. In that state the Father and the Son dwell perfectly within us through love. Consequently, we know them and especially know that it is the Father who sent Jesus.

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### Chapter 18

*(18:1) After he had said these things, Jesus together with his students went out across the Kidron Creek to a garden which he and his students entered. (2) Judas who was betraying him also knew the location because Jesus often gathered there with his students. (3) Judas took a battalion and retainers from the high priests and Pharisees and came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (4) Jesus, who knew all that was coming upon him, went out and said to them, "Who is it you are seeking?" (5) They replied to him, "Jesus, the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am the one." Now Judas who was betraying him also was standing with them. (6) When he said to them, "I am," they staggered backward and fell on the ground. (7) So he asked them again, "Who is it you are seeking?" They said, "Jesus, the Nazarene." (8) Jesus replied, "I told you that I am the one. So if you are seeking me, allow these others to go," (9) in order that the word which he said would be fulfilled, "Of those you gave me, I did not lose any of them" [cf. 6:39, 17:12]. (10) Simon Peter who had a sword drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right earlobe. The slave's name was Malchus. (11) Jesus said to Peter, "Thrust your sword into your scabbard. The cup which the Father has given me--shall I not drink it?"*

The basic content of this passage appears to be historically accurate. All the gospels record that after Jesus and the disciples had a final meal they went to another place. Judas arrived with an armed guard. A brief fracas ensued in which someone cut off the ear of a member from the arresting party. Jesus himself did not resist, and his followers fled (Mat. 26:47-56, Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53). These events seem inherently plausible, and, since so many witnesses were present, we should assume that the early church had access to firsthand testimony about what occurred.

We may remain agnostic as to whether the special details in John's Gospel are more accurate than the ones in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Thus, for example, only John's gospel records that Peter was the one who cut off the ear and that his victim's name was Malchus. Whether such details are correct remains uncertain. Perhaps John is right, but perhaps not. The events must have been confusing at the time, and subsequently, as early Christians retold them, errors and elaboration certainly crept in. On the other hand, the Beloved Disciple may well have been present and may have

noticed things (or subsequently learned them) that others did not know.

Since it tells the story from God's point of view, the Fourth Gospel emphasizes that Jesus was in complete control, and the soldiers were able to arrest him only with his permission. Naturally, at the time it appeared that the soldiers overpowered Jesus. God, however, cannot be overpowered, and the evangelist makes this clear. Indeed, the evangelist gives us an imaginary scene which borders on being humorous. Jesus takes the initiative by going up to his enemies and asking whom they are seeking. When they reply that they are seeking Jesus, he identifies himself. In Greek the phrase "I am the one," is simply, "I am." Hence, like so many other phrases in the Fourth Gospel, it has a double meaning, and the evangelist expects the reader to notice it. "I am" is the way that God identifies himself in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod. 3:14), and here as elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel (e.g., 8:58) the phrase implies that Jesus is divine. In response to this revelation, the attackers collapse on the ground--no one can stand before the revealed majesty of God. Ironically, Jesus must encourage them and so assures them that they are looking for him.

Like the rest of the gospel this passage emphasizes that Jesus protected his followers. In the preceding prayer, Jesus stresses that he guarded his disciples and only lost Judas (17:12). Now we see the same theme enacted in the narrative. Jesus voluntarily hands himself over and commands the guard to allow his disciples to depart. The evangelist explicitly notes that Jesus now fulfills the statement he made earlier. We will see a similar compassion for the disciples at the climax of the passion when Jesus entrusts his mother and the Beloved Disciple to one another's care.

This scene also emphasizes that whether we recognize who Jesus truly is depends in large part on whom we are seeking. Jesus asks his enemies twice whom they are seeking, and their answers make it obvious that they are only looking for the human being Jesus. Jesus tells them who he truly is by using the divine, "I am." The fact that his enemies collapse on the ground verifies the truth of the statement. Yet, they do not perceive the obvious. Those who are closed to the presence of God will never perceive him even when he makes his presence clearly known.

In accordance with the gospel's larger perspective and structure, we find here only a tiny remnant of Jesus' agony in the garden. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus begged the Father to remove the "cup," to spare him from having to suffer (Mat. 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42). This request is surely historical. The church would never have invented such pitiful hesitation on Jesus' part. God, however, is never hesitant, and here the Fourth Gospel reduces Jesus' "agony" to the triumphant question, "The cup which the Father has given me--shall I not drink it?" As we noted above, the Fourth Evangelist transferred some elements of the agony in the garden to 12:27-28.



*(18:12) The battalion and its commander and the Jewish retainers arrested Jesus and tied him up (13) and led him away first to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was that year's high priest. (14) It was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was to their advantage that one human being die for the people [11:49-50].*

*(15) Simon Peter and another student were following Jesus. But that student was an acquaintance of the high priest and went into the courtyard of the high priest along with Jesus. (16) Peter was standing outside by the gate. So the other student who was the high priest's acquaintance came out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in. (17) The maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter, "You aren't also one of this person's students, are you?" He said, "I am not." (18) The slaves and the retainers were standing by. They had made a charcoal fire because it was cold and were warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.*

*(19) The high priest questioned Jesus about his students and about his teaching. (20) Jesus replied to him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in a synagogue and in the temple where all the Jews gather, and I said nothing in secret. (21) Why do you question me? Question those who heard as to what I said to them. Look, these know what I said." (22) After he had said these things, one of the retainers who was standing by slapped Jesus and said, "Are you replying to the high priest like this?" (23) Jesus replied to him, "If I spoke improperly, point out what was improper; but if properly, why do you hit me?" (24) Annas sent him off tied up to Caiaphas, the high priest.*

*(25) Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You aren't also one of his students, are you?" He denied it by saying, "I am not." (26) One of the high priest's slaves, a relative of the one whose earlobe Peter had cut off, said, "I myself saw you in the garden with him, didn't I?" (27) Again Peter denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.*

It seems clear that after the arrest, Jesus was escorted into the high priest's residence where there was an interrogation. Certainly, the account of Peter's denials must be historical. The church would never have made up such an embarrassing story. Since Peter followed Jesus up to the high priest's residence, he must have seen Jesus being taken inside. We may assume that some kind of hearing followed. All the gospels assert this (Mat. 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54-71).

The historical details of the hearing, however, remain uncertain. We have no way of knowing whether the early church had any access to what took place. John's account of what happened at the "trial" differs markedly from that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since in those gospels Jesus is convicted of blasphemy (Mat. 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-64; cf. Luke 22:67-71). One doubts that anyone who was present later spoke to an early Christian, but perhaps gossip reached the evangelists. It is equally plausible, however, that the evangelists simply guessed what took place at the hearing, and it is

such speculation that we read here. Of course, even guesses may contain accurate information. Personally, I suspect that John's Gospel is correct that the hearing was informal, brief, and abusive. The odd detail that Jesus was first brought before Annas and then taken to Caiphas has a special claim to be historical. It serves no theological or literary purpose and is confusing. Moreover, the transfer of Jesus from one residence to another would have been publicly visible.

In John's account of the "trial" before Annas we have a brief reference to the theme that the disciples must now replace Jesus in this world. During the interrogation, Jesus insists that those who heard him know what he said and that anyone looking for information about him should question them. To the Christian reader the implication is clear: We who have heard about Jesus must reveal him to the world now that he has returned to the Father. In the edited gospel we also have here a reference to the highest stage of the Christian life in which we become Jesus for one another.

The narrative carefully interweaves the trial of Jesus with the story of Peter's denials. We first read about Jesus being taken to the house of the high priest; then we read about Peter following and the first denial. Next we read about the interrogation of Jesus and then about the second and third denials.

This intercalation emphasizes the contrast between Jesus' faithfulness to the truth and Peter's duplicity. Jesus speaks the truth and is struck. Peter denies the truth and escapes suffering. In doing so he fulfills Jesus' prophecy at the last supper, as the crowing rooster reminds us (13:38). Here, as elsewhere, Peter serves as an illustration of what the reader should avoid.

It appears that in the story of Peter's denial we have a cameo appearance of the evangelist himself. Thus, we read about an anonymous disciple who accompanied Peter to the high priest's courtyard and got him in by speaking to the gatekeeper. Unlike the references to the "disciple Jesus loved" that the editor added (13:23, 19:26, 20:2; 21:7,20), this reference to an anonymous disciple makes no special claims as to the disciple's prominence and fits smoothly into the narrative. The reference also serves no obvious literary purpose. I suspect it is historical. The fact that this "other disciple" moved in high social circles in Jerusalem fits with what we otherwise know about the evangelist. He must have been well educated to write the gospel and probably lived in Jerusalem, as we have repeatedly seen. Moreover, the label of "other disciple" could easily have encouraged the editor to refer to the author as the "disciple Jesus loved."

In the edited gospel the Beloved Disciple here fulfills his usual role of being the ideal follower of Jesus. Before the editor added the explicit references to the "disciple Jesus loved," the reader would have made no moral evaluation of the "other disciple" who accompanies Peter in this passage. Once the editor intervened, however, the situation changed. In the references the editor added, the Beloved Disciple normally appears with Peter and is always one step ahead of him. After we have gotten used to that

pattern, we can read it into the present scene. The Beloved Disciple follows Jesus more closely, since he enters the courtyard first; and unlike Peter the Beloved Disciple did not deny being Jesus' follower.

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*(18:28) They brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace. It was early morning. They themselves did not go into the palace so that they would not be defiled but eat the Passover meal. (29) So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge are you bringing against this person?" (30) In reply they said to him, "If this person was not a malefactor, we would not have handed him over to you." (31) So Pilate said to them, "You take him yourselves, and judge him by your law." The Jews said to him, "It is not permitted for us to execute anyone," (32) in order that Jesus' word might be fulfilled which he spoke to indicate what sort of death he was about to suffer [12:32-33].*

There can be no question that the gospel is correct in asserting that the Romans ordered the execution of Jesus after some sort of hearing. Crucifixion was normally a Roman punishment; the Jews preferred stoning. Moreover, there is no reason to doubt the gospel's claim that during Jesus' lifetime the Romans had to confirm any capital verdict by a Jewish court. In a country under military occupation, the occupying power cannot afford to allow locals the right to execute freely because it could be used to eliminate collaborators (Brown, *The Gospel*, 2:849-50). If the Romans had to confirm a capital sentence, they would at least have had to consider the charges against Jesus and agree that in his case the penalty was appropriate. The fact that duly constituted Roman authority had executed Jesus was a dangerous embarrassment to the vulnerable early Christian community, and the church would never have invented it. Accordingly, the unanimous testimony of the gospels that the Roman governor had Jesus crucified must be accurate.

It is difficult to decide, however, whether the details that the gospels supply about the trial are historical. We have no way of knowing how much of the proceedings were public. John's Gospel makes the plausible assertion that Pilate's interrogation of Jesus took place in private within the palace, but his consultations with the Jewish leaders were outside in order that they could maintain the ritual purity necessary for participation in the Passover meal (see Num. 9:6-12). The gospels sometimes differ concerning specifics. Luke, for example, claims that Jesus also had to appear before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), but there is no hint of this in the other accounts.

It does seem, however, that the Fourth Gospel had some reliable knowledge about the specifics of what took place and sometimes is more accurate than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We have an example here. The Fourth Gospel alone asserts that Jesus was crucified before the Passover. According to the first three gospels, the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Mat. 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-14, Luke 22:8-15), and Jesus was crucified on the same date, since by Jewish reckoning the new day begins at sundown.

Historically, however, it is most unlikely that the Romans would have defied conventional piety by ordering an execution on a solemn holy day and even more unlikely that the high priests would have brought charges then. In addition, if the Last Supper had been a Passover meal, the eucharist would subsequently have been celebrated only once a year.

Assessing the relative responsibility for the death of Jesus is a thorny issue. The gospels assert that the Jews were primarily to blame. However, since the Romans ordered the execution and carried it out, it is tempting to assume that they (perhaps in conjunction with the high priest who was beholden to them) were culpable. The claim in the gospels that Pilate was reluctant to have Jesus crucified and only gave in under pressure from the Jews could be merely early Christian propaganda. The evangelists wanted to deflect the charge that their leader had been a traitor against Rome. Today blaming the Romans has the additional advantage of promoting ecumenical relations between Christians and Jews and depriving people of an excuse for anti-Semitism. Historically, the charge that the Jews killed Jesus led to pogroms.

