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CHAPTER

8 The Gospel of John

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Abstract

This article surveys the outline, form, and content of the Gospel of John. If the significance or impact of a text could be measured by the variety of memorable designations attributed to it by subsequent interpreters, the Gospel of John would, simply on this basis alone, be granted pride of place among the New Testament writings. The text of John's Gospel, in its present form, can be divided into two main parts framed by a prologue (1:1–18) and an epilogue (21:1–25). The first major section depicts the public ministry of Jesus (1:19–12:50) and the second contains Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples and an account of his death and resurrection (13:1–20:31). Although several themes appear in different configurations throughout the text, the structural divisions reveal a close alignment between the order of various episodes and the distribution of key themes and motifs, some of which are examined.

Keywords: John, gospel, New Testament, Jesus, public ministry, resurrection

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If the significance or impact of a text could be measured by the variety of memorable designations attributed to it by subsequent interpreters, the Gospel of John would, simply on this basis alone, be granted pride of place among the New Testament writings. The distinctiveness of John's style and content, especially when compared to the other three canonical Gospels, has given rise to a number of striking epithets, from the widely quoted 'spiritual Gospel' coined by Clement of Alexandria (c.155–220 CE, cited in Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.14.7) to its popular description, eighteen centuries later, as 'the maverick Gospel' (Kysar 2007). Its designation as a 'Gospel of surprises' (Lindars 1990: 9), though less well known, is particularly apt, because it captures the fact that, in John's Gospel, things are rarely as they first appear. Although the simplicity of its language may initially give the impression that this is a relatively

straightforward text, bubbling under the surface is a profound message clothed in evocative symbols that open up all kinds of interpretative possibilities.

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Many of the surprising elements in John's Gospel are, inevitably, also puzzles. In a text that supplies its readers and hearers with several aids to secure comprehension, how can it, at the same time, incorporate so many complex and ambiguous features? No other New Testament text displays such fondness for the repetition of its key themes, as well as for explanatory comments like translations of Hebrew and Aramaic words (e.g. 1:38, 42; 4:25; 9:7) and guiding notes on customs (2:6; 4:9) and characters (e.g. 3:1; 7:5; 19:38). Yet, as literary approaches to John's Gospel have particularly highlighted (Culpepper 1983; Thatcher 2000), its symbolic language and deliberate play on the literal and figurative meanings of words (e.g. 3:3–5; 4:10–11; 8:21–2), though sometimes explained for the benefit of readers/hearers (e.g. 2:21–2; 7:39; 12:33), project the image of Jesus as a 'stranger from heaven' (de Jonge 1977) whose riddles lead, certainly for his dialogue partners within the text, to confusion rather than clarification. And if the Gospel's (sometimes rather basic) interpretative asides presuppose a broad audience from a variety of cultural backgrounds, how can this be reconciled with its sophisticated, often deeply allusive, interaction with the practices, expectations and, not least, the scriptural heritage of first-century Judaism? Perhaps one of the greatest surprises is that the Gospel, for all its theological subtlety and literary sophistication, contains many unexpected breaks or tensions ('aporias'). In what is largely a carefully crafted text, a clear awkwardness can be detected at various points in the narrative. Thus, for example, although Jesus' words, 'Rise, let us be on our way' (14:31), suggest that they signal the ending of his farewell speech to the disciples, the discourse continues for a further three chapters. Similarly, after apparently ending the Gospel with a succinct statement of its purpose (20:30–1), another resurrection narrative is appended in chapter 21.

