

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEATH OF JESUS

THE PROBLEM OF THE DEATH OF JESUS IN JOHN

If there is one aspect of Jesus' life which would seem to constitute proof of his true humanity, then that would surely be found in his passion and death. Jesus does not escape the final fate of all other human beings. And yet when John's passion narrative is compared with that of the other Gospels, there are telling differences amidst the ample similarities. Missing from the account is Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. At his arrest, the Roman cohort sent to seize him falls prostrate at his feet, overcome with awe. On trial before Pilate, he speaks of the divine origin of his kingdom and power, which far surpasses Pilate's. He requires no assistance in carrying his cross. Subject to no one but God, he willingly lays down his life and dies, not with a cry of dereliction on his lips, but with a triumphant "It is finished!"

In short, the Johannine passion narrative appears to obliterate the traces of suffering and agony associated with it in the other Gospels and to eschew the Pauline theology of the weakness and foolishness of the cross, thereby appearing to lessen the reality of death and the ignominy of crucifixion. Does it also, then, lessen the reality of Jesus' humanity? To state the problem another way, no one has charged the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, which picture Jesus praying in the garden "let this cup pass from me," and

crying out from the cross, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" with "naive docetism." Does the Johannine narrative, suffused with the aura of Jesus' supreme confidence in his sovereignty over circumstances, minimize either the reality or the significance of the death of the man "Jesus of Nazareth"? Is Jesus' death so radically reinterpreted that it has ceased to be the real death of a real human being, and become instead the means by which this "stranger from heaven" escapes the confines of this alien world?

Such are the questions raised by Käsemann's characterization of the passion narrative of the Fourth Gospel, crystallized in his statement that the account of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and death are "a mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work."¹ "The solution," writes Käsemann, "was to press the features of Christ's victory upon the passion story." In this assessment the passion narrative does nothing to ameliorate the charge that the Gospel is "naively docetic" but actually contributes to the picture of the Johannine Christ as "God on earth" in two ways. First, the narrative obscures those aspects of Jesus' demeanor, motivation, and action which might point away from a Christology of glory in another direction. That is, one cannot explain what Jesus does and why he does it in terms of human behavior. For example, Jesus' death can scarcely be described as an act of human obedience, for there is no real moral choice for one who is already and always one with God. And neither is his death a willing humiliation, as it is in the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2: in the Fourth Gospel Jesus comes from glory, is characterized by glory during his entire earthly life, and returns to that pre-existent glory. There is no movement from humiliation to exaltation, no reversal of fortunes typical of the Synoptic passion narratives, and hence no change in Jesus' status effected by his death.

Second, just as Jesus' death does not effect any change in his own status, neither does it effect any change in God's salvific or revelatory relationship to the world. Since Jesus' entire life is a revelation of God's glory, his death reveals nothing new. Salvation depends upon belief in Jesus and his unity with the Father, but such belief

gains nothing further from Jesus' death. If Jesus is "God on earth," present only in the "minimum costume" required for his temporary exile on this earth of which he is never truly a part, then in what sense can his death be said to be real and human, or significant precisely because it is that? Instead, it is merely the means by which this "stranger" returns to his heavenly home. In passing, Käsemann notes that John 3:16, which is often interpreted as showing God's love for the world in the death of his Son, is "a traditional primitive Christian formula" whose sole purpose in this Gospel is to stress the glory of Jesus' mission and the miracle of his incarnation.²

There is little in Jesus' death in John, as Käsemann interprets it, which would offer testimony to Jesus' humanity. Instead, Jesus' death is an ungainly appendage to the Gospel in which all the emphasis falls on the signs by which the glory of God shines forth. Thus there is a sharp disjuncture between Jesus' signs, ministry, and life on the one hand, and his death on the other. But what if all aspects of Jesus' life are understood by John as integral parts of his mission? Immediately the picture changes. Jesus' signs are not emphasized to the exclusion of the passion and, consequently, his miraculous deeds *and* his death on a cross are constitutive of the Johannine Christology. As a result, one might well expect that the humanity of Jesus would be of greater importance in the evangelist's theology. Not surprisingly, Bultmann's interpretation of the Gospel, with its emphasis on Jesus' humanity, views Jesus' death as the culmination of his mission on earth, whereas Käsemann's interpretation denies it that role. Thus the place of Jesus' death and the extent to which one judges that it constitutes an essential part of his ministry illumine not only the evangelist's theology, but his understanding of Jesus' human life as well.

Three Crucial Questions

Subsequent to the appearance of Käsemann's *The Testament of Jesus*, several studies were undertaken to disprove, confirm, or modify his position by analyzing either the Johannine passion narrative itself or passages which relate to the significance of Jesus' death within the Fourth Gospel. In these studies, at least three closely related questions—already suggested by the sketch of Käsemann's

position—surfaced as germane: (1) What is the relationship of Jesus' death to his work and ministry? Does Jesus' death merely put an end to his revelatory signs and so allow him to return to God, or is it the climax of his mission? (2) This leads directly to the second question: Does Jesus' death effect a change in God's relationship to the world, so that it is an indispensable part of his salvific work? Does Jesus' death effect a change in his status, or is that status in fact one of pure, unchanged glory? In short, is Jesus' death an essential part of Johannine theology and Christology? (3) What is the peculiarly Johannine interpretation of Jesus' passion and death? Surely Käsemann and others correctly point out some of the distinctive features of John's passion narrative. How are these to be accounted for?

1. On the whole, the question of the relationship of Jesus' life and ministry to his death is generally resolved in favor of Bultmann. That is, one finds exegetes arguing that Jesus' death completes his mission and is thus integral to it, whether this mission is viewed primarily as one of glorifying the Father's name (Richter),³ cleansing and convicting (Hegemann),⁴ or of the revelation of God (Forestell).⁵ Because the evangelist regards Jesus' death as an integral part of his mission, it is, therefore, also a part of his Gospel which cannot be dismissed as an extraneous bit of tradition.⁶

2. Just as Jesus' death is regarded as the completion of his mission, it follows that there must be some change effected by that death, whether it be a change in Jesus' status or in the relationship of God to the world. Many scholars, including Richter, Thyen, Hegemann, Forestell, Becker, and Wengst,⁷ have opposed Käsemann at this point. Nevertheless, Käsemann's emphasis on the glory of Christ in the Fourth Gospel has exerted considerable influence. That the cross is Jesus' exaltation and not his humiliation is repeatedly emphasized (Richter, Hegemann, Forestell, Müller, Becker, Nicholson). Moreover, the descent/ascent schema against which Jesus' exaltation is to be understood receives considerable emphasis, as does Käsemann's thesis that death constitutes the Son's passage to the Father. On the question of whether the death of Jesus effects any change, there has been a negative reaction to Käsemann's position. And yet there remains considerable agreement that one cannot sim-

ply take over other New Testament evaluations of the meaning of Jesus' death and read them into the Fourth Gospel. John's unique emphasis on Jesus' exaltation radically reinterprets the significance of Jesus' death.

