

88.1; Zech. 13.9 Septuagint). This does not, however, mean that John should be seen as simply equating Jesus with God, still less subscribing to the later doctrines of the creeds. This is one disciple's faith-confession, its individual character being heightened by the repetition of the personal pronoun, 'My Lord and *my* God' (see further below, Ch. 12).

Conclusions

The titles accorded to Jesus in confessions of faith contribute, each in its own way, to John's overall presentation of christology. Jesus is acknowledged in turn as Israel's 'messiah' and king, as God's Son and Holy One, as Saviour of the World, and as sacrificial 'Lamb'. He comes as a teacher and prophet, in fulfilment of Moses' promises, revealing God's nature in life-bringing words and actions. He is 'the Son of Man' who came down from heaven and returns to the Father through the way of the cross, an example of love and conformity to God's will. He is 'Master' and 'Lord', demanding obedience and loyalty, but also acts as a slave in washing his disciples' feet. While several of the faith-confessions effectively acknowledge Jesus' character as like God's, only Thomas's acclamation actually calls him 'God'. Thus John's faith-confessions themselves serve as 'narrative theology', reinforcing and developing the message of the 'signs'. The next chapter will consider how John uses other actions, and especially Jesus' passion and resurrection, to express his christology.

8

Jesus' Passion and Resurrection

What light does John's depiction of Jesus' death and resurrection shed on his understanding of Jesus' person and mission? Perhaps the most striking point is his perception of Jesus' passion as something that Jesus actively undertakes rather than as something he passively endures. A basic theme in the Synoptics is that Jesus is a *suffering* messiah. In Mark he teaches his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer grievously, be rejected by the elders, High Priests, and scribes, and be killed, and rise again three days later (8.31; cf. 9.12, 31; 10.33f.). Matthew and Luke have similar predictions, and Luke has the risen Jesus specifically

explain that this suffering was foretold by the prophets (24.26f.). But although John presents Jesus as rejected by his own people (1.11; 12.37; 18.40; etc.), he never once uses *paschō*, 'suffer', of Jesus. Rather he depicts him as giving his life voluntarily, in obedience to the Father, knowing that he will rise again: as he says, 'I have power to lay [my life] down, and I have power to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (10.17f.; cf. 10.11, 15). In describing Jesus' passion John stresses his autonomy: he knows beforehand who will betray him, and tells Judas to do quickly what he has to do (13.11, 18, 26f.; cf. 6.70f.). When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, Judas does not need to identify him with a kiss, for he identifies himself with the words 'I am [he]' (18.5f.) – possibly a divine 'epiphany' (discussed below, Ch. 12). Jesus takes the initiative in bidding them let his disciples go (18.8f.), fulfilling words from his Farewell Prayer, 'I have guarded them, and none of them perished, except the son of perdition, that Scripture might be fulfilled' (17.12).

Trial and 'Glorification'

When brought before Pilate, Jesus questions the governor in a way that would be impertinent for an ordinary prisoner (18.34–7), speaking of truth, and of his own kingship, 'not of this world' – hardly the conduct of someone on trial for his life. He even tells Pilate that he would have no authority over him if it had not been given him 'from above' (19.11). This contrasts with his silence in the Synoptics before both the High Priest and Pilate (Mk 14.60f.; 15.4f.; Mt. 26.62f.; 27.14; Lk. 23.9; cf. 1 Pet. 2.23). In John, Jesus carries his own cross (19.17); contrast Mark (15.21 par.), where it is carried by Simon of Cyrene. John's trial and crucifixion narratives are full of symbolic allusions to Jesus' kingship, including his crowning with thorns, being arrayed in purple, and mockingly acclaimed king (19.1–3). His dying cry, 'It is accomplished' (*tetelestai*), echoes words from his Farewell Prayer, when he spoke proleptically of having completed (*teleiōsas*) the work God gave him to do (17.4); cf. 13.1: 'he loved them to the end' (*eis telos*). Then 'he bowed his head and handed over his spirit' (19.30), words bringing out the voluntary nature of his death.¹ The purpose of all this is to show that, far from being passive, Jesus consents to and controls what happens to him: he dies so that God may be glorified, and so doing is himself glorified (17.1–5). He willingly drinks the cup that the Father has given him (18.11), and reigns from the cross (19.19–22). This is John's solution to the problem of a crucified messiah, 'a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1.23; cf. Gal. 5.11; Heb. 12.2).²