As far as the awkward tensions are concerned, the most plausible solution is that they are textual indicators that the Gospel was not composed in one sitting, but, over a period of time, underwent different stages of composition and revision, including the addition of new material like chapters 15–17 and 21 (see Ashton 2007: 42–53). The function of John's symbolic language has become the subject of more vigorous debate. Some propose that it represents a 'closed system of metaphors' in a book originally intended for insiders (Meeks 1972: 68–9), while those who view the Gospel's doors as left open for outsiders, at least to those who were already Christian believers, highlight the didactic role of its special language (Phillips 2006: 57–71; cf. Bauckham 2001). Whether the Gospel was initially aimed at those within or also at those outside the Johannine community, there is no doubt that a number of its wordplays, riddles, and use of irony belong to a communicative strategy designed to enable readers/hearers to gain a fuller understanding of John's message. Furthermore, while the many explanations included in the text are intended as tools to assist comprehension, they also reflect the author's awareness of the various levels at which the message could be grasped by a culturally diverse audience. What seems certain, and will underpin much of the discussion in this chapter, is that the roots of John's Gospel belong firmly within the traditions of Judaism, and that one of its primary aims is to offer what it regards as the definitive interpretation of the relationship of Jesus to Jewish beliefs and practices.

This selection of surprises merely scratches the surface of the puzzles posed by John's Gospel, but it does offer some clues as to why this most fascinating, and enigmatic, of biblical texts has engaged the attention of readers and hearers down the centuries and, as a result, has enjoyed such a rich history of interpretation.

The Shape of John's Narrative

The text of John's Gospel, in its present form, can be divided into two main parts framed by a prologue (1:1–18) and an epilogue (21:1–25). The first major section depicts the public ministry of Jesus (1:19–12:50) and the second contains Jesus' Farewell Discourse to his disciples and an account of his death and resurrection (13:1–20:31). Although several themes appear in different configurations throughout the text, the structural divisions reveal a close alignment between the order of various episodes and the distribution of key themes and motifs, some of which will be examined in later sections of this chapter.

Mapping out its content and structure also throws into sharp relief the major differences, and also some noteworthy points of contact, between John and the other three canonical (Synoptic) Gospels. Even though John's narrative stands firmly apart from the others in terms of vocabulary, style, and much of its content, the resemblances between their narrative outlines of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection cannot be denied. The dominant view during the second half of the twentieth century was that links between John and the Synoptics pointed to their use of a common pool of oral tradition. However, a growing number of scholars now favour some form of dependence by John on the Synoptic Gospels, particularly on Mark, given the striking similarities between the order and content of some Johannine passages and those in Mark that also attest the author's redactional activity (e.g. John 6:1–71 and Mark 6:30–9:1; cf. Mackay 2004). Due to an increasing emphasis on the highly oral/aural environment in which John's Gospel was composed (cf. Dewey 2001), the debate about the precise nature of the 'use' of existing texts is now entering a new phase, because John's familiarity with Mark may not be due to reliance on a written version of the text but through its oral performance(s) and subsequent recollection from memory.

That John significantly parts company from the Synoptic Gospels, and had access to a wealth of other material, becomes evident in his prologue of celebration to the eternal Word who becomes incarnate in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth (1:1–18). His origins are set against a cosmic stage, 'in the beginning' (1:1), as preparation for his depiction as the agent of creation (1:3) in whom there is life and light (1:4–5). The themes of conflict and ignorance (1:5, 10) anticipate the division between those who reject the mission of the Word and those who, through belief in him, become children of God (1:11–13). The theme of revelation dominates the final part of the prologue, because Jesus, as the embodiment of the divine Word, both manifests his glory (1:14) and, as Son, makes known the invisible God (1:18). Even if the prologue was added during the later stages of the Gospel's composition, its focus on revelation and division offers a gateway to what, from a literary and theological perspective, will become the central themes of the narrative.

p. 107 The selection of miraculous works or 'signs' and lengthy discourses and dialogues that make up the Johannine account of Jesus' public ministry (1:19–12:50) all serve to disclose his identity, his relationship with the Father, and the life-giving purposes of his mission. It begins with a second introduction which places Jesus firmly on the historical stage (1:19–51), and, through the testimony of John the Baptist and the responses of the first disciples, presents him as the fulfilment of Jewish expectations. Seeking and finding Jesus are familiar motifs in these initial encounters (cf. 1:38, 39, 41, 45, 46), while quests for Jesus and his work continue to dominate his ministry 'from Cana to Cana' (2:1–4:54; cf. Painter 1991: 129–73). The response to Jesus by initiators of these quests ranges from confusion to varying levels of recognition, but he encounters little open hostility during these early stages of his earthly mission.