3. This leads directly to the third question: How does John reinterpret the death of Jesus? What is the unique Johannine perspective which one must uncover to understand properly his view of Jesus' death? John's perspective on Jesus' death becomes crucial, as Bornkamm asserted in his response to Käsemann's *The Testament of Jesus*,⁸ and this is a point often noted and reiterated. In recent literature, the question is asked, "For what purpose does John portray Jesus' death as he does?" Some suggest that John wishes to counter Jewish polemic against the cross (Richter, Müller, Nicholson), to exhort the community to follow Jesus' example (Richter, Thyen, Wengst),⁹ or to assure believers of their share in life (Becker, Wengst). The perspective of the fourth evangelist—including his retrospective interpretation and theological purpose—in presenting the passion and death provides an important clue to his overall presentation of Jesus.

These three questions about Jesus' death—its unity with the earthly ministry, its effects, and the evangelist's interpretative perspective of it—have been raised, directly or indirectly, by Käsemann's assertions about the role of Jesus' death in the Fourth Gospel. Yet Käsemann's *The Testament of Jesus* scarcely examines the passages typically cited as bearing on the evangelist's understanding at this point: the parable of the good shepherd (10:11–18), the parable of the grain of wheat (12:20–36), and the footwashing (13:1–20). Käsemann briefly discusses 10:17–18, but his discussion of this passage, which speaks of the Father's love for the Son because he lays down his life, takes little note of the meaning of "to lay down one's life." A glance at the index reveals that the situation is the same for the passion narrative itself; Käsemann includes no exegetical discussion of it. In arriving at his conclusions, although Käsemann alludes to certain key passages, he virtually ignores several crucial texts which demand close scrutiny if one is to ascertain John's understanding of the death of Jesus. An examination of these passages will aid us in evaluating Käsemann's theses about the death

of Jesus in John and in reaching some conclusions, not only about their correctness but also about the testimony of Jesus' death to his humanity.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF CRUCIAL PASSAGES

John 10:1–18: The Good Shepherd

Of particular interest in this section is 10:11–18, in which the good shepherd is twice identified by his willingness to "lay down his life" (*tithēnai tēn psychēn*). Because the phrase is used with variations (10:11, 15b, 17–18) the usages must interpret each other and, in view of the clear reference to Jesus' death and resurrection in 10:17–18, the phrase must mean "to give oneself up to death, to die."¹⁰ That dying is "for" (*hyper*) others. More often than not, the preposition *hyper* is used in John in association with the idea of death, whether of the death of Jesus (6:51; 11:50–52; 15:13; 18:14; and perhaps 17:19), of Peter's willingness to die for Jesus (13:37–38), or of one's death for a friend (15:13). When used with any verb meaning "to die," *hyper* suggests that such a death is "for the benefit of others."¹¹ In the Fourth Gospel, then, *tithēnai tēn psychēn hyper* refers to the death of one person for another.¹² Here, of course, that death is the death of Jesus, the good shepherd.

Second, Jesus speaks of his death as a "command" which he received from his Father, a command which includes the resurrection as well (10:18). Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus states that his Father commands him what to say (12:49) and do (14:31) and that he has kept these commandments (15:10). As Brown aptly summarizes, the Father's command to Jesus relates to his entire mission, encompassing his words, his deeds, and his death and resurrection.¹³ Thus it can be said that the Father's command "is eternal life" (12:50): Jesus' accomplishment of his mission means eternal life for others.

Third, within this passage there is a stress on Jesus' sovereign action: he lays down his life freely, not by force (10:18), a theme sounded in various ways throughout the Gospel (7:30, 44–46; 8:20,

59; 10:39). Jesus has the power (*exousia*) to lay down his life and to take it up again (10:18), and this power remains his own, independent from that of the human actors in the drama. Yet the Gospel emphatically affirms that Jesus' power comes from the Father (cp. 5:19): even Jesus' "own" authority to lay down his life is a charge from the Father (10:18). In short, Jesus' death happens in accordance with God's will (10:16; cp. 6:38), not as a result of human schemes. That the cross happened in accord with God's will argues for Jesus' vindication despite his execution; that Jesus dies willingly and rises again shows the inability of worldly forces to exert their final power over him who always did the will of God.

Finally, there are results which arise directly and only from Jesus' death and resurrection. To be sure, these are not in conflict with the purpose of his teaching and healing ministry, but his death and resurrection are necessary to insure the benefits of that ministry. In 10:15 and 10:17, Jesus speaks of his death; in 10:16 he speaks of his mission of gathering the "other sheep" so that there will be "one flock."¹⁴ It is clear from the juxtaposition of these verses that the gathering of the sheep into one unified flock results from Jesus' death.¹⁵ Moreover, Jesus is the good shepherd who has come to sacrifice his life (*psychēn*) that the sheep may have life (*zoēn*) (10:10–11).¹⁶

In summary, then, this passage makes clear that Jesus dies for others; that he does so, as is characteristic of his entire life, in response to the Father's command; that he does so willingly; and that from his self-surrender in death there results life and unity for those who believe.

John 12:20–36: The Grain of Wheat

Käsemann gives but cursory treatment to the saying about the grain of wheat (12:24): "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Coming as it does at the end of Jesus' ministry of signs and immediately prior to the events of the passion, the saying occupies a pivotal position.

Upon hearing that "some Greeks" wish to see him, Jesus announces, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified"

(12:23). Up to this point in the Gospel, Jesus' hour is yet in the future (2:4; 7:30; 8:20); but after 12:23, Jesus' hour "has come" (12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus' final hour is the "moment that will set in motion the whole process of the death and resurrection by which the Son of Man will be glorified."¹⁷ That hour has a two-fold character, for it is inaugurated by his arrest (7:30; 8:20), which leads to his trial and crucifixion; but it is also the hour of the Son's glorification by the Father (12:23; 17:1).¹⁸ In 12:27–28 the dual character of the hour as the hour of death and glorification (12:23; 17:1) is best seen. Jesus' prayer "Father, save me from this hour" must refer to his imminent death, for it would make no sense for Jesus to pray for deliverance from the hour of the Father's glorification or of his own return to the Father.¹⁹ Instead he prays, "Father, glorify thy name" (12:28). Jesus will not pray for deliverance from death, but he will pray that the Father be glorified in his death.²⁰ And he will not pray for deliverance because his death consummates his ministry and is the purpose for which he has come (12:27; cp. 18:11). The heavenly voice ratifies Jesus' decision by granting his prayer and by offering an accreditation of Jesus to his audience.²¹ Jesus' prayer is no charade, but represents his obedient choosing of the Father's will, and the Father accepts his obedience by answering his prayer—an expression of submission to the Father.