Nevertheless, I believe that the gospels are indeed historically reliable when they stress that the Jews demanded Jesus' death and Pilate initially resisted. Jesus had alienated his compatriots by his assault on the temple. N.T. Wright is surely correct in insisting that this demonstration was a protest against violent nationalism (2:417-24). Jesus wanted the temple to be a house of prayer for all the nations (cf. Mark 11:17; Isa. 56:7), and he opposed violence and believed in loving one's enemies (Mat. 5:38-48, Luke 6:27-35). The protest in the temple courts not only threatened the high priests whose position depended on the building complex. It also outraged the anti-Roman populace in Jerusalem. Hence, the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem clamored for Jesus' execution. The Romans, by contrast, viewed anyone who opposed violent nationalism as a political asset. Consequently, Pilate initially resisted demands for Jesus' execution. When a riot threatened, however, Pilate gave in. This historical reconstruction is inherently plausible and accords with what the gospels tell us. Later we will have occasion to note that this reconstruction also explains the otherwise puzzling detail of the freeing of Barabbas.

Writing from God's point of view the evangelist insists that providence guided the events. The death of Jesus by crucifixion was not primarily the result of political events. It was God's will. God had foreseen--and, we may add, chosen--the way that Jesus would die.

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*(18:33) So Pilate went back into the palace and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (34) Jesus replied, "Are you saying this on your own, or did others talk to you about me?" (35) Pilate replied, "Am I a Jew! Your nation and high priests handed you over to me. What did you do?" (36) Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom was from this world,*

*my retainers would fight so I would not be handed over to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” (37) Pilate said to him, “Therefore, you are a king?” Jesus replied, “You are the one who says that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (38a) Pilate said to him, “Truth? What is that!”*

Historically, there can be no question that the Roman Governor ordered the execution of Jesus on the charge of claiming to be a “king.” We have evidence that the Romans posted the accusation against a criminal at the execution site in order to deter others. The evangelists all state that there was a placard on the cross and that it read, “The King of the Jews” (Mat. 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19). This title does not accord with the church’s normal claims about Jesus and must be the actual charge, especially since the Fourth Gospel so often uses the word “Jews” negatively. Pilate as Roman governor accused Jesus of fomenting rebellion by claiming to be a “king.”

The charge that Jesus was claiming to be a “king” had some plausibility. The centerpiece of Jesus’ preaching was that the “kingdom” of God was coming. This “kingdom” certainly included the rise of a new Israel. Indeed, Jesus appointed a council of twelve who surely served as the symbolic leaders of the twelve tribes. In some unique way Jesus himself headed the kingdom. He did not include himself among the twelve, and so occupied a higher status. Occasionally, Jesus publicly acted as a royal figure, especially when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the acclamation of bystanders (Mat. 21:7-11, Mark 11:7-10, Luke 19:35-40, John 12:12-15). At various times others may even have accorded Jesus the title of “king” or “messiah.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Peter addressed Jesus as the “Messiah” (Mat. 16:16, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20), and John claims that after the feeding of the five thousand the crowds tried to force Jesus to become king (John 6:15).

Nevertheless, Jesus did not act like a conventional royal pretender. He preached non-violence, even loving one’s enemies. He also insisted that in his kingdom the leaders must act as servants, and he seems to have modeled this behavior himself. In John’s Gospel Jesus even washes his disciples’ feet (13:2-11).

For both political and theological reasons, the evangelist must have been anxious to explain in what sense Jesus was king. Politically, the evangelist wanted to scotch any accusation that Christians worshiped someone who was a traitor against Rome. That accusation could lead to persecution. Theologically, the evangelist believed that Jesus was primarily the incarnation of the eternal Word and, therefore, his kingship differed fundamentally from political leadership.

In this passage the evangelist carefully corrects Pilate’s view by insisting that Jesus is primarily the one who reveals the truth. Pilate assumes that Jesus is a worldly king, and this assumption is inevitable because Pilate himself is a worldly ruler. Jesus replies by insisting that Pilate misunderstands. If Jesus was a worldly ruler, he would resort to force to avoid execution. Instead, Jesus insists that he came into the world

from elsewhere and did so to testify to the truth. Of course, the reader already knows that when Peter attempted to use force to prevent the arrest of Jesus, Jesus reprimanded him (18:10-11).

The passage reminds the reader that only those who are open to the leading of the Spirit can know who Jesus truly is. Pilate is of this world and can make no sense of Jesus' claims. But the Christian reader knows by experience what Jesus is saying when he insists that those who belong to the truth listen to him. Hence, Pilate's famous question, "Truth? What is that!" has two answers. For Pilate, who will soon ignore justice and for the sake of political expedience have Jesus executed, there is no such thing as "truth." By contrast, for the Christian reader of this gospel, the truth is Jesus himself (14:6).

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*(18:38b) When he said this, he came back out to the Jews and said to them, "I myself find in him no grounds for complaint, (39) and it is your custom that I release someone for you on the Passover. So do you wish me to release for you the 'King of the Jews'?" (40) They shouted back, "Not this fellow but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.*

It is most unlikely that the Romans customarily released anyone whom the Jews requested on Passover. To be sure, Matthew and Mark join John in affirming that the custom existed (Mat. 27:15, Mark 15:6), and granting amnesties on holy days can be politically expedient. Nevertheless, Luke who used Mark as a source does not mention the custom,<sup>9</sup> and, in general Luke seems to have been better informed about Roman practice. We have no evidence outside the gospels for an annual Passover amnesty, and it seems unthinkable that the Romans would have committed themselves to release *any* prisoner, no matter how objectionable. Such a commitment might impel the authorities to free someone who constituted a threat to their own power. Barabbas himself was such a person. "Bandits" were armed revolutionaries who defied the Roman government and attracted sympathy from the common people. Mark, followed by Luke, tells us that Barabbas had even committed murder in some sort of uprising (Mark 15:7, Luke 23:19, 25). The fact that the release of such a criminal seemed so contrary to conventional practice probably explains why Matthew and Mark assumed that there was a customary amnesty. The first two evangelists (like scholars today) were struggling to come up with some sort of logical explanation.

Still, historically the Jews must have demanded the release of Barabbas, and, apparently, Pilate ultimately granted it. The gospels all record as much (Mat. 27:16-

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:17 does in fact mention the custom of releasing a prisoner. This verse does not appear in the earliest and best ancient copies of Luke, however, and is surely a later addition to make Luke conform to the other gospels.

26, Mark 15:7-15, Luke 23:18-25), though, to be sure, John does not explicitly say that Pilate ordered the release. The evangelists do not claim that Barabbas's release fulfilled a prophecy or was theologically significant. Moreover, it was no credit to Jesus that his own people preferred a notorious criminal to him. Hence, the evangelists had no reason to invent Barabbas. The fact that the evangelists even remembered his name confirms that Barabbas must have existed. Indeed, some manuscripts of Matthew recall the disturbing—and, therefore, surely historical detail—that Barabbas's other name was "Jesus" (Matthew 27:16-17 according to Caesarean texts).

Pilate probably granted the release of Barabbas to placate the nationalistic crowd who was outraged over the attack on the temple by Jesus of Nazareth. As noted above, Pilate was sympathetic to Jesus because Jesus opposed violent resistance to Rome. Jesus' attack on the temple had been a symbolic assault on violent nationalism and a warning that if the nation continued down the road of armed resistance the temple would ultimately be destroyed. Jeremiah had issued a similar warning six centuries earlier (especially, Jeremiah 7), and Jesus and his critics would have used the scriptural tradition to interpret an assault on the temple. The populace was outraged by Pilate's reluctance to execute someone who had attacked the symbol of Jewish nationalism, and a crowd threatened to riot. As the riot was beginning, the mob also demanded the release of its hero, the revolutionary Barabbas. Pilate could not afford a riot, especially during the incendiary period of Passover when tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims were in Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday of national liberation. Not only could a riot escalate into open revolt, but it could also be used to discredit Pilate with his superiors at Rome (cf. John 19:12). Therefore, he reluctantly gave in and ordered the execution of Jesus and the freeing of Barabbas.

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## Chapter 19

*(19:1) Then Pilate had Jesus taken and whipped. (2) And the soldiers fashioned a crown from thorns and put it on his head, and they put around him a purple robe. (3) And they kept coming to him and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they slapped him repeatedly. (4) Pilate came back out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you so you will know that I find in him no grounds for complaint." (5) So Jesus came out, wearing the thorn crown and the purple robe. And he said to them, "Look at the person."*

The ridiculing of Jesus seems to be historical. Matthew and Mark also record this brutal jest in front of Pilate (Mat. 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20), and it fits the social context well enough. It was a brutal age, and abusing prisoners probably was common sport. Moreover, the details of the abuse seem to parody an ancient coronation. For example, the cry, "Look at the person," probably mimics the cry, "Behold the King," when a newly invested monarch was presented to the populace (Brown, *The Gospel*,

2:890).

In the gospels the insults have a special irony, because the very claim that the soldier ridicule is true. Jesus in fact is the “king,” and not of the Jews only but of the entire universe. Moreover, as the Fourth Gospel emphasizes elsewhere, it is precisely through his rejection and suffering that Jesus will conquer the universe. By being “lifted up” he “will draw all people to” himself (12:32). Hence, by ridiculing Jesus’ kingship, the soldiers help to bring it about. The feigned coronation is a real one.

The Fourth Gospel, however, in line with its overall theology stresses that Jesus is especially the exemplary human being. As God incarnate, Jesus is both Son of God and son of humanity and as such reveals who God is and what a human being can be. Here the gospel emphasizes the second. When Pilate says, “Look at the person,” he says literally in Greek, “Look at the human being.” The Fourth Gospel invites its readers to see the mocked Jesus as their ideal model. Just as Jesus bore his humiliation patiently in loyalty to God’s call, so must we.

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*(19:6) When the high priests and the retainers saw him, they shouted, “Crucify, crucify.” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I myself find in him no grounds for complaint.” (7) The Jews replied to him, “We have a law and, according to that law, he ought to die, because he made himself out to be God’s Son.” (8) Now when Pilate heard this statement, he was more afraid, (9) and he went back into the palace and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no reply. (10) Pilate said to him, “You are not speaking to me! Do you not know that I have authority to release you, and I have authority to crucify you?” (11) Jesus replied to him, “You would not have any authority over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason, he who handed me over to you is more culpable.” (12) From this point on, Pilate kept seeking to release him, but the Jews shouted, “If you release this fellow, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.”*

*(13) When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and he sat on the judgment seat in a place called the “Stone pavement”—“Gabbatha” in Aramaic. (14) It was Friday and the day before the Passover, about noon. He said to the Jews, “Look, your king!” (15) They shouted, “Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Am I to crucify your king?” The high priests replied, “We have no king except Caesar.” (16a) So then he handed him over to them to be crucified.*

Little of this passage seems historical. At least much of what we find here supposedly took place between Pilate and Jesus in private. But if such was the case one can only wonder how the evangelist would have learned about it.



Instead, the passage expresses the evangelist's theology that Jesus is God's Son and, accordingly, the real king of the universe. Thus, the Jews inform Pilate of Jesus' claim to be God's Son, and Pilate fears (what the reader knows to be the case) that there may be something to this claim. Pilate asks the crucial question: Where does Jesus come from? Jesus remains silent. But, as the Christian readers knows, this silence indicates the correct answer. Jesus is the suffering servant foretold by Isaiah who "did not open his mouth" (Isa. 53:7), and in John's Gospel this servant has come from the Father. Pilate then, at least from the reader's viewpoint, confesses Jesus' dignity in the only way that a Pagan governor can understand it. Pilate declares to the Jews that Jesus is their "king."

Because he is truly God's Son, Jesus exposes Pilate and the Jewish accusers for who they truly are. To those who only see through this world's eyes, Jesus appears to be on trial. But from God's viewpoint, Jesus is standing in judgment. When Pilate claims to have authority to release Jesus, Jesus informs him that Pilate's authority depends solely on God. Since it is God's will that Jesus be crucified, Pilate ultimately finds himself powerless. Having claimed that he has the ability to free Jesus, in the end he cannot because he is merely Caesar's friend. Similarly, the narrative exposes the weakness of Jesus' Jewish enemies. In the end they implicitly disown God by declaring that their only king is Caesar. As Smith points out, when the evangelist wrote, this declaration had an even deeper irony (*Harper's* 1073). In the year 66 the Jews revolted against the Romans, and after the revolt was crushed in 70 had to accept even greater oppression from them--including having to pay for the temple of Jupiter in Rome. Hence, when the Beloved Disciple wrote, the only king the Jews had was indeed Caesar. It is striking that in the phrase, "he sat on the judgment seat" (19:13) the Fourth Gospel leaves the antecedent ambiguous. Grammatically, "he" could refer either to Pilate (the logical subject) or to Jesus (the closest noun). As so often in this gospel, the ambiguity seems deliberate. In the eyes of the world Pilate sits in judgment on Jesus. From the perspective of God Jesus sits in judgment on all his accusers.