A marked change of tone occurs from chapter 5 onwards. Jesus' ministry causes division (7:43; 9:16; 10:19), and he engages in a series of bitter disputes with opponents described as 'the Jews' or Pharisees (5:16–18; 7:14–24; 8:12–59; 10:22–39). These scenes of confrontation depict Jesus as a defendant on trial (Lincoln 2000), whose testimony is rejected by those accusing him of breaking the law (e.g. 5:16; 8:13; 9:16) and of blasphemy (8:59; 10:33). Their attempts to arrest and even kill Jesus fail at this point (cf. 8:59; 10:39), because the time for him to die has not yet arrived. Nevertheless, Jesus' raising of Lazarus (11:1–44) initiates

rapid movement towards the hour of his departure (cf. 11:45–53), with the narrative recording numerous episodes which anticipate his death (12:1–26) before reflecting on the unbelief encountered by Jesus during his ministry (12:37–40).

Having withdrawn with ‘his own’, Jesus prepares his disciples, through instruction and prayer, for the future after his departure to the Father (13:1–17:26). The act of foot-washing (13:3–20) illustrates his commandment that, by following his example (13:12–18; 15:13–14), the disciples are to love one another (13:34–5; cf. 14:15; 15:12). They are reassured that Jesus will not leave them as orphans (14:18); by departing to his Father, he will prepare a place for them (14:2–3) and will come and abide with them (e.g. 14:18–20; 16:16–22) in a relationship characterized by unity and mutual love (cf. 15:1–11, 12–17). Jesus promises the sending of the Spirit, ‘the Paraclete’, who will guide the disciples to the truth (16:13) and disclose the sin of unbelief (16:8–9). In the prayer that brings the Farewell Discourse to a close, Jesus announces the completion of his mission (17:1–5, 6–8), and, with the aid of the now familiar themes of unity, love and glory, sets out his requests on behalf of present and future believers (17:9–19, 20–6).

p. 108 While the passion narrative (18:1–19:42) largely follows the order of the Synoptic accounts, many of its distinctive features crystallize in narrative form the Gospel's earlier interpretative expressions of Jesus' death. It fulfils his prediction that he will be lifted up so that whoever believes in him will receive eternal life (3:14; cf. 8:28; 12:32–4), a ‘lifting up’ that connotes both his physical elevation on the cross and his exaltation. Jesus' death as exaltation, and glorification (12:23; 13:31–2), accounts, to a large degree, for the fact that the passion narrative does not focus on suffering but, with much dramatic irony, on Jesus' kingship (18:33–7; 19:2–5, 14–15, 19–22) and control over events (18:4–8; 19:17, 25–7; cf. 10:17–18). Jesus' final cry on the cross, ‘It is completed’ (19:30), encapsulates his death as the fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father and accomplish his work (cf. 4:34; 18:11).

Jesus' death undoubtedly occupies a central place in John's understanding of revelation and salvation, although the resurrection narrative (20:1–29) proves, in many respects, to be the culmination of John's Gospel. Jesus' hour of glorification, whereby he returns to the Father, involves not only his death, but also his resurrection and ascension (cf. 7:39; 12:16). The importance of faith in, and recognition of, the risen Jesus is emphasized in a series of scenes, while his bestowal of the life-giving Spirit (20:22) serves to affirm the truth of his claim that he possesses and mediates life (cf. 5:24–5, 26; 11:25). It therefore comes as no surprise that the themes of life and (in all likelihood the strengthening of already existing) faith feature as integral components of the Gospel's statement of purpose: ‘These [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’ (20:31). John's narrative, in its present form, continues with a chapter recounting how the appearance of the risen Jesus in Galilee leads to a miraculous catch of fish (21:1–14) and to a dialogue clarifying the roles of Peter and the Beloved Disciple (21:15–24).