The glorification of Jesus in death. In the response of the heavenly voice, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (12:28), the Fourth Gospel's theology of glorification through Jesus' death is expressed clearly. In Jesus' acceptance of the events set in motion by the "hour," the Father will glorify his name, even as he has glorified it through the signs and will continue to glorify it in Jesus' death.²² Since Jesus' "hour" has now arrived, the past and future must refer to the glory which has preceded and which will follow this particular hour, the glory manifested in Jesus' signs (2:11; 11:4, 40) and death (12:23; 13:31–32; 17:1–2). In fact, verbal references (*doxazō*) are concentrated in the second half of the Gospel (chaps. 13–21). As John 12:23–29 makes clear, glorification is integrally linked to the passion of Jesus. In the vast majority of usages, the

"glory" which is spoken of comes from God and is given to Jesus. It is not inherent in Jesus himself (7:18; 8:50, 54; 11:4; 17:22, 24). Only 1:14; 2:11; and 12:41 speak of "his [Jesus'] glory," and in 1:14, that glory derives from Jesus' being "the only Son from the Father." Elsewhere in the Gospel Jesus denies that he seeks his own glory (5:41; 8:50, 54) and urges others to seek God's glory (5:44). That God's glory can be actively sought and is done so only by Jesus shows that God's glory is external to him and is granted to him by God. And so it is that when Jesus' own glory is spoken of, that glory always reveals the mutual glory of Father and Son: in 11:4, "[This illness] is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." This is particularly true of the references to glorification which are tied to Jesus' death (12:23, 28; 13:31–32; 14:13; 16:14–15; 17:1, 4–5), in which Jesus is glorified through God's glorification of him. Jesus' glory is granted to him by the Father, the one who sent him, and thus it reflects his dependence upon the Father.

That Jesus' glory comes from God fits with the frequent use of the verb *doxazō* in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus will "be glorified" (12:23; 13:31; 16:14; cf 7:39): this denotes an action, not a static possession.²³ Moreover, it is God the Father who glorifies Jesus (13:32; 14:13; 17:1, 5), even as elsewhere the Father gives his glory to Jesus. Again, what is in view is a process, an event. But what, then, of the statements that speak of Jesus' pre-existent glory which he shared with the Father? John 17:5, for example, refers to such glory (cp. 17:24). But if Jesus possessed that glory in his pre-existent state and manifested it on earth, is there any real sense in which his "glorification" constitutes a new or different glory? That Jesus prays for God's glorification indicates that he does not yet fully possess that glory. Although John 17:5 does indeed speak of the glory Jesus had with the Father "before the world was made," that verse must be read in its context, for there are also references to the glorification which will occur in the hour (17:1) after the completion of Jesus' earthly work (17:4) and which thus lies yet in the future (17:5).

The Father's glorification of the Son, even in death, receives such prominence that one cannot deny that Käsemann correctly notes

that all references to Jesus' passion are allusions to his glorification.²⁴ But for the fourth evangelist, the reverse holds true as well; that is, all references to Jesus' glorification include a reference to his passion. After Jesus' statement that the hour for his glorification has come (12:23), there follows the saying about the grain of wheat which dies. And following the statement about his being "lifted up" (v. 32), there is the editorial comment that Jesus was speaking of the manner of his death (v. 33). *Glorification entails death; exaltation implies the cross.* As Hoskyns and Davey write, "It is not that at the mention of death he hurries on to speak of exaltation, but that when events might lead him to speak directly of Christ's glory he obstinately refers to his death."²⁵ In other words, the evangelist wishes to interpret Jesus' death more than his exaltation and glorification. Furthermore, he wants to show that Jesus' death was the beginning of that hour which leads to glorification.²⁶

That God's glory is revealed in Jesus' death as well as in his signs suggests that the death does not merely provide a convenient way to end Jesus' earthly ministry, but is actually the capstone of it. If, then, Jesus' death consummates his earthly ministry, 12:20–36 also testifies that, just as the good shepherd saying made clear, there are results which arise from—and only from—Jesus' death and resurrection. In the parable itself, what results from the dying grain is abundant fruit. Within the broader context, "much fruit" looks backward to the "Greeks" (12:20) and forward to "all" who are drawn to Jesus (12:32). The fruit which is borne is thus the fruit of the world-wide Gentile mission, and hints of this mission have already appeared in the Gospel (4:35–36, 42; 7:35; 10:16; 11:52).²⁷ Moreover, it is only through death that such fruit is borne, for there is no fruit "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies," just as the "other sheep" can be brought into the fold only if the shepherd lays down his life (10:15–17); and the scattered children of God are gathered only if Jesus dies (11:52). While there are allusions to the future Gentile mission throughout the Gospel, it is only Jesus' death which seals and secures the harvest. Again, this pericope testifies that Jesus' death both completes and enlarges his earthly ministry.

In summary, the saying about the grain of wheat in context makes

clear that Jesus' "hour" is a unique time which has been anticipated throughout the Gospel and which finally arrives at the beginning of the events of "passion week." "Jesus' hour" has in view both his death and his subsequent glorification, and refers to neither exclusively. Furthermore, Jesus' hour does signal a turning point in his glorification by the Father. God's glory had been manifested in Jesus' signs and will continue to be manifested through Jesus' death. Although elsewhere in the Gospel the glory which Jesus has is said to be his own, it is clear that it is his only by virtue of the Father's granting it to him as the Son of man.²⁸ Finally, there are results which come from, and only from, Jesus' death and resurrection—the abundant harvest. That harvest is the gathering in of the scattered children of God: all may be drawn by Jesus' death on the cross.

John 13:1–20: The Footwashing

Käsemann slights this pericope, commenting only, "Undoubtedly John cannot conceive of love without selfless service and surrender, and 13:1 shows that Jesus' service and surrender implies death. However, this is not the characteristic Johannine manner of speaking of love."²⁹ On the contrary, I suggest that the interpretation of Jesus' death implicit in this pericope shares key elements with the other passages we have examined.

The opening verses (13:1–4) provide the backdrop for the footwashing. Jesus' "departure" is imminent, for "the hour" has come. As the twin references to Judas' betrayal (13:2, 11) make clear, this is the hour of Jesus' death. Jesus' death is also the hour of his "departure" out of this world to the Father from whom he had come. The hour marks a transition from this age ("this world") to the age to come and not merely a change of locale, for the hour is a temporal turning point, and "this world" and "the Father" represent qualitatively different realms of power (12:31; 14:30; 16:11, 33).³⁰

Authority and identity. Conscious of his imminent departure, as well as of his authority and origin, Jesus approaches his death with the final victory assured.³¹ One finds the motif that "all things"

have been entrusted to Jesus not only here (13:3), but throughout the Gospel: "all things were made through him" (1:3); "the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hands" (3:35); "the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing" (5:20); "all that the Father gives me will come to me" (6:37); "this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day" (6:39; cp. 10:29; 12:32; 15:15; 16:15; 17:10). Because of the scope and variety of these references, it is clear that in the Fourth Gospel the "all things" entrusted to Jesus and accomplished through him refers to the totality of his mission, including his words (15:15); his granting of salvation to be consummated in the last day (6:37, 39; 10:29; 12:32); and, in view of 13:3, his death on the cross.³² In compressed form, then, 13:3 reveals that Jesus' death on the cross is his own deed ("into his hands"), but also the Father's will.³³ Jesus' death thus expresses his sovereignty³⁴ as well as his acceptance of "all things" that the Father has given to him.

