

Conclusion

Thus John's achievement in his Passion and Resurrection Narratives is his presentation of the cross not as a humiliation inflicted on Jesus, but as something voluntarily undertaken and the means of his 'glorification', through which he returned to the Father having brought life to the world. His resurrection appearances reassure the disciples that he is alive, demonstrate his continuing care for them, and make possible their commissioning to act by his authority; but they are not essential for faith.

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Jesus: Word Incarnate and Father's Son

John's Prologue (1.1-18) has been called 'the pearl' of his Gospel (Brown, 1966, p. 18). Venerated since antiquity, it is generally seen as the Evangelist's maturest reflection and the high point of his theology, being responsible above all else for the traditional image of John as an eagle soaring to heaven. Yet few texts have caused such problems to commentators or given rise to so much scholarly literature. Haenchen, who worked on John almost daily for twenty years, described it quite simply as 'difficult to understand' (1984, vol. 1, p. 101). The problems arise partly through disputed manuscript readings, partly through controversies over a hypothetical pre-Johannine hymn, and perhaps most of all because the Prologue's grand ideas, open-ended images, and abstract terminology defy precise definition. Scholars dispute even its structure and basic shape.

The Form and Origin of the Prologue

Barrett (1978, pp. 149f.) saw it as composed of four sections, which together prepare readers for John's main narrative:

- 1 1.1-5. *Cosmological*. The eternal divine Word, God's agent in creation, is the source of light and life for humanity.
- 2 1.6-8. *The Witness of the Baptist*. Following early Christian tradi-

tion, John introduces the Baptist, carefully distinguishing him from 'the true light'.

- 3 1.9-13. *The Coming of the Light*. Neither 'the world' nor 'his own' recognize and receive the light; but those who do so constitute the Church.

- 4 1.14-18. *The Economy of Salvation*. The Word is made flesh, displaying the glory and mercy of God; the Baptist's role is clarified.

This analysis offers a useful way of looking at the Prologue, but makes too little of the new birth of believers in 1.12f. (substituting the concept of 'the Church'), and does less than justice to the theological wealth of 1.16-18, with the idea of Jesus as the only Son (or God) in the bosom of the Father, who makes God known.

Talbert (1992, p. 66), following Culpepper (1980), detects a more elaborate 'concentric' or 'chastic' structure:

- A (1.1-5): The relation of the Word to God, creation, humanity
- B (1.6-8): The witness of the Baptist
- C (1.9-11): The coming and rejection of the Light/Word
- D (1.12f.): Benefits of belief in the Word
- C (1.14): The coming and reception of the Word
- B' (1.15): The witness of the Baptist
- A' (1.16-18): The relation of the Word to humanity, re-creation, God.

This brings out nicely the symmetry of the Baptist references; it recognizes the importance of 1.18 on Jesus as revealer of God to humanity. However, the idea of 're-creation' there seems forced, and the reading 'God' (of Jesus) in 1.18 is uncertain. This analysis still fails to deal adequately with the complex interweaving of theological ideas in 1.16-18, including 'fulness', 'law', 'grace', 'truth', and 'seeing God', and, while it rightly recognizes the importance of the birth of 'God's children' in 1.12f., one must query whether this is really the Prologue's pivot, rather than the incarnation (1.14).

Moloney (1998b, pp. 34f.) finds three main sections:

- I (1.1-5) The Word in God becomes the Light of the World
- II (1.6-14) The Incarnation of the Word
- III (1.15-18) The Revealer: the only Son turned toward the Father.¹

In a further complex analysis he detects, within these sections, four repeated themes that are stated and restated in a movement like waves on a shore. The Baptist references fit poorly into his scheme. Other scholars produce different analyses of greater or lesser complexity: e.g.

Brown (1966, pp. 3f.) finds four poetic strophes, plus four prose sections including the two Baptist references (1.6-9, 15), which he brackets as interrupting the thread. Hooker (1969), on the other hand, sees them as essential in linking the Prologue's metaphysical truths with later historical statements.

The difficulty of finding a clear structure for the Prologue highlights the basic problem of determining precisely what John intends by his picturesque and powerful, yet obscure, language. At what point does he first allude to the incarnation? The earliest possible point is 1.5, when 'the light' shines in the darkness, but 'light' in the Prologue could refer to God's revelation through creation, or his self-disclosure to the Hebrew people. Possibly both pre-Christian revelation and the revelation in Jesus are presupposed. Some see the incarnation as first alluded to in 1.9: 'The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world' (NRSV). But the Greek is ambiguous, and the sentence could also be translated, 'This was the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world' (cf. AV). The reference to the *logos* coming to 'his own', and 'his own' not receiving him (1.11), is also ambiguous. It may refer to Israel's refusal of God's word through the prophets (Dodd, 1953, p. 270), or conceivably a 'wisdom myth', whereby Wisdom is unable to find a home among mortals (discussed below, p. 88); but most probably it anticipates the incarnation. Perhaps John deliberately left Jesus' entry on the scene ambiguous, using 1.5, 9, 11 as pointers to it before proclaiming it unequivocally in 1.14.