Jesus' Mission in the World: Contrasts and Conflict

If the mapping out of John's narrative helps to clarify its shape and content, examining the sequence of events, and the connection between them, reveals that the central element of its plot is Jesus' mission to/in the world. This is evident from the many mission statements and the prominence of 'sending' language in the text, which, as we shall see, is a key component of Johannine christology. How the plot unfolds can be described in several ways (cf. Culpepper 1995; Stibbe 1994: 32–53), but setting out its development according to the three-stage movement of commission, complication, and resolution (Lincoln 2000: 17–19, 159–66) ensures that due attention is given to the purpose and outcome of Jesus' mission, and to the conflict encountered by him during his ministry. The 'commission' involves the sending of Jesus into the world to carry out the tasks of revealing God (1:18; 17:6, 26), bringing life (3:16; 10:10) and light (8:12; 12:46), bearing witness to the truth (18:37), and bringing judgement (5:22; 8:16). The theme of conflict ('complication') is concretized in the opposition to Jesus from his human adversaries and from ↵ Satan, while the 'resolution' of the plot is effected by Jesus' death, bringing about the accomplishment of his work, including the judgement of those who reject him (cf. 19:11) and the overthrow of 'the ruler of this world' (12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Integrally related to the plot of John's story is the underpinning of its worldview by the belief in two essentially different realities, with the result that the account of Jesus' mission is permeated by a language of contrasts: life and death, light and darkness, heaven and earth, above and below, truth and lies. Of decisive importance is John's use of the term 'world' (*kosmos*) in spatial-vertical terms to distinguish between the heavenly reality ('above') and the earthly reality ('below'). Jesus says to 'the Jews': 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world' (8:23; cf. 18:36). Because the world below, inhabited by human beings, is under the power of the devil ('the ruler of this world'), it becomes a symbol of alienation from God. However, John does not embrace an absolute form of 'spatial' dualism, because God's initiative through Jesus seeks to bridge the gap between these different spheres of existence (Smith 1995: 81; cf. Barrett 1982: 106–14: 'dualism in motion'). By his descent from heaven (cf. 3:13, 31), Jesus offers revelation and salvation to the world, the object of God's love (3:16–17).

In addition, John employs the term 'world' to express the opposition to Jesus, which, in horizontal terms, takes place on earth (1:10: 'the world did not know him'; cf. 7:7; 15:18). It reflects a form of ethical dualism that centres on the importance of human decision. Those who believe in Jesus are assured life (5:24; 6:35) and light (3:21; 12:36), but those who reject him remain enslaved to a world dominated by darkness (1:5; 12:46), sin (8:21, 34), and death (8:24). This division is directly linked to the Johannine theme of judgement (*krisis*). Although 'judgement' terminology sometimes possesses the negative connotation of condemnation (3:17, 18; 12:47), particularly to express the consequences of rejecting Jesus, it primarily denotes the process of separation, and relates closely to Jesus as 'the light of the world' (8:12; 9:5) who exposes believers and unbelievers, depending on whether or not they see the light (cf. 9:39). Judgement, therefore, is already at work in Jesus' earthly ministry; in his many confrontations with opponents (e.g. 5:1–47; 8:12–59; 10:22–39) and trials before the Jewish and Roman authorities (18:19–24; 18:28–19:16), earthly categories are turned on their head because Jesus' accusers in fact bring judgement upon themselves.

A particularly difficult interpretative issue is the fact that, more often than not, those who accuse Jesus and vehemently oppose him during his ministry are described as 'the Jews' (*hoi Ioudaioi*). Whereas the Synoptic Gospels tend to concentrate more on individual Jewish groups, especially the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as the chief opponents of Jesus, John's Gospel singles out 'the Jews' as a hostile force seeking to kill Jesus (cf. 5:18; 8:40; 10:31). In line with its dualistic outlook, it characterizes them as being 'of this world' (8:23), 'not from God' (8:47), and, because of their unbelief, accuses them of being children of the devil (8:44). The profound hermeneutical challenges posed by John's negative depiction of ↵ 'the Jews' have long been recognized (most recently by Motyer 2008; Lieu 2008), because, although the Gospel 'may not itself be anti-