At this critical juncture, Jesus washes the disciples' feet, an act which prefigures and interprets his death on the cross, as becomes evident in 13:7, when Jesus tells Peter, "Afterward you will understand." Jesus' statement refers to the understanding that Peter and the disciples will be granted after Jesus' resurrection and ascension and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit as part of the Spirit's teaching (cp. 2:22; 7:39; 12:16; 13:19; 14:26, 29; 15:26; 16:13). That understanding comes after Jesus' death and includes the proper interpretation of that death.³⁵

A proper interpretation of Jesus' death includes the understanding of who he is. Thus Jesus states (13:19), "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he."³⁶ John 13:18–19 is strikingly similar to Jesus' statement "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he" (8:28). So also when Judas hands over Jesus, the disciples will believe that "I am he" (13:18–19). Jesus' death sharpens the revelation of his identity, here stated in the strongest possible terms in the absolute *egō eimi*.³⁷

An act of love. Jesus' death is an act of love "for his own" (13:1).

This love is manifested on the cross, for the statement that he loved them until the end (*eis telos*) already has in view Jesus' declaration from the cross, "It is finished" (*tetelestai*; 19:30).³⁸ One finds the same theme in John 3:14–16. Verses 14–15 and v. 16 are parallel, for each promises the same result: both the lifting up of the Son of man and God's "giving" his only Son confer eternal life. Jesus' "lifting up" implies his crucifixion (8:28; 12:33); "he gave" (3:16) should similarly be construed as a reference to the cross. But if this is so, then Jesus' death is a manifestation of God's love for the world, even as it is a manifestation of Jesus' love for his own (13:1). Jesus' love is revealed not only in the cross ("he loved them to the end") but also in his past actions ("having loved his own"). His entire life discloses his love for his own, a love which is manifested supremely on the cross. It is, therefore, not surprising that this section which centers on Jesus' death (chap. 13) opens and closes with an emphasis on love: 13:1 underscores Jesus' love "for his own," just as 13:34–35 highlights the love which the disciples are to manifest.

Jesus' cleansing death. In the dialogue between Peter and Jesus (13:6–10), we find yet another clue to comprehending the meaning of Jesus' deed. Peter first protests Jesus' intention to wash his feet (13:6) because it is a puzzling role reversal that one who is properly "Lord" and "Teacher" (13:6, 9, 13–14) should wash the feet of a disciple and servant (13:16).³⁹ Jesus replies that Peter will understand the significance of this act at a later time. Peter renews his protest: the Lord shall never perform for him the service of a servant or pupil. Jesus' second response shows the necessity of the act: "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

With this response several points about the footwashing and, therefore, about Jesus' death are established. First, Jesus makes it plain that despite human resistance to his death, it must take place. One who does not accept the cross stands in danger of overlooking God's chosen path for the one whom he has sent.⁴⁰ Here, then, we see an attempt to overcome objections to the crucifixion of God's anointed one. Second, Jesus' response shows that Peter cannot participate in the benefits of Jesus' passion unless he is washed—unless

he submits in faith to God's way of salvation. One finds a similar struggle between human perception and God's purpose in chapter 6, where Jesus insists that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (6:53). Here washing refers to that death apart from which there is no "part" (*meros*) in Jesus. *Meros* (part, portion, lot), like the term "life" (*zoē*) in 6:53 (cp. 6:51), refers to the eschatological reward of an eternal heritage with Jesus, and is paralleled by other promised rewards of sharing Jesus' life (14:19), his glory (17:22, 24), and being where he is (12:26; 14:3; 17:24).⁴¹

But Peter misunderstands Jesus and asks for a more complete washing, apparently assuming that where some washing is beneficial, unlimited washing would be even more so. Jesus, however, assures him that one washing is enough and will make him "entirely clean" (13:10).⁴² Jesus' reply to Peter discloses, first of all, the efficacy of the washing, that is, the efficacy of Jesus' death in cleansing his disciples. The cleansing is not specifically explicated as a cleansing from sin. Nevertheless, from the context one can determine that those who are clean stand in contrast to the one who betrays Jesus. Those who are clean are not morally perfect, but are faithful in their allegiance to the Lord. Similarly, in 15:2-3, the branches which "abide" in Jesus are said to be "clean." To be clean, then, implies faithful discipleship, a continued and committed abiding in Jesus by virtue of which one bears fruit and so receives a place (*meros*) among the people of God (cp. 11:52).⁴³

Not only does Jesus' death cleanse efficaciously, it does so uniquely. The cleansing which Jesus' death effects need not be repeated and, in fact, it cannot be. It is a once-for-all event whose arrival is signaled by the arrival of the crucial "hour" and whose efficacy depends ultimately on Jesus' departure to his Father (13:1, 3). It is the necessary event which consummates Jesus' ministry among his own. That Jesus washes the disciples' feet at this point means that they still need to be cleansed, even after his teaching and healing ministry among them. His death on the cross is the one thing yet necessary to insure their complete cleansing and final salvation.⁴⁴ Thus his death completes, and does not merely duplicate, what is accomplished during his ministry.

A second interpretation? This brings us to the so-called second interpretation of the footwashing (13:12-17). The first interpretation (13:6-11) emphasizes that Jesus' death on the cross constitutes a salvific cleansing of the disciples. But this so-called second interpretation shifts the focus from what Jesus' death accomplishes to that which is required of the disciples by way of response. More than one scholar has suggested that the two interpretations of the footwashing are so different that one must assign them to two different hands.⁴⁵ Jürgen Becker, for instance, states that the two interpretations are not at all related and are, in fact, mutually exclusive; for while the first (vv. 6-10a) treats the footwashing as an act which is a soteriological sign, the second (vv. 12-15) views it as an act which is to be imitated.⁴⁶

But it is doubtful whether such a sharp disjuncture within the text can actually be substantiated. First, there are not really two "interpretations" of the footwashing, but only the one offered in vv. 12-17. Before that we have the evangelist's editorial comments (13:1-4) and the event itself, with the accompanying dialogue between Jesus and Peter (vv. 5-10), but whether either of these constitutes an "interpretation" of that event seems doubtful. Instead, we have an act which, in its wider context, prefigures Jesus' death; and this act, taken together with the following interpretation (vv. 12-17), must be read as a unit to discern adequately the meaning of this whole scene within the Fourth Gospel. At the very least, the context itself suggests that the interpretation of the footwashing offered in vv. 12-20 cannot be severed from its moorings in the death of Jesus.⁴⁷