Scholars who postulate a pre-existing hymn differ as to its length, structure, and source. Brown (1966, p. 22) tabulates eight different theories: these agree in omitting the references to the Baptist (1.6-8, 13, 15) from the hypothetical original, and in attributing to it 1.1, 3f., 10f.; they disagree in almost all other details. The problem is that, though elevated in tone and in places rhythmic, the Prologue is not formally poetry, either in classical Greek form (which depends on syllable length), or of Semitic type, with metrical units displaying clear-cut parallelism. Proponents of an underlying 'poem' or 'hymn' have to take scissors to the text, excising a verse here and a phrase there (e.g. Schnackenburg, 1968, p. 226). While parts of the Prologue do follow Semitic verse-patterns (including 'step' or 'stair' parallelism), others do not.² In any case this feature is not unique to the Prologue, rhythmic and poetic sections being found also in John's discourses.

Another difficulty is determining the potential source of the 'hymn'. Bultmann thought that 'the whole Prologue has been adopted from a Baptist document', with 1.6-8, 15 as later additions reducing the Baptist's role by making him only a witness to the light (1986, p. 33; cf. 1971, p. 18). But evidence for a pre-Johannine Gnostic-Baptist sect is

weak, and there are no grounds for supposing that John the Baptist was ever called 'the Word' or was envisaged as being incarnate. More commonly John is thought to draw on a *Christian* hymn (e.g. Brown, 1966, pp. 20f.; Hachen, 1984, vol. 1, p. 101). But it is still not easy to find a good literary parallel: the Prologue lacks the praise and thanksgiving characteristic of Jewish and Christian hymns of around this period,³ and nowhere addresses God in the second person. It is also longer and structurally different from other New Testament christological 'hymns' (Sanders, 1971, pp. 20-4); contrast Phil. 2.6-11; Col. 1.15-20; 1 Tim. 3.16; 2 Tim. 2.11-13. Stylistically the Prologue cannot be separated from the rest of the Gospel: Johannine language and ideas appear in the supposedly pre-Johannine 'hymn', while untypical terminology occurs in parts of the Prologue attributed to the Evangelist. The Prologue fits its present context admirably, and heralds major themes to be developed in the Gospel. For all these reasons it is best regarded as composed by John, either before or after the main text.⁴

Leading Ideas

The Logos in Creation and Revelation

Foremost in any discussion must be the concept of Jesus as *logos*, found only here in the New Testament (though note Rev. 19.11-13; 1 Jn 1.1). The noun *logos*, conventionally translated 'word' (cf. Greek *legō*, 'say'), has a wide semantic field, including ideas of reason and thought, as well as rational spoken utterance. Ironically it never means one single word, as its English translation might imply. In what sense(s) did John use the term? He states that the *logos* existed *en archē* (i), 'in the beginning' (1.1), words evoking 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1.1); he also says that the *logos* was 'with God', and 'was God'. If he is further described as the agent of creation, in which/whom was 'life, the light of humanity'.⁵

Educated pagan readers, and Jews familiar with Greek philosophy, might recall Stoic concepts of the *logos* as a kind of divine essence, or underlying principle of natural order, pervading the universe (cf. Barrett, 1987, pp. 65-72). The Church Fathers certainly read John this way, as have many earlier exegetes. Yet it remains doubtful whether this is what John intended; it is certainly not *all* that he intended. Readers familiar with the Jewish Scriptures could not fail to remember the rich and diverse ways in which 'word' is used there. *Logos* would be seen as corresponding to *dabar*, occurring no fewer than 1,430 times in the Hebrew Bible in the sense of 'matter', 'thing', or 'spoken' or 'written word' (Edwards, 1988a, pp. 1101f.). Along with *rhēma*, 'spoken word', 'saying' (an alternative translation for *dabar*), *logos* expresses God's

action in creation: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made' (Ps. 33.6; cf. Ps. 148.5; Gen. 1.3, 6, etc.). Ever reliable and effective, God's word sustains the universe through what we call natural phenomena (cf. Ps. 147. 16–18), and acts in history for healing and salvation (cf. Ps. 107.20; Isa. 55.10f.). It also serves as God's agent for judgement, as in Wisdom 18.15f., where God's all-powerful *logos* leaps down from heaven like a stern warrior, bearing his decree for the Egyptians' death.⁶

