

Chapter Six

**The Death of Jesus
and the Human Condition**

Exploring the Theology of John's Gospel

Craig R. Koester

Luther Theological Seminary

The meaning of Jesus' crucifixion is a question that occupies a central place in Christian theology, and Raymond Brown made invaluable contributions to the discussion of this question through his magisterial commentary on John's gospel and his two-volume study of the Passion narratives.¹ Brown recognized that as a source for theological reflection the Fourth Gospel has few peers. His revised introduction to the gospel observes that if the Christian tradition regularly identified Paul as the Apostle, it hailed John as the Theologian, a title that befits a gospel writer of such depth.² Nevertheless, interpreters find that inducing John the Theologian to give a clear answer to a theological question can be a formidable task. We may ask whatever questions we like, but the reply always comes back in the same form: John tells the story of Jesus. The gospel carries no separable theology of Jesus' death; John's understanding of it must be discerned in and through his telling of the story.³

Traditionally Christians have woven John's story of the crucifixion together with those of the other gospels to create a single multicolored tapestry. By way of contrast, critical scholarship has more commonly moved in the other direction, seeking to disentangle the four stories so that each can be seen in its own right. Rather than looking for the similarities between the gospels, studies have usually stressed the differences, and John's account does not always fare so well in the process. The reason is that where the Synoptics tell of Jesus' suffering, John tells of Jesus' triumph. In the Synoptic gospels Jesus warns that the Son of Man must undergo great sufferings and be rejected and killed (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34 par.). In John, Jesus says that the Son of Man must be "lifted up," an expression that suggests exaltation to glory (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32), and he speaks of "going away" to the Father, which might imply that his death simply marks the transition between his life in the world below and his resumption of majesty with God above (13:1; 14:2; 16:5, 7).

According to John the soldiers approach Jesus in the garden, but they can arrest him only after falling to the ground when he utters the words, "I Am." On the way to Golgotha, Simon of Cyrene does not bear Jesus' cross; Jesus carries it himself. The scenes of mockery at Golgotha are gone, replaced by a gentle episode in which Jesus entrusts his mother to the Beloved Disciple. There is no pall of darkness, there is no cry of abandonment, but in triumph Jesus declares "It is accomplished," and hands over his spirit. The story seems to be a seamless outworking of the divine will.

Interpreters respond in different ways to John's account of Jesus' death. John Ashton provocatively remarks that the painful and shameful elements are so thoroughly suppressed that in the case of the Fourth Gospel the term "passion"—which means suffering—is really a misnomer, since Jesus controls and orchestrates the whole performance.⁴ From this perspective what is disturbing is not the crucifixion, with its horror and shame, but John's treatment of the crucifixion, a treatment that replaces suffering with glory and humiliation with triumph. Others, however, find in John's gospel a deeper sense of paradoxical truth, the truth that divine glory is manifested in human flesh and that life with God is given through a crucified Messiah. They observe that if Jesus being "lifted up" connotes exaltation or glory, it is an exaltation that must be understood in terms of the crucifixion, since Jesus will be lifted up on the cross as Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole (3:14), and the evangelist makes clear that in speaking about being lifted up, Jesus points to the kind of death by which he will die (12:32).⁵ These also point out—rightly in my judgment—that the crucifixion plays a defining role in the gospel, from the moment Jesus is introduced as the sacrificial Lamb of God in chapter 1 to the climactic scenes in which the risen Jesus shows his wounds to Thomas in chapter 20. Accordingly, the meaning of Jesus' death must be understood in light of the gospel as a whole.⁶

As we consider John's theology we do well to distinguish between what the gospel presupposes and what the gospel argues. The gospel presupposes that Jesus was a man who died by crucifixion. Throughout the gospel everyone in the story, both friend and foe, assumes that Jesus is a human being. His opponents may question his sanity, but they never doubt his humanity. For the Jewish leaders the issue is not whether Jesus is a human being, but whether he is a human being claiming equality with God. When Jesus declares, "I and the Father are one," they charge that "you, though a man, are making yourself God" (10:33). His humanity is a given; his higher claims are the problem.⁷

In the same way, the gospel assumes that the man Jesus died by crucifixion. The reality of his death is not in question. John's Passion account may help readers see the divine victory in the events surrounding Jesus' death, but the victory remains hidden from the people in the narrative. Readers may see the unfolding of God's purposes, but the participants in the story see only the execution of a man from Nazareth. The Fourth Gospel says that the soldiers ar-

rested Jesus, bound him, and took him to Annas (18:12-13). One of them struck Jesus on the face, and Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas (18:22, 24). Pilate had Jesus scourged; the soldiers hit and mocked him (19:1-3). Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and they crucified him (19:16, 18). If the readers of John's Passion narrative see what follows as a triumph for Jesus, those who perform the execution do not. The gospel says that at the end of the day the soldiers who came to break the legs of the crucified men saw that Jesus "was already dead" (19:33).⁸

The death of the man Jesus is a given for the fourth evangelist. The question is what this death means, and the evangelist recognizes that people see the meaning quite differently depending on their frame of reference. From the perspective of the Jewish leaders in the gospel, the crucifixion is a fitting condemnation of a man who flouts the Law of Moses and threatens social stability (10:33; 11:48-50; 19:7, 12). From the perspective of Pilate, as John depicts him, crucifying a man whom some call king is politically expedient since it shows Pilate's loyalty to the emperor and lets the public know that opposition to Roman rule will not be tolerated (19:12-22). The fourth evangelist wants readers to see the crucifixion differently from the way Pilate or the Jewish leaders see it, and to achieve this he must develop alternative frames of reference. As interpreters we do well to think of multiple frames of reference rather than initially trying to define a single Johannine viewpoint, because the gospel constructs the crucifixion in a number of different ways. Here we will consider the crucifixion as an expression of love in human terms, as a sacrifice for sin, as conflict with evil, and as a revelation of divine glory. In the history of theology these perspectives have often followed separate trajectories, but all appear together in John's gospel, opening up multiple dimensions of the singular act of Jesus' crucifixion as well as multiple dimensions of the human condition.⁹

Love in Human Terms

Beginning at the simplest level, John's gospel indicates that Jesus' death conveys love in human terms. During the Last Supper, Jesus said: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (15:13). In a basic sense this saying is a commentary on the crucifixion, indicating that Jesus will go to his death willingly out of love for his friends.¹⁰ The idea is that if people show love by what they give for others, the most complete form of love is revealed through the most complete form of giving, the giving up of one's own life for other people. Readers would not need to belong to the circle of Jesus' followers to understand this. Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and Paul agreed that true love and friendship might mean that one person would willingly die for another.¹¹ Drawing on this familiar idea, John's gospel turns it into a lens that brings the meaning of the crucifixion into focus. Jesus defines love by his words so that readers will see that he conveys love by his death.

John's account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet reinforces the point. The passage begins by saying that Jesus, "having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end" (13:1). By introducing the scene with an explicit statement about Jesus' love, the gospel enables readers to see the footwashing as a tangible expression of that love—and most early readers would have needed help seeing the footwashing in this way. If Jesus' statement about laying down one's life for one's friends sounds the lofty tones of virtue and heroism, his act of washing feet smacks of scandal and self-abnegation. People normally washed their own feet or had them washed by a slave. Therefore when Jesus the master washes the feet of the disciples he does the work of a slave, and Peter emphatically objects to his behavior, saying "Lord, you will never wash my feet" (13:8). There were, of course, rare instances when a free person would assume the role of a slave and wash another person's feet as an expression of complete devotion, but these were extremes—which is why the action suits Jesus' purposes so well.¹² He washes feet to show extreme love, to convey scandalous devotion, and to foreshadow his consummate act of self-giving on the cross.