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*(19:16b) So they took charge of Jesus, (17) and, carrying the cross on himself, he went out to what is called "Skull Place" (which in Aramaic is called "Golgotha") (18) where they crucified him, and with him two others on either side with Jesus in the middle. (19) Pilate also had a placard written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." (20) Many of the Jews read this placard, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. (21) So the high priests of the Jews tried to tell Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but 'That fellow said, "I am king of the Jews.'"" (22) Pilate replied, "What I have written, I have written."*

The basic facts recorded here appear to be historical. Certainly Jesus was crucified. The church would never have made up something that was so damaging to its

credibility. The other gospels join John in affirming that two others were crucified at the same time, apparently on the same charge (Mat. 27:38, Mark 15:27, Luke 23:33). They were “bandits,” very probably associates of Barabbas. As we have noted already, a “bandit” was an armed revolutionary. The mass execution served Pilate’s political interests. By executing three people on the charge of sedition, Pilate took the focus off Jesus and the fact that Jesus had not been a violent revolutionary or even a messianic pretender in the usual sense. As we noted above, the placard is surely historical since it was customary for the Romans to display the charge at the execution site.

Nevertheless, the gospel account focuses not on the events but on the theological claim that the death of Jesus revealed his kingship. Thus, the evangelist emphasizes that the charge on the sign was that Jesus was a “king,” and that the sign was in three languages, thereby suggesting that Jesus was not merely king of the “Jews” but of the entire world. Pilate’s refusal to qualify the charge by saying that Jesus only claimed to be king reminds the reader that the charge is true.

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*(19:23) The soldiers, when they crucified Jesus, took his clothes and divided them into four parts, a part for each soldier. They took the inner garment too, but the inner garment was seamless, woven in a single piece from the top down. (24) So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but toss for it, whose it will be” (in order that the scripture would be fulfilled, “They divided up my clothes among themselves, and for my apparel they cast lots” [Psal. 22:18]). Hence, the soldiers did these things.*

We must suppose that historically the soldiers did gamble over Jesus’ clothes. The Romans crucified people naked, since nudity made the punishment more humiliating, and the executing soldiers received the clothing (Brown, *The Gospel*, 2:902). John’s testimony that the soldiers divided up some of the clothing and gambled for the remainder is inherently plausible and basically appears in the other gospels too (Mat. 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34).

Nevertheless, the evangelist recalls the incident primarily because it accords with the description in Psalm 22. There we read about a persecuted righteous person. In verse 18 his enemies divide up his clothes and gamble over them.

Today we can still accept the evangelist’s claim that Jesus “fulfills” this scripture. To be sure, we no longer think of the Psalms as literal prophecies the way that Christians did in the first century. But Jesus in his suffering supremely illustrates the message of the psalm. Psalm 22 describes the extreme sufferings of a righteous individual and insists that God will ultimately vindicate him. Jesus suffered the ultimate horror and exemplified righteousness. Soon the gospel will remind us that God vindicated him to a unique degree. Therefore, he perhaps better than anyone else demonstrates the truth of what the psalm is claiming--what it is claiming about suffering, what it is

claiming about righteousness, and what it is claiming about God.

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*(19:25) There were standing beside Jesus' cross his mother and his mother's sister, Clopas's Mary, and Mary Magdalene. (26) Jesus saw his mother and, standing by, the student he loved. He said to his mother, "Lady, look, your son!" (27) Then he said to the student, "Look, your mother!" And from that hour on the student took her into his own home. (28a) After this, since Jesus knew that all things had already been completed . . .*

It seems likely that some female acquaintances of Jesus did witness the crucifixion, though whether Jesus' mother was among them is less sure. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that women were there (Mat. 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:49) but do not mention Mary the mother of Jesus explicitly. Since these gospels state that they are only naming some of those present, Jesus' mother might have been one of bystanders. In any event, it was the solemn responsibility of the deceased's family and friends to do what they could to arrange for a burial. Hence, the gospels' insistence that the women watched to see what would happen to Jesus' body fits what we know (Mat. 27:61, Mark 15:47, Luke 23:55).

It is clear, however, that the editor added the reference to the Beloved Disciple. Verse 25 names those who were present, and the list seems to be exhaustive. Yet, the Beloved Disciple does not appear. Then suddenly he pops up in verse 26 with no introduction. The implication seems evident. The editor simply inserted the figure into an already existing literary structure.

In the edited gospel the famous scene between Jesus, Mary, and the Beloved Disciple provides a climax to the crucifixion, and even to the book as a whole. In the next half verse we read that as soon as Jesus had entrusted his mother to the Beloved Disciple, "all things had already been completed." What Jesus and Mary and the Beloved Disciple have just done essentially completes everything that Jesus had come to accomplish.

In line with the editor's overall theology, what Mary and, especially, the Beloved Disciple do is take Jesus' place in this world and thereby illustrate the highest stage of Christian maturity. Jesus is dying and about to return to the Father. Therefore, he asks Mary and the Beloved Disciple to replace him in each other's life. The Beloved Disciple must be Mary's son instead of Jesus. Of course, they rise to the challenge because the Beloved Disciple immediately takes Mary into his own home. By becoming Jesus for each other, these two symbolize the last and greatest step in the spiritual life when we love one another as Jesus loved us and thereby continue to incarnate his love in this world.

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*(19:28b) he [Jesus] said in order that the scripture [Psal. 69:21] might be fulfilled, "I am thirsty." (29) A vessel full of vinegary wine was lying there. They put around some hyssop a sponge full of the vinegary wine and brought it to his mouth.*

This scene is probably basically historical. As we shall see in a moment, the Fourth Gospel insists that an eyewitness was present during the last moments of Jesus' life and testified about them, and this witness may have been the evangelist himself. The other gospels also record that the soldiers offered Jesus vinegary wine after he cried out (Mat. 27:48, Mark 15:36, Luke 23:36). It seems likely that the soldiers would have had cheap wine and a sponge. Drinking would be a logical way to get through the grim task of supervising three crucifixions. Roman soldiers normally carried a sponge and a stick for personal sanitation.

The detail involving hyssop cannot be historical, however, and must be a theological symbol indicating that Jesus' crucifixion delivers us from the power of death. Matthew and Mark more plausibly record that the sponge was put on a stick (Mat. 27:48, Mark 15:36). Hyssop is a short stubby plant which cannot support any weight. In the book of Exodus, God tells the Israelites to dip hyssop in the blood of the Passover lamb and smear it on the doorpost of their houses so that when he goes over the land of Egypt he will see the blood and not kill their firstborn (Exod. 12:21-27). Jesus by his suffering also delivers us from death.

Here Jesus once again "fulfills" a psalm by his exemplary righteous suffering. Writing from God's point of view, the evangelist stresses that Jesus deliberately acted to fulfill scripture. The scripture in question is Psalm 69:21. The Psalm records the bitter persecution of someone who had been zealous for God. At one point the psalmist was thirsty, and his enemies made him drink vinegar. The evangelist has cited this psalm before (see the discussions of John 2:17 and 15:25 above) and like the rest of the early church saw the psalm as a detailed prophecy of some events in Jesus' life. Today we may doubt that the psalm was a prophecy. Nevertheless, it does portray the terrible suffering of a person due to his exemplary faithfulness toward God. Jesus assuredly was such a person.

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*(19:30) When he received the vinegary wine, Jesus said, "It is finished," and he bent his head and handed over his Spirit.*

In this brief sentence we have two puns. "It is finished" (a single word in Greek) means both that "it is over" and "it is accomplished." "Handed over the Spirit" in this context must mean "died," but its normal meaning would be "passed on the Spirit." All these meanings are clearly intended.

These puns suggest that by his death Jesus completes the work God gave him to do

and thereby makes the Holy Spirit available. Earlier Jesus told his disciples that it was to their advantage that he was going away since his departure would bring the gift of the Spirit (16:7). Now Jesus has definitively completed God's work by demonstrating through his crucifixion the depths of God's love. Jesus is also returning to the Father. Therefore, at least symbolically, his death makes the coming of the Spirit possible. The gospel will later give us a more "proper" narrative describing the coming of the Spirit (see the discussion of 20:22 below).

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*(19:31) Since it was Friday, so the bodies would not stay on the cross during the Sabbath (for that Sabbath day was a major holiday), the Jews asked Pilate for their legs to be broken and the bodies removed. (32) So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who was crucified with him. (33) But when they came to Jesus and saw that he had died already, they did not break his legs, (34) but one of the soldiers jabbed his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (35) And he who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true--that person knows that he is telling the truth--that you people too may believe. (36) For these things happened in order that the scripture would be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him will be broken" [Exod. 12:46, Num. 9:12]. (37) And, in addition, another scripture says, "They will look at him whom they pierced" [Zech. 12:10].*

There is no reason to doubt the historicity of what we read here. The passage explicitly claims that an eyewitness (the Beloved Disciple?) saw the events, and they are inherently plausible. In accordance with Deuteronomy 21:22-23, the Jews did insist that criminals not remain on crosses overnight but instead be taken down and buried, as the first-century Jewish historian Josephus also attests (Jewish War IV,v,2;#317). No doubt if leaving a person hanging overnight would have been offensive on any occasion, it would have been intolerable on the Passover. Breaking the legs of a crucified person would guarantee quick death by suffocation. Since Jesus had already suffered a beating prior to his crucifixion, he may have died relatively soon and there have been no need to hasten his demise. Nevertheless, it would have been essential to verify that he was indeed dead, and jabbing him with a spear would have been an easy and logical means to do so. It apparently is medically possible that blood and water would flow from a corpse under these circumstances (Brown, *The Gospel*, 2:946-47).

The passage, however, recalls these events primarily to demonstrate that the death of Jesus fulfills scripture and, hence, should inspire our faith in him. Specifically, the evangelist claims that the precise manner of Jesus' death fulfilled both the text, "Not a bone of him will be broken," and the text, "They will look at him whom they pierced."

The first text continues the gospel's theme that Jesus is the pascal lamb whose blood frees the world from sin and death. In chapter 1 John the Baptist points to Jesus as the lamb who removes the world's sin (1:29, 36) though there we have a reference to a

sacrifice offering, rather than to the pascal lamb. We noted above that the mention of hyssop at the crucifixion a few verses before the passage we are now considering recalls the spreading of the pascal lamb's blood. Smearing this blood on the doorposts preserved the lives of the Jewish firstborn at the time of the Exodus. The text "not a bone of him will be broken" refers to how the lamb must be prepared. According to the Bible the pascal lamb had to be a male (Exod. 12:5) and cooked whole. None of his bones could be broken (Exod. 12:46, Num. 9:12). We may note in passing that John's special chronology of the crucifixion strengthens the symbolism of the Passover lamb. Since Jesus was crucified on the day before the feast, he died when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered.

The detail that blood and water flowed from the wound underlines the gospel's theme that the Son of God entered a real human body. The evangelist was replying to radical Christians who claimed that Jesus did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:2, 2 John 7). Already in the opening verses he emphasizes that the word became "flesh" (1:14). We find the same stress here. A physical body can bleed; a disembodied spirit cannot.

In addition, the specific mention of "water" flowing from the wound completes the symbolism of Jesus giving the Holy Spirit to the church at his death (Brown, *The Gospel*, 2:949-951). Earlier in the gospel Jesus had insisted that "rivers of water" would flow from those who believe, and the evangelist explicitly commented that Jesus was speaking of the "Spirit" (7:38-39). Then when Jesus died, he handed over the Spirit (19:30). Hence, the evangelist's emphasis that not only blood but "water" came forth from the dead Jesus underlines the proleptic gift of the Spirit. Of course, the actual giving of the Spirit will occur later (20:22).