Other readers might perceive allusions to the concept of wisdom as God's agent in creation. In Jewish wisdom literature Hebrew *hokhmah* and Greek *sophia* (both feminine nouns) are regularly personified as a woman. In Proverbs 8.22–31 Wisdom speaks in the first person, saying that God created her before the world was made: she was at his side when he established the heavens, and created the sea and earth. In Ecclesiasticus 24.1–11, Wisdom says that she came forth from God's mouth, and she alone created the circuit of heaven's vault, and walked in the depths of the abyss. She sought a dwelling-place (*skēnē*) to rest in, and God bade her dwell (*kata-skēnoō*) in Jacob/Israel (cf. Bar. 3.36f.). The use of *kata-skēnoō*, meaning both 'pitch a tent' and 'dwell', and *skēnē*, 'tent' or 'dwelling-place', recalls the idea of the tabernacle as the symbol of God's presence (e.g. Ex. 29.43–6; 40.34–8); Wisdom is specifically said to have ministered there (Eccclus 24.10). John may have had this image in mind when he wrote (1.14) 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (*eskēnōsen*, using the related verb *skēnoō*). There may also be an allusion to Aramaic *shekinah*, 'residence' or 'presence', a periphrasis for God in the Targums and among rabbis (note the coincidence of the consonants *skn* with *skēnē*).

Sometimes Wisdom fails to find a resting-place on earth. In *1 Enoch* 42 she goes to live with the 'children of the people' but finds no dwelling-place, and so returns to the heavens, while inquiry goes to live with them instead. From this some scholars have inferred the existence of a 'wisdom myth' lying behind John's statement (1.11) that 'the *logos* came to his own, and his own did not receive him' (so Bultmann, 1971, p. 22; cf. 1986, p. 23). But it is doubtful how developed or widespread this 'myth' was when John was writing. Many of the passages cited in its support are quite general references to sinful human beings searching for Wisdom or rejecting her (e.g. Eccclus 15.7; Bar. 3.12, 29–31). And although John says the *logos* was not received, he immediately follows this statement by saying that those who did so were given authority to become children of God (1.12f.).

Another point to be noted is that wisdom in Jewish literature is always pictured as created by God, rather than existing before creation (like John's *logos*). Moreover, although 'wisdom' occasionally occurs in parallel with 'word', wisdom is never directly called 'the word of God' (cf. Brown,

1966, p. 522). If Jewish wisdom ideas were as important for John as some scholars claim, why did he choose *logos* rather than *sophia* to describe Christ, and never use the word 'wisdom' in his entire Gospel? The usual answer is that it would have been too awkward to use *sophia*, since Jesus was male and wisdom was regularly personified as a woman (Scott, 1992, pp. 170f.). This did not, however, stop Paul from calling Jesus the 'wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1.24; cf. 1.30). Perhaps there were other reasons why John equated Jesus with 'word' rather than 'wisdom', and other connotations he might expect his *logos* image to have for readers.

In the Hebrew Bible (including the Septuagint) 'word' is also used for God's revelation to the prophets, especially in the formula, 'the word of the Lord came to X' (cf. 1 Kgs 12.22; Hos. 1.1; etc.) – a formula used by John himself (10.35, on Jesus' lips). In poetry 'word' often appears in parallel with *tōrah*, conventionally translated 'law' (e.g. Isa. 2.3; Ps. 119.17f, 43f.). The Ten Commandments – the 'ten words' in Hebrew – were seen as bringing life and light, as was the Law generally (Dt. 32.46f.; Prov. 6.23; cf. Jn 12.50). This usage fits in beautifully with the Prologue's statement that in the *logos* was life, 'the light of men' (1.3 AV), and its description of Jesus as the one who makes God known (1.18). It raises the question whether John is identifying Jesus with Torah, just as Wisdom became identified with it (Eccclus 24.23; Bar. 4.1). In rabbinic theology Torah (feminine in Hebrew) was one of the seven things created before the world. Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose (c. 150 CE) reportedly said, 'Before the world was made Torah was written, and lay in God's bosom' (Dodd, 1953, p. 85, citing *Pesachim* 54a Bar.). It has been doubted whether Jewish personification of Torah was sufficiently strong, or attested early enough, to serve as a source for John's *logos*. But ancient readers familiar with the concept of Torah's pre-existence would certainly have no problem in grasping John's idea of the *logos* as existing from the beginning.