Semitic, it has given aid and comfort to anti-Semites' (Smith 1995: 169). John's use of the designation *hoi Ioudaioi* is, in fact, complex and varied; characters who are themselves Jewish are at times distinguished from 'the Jews' (e.g. 1:19; 3:25; 9:22), and some 'Jews' are more sympathetic than antagonistic towards Jesus (cf. 10:21; 11:45; 12:9). Consequently, attempts have been made to equate the hostile *hoi Ioudaioi* with the religious authorities or, alternatively, with the inhabitants of Judea. Neither proposal can account for all the evidence (cf. 11:45–6 and 6:41, 52), unless, in the case of the latter proposal, there is some loosening of the geographical focus so that *hoi Ioudaioi* denotes a distinct religious group with adherents both within and outside Judea (cf. Boyarin 2002). The religious nature and intensity of the disputes between Jesus and 'the Jews' are, in fact, widely held to shed light on the historical circumstances from which John's Gospel emerged, belonging to what has been described as its 'two-level drama' depicting both the story of Jesus and the situation of the evangelist and his group (Martyn 1968). Its portrayal of 'the Jews' may, then, have developed in the context of a conflict with a local Jewish community, whose rejection of Jesus as the messiah led to the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue (cf. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Reconstructing John's social location can help to explain, but does not remove, the text's hostility towards 'the Jews', although it may offer some valuable insights into the strategies used by the Johannine side to define themselves over against a group with whom they shared a common Jewish heritage, but with whom there was profound disagreement about the significance of Jesus in relation to that heritage.

Symbols, Signs, and Jesus' Offer of Life

If judgement results in the condemnation of those who reject Jesus' revelation, those who believe in him are rewarded with 'eternal life' (*zōē aiōnios*). This phrase stems from the Jewish concept of 'the life of the age to come' (cf. LXX Dan. 12:2), but it is used by John to denote a present eschatological reality. The offer of life, like the process of judgement, has definitively taken place in Jesus, who is 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25; cf. 3:36; 14:6). As Jesus shares God's prerogative of giving life (5:21), those who believe in him have *already* passed from death to life (5:24), even though, in a few passages, the more traditional belief in a future resurrection is also affirmed (cf. 5:28–9; 6:39–40). The emphasis is not upon the long duration of the 'life' that death cannot touch, but upon its particular quality and intrinsic difference from physical/material life. This is the life that Jesus himself, like God, possesses (5:26; 6:57; cf. 1:4), and believers, through new birth (1:12–13; 3:3, 5), can participate in this life by entering into a relationship of intimate communion with the Father and the Son (17:3).

The centrality of the concept of 'life' in John's Gospel is further confirmed by the use of Jesus' words and actions as vehicles to express his life-giving purposes. This, for example, is what binds together the memorable metaphorical 'I am' statements, for the claims made with the aid of images like bread (6:35), light (8:12; 9:5), and vine (15:1, 5) convey various aspects of Jesus' role as the giver of life. As with the offer of 'living water' (4:10), a number of the 'I am' declarations draw on earthly images to symbolize the life 'from above', a function sometimes misunderstood by characters within the text (e.g. 4:10; 6:32–42). In this respect, the seven carefully selected signs recounted in the first half of the narrative (2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–18; 6:1–15; 6:16–21; 9:1–41; 11:1–53) can be categorized as 'symbolic actions' (Koester 2003: 79–140). As miraculous deeds, they operate on the material level and centre on tangible realities (Jesus changes water into wine, heals an official's son, heals a lame man, feeds a crowd with bread, walks on water, gives sight to a blind man, raises Lazarus from the dead), but, as signs, they point beyond themselves to Jesus' true identity and, in particular, to his role as the one who bestows eternal life. Thus, in the first sign, the abundance of wine symbolizes the new life offered by Jesus (cf. 10:10; Isa. 25:6–9; Amos 9:13; Sira 31:27), as does the scripturally evocative depiction of the disciples reaching the other side of the sea upon 'receiving' Jesus (6:21; cf. Williams 2000: 225–8). In the case of the other signs, readers/hearers are directed to Jesus' life-giving significance by subtle 'signifiers' within the narrative (cf. 4:50, 53–4; 9:39; 11:25–6) or through a subsequent discourse (5:19–29; 6:25–65). The connection with Jesus' bestowal of eschatological life is most

fully explicated in the seventh, and most significant, of the Johannine signs, because the raising of Lazarus to physical life serves as a symbolic enactment of Jesus' claim to be 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25) and as a concrete manifestation of his earlier promise that 'the hour is coming, *and is now here*, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live' (5:25; cf. 11:38–44).

