

the Fourth Gospel was one in which the presence and activity of the Spirit must have loomed large, and the experience of the Spirit with all its spontaneity and the problems that could arise from it was nevertheless the basis for the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinity.

The purpose of this major chapter of the book is to see how the presuppositions of the Fourth Gospel unfold in its understanding of faith and life. We shall not proceed chronologically, or even by the progression of the narratives, although either way might be possible. Instead we shall attempt to unfold the logic of faith's understanding of revelation, in order to see how the revelation itself is perceived and in what terms it is presented. Although God is the ultimate source of revelation, it would be a mistake to begin a presentation of Johannine theology with the doctrine of God, for that doctrine is formed, or reformed, on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the only viable beginning point is Jesus Christ himself, or the presentation of him in the Gospel of John. We shall be interested in asking: Against what background of expectation is he understood? How are such expectations fulfilled, contravened, or revised? What are the implications of belief in the revelation (i.e., faith in Jesus Christ) for the believer's faith and life?

#### B THE REVELATION OF THE GLORY TO THE WORLD

Traditionally, Christian theology has as one of its major headings or subjects anthropology, a consideration of the human condition. The Johannine view of the human condition is summed up in the term *world*. John can use "world" (Greek: *kosmos*) as a virtual synonym for creation, "all things" (cf. 1:1, 10), with no negative connotation whatsoever. There is, however, another and more typical use of *kosmos* that occurs already in the prologue, where the evangelist writes (verse 10): "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not." The first occurrence of "world" in this passage is neutral; it simply signifies the place where Jesus appeared. The second is positive; the world is God's

creation through the word. The third is negative; the world as such rejects God's revelation in Jesus. Thus the world in the negative sense defines itself precisely by rejecting or refusing to know Jesus Christ. The world then is opposed to God and takes its place as the primary antipode in the Johannine dualism: God and world. Yet in the Fourth Gospel the dualism of God and world is not absolute: the world was not only created by God, but is also the object of his love and salvation (3:16-17; 12:46).

As the object of God's salvation, however, the world presently stands in a state of alienation and condemnation characterized by darkness (1:5; 12:46), death (5:19-27; 8:37, 44), sin (8:21, 34), slavery (8:34-36), and falsehood (8:44). The portrayal of the world, and thus of the human condition, not only accords with what we find in the New Testament generally, but summarizes and, indeed, accentuates its desperate quality. It seems to agree most closely with what is found in Paul, whose probing of the depths of human depravity is profound (cf. Romans 1:18-3:20; chaps. 5-7). Both Paul and John agree that the human plight is desperate, indeed, hopeless apart from God's initiative in salvation through Jesus Christ. Both see the salvation wrought by God through Jesus Christ as centered, or culminating, in his death and resurrection, although they understand and interpret Jesus' death in different ways.

How humanity reached such a hopeless condition is also understood somewhat differently. Paul devotes a good deal of attention to human *sinfulness* or what one might call the history of *sin* (Romans 1:18-3:20; chaps. 5, 7, cf. chaps. 9-11), but John seems to assume the human condition as a given. At points John can sound quite Pauline, as he has Jesus speak of slavery to sin and of salvation as liberation from bondage (8:31-36), although the familiar Pauline polarity of righteousness and sin, or human sin versus God's righteousness, is not found in John. John knows and uses the terms for sin (*hamartia*) and righteousness (*dikaioynē*), although they are many times less frequent than in Paul, but the typical Pauline verb *dikaion*, to justify in the sense of make or pronounce

righteous, does not occur at all in the Fourth Gospel or Johannine Epistles. Thus it is unsafe to assume that Paul's struggling with the history of the human condition really underlies John's assessment of it.

In the case of Paul it is certainly justifiable to speak of human sin as the presupposition of God's salvation understood as the revelation of his righteousness, for the Apostle devotes a great amount of attention to the development of these themes. While it is arguable that Paul's thought really moves from solution to human plight, so that he could scarcely have imagined the former apart from the latter, at the same time his painstaking reconstruction of the human condition suggests that for him it becomes quite intelligible and indeed important as the prolegomenon of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> With John, however, the situation is somewhat different in that the Gospel almost goes out of its way to indicate that the seriousness of the human plight would not even have been known apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which is not, as in Paul, described as the revelation of God's righteousness. (Moreover, the role of the law in relation to consciousness of sin receives no attention in John, as it does in Romans 7.) The Johannine Jesus says, "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father" (15:24). And again: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind" (9:39). When the understandably perplexed Pharisees ask whether they are then blind, Jesus continues: "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (9:41). Obviously, the advent of Jesus as God's word, his revelation, creates a new situation. It is not that God in no way revealed himself or acted in the history of Israel – what is now called the Old Testament period. John assumes the reality of God's revelation to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. But someone greater than Jacob or Abraham has now come (4:12; 8:53).

<sup>5</sup> On the priority of plight to solution, see Ed P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, 1977), esp. pp. 442–447.