There are also fascinating parallels in Philo's writings: he used *logos* over 1,300 times, mostly in the sense of 'spoken word' or 'reason', but also in a special religious sense for God's expressed thought and his power active in the world. Thus the *logos* is said to be God's *eikōn* or image (e.g. *Somn.*, II.45); it is identified with wisdom, with *archē* ('beginning' or 'first principle') and with archetypal light; it is God's chief messenger, eternal, not created as a human being (*Quis Rer.*, 206), though 'the eldest of created things' (*Leg. All.*, III.175). It feeds and guides human beings, serving as a mediator between them and God. It implants its 'seed' in them so that they become like it (cf. the Stoic *logos spermatikos*), bringing them to repentance and salvation; it is the mysterious 'bread of heaven' (cf. Ex. 16.15). Sometimes Philo's *logos* is described as God's first-born (*Conf. Ling.*, 146), and even as *ho deuterios theos*, 'the second God' (*Quaest. in Gen.*, II.62). Occasionally it is iden-

tified with specific human beings – Moses, called ‘the law-giving *logos*’ (*Migr.*, 23) and even the High Priest (*Fug.*, 108) (further details in Williamson, 1989, pp. 103–43). Philo does not have a consistent ‘*logos* doctrine’, and recent commentators have been wary of postulating his influence on John; but older scholars took the possibility very seriously (e.g. Dodd, 1953; Barrett, 1978). Some of the parallels with John’s thought are impressive, especially Philo’s calling the *logos* ‘God’, and using the same term for human beings. Readers who knew his works would perceive similarities between Philo’s ideas and John’s.

Philo lived in Alexandria and wrote in Greek. It is not clear how widely disseminated his writings were, but it is likely that only learned Jews with exegetical and philosophical interests would have known his works. But many Jews in Palestine, the Eastern Diaspora, and other Aramaic-speaking communities would have been familiar with the Targums, biblical paraphrases which were read regularly in synagogues for the benefit of Jews who found Hebrew difficult. In these the term *memra*, ‘word’, frequently appears in reverential idioms designed to prevent the uttering of the divine Name (YHWH), and to ‘protect’ God’s transcendence by avoiding references to people – even Moses or Isaiah – ‘seeing God’ or ‘talking with God’.⁷ This usage has sometimes been related to John’s use of *logos*, particularly where *memra* is associated with creation, revelation, and light, or directly identified with God. For example, in Genesis 1.3 the Fragment Targums have the ‘Word of the Lord’ say, ‘Let there be light’, and in the Palestinian Targum (Neophyti 1) this light at creation is identified with God’s *memra*. In its account of God’s appearance to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3.12), the same Targum identifies ‘word’ with God, reading, ‘My *memra* will be with you’, instead of ‘I will be with you’ (Boyarin, 2001, p. 256–9). New Testament scholars have generally been wary of making too much of *memra*, arguing that it occurs mostly in genitive phrases like *memra da-veyah*, ‘God’s word’, rather than absolutely as *logos* in John 1.1, 14. They also point out that it was never regarded as a ‘hypostasis’ or separate being from God (cf. Barrett, 1978, p. 153, dismissing *memra* as a ‘blind alley’). All the surviving Targums are later than John (some much later).⁸ Nevertheless, their significance for interpreting his Gospel should not be underestimated. If they were current in the first century CE, then surely at least some Jews must have linked John’s divine *logos* – the light that shone in the darkness, through whom all things were created – with the Targumic *memra*.⁹

Further parallels have sometimes been found in the *Hermetica*, where *Logos* comes forth from *Nous*, ‘Mind’; it is called ‘God’s son’, and acts as his agent in creation and as a divine intermediary (Dodd, 1953, ch. 2). Alternatively, or in addition, John has been seen as drawing on Mandaeen concepts (Bultmann, 1971). Clearly any readers familiar with

such texts might have their understanding of John coloured by them. But the images John uses – light, life, word – are found in religious writings of so many periods and backgrounds that strong reasons are needed to postulate direct influence, especially where texts cannot be shown to antedate John. One sometimes feels that the net has been cast too wide in the quest for sources, and that explanations for John’s meaning may lie nearer to hand.