Jesus, the Heavenly Emissary and Son of God

p. 112 Life, according to John's (original) conclusion, is the consequence of belief in Jesus as 'the Messiah, the Son of God' (20:31). Both of these titles feature prominently in confessions and disputes about Jesus' identity (e.g. 1:41, 49; 7:41–2; 10:24; 11:27; 19:7), but, in this final summary statement, their function as the content of Johannine belief cannot be appreciated in isolation from the christological portrayal that unfolds in kaleidoscopic form within the Gospel. Underpinning this statement is an exalted christology which introduces new dimensions of meaning to the titles 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', and offers a presentation of Jesus that cannot be contained in these two titles. From beginning to end, in narratives and discourses, and in a manner unparalleled in the Synoptic Gospels, the focus of John's Gospel is its intricately woven claims about Jesus' heavenly origin, his relationship with the Father, and his sending as Son to make God known in the world.

Its christological agenda is unequivocally set out in the prologue (1:1–18), whose identification of Jesus with the eternal Word (*logos*) provides readers/hearers with a vantage-point from which to view the ensuing narrative. To state that the Word was 'in the beginning' with God (1:1) amounts to a declaration of timeless existence, one to which Jesus also lays claim during his earthly ministry (cf. 8:58; 17:5). In addition, the first verse seeks to express the relationship between the Word and God ('the Word was with God'), followed by a declaration, 'the Word was God', whose precise meaning continues to be debated due to the subtleties of the Greek text. It neither claims that the Word is 'divine' nor that he is a second god, but it does affirm that the Word is to be identified with God (*theos*) at the same time as maintaining his separate identity ('with God'). It is significant that Jesus is also called *theos* in 1:18 (if one accepts the reading 'the only-begotten, God') and in the confession made by Thomas, 'My Lord and my God' (20:28). Thus, although *theos* is not a title claimed by the earthly Jesus, its attribution to him at these two key points in the Gospel expresses the conviction that he is the definitive revelation of God. As the vehicle of God's disclosure in the world, the Word becomes flesh and reveals his glory (1:14). And since 'no one has ever seen God' (1:18; cf. Exod. 33:20), the revelation mediated by the Son is superior to that received in the past by figures like Moses (1:17), because only the Son is in direct and personal communion with the Father. It is through the Son, in his own person, that humankind receives the authentic revelation of light and life (1:4–5), grace and truth (1:14, 16) and the invisible God (1:18).

p. 113 'Word' as a christological title disappears after the prologue, but the interest in the nature of the relationship between Jesus and God is sustained in the narrative that follows. Some of Jesus' strongest assertions about his identity are made in confrontation with 'the Jews', whose accusation that he is making himself equal to God (5:18–19; 10:33; cf. 19:7) may reflect issues shaping the conflict between Johannine Christians and synagogue Jews (Meeks 1990). Jesus' opponents interpret his claims (5:17: 'My Father is still working, and I also am working'; 10:30: 'The Father and I are one') as a direct challenge to Jewish monotheism, but he responds that, as God's emissary and obedient Son, they are not incompatible with belief in the one God, since he only does what the Father has commissioned him to do (cf. 5:19; 10:32, 37–8). The repeated stress, in these and other passages, on the 'sending' of Jesus (e.g. 5:23–4, 36–7; 7:29; 10:36; 17:18) indicates that his depiction as God's authorized envoy is to be explained against the background of Jewish notions of agency (Borgen 1968). Based on the principle that the one who is sent (Hebrew: *shaliach*) is endowed with the full authority of the sender (m.Berakot 5:5: 'An agent is like the one who sent him'), the agent is to be treated like the sender, to whom the agent returns after carrying out his mission in total

obedience. Jesus, therefore, functions as the unique emissary, because the Father 'has placed all things in his hands' (3:35). His words and works are those of God, including the giving of life and executing judgement (5:21–2, 27). The Son acts in dependence upon the one who sent him (7:28; 8:42; 10:37; 12:49) and commits himself obediently to the will of the Father (4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38). During his earthly life he speaks and acts in unity with God (10:30), so that to see and know him is to see and know the Father (12:45; 14:7, 9). After completing his mission, Jesus returns to the one who sent him (cf. 7:33; 16:5).