Second, Jesus' interpretation of the footwashing does not radically shift the focus from soteriology (a view of salvation) to parænesis (instruction or exhortation). In the conversation with Peter, it becomes apparent that he objects that Jesus, the Lord, intends to wash his feet. This is, however, precisely what is required: "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me" (13:8). Because the promised eschatological reward is participation in Jesus, he himself must perform this act of cleansing. And it is the theme of the necessity of Jesus' action which forms the leitmotif of the interpretation in vv. 12-20, for the first question which Jesus asks is "Do you know

what I have done to you?" The death, prefigured by the footwashing, is Jesus' act (cp. v. 3) on behalf of his disciples (*hymen*). Jesus continues to stress the importance, above all, not of the disciples' action, but of his own deed: "If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet . . ."; "I have given you an example, that you should do as I do"; and "I know whom I have chosen" (cp. 13:11). Emphasis on Jesus' deed comes to its climax in the "I am" statement of 13:19, which points towards the revelation of Jesus' identity on the cross (8:28). In short, both the interpretation of the footwashing and the event itself stress the importance of Jesus' fulfillment of salvation through the cross (19:30).

Nevertheless, in the interpretation of the footwashing there are explicit commands to the disciples to do for another what Jesus has done for them. Certainly there is an exemplary note introduced here. But obedience to Jesus' commands does not take the place of participation in his salvific cleansing. Rather, the disciples assume their place (*meros*) among the people of God by participation in Jesus' death "on their behalf." As Bultmann writes, Jesus' death is not the pattern to which the disciples must conform in order to receive eternal life. Rather, they are committed by reason of what they have received: "even as (*kathōs*) I have done for you" (*hymen*) (13:15).⁴⁸

Barrett offers a helpful description of the footwashing and its attendant interpretation: In the Fourth Gospel, the death of Jesus is at once *salutary* (or "salvific"), for it cleanses the disciples for a faithful and abiding commitment; it is *revelatory*, for in his death Jesus reveals God's love (13:1; 3:15, 16), his identity (13:19; 8:28), and the fulfillment of God's plan (13:1; 19:30); and it is *exemplary*, for Jesus' cross provides an example of obedience to God and service to those whom he loves that the disciples are to emulate precisely because Jesus has died for them.⁴⁹

Summary

These three passages (10:10–18; 12:20–36; 13:1–20) share elements which, taken together, suggest an understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus which stands in sharp contrast to that delineated by Käsemann in *The Testament of Jesus*. These texts

demonstrate that Jesus' death can scarcely be relegated to a remnant of tradition which the evangelist was unable to appropriate satisfactorily.

In particular, Käsemann's contention that the death of Jesus can be equated with his return to the Father, thus merely ending his sojourn on this earth, cannot be sustained. Quite the contrary, the death of Jesus is an integral part of his salvific mission! It yields "much fruit"—the universal drawing of "all" peoples, their subsequent unity, the pledge of eternal life, and the complete cleansing of the disciples. Indeed, because Jesus' death consummates his earthly ministry (19:30), Jesus can even say, "For this hour I have come" (12:27). Although the benefits of Jesus' ministry and death can be viewed as identical (cp. e.g. 13:10; 15:3), nevertheless Jesus' death is necessary to insure those benefits (13:8).⁵⁰

In the statement "For this hour I have come," Jesus declares that his death is the ultimate purpose of his coming, the final outcome of his constant obedience to the Father. His life and death can also be characterized as service for others, arising out of love, as the footwashing graphically depicts. Because his death is a service of love, it becomes an example for those who would be with him to follow and, more important, it enables them to follow it because it cleanses them for faithful commitment expressed in loving one another after Jesus departs from them (Thyen, Wengst). Thus it is doubtful whether John completely subsumes love and obedience under the rubric of a "unity" emptied of any moral component (against Käsemann, Lattke).

Jesus' death does effect change: in Jesus' own status, in God's relationship to the world, and among the disciples. First, in regard to Jesus' own status, Jesus' hour, a unique one-time event (Wengst), initiates his glorification by the Father. Thereby the cross becomes the visible symbol of Jesus' glorification and exaltation (Forestell). Jesus returns to the Father, whose glory he shared "before the world was made" (17:5), but only after he has accomplished God's work on earth through the ongoing process of glorifying God's name. The Father's glorification of the Son is a process that is completed on the cross (19:30) and in his return to the Father (17:4–5, 24).

God's relationship to the world also changes as a consequence

of Jesus' death. Although Käsemann focuses on John 17, he simply glosses over the full range of references to the "world" in that chapter and elsewhere in John.⁵¹ The world is only the alien realm in which Jesus and his disciples dwell temporarily. With respect to 17:23, for example, Käsemann comments only on the expression "that they may be perfected into unity," and not on the subsequent phrase "that the world may know that thou hast loved them."⁵² He emphasizes statements such as "They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world" (17:16) at the expense of other statements which envision a mission to the world (17:18, 21, 23).

Yet Jesus' death does have undeniable benefits for the world. It brings life to the world (10:10; 12:24, 50; cp. 3:15–16; 5:21, 25–29; 6:51, 53–54, 57–58). It ensures the universal extension and scope of Jesus' mission (11:50, 52; 12:32); and it changes the disciples, providing the foundation for unity, faithful abiding, and mutual love (12:26; 13:15–17, 34–35; 15:3–4, 8–13) (so Thyen, Wengst). Chapter 21 illustrates the point, for Peter is to express his love for Jesus by tending the sheep, which would lead finally to his death by which he would "glorify God" (21:19), and so "follow" Jesus (21:19). Peter's restoration from one who denied Jesus to a faithful follower shows that his cleansing is completed and that his faithfulness (love) for Jesus must be expressed as service to the sheep. So Jesus' death changes the disciples, enabling them truly to "follow me" (12:26; 20:19).

In short, it is quite clear that the evangelist did "fit [Jesus' death] organically into his work." This reality raises serious questions against Käsemann's claim that a thorough integration of Jesus' death into the Fourth Gospel and its Christology was precluded by John's "naive docetism."⁵³ Indeed, inasmuch as Jesus' death constitutes the culmination of his work done out of love for others and in obedience to the Father, John surely escapes the charge of Docetism as Käsemann defines it. For here there is the human motivation of love, obedience, and submission to God. Yet when one comes to the passion narrative itself, that human motivation appears radically reinterpreted. Unquestionably the passion narrative of John's Gospel manifests unique features—features which at first glance point not to Jesus the man, suffering and dying a human death, but

to Jesus the king, who without a struggle triumphs over earthly circumstances, commanding awe and fear from soldiers and authorities. Unquestionably Käsemann is correct that John "presses features of Christ's victory upon the passion." But John's interpretation of the passion in such a manner does not stem from his "naive docetism" or from the inability to integrate it into his Gospel. Instead, it arises from the need to remind his readers of the Spirit's witness that even and especially here one sees the hand of God active. At this point, then, an examination of the pertinent passages and themes within the passion narrative is in order.