The love expressed through the footwashing anticipates the love given through the crucifixion.¹³ The gospel links the footwashing to the crucifixion by framing the episode with references to the impending betrayal (13:2, 18-30), and by saying that Jesus "laid down" his garments, echoing what was said earlier about laying down his life (10:17-18; 13:4). The introduction to the footwashing said that Jesus loved his own "to the end," which in Greek is *eis telos* (13:1), and this expression anticipates his final word from the cross: *tetelestai*, "it is accomplished," "the *telos* has been reached." Connecting the footwashing to the crucifixion enables readers to see that the love Jesus shows in a preliminary way by washing feet is the love he gives in a definitive way by laying down his life.

Presenting the crucifixion as love in human terms is theologically important for at least two reasons: First, it shows that if love is to be given to human beings it must be given in forms that can be grasped by human beings. Jesus comes from above, but he cannot reveal the things of God in heavenly speech. Human beings belong to the earth, and in his teaching Jesus refers to the things of the earth—such as bread, light, and water—to convey what comes from above. In the same way, Jesus washes feet like a slave and speaks of laying down one's life for a friend, drawing on patterns of earthly life to communicate with earthly people so that they might grasp the love he gives through his service in life and finally through his death.

Second, love is conveyed in human terms so that it can be lived in human terms. Jesus' death is both the source and the norm for Christian discipleship, according to John. After showing love by washing his disciples' feet Jesus directs them to wash one another's feet, saying, "as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (13:14-15, 34). Again, when explaining that the

highest form of love is to lay down one's life for others, he relates this to the new commandment, that the disciples are to love one another as Jesus loved them (15:12-13). Since Jesus' love is the source and norm for Christian discipleship, he gives his love in tangible worldly forms so that his disciples might give their love in tangible worldly forms. Jesus' love is conveyed in human terms so that it may be lived in human terms.¹⁴

Sacrifice for Sin

Readers find themselves in a different theological context when they consider the death of Jesus through the words of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Here we move from the realm of love and service to the sphere of sin and sacrifice. Rather than relating the crucifixion to the circle of Jesus' friends, the passage relates it to the world and its sin. This perspective on the death of Christ presupposes a more radical sense of human alienation from God. Although some interpreters have argued that John's Lamb of God imagery is an isolated vestige of early Christian tradition that has little importance for Johannine theology, the final form of the gospel gives the imagery a prominent place.¹⁵ Jesus is called the Lamb of God at the moment he first enters public view in chapter 1, and no one follows Jesus until John the Baptist says again, "Behold the Lamb of God," prompting two of John's own disciples to follow Jesus (1:29, 36). To discern the theological implications we must consider each part of John's statement in turn.

First is the expression "the Lamb of God." Introducing Jesus as the Lamb at the beginning of the gospel anticipates his death at Passover at the end of the gospel. According to John's distinctive chronology Jesus ate his last meal with the disciples on the night before Passover, rather than on Passover evening as in the other gospels (13:1). On the morning before Jesus' execution the Jewish authorities avoided entering the praetorium in order to keep themselves pure for the Passover meal that evening (18:28). Jesus was taken out to be crucified on the day of preparation for the Passover at about noon, when the sacrifice of the Passover lambs began in the Temple (19:14). The slaughter of the lambs was to be completed before sundown, and John relates that the soldiers saw that Jesus was dead before evening fell (19:31). The soldiers broke the legs of the two men who hung beside Jesus, but they did not break Jesus' legs since he was already dead. The gospel relates this to the Scripture passage that says, "His bones shall not be broken" (19:36), citing the Torah's stipulation that the bones of a Passover lamb are not to be broken.¹⁶

The link between the crucifixion and the Passover sacrifice seems clear, but its meaning is not simple. A Passover lamb was not generally regarded as a sacrifice for sin, but was more closely associated with deliverance from death. According to Exodus 12 the people of Israel observed the first Passover in

Egypt by putting lamb's blood on their doorposts and lintels, not to atone for sin, but to prevent the destroyer from entering their homes and slaying their firstborn. The annual Passover sacrifice of the lambs commemorated this deliverance. To account for the connection between the Lamb of God and sin, some interpreters plausibly suggest that the gospel combines Passover imagery with that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who is compared to a lamb that is led to the slaughter and who is said to bear the sins of many.¹⁷ By drawing on these and other backgrounds the Fourth Gospel develops a new type of imagery in which Jesus the Passover Lamb of God delivers people from death precisely by delivering them from sin.

This brings us to the second element in John the Baptist's testimony: "the sin of the world." Sin, in the Fourth Gospel, is fundamentally a theological notion; it is a problem in one's relationship with God that by extension affects one's relationships with other people. Sin is the alienation from God that is expressed in a refusal to believe in Jesus, the one whom God has sent. The particular sins that people commit manifest this underlying antipathy toward God and Jesus, so that sin encompasses both unbelief and the actions that proceed from it (15:18-25). The sin of the world is fundamentally the world's alienation from God and the one whom God sent.

The third element of John the Baptist's testimony is that the Lamb of God "takes away" sin. The Fourth Gospel regularly uses this verb (*airein* in Greek) to mean taking away or removing something.¹⁸ If sin is the unbelief that separates people from God, then the Lamb of God removes sin by removing unbelief. In Johannine theology sin is taken away when faith is evoked. Sin is the opposite of faith, and both are relational notions. If sin is a deadly alienation from God, then faith is a lifegiving relationship with God, and the death of Christ takes sin away when it moves people from sin into faith. If sin is the hatred that separates people from God, then faith awakens the love that binds people to God, and the death of Christ calls forth human love for God by conveying God's love to humankind.

The dynamics of divine sacrificial love are reflected in John 3, which anticipates that as Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole, so must the Son of Man be lifted up on the cross, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (3:14-15). The passage goes on to say that it was because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son—and in light of the previous verses God's giving of the Son includes giving him up to die (3:16). It was because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son up to death, so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. If on one level the crucifixion conveys Jesus' love for those who followed him, on another level it conveys God's love for the world that hated him. John's ominous sense of the world's sin is what gives this text its edge. The "world" in John's gospel is not characterized by radiant sunsets and gentle breezes, by the colors of spring flowers or the golden hues of fall—it requires no sacrifice to love a world like that. But

in John's gospel God loves the world that hates him; he gives his Son for the world that rejects him; he offers his love to a world estranged from him in order to overcome its hostility and bring the world back into relationship with its Maker. The proper theological term for this is "atonement," for if atonement means reconciling parties that have been separated, then the sacrificial love of God, conveyed through the death of Jesus, brings about atonement in a Johannine sense when it overcomes the hostility of unbelief by bringing about faith.¹⁹

This way of understanding John's language differs from the views of scholars who assume that if the gospel uses sacrificial language it must construe Jesus' death as a vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice.²⁰ The notion of vicarious sacrifice revolves around the two poles of justice and mercy or law and grace. The idea is that when someone transgresses a law, justice requires that the person be punished. In cases of severe wrongdoing, justice might require that a person surrender his or her own life. As an act of mercy, however, a transgressor might be allowed to offer something in exchange for his or her life: a vicarious sacrifice. When this paradigm is transferred to the realm of theology, human beings are regarded as sinners who are justly condemned by God. Because God is just, he expects the penalty for sin to be paid, but because God is merciful he allows the penalty for sin to be paid by his own Son Jesus, who dies in the place of sinners. The result is that Jesus' self-sacrifice honors the need for divine justice while making room for divine mercy.

The Fourth Gospel, however, operates with a different theological framework. The gospel does not relate Jesus' death to the need for divine justice but to the need for human faith. When the gospel speaks of the wrath of God it says that the wrath of God threatens those who do not believe (3:31). When Jesus tells his opponents that they will die in their sins he adds that they will die in their sins unless they believe (8:24). When the Advocate, the Spirit, comes to convict the world of sin after Jesus' return to the Father, readers are told that the sin that brings judgment is the world's unbelief (16:8-9). According to the Gospel of John, people fall under divine judgment because of unbelief and they are delivered from divine judgment by being brought to faith (3:17). When the love of God, revealed through the death of Jesus, overcomes the sin of unbelief by evoking faith it delivers people from the judgment of God by bringing them into true relationship with God. This is atonement in the Johannine sense.