This image of the passion as Jesus' triumph rather than humiliation is

borne out by earlier references which carefully prepare the way for John's presentation of Jesus' death. In his passion predictions Jesus speaks of being 'lifted up' or 'exalted' (Greek *hypsōō*) rather than of suffering (e.g. 3.14; 8.28; 12.32f.). He repeatedly refers to his 'hour' (e.g. 7.30; 8.20), when he will be 'glorified' (*doxazō*: 12.23f.; 17.1; cf. 12.16; 13.31f.), a theme already obliquely heralded by the references to his 'glory' in the Prologue (1.14) and the wine miracle (2.11). In this understanding John was probably influenced by Isaiah's picture of the Lord's despised and rejected Servant (52.13–53.12), who bore his people's iniquities and was vindicated by God. The coincidences of language are striking: in Isaiah (52.13, Hebrew text) God promises: 'My servant ... shall be high [*yarum*], and lifted up [*nišša*]', and exceedingly exalted [*gabab*]' (Septuagint, *hypsōthēsetai kai doxasthēsetai sphodra*); in John (12.23, 32), Jesus is 'lifted up' (*hypsōomai*) and 'glorified' (*doxazomai*). In Isaiah the Servant 'pours out his soul to death' (53.12, Hebrew text); in John, Jesus 'hands over' his spirit, using *paradidōmi* (cf. Isa. 53.12 Septuagint, with the same verb in the passive).³ John's knowledge of this part of Isaiah is shown by his direct quotation in 12.38 of Isaiah 53.1. He also refers to Isaiah's call vision (12.40f., citing Isa. 6.10); he says that Isaiah 'saw' Jesus' glory and spoke of him. Presumably he understood Isaiah as seeing the pre-existent Word, identified with YHWH's glorious presence.⁴

But Jesus' 'glorification' in John does not just encompass his death; it also involves his resurrection, seen as part of one movement with his exaltation. At the 'triumphal entry' when the crowds acclaim Jesus as 'King of Israel', John quotes Zechariah (9.9), 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion; behold, your king comes, seated on the foal of an ass'. He explains that the disciples did not understand at first, 'but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him' (12.16). The phrase italicized corresponds to 'when he was raised [*ēgerthē*] from the dead' in a parallel passage in 2.22, where the disciples understand Jesus' enigmatic Temple saying only after his resurrection.⁵ 'Glorify' is also used in 7.39 when it is explained that the Spirit had not yet been given 'because he was not yet glorified'.

Departure, Ascent and Return

John also has Jesus regularly speak of his death as his 'departure' to the Father.⁶ In 7.33 he warns officers sent to arrest him, 'For yet a little while I am with you, and [then] I depart to him who sent me'. 'The Jews' misunderstand him, and wonder whether he is going to teach the Greeks; but Jesus is speaking of his going to God when he has fulfilled his mission. In 8.21f. Jesus again speaks to 'the Jews' of his departure,

and this time they think that he may be intending to kill himself. In the Farewell Discourses 'departure' is a prominent theme: Jesus tells the disciples that he goes to prepare a place for them (14.2f.). Because he is going to the Father, they will be able to do even greater works than he has (14.12). He promises not to leave them desolate, but to come again and take them to him (14.3, 18). The climax comes in his 'High-Priestly Prayer', when he says to his Father, God: 'Now I am coming to you' (17.13).