THE PASSION NARRATIVE

What follows is a brief review of certain passages and themes which are taken either as supporting an overtly anti-docetic polemic (e.g. 19:34) or as buttressing the charge that the narrative points "in the direction of a gnosticizing Christianity."⁵⁴ Of particular interest is Pilate's presentation of Jesus with the teasing and enigmatic statement, "Behold the man!" (19:5). It raises the question of its relationship to Pilate's second pronouncement, "Behold your king!" (19:15), and to the theme of kingship which runs throughout the trial narrative and, for that matter, the Gospel (cp. 6:15). In addition, the crucifixion scene itself contains two passages of note. As already indicated, Jesus' dying words contrast rather sharply with those recorded in Matthew and Mark, thus raising the question of John's reinterpretation of that death in a docetic direction, or at least in a direction which mitigates its agony and suffering—and hence its reality and humanity. By contrast, the report about the piercing of Jesus' side (19:34) has been taken as stressing the reality of Jesus' death and humanity against those who denied both. A look at crucial passages in the passion narrative can serve as the basis for corroborating John's interpretation of Jesus' death and the implications for his understanding of Jesus' humanity.

John 18:1—19:16: The Arrest and Trial

Throughout the narrative Jesus' sovereignty and victory over his opponents loom large. When the Roman cohort comes to the garden

and asks for Jesus of Nazareth, his response quite clearly is more than simple self-identification. The soldiers fall to the ground in awe at the majestic "*ego eimi*" (18:6). Jesus has the upper hand here and remains in control. Although the soldiers take Jesus captive, they do so only by his willing submission. In fact, he virtually guides their actions, twice identifying himself as the object of their search (18:5, 8), directing that the disciples be released (18:8), and commanding Peter to permit his arrest (18:11). Although such stoic behavior in the face of death may be unusual, it is certainly by no means without parallel—one is reminded of Ignatius' quest for martyrdom.⁵⁵ At any rate, the issue is not whether Jesus acts as one might expect other human beings to behave in a similar situation. The issue is how these features of victory and sovereignty in the narrative express the Gospel's interpretation of that event.

Here one should note that Jesus' triumph is only one panel of a tapestry. Another panel reveals that Jesus' arrest and imminent death are the will of God for him. Repeatedly the passion narrative declares that what has happened fulfills God's word in Scripture (18:9, 32; 19:23, 28, 36, 37). Pilate acts not by the authority of Rome but by the authority of God (19:11). Moreover Jesus' dying words, "It is finished!" make it clear that his death on the cross consummates God's work in him (12:27; 13:1). Jesus submits to his captors and so to his death in obedience to the Father's will (cp. 10:18). Thus he tells Pilate that if his was an earthly kingship, based on human authority and values, then his servants would fight to prevent his death; but God's path for him includes the cross (10:18; 11:51–52; 13:8). Jesus' victory and kingship are assured precisely because he obeys the will of God completely and until the end (13:1; 19:30).

Indeed, in John there is no royal victory and no kingship at all without death. In chapter 6 the crowd's clamorous recognition of Jesus as king (6:14–15) dissipates into unbelief and leads to desertion when he insists that his mission culminates in his death on the cross. Furthermore, in chapter 6 Jesus' claims to be the "bread of life" and "bread of heaven" are set against the objection that he is "Jesus of Nazareth." Not only is the rightful King of the Jews this man of Nazareth, but it is precisely as king that he must suffer

death. So also in the trial narrative Pilate presents Jesus with the two-fold "Behold the man!" and "Behold your king!"

Clearly these two declarations are parallel. But their meaning is less clear. Is Pilate's first statement, "Behold, the man!" designed to arouse pity and compassion for Jesus, the harmless caricature of a king?⁵⁶ Or is "the Man" itself a throne name, a title of honor and dignity?⁵⁷ In making a decision, one should note the frequent, sometimes sarcastic and disparaging, sometimes innocent, but usually ironic references to Jesus as "this man" (cp. 4:29, "a man"; 5:12, "the man"; 10:33, "you, being a man"; 11:47, "this man"). The designation of Jesus in this way occurs in the dramatic dialogue of chapter 9. It is "the man called Jesus" who healed the blind man (9:11), "this man" who is called a sinner (9:16, 24), "this man" whose origins are unknown (9:29) or who comes from God (9:33). During Jesus' trial the servant asks Peter whether he is not one of "this man's" disciples (18:27), and Pilate asks the Jews what charge they bring against "this man" (18:29). As Culpepper writes, "When Jesus is called simply 'a man' the implied author winks at the reader."⁵⁸ In the statement of the man at the pool of Bethzatha, "I have no man to put me into the pool," the double-edged character of the term *anthrōpos* is clear. Jesus is the man who will help him, but of course his action will subsequently lead to the charge that Jesus "made himself equal with God" (5:18; cp. 10:33; 19:7). "The man" who helps is not merely a man.

Pilate's declaration "Behold the man!" (19:5) brings this theme to its climax. Whether or not Jesus is the King of the Jews, the meaning of that kingship and its relationship to Caesar's rule are the recurring themes of conversation between Jesus and Pilate on the one hand, and Pilate and the Jews on the other. Immediately preceding the scourging of Jesus, Pilate asks the Jews whether they want him to release the "King of the Jews" (18:39). Throughout the narrative, in fact, he obstinately uses this title (18:33, 37, 39; 19:14–15, 19); but the Jews refuse to ascribe it to Jesus except as a false claim. Beaten and arrayed with royal robes and a crown of thorns, Jesus is presented by Pilate to the crowds. In the context of this scene, which so stresses Jesus' kingship, Pilate's statement must mean "Look at him! This is the King you want crucified!"⁵⁹ Al-

though Pilate's intention may be to ridicule the Jews' charges against Jesus and so to secure his release, the evangelist intends a deeper significance.⁶⁰ And the parallelism between Pilate's two pronouncements suggests that the deeper significance is to be found in the secret that this man is indeed King. Pilate refuses to change the *titulus*, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"; but the chief priests would prefer that it read, "This man said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" If anything, their suggested change brings yet more guilt upon them, for it lays bare the refusal to believe that "Jesus of Nazareth" is "the King of the Jews" (cp. 6:41-42). Jesus is still merely "this man."