One area often neglected is the *Christian* background to John’s Prologue. The magnificent opening of the Letter to the Hebrews (1.1–4) proclaims how in the last days God has spoken by [his] Son, through whom he created ‘the worlds’ (*aiōnes*); it further describes Jesus as reflecting God’s glory and upholding all things by his word of power. Some of these ideas come quite close to what John says of the *logos*. In other texts *logos* is used for the preached word: the Sower sows ‘the word’ (Mk 4.14 par.); Jesus teaches ‘the word’ (Lk. 5.1, etc.); Paul and Barnabas preach ‘God’s word’ (Acts 13.5), just as Paul preaches ‘Christ crucified’ (1 Cor. 1.23). The ‘word’ is not fettered (2 Tim. 2.9), but works within believers (1 Thess. 2.13); it is ‘the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’ (Eph. 1.13). In 1 John 1.1–4, the ‘word of life’ may denote either Jesus Christ, or the message of salvation, or both. It is not such a big step from seeing Jesus as preaching the word, the truth, and the life-giving message of salvation, to describing him as ‘the Word’ (Jn 1.1), or as ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (14.6). While there is no guarantee that John knew any of the above New Testament texts (1 John is probably later than the Gospel), at the very least they provide a context in which an early Christian audience might have understood the Prologue (cf. Barrett, 1978, p. 154).

The Word Incarnate

‘And the Word became flesh’ (1.14): ‘In these five short words the central mystery that John will unfold is stated with absolute simplicity’ (Newbigin, 1982, p. 8); ‘In these simple words the whole profound mystery and miracle of the Christian faith is expressed’ (Richardson, 1959, p. 42). With 1.14 we reach what most people consider to be the climax of the Prologue, the expression of a mystery at which some Christians today still kneel in reverence. Augustine, who had studied the Neoplatonist philosophers, commented that he had found in them many of John’s ideas, but ‘I did not read in them that the word was made flesh and dwelt among us’ (*Confessions*, VII.9). Modern scholars have ransacked ancient Jewish and pagan texts in vain for a text that might have served as John’s source. As noted earlier (p. 88), the so-called ‘wisdom myth’ in which Wisdom seeks a place to dwell among humanity, is too vague to have been John’s main inspiration. The

Gnostic 'redeemer myth' is likewise pale in comparison, different in its concepts, and later in attestation.¹⁰ There is nothing precisely like this in Stoicism, the *Hermetica*, the Targums, or even Philo.

So what did inspire John? It has often been noted that the style of the Prologue changes with the use of the 'we' phrases in 1.14, 16: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory ... and from his fulness we have received grace instead of grace'. This section's inspiration is not to be sought in recondite allusions to potential Jewish or Gnostic sources, but in the author's own spiritual insights and the experience of the Christian community (cf. Haenchen, 1984, vol. 1, p. 119). It is in the incarnate Jesus Christ that he and they have found a full experience of grace and truth, and have beheld God's glory. Other New Testament writers also speak of this experience of having received God's grace through Jesus Christ (e.g. Rom. 5.15; Eph. 1.3-14; Tit. 2.11-13; cf. Acts 14.3), but John expresses this idea in a unique way.

John says 'the Word became flesh' (*sarx*), not that God became a human being (*anthrōpos*). The Romans and Greeks had legends of gods taking human form, to see for themselves the depths of human wickedness (Ovid, *Met.*, I, 209-43), to give advice (Homer, *Od.*, 1.88-105), or to seduce mortal women (e.g. Hesiod, *Scut.*, 27-36). The incarnation was not like this. It is not like the temporary adoption of human form by angels, such as those entertained by Abraham in Genesis 18, or the archangel Raphael in Tobit, who appears to be a man (5.4), but is really only a vision (12.19). Nor is it the same as when Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel see God in glory, or when Moses talks with God (e.g. Ex. 19.9, 19f.; 33.20-3). In all these examples, the encounter with the Divine is visionary, or for a brief period. By contrast, John speaks of the *logos* actually becoming flesh, and living among human beings. He chooses the word *sarx*, used in secular Greek for animal meat or the human body, and in Paul's writings for physical human nature (cf. Robinson, 1952, pp. 17-26). John may have chosen this term to avoid the misunderstanding that the *logos* only appeared to be human (as the Docetists later claimed), but we cannot be sure of this. Thus his statement is both more robust (to use modern jargon) and in some respects more reticent than Paul's famous 'hymn' which speaks of Christ being in the form of God, but emptying himself to be born 'in the likeness of human beings' (Phil. 2.7f.; cf. Col. 2.9).

John does not explain *how* he pictured the Word becoming incarnate: he makes no mention of the Virgin Birth (more accurately, 'virginal conception'), as in Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives.¹¹ Nor is it clear whether his language is to be understood as myth, metaphor, or actual fact. In the course of his main narrative he represents Jesus as fully human (Thompson, 1988), yet at the same time as different from other people.