There is an ambiguity in Jesus' promise to 'come again': is he speaking of his *parousia*, '[second] coming', as predicted in the Synoptics and in John's Appendix (21.22), or the resurrection appearances? In general, the hope of an imminent apocalyptic *parousia* has faded in John, in favour of what is now called 'realized' eschatology. John presents the 'last days' or 'messianic age' as already present in Jesus' ministry, and judgement as happening here and now as people make decisions for or against him (3.18, 36; 8.24; etc.). Many scholars therefore see Jesus' promised 'coming' as his resurrection, with his gift of Spirit as a continuation of his presence, fulfilling his promises to send the Paraclete (16.7) to guide the disciples and remind them of his teaching (14.26; 15.26; 16.13). However, John's eschatology is not entirely 'realized': he refers repeatedly to 'the last day' (6.39, 40, 44, 54; 11.24; 12.48) and to the future resurrection of believers (5.25, 28f.). It is therefore likely that in passages like 14.3 there is at least an indirect allusion to the *parousia* (cf. 1 Jn 2.28).⁷ In other words, present and future eschatology are held together in creative tension: cf. 4.23, 'The hour is coming and now is ...'.

As well as speaking of Jesus' 'lifting up' and 'departure', John uses the language of 'ascent', referring, for example, to 'the Son of Man ascending to where he was before' (6.62). This raises the question of how he understood the ascension, pictured traditionally in the Church as a physical return to heaven forty days after the resurrection (cf. Acts 1.1–11).⁸ John never describes Jesus' ascent as an event, but sees it as an integral part of his 'glorification', the process by which he returns to the Father through death and resurrection. He regularly uses spatial, 'up/down' language in talking of Jesus' earthly life and his presence with God. Thus in the Nicodemus episode, immediately before mentioning his 'lifting up', Jesus says, 'Nobody has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man' (3.13).⁹ Jesus 'comes down' from heaven to fulfil God's will (6.38) and bring life to the world (6.33; cf. 6.41, 50f., 58); when this is accomplished he goes back to God. He also speaks of himself as being 'from above' and 'not of this world', in contrast to those who are 'from below' and 'of this world' (8.23; cf. 17.11, 14). And he refers to his 'coming' or being 'sent' into

the world (3.17, 19; 10.36; 12.46; 17.18; etc.) like 'an embassy from without' (Bultmann, 1955, p. 33).

Passion and Death

Because John understands Jesus' teaching as life-giving, and speaks of the disciples being 'clean' through his word (15.3), some scholars have suggested that Jesus' death has no soteriological significance for him. In a much quoted passage Bultmann wrote, 'In John, Jesus' death has no pre-eminent importance for salvation, but is the accomplishment of the "work" which began with the incarnation: the last demonstration of the obedience (14.31) which governs the whole life of Jesus' (1955, p. 52). Käsemann similarly argued that Jesus' glory so thoroughly determines John's whole presentation that his Passion Narrative becomes problematic. He is tempted to regard it as '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' (1968, p. 7).

Such remarks underestimate the significance of Jesus' passion and death in John, and the degree to which they are integrated into the Gospel's structure. If the passion was only a 'postscript', why did John spend so long describing Jesus' last days on earth (Jn 12–19)? Why did John prepare so carefully for his death? Jesus' 'hour' and his 'glory' are already mentioned in the Cana narrative (2.4, 11), and John's Temple 'cleansing' story contains more than one allusion to his death. When Jesus bids the pigeon-sellers, 'Take these things away', the disciples remember Psalm 69.9, 'Zeal for your house shall consume me' (2.17). The verb translated 'consume' means to eat up in the sense of 'destroy'; in its original context it described, in a past tense, the pains, anguish, and insults which the Psalmist had to bear because of his loyalty to Israel's God. But John cites it in the future tense as a prophecy of how Jesus' loyalty to his Father will lead to his own destruction. His resurrection, as well as his death, is predicted in his words, 'Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it' (2.19, 22). This saying must relate in some way to the Synoptic accusations at Jesus' trial (Mk 14.57f.; Mt. 26.61), and the taunts of the bystanders at the crucifixion: 'Ah! You that destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross' (Mk 15.29; Mt. 27.40; cf. Acts 6.14). To anyone who knew these texts, John's Temple saying would certainly point forward to the passion.