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*(19:38) After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a secret student of Jesus out of fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave permission. So he came and took away his body. (39) Nicodemus, who earlier had come to him by night, also came carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. (40) They took the body of Jesus and bound it in strips of linen along with the spices, just as is customary for a Jewish burial. (41) In the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had yet been put. (42) There they put Jesus, because it was the Jewish Friday, and the tomb was near.*

There is no reason to doubt that a prominent Jew named Joseph of Arimathea intervened to give Jesus a decent burial. The Romans did not normally return the bodies of crucified criminals. Recently, however, we have found the skeleton of a crucified man in a family tomb, and this find demonstrates that exceptions occurred, as the ancient Jewish writer Philo also states (Flaccum x;#83; Brown, *The Gospel* 2:934). All the gospels claim that Joseph of Arimathea was a man of influence and interceded with Pilate to gain permission to bury Jesus and then proceeded to do so

(Mat. 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, Luke 23:50-53). Joseph can scarcely be legendary. The gospels recall both his name and place of origin. It is noteworthy that Arimathea otherwise has no connection with the traditions about Jesus, and so cannot be an invention. Moreover, if Christians had invented Joseph, they certainly would never have claimed that he was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43, Luke 23:50-51), the very body that condemned Jesus.

It may well be true that Joseph of Arimathea was only a sympathizer rather than a committed follower of Jesus. The absence of any mention of him in the gospels prior to the crucifixion is striking. We might have expected that such an important person would have attracted more notice if he had been publicly known to be one of Jesus' followers. Nevertheless, all the gospels insist that in some sense he was a disciple, and otherwise Joseph would scarcely have intervened to gain a respectable burial for Jesus.

Within John's Gospel the brief mention of Joseph may have been a challenge to secret followers of Jesus to confess their faith publicly (Brown, *The Gospel* 2:959-60). As we have seen before, the evangelist wrote shortly after Jewish Christians had been expelled from the synagogues. In response to this crisis some Christians kept their faith secret in order to avoid the excommunication. The evangelist earlier condemned such duplicity saying that such people preferred human approval more than God's (12:42-43). In the brief scene we are presently considering, the death of Jesus forces Joseph to make a public stand by going to the Roman Governor to obtain Jesus' body. The implication seems clear: The suffering and death of Jesus should challenge any Christian to take a costly stand in behalf of Christ.

The odd details of the burial continue the theme that the death of Jesus reveals that he was indeed the messianic king. We have already noted that many details of the execution (e.g., the sign on the cross) ironically emphasize Jesus' royal authority. Now Jesus receives a royal burial. A hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes and a new tomb in a garden would only be appropriate for the interment of a monarch.

In the edited gospel this brief scene completes the spiritual progress of Nicodemus. The editor, of course, rearranged the gospel so that it would parallel the stages of the Christian life. In this new arrangement Nicodemus becomes an illustration of spiritual growth. When we first meet him at the beginning of chapter 3, he believes in Jesus, but when Jesus challenges him to accept baptism, he responds with confusion. When Nicodemus appears again in the middle of chapter 7, he becomes a committed disciple, because he asks his fellow Pharisees to give Jesus a hearing. They in turn abuse Nicodemus, and so Nicodemus symbolizes someone who suffers ridicule for the faith. Finally, in this scene Nicodemus shares in the death of Jesus and by helping bury him takes the first step in replacing him in this world.

## Chapter 20

*(20:1) On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. (2) She ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other student, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have removed the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him."*

There is good historical evidence that Mary Magdalene, probably accompanied by other women, found the tomb of Jesus empty. All the gospels make this claim (Mat. 28:1-8, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12), and the account of the finding of the empty tomb in John appears to be independent of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since there are variations in detail (e.g., in the other gospels Mary Magdalene has at least one female companion). As we have seen, the basic story of the burial of Jesus accords with all that we know about first-century Palestinian life. Jewish law required the burial of crucified criminals by sundown, and even during the Roman occupation that law was kept. The family and friends of the deceased had the responsibility to do all in their power to assure the burial of their loved ones. Hence, we have every reason to assume that Joseph of Arimathea, an observant Jew who apparently also had some sympathy for Jesus, used his political influence to obtain the corpse of Jesus and buried it. We should also assume that Mary Magdalene (and her companions) did observe the location of the tomb. Claims that the body of Jesus rotted on the cross or that the location of the tomb was somehow lost have no foundation in the gospel accounts and do not fit the larger cultural milieu. Once we admit that people knew where the grave of Jesus was, it follows that it must have been empty. The early church could never have maintained the resurrection if the grave of Jesus was still intact. Moreover, if early Christians invented the story of the finding of the empty tomb, they certainly would never have claimed that the people who discovered this were women. The patriarchal world of first-century Palestine did not regard women as reliable witnesses. By Jewish law a woman could not even testify in court (Josephus, *Antiquities* IV.8.15 #219). Accordingly, it is not surprising that Paul in defending the resurrection only lists males as witnesses (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Scholars who deny that the tomb was empty do so because they regard the physical resurrection of Jesus as impossible. That, strictly speaking, is not a historical judgment but a religious and metaphysical one.

The Gospel of John uses the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb to illustrate how a Christian comes to spiritual enlightenment, and, therefore, the story begins in darkness. While naturally there is no historical reason why Mary could not have come to the tomb in the middle of the night, it seems more likely that she would have waited until light. Matthew and Luke record that Mary arrived at dawn (Mat. 28:1, Luke 24:1), and Mark even states that the sun had risen (Mark 16:2). Probably no one remembered what time it was, and Matthew, Mark, and Luke simply guessed. But their guesses are far more plausible than Mary stumbling around in the dark. Throughout the gospel of John light is used symbolically, and the same holds true



here. Mary is in spiritual darkness when she arrives, because she assumes that someone has vandalized the tomb and stolen Jesus' body. She rushes to get help from Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Subsequently, Mary will come to enlightenment.

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*(20:3) So Peter and the other student came out and started to go to the tomb. (4) The two were running together, but the other student ran ahead, since he was faster than Peter, and came first to the tomb. (5) He bent down and saw the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. (6) Simon Peter also came, following him, and he went into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there (7) and the handkerchief which had been on his head. (It was not lying with the linen strips but folded up in a place by itself.) (8) Then the other student also went in, the one who came first to the tomb, and he saw and believed. (9) For they did not yet know the scripture that he must rise from the dead. (10) The students then went away back to where they were staying.*

Once again we have a passage about the Beloved Disciple that interrupts its context and appears to come from the editor. This brief section occurs in the middle of the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb. When the story resumes, Mary is standing by the tomb. We have no indication as to when and how she returned. It is as if she never left. Consequently, it seems likely that in an earlier version of the gospel Mary simply found the tomb to be empty and began to weep or, alternatively, as Hartmann suggests, that Mary originally got Peter and the two of them rushed back to the tomb (Hartmann, see Brown, *The Gospel* 2:984; cf. Luke 24:12). In either case, it was the editor who added the story of the Beloved Disciple running to the tomb. As we have seen, other stories about the Beloved Disciple also interrupt their contexts and seem to come from the editor.

In this section the editor gives the most elaborate comparison of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in the gospel, and, not surprisingly, the Beloved Disciple comes off better. We found the same pattern earlier. Thus, at the last supper, the Beloved Disciple was next to the chest of Jesus, and Peter had to signal to him to ask Jesus who would betray him (13:23-25). Here we have two brief scenes side by side, and both scenes carefully associate Peter and the Beloved Disciple and yet portray the Beloved Disciple as superior. In the first scene the two men run to the tomb, but the Beloved Disciple arrives first. In the second scene the two men enter the tomb. To be sure, Peter has the honor of entering first, but the Beloved Disciple has the much greater honor of coming to faith in the risen Jesus.

The story of the Beloved Disciple coming to faith maintains a careful balance between seeing and perception. The story emphasizes that the Beloved Disciple did see physical evidence of the resurrection. He "saw" the tomb and the abandoned grave clothes. Yet, he also perceived. He "believed" in the resurrection. Significantly, Peter is not yet able to come to a similar faith.

This careful balance between seeing and perceiving helps emphasize two differing roles of the Beloved Disciple in the resurrection narratives. Thus, on the one hand, the Beloved Disciple in these stories (as in the rest of the gospel) has the indispensable function of an eyewitness. He “saw” the empty tomb and the grave clothes, whereas we readers did not. The Beloved Disciple is an apostolic witness, and our faith depends on his. Yet on the other hand, the Beloved Disciple as the ideal follower of Jesus models for us the possibility of coming to faith without “seeing.” All the Beloved Disciple actually saw was an empty tomb and the discarded clothes. His faith came from elsewhere. At the climax of chapter 20 (see below) Jesus will acclaim those who believe without having seen. Our faith must be like the Beloved Disciple’s.

The story of the Beloved Disciple coming to faith gives us an illustration of how the Holy Spirit enables us to perceive the resurrection through our love for Jesus and one another. Earlier in the gospel Jesus told his disciples that the world would not see him again, but they would see him if they loved him and kept his commandments (14:15-19). Of course, one of those commandments was to love each other as Jesus loved us (e.g., 13:34). At the cross, in a passage that comes from the editor, the Beloved Disciple kept Jesus’ commandment and showed his love by taking Mary into his own home (19:25-27). Immediately, thereafter Jesus died and handed on the Holy Spirit (19:30). Now once the Beloved Disciple sees the grave clothes, he comes to faith in the resurrection. He does so even though he does not yet understand the scriptural prophecies and even though Peter does not believe. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit and his own love, the Beloved Disciple perceives that Jesus is alive.

The passage we are presently considering suggests that the church normally used the historical events of the crucifixion and the resurrection to reinterpret the scriptures rather than the reverse. Radical scholars have sometimes argued that the gospel accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection were largely invented through scriptural exegesis. Early Christians studied Old Testament texts and then fabricated scenes to fulfill what “was written.” Our study suggests that such skepticism is largely unwarranted. Such scenes as the soldiers gambling over Jesus’ clothes or offering him a sponge soaked with vinegar or piercing his side with a spear have historical plausibility. The claim that such events fulfilled scripture does not mean they were invented. The present passage insists that the early disciples did not initially “know” any biblical text that predicted the resurrection. The resurrection experiences came first. It is indicative that here we cannot even be sure what the scripture in question was (Hosea 6:2?). Perhaps the evangelist is only claiming that the entire Old Testament attests the fidelity of God—a fidelity supremely vindicated in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

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*(20:11) Mary stood by the tomb weeping outside. As she wept, she bent over into the tomb (12) and saw two angels in white clothes sitting where the body of Jesus had*

*lain, one at the head and one at the feet. (13) And they said to her, "Lady, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have removed my Lord, and I do not know where they put him." (14) After she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; yet she did not know that it was Jesus. (15) Jesus said to her, "Lady, why are you weeping? Who is it that you are seeking?" She, thinking that he was the gardener, said to him, "Sir, if you are the one who carried him off, tell me where you put him, and I will remove him myself." (16) Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni," (which means teacher). (17) Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and sisters and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.'" (18) Mary Magdalene went and reported to the students, "I have seen the Lord," and that he said these things to her.*

A notorious problem for New Testament scholars is that the various accounts of the resurrection have many inconsistencies, and we can illustrate the problem by considering the empty tomb. The story appears in all four gospel (Mat. 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12), and in each case we have the assertion that Mary Magdalene found that the tomb of Jesus was empty. Here all similarities end. The gospels disagree on the time. Mark claims that the sun had risen; Matthew and Luke say that it was dawn; John tells us it was still dark. The gospels disagree on who the women were. John mentions only Mary Magdalene,<sup>10</sup> Matthew mentions an additional Mary, Mark mentions three women, and Luke names three women and refers to an indefinite number of others ("the rest"; Luke 24:10). The gospels have very different versions of what the women saw other than the empty tomb itself. In Mark the women see a young man dressed in white seated at the right side of the tomb. In Matthew the women see an angel who rolls back the stone, and later they encounter Jesus himself. In Luke, after the women see that the tomb is empty, two men in dazzling clothes appear. There are many other discrepancies which we could note if space allowed.

These discrepancies seem to come from at least three different factors. To begin with, people either did not remember certain details or else recalled them differently. Thus, I suspect that by the time the evangelists were writing, no one knew who were Mary Magdalene's companions or what was the hour when the women visited the tomb on the first day of the week. Next, early Christians, including the evangelists, varied certain details to express their own theological convictions. Since no one knew many of the details, believers felt free to supply them, and, naturally, what they supplied accorded with their own ideas. For example, as we noted above, the Fourth Gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark because the evangelist wished to portray Mary herself as being in spiritual darkness. Finally, the

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10 In my opinion, there is no basis for the popular suggestion that Mary's statement, "We do not know where they put him [Jesus]" implies the existence of female companions. The "we" are Mary, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple.

resurrection stories are translations into human terms of experiences that were unlike normal experiences, and different people gave different translations. Whatever the resurrection experiences may have been, we may be sure that they differed drastically from everyday life. We do not normally meet someone who has risen from the dead and exercises divine power! Nevertheless, the original witnesses, followed by the evangelists, had to give their audiences some idea of what these experiences were. To do so, they used images from normal experience, and different people chose different ones. If a blind person asks what shocking pink is, one person might reply, "Shocking pink is like the blast of an electric guitar," whereas another might say, "Shocking pink is like the taste of a hot pepper." Both replies give the blind person at least some impression of the impact of the color, but, of course, the sound of an electric guitar and the taste of a hot pepper differ. So too do the accounts of meeting the risen Jesus.