His Jesus displays uncanny or supernatural knowledge (e.g. 2.25; 4.18; 6.6); he refers mysteriously to his origin 'above', and to his not being 'of this world' (8.23; 17.14, 16); he walks on water. Several of his sayings may imply divinity, especially the formula 'I am he' and his statement 'I and the Father are one' (10.30; cf. also 5.17f.; 14.9f.). But he also speaks of the Father as greater than himself (14.28); he prays to God (11.41f.; 17.1-26), and lives his life in complete dependence on God (cf. Davey, 1958, pp. 78f.; Barrett, 1982, p. 22). From the times of the Church Fathers, theologians have sought to understand how Jesus could be both God and human. John does not explain this (see further below, Ch. 12).

Returning to the Prologue, John says that the Word 'dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory' (1.14a-b). The verb for 'dwell' (*skēnoō*) is the same as used in Revelation's vision of the new Jerusalem, when the seer hears a loud voice saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell [*skēnōsei*] with them, and they shall be his people ...' (21.3, AV). The Septuagint uses it in its compound form *kata-skēnoō* to translate the Hebrew *shakan*, 'dwell', in prophecies of God's presence with his people (e.g. Joel 3[4].17; Ezk. 43.7; cf. above, p. 88, on Ecclus). Many scholars see in 1.14 an allusion to Exodus, especially 40.34, where the tabernacle is filled with the Lord's glory. 'Glory' (Hebrew *kabod*; Greek *doxa*) is a biblical way of describing the visible manifestation of God's splendour; sometimes under the image of bright light (cf. Acts 22.11).¹² It is a favourite theme of John's. He presents Jesus as disclosing his, or God's, glory during his ministry (2.11; 11.40); Jesus himself says that he was given God's glory before the foundation of the world (17.5, 24), and that Isaiah 'saw' his glory (12.41; cf. above, p. 75) - allusions to his pre-existence. But 'glory' in John is not simply about majesty and splendour: it is also about obedience to the Father and seeking his honour (cf. 7.18; 8.50, 54). As was seen in Chapter 8, John regularly uses *doxazomai*, 'be glorified' (cognate with *doxa*), with reference to crucifixion. Jesus' death is not directly mentioned in the Prologue, but discerning readers familiar with the rest of John might detect a pointer to it.

The Prologue also describes Jesus (or less probably his glory) as 'full of grace and truth' (1.14). 'Grace' (*charis*) occurs four times, twice in the phrase *charin anti charitos* (1.16), and twice linked with 'truth' (1.14, 17). Its significance has been much discussed. In secular and biblical Greek *charis* has a wide range of meanings, including a source of delight (cf. *charō*, 'rejoice'); outward beauty and gracefulness; favour, kindness, and goodwill extended to others; thankfulness or thanks for favours received. In the New Testament it denotes especially the undeserved kindness and gifts of God (cf. *charismata*, 'gracious gifts'). Paul is famous for using *charis* to describe God's gracious action in freely 'justifying' sinners through Jesus' death (Rom. 3.23-5; 5.21; etc.), but one should not assume Pauline doctrine here.

Two slightly different senses for *charis* may be detected in the Prologue. In *charin anti charitos* (1.16) it seems to mean 'gracious gift'. Usually this phrase is translated 'grace upon grace', or 'one blessing after another' (cf. RSV, GNB), and taken to refer to the series of blessings received from Christ. But there are problems with this understanding. Greek linguistic usage seems to demand *anti* to be translated not 'upon', or 'after', but 'instead of' (Edwards, 1988b). If this meaning is adopted, John must be saying that the 'grace and truth' that comes through Jesus Christ now takes the place hitherto occupied by God's gracious gift of the Law through Moses. In 1.14 and 17 'grace and truth' occur as a pair. This probably reflects a Hebrew phrase, *hesed we'emet*,¹³ where *hesed* means 'love' or 'mercy', and *'emet* 'faithfulness' (deriving from *'aman*, 'be firm' or 'binding'), sometimes translated as 'truth'. The Hebrew Bible regularly uses this pair of nouns to refer to God's loving and trustworthy character, and his faithfulness towards Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 2.6; Pss. 25.10; 89.14; etc.). On Sinai God reveals himself to Moses as 'plenteous in mercy and truth' (Ex. 34.6 RV) or 'abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (RSV). By describing Jesus as 'full of grace and truth' John suggests not only that he possesses these qualities of God, but that he is also the source of them for others (see further de la Potterie, 1977, 1986).