It is doubtful, then, that 19:5 should be attributed to John's overtly anti-docetic stance; but in concert with 19:14 it emphasizes in the strongest possible way that the King of the Jews is a human being, Jesus of Nazareth.⁶¹ Bultmann aptly summarizes the point: the "entire paradox of the claim of Jesus" is asserted in 19:5, "In very truth, such a man it is who asserts that he is the king of truth! The declaration *ho logos sarx egeneto* has become visible in its extremest consequences."⁶² That this man is king, and that to and in his death he obeys the will of God and so is the victor, are assertions which deflect any claim that the Johannine passion minimizes the true humanity of Jesus.

John 19:17-37: The Crucifixion

Jesus' statement from the cross "It is finished!" (19:30) looks back to 13:1, which introduces the events of Jesus' death by stating that Jesus loved his own "to the end." A translation such as "It is achieved, it is accomplished," referring to the consummation of the mission and work which God had given him to do, accurately captures the essence of *tetelestai*. Throughout the Gospel Jesus states that he does the work of the Father (e.g. 5:36; 10:25, 31; 14:11). Anticipating his death, Jesus states that he has accomplished the work God gave him to do (17:4). On the cross, that work is brought to its goal (*telos*), and so Jesus declares that work finished. In comparison to Jesus' words as reported in Matthew and Mark, the last words of the Johannine Jesus appear to be a statement of victory. However, in view of the likely independence of John from the Syn-

optics, it would be rash to state that John substitutes a pronouncement of triumph for a cry of dereliction, or to interpret John's words in light of the synoptic record.⁶³ When interpreted on their own and in the context of Johannine theology, Jesus' words are the ultimate, that is the last and the climactic, statement of his submissive obedience to God.⁶⁴ Rather than suggesting the death of one untouched by human suffering, his words point to the death of one obedient to God's command for him. "If 'it is finished' is a victory cry, the victory it heralds is that of obediently fulfilling the Father's will."⁶⁵

The pericope concerning the piercing of Jesus' side (19:34-35) is often taken as evidence of John's anti-docetic interest when it is understood as a testimony establishing the death, and hence humanity, of Jesus. The soldier's act can only be taken as a test to see if Jesus has indeed died.⁶⁶ When the soldiers come to break the legs of the three victims to hasten death, they clearly expect to break the legs of all three; they expect Jesus also to be alive. The lance thrust into Jesus' side lays to rest any doubts regarding his early death.

The testimony of 19:35 confirms the undeniable reality of what has been seen. But does the witness testify to the piercing of Jesus' side and his death, or to the fact that water and blood came out from his side as a result—or are the two inseparable? The answer here depends on whether the flow of blood and water should be taken as an event characteristic of any normal death, or whether it is viewed as a miraculous occurrence. Bultmann and Haenchen assert that for John the event is a miraculous occurrence, but the view that the evangelist understood the event as a natural phenomenon also has much support.⁶⁷ Such an interpretation has the advantage that the narrative itself does not give any hint that the event was miraculous.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it links the soldier's actions (he expects Jesus to be alive but finds him dead) with the testimony of the eye-witness (he testifies to Jesus' death). Theories about additions or reinterpretations of the event by the ecclesiastical redactor are thus rendered superfluous.⁶⁹

Thus the water and blood which flowed from Jesus' side are to be taken as evidence of his death. But does the event have a symbolic

meaning as well? Scholars have long argued that it does indeed have a deeper significance, and what that significance is has been thoroughly debated.⁷⁰ The most plausible suggestions, which interpret the symbolism in the context of the Gospel, are that the water symbolizes the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the giving of the Spirit, elsewhere in the Gospel called "living water" (7:38–39), and that the blood refers to the cleansing death of Jesus, the Paschal Lamb (1:29; 6:51–59). Earlier in the Gospel, when Jesus promises the Spirit, the evangelist comments that the Spirit was given when Jesus was glorified, or upon his death and return to the Father; hence, the giving of the Spirit is dependent upon and subsequent to Jesus' death. And the blood of Jesus' death is requisite for salvation (6:51–59). Thus the context of the Gospel's use of the symbolism of water and blood is Jesus' death. This further strengthens the case that 19:34 and 19:35–37 are a double testimony to the real death of Jesus, upon which depend the gift of the Spirit and the cleansing from sin. Although the pericope does not have an explicitly anti-docetic aim, it does establish the certainty of Jesus' death and the benefits of salvation which depend upon it. As Barrett writes, John was concerned to emphasize "that the real death of Jesus was the real life of men."⁷¹

Summary

The passion narrative does not minimize the humanity of Jesus. The themes of victory and triumph point to the consummation of the work of God through the obedience and actions of Jesus, and so are indirect testimony to the humanity of the victor. Direct testimony to Jesus' humanity is found in the statements of Pilate and in the account of Jesus' death. Neither of these passages endeavors to prove Jesus' humanity; that is assumed. Indeed, is it not precisely the problem? For the question which the Gospel addresses is who this man Jesus is. The passion narrative does seek to establish Jesus' ultimate identity (19:5, 14) and that the eschatological blessings of salvation are present in this man (19:30, 34–35). Jesus, the man of Nazareth who unquestionably died on a Roman cross, is King of the Jews, who offers cleansing and the promised Holy Spirit to the world. The meaning of his death, no less than that of his origins

and signs, demands the answer of faith. Without faith one sees only a dead man on a cross, not the King who brings life to the world.

THE JOHANNINE INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' DEATH

Undoubtedly those features which we associate with the passion and death of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul do not figure prominently in John. But that does not necessarily mean that John's Christology can be described as a "pure exaltation Christology" (Hegermann), quite apart from the question whether such a formulation is at all helpful. Do not Käsemann and others too quickly assume that the opposite of a "Christology of humiliation" is a "Christology of glory"? Whatever the precise nuance of "glory" (*doxa*) in the Fourth Gospel, it is certainly revelatory glory (1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40), as Käsemann himself so adamantly asserts in his analysis of the incarnation and the signs. But there is no revelation in John apart from Jesus' death! Only with the death and resurrection of Jesus is the proper understanding of these events offered to the community of faith (2:22; 7:39; 12:16, 33; 13:13, 19). Even John's narrative points to the centrality of Jesus' death by continually foreshadowing that death (1:29; 2:4, 22; etc.) and by asserting that Jesus' death is that event in which his work is completed (19:30).⁷² There is no glory apart from the cross.

Moreover, insofar as Jesus alone seeks God's glory, he stands opposed to the falsehood (7:18; 8:54–55), darkness (1:5, 9, 14) and self-seeking (5:41–44) which characterize the world below (8:23, 50). Here "glory" designates Jesus' character in radical antithesis to the character of the world. Just as the world's true nature is manifested in its rejection of God and the one whom he has sent, so Jesus' nature is manifested in his unity with God. In this sense Jesus is truly always "on the side of God," one with him, and so manifests God's glory. But although such statements imply that Jesus is not "of this world" (i.e. manifesting its character), they certainly cannot be taken to mean that Jesus does not fully enter into this world (1:5, 9, 14; 3:16). Inasmuch as the realm below is characterized by lies, darkness, and rebellion, such features could

not depict a "humiliated" Christ who comes from above. John does not juxtapose glory and humiliation; he rather contrasts light, truth, love, and obedience—all encapsulated in the word "glory"—to darkness, falsehood, hate, and disobedience.