Because of these problems, all we can safely say about what Mary Magdalene experienced after she discovered that the tomb was empty is that she encountered a heavenly being who convinced her that Jesus was alive. Certainly, she must have had some such experience. Different versions of it are found in each of the gospels, and only a resurrection encounter can explain why she is so much more prominent in the stories than the other women who are mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Brown, *The Gospel*, 2:1003). However, whether she encountered Jesus himself or an "angel" who spoke about him, we will never know. Perhaps such distinctions are ultimately meaningless and untrue to the experience itself.

In the various accounts of the resurrection appearances, we find a common pattern, as Perry has noted (e.g., 37). Initially, the witnesses sense that there is an uncanny presence but are not sure what to make of it. Then they become certain that it is Jesus. Jesus commands them to share the good news and somehow promises that when they do so he will support them.

We find most of that pattern in this story. Mary Magdalene sees the angels and then Jesus himself. Nevertheless, even when she sees him, she does not realize at first who it is but mistakes him for the gardener. Jesus calls her by name, and she recognizes him. Jesus commands her to convey the news to her brothers and sisters. In this particular story, we find no promise. In the next story, however, when Jesus appears to other disciples, he gives them authority to bind and loose. Whatever disciplinary actions they take, Jesus will confirm (20:23).

In the Fourth Gospel the resurrection is a transcendent event that leaves traces in history. Basically, the resurrection is Jesus' return to the Father. The gospel's opening verses tell us that originally the eternal Word was with the Father and then became incarnate. Later Jesus repeatedly looks forward to returning to the Father (e.g., John 17:11). Here Jesus once again announces that he is going to God. Therefore, the resurrection, at least in this gospel, is not primarily an event in time and space but Jesus' departure from the created world and return to heavenly glory at the Father's side. Still, the departure from the earthly realm leaves physical evidence,

namely the empty tomb and the discarded grave clothes.

Because the resurrection is a transcendent event that leaves traces in history, signs and eyewitnesses attest it, and we also have access to it through the Spirit. Thus, the account here, like all the accounts of the resurrection in the gospels, insists that there is objective evidence for the resurrection. Jesus' body was gone and the linen wrappings remained. Reliable people saw all this. Nevertheless, in the Spirit we can perceive the resurrection through our own relationship to Jesus and the Father. The Beloved Disciple perceived the resurrection because of his great love.

The story of Mary Magdalene here illustrates how one can go from relating to the physical, human Jesus to relating to the risen Lord through the Spirit, and, consequently, at first Mary clings to the physical Jesus. As we noted above, initially she is in spiritual darkness. The only Jesus she can imagine is the corporal person. Hence, when she sees the empty tomb, she assumes that the corpse has been stolen. Even when she sees the discarded linen and the angels, and it should be obvious that no such theft has occurred, she continues to weep. The angels ask her why, and she gives no reply. Jesus himself repeats the question and inquires whom she is seeking. She mistakes him for the gardener and asks for the body of Jesus.

In the Fourth Gospel one finds only what one seeks, and since Mary is seeking only a physical body, she does not recognize the glorified Lord. The question of who or what one is seeking occurs in various places in the gospel, and how one answers the question determines what one discovers. In chapter 1 when Andrew and the unnamed disciple (probably the Beloved Disciple) begin to follow Jesus, he asks them, "What are you seeking?" They in turn ask the appropriate question as to where Jesus dwells. Jesus invites them to come and see (1:38-39). Their willingness to dwell with Jesus allows them to begin to discover who he is. In chapter 18 when Judas and the soldiers and police come to arrest him, Jesus also asks them whom they are seeking. They reply that they are seeking the human being Jesus. Jesus says, "I am," simultaneously revealing both that he is this human being and that he is divine. In response the people who are trying to arrest him fall to the ground, because no one can stand before God. Nevertheless, since they are only seeking the human being Jesus, they do not recognize that Jesus is divine (18:4-7). Similarly, when Jesus asks Mary Magdalene whom she is seeking, her reply asking for the location of the corpse shows that she is only seeking the physical Jesus. Therefore, she cannot recognize him in his risen form.

Mary recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name, and she allows him to teach her. It is when Jesus pronounces her name that she "turns." Of course, this turning is symbolic; Mary is already facing Jesus. She then calls him "teacher," because in that very moment he is teaching her. Earlier in the gospel Jesus noted that a good shepherd calls his sheep by name and they recognize his voice (John 10:3-4). Here Jesus acts as the good shepherd.

The implication for the readers seems to be that if we truly seek the risen Lord and allow him to address us by name and teach us, we too will perceive him.

The story of Mary Magdalene suggests that in the Christian community from which the Fourth Gospel came, she was an apostle. The Greek verb “*apostello*” means “sent out,” and originally, an apostle was someone whom the risen Jesus sent out to proclaim the “good news.” Thus, Paul begins the letter to the Galatians by insisting that his apostleship came directly from the risen Christ (Gal. 1:1). Here the risen Christ tells Mary Magdalene to proclaim the resurrection to her brothers and sisters. Hence, at least in this community she served as an apostle. Only later did the church restrict the title of “apostle” to the twelve, and, we may note, also restricted church leadership to males.

In the edited gospel, Mary Magdalene illustrates the highest stage of Christian maturity, since she takes Jesus’ place in this world and shares in his own relationship to the Father. In chapter 13 after Jesus challenges his disciples to replace him by washing each other’s feet as he washed theirs (13:12-17), he tells them that whoever receives anyone he sends receives him (13:20). Here he sends Mary Magdalene to proclaim the resurrection, and, as he does so, he tells her that she and all whom she converts are now his brothers and sisters--in other words, they share in his own relationship to the Father. Significantly, this is the first passage in the gospel in which Jesus calls his students his “brothers” and sisters. Moreover, Jesus stresses that his Father is now their Father, his God, their God.

Naturally, the reason why Mary Magdalene and her “brothers” and sisters must replace Jesus is that he is returning to the Father and thereafter will only be available in the Spirit. The message Mary must deliver is that Jesus is ascending. The gift of the Spirit will occur in the next scene.

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*(20:19) When it was evening on that day, the first of the week, the doors were locked where the students were from fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace to you!” (20) After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The students were glad when they had seen the Lord. (21) He said to them again, “Peace to you! Just as the Father has sent me out, I also am sending you.”*

Here we apparently have the Fourth Gospel’s version of the historical resurrection appearance to the twelve. Paul in the earliest written testimony that we have concerning the resurrection records that after Jesus first appeared to Peter, he then appeared to the twelve (1 Cor. 15:3-5). Since Paul stresses that he is passing on what he himself received, we seem to have a statement of faith which goes back to the earliest days of the church and is surely historical. Matthew gives us what is probably the first narrative account of this appearance but correctly notes that the appearance was actually to the “eleven” (Mat. 28:16-20). Judas, of course, no longer belonged to

the fellowship. We have no way of knowing whether only the eleven were present at the original event. It is possible that as Luke suggests (Luke 24:33ff.) more people were there but that subsequently the community emphasized the eleven. In any event, what we seem to have in this passage is another version of this appearance. The most noteworthy difference is that Thomas, another member of the “twelve,” is absent.

Once again we see the pattern of presence, certainty, command, and promise. Jesus appears, but it seems that at first the disciples remain uncertain as to who he is. He then dispels all doubt by showing them his wounded hands and side. The Jesus who is among them is the same person who has been crucified. He sends them out to proclaim the good news and (as we shall see in a moment) bestows on them the authority to announce God’s forgiveness of sins or God’s condemnation.

Historically, the pattern of mysterious presence followed by the recognition of Jesus and then a command and promise must certainly have been part of the actual resurrection experiences. This pattern occurs in resurrection story after resurrection story--we have already seen two illustrations in chapter 20, and we will see another in chapter 21. In addition, historically it is hard to imagine how the experience could have been much different. Surely the disciples were initially surprised and confused when they encountered the risen Jesus. How could it have been otherwise? Yet very quickly they became utterly convinced that what they experienced was in fact Jesus himself and that this Jesus was Lord of the universe. But how could they have experienced this without believing that they must share this joyful news and that Jesus would sustain them as they did?

One implication of the pattern of mysterious presence followed by command and promise is that those who did not themselves “see” the risen Jesus may still verify the experience by following the command and waiting for the promise. Whereas the resurrection appearances were always to a privileged few, the commands and promises were more general. Thus, in this passage Jesus does not send out just the twelve into the world but by implication sends out everyone who will believe in him through their word (17:20), and the promise of “peace” is for us too. The universality of the command and the promise becomes evident in the subsequent verse when Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was not for the twelve only, but for every Christian! And the presence of the Spirit of Jesus verifies that he is alive and reigns with the Father.

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*(20:22) After he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) Whose ever sins you forgive are forgiven; whose ever sins you retain are retained.”*

In the New Testament we have two contrasting accounts of the giving of the Holy Spirit. The second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Holy Spirit came

on the feast of Pentecost after Jesus' final departure into heaven. By contrast, in John the risen Christ gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples on the day of the resurrection. Of course, earlier in this gospel Jesus in some sense "handed over his Spirit" when he died on the cross (see the discussion of 19:30 above).

Once again we seem to have different "translations," in this case of the experience that after the resurrection appearances ended Jesus continued to be present with the disciples but in a different way. During the actual appearances, Jesus' presence became so arresting, so dazzling that it was as if one could reach out and touch him. These overwhelming experiences of the tangible presence of the risen Lord occurred only to a few people and only for a brief period. Subsequently, the same people continued to have the peace and joy of the risen Lord, but it was no longer as if he was physically present. Christians who had not been at the resurrection appearances also experienced this new presence. Hence, people began to conclude that Jesus himself had gone to the Father but had given his Spirit. Both Luke and the Fourth Evangelist attempted to describe the coming of the Spirit, and, to do so they "translated" the experience into stories that anyone could understand. Not surprisingly, these stories differ in their literal contents.

I suspect that both Acts 2 and the passage in John that we are presently considering were based on actual incidents. Acts 2 undoubtedly builds on an occasion when the young Christian community in Jerusalem felt almost drunk with the Spirit and spoke ecstatically in tongues. By contrast, this Johannine passage builds on the fact that an inherent part of the resurrection experiences was a "promise" that Jesus would not desert his followers but would always be with them supporting and guiding them.

Of course, the passage in John fulfills the assurances in the last discourses. As we noted above, in his final speeches Jesus keeps promising the coming of the "helper" who will replace him in this world (14:16, 26-27, 15:26, 16:7). Now that promise comes to pass.

The experience that the risen Jesus sent the Holy Spirit demonstrated Christ's divinity. The Spirit herself is divine, and, therefore the risen Jesus must be as well. "Only God sends God."<sup>11</sup>

In this gospel the Holy Spirit allows the disciples to become Jesus for each other, and this passage emphasizes that, therefore, the leaders of the church have the power to forgive and retain sins.

In attributing this power to the leaders of the church, John's gospel continues a long standing tradition which in some form probably goes back to Jesus himself. Matthew, Mark, and Luke clearly claim that Jesus gave the authority to interpret his teaching

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11 I owe this point to Donald Gelpi, S.J., who emphasizes it in his classes.



and to pronounce God's forgiveness (or wrath). This theme is especially prominent in Matthew where Jesus gives the authority to bind and loose first to Peter (Mat. 16:17-19) and then to some amorphous larger group (Mat. 18:18). Behind these traditions must lie Jesus' own practice. Despite his emphasis that the first must be last of all and servant of all, Jesus did choose some people to have leadership roles in his movement. One thinks, especially, of the twelve, and one presumes that such leaders must have had authority to proclaim and interpret Jesus' teaching. Indeed, according to a saying found in Matthew and Luke (Mat. 19:28, Luke 22:29-30), the twelve would one day even rule over the renewed Israel.