Proponents of a substitutionary view sometimes respond that John's gospel might exhibit a vicarious notion of sacrifice in the sayings about the good shepherd laying down his life "for" (*hyper*) the sheep (10:11, 15) and in Caiaphas's remark that one man should die "for" the people (11:50).²¹ Nevertheless, there is no suggestion that the good shepherd lays down his life to deliver the flock from divine judgment. Instead, the shepherd shows his devotion by laying down his life for the flock in contrast to the hired hand who cares nothing

for the sheep (10:13-14). Later, Caiaphas's comment initially has to do with Jesus dying in order to save the people from the consequences of a popular uprising, rather than from divine judgment. The evangelist interprets the meaning of Caiaphas's comment in terms of Jesus' death unifying his followers (11:51-52). Laying down one's life for (*hyper*) others expresses love, but John's gospel does not develop the idea in terms of vicarious atonement.

The theme of cleansing is another way the gospel relates the death of Jesus to the removal of sin.²² When Jesus washes the disciples' feet he says, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me" (13:8). We have already noted that Jesus washes the disciples' feet to show his love for them, and that the love he shows by washing anticipates the love he gives by dying. Therefore when Jesus says he must wash people he indicates that he must cleanse them by the love he conveys through his death. The counterpart to washing is uncleanness, which in John's gospel is associated with opposition to Jesus and the God who sent him. The account of the footwashing specifically identifies Judas as unclean because of the hostility he shows by betraying Jesus (13:11). For people to be made clean, their opposition to Jesus must be removed. They are washed when the love Jesus extends by his death purges away the alienation of sin and brings people into the relationship with Jesus that is faith. To be in such a relationship is to be clean and to have a part with Jesus (13:8; cf. *met' emou*, 17:24).

Presenting Jesus' death as the means of removing sin adds theological depth to the Fourth Gospel in at least two ways. First, it takes seriously the depth of the world's estrangement from God. When we looked at Jesus' death as love in human terms we noted that he spoke of laying down his life for his friends (15:13). Now we see that he lays down his life for a world characterized by sin. Sacrificing one's life for a friend expresses a relationship of love that already exists; sacrificing one's life for a sinful world is done to create a relationship of love where one does not exist. Jesus' death may provide an example of love for people to follow, but a sinful world needs more than an example or it will not follow. The Lamb is sacrificed to create a relationship of faith in the face of the alienation created by sin.

Second, the sacrificial dimension accents the singular quality of what God does through the death of Jesus. Many lambs were slaughtered at Passover, but Jesus is the Lamb of God in the singular. Many human beings have shown their love by laying down their lives for others, but in John's gospel Jesus' death is a unique and definitive action. The Lamb of God is the Lamb *from* God, the Lamb that God provides. It is out of God's love for the world that he gave his one and only Son to be crucified in order to bring an estranged world back into relationship with its Creator.

Conflict and Victory

We enter yet another theological world when we hear Jesus say, "Now is the judgment of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"; the narrator explains that Jesus said this to show by what death he was to die (12:31-33). Rather than speaking of love and friendship or sin and sacrifice, this passage interprets the crucifixion in terms of conflict and victory in a world dominated by a hostile power.²³ Here the basic problem is not so much human sin as it is the oppressive power of evil. People are not only sinful and in need of atonement, they are oppressed by evil and in need of liberation. Jesus' opponent, according to this passage, is the ruler of this world, whom the gospel also calls Satan, the devil, and the evil one (13:2, 27; 17:15). John never fully personifies Satan, but by telling of Jesus' clashes with opponents he alerts readers that evil works through human actions such as hatred and deceit (7:7; 8:44). Therefore, as the battle with evil reaches its climax in the Passion, Jesus must meet hatred with divine love and deceit with divine truth.

Judas is the devil's ally in the Passion story. Judas is initially linked to evil in John 6, but the plot thickens in John 13, where readers learn that the devil himself has determined that Judas will betray Jesus (13:2-3). Jesus' strategy in the conflict with evil is to show unwavering love (13:1). He assumes his battle dress by laying down his garments, girding himself with a towel, and taking up a basin to wash feet. The text makes clear that Jesus does not act out of weakness, but out of the strength of one who has come from God, who is going to God, and who has been given authority by God to manifest his power in an act of devoted love (13:1, 3). God has put all things in Jesus' hands, and Jesus uses his hands to wash the disciples' feet, apparently including the feet of Judas. Therefore if Judas remains unclean, as the text says he does, it is not because Jesus excludes him from his cleansing love, but because Judas is resistant to what Jesus offers (13:11).²⁴

The gospel indicates that Jesus possesses superior battlefield intelligence and knows that Judas will hand Jesus over to his enemies. Yet when asked to identify the betrayer, Jesus dips bread into the supper dish and gives it to Judas—a gesture commonly understood to show favor.²⁵ This gracious act on Jesus' part provokes intense demonic resistance in Judas, for when he receives the bread, Satan enters him (13:27). The action and response disclose the nature of the conflict, for what evil resists is the graciousness that Jesus extends. The gospel says that Jesus chooses Judas, washes Judas, and gives Judas food (6:70-71; 13:1-11, 26), so that Satan's entry into Judas marks opposition to the graciousness Jesus shows. This opposition does not mean that evil is the superior force, however, for Judas does not depart from the table until Jesus gives him leave, saying, "What you are going to do, do quickly" (13:27). Judas leaves the table only at Jesus' bidding, and in scenes to come Jesus will turn the destructive designs of evil toward the accomplishment of God's saving ends.

Jesus tells the disciples who remain with him, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, but I do as the Father has commanded me so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way" (14:30-31). When Jesus finally leaves the supper and arrives in the garden he is met by Judas and a group of soldiers and police, who serve as agents of the ruler of this world.²⁶ Jesus seizes the initiative by asking whom they are seeking. When they reply "Jesus of Nazareth," he says "I Am," using words that recall the name of God, and Judas and the soldiers draw back and fall to the ground. The episode bears out that the ruler of this world has no power over Jesus (18:5-6).

Many a scriptwriter would end the scene here, with Judas and the soldiers lying helplessly on the ground and Jesus standing coolly erect after his effortless victory, but John does not do so. At the end of the episode the soldiers arrest Jesus, bind him, and take him away. So why subdue the opposition only to be taken captive? Jesus subdues the opposition long enough to secure the release of his disciples: "If you are looking for me, let these men go" (18:8). John tells the story to show the extent to which Jesus cares for his own. Divine power is used for human deliverance. Jesus subdues the opposition so that others might be set free, but he himself is bound and taken away by his captors because the battle is not yet over and he must infiltrate more deeply into his opponents' territory where judgment will take place.