There are also references to Jesus' death in the reflections following the Nicodemus dialogue (3.12–21), in the sequel to the feeding miracle (6.51c; cf. 6.70–1), and at numerous points in John 7 and 8. References forward are prominent in the Good Shepherd Discourse (Jn 10.11, 17).

the aftermath of the raising of Lazarus, when the Jewish authorities resolve that Jesus must die (11.50–3). Merely as part of John's story-line, Jesus' death is necessary as the climax to the machinations attributed to 'the Jews' to arrest or destroy him (7.30f.; 8.59; 10.31, 39; 11.53).

John 12 is particularly important as a preparation for Jesus' passion. It begins with his anointing at Bethany by Mary, Martha's sister (12.1–8). In Mark's and Matthew's parallel a woman anoints Jesus' head, possibly a royal 'messianic' anointing (Hooker, 1991, p. 328); but that is not John's emphasis. He has Mary anoint Jesus' *feet* (cf. Lk. 7.38), and she is told to keep the ointment for his *burial*. The mention of Judas' betrayal (12.4) strengthens the sense that Mary's act points forward to his death. Jesus' glorification is mentioned in John's comment on the 'triumphal entry' (12.16); his death is further interpreted in the saying about a grain of wheat needing to 'die' before it can bear fruit (12.24). Thereupon Jesus is troubled in his soul, and wonders whether he should ask God to save him from 'this hour', but concludes that God's Name must be glorified (12.27f.). This is the nearest one gets to the Synoptic agony at Gethsemane (Mk 14.32–42 par.), with which John seems to be familiar (cf. 18.11), but the scene is much less poignant. Jesus is vindicated by a voice from heaven saying, 'I have glorified [my Name] and I will glorify [it] again' (12.28), and he goes on to speak of his 'lifting up', explicitly explained as his death (12.32f.). John's account of the foot-washing is marked by a clear reference to Jesus' forthcoming betrayal (13.18–30) and allusions to his death (13.1, 31–3). While performed as an example of humble service, his laying aside and resumption of his garments also symbolize his laying down his life and taking it up again (exactly the same, unusual Greek verbs are used as in the Good Shepherd Discourse: Edwards, 1994).

The Farewell Discourses are replete with allusions to his death and resurrection under the scarcely veiled terminology of 'departure', 'going to the Father', 'being glorified', and 'coming again'. The High-Priestly (or Consecration) Prayer, occupying the whole of John 17, is rightly treasured by Christians. John Knox asked his wife to read it to him on his death-bed (Bruce, 1983, p. 328); William Temple believed it to be, perhaps, 'the most sacred passage even in the four Gospels' (1940, p. 307). It complements John's version of Jesus' agony by expressing his total dedication to God's will. It also balances the Prologue by giving, in prayer form, a summary of how he has glorified God through manifesting God's Name on earth. Käsemann (1968) calls it 'the Testament of Jesus' because it expresses his last wishes. Jesus' continuing care for the disciples is demonstrated by his prayer that they may be one, as he and God are one, and that they may be preserved from the Evil One and made holy. He also looks to the future Church, by interceding for those

who will believe through the disciples, and prays that they too may be one. The prayer is both a reflection on Jesus' life and relation to God, and a powerful interpretation of the events that are to follow.

Jesus' passion and death, then, are no mere 'postscript', but an essential part of John's story and theological message. Apart from depicting Jesus' kingship and autonomy, they demonstrate his obedience to his Father, who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that those who have faith in him may have eternal life (3.16). Thus Jesus' passion and death, like his teaching, are life-giving: they reveal not just God's love, but also Jesus' own love expressed through the ultimate gift of his life: 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (13.1).