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*(20:24) Thomas, one of the twelve (whose name means "Twin"), was not with them when Jesus came. (25) So the other students kept saying to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "If I do not see in his hands the mark of the nails and stick my finger into the mark of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will not believe." (26) After eight days his students were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood among them and said, "Peace to you!" (27) Then he said to Thomas, "Bring your finger here and examine my hands, and bring your hand and stick it into my side, and do not be unbelieving but believing." (28) In reply Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."*

*(30) Jesus also did many other signs before his students, which are not recorded in this book, (31) but these have been recorded that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Originally, this section must have been the conclusion of the entire gospel. Verse 30 makes it clear that the gospel will not give us any more stories ("signs") about Jesus. What has been narrated so far is sufficient to produce faith. Then the gospel turns from talking about what Jesus did to exhortation. We the readers must believe in God's Son if we are to have life. This turn to the reader is yet another signal that the gospel is at an end. Therefore, the next chapter must have been added by an editor. Later we will see that the addition probably occurred after the evangelist died.

Even with the addition of chapter 21, the appearance to Thomas remains the literary climax of the gospel. The end of chapter 20--especially the insistence that what has been recounted thus far is sufficient for faith--marks the section as a definitive high point. Moreover, the scene is fraught with drama and leaves a lasting impression. We begin with Thomas's aggressive skepticism. He will never believe unless he can feel the wounds of Jesus. We go on to Jesus' even more aggressive response. He challenges Thomas to put his fingers and hand into those very wounds. Then Thomas responds with the dramatic confession that this Jesus is "Lord" and "God."

We may note in passing that the gospel carefully orchestrates all of chapter 20 so it climaxes in the appearance to Thomas. In each scene in chapter 20 we get one step closer to touching the risen Jesus (cf. Moloney 517). When the chapter begins, we only see that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb (20:1). Then we see the linen that had been wrapped around Jesus' body (20:5). Then we enter the tomb and see the napkin that had been wrapped around his head (20:6-8). Then we see Jesus himself, but Jesus explicitly refuses to let himself be touched (20:14-17). Then Jesus shows us his hands and his side (i.e., his wounds; 20:19-20). Finally, Jesus invites Thomas to put his fingers into these wounds (20:24-27).

As is appropriate in a literary climax, the gospel here reminds us of its central theme, namely that Jesus is God infleshed and that by believing this we will find life. This theme already appears in the opening verses of chapter 1. There we read that the eternal Word was God and became flesh and that those who accepted him found life. In the climax we are now considering, there is once again a strident emphasis that Jesus is divine. Thomas rightly calls him "God." Yet there is perhaps an even greater emphasis that this "God" has a fleshly body. Even in his risen state Jesus is so physical that the wounds from his crucifixion remain and, indeed, may be touched. Then the evangelist speaks directly to the readers and reminds us that by believing that Jesus is God's Son we will find life.

As the gospel stresses that Jesus is God infleshed, it insists that most of us must come to this faith without the direct proof that Thomas received. Thomas believed because he had seen. We, however, will be blessed if we believe without seeing.

We may note in passing that this challenge to believe without the direct proof of seeing for oneself must have been especially challenging for the original readers of the gospel. We can only date the gospel approximately, but it must have been written close to the end of the first century. In this period the people who had actually known Jesus or witnessed his resurrection were dying out. The community now had to stop believing on the basis of oral testimony from living eyewitnesses.

One basis for believing without having seen is the testimony of the gospel itself. The gospel records what others saw, and to some degree we must simply accept this testimony as reliable.

Nevertheless, as we shall now discover, the editor did not think that this testimony was still sufficient. The editor probably wrote after the eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection were all dead. Some of this eyewitness testimony was preserved in this gospel. But this testimony was weakened by the fact that those who gave it were no longer around to explain and defend the historical accuracy of what the gospel claimed. Moreover, Christians were under great pressure not to believe that Jesus was God infleshed. The gospel itself emphasizes that for Jewish readers the price of proclaiming that Jesus was the Divine Messiah was permanent expulsion from the synagogues. Mob violence apparently sometimes accompanied

these expulsions. The gospel mentions Christians getting killed by people who thought that they were doing God a favor (16:2). Within the church, Christians were under pressure to stop believing that God's Son ever had a normal human body. The three short documents that we now know as First, Second, and Third John attack an opposing Christian group who denied that Jesus Christ "came in the flesh" (1 John 4:1-3, cf. 1 John 1:18-19, 2 John 7), and it appears that this group was more numerous than the "orthodox," since 1 John must admit, "the world listens to them" (4:5). Because the price for believing that Jesus is God infleshed had become so high, and because there were no more eyewitnesses to Jesus left, the editor apparently felt that it was necessary to provide the gospel's readers with a way to verify in their own lives that the message of the gospel was true.

As we have seen, the way that the editor attempted to prove to the reader that the gospel was true was to organize the gospel so that it paralleled the different stages of the Christian life. Hence, as readers go through the gospel, they are challenged to grow in faith. Indeed, each section of the edited gospel suggests what truths the readers ought to be able to experience at a particular point in their Christian growth.

Thanks in part to the work of the editor, the concluding statement that the "signs" that the gospel records should be sufficient to lead to faith is very rich and reminds the reader of the entire progression of the book. In the opening section about conversion the signs are miracles that strengthen initial faith but which cannot convince people who are hardened in unbelief. Thus, the turning of water into wine strengthened the faith of the disciples but went unnoticed by the master of ceremonies, even though he tasted the wine himself. In the sacramental section, by contrast, we have the strong message that we must now go beyond a faith founded on miracles. When Nicodemus comes to Jesus and on the basis of miraculous signs confesses that Jesus is a teacher from God, Jesus insists that Nicodemus must be born from above. In subsequent sections the miraculous healing of the man born blind symbolized the insight that comes with committed discipleship, and the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead symbolized martyrdom and resurrection. In the sacramental section we also learn that ultimately the resurrection must largely replace signs as we mature in faith. After Jesus cleanses the temple, the authorities demand that Jesus show them some sign to justify his aggressive behavior. Jesus responds by pointing to the "sign" that his body will be destroyed and raised. Of course, an integral part of the resurrection is the gift of the Spirit. This Spirit, we read elsewhere in the gospel, will lead the disciples into all truth and so transform them that they can become Jesus for one another. Accordingly, when chapter 20 concludes with a reference to the many "signs" Jesus worked, it reviews the basic content of the gospel as a whole.

It would seem that the evangelist produced the appearance to Thomas by drawing out the implications of the original resurrection appearance to the eleven. Our other sources for the resurrection all insist that Jesus made a single appearance to the eleven (1 Cor. 15:5, Mat. 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:33-49). At least according to Luke's account, the presence of Jesus on this occasion was especially tangible. He

showed the disciples his hands and feet and ate a piece of cooked fish to prove that he was not a ghost. As we noted above, the details of the resurrection stories are often translations into earthly terms of experiences that would otherwise be beyond description. What the eleven may have experienced was an overwhelming sense of Jesus himself being physically present. It was as if they could touch him or as if he could have eaten a piece of fish. The fourth evangelist produced two scenes. In the appearance to the disciples without Thomas being present, we have Jesus showing them his hands and side. In the appearance to Thomas, the evangelist put the undeniable sense of Jesus being physically present. It was as if someone could have put a finger or a hand into the wounds left by the crucifixion. Here, as so often in the gospel, we see that the evangelist used imagination to draw out the dimensions of an actual event.

The appearance to Thomas also faithfully reflects the historical fact that it was the resurrection appearances that first led the church to believe that Jesus was divine. To be sure, even long after these appearances the church had difficulty understanding how Jesus could be divine. John's Gospel itself struggles with the question of how Jesus can be one with the Father. Still, it remains true that from the earliest days after the resurrection Christians insisted that Jesus was Lord of the universe. In this story John's Gospel reminds us that it was at the resurrection that the believers understood who Jesus truly was. Prior to the appearance to Thomas no disciple in this gospel seems to understand—let alone endorse—Jesus's repeated declarations that he shares the Father's deity. By contrast, as soon as he sees the risen Christ, Thomas exclaims that Jesus is "Lord" and "God." The implication is evident. Even though Jesus was always divine, the followers of Jesus learned this at the resurrection.

It seems likely that the story of the appearance to Thomas was especially directed against early Christians who denied that God's Son had a physical body. The three epistles of John attack people who apparently once were members of the same community from which the gospel originated. These people denied that "Jesus Christ came in the flesh" (1 John 4:2, 2 John 7). The story of the appearance to Thomas insists that even in his risen state Jesus had a body that was so physical it could have been touched.

The evangelist had to insist that Jesus had a real body because if Jesus was only a ghost, he would not have truly suffered, and his death would neither express God's love for us nor inspire us to costly self-sacrifice. If Jesus was merely a spirit, his death was an illusion and certainly did not involve any pain. Accordingly, the cross was not a costly sacrifice on God's part that expressed his love for a fallen world, and it certainly could not be an invitation to us to suffer for the sake of others. In response to those who denied that Jesus Christ had a material body, 1 John insists that Jesus came not only with water but with blood (1 John 5:6) and that we in turn must love others not merely in word but in costly deed (1 John 3:17-18). The evangelist in this passage seems to make a similar set of points. It is no coincidence that it is the wounds left by the cross that Jesus challenges Thomas to touch. The reality of Jesus'

risen body is the guarantee that God himself actually suffered.

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## Chapter 21

*(21:1) After this, Jesus again revealed himself to the students at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. (2) Simon Peter and Thomas (whose name means "Twin") and Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others from his students were together. (3) Simon Peter said to them, "I am going off to fish." They said to him, "We too are coming with you." They went out and got into the boat, and on that night, they caught nothing. (4) When it was already early morning, Jesus stood on the shore. Nevertheless, the students did not know that it was Jesus. (5) Jesus said to them, "Babes, you don't have any fish, do you?" They replied to him, "No." (6) He said to them, "Throw the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find them." So they threw, and they were no longer able to draw it in because of the great number of fish. (7a) So that student--the one Jesus loved--said to Peter, "It's the Lord."*

As we have seen, the editor must have added all of chapter 21. The original gospel certainly ended with 20:30-31. There we read that although Jesus did other "signs" the gospel will not narrate them. Then the evangelist abandons the narrative about Jesus and instead addresses the reader directly and comments on the purpose of the book. The book was written so that we readers would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, and by believing find life. These verses exclude the possibility that the narrative about Jesus will continue. Yet it does. The only reasonable explanation is that a later hand intervened. That later hand clearly identifies itself in the final verses of chapter 21, which now conclude the entire gospel. Those verses state that, "we" know that the Beloved Disciple wrote the gospel and that his testimony is true. Then the editor comments, "I suppose," that an endless number of books could be written about Jesus. Consequently, this later hand must have been an individual speaking for the church.

Chapter 21 does incorporate earlier traditions, as we can see from the present passage. As in the previous resurrection stories, we have the pattern of presence, certainty, command and promise, and I argued above that this pattern actually was part of the historical resurrection encounters. Thus, Jesus appears on the shore, but at first the disciples do not recognize him. Then he works a miracle, and they initially perceive who it is. In a few verses certainty will occur. The disciples will not even need to ask Jesus to verify who he is. They "know" that it is the Lord (21:12). Various commands and promises will come later. Perhaps most strikingly Jesus will command Peter three times to feed the sheep and will promise that the Beloved Disciple will abide until Jesus' return (see below). The passage we are presently considering obviously also adapts an earlier tradition about a fishing miracle. A very similar miracle is recorded in Luke 5:1-11. There too Peter and his companions toil all night with no

success, and Jesus challenges them to try again. The astonishing result is the same: They catch so many fish that they have difficulty bringing the nets in, and the disciples acknowledge Jesus' lordship. To be sure, this tradition itself may not be based on an actual event in the life of Jesus. The miracle might be a narrative meditation on the saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Mat. 4:19, Mark 1:17). (The substance of the saying appears at the end of Luke's account, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching human beings alive" [Luke 5:10]). Regardless of whether it is based on history, the tradition obviously existed once Luke wrote his gospel in the eighties and must have existed when the editor was at work at least a decade later.

Although chapter 21 incorporates earlier traditions, it often does not seem to have any firm basis in the resurrection experiences themselves, as the present passage illustrates. There is no reason to assume that the fishing miracle had ever been a resurrection story. Instead, the editor made it into one. Luke's version of the story was written down years before and places it during the ministry of Jesus. We have no mention of such a story in the resurrection narratives of the other gospels, and the fishing miracle could not have been a "third" resurrection appearance as John 21:14 claims. If Jesus had already appeared to the disciples, they surely would not have been still working as fishermen and would not have been so slow to recognize him in his risen state. The story also cannot be a displaced account of an initial resurrection appearance to Peter; that appearance occurred when Peter was alone (1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:34). What is true of this story is also true of most of the rest of the chapter: The material here usually has little basis in the actual resurrection experiences beyond the general pattern of presence, certainty, command, and promise.