John's gospel understands that people are judged by their positive or negative responses to Jesus.²⁷ A saying earlier in the gospel sets the tone: "Those who believe are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already" (3:18). Therefore during the hearings before Pilate and the Jewish authorities the world is judged as it passes judgment on Jesus. Jesus engages in this conflict by rejecting the weaponry of the world and meeting his opponents armed only with truth (18:36-37). In some of the gospel's most ironic scenes, Jesus' accusers make charges that bring Jesus closer to death while bringing the accusers themselves under judgment.²⁸ The Jewish leaders charge that Jesus opposes Roman rule, yet they are the ones who demand the release of Barabbas the insurrectionist, and they insist that Jesus opposes God by elevating himself to divine status, yet they finally give their highest loyalty to the emperor, one of the men who was regularly elevated to divine status.²⁹ Pilate the gentile fares no better. He claims to have the power to do whatever he wants with Jesus, and he declares three times that Jesus is innocent, which is true. But if Pilate knows the truth, he proves powerless to do the truth, for in the end he hands over an innocent man to be crucified. In one sense this episode is a defeat, for the claims made against Jesus lead to his death, but in another sense it is a victory for truth since the world's pretensions to power and right are exposed to the readers. In passing judgment on Jesus the world reveals the truth about itself.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out" (12:32). John's gospel describes no mythic fall of Satan, but it intimates

that the ruler of this world is cast out as the crucified Jesus is lifted up as the world's true sovereign.³⁰ Jesus is given his royal robe and crown of thorns during the scourging that prepares him for death; Pilate acclaims him a king before handing him over to his executioners; and Jesus is enthroned by means of crucifixion. If the sign above the cross reads "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," it says this in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek for all the world to see. On the cross one sees the proper ruler of this world, according to John, the king whose love and truth cast out the power of hatred and deceit. His kingdom is not "from" the world since his power comes from above rather than below (18:36; cf. 6:15), yet Jesus does reign for the world and rightly bears the title "Savior of the world" (4:42).³¹

The theme of conflict and victory enables John's story of the crucifixion to confront readers with two forms of dominion. One is that of the crucified Jesus, whose resolute love, witness to the truth, and obedience to God bring him to his throne on Golgotha. The other is that of the sinister ruler of this world who entwines his allies in a web of hostility and deception as he seeks to bring about the death of the Son of God. From this perspective readers find that there is no place for neutrality. In the cosmic battle between God and evil the question is which claimant to the throne will obtain the readers' loyalty. The fourth evangelist is a participant in the conflict, exposing the pretensions of evil in order to capture the readers for the crucified and risen king.

Love remains central to John's understanding of the crucifixion, but when viewed in the context of conflicting powers it assumes a new vitality. Love is a weapon in a conflict, and it serves along with truth to dethrone the forces that oppose it. Those who follow Jesus are called to love as he loved, and if Jesus wielded love in the face of evil, then his disciples' love may also take militant forms. The expression of love is complex rather than simple. Jesus loved by washing feet and contending with Satan. For those who follow, love means service to others and witness to truth; it entails giving of oneself and opposing evil. For the writer of the Fourth Gospel, authentic love encompasses all of this.

Revelation of Divine Glory

Shifting our perspective one last time, we can consider the crucifixion in terms of glory. Jesus' final prayer before his arrest sounds the theme: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you . . . I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had in your presence before the world existed" (17:2, 4-5). The theme of glory takes us into yet another theological world, one that deals with the human need to know God.³² The word "glory" (*doxa*) sometimes connotes honor (5:41), but in John's gospel glory also has to do with the way God is revealed to human beings. This theological world recognizes that people were created to know God, and

the prayer in John 17 therefore states that eternal life means knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent (17:3). To know God is to be in relationship with God, yet the gospel also recognizes that people have no immediate knowledge of God. "No one has ever seen God," the gospel says (1:18). God's presence is hidden until God chooses to reveal it. The theme of glory has to do with the way revelation takes place.

The prominence of glory in a prayer that concludes the Last Supper and leads into the Passion has, however, generated sharp debate. By looking back to Jesus' ministry as a period of glorifying God on earth and by looking ahead to Jesus resuming his preexistent glory with the Father in heaven the prayer seems to let the cross drop from view. For some interpreters the prayer shows that the Johannine Jesus simply moves from earthly glory to heavenly glory with the crucifixion marking the transition between the two spheres.³³ Others maintain—rightly, I think—that the crucifixion has a more integral role to play in John's understanding of glory.³⁴ To discern what this might be, we must consider the key parts of Jesus' saying in light of the wider gospel story.

First, Jesus said that he glorified God on earth by accomplishing the work God gave him to do. Jesus' earthly ministry was done to glorify God, and in a basic sense this means he honored God through his faithful obedience to God's commands. During his public ministry Jesus claimed to teach what God wanted him to teach, and to perform the healings and other works God wanted him to perform. Such faithfulness honors God (8:49). In another sense, however, Jesus glorified God by revealing God's power. Biblical writers sometimes use the term *doxa* or "glory" for the way the power of God is brought within the realm of human experience.³⁵ According to John's gospel, Jesus made divine power visible by the miraculous signs he performed. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus manifested his glory by turning water into wine at Cana (2:11), and at the end of his ministry he revealed the glory of God by calling the dead man Lazarus back to life (11:40). John's account of Jesus' career encompasses these and other miraculous acts, which reveal divine glory by revealing divine power.

A second element in Jesus' prayer concerns the glory he will resume in heaven once his ministry on earth is over. This heavenly glory is something that the Son of God enjoyed before the world existed. To share in such glory is to share in divine honor, divine majesty, and divine power. It was out of love that the Father gave the Son such glory before the foundation of the world, so that sharing in God's glory means sharing in God's love. By means of his Passion, Jesus will return to the Father and enter a heavenly glory his followers on earth cannot fully perceive, but can hope to see in the future. Therefore Jesus concludes his prayer by asking that those God has given him may one day be with him in God's presence to see the fullness of the glory God gave to him in love (17:24).

The prayer traces a movement from glory on earth to glory in heaven, and given only the lines we have considered thus far it would be easy to bypass the

cross without comment. Yet other passages do connect glory more directly to the crucifixion itself. When Jesus enters Jerusalem at the end of his ministry he says: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," and he compares himself to a seed that must fall into the earth and die (12:23-24). When Judas receives the piece of bread and departs to betray him, Jesus says: "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him" (13:31). The saying does not limit glorification to what happens after the crucifixion, but links glorification to the process of betrayal that culminates in the crucifixion. And this brings us back to the prayer in John 17 where Jesus says that he has glorified God on earth by accomplishing the works God gave him to do. The Greek word for "accomplish" is *teleioun*, the word Jesus will utter at the time of his death when he says *tetelestai*, "it is accomplished." If Jesus glorifies God on earth by accomplishing God's works, he glorifies God by the crucifixion that completes these works. The question is how he does this.

Given the way Jesus manifested divine glory by miraculous acts of power during his ministry, we might expect a battery of miracles to occur during his crucifixion. The patristic writer John Chrysostom evidently had this expectation, but when commenting on how Jesus could be glorified by crucifixion he found no Johannine miracles to suit his needs. To explain how the Fourth Gospel could suggest that the crucifixion manifested divine glory, Chrysostom had to import material from the Synoptics.³⁶ It was in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that he found the cross most vividly framed with displays of divine power. He understood that the eerie pall of darkness the Synoptics place over the crucifixion was a visible sign of supernatural force, and that the dramatic tearing of the Temple curtain revealed the hand of God. He understood that God's glory was palpable in Matthew's account of the earth quaking and the saints rising on Good Friday.³⁷ The irony is that these traditional signs of divine power are missing from John's gospel. John gives his readers no portents in heaven or on earth. If readers are to see glory in the crucifixion, they must see it in another way.

Put briefly, if the signs reveal God's glory by displaying divine power, the crucifixion reveals God's glory by disclosing divine love.³⁸ The crucifixion completes Jesus' work of glorifying God on earth, for by laying down his life he gives himself completely so that the world may know of Jesus' love for God and God's love for the world (3:16; 14:31). By his resurrection and ascension Jesus returns to the heavenly glory God prepared for him in love, and Jesus prays that his followers will one day join him in the Father's presence to share in this glory and love (17:5, 24-26). To the eye of faith, however, the glory of the exalted Lord is already present in the crucified body of Jesus.³⁹ If glory defines what the crucifixion is, the crucifixion defines what glory is. The crucifixion manifests the scope of divine power by disclosing the depth of divine love.

Concluding Reflections

The meaning of Jesus' crucifixion was the question with which we began, and we have explored the way the Fourth Gospel conveys its meaning from a number of perspectives. We started by considering the human side of Jesus' death and concluded by considering it as divine revelation, but this does not mean that the gospel takes us on a straight-line ascent from the mundane truths of earth to the dizzying heights of heaven only to leave us there. The human and the divine, the sacrificial and the militant dimensions of Jesus' death must all be taken together for readers to gain a sense of the whole. Each dimension also assumes something different about the human condition. In one sense Jesus died for human beings in need of love and friendship; in another sense he died for sinners in need of atonement. In yet another sense he died for those oppressed by the powers of evil, and in yet another sense he died for those who were created to know God. The human condition has as many dimensions as the crucifixion itself.