Jewish notions of agency, even when combined with the Father–Son language, do not fully encompass the presentation of Jesus as the emissary of God. John's conviction that Jesus' authority as divine agent is due to his heavenly origins, as well as his unparalleled relationship with the God whom he fully represents, has led to the proposal that other strands within Jewish tradition may also have contributed to the shaping of Johannine christology, including traditions about God's principal angel, his chief agent, who bears God's name (cf. 5:43; 17:6, 11, 26) and glory (cf. 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24), and is entrusted with his authority and power (Ashton 2007: 281–96; cf. Meeks 1990: 317–18). Such traditions would provide a framework whereby, as with the *logos* christology, Jesus can be linked to God in the closest possible terms without infringing on the authority of the one God.

Certain facets of the presentation of Jesus' relationship with God are intended to bolster what is undoubtedly one of its dominant themes, the impossibility of seeing God other than through Jesus: 'Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father' (6:46; cf. 1:18; 14:9). Central to this claim is the intimate and unique nature of Jesus' status as divine Son; he offers unmediated revelation of the invisible God because he is the 'only-begotten Son' (1:14; 3:16, 18) who is 'in the bosom of the Father' (1:18). His heavenly origins explain why he alone can lay claim to have seen God; with the aid of the descent–ascent pattern, Jesus constantly reiterates the claim that he has come from above where he has dwelt with the Father from the beginning, and, as a result, he 'testifies to what he has seen and heard' (3:31–2; cf. 8:38; 17:4–5). Even figures from Israel's ancient past did not see God, but are to be remembered as witnesses to Jesus: Abraham rejoiced because he saw Jesus' day (8:56), Moses wrote about him in the law (1:45; cf. 5:46), and it was a vision of Jesus as the divine glory that led Isaiah to speak about him (12:41).

p. 114 The significance of Jesus as the definitive revelation of God finds expression in Jesus' proclamation of the words 'I am (he)' (*egō eimi*). He declares to 'the Jews', 'You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am (he)' (8:24; cf. 8:28; 13:19), and they pick up stones to kill him upon hearing him proclaim, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (8:58). To these may be added the occurrences of *egō eimi* where a predicate is implied (4:26; 18:5, 8; cf. 6:20), although its pronouncement by Jesus as he walks on the sea (6:20) and the dramatic response of the arresting party in the garden (18:6) indicate that it amounts to more than a form of self-identification, but points to Jesus' divine status and authority, particularly in view of John's fondness for polyvalent words and expressions. The key that unlocks the christological significance of these 'I am' statements is the use of the same phrase in the Greek versions of Isaiah (e.g. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 46:4) and Deuteronomy 32:39 to express Yahweh's claim to unique sovereignty. Jesus can also utter the divine self-proclamation *egō eimi* because he is the eternal Word incarnate, the heavenly emissary, the Son who speaks in unity with the Father who sent him.

The Spirit and 'the Remembering Community'

The Johannine Jesus, from the outset of his earthly mission, openly manifests his identity with the aid of exalted christological claims, and yet, during his ministry, even his own disciples fail to grasp fully the significance of his words and deeds. The true import of his teaching often escapes them (cf. 4:31–4; 11:7–16), even within the context of his farewell speech to them (13:36–8; 14:4–5, 8–9; 16:16–18, 25).

