

ETERNAL LIFE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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I. INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

Even the casual reader of the Gospel of John can scarcely fail to be impressed by the prominence given to the theme of "life" in it. Early on the theme is introduced with the statement that in the Logos there was "life" (1:4). Towards the end of the book, the Gospel's purpose is succinctly presented in a statement formulated in terms of "life:" "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31). And throughout the Gospel one regularly finds the theme of life, especially in prominent places. Many of the beloved "I am" sayings of the Fourth Gospel have as their predicate a term or terms related or equivalent to life. The Johannine Jesus declares "I am the bread of life;" "I am the resurrection and the life;" "I am the way, the truth and the life;" "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In other formulations Jesus promises life to those who follow him: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (10:10). "The water that I will give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (4:14). "So also the Son gives life to whom he will" (5:21). And, of course, there is perhaps the most-oft quoted verse of John and, indeed, of the entire New Testament: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:16).

One could adduce many more examples of verses which refer to "life" or its synonym "eternal life."¹ But statistics alone do not adequately convey the centrality of the theme of "life" in John. For as the verses cited above suggest, the purpose of the Son's mission as well as the purpose of the Gospel can be summarized in terms of the giving of life. But if it is easy to document the importance of the theme of life, it is more difficult to account for its prominence and to delineate the precise content of the Johannine concept of "life."

Some scholars argue, for example, that John has appropriated the term "eternal

life" because it allows him to make more personal and individualistic the corporate concept of "kingdom of God."² Along these lines one finds also the suggestion that life is a "mystical" or perhaps "spiritual" conception, a description of internal experience or of the ultimate destiny of one's soul.³ Often the view that John significantly reinterpreted the concept of "life" has been linked with the theory that John's Gospel was directed towards a Hellenistic readership. "Life" embodied the hope for salvation of the Hellenistic (Gentile) reader, a reader filled with a dread of death and yearning for life which could surpass and overcome the all too present experience of death.⁴ Coupled with this theory one also finds an emphasis on eternal life as a "timeless" reality, in contrast to the "Jewish" conception of life as "life of the age to come."⁵ Still another scholar has concluded that John's emphasis on "realized eschatology" comes from John's effort to deal with the problem of the delay of the *parousia*.⁶ And Rudolf Bultmann pressed realized eschatology to its extreme, asserting that John had radically reinterpreted the future hope as an existential reality to be known in the present reality of "life." In the present, and in the present alone, one would know and find "salvation."⁷

Precisely the emphasis on the present possession of life throws into sharp relief the question of its content. Almost by definition it seems impossible that one should have *eternal* life now. And although John does seem to speak of receiving eternal life in the future (3:16, 36; 5:25, 29; 6:27, etc.), these references are ambiguous, and none of them relegates eternal life entirely to a future state. Those who believe *have* life (5:24), and they have "passed from death to life" (5:24). What, then, can it be that believers enjoy even in the present world?

In order to probe the question of the meaning of life and, specifically, of "salvation as life" in the Gospel of John, we will divide our study into three parts, each intended to answer a subsidiary question. These questions are as follows: (a) What can we learn from John's use of the vocabulary of "life" and "eternal life?" That is, what understanding of *life* is manifested in the use of these terms in John and in possible background material? (b) How does one receive *life*? Although this question might seem, at first glance, to be secondary to the issue of "salvation as life," it provides the framework into which one must fit the answer to the third question: (c) what is it that one has when one has *life*? After an investigation of each of these three questions, we shall close with some reflections on salvation as life in the Gospel of John.

II. THE GOSPELS' VOCABULARY OF LIFE

1. *The Synoptic vocabulary of life*

It will be helpful at the outset to review briefly the Synoptic use of the terms "life" and "eternal life." A few summary statements will suffice. First, the terms "life" and "eternal life" are equivalent. For example, in response to the rich man's question "What good deed must I do, to have *eternal life*?" Jesus responds, "If you would enter *life*, keep the commandments" (Matt 19:16-17).

Second, both "eternal life" and the absolute "life" refer to future blessings to be received by those who heed the call of Jesus. More specifically, these are not merely future blessings, to be received at some point in this life, but eschatological blessings, for the life promised is the life of the age to come" (Mark 10:29-30; Matt 19:29; Luke 18:29-30; cf. Matt

7:14; Luke 13:23-24). These passages point towards the future, the age of salvation (Mark 20:26; Matt 19:25; Luke 18:26), the "age to come."