Love is the element all these perspectives have in common. One might say very simply that according to John's gospel Jesus died to make God's love known. What keeps this simple statement from becoming simplistic is the way the gospel pulls and stretches its readers by opening up different dimensions of the crucifixion's meaning. Human and divine, giving and resisting—the differing aspects work together like the treble and bass lines in a musical composition, all of which must be played for the music to be heard properly.⁴⁰ To say that Jesus died a human death in love for his followers is true, but when taken alone it is inadequate, for it might suggest that Jesus' death was merely one instance among countless others in which a person made a noble self-sacrifice for others. Similarly, saying that his death reveals the glory of divine love is true, but when taken alone, this too is inadequate, for without the human dimension it can turn divine love into a free-floating sentiment that has no tangible expression. The prologue to John's gospel says that from Christ's fullness people receive grace upon grace (1:16), and in telling the story of Jesus, the evangelist weaves together a number of perspectives so that readers may come to know something of the fullness of the crucified Word.

Notes

1. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*. 2 vols. AB 29-29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970); idem, *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. 2 vols. ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
2. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edited by Francis J. Moloney. ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2003) 220.
3. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 29. Brown plausibly argued that the Fourth Gospel was composed in several stages over a period of years, yet he insisted that one had to deal with the text in its final form, which is the approach taken here (*Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 111). See also Francis J. Moloney, "Raymond Brown's New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presenta-

tion—and Some Questions," *CBQ* 65 (2003) 1–21, especially 5, 16. On story and theology see Gail R. O'Day, "The Word Becomes Flesh: Story and Theology in the Gospel of John," in Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *What Is John? Volume II: Literary and Social Readings*. SBLSymS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998) 67–76.

4. *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 489. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 4–26; Ulrich B. Müller, "Zur Eigentümlichkeit des Johannesevangeliums: Das Problem des Todes Jesu," *ZNW* 88 (1997) 24–55.

5. See also 8:28, where Jesus refers to being lifted up by his opponents, which will occur when they crucify him. On "lift up" and crucifixion see Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 193; Jörg Frey, "Die 'theologia crucifixi' des Johannesevangeliums," in Andreas Dettweiler and Jean Zumstein, eds., *Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2002) 169–238, especially 188.

6. Jean Zumstein, "L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ," in Frans van Segbroeck, Christopher M. Tuckett, Gilbert van Belle, and Jozef Verheyden, eds., *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*. 3 vols. BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992) 2119–38; Thomas Knöpler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums: Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der johanneischen Inkarnations- und Erhöhungschristologie*. WMANT 69 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994); Müller, "Zur Eigentümlichkeit," 37.

7. The Johannine epistles argue against those who deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7). Some maintain that aspects of John's gospel are also designed to counter docetic tendencies (Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992]). Elements in the gospel can function in an antidocetic way, but in its basic direction the gospel argues neither for nor against the humanity of Jesus, but presupposes it. See Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 121–22; cf. 87–115 on Jesus' death.

8. On common crucifixion practices and John's Passion narrative see Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 210–16.

9. Gustaf Aulén distinguished theories that considered the death of Jesus to be an example, a sacrifice, and a victory over evil (*Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* [New York: Macmillan, 1969]). Nevertheless, all of these are present in John's gospel. Cf. Barnabas Lindars, "The Passion in the Fourth Gospel," in Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honor of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 71–86. Martinus C. deBoer proposes that some of the gospel's multiple perspectives on Jesus' death developed over time in response to crises within the community (*Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* [Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996]).

10. Hartwig Thyen, "Niemand hat grössere Liebe als die, dass sein Leben seinen Freunden hingibt" (Joh 15:13)," in Carl Andresen and Günther Klein, eds., *Theologia crucis—Signum crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1979) 467–81. Cf. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 664.

11. Plato, *Symposium* 179b; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8 1169a; Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 9.10; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.120; Rom 5:7.

12. On footwashing see Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 127–34. For examples of footwashing as a show of devotion see 1 Sam 25:41; *Jos. Asen.* 13:13–15; Catullus, *Poems* 64.158–63.

13. On the relationship between the footwashing and the crucifixion see Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 566; Johannes Beutler, "Die Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium nach Joh 13,1–20," in Karl Kertelge, ed., *Der Tod Jesu: Deutungen im Neuen Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976) 188–204; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*. 3 vols. (New York: Herder/Seabury/Crossroad, 1968–82) 3:19; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*. SP 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 373–79.

14. On the love commandment see Raymond F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Louvain: Peeters; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 217–56. On the problems that arise when the Johannine tradition fosters a diminished sense of Jesus' humanity or a truncated view of Christian love see Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*. AB 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 73–86.

15. Those who downplay the sacrificial imagery include Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 491; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955) 2:53; de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, 277–81; J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*. AnBib 57 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974) 157–66; Müller, "Zur Eigentümlichkeit," 50–51. Those who give greater weight to the sacrificial imagery include Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 918, 951–53; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 176–77; Lindars, "The Passion in the Fourth Gospel," 72–74; Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis*, 67–101; Frey, "Die 'theologia crucifixi,'" 200–219; Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001) 190–96; cf. Helge Kjaer Nielsen, "John's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen, eds., *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Århus 1997*. JSNTSup 182 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 232–54, especially 250–53.

16. Exod 12:46; Num 9:12. Similar words are used for the righteous sufferer of Ps 34:21, whose legs were not broken, but the connection with the Passover lamb is primary (Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1185–86). On the complex textual background see M. J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form*. CBET 15 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 147–66.

17. On the various associations connected with the Lamb of God imagery see Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 60–63; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 219–24.

18. The Fourth Gospel uses the verb *airein* in a physical sense for removing doves from the Temple (2:16), a stone from a tomb door (11:41; 20:1), a branch from a vine (15:2), and a body from its burial place (20:2). In an extended sense it entails taking away life or joy (10:18; 16:22). The verb does not suggest that the Lamb took sin upon himself, but that he took it away (Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, 160–65).

19. On the sacrificial overtones in 3:16 see Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 134, 147. On the role of faith in taking away sin see R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 88; Lindars, "The Passion in the Fourth Gospel," 82.

20. A nuanced case for the substitutionary view is that of Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) 203. On the role of vicarious sacrifice in atonement theories see Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 83–141.

21. For a vicarious interpretation of 10:11–15 and 11:50 see Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis*, 201–16. Those who do not find such a vicarious view operative in John include Beutler, "Die Heilsbedeutung," 190–91, and Frank J. Matera, "'On Behalf of Others,' 'Cleansing,' and 'Return': Johannine Images for Jesus' Death," *LS* 13 (1988) 161–78, at 164–70.

22. See Matera, "'On Behalf of Others,'" 170–72; Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," *New Interpreters Bible* 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) 491–865, especially 724.

23. On conflict, victory, and the crucifixion see Judith L. Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36," *JBL* 114 (1995) 227–47; Herbert Kohler, *Kreuz und Menschwerdung im Johannesevangelium: ein exegetisch-hermeneutischer Versuch zur johanneischen Kreuzestheologie* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987) 237–39. The expression "cast out" (*ekballein*) is used in the other gospels for casting out demons (e.g., Mark 1:34, 39, 43). John, however, reports no exorcisms, but links the casting out of evil to Jesus' Passion. Cf. Eric Plummer, "The Absence of Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel," *Bib* 78 (1997) 288–94.

24. William Klassen, who deals with Judas sympathetically, is critical of John's portrayal (*Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996] 137–59). He does not, however, deal adequately with the gospel's theological dynamics. More helpful is Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of a Lost Disciple* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 33–36. She rightly notes that Judas is not well developed in the gospel. Nevertheless, there are more dimensions to John's portrayal of Judas than are commonly noted (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 73–75).

25. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 578; Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 384.

26. Cf. Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 52–53; Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 184–85.

27. O'Day, "Gospel of John," 712.

28. On ironic judgment in John 18–19 see Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985) 126–37; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 123–38.

29. Roman emperors were formally deified at their deaths, but the imperial cults sometimes included the living emperors in divine honors. See S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

30. The saying in 12:31–32 adds that when the ruler of this world is cast out, Jesus will be lifted up and draw people to himself. The lifting up points to his crucifixion, and Brown has plausibly argued that the crucified Jesus demonstrates his power to draw people to himself by drawing Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea into asking for the body of Jesus (*Death of the Messiah*, 1265–68).

31. O'Day, "Gospel of John," 830. The title "Savior of the world" was sometimes used for the Roman emperors. See Craig R. Koester, "'The Savior of the World' (John 4:42)" *JBL* 109 (1990) 665–80. Cf. Michael Labahn, "'Heiland der Welt.' Der Gesandte Gottessohn und der römische Kaiser—ein Thema johanneischer Christologie?" in idem and Jürgen Zangenberg, eds., *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und römische Herrschaft* (Tübingen: Francke, 2002) 147–73.

32. See John Painter, "Inclined to God: The Quest for Eternal Life—Bultmannian Hermeneutics and the Theology of the Fourth Gospel," in R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black, eds., *Exploring the Gospel of John. In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 346–68.

33. Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, 6–13; Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema*. SBLDS 63 (Chico: Scholars, 1980) 149–55; Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 490–96; Müller, "Zur Eigentümlichkeit," 48; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 11–21*. ÖTK 4/2 (3rd ed. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn; Würzburg: Echter, 1991) 468–74.

34. D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 115–22; Thompson, *Humanity of Jesus*, 87–105; O'Day, "Gospel of John," 790; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991) 15–18; Moloney, *Glory not Dishonor*, 24; Frey, "Die 'theologia crucifixi,'" 186.

35. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 509.

36. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. John* 72.4 (NPNF¹ 14:265).

37. On the way the darkness, the torn curtain, the earthquake, and the rising of the saints show divine power see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1034–43, 1097–1105, 1129–40.

38. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 207–208.

39. Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, 73–74.

40. Cf. Jan A. du Rand, "Reading the Fourth Gospel Like a Literary Symphony," in Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *What is John? Volume II: Literary and Social Readings*. SBLSymS 7 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998) 5–18.

The Love of God Incarnate

The Life of Jesus in the Gospel of John

Gail R. O'Day

Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Professor Koester identifies four "frames of reference" through which the Gospel of John "construes the crucifixion": as an expression of love in human terms, as a sacrifice for sin, as conflict with and victory over evil, and as a revelation of divine glory. Professor Koester does a careful job of showing how each of these frames of reference is visible in the story of the Fourth Gospel.

Koester's analysis also shows that these four frames of reference are not really four distinct perspectives, but are inseparably overlapping. The common piece of all four perspectives is the centrality of love. In Koester's discussion the meaning of love comes to the center of each perspective as much as the meaning of the crucifixion does. The centrality of love is explicit in the first category (defining love in human terms), but is also central to the exposition of the other three categories. For the category of sacrifice Koester writes, "[People] are washed when the love Jesus extends by his death purges away the alienation of sin and brings people into a relationship with Jesus that is faith." For the category of conflict and victory Koester writes, "Love is a weapon in a conflict, and it serves along with truth to dethrone the forces that oppose it." For the category of the revelation of God's glory Koester writes of love, "If the signs reveal God's glory by displaying divine power, the crucifixion reveals God's glory by revealing divine love." In his conclusion Koester writes, "One might say very simply that according to John's gospel, Jesus died to make God's love known."

As useful as Koester's paper is in identifying the frames of reference through which one can understand the crucifixion of Jesus in John, the paper rests on a question that is not John's central theological concern. John's shaping theological question is not about the meaning of the death of Jesus; it is about the meaning of the life of Jesus. Koester rightly notes that "the gospel

contains no separable theology of Jesus' death," and that John's understanding of the death must be discerned in and through his telling of the story. But he nonetheless treats Jesus' death as a distinct category. In John, Jesus' death is inseparable from his life, which is why love comes to the center in each of Koester's categories. Jesus did not die to make God's love known; Jesus *lived* to make God's love known.

In this response I will explore the inseparability of Jesus' life and death in John from theological and literary perspectives. First I will look at the incarnation, Jesus' life and death, as the definitive theological category for John. Then I will look at how the theological centrality of the incarnation informs the way John tells the story of Jesus' life and death. The gospel integrates the ever-present reality of Jesus' death into the narration of his life.

"And the Word Became Flesh"

For the Gospel of John the defining theological category is and remains the incarnation. This is a commonplace in Johannine studies, but it needs to be restated and reasserted in the context of any study of the death of Jesus in John. Three statements in the Prologue warrant special attention for fixing the centrality of the incarnation: the classic statement of 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"; 1:16, "From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace"; and 1:18, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made God known."

These verses are the necessary—and to a degree, the only necessary—frame for understanding the revelation of God in Jesus. God is made known in the enfleshed life of the Word in the world, and that life is one of fullness and grace, not sacrifice and emptying. John 1:14 could not be farther removed from the kenotic perspective of Phil 2:6-8, for example. Both Paul and John begin from a pre-incarnational perspective, but they part ways at the moment of the incarnation. For Paul, and this is the perspective that dominates most Protestant conversations about the life and death of Jesus, the incarnation is a moment of emptying, of "giving up" that reaches its nadir in the death on the cross (Phil 2:8). The low point of the death is then balanced by the high point of exaltation (Phil 2:9). But for John the incarnation is not an emptying; it is a moment of fullness.

To say that the Word becomes flesh, *sarx*, leaves little doubt as to the tangible presence of the incarnate Word in the world. The radical theological claim *here* is often overlooked because (1) many Christians look beyond the incarnation for redemption and salvation in the death of Jesus, and/or (2) we read *sarx* through the lens of Paul and Bultmann and not through John. "Flesh" is never identified with or used as a metaphor for the realm of human sin or even

human brokenness in John. *Sarx* is the coinage of human life and mortality. When it is used as a figure of speech, *sarx* is more synecdoche than metaphor in John. It is the part, flesh, standing for the whole, human life. We see this in 1:13 when the gospel contrasts new birth as children of God with birth "of the will of the flesh." The flesh is the realm of ordinary human existence, as it is also in John 3:6, "The one who is born of the flesh is flesh," and 17:2, "you have given him authority over all flesh."

When the Word becomes flesh, flesh is *at that moment* redeemed. Jesus' death is not necessary to redeem humanity; he redeems flesh by becoming flesh. Flesh is now the habitation of the holy. Human flesh is now the embodiment of God in the world. The presence of God dwells in the flesh, not in the *shekinah* of the wilderness tabernacle or of the Holy of Holies. God can be seen and known in a human life and in the fullness of that life. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The intimacy of this theological moment cannot be overemphasized. God is known because the Word, who dwells near the Father's heart, also dwells with human hearts. Indeed, the Word has a human heart. The incarnation places the most positive value on human life.

Koester makes a very helpful distinction in his paper between what John presupposes and what the gospel argues. In announcing the incarnation John presupposes, and does not argue, that the Word-become-flesh will die. One of the marks of the flesh, of a human life, is mortality. By becoming flesh the Word joins humanity in its mortality. It would not be the incarnation if there were no death, which is something that docetics and their opponents readily recognized. It borders on the tautological to say that Jesus is human because he dies and he dies because he is human, but such a tautology has real theological significance. Death is redeemed and redeeming because Jesus dies, because the Word-made-flesh lives a full life.