The search for the key that unlocks this enigma of 'hidden revelation' must begin with John's explicit linking of the gift of the Spirit to Jesus' glorification (7:38–9). When the risen Jesus breathes the Spirit upon his disciples (20:22), it fulfils his earlier words: 'If I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you' (16:7). There is much debate about the origins of the Johannine use of 'Paraclete' (*paraklētos*), the term used consistently for the Spirit in the Farewell Discourse (14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–11, 12–15), but, on each occasion, a clear description is given of the Paraclete's role in relation to the hostile world (16:8–11) and, in particular, to the disciples. Jesus assures them that, through the abiding presence of the Paraclete—his agent and successor—their relationship with him continues despite his physical absence (14:16–17). The Paraclete will carry on Jesus' work of teaching the disciples, reminding them of all that Jesus said (14:26) and testifying on his behalf (15:26). Continuity, in this respect, does not amount to reproducing the words of the earthly Jesus. The final saying (16:12–15) establishes a clear distinction between what Jesus, due to the disciples' limited capacity, was able to communicate during his ministry (16:12) and the fuller disclosure made available after his glorification: the Spirit of truth will instruct the disciples and guide them into all the truth (16:13). This disclosure will include 'the things to come', but the uniqueness of Jesus' revelation is still maintained, because whatever the Paraclete declares will in fact belong to Jesus (16:13–15).

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Not only the post-resurrection period, but also Jesus' earthly ministry is regarded by John as 'a storehouse of revelation waiting to be unpacked by the Spirit of truth' (Hall 1991: 217), as exemplified by the promise that the Paraclete will *remind* the disciples of all that Jesus said to them (14:26; cf. 16:4). That the Spirit's activity involves the elucidation, rather than mere recall, of Jesus' words is strongly suggested by other statements about the disciples' post-glorification memory. After Jesus' veiled declaration about the temple (of his body), it is remarked that, following his resurrection, 'his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken' (2:22). Similarly, in the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem it is stated: 'His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him' (12:16). 'Remembering', in both cases, points to the disciples acquiring greater insight into what had hitherto been obscure or partially hidden. And, despite the lack of explicit reference to the Spirit's involvement, this interpretative recollection is clearly placed within the period after the gift of the Spirit. It appears that, for John, it is the Paraclete-inspired memory promised by Jesus that enables the disciples to comprehend his revelation more fully. Furthermore, in the context of a discourse (John 13:31–16:33) in which the envisaged future resonates with the 'now' of the evangelist and his group, the disciples act as representatives of the Johannine 'remembering community' whose post-Easter perspective moulds its understanding of Jesus' earthly mission.

The relevance of a post-glorification remembering should not, consequently, be restricted to those individual words and events (2:22; 12:16) where the post-resurrection perspective is brought to the surface. Together with other textual indicators (7:39; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–15; 20:9), these statements indicate, in a more conscious manner than anything encountered in the Synoptic Gospels, that John's Gospel has been significantly shaped by the Spirit-inspired memory of Jesus (Dahl 1976: 28; Hurtado 2007: 203). This is implied by Jesus' promise that the Paraclete will bring to remembrance 'all' that he has said (14:26), and by the (deliberate) framing of Jesus' public ministry with references to the disciples' remembering of his words and deeds (Painter 2007: 242). John, in other words, bears witness to a process of intertwining the post-Easter 'present' and the pre-Easter 'past', and although the narrative displays a distinct awareness of the difference between these two perspectives, the post-Easter remembrance so deeply permeates the story of the pre-Easter Jesus that the one is largely inseparable from the other.

The intermingling of two temporal perspectives is part and parcel of John's literary and theological design, and, for that reason, it yields important insights into how this Gospel 'works'. It not only underscores the necessity of Jesus' glorification and the gift of the Spirit, but also seeks to secure the identity of the

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earthly Jesus with the glorified Lord. The close intertwining indicates that, for John, Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Lord cannot, and need not, be disconnected from each other; the christological insights revealed through the Spirit simply disclose what, from a Johannine viewpoint, has always been true of Jesus (cf. Hurtado 2007: 206): he is the incarnate Word, God's agent and only Son, who brings revelation into the world. To recognize the correlation of these two perspectives within the text is to make a decisive first step towards unravelling one of John's Gospel's many surprising, and challenging, puzzles.

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