Atonement and Salvation

But did John see Jesus' death as atonement for sin? Bultmann's words about it having 'no pre-eminent importance for salvation' have triggered considerable scholarly controversy (e.g. Forestell, 1974; Turner, 1990). The problem is that for many centuries Christian scholars have sought to harmonize the various New Testament writings in an attempt to discover a consistent theology of sin and redemption. All too often it has been assumed that John must have the same message as other Scripture writers. There is no doubt that Paul's writings, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation all interpret Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin. This is illustrated by their use of such terms as *hilastērion* and *hilasmos* ('propitiation' or 'expiation'), *lutroō* and *lutrōsis* ('redeem', 'redemption'), and the image of Jesus as a slain lamb. The same is probably true of the Synoptics though their theology in this respect is less developed and less explicit.¹⁰ In interpreting Jesus' death in this way the New Testament writers were applying to the Christian faith the idea common to Judaism and many ancient religions that blood-sacrifice is necessary as a means of reconciling humanity to God (see the sensitive discussion in Bradley, 1995, chs. 3–4).

John's Gospel does not use the language of 'redemption' or expiation/propitiation (though 1 Jn does: 1.7, 9; 2.2); it is, however, beyond doubt that its author is familiar with such ideas. Jesus is 'the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world' (1.29); he dies on the day of preparation for Passover (19.14). During the crucifixion he is given a drink 'on hyssop' (19.29), recalling the original Passover ritual when hyssop (a leafy plant) was used to sprinkle blood on the Hebrews' doorposts (Ex. 12.22). Furthermore, when the soldiers refrain from breaking Jesus' legs (because he is already dead), John refers explicitly to the Scripture that no bone of the Passover lamb should be broken (19.33–6; cf. Ex. 12.46; Num. 9.12).

He also tells of blood and water flowing from the spear-wound in Jesus' side (19.34). While many different interpretations of this have been offered, the most probable is that the blood represents Jesus' atoning sacrifice, and the water new life (cf. Lindars, 1972, p. 587). All this strongly argues for a sacrificial understanding of Jesus' death.

This idea is supported by a series of texts involving the preposition *hyper* ('for' or 'on behalf of') where Jesus speaks of giving his flesh for the life of the world (6.51), of laying down his life for the sheep (10.11, 15) or for his friends (15.13), of consecrating himself for the disciples (17.19); cf. Caiaphas' reference to his dying for the nation (11.50f.; 18.14). Although the word 'sin' is not mentioned, such texts seem to suggest that Jesus' death somehow enabled the forgiveness of sins, not only of his friends, but also of the whole world (cf. 1.29; 1 Jn 2.2). To say this is not to insist that John's theology must be harmonized with that of the rest of the New Testament; it is merely to point out that such an explanation would make sense. The idea that Jesus' death is merely an example of obedience or only a demonstration of love seems inadequate to explain both the '*hyper*' texts, and the underlying paschal symbolism of the Passion Narrative.

Jesus' death in John is also seen as attracting humanity to Jesus: 'When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to me' (12.32). It will enable people to know who Jesus truly is (8.28), and through knowing him, and God who sent him, they will be able to attain eternal life (17.3; cf. 3.14f.). His passion and death, as well as his teaching, are the means of conquering evil: immediately after his agony over his 'hour', he says (in anticipation of his death), 'Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out' (12.31). Similarly at the end of his second Supper Discourse he says, 'Take courage; I have overcome the world' (16.33). Though couched in a perfect tense these words again look forward to his victory on the cross, where he is both priest and victim (so Bruce, 1983, p. 328).

Yet, for John, the interpretation of Jesus' death cannot be separated from that of his life. Jesus comes as a light shining in the darkness (3.19; 9.5; etc.). Through his life and his death he is indeed 'the Saviour of the World' (4.42). In everything he says and does he opposes evil, falsehood, and hypocrisy. His words convey life (6.68) – they *are* 'spirit and life' (6.63) – precisely because they reveal the true nature of God. In his own person he has revealed the character of God (14.9), because he came from him and lived his whole earthly life in unity with his will (cf. 10.30; 14.10; 15.10; etc.). Seen this way, there is no conflict between the concept of Jesus bringing salvation through his words, and that of his bringing it through his death.