Although one may reject "glory in humiliation" as the epitome of the Johannine view of Jesus' death, nevertheless, one may represent the theme of the Johannine passion as "glorification in death," for Jesus' hour of glorification begins with his hour of death. The difference between the formulations "glory in humiliation" and "glorification in death" may seem minor but is important. Käsemann refuses to see Jesus' glorification as a process, but tends to speak only of the pre-existent "glory" which shines through him. But Jesus' "glory" is granted to him by God and is especially the result of God's glorification of him, even in the hour of his death. One may hesitate to call this "paradox," but one cannot as a result reject the importance of Jesus' death, for the "glory" which Käsemann so strongly emphasizes includes the "hour of death."

A second formulation which is both truer to the Fourth Gospel and to the British school of interpretation of it—which school Käsemann sharply criticizes—is that Jesus' passion shows that the life of the world is hidden in death.⁷³ The Fourth Gospel speaks of the love (3:16; 17:24) and life (3:14–16; 6:33, 38–39, 51; 19:34–35) which are available to the world only through Jesus' death. And it is this assertion that only Jesus' death offers life to the world that is peculiarly offensive to unbelievers (6:62). Peter is also offended, because he cannot accept Jesus' death as the necessary prerequisite for receiving the promised eternal heritage (13:8–10). Although Peter eventually does understand, as chapter 21 shows, the Jews ask, "How can this be?" (6:41, 62), for they fail to understand, are offended (6:61), do not believe (6:64), and hear not an offer of life, but only a "hard saying" (6:60). John 19:34 views the problem from a different angle: that of reminding the believing reader that since Jesus had indeed died, the Spirit and promised blessing were surely present. Life for the world results exclusively from the death of Jesus (12:24), but this declaration offends precisely because that life is hidden in the death of this man from Nazareth (6:41). Only the Father's gift of faith enables one to grasp this truth (6:65).

Thus the recognition that humiliation, weakness, and suffering are not central in John's depiction of Jesus' passion does not negate Jesus' real humanity or imply that the evangelist's Christology is "naively docetic." It is an understatement to say that the fourth evangelist assigns to Jesus' death a more significant place than Käsemann allows. Those who criticize the Fourth Gospel's passion narrative for its lack of emphasis on Jesus' humiliation and suffering tend to read it through Pauline spectacles, wishing to see John accentuate "the weakness of the cross" as does Paul.⁷⁴

Although the Fourth Gospel does not argue as explicitly as Paul that, viewed from God's perspective, the cross is not what it seems to be, there is still a polemical purpose lying behind its presentation of Jesus' death. There is no doubt that the cross constitutes a problem. The objections of the Jews to eating Jesus' flesh (6:52, 60) and to the Messiah's "departure" (12:33–34) show that the necessity of the cross and its place in God's purpose had to be established. By insisting upon the necessity of the cross (13:8), the evangelist also underscores the unique claim that Jesus alone is life; but he is life for the world because, and only because, he dies. From his death flow cleansing and the promised Spirit (19:34–35). Resistance to the cross and Jesus' death—such as Peter's attempts to "save" Jesus (cp. 18:36)—is thus resistance to God's way of salvation, for Jesus has come "to give life to the world" (6:33, 38–39, 51). By presenting the cross as Jesus' glorification, the evangelist counters Jewish arguments that the cross negated Jesus' status as "the Christ, the Son of God" (12:34; 20:31). Thus Jesus declares that the Son of man must (*dei*) be lifted up and die on the cross, even though the Jews insist that the "Messiah remains forever" (12:32–34).⁷⁵

Jesus' death on the cross is further understood as his sovereign and independent action and victory. Not only is this theme underscored by the passages about the good shepherd and the foot-washing, but it also appears in the actual narrative of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.⁷⁶ In short, the Johannine passion narrative "celebrates the victor who followed the unswerving cause of God to his last breath."⁷⁷ Such a portrayal would serve to assure Christian believers that Jesus' death was not merely a capricious result of human sinfulness, but constituted God's purpose to which Jesus

obediently submitted. Therefore, in Jesus' death one ultimately sees the hand of God active. Reminded thus of their own share in eternal life, believers would be strengthened to follow Jesus, even to the point of death (see 12:25–26; 13:16; 15:13; 16:2–4); (so Müller, Becker, Wengst).

Thus the passion narrative addresses the situation of a community which has likely encountered antagonism towards its faith, in part because of the inexplicable event of the crucifixion. Yet John presents that crucifixion not as a scandal but as an event suffused with triumph. He does so because he views it retrospectively, from the viewpoint of Jesus' final glorification. The Gospel itself insists upon the necessity of the later interpretative viewpoint, available only after Jesus' resurrection (2:19–22; 7:37–39; 12:12–16) and the subsequent gift of the Spirit (14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15). Thus the Gospel explicitly states that true understanding of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation occur only after these events and in light of the teaching of the Spirit. In other words, as Bornkamm asserts, not only Jesus' death, but the entire Gospel as well, must be understood retrospectively (*von rückwärts aus*), from the later vantage point of the insight given through the Spirit. John does not simply collapse the time of the earthly and exalted Jesus together, but interprets the former in light of the latter via the agency of the Paraclete.⁷⁸ Of the Gospel's retrospective viewpoint, Alan Culpepper writes:⁷⁹

The Johannine narrator tells the story of Jesus' ministry from the temporal perspective of a group, "we," which advocates belief in Jesus after his resurrection. The narrator therefore speaks from some point in the future within the narrative world and interprets Jesus as no contemporary observer would have been able to do. The references to what the disciples did not know at the time but discovered after Jesus' resurrection (2:22; 12:16; 13:7; and 20:9) suggest that the perspective of the believing community—should we say the Johannine community—is presented as absolutely necessary if one is to have an adequate understanding of Jesus.

In short, the later perspective is the Spirit-inspired one and, therefore, the perspective of faith (6:63). Only by means of this vantage point does one comprehend that Jesus' death brings life to the

world. Thus the unbelief of the Jews, for whom Jesus' life-giving death remains a "hard saying," contrasts the faith of the disciples, who know that Jesus has "the words of life" (6:60, 68). Just as it is the confession of the community of faith that "The Word became flesh and we beheld his glory," and that the signs show Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of God," (20:31), so too the believing community alone sees hidden in Jesus' death the life of the world. In the words of Hoskyns and Davey, "To those whose eyes have been opened, everything Jesus said or did appears translucent, bearing witness to his glory. No one saw this glory until he was risen from the dead, and once he was risen, each episode, saying, discourse, or act is now seen to be significant and creates belief and manifests his glory to the believer."⁸⁰