This affirmation of the life of Jesus, of which his death is a part, as the locus of revelation and redemption runs counter to understandings of soteriology and redemption that place the definitive weight for redemption on Jesus' death on the cross. Koester writes, for example, that "The dynamics of divine sacrificial love are reflected in John 3:16, which says that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son *up to death* so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life." Koester's sentence is a direct quote of John 3:16, with the significant exception of the addition of the words "up to death" as the interpretation of "give," *didōmi*. While this addition may be warranted by theological interpretations that equate Jesus' decisive gift with his death, I do not think this addition can be supported by the text of the Gospel of John. John 3:16 is about God's act of love in the incarnation, not singly about God giving Jesus up to death.

The importance of the incarnation for this verse is indicated by one of its key words, *monogenēs*. John 3:16 and 18 are the only occurrences of *monogenēs* outside of the Prologue. In the Prologue *monogenēs* is the decisive ad-

jective that gives the incarnation a human face and form. It brings the language of birth and generation into the incarnation. Much of Christian theology moves quickly to the non-literal meaning of this adjective, often translating it as "unique" or "one and only," and dropping the links to the "birth" root meaning. Yet given John's propensity for words conveying a double meaning—especially in this section of chapter 3 (*anōthen*, *pneuma*, *hypsōō*)—and for that double meaning to be an essential part of what the word communicates, one wonders if such a double layering is also at play here with the use of *monogenēs*. The word can be read simply in the sense of "unique," but at the same time it communicates the source of the uniqueness, "only begotten." The association of father and son language with *monogenēs* in John 1 and here in John 3 confirms the importance of the birth and generation metaphor field in translating and interpreting *monogenēs*. It belongs to the language of incarnation.

Monogenēs as the language of birth and incarnation also fits with what Jesus has just discussed with Nicodemus in the preceding verses. Nicodemus has difficulty understanding the language of *anōthen*, in part because he cannot hold the physical and the spiritual together. Jesus tries to clarify Nicodemus's misunderstanding by restating the kind of birth he envisions with the phrase "born of water and Spirit." This phrase highlights the new life of which Jesus speaks, because "water" evokes the waters of physical birth and "spirit" points to a new birth from God. The physical birth and the spiritual rebirth go hand in hand, however, because flesh and spirit belong together in the new birth Jesus envisions. One is not reborn to a new life apart from the physical body; one is reborn to a new life within the physical body. In this way what Jesus offers Nicodemus is what Jesus himself models in the incarnation: God-made-present in the flesh.

As the language of incarnation, *monogenēs* helps to interpret the gift of God to which John 3:16 refers and the shape of God's love that is visible in the gift. The fullness that characterizes language about the incarnation in John 1:14-18 ("full of grace and truth," "grace upon grace") is repeated here in the vocabulary of love and gift. One is not required to see a reference to the giving up to death; rather, the Johannine context leads one to see instead the full gift of the incarnation as that which makes eternal life possible.

"My hour has not yet come"

The complete integration of Jesus' life and death in the incarnation shapes the way the gospel story is told. I want to focus on two ways in which this shaping can be seen in the unfolding of the gospel story.

First, the gospel regularly mentions Jesus' death as part of the narration of the events of his life. The two main events narrated in John 2—the miracle at the Cana wedding and the cleansing of the Temple—show this clearly.

The conversation between Jesus and his mother at the Cana wedding is punctuated by Jesus' reference to his "hour": "My hour has not yet come" (2:4). Jesus mentions the non-arrival of his hour in response to his mother's comment that the wine at the wedding is gone. His mother makes no direct request of Jesus, but Jesus responds to what he takes as her implied request, that he do something about the problem. To speak of Jesus' hour in John is to speak of the interrelated moments of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. This constellation of moments will reveal God's glory. Jesus' initial rebuff of his mother in v. 4 seems to suggest that she is asking him to reveal something that can only be revealed in his hour. And yet—and this is the key to this miracle—Jesus acts in advance of his hour. He provides more wine for the wedding, and as the narrator concludes, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and *revealed his glory*, and his disciples believed in him."

Here, in the opening act of his ministry, Jesus does what will also later be said of his hour: he reveals his glory. Nothing in the narration of the miracle story indicates that this is a partial or even proleptic revelation of his glory. To the contrary, this revelation of glory leads his disciples to faith. John 2:1-11 is the first example of what John 1:13 promises: "to all who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God."

This story shows how Jesus' life and death are of a piece. The reference to the hour in v. 4 places the opening act of Jesus' ministry in the context of the closing acts of that ministry, and the narrator's comment in v. 11 suggests that the effects of Jesus' life and death are the same. John 2:4 is the first occurrence of "hour" in John, so the reader is not equipped fully to decipher this reference at this juncture; the significance of the "hour" for the story will become clearer as the story progresses. But the reference to "hour" nonetheless suggests that Jesus' death is not to be isolated to the end of the story. The wonder enacted by this miracle cannot be interpreted apart from the context of Jesus' hour, but equally, Jesus' hour cannot be interpreted apart from the context of his life. The beginning and the ending are both in view in the Cana miracle.

Jesus' death is also imported to the beginning of his ministry in the scene that immediately follows the Cana miracle, the cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple. The conversation between Jesus and the religious authorities in vv. 18-21 hinges around the warrant for Jesus' preceding actions in the Temple ("what sign can you show us?"). As a sign, Jesus challenges the authorities to destroy the temple, which he will then raise up three days later. Jesus' interlocutors respond with details of the construction of the current Temple, and scoff that forty-six years' work could be redone by Jesus in three days. The narrator's comments again, as at 2:11, hold the key to the story. The narrator tells the reader (but Jesus does not tell his interlocutors) that he was "speaking of the temple of his body."

Here again we find a crucial link between the incarnation and the events of Jesus' hour. The temple is the place in cultic Jewish practice where the pres-

ence of God is said to dwell. For Jesus to speak of his body as the temple is for him to speak of his body as the place where God dwells, the place where God's presence can be found in the world. Jesus makes a similar claim about himself in 1:51 ("you will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man"). In that saying he positions himself as the ladder of Jacob's dream sequence (Gen 28:10-17), the place where the holy becomes available. Both of these affirmations, and the temple affirmation most explicitly, use the language of Jewish religious practice and tradition to express the claim of the incarnation: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The use of *sōma* in 2:21 also warrants our attention. The only other occurrences of *sōma* in John refer to dead bodies (19:31) and most particularly the dead body of Jesus (19:38 [2x], 40; 20:12). In those instances *sōma* functions as a synonym for corpse, a common usage (e.g., Luke 17:37). There is no symbolic use of *sōma* in John; it always evokes the physicality of a human body. There is no conventional eucharistic presentation in which Jesus, holding a piece of bread, says "This is my *sōma*" (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). Jesus' death is a physical, tangible reality that points to the incarnation: the body in which God dwells is a human body that will experience death. God dwells in Jesus' body, and the warrant for Jesus' actions in the Temple will be seen in the death and resurrection of *that body*. But importantly, Jesus acts on those warrants in his lifetime. What will be revealed about God and Jesus in death and resurrection is already enacted by Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple at the beginning of his ministry.

The Temple story illustrates a second major technique the evangelist uses to shift the emphasis in the gospel story from Jesus' death as a single defining moment to Jesus' death as part of the story of the incarnation. In John the Temple story is placed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in contrast to its placement as part of the final events of his life in the Synoptics. This has led to many different theories about the chronology of Jesus' ministry and the composition and editing of the Fourth Gospel. Yet the primary lens for these theories is often that of gospel harmonization or the quest for the historical Jesus, and not the Fourth Evangelist's own narrative techniques. I suggest that the placement of the Temple incident at the beginning of Jesus' ministry can most helpfully be understood as an example of something that happens many times in the telling of the Jesus story in John: traditions conventionally associated with the events leading up to the death of Jesus in the other canonical gospels are moved out of the Passion narrative and into the story of Jesus' life and ministry.¹

Other traditions that are located within the Passion narrative in the Synoptic Gospels and are placed before the account of Jesus' last days in John include the Sanhedrin's decision to put Jesus to death (11:47-53); the anointing at Bethany (12:1-8), which takes place before the triumphal entry; the "agony" in the garden of Gethsemane, which is refracted in 12:27-28; and the

eucharistic traditions, to which we will turn below. This handling of some of the "Passion" traditions is consistent with the integration of literary technique and theological interpretation that characterizes this gospel. The evangelist's intent is not to present a chronicle of the life of Jesus, but to interpret the life of Jesus for his community.