The Only Son as the Father's 'Exegete'

The Prologue reaches a second climax when John says 'the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known' (1.18 RSV). The verb translated 'made known' (Greek *exēgounai*) means literally 'lead out', hence 'explain' or 'interpret' (cf. English 'exegetis'). In secular Greek it is used of priests and prophets giving divine oracles; in Josephus it is a technical term for rabbinic interpretation of Torah (Schnackenburg, 1968, p. 279). John uses it to express his concept of Jesus as the one who reveals God. Jesus is able to do this because he is 'in the Father's bosom'. In English versions of the Bible this old-fashioned word 'bosom' (Hebrew *beg*, Greek *kolpos*) expresses conjugal intimacy, as in the phrase 'wife of your bosom' (e.g. Dt. 13.6; Mic. 7.5; cf. Gen. 16.5), and loving care. It is used for a mother, or nurse, holding a child to her breast (1 Kgs 17.19; Ruth 4.16); and for God, as shepherd, carrying his 'lambs' in his bosom (Isa. 40.11). A more modern translation of the phrase in John 1.18 might be 'close to the Father's heart'.

Jesus is able to 'explain' or 'reveal' the Father because he has uniquely seen and known him; hence the apparent polemic in 1.18a, 'Nobody has seen God at any time'. The Hebrew Bible says that Isaiah indeed saw God (Isa. 6.1, 5), and that Moses both talked with him and saw him (e.g. Ex. 3). But later Jewish interpretations softened such anthropo-

morphisms (picturing God as human) to emphasize his transcendence. Thus in the original Hebrew of Exodus 24.10 Moses and the Elders see 'the God of Israel', but in the reverential Septuagint translation they see only 'the place where the God of Israel stood' (cf. above, p. 90, on *menai*). In 1.18a John aligns himself with those Jews who felt no ordinary human being could see God. He may also be indirectly criticizing Jewish mystics who claimed to have made heavenly journeys to receive divine revelation (Carter, 1990, pp. 43–5; cf. Kanagaraj, 1998, p. 226).

1.18b contains a textual problem. While most English translations refer to Jesus there as 'the only Son' (RSV, NEB, NJB; cf. AV), some important manuscripts, including two papyri, read (*ho monogenēs theos*, '(the) only-begotten or unique God'. This reading, now adopted in some scholarly Greek texts, has the support of many commentators. But it creates an almost unbearable tension for Jesus to be described as the 'unique' or 'only' God in a sentence that has just referred to 'the Father' as God. Those who adopt this reading are forced to take *monogenēs* and *theos* in apposition to one another, resulting in unnatural translations, e.g. 'the only one, himself God' (NEB, footnote; cf. Fennema, 1985, p. 131) or 'the only Son who is the same as God' (GNB). But there is nothing in the Greek to correspond to 'himself' or 'who is the same as'. This suggests that the traditional reading 'only [or only-begotten] Son' may well be right.¹⁴ It is in keeping with both John's style and theology (cf. 3.16, 18; also 1 Jn 4.9), and has the support of several major uncials. The substitution of *theos* might then be explained as the work of an over-pious Christian scribe.

One should perhaps add that there is no reason to insist, as do several leading commentators,¹⁵ that *monogenēs* here means 'unique' rather than 'only child'. Neither its etymology¹⁶ nor its normal usage requires this. From its earliest attestation *monogenēs* describes 'only children' (so Hesiod, *Op.*, 376, *Theog.*, 426, 448); this use is found in the Septuagint (e.g. Jdgs 11.34; Tob. 3.15),¹⁷ and is the sole meaning in the New Testament (Lk. 7.12; 8.42; 9.38; Heb. 11.17). As a compound meaning 'only-born', *monogenēs* is paralleled by a whole series of words involving the idea of birth, including *agenēs*, 'unborn', *diogenēs*, 'sprung from Zeus', *eugenēs*, 'well-born', *gēgenēs*, 'earth-born', *nothagenēs*, 'base-born', and *protogenēs*, 'first-born'. In using this term John describes Jesus' unique relationship to God, rather than his unique deity or absolute uniqueness.

It remains to discuss briefly what John meant by calling Jesus God's 'son'. He clearly did not picture him as physically begotten in the way that gods in Greek mythology fathered children by mortal women. Nor does this image necessarily imply a metaphysical relationship, as in patristic doctrines of Christ. John uses 'the Son' to express Jesus' moral

unity with God – his utter obedience to God, his one will with God's, his authority from God, his speaking God's words, his doing God's work, including tasks of life-giving and judgement, and his sharing in God's glory (see Schnackenburg, 1980, pp. 172–86).