Chapter 21 would have been the ideal place to emphasize the editor's own special perspectives and make them a key to the interpretation of the rest of the gospel. If the editor added the entire chapter and the chapter has only a slight basis in previous traditions about the resurrection, here the editor had almost complete liberty. Whereas elsewhere the editor could only insert brief passages and do a little rearranging, the editor was almost entirely free of constraint in chapter 21. Moreover, chapter 21 is a concluding passage and as such guides the reader's interpretation of what went before. We normally expect conclusions to highlight important points and thereby guide how we remember earlier material and put it in some final perspective.

Consequently, chapter 21 is the definitive test of my thesis that the editor rearranged the gospel so that it would parallel the stages of the Christian life. Years ago D. Moody Smith wrote that chapter 21 must provide the "key and cornerstone for any redactional theory" (*The Composition* 234). I heartily agree. As the reader now knows, I claim that the editor deliberately produced a gospel that goes from conversion to baptism to eucharist to committed discipleship and climaxes with the great alternative of martyrdom or taking Jesus' place in this world. We must now see if this pattern clearly appears in chapter 21.

I would argue that the scene we are presently considering is about conversion. When the story opens, it is as if the disciples had never known Jesus or had completely

abandoned him. Indeed, they are back in the setting in which Jesus initially calls them in Matthew, Mark, and Luke--they are back in Galilee fishing (Mat. 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11). In accordance with the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel, they abide in darkness and futility. Without Jesus there is no light (e.g., John 8:12), and we can do nothing (John 15:5). Hence, the disciples toil all night with no success. Then the light begins to shine. Dawn arrives and Jesus is on the shore. They do not recognize him. He challenges them to cast the net on the other side of the boat and works a miraculous sign. The Beloved Disciple recognizes Jesus and informs Peter that it is the Lord and, as we shall see in a moment, Peter jumps in the water, apparently to come to Jesus. In this passage we find many of the themes and literary patterns in 1:1-2:11--the section in the edited gospel that I believe deals with conversion. Thus, in those opening chapters we noted that a consistent feature was a conversion chain. Jesus summons someone who in turn summons someone else, and the literary emphasis is on the conversion of the last person in this progression. For example, Jesus calls Philip who in turn calls Nathaniel, and the scene ends with Nathaniel's conversation with Jesus (John 1:43-51). Here in chapter 21 we find a similar chain. Jesus appears to the disciples, and the Beloved Disciple recognizes him. The Beloved Disciple speaks to Peter, and Peter starts to come to Jesus. In the subsequent narrative, the longest section will concern the conversation between Peter and Jesus (21:15-19). Of course, we also have another illustration of an association of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in which the Beloved Disciple comes off a little better, since he recognizes Jesus and speaks to Peter. We may note in passing that the pattern of the Beloved Disciple being one step ahead first appears in the editor's touched up version of the calling of Andrew and Peter (John 1:35-42; see above). We may also note that throughout the Fourth Gospel miraculous signs accompany conversion, either initiating it or strengthening it. Strikingly, the fishing miracle in Luke 5:1-11 also concerns conversion and call. As a result of the miracle, Peter and his fishing partners begin to follow Jesus. Apparently then, the editor took a conversion story originally set in the early ministry of Jesus and transferred it to chapter 21 to remind the reader of the first stage of the Christian life--conversion.

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*(21:7b) When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his coat around him, for he was naked, and threw himself into the sea.*

This is the oddest scene in the gospel. The reader cannot help wondering why Peter was naked. Had he been fishing naked all night, and, if so, how did he stand the cold? And why was Peter naked, when the other disciples apparently were not?

I would argue that the only way to make sense of this otherwise bizarre episode is to conclude that it symbolizes the next stage of the Christian life, baptism. Baptism in the early church occurred by immersion. Indeed, the Greek verb "to baptize" means "to immerse." Before immersion, the candidates must have removed their clothes and been temporarily naked. Hippolytus's Apostolic Tradition explicitly tells us that at

least in the period that this author knew (late second century and early third) such was the case (Apostolic Tradition, 21) . We must assume, however, that when the editor was at work, baptismal candidates tied on a temporary genital covering after removing their normal clothes and immediately before immersion. In Gentile culture nudity enjoyed some social respectability; as we know, athletes competed in the nude. By contrast, in Jewish culture nudity was a disgrace. The Christian community from which the Fourth Gospel came was still very close to its Jewish roots, as the gospel's bitterness over the expulsion from the synagogues attests. In such a community it would have been natural to put on some kind of loin cloth just before the actual ritual bath. The fourth evangelist himself clearly attests this practice. At the last supper Jesus takes off his clothes and then ties on a towel and pours water into a basin to wash feet (John 13:4-5). Originally this scene symbolized baptism and served as a companion piece to the eucharist at the last supper. As we saw when we dealt with this section, the editor transferred the eucharistic material to chapter 6 and tried to suppress the baptismal symbolism by stressing that the footwashing is an example of how the disciples can now take Jesus' place in this world. Given the exact correspondence between the contemporary baptismal practice and Peter tying on a covering and entering the water, this otherwise strange scene in chapter 21 must symbolize baptism.

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*(21:8) The other students came in the boat dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about two hundred cubits [one hundred yards] off. (9) When they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire there with a fish lying on it and bread. (10) Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you caught just now." (11) So Simon Peter came up and drew the net to the land. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them, and even though there were so many, the net was not torn. (12) Jesus said to them, "Come have breakfast." Not one of the students dared to inquire of him, "Who are you?" since they knew that it was the Lord. (13) Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. (14) This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the students after he had been raised from the dead.*

This scene clearly symbolizes the stage of the ideal Christian life that immediately follows baptism, namely, receiving the (first) eucharist. The meal of bread and fish reminds us of the feeding of the five thousand with bread and fish by the Lake of Galilee in chapter 6, and, as we saw above, that passage is explicitly eucharistic. Indeed, thanks to the work of the editor, the feeding of the five thousand leads into a discourse in which Jesus insists that we must chew his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:53-58). To further the eucharistic symbolism here, the editor deliberately emphasizes the bread and de-emphasizes the fish in the description of the actual meal. Even though the overall story is about a fishing miracle, when he get to the breakfast we read that Jesus "took the bread and gave it to them"; the fish are almost an afterthought. The language of taking bread and giving it appears in various accounts



of the institution of the eucharist (Mat. 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-24) and surely was part of the actual liturgy when the editor wrote.

The editor may here have drawn on some diverse traditions. At the beginning of the section we seem to have some more details from an older account of the fishing miracle, such as the number of fish that were taken and the surprising fact that the net was not torn. We then may have a tradition of some meal, quite possibly one that the risen Jesus ate with his disciples. Luke assures us that Peter and others ate and drank with Jesus after the resurrection (Acts 10:41). Perhaps that tradition ultimately lies behind this passage and explains the odd detail that this was the “third” resurrection appearance, whereas in its present setting, it is the fourth.

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*(21:15) When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I care about you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” (16) He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I care about you.” He said to him, “Look after my sheep.” (17) He said to him a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you care about me?” Peter was distressed that he said to him a third time, “Do you care about me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you are the one who knows all things; you know that I care about you.” He said to him, “Feed my sheep.*

This section symbolizes committed discipleship, the stage of Christian life that ideally follows baptism and the reception of one’s first eucharist. Jesus asks Peter three times whether Peter loves him. This threefold question reminds us that earlier Peter denied Jesus three times (18:15-18, 25-27). Indeed, both scenes take place near a charcoal fire (18:18, 21:9)--so far as I am aware, the only references to charcoal fires in all of early Christian literature. Significantly, in the Fourth Gospel what Peter explicitly denies is that he is Jesus’ “disciple” (18:17, 25). Peter did not love Jesus enough to accept rejection by a hostile world. When we dealt with the section on committed discipleship, we saw that accepting rejection is the primary prerequisite for committed discipleship. Now Jesus challenges Peter to do better. The historical Peter served as a church leader (e.g., Gal. 2:7-9), and the imagery of a shepherd became associated with him. Thus, in 1 Peter the author exhorts his “fellow elders” to “look after God’s flock” (1 Peter 5:1-2). Hence, the present passage reminds us of how Peter actually exercised his committed discipleship. By extension the passage applies to every Christian. If Christians are “sheep,” then anyone who sacrifices to help a brother or sister exercises the role of a nurturing shepherd who feeds Christ’s flock.

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*(21:18) “Truly, truly I tell you, when you were younger you tied on your own belt and walked where you wished. But when you become old, you will hold out your*

*hands, and someone else will tie you up and bring you where you do not wish to be.” (19) He said this, revealing figuratively by what sort of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”*

Here the editor uses the martyrdom of the historical Peter to illustrate one ideal conclusion to the Christian life. It seems to be a fact that Peter did die for the faith. Not only do we have oblique references to his martyrdom here and in 13:36. Outside the New Testament we find similar hints in 1 Clement 5:1-6:1. The reference here, however, is not primarily to provide the reader with information about Peter, but to remind us of a possible conclusion to the perfect Christian pilgrimage. Thus, the passage idealizes Peter's death. After a lifetime of feeding Jesus' sheep, he will “glorify God” by his exemplary martyrdom. The language echoes an earlier passage which predicts Jesus' death (12:33). In both places Jesus gives a cryptic utterance, and then we read the explanation that he was “revealing figuratively by what sort of death” he or Peter would pass from this world. Nevertheless, there is an alternative to passing from this world, and that we come to now.

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*(21:20) Peter turned and saw the student Jesus loved, who was following, who at the supper had also reclined at his chest and said, “Lord, who is it who is betraying you?” (21) When Peter saw this person, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” (22) Jesus said to him, “If I want him to stay until I come, why is that your business? You, follow me.” (23) This word went out to the brothers and sisters that that student was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I want him to stay until I come . . .”*

Based on what we have seen before, we expect that here the editor will present us with a superior alternative to Peter's martyrdom. The edited gospel almost always pairs Peter and the Beloved Disciple, and whenever it does, the Beloved Disciple comes off better. That pattern, we assume, should continue here.

And so it does: The Beloved Disciple in this passage illustrates the supreme ideal of taking Jesus' place in this world now that Jesus himself is returning to the Father. The passage explicitly reminds us that the Beloved Disciple was by Jesus' chest at the last supper. According to the opening verses of the gospel, Jesus himself was at the Father's chest (1:18) before the incarnation. Hence, just as Jesus made the Father visible, so the Beloved Disciple will now reveal Jesus and thereby take his place in this world and “stay” until Jesus returns.

The way that the Beloved Disciple will take Jesus' place is through the testimony that he recorded in this gospel. Thus, the passage insists that Jesus never predicted that the Beloved Disciple would not die. Those who concluded that were mistaken. What Jesus promised was that the Beloved Disciple's testimony would remain, and it does remain by being recorded for all time in this gospel.

We may note in passing that this passage makes it especially clear that the Beloved Disciple was a real individual and probably outlived the other eyewitnesses of Jesus. If the Beloved Disciple had been only a literary symbol of the ideal Christian, his death would not have caused a crisis and demanded a theological explanation. Apparently the church applied to the Beloved Disciple a saying like Mark 9:1: "There are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power." Of course, originally Jesus was being vague. He simply was predicting that some of his original followers would live long enough at least to glimpse the glorious hope that he had proclaimed. Later, however, the church specified this prediction and assumed that it meant that a few of the original disciples would live until the second coming. The fact that this prediction came to be specifically applied to the Beloved Disciple suggests that of Jesus' original disciples he was one of the last to die.

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*(21:24a) This is the student who testifies about these things and who wrote them . . .*

Church tradition claims that John the fisherman whose father had the name "Zebedee" wrote the gospel, but the gospel itself calls this claim into question. The book never identifies the author, "the disciple Jesus loved," with John the son of Zebedee, and the sons of Zebedee only appear in 21:2. Much of what the gospel tells us about the author does not fit with what we know about the John the son of Zebedee. The gospel states us that the author stood by the cross of Jesus (19:26-27, 35) and went to the empty tomb on Easter morning (20:2-10). We have no evidence that John the son of Zebedee did either of these things, and the Acts of the Apostles records that this John was illiterate (Acts 4:13). Moreover, as we have repeatedly noted, the Beloved Disciple only appears in the gospel when Jesus is in Judea. The synoptic gospels tell us that John the Son of Zebedee was a fisherman on the Lake of Galilee and became Jesus' disciple there (Mat. 4:21-22, Mark 1:19-20, Luke 5:10-11) and subsequently traveled around with him in the region.