I have little doubt that John knew his readers would notice that the cleansing of the Temple was located at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and not with the last events of Jesus' life. We sell John and its readers short when we propose theories that seem to assume that readers would not have noticed the shift of location for this tradition from its placement in other tellings of the Jesus story. Many theories of redaction or displacement inadvertently suggest that the first readers of the gospels were very poor readers. On the contrary, my surmise is that John counted on his readers noticing the shifts he worked with tradition, so that they would then be led to ask about the Temple incident, "why is this story told here?"

There are lots of possible answers to "why is this story told here?" One possibility is that John wanted to create an inaugural event similar to the synagogue inaugural in Luke 4, a tradition Luke moves to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a shift in the location of this tradition in Mark and Matthew (Mark 6:1-6; Matt 13:53-58). The answer I would like to propose here is that the placement of the Temple story at the beginning of Jesus' ministry is part of an intentional narrative and theological strategy to show how Jesus' life and death are seamless. Placing this tradition in the opening events of Jesus' ministry shows that the decisive and defining moments are not reserved for the story of Jesus' death but are played forward into the story of Jesus' life. This is the realization to which John wants to draw his readers as they ask "why is this story told here?"—not that John did not know the tradition or that the gospel must have had a careless editor, but that the incarnation so infuses the Jesus story with meaning that the last days must be understood as being part of the first days.

John 2:22 ("After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that Jesus had said these things") is one way the gospel explicitly communicates this theological reality to its readers. John 2:22 (and its parallel in 12:12, a narrative comment also associated with a traditional "Passion" event) acknowledges that traditions take on different meanings depending on the contexts in which they are remembered. The reader is simultaneously asked to interpret the Temple incident as part of the opening of Jesus' ministry and to look ahead to its meaning when placed in a post-resurrection perspective. By moving traditions associated with Jesus' death into the beginning and middle of the story of Jesus' life, John asks his readers to incorporate the crucifixion into the larger story of the incarnation.

At the events of Jesus' Last Supper in John 13 there is no conventional narrative of the institution of the eucharistic meal. The supper is marked by the

footwashing, not the ritual sharing of bread and wine, and the traditional words of institution appear nowhere in John. Again we misjudge John and his readers if we think John did not assume that his readers would not notice that this key piece of the Jesus story was not present in its traditional form and location in this gospel. The words of institution clearly traveled as a significant piece of oral tradition in early Christianity, as their presence apart from a narrative context in 1 Cor 11:23-26 attests. The absence of a narrative of institution at the last meal would evoke a variety of related questions from early Christian readers, including "Why the foot washing instead of the bread and wine?" and "Where is the story of the institution?"

As with the Temple incident, John has moved the eucharistic traditions out of the traditional chronological frame of the Passion narrative and shifted them forward into the narrative center of the recounting of Jesus' life and ministry. The eucharistic traditions of the gift of Jesus' body and blood are reformed and expanded in the feeding story and discourse of John 6. The extent and significance of eucharistic traditions in this chapter has long been an interpretive crux in Johannine studies and is often a divide between Protestant and Catholic interpreters of John. What John does with the eucharistic traditions does not fit easily with much Protestant eucharistic theology, since most Protestants approach the Eucharist as a meal that commemorates "the night on which he was betrayed." Because John dislodges the eucharistic traditions from the night of betrayal and death, this understanding of the Eucharist and this way of articulating its theological and salvific value for the faith community are not useful interpretive lenses for reading Johannine sacramentalism.

Contained within the rich symbolism of the bread of life in John 6 are associations with the Exodus manna tradition (e.g., John 6:32-34) and the Wisdom tradition of the lifegiving word of God (e.g., John 6:35). All these symbols and resonances shape the narrative and theological context in which John places the traditions about Jesus' flesh and blood (6:51-58). Exodus and Wisdom traditions, paired with "I am" sayings (6:35, 41, 48, 51) that mark Jesus' self-revelation throughout his life, show that the gift of God that Jesus brings is not limited or demarked by the events of the night of betrayal and death. The gospel reader is not asked to choose among these meanings of bread, but to see them as expressions of the multiplicity of ways that Jesus' life makes life available to the believer.

The multiplicity of possibilities can be seen in Jesus' words of 6:51, "I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." John 6:51a draws on the Exodus and manna allusions that informed the first part of the discourse; v. 51b can be read as drawing on the Wisdom traditions that shape much of vv. 35-40 ("Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"). Verse 51c, however, is the decisive theological lens that holds all the multiple images together. The

phrase, with its vocabulary of flesh, give, world, and eternal life (live forever), recalls 1:14 ("and the Word became *flesh*") and 3:16 (God so loved the *world* that he *gave* his only Son so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have *eternal life*").

John 6:51c, like 1:14 and 3:16, speaks of the incarnation: the gift of the Word-made-flesh as a sign of God's love for the world. The use of flesh, *sarx*, in 6:51-58 locates this discourse solidly within the rhetoric of the incarnation. Jesus' words do look ahead also to his death, as there are clear resonances of the traditional eucharistic setting in much of John 6. By refracting the eucharistic traditions through the primary lens of the incarnation, however, John reminds his readers that what is revealed in the death has already been revealed in the incarnation. Jesus' life is the life of the Word-made-flesh, already carrying in his flesh God's love for the world.

The institution of the Eucharist is moved forward into the middle of Jesus' ministry so that it can be theologically reconfigured as the feast of the living bread, not the feast of betrayal and death. Jesus' life, not solely his death, is celebrated and experienced in the eucharistic meal. The host of the eucharistic meal provides a superabundance of gifts that surpasses the needs and expectations of those who are present for the feeding. The radical interpretation of the eucharistic traditions that John works in chapter 6 presents the eucharistic meal as a sacrament of the incarnation, a meal of Jesus' living presence for the community.

Conclusion

Professor Koester's approach to the death of Jesus in John and my approach to the life of Jesus in John are not contradictory, yet they are not simply complementary either. It makes a difference for any theological construal of the Fourth Gospel whether one finds redemptive significance in the incarnation as incarnation or whether one places the redemptive weight more on the crucifixion.

I emphasize the need to keep the incarnation in the center of the theological conversation because I am convinced that this is John's distinctive contribution to theological conversations about redemption, atonement, and salvation. John's distinctive theological contribution is often not given its full voice because the weight of centuries of Christian tradition, not to mention other New Testament witnesses, falls more on the crucifixion as the defining locus of redemption. John's distinctive understanding of soteriology and the incarnation is also often muted by popular Christian appropriations of John that reduce John to maxims, and by some of John's own ways of positioning Christian faith in the world.

John's focus on the incarnation nonetheless remains a crucial perspective for contemporary Christian theology and one that needs to be integrated as a full voice in conversations about the meaning of Jesus' life and death. John envisions the possibility of grace and new life that come from fullness, not emptiness and sacrifice, from an image of God that creates new possibilities out of the stuff of human flesh, from love that dwells incarnate.

Notes

1. This view was proposed by Wilhelm Wilkens in the 1950s but has received little attention. See Wilckens, "Das Abendmahlszeugnis im vierten Evangelium," *EvTh* 18 (1958) 354-70, and *Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Vierten Evangeliums* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958). Wilkens links this move with a redactional theory and carefully delineated antidocetic purpose, but his sense of the ways in which John incorporates the "Passion" into the telling of the life story remains helpful. See also David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) 71-77.