Some have suggested that reading *theos* in 1.18 provides a neat chiasmus with 1.1–5 by returning to the same themes (cf. Talbert's analysis above, p. 85). There is indeed a balance between the description of the Word as 'with God' (1.1b) and that of Jesus as 'in the Father's bosom', and between the idea of the *logos* as revelation and that of Jesus as God's 'exegere'. But 1.16–18 does more than echo motifs from the Prologue's opening. It builds on them by identifying the undefined *logos* as a specific individual, Jesus Christ, the source of grace and truth, who as God's only son uniquely knows him, and makes him known. Nor does 1.14 contain 'the whole mystery of the Christian faith' as suggested by Richardson (cf. above, p. 91). For that mystery must also involve both Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross (to be recounted later by John), and his role as God's interpreter.

The Prologue and the Rest of the Gospel

One argument used to support the view that the Prologue incorporates a pre-existing hymn is the occurrence of vocabulary and themes not found again in the Gospel. But, in fact, all its major ideas seem to be picked up later (cf. Robinson, 1962/3, pp. 122f.). Admittedly *logos* never again bears the special sense it has in 1.1 and 1.14; but the concept of Jesus as the one who makes God known, and of his words as God's words, recurs frequently (e.g. 14.8, 24; 17.26). John also regularly refers to Jesus' teaching and authoritative commands as his *logos* (e.g. 4.41, 50; 5.24; 8.31). Jesus is presented as life-giver in his dialogues (e.g. 5.21) and in his miracles (cf. above, Ch. 6). Although the idea of him as God's agent in creation is not precisely repeated, his breathing into the disciples on Easter Day could be an act of new creation (cf. above, pp. 82f.). Several passages represent Jesus as pre-existent (8.58; 17.5, 24; cf. 1.30; 12.41) and pre-existence may also be implied by references to his 'coming' or 'being sent' (e.g. 10.10; 8.29; cf. above, pp. 67–8). The opposition between light and darkness (1.5) is picked up by several later episodes (e.g. 3.19–21; 8.12; 11.9f.) and especially in the healing of the man born blind. The Baptist's 'witness' (1.7, 15) leads nicely into his testimony in 1.19–35 and 3.25–30; the motif of witness also features prominently in subsequent dialogues.

'The world' (*ho kosmos*) is an important theme for John, occurring 78 times in all (contrast Mark, 3 times; Matthew, 9; Luke, 3). In the Prologue it is used with three different nuances, all in 1.10: neutrally, for

the world of human affairs (10a), positively, for creation (10b), and, negatively, for those who do not know the *logos* (10c). Later texts speak of God loving 'the world' (3.16f.), of Jesus taking away its sin (1.29), and of Jesus as its Saviour (4.42). It also serves as a generic term for humanity alienated from God (e.g. 7.7; 14.17), and as a sphere to which neither Jesus nor his disciples properly belong (e.g. 8.23; 15.19). 'The world' is judged through Jesus (12.31–3) and conquered by him (16.33) (see further Cassen, 1972/3; Marrow, 2002). Other ideas picked up later are that of his own' (10.3f., 12; 13.1), and that of spiritual rebirth (3.3–8). While *charis*, 'grace', is not mentioned again, the themes of God's love and gracious giving recur (e.g. 3.16; 6.32f.). 'Truth' is also a prominent motif, with the noun *alētheia* occurring 25 times and the adjectives *alēthēs* and *alēthinos* 13 and 9 times respectively (contrast their rare appearances in the Synoptics). Some of these words are not always used in precisely the same sense as in the Prologue.¹⁸ 'Glory', as already noted (p. 93), is one of John's favourite motifs. The themes of Moses and the Law (1.17) are picked up quite often (e.g. 1.45; 3.14; 5.45f.; 6.32; 7.19, 22f.; 9.28f.) and there are further allusions where Moses is not mentioned by name (cf. Glasson, 1963; Pancaro, 1975). The idea of the *logos* as divine (1.1) – and the more explicit identification of Jesus as God in 1.18, if *theos* is read – is echoed in Thomas' confession (20.28).

Are there major elements in the Gospel unheralded in the Prologue? The identification of Jesus as the Christ (i.e. messiah) occurs only in the formal reference to 'Jesus Christ' (1.17); but this is enough to alert readers to the theme. The Prologue does not refer to Jesus' being 'sent', but it does allude to his 'coming' (possibly 1.9; 1.11, 15) and to his sonship. The Spirit – important later in the Gospel – is not mentioned (its traditional role in creation being taken by the *logos*), nor are Jesus' miracles. Jesus' kingship does not feature, or his conflicts with 'the Jews', or his passion, death, and resurrection (except perhaps indirectly as his *doxa*). But one cannot expect a writer to include in the introduction every theme that is to occur in a book. In spite of its obscurities the Prologue is an artistic unity; by capturing the reader's imagination, and adumbrating ideas and images that will later be developed, it offers a dramatic and thought-provoking introduction to the Gospel. It is rightly regarded as John's supreme achievement.