Instead, it seems most likely that the author of the Fourth Gospel was an otherwise unknown follower of Jesus who lived in Judea and repeatedly encountered Jesus there. If we assume--as I believe we should--that the unnamed disciple in chapter 1 and chapter 18 is the Beloved Disciple (see above) then the Beloved Disciple came from the high priestly circles in Jerusalem and was a disciple of John the Baptist before meeting Jesus. Since the Fourth Gospel contains so little about Jesus' ministry in Galilee, we may suppose that the Beloved Disciple did not accompany Jesus there but remained in the south. Perhaps he saw Jesus whenever the latter came to town for the pilgrimage festivals, as Jesus repeatedly does in this gospel. In any event, the Beloved Disciple seems to have been with Jesus during the Passion, especially since occasionally the gospel records information about the crucifixion (e.g., that it took place on the day before the Passover rather than on the holiday itself) that appears to

be more historically accurate than what Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us.

As we have seen, the editor added the explicit references concerning the “Disciple whom Jesus loved” to the gospel, and they appear to be idealized. Some of these references interrupt their contexts. For example, in 19:25 the gospel tells us that only some women were standing by the cross; then inexplicably the Beloved Disciple pops up in the next verse. In almost all these scenes the Beloved Disciple is somehow superior to Peter. Thus on Easter morning both Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to the tomb, but the Beloved Disciple arrives first. Both men then enter the tomb, but only the Beloved Disciple “believes” (20:3-10). The pattern that the Beloved Disciple is normally with Peter but superior to him seems artificial. Hence, it appears that the editor decided to honor the Beloved Disciple by portraying him as the ideal disciple who even surpassed Peter.

Because the explicit references to the Beloved Disciple seem idealized, it is hard to know how much of what they record is historically reliable. Thus, it is conceivable, as 19:27 claims, that the Beloved Disciple actually took Mary into his own home. It is more probable, however, that the editor invented this detail in order to give an example of the highest Christian vocation, namely taking Jesus’ place in this world.

It is possible that the Beloved Disciple only witnessed a small portion of what the gospel records and that some of his sources may not have been all that reliable. The gospel does not claim that the Beloved Disciple was present at most of what it narrates. We have no way of knowing what sources he may have consulted for other events (especially, what the gospel records about Jesus’ ministry in Galilee). Nevertheless, at the very least we must concede the possibility that some of these sources had already been heightened by legend or theological elaboration.

In any event, what is clear is that Beloved Disciple produced a meditation on the significance of the life of Jesus rather than a strictly accurate record of what Jesus historically said and did. Thus, the teaching of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel differs fundamentally from what Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus primarily talks about the coming of God’s rule. “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). By contrast, in the Fourth Gospel Jesus primarily proclaims that he is the divine savior: “I and the Father are one” (10:30). Historically, it appears that the first three gospels are more accurate. The Beloved Disciple wrote down what he concluded about Jesus subsequently and put it into Jesus’ own mouth. We have a close ancient parallel in the relationship of the Dialogues of Plato to Socrates. Plato certainly knew Socrates. Yet, after the latter’s death, Plato produced a series of highly literary works in which Socrates serves as a mouthpiece for Plato’s own thought, including Plato’s understanding of the ultimate significance of Socrates. Plato also idealizes Socrates’s life and character. For example, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates just before his death calmly reminds his hearers to offer a cock to the god Asclepius. Such a scene cannot be historical. Hemlock produces agonizing death by strangulation (Gooch 196-197). Of course, John’s Gospel gives us an equally idealized version of the

death of Jesus.

Probably many years of peaching on Jesus helped the evangelist produce this meditation. We must suppose that as an eyewitness to Jesus the fourth evangelist was expected to help his community apply the life and teaching of Jesus to new situations. The evangelist had to tell the community what Jesus would have said in response to conversions among the Samaritans or to the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues. The historical Jesus had not dealt with these situations. Nevertheless, the evangelist had to and probably had to do so in the name of Jesus. In his sermons and other comments the evangelist got used to being creative. By the time that he decided to produce a gospel the evangelist was already elderly. The expulsion from the synagogues had taken place, and this event could not have occurred before the year 80. Even if we assume that the evangelist was only a teenager when he knew Jesus, he was now at least seventy. It was only natural for him to continue to do what he had always done—creatively adapt his memories of Jesus to deal with problems in the present.

Yet, even when he was being most creative, the evangelist never lost contact with the historical Jesus. As we have repeatedly noted, even when the evangelist invented whole scenes, they still are at least consonant with the sort of things Jesus actually did or said. For example, I argued above that the evangelist invented the story of the changing of water into wine. Nevertheless, this story has striking similarities with the feeding of the five thousand, and that miracle seems to be historical.

The Beloved Disciple was able to produce this meditation on Jesus because he believed that after the crucifixion and the resurrection the Holy Spirit had led him into all truth. Here we may recall that at a couple of points the gospel itself emphasizes that when certain events occurred no one understood their true significance. Thus, the gospel tells us that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, no one noticed that he was fulfilling a prophecy. Subsequently, however, his disciples concluded that Jesus had deliberately acted to fulfill a scriptural prediction that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem seated on a donkey's colt (12:14-16). In his last discourses Jesus promises that later the Holy Spirit will remind the disciples of what Jesus had said to them and lead them into all truth (14:26, 16:13). Presumably the Beloved Disciple believed that this promise had been fulfilled in his own life, and he wrote the gospel to share what the Spirit had taught him.

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*(21:24b). . . and we know that his testimony is true.*

It is obvious that the editor--not the evangelist--is speaking. Clearly the evangelist could not write about his own book that everyone knew that it was true. Instead this line must come from a later hand.

The editor seems to be speaking for the church and must have been a prominent individual in it. Even though the word “we” appears here, there was no editorial committee, because the next verse switches to the first person singular. The editor modestly comments, “I suppose.” Here the editor feels able to speak for the church as a whole in endorsing the gospel’s truthfulness. Apparently then, the editor was a person of great authority. Perhaps that authority came from having been a student of the Beloved Disciple who in turn was the community’s link to Jesus.

In any event, this verse makes it clear that both the editor and the church were concerned about the reliability of the gospel. The editor insists that the document that we have just read is true, and in making this assertion the editor speaks for a larger Christian audience.

The editor’s assertion that the gospel is true must have come as a direct response to attacks on the gospel’s fundamental assertion that Jesus was God infleshed. When the evangelist was writing, the mainline Jewish community expressed outrage over the claim that Jesus was somehow divine and excommunicated anyone who made it. Whenever Jesus in the gospel claims to be God, the “Jews” seek to kill him (5:18, 8:58-59, 10:30-31), and this hostility must reflect the situation in the evangelist’s day rather than during the lifetime of Jesus himself. The historical Jesus did not make explicit claims to be divine. Instead, these claims arose thanks to the experience of the resurrection. The gospel itself bitterly complains that anyone who confessed Jesus faced expulsion from the synagogues (9:22, 12:42, 16:1-2). Hence, a Jewish Christian constantly had to face criticism for any initial faith in Jesus, and if he or she maintained it had to pay the terrible price of being disowned by the community. To be sure, by the time the editor was at work, the expulsion may already have been an accomplished fact. Nevertheless, Christians who were now former Jews still needed to be reassured that their costly sacrifice for the faith that Jesus was divine had been correct. At least by the time the editor was writing, people within the church also had to face hostility from other Christians who insisted that the Son of God did not have a normal body. The letters of John complain about people who refuse to confess that Jesus Christ “came in the flesh” (1 John 4:2-3, 2 John 7). Apparently, this “heretical” group engaged in fierce propaganda and succeeded in convincing the majority of the community. The letters warn the reader not to receive such people (2 John 7-11) and have to admit that the “world listens to them” (1 John 4:5).

One way that the editor attempted to respond to attacks on the credibility of the gospel was to insist that the author was an eyewitness and, therefore, knew what he was talking about. We see this insistence in the claim above that the Beloved Disciple wrote the book. Of course, as we have repeatedly noted, the editor deliberately inserted the Beloved Disciple into various important scenes in the gospel, including the last supper, the crucifixion, and the finding of the empty tomb to emphasize that the author of the gospel was present at these events. If the Beloved Disciple did know Jesus, then he could have replied to Jewish accusations that Jesus could not possibly have been God or allegations from other Christians that the Son of God could not have

had a normal human body. To orthodox Jews, the Beloved Disciple could have replied that he himself was a Jew and initially did not even imagine that Jesus was divine. Nevertheless, as a result of first being with Jesus during his earthly ministry and then experiencing the resurrection, he became certain that Jesus must be God. To Christians who denied that the Son of God had a normal human body, the Beloved Disciple could have replied that he touched that body (cf. 1 John 1:1). The death of the Beloved Disciple weakened such testimony. It was one thing for the Beloved Disciple to say that he had come to believe in Jesus' divinity or touched Jesus' body. It was quite another for the editor to make such claims in the Beloved Disciple's behalf.

Perhaps as a result, the editor devised another way for readers to know that the gospel was true: The editor rearranged the gospel so that it would correspond to the stages of the Christian life and show how people come to know the truth of the gospel through their own personal growth. We have spent a great deal of time looking at these stages already. Here we may only note that the edited gospel shows us what we can expect to learn at each point. Thus, if we listen to the testimony of another person about Jesus and are willing to check it out, willing "to come and see," Jesus will tell us something about ourselves. We will learn both who we presently are and who we can become through him. Jesus will also provide us with some secret sign. At this point we can at least begin to believe. If we then are willing to go on to receive baptism and eucharist, we will discover that God can sanctify material things, and this discovery will strengthen our faith in both the incarnation and the resurrection. If we go on to committed discipleship we will gain an inner spiritual perception that will assure us that Jesus is God. If then we die for Jesus, we will join him at the Father's side and see their eternal glory. On the other hand, if we remain in this life and go on to the supreme spiritual state of becoming Jesus for others and replacing him in this world, Jesus will dwell fully in us through the Spirit, and we will know him as completely and certainly as we know ourselves.

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*(21:25) There are also many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them was written, I do not suppose even the world itself would hold the books that would be written.*

This conclusion to the gospel echoes the conclusion to chapter 20. In both passages we read that there are many other things that Jesus did, but that the gospel will not attempt to include them.

Therefore, it seems likely that the editor produced this ending by imitating the original conclusion of the gospel. The editor found 20:30-31 and produced a new conclusion by reworking it. Of course, by echoing the old conclusion the editor was honoring what went before.

Nevertheless, I believe that here the editor was also acknowledging the legitimacy of other gospels. John's Gospel was probably the last of the four to be written. As we have seen, this gospel builds on old tradition which it frequently expounds in imaginative ways. Often we find more primitive versions of this tradition in the first three gospels, and it seems reasonable to assume that they were published first. Moreover, the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel repeatedly mentions the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues, and this event did not happen until late in the first century when Mark's Gospel already existed and Matthew and Luke were at least being written. The editor probably did not complete the revisions until around the year 100. By that time the editor's audience must have been aware of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Of course, books spread slowly in the ancient world because they had to be copied by hand. As time passed, however, more and more copies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke came into existence, and, as a result, these books became better known. Consequently, readers of the Fourth Gospel must have become increasingly familiar with the first three, and as they did so, they must have wondered how to evaluate them. Should the community that cherished the memory of the Beloved Disciple accept only his gospel as authoritative, especially since it so often differed from Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Or should the church accept these books too? In the passage we are presently considering, the editor seems to insist that despite the discrepancies between his own gospel and the others, the church should acknowledge that no one book could say everything about Jesus, and that, therefore, at least several gospels would be desirable. In due time, the church as a whole recognized the wisdom of this position.

The conclusion of the Fourth Gospel, however, also suggests that no book can cover everything that might be said about Jesus, and that, therefore, we should feel free to produce new ones. The Fourth Gospel itself was an imaginative meditation on the continuing significance of who Jesus was and what he did. The evangelist and then the editor started with the "historical" Jesus, and then reflected on what his life and message meant in the light of such recent events as the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues or--in the case of the editor--the death of the evangelist. So too we must reflect on the meaning of Jesus for our time. Every age needs new books about Jesus, and it is my devout hope that this volume will help make Jesus and the evangelist's and editor's understanding of him relevant to the beginning of the third Christian millennium.



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