Not Moses but Jesus gives the true bread from heaven (6:32–35), and Moses wrote about Jesus, if only he were properly understood (5:45–47). Now, whether or not one even believes in God will be decided on the basis of the response made to Jesus, so that those who do not believe in Jesus also reject God (5:37–38).<sup>6</sup>

Obviously John does not envision a situation in which all was well until the appearance of Jesus, who upset all previously held standards and expectations; therefore, the view that John must have presupposed something like the Pauline accounting for sin, even if he did not know or make use of Paul's Letters, makes a certain sense. "He came to his own, but his own received him not" (1:11), but why should they have not received him if all has been well? Of course, the continuing assumption of Jesus' Jewish opponents is that all is well (cf. 8:33), and precisely for that reason Jesus' coming and claims constitute an unnecessary interruption and disturbance of their ordered universe. But for John the givenness of a human situation characterized essentially by death, darkness, falsehood, and sin is axiomatic: "The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). Whoever believes in the Son does not perish, which would otherwise be his or her fate, but has eternal life (3:17). The "which would otherwise be his or her fate" is not explicitly said, but is the proviso, and the only one, that makes sense of what is said.

That grim proviso should, however, be seen in the likely historical setting of the Fourth Gospel, which is the conflict between Jewish adherents of Jesus and those who oppose that claim. This conflict has led to increasingly negative views of the opposition on either side, so that we have "the Jews" represented as vehemently rejecting Jesus and heaping opprobrium upon him, while Jesus, who clearly represents the Johannine

<sup>6</sup> The KJV translation of John 14:1, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me," although grammatically possible, is hardly possible theologically. In Johannine thought, belief in Jesus is not something merely to be added to belief in God. Most modern translations rightly construe this as a double imperative: "Believe in God; believe also in me." The command to believe in God becomes the command to believe in Jesus.

Christians, responds in kind. Given the Johannine view of the Jewish authorities, presumably the heirs of the Pharisees, who are his chief opponents, it is not surprising that the Gospel portrays the world into which Jesus came as one of falsehood, sin, darkness, and death. Whether that is an accurate portrayal remains a question for the open-minded reader. But suffice it to say that the evangelist does not wish his reader to remain open-minded, but to take sides. In fact, he anticipates a sympathetic audience for his Gospel. At the same time he does not doubt that the facts bear him out. Of course, the question that must be decided is what are the facts.

It would be unfair to the evangelist, however, to characterize the view of the world or of the human situation as simply a by-product of a religious struggle with social overtones and implications (i.e., being put out of the synagogue). The fact that subsequent generations of readers, who have no direct relation to that ancient struggle, have resonated to the evangelist's description of the world and of the bleakness of human existence strongly implies that John's perception of the forces threatening human blessedness and life is widely shared. Whether Jesus affords the answer to such threat and the possibility of life is a matter of faith, for it cannot be proved that he does, except, of course, in the experience of those who share that faith as they face life and death. Moreover, the Fourth Gospel presupposes a history of God's standing over against the world, particularly as it is represented in scripture, that is, the Old Testament. Such an assessment of the tension in the relationship between God and world as we find in the Gospel would appear extreme, but not unprecedented against that background.

Toward the end of the biblical period, in books like Daniel, Zechariah, and Isaiah 24–29, Old Testament *prophecy* gives way to *apocalyptic*, a view of the world and its history that distinguishes sharply between good and evil, sees the world as dominated by the latter, and looks only to God's intervention for redemption. Characteristic of apocalyptic is the revelation itself, mediated from a heavenly or supernatural figure through a human recipient. While the prophetic literature generally

anticipates an historical future in which God's judgment will be made manifest as life goes on, apocalyptic literature characteristically anticipates God's intervention in history to change it radically from the history of sin to the time of God's rule. Such an apocalyptic view of history underlies much of the Synoptic tradition, as well as Paul's theology, and is, of course, the subject of the Revelation to John. While the Gospel of John does not share the expectation of a future, cataclysmic resolution of world history in favor of God's people, its view of the world and God is quite similar to that of apocalyptic.<sup>7</sup> The Qumran War Scroll is an account of the apocalyptic conflict between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. Such light/darkness dualism in the Scrolls, and probably also in John, is rooted in an apocalyptic world-view. In John the character of the future expectation has changed because of the past, historic advent of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Spirit in the community, but the view of the nature of the world and its continuing bondage in darkness has not.

Into the world of darkness and death, God sends his Son Jesus Christ in order to save it (3:16–17). Thus Jesus is not only the light of the world (1:5; 8:12), but also the resurrection and the life (11:25), the one who has descended from God and ascended to God (3:13; 6:38; 17:13). He is the revealer who contravenes and overrules all human expectation. Yet at the same time he is the expected one, the Messiah of Israel, the Christ, and the fulfillment of deep human need.

### 1 Jesus as Messiah or Christ

All the Gospels are based upon a fundamental conviction of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that to follow him is to attain life (see John 20:31), but only John formulates

<sup>7</sup> On the origins and characteristics of apocalyptic literature and thought, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York, 1984), pp. 1–32 ("The Apocalyptic Genre"). On the relationship of apocalyptic thought to the Fourth Gospel, see Robert G. Hall, *Revealed Histories: Techniques for Ancient Jewish and Christian Historiography*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 6 (Sheffield, 1991), esp. pp. 209–236.