Third, already in the Synoptic Gospels, "eternal life" and "kingdom of God" are used interchangeably. This does not imply that "eternal life" and "kingdom of God" are simply identical. Both are used to speak of that which God's saving work will grant to Jesus' disciples (Mark 9:43, 45, 47; 10:17-30; Matt 19:23-29; Luke 18:24-30). Specifically, "eternal life" refers to the inheritance of the righteous in the age to come, as it does in Jewish writings prior to or contemporaneous with the NT.⁸ While it is sometimes said that by its etymology *zōē aiōnios* literally means "life of the age," in practice it typically meant "life of the age to come," and that is the usage which we see in Dan 12:2, the only use of *zōē aiōnios* in the OT, where the LXX renders the Hebrew phrase *ha we'olam*. There "eternal life" means "everlasting life" for the righteous, as opposed to everlasting punishment, following a general resurrection of all the dead. "Eternal life" as life of the age to come is also reflected in other Jewish apocalyptic writings (e.g., *Ps Sol* 3:12, 13:11, 14:10; 1 *Enoch* 37:4, 58:3; cf. also 91:10, 103:4; see also 2 *Macc* 7:9, 14, 36; 4 *Macc* 15:3), as well as in rabbinic sources (*m. Aboth* 2:7, 4:16-17; *b. Bez.* 15b; *b. Shab.* 33b; *Sifra Lev.* 5.85d [on 18:5]; *Sifre Deut.* par. 47-8; *Mek. Exod* 13.3; *b. Berak.* 28b).

In short, *zōē aiōnios* did not simply mean life appropriate to "an age," but rather life appropriate to the "age to come." This life was understood to be everlasting in character, antithetical to life which was merely temporary and fleeting. "Eternal life" implied a quality of life, and not merely a quantity of life, for it was contingent upon and subsequent to the resurrection to life in the age to come. This is the conception of life found in the Synoptic Gospels. Further, in those Gospels, "life," "eternal life," and "kingdom of God" are used interchangeably to speak of what is promised to those who in this life respond to the call of Jesus. These promised blessings are viewed as predominantly future, although reception of them in the future depends on one's action in the present. Moreover, these three terms speak of what can also be called "salvation," or participating in the future state of blessedness. That age is to be characterized by the fullness of the knowledge of God and perfect human response to God, and all the spiritual blessings attending such a relationship, as well as by material and physical well-being.⁹ To have eternal life means to live in the age brought by God or, in short, to live with God.

2. The Johannine vocabulary of life

When we come to the Gospel of John, we find that the situation is sometimes analogous to, and sometimes less clear than, the situation which obtains in the Synoptics. John uses the simple noun "life" (*zōē*) nineteen times; and the phrase "eternal life" (*zōē aiōnios*) eighteen times. In addition, the verb "to live" (*zaō*) appears seventeen times. Again, it is apparent from Johannine usage that "life" and "eternal life" are synonymous. Thus in 5:24, Jesus says, "Those who hear my word and believe him who sent me, have *eternal life*; they do not come into judgment, but have passed from death to *life*." Later we read, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have *eternal life*; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have *life*" (5:39-40). In the following chapter, Jesus says "whoever believes has *eternal life*. I am the bread of *life*" (6:47-48). And in John 10, Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd who has come that his sheep may have life. He later states that he gives his sheep *eternal life* (10:10, 28). Finally, we may note that verses previously cited, John 3:16 and 20:31, speak of what Je-

sus brings as, respectively, *eternal life* and *life*. These parallel passages suggest that what is the case in the Synoptics holds true here as well: "eternal life" and "life" are synonymous.

More difficult to answer, however, are the questions whether "life" and "eternal life" are also interchangeable in the Johannine vocabulary with kingdom of God and whether we may understand "eternal life" as the "life of the age to come." To the first question we may answer, somewhat cautiously, in the affirmative. "Kingdom of God" appears only twice in John, and there it is not so clearly in parallelism with life, eternal life, or salvation, as it is in the Synoptics. And yet where "kingdom of God" does appear, we find that "eternal life" follows close in its train. In the discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus states that no one can see (or enter) the kingdom of God unless they are "born again" (3:3, 5). Subsequently we read that "the Son of man [must] be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:15). Appropriate to the new birth is new life, eternal life. Not surprisingly, in 3:17, "eternal life" and salvation are also linked; the Son comes to give eternal life; the Son comes to save. In Johannine thought, no less than in the Synoptic Gospels, kingdom of God, eternal life, and salvation may be used interchangeably.¹⁰

We may then ask, second, whether the Johannine conception of "eternal life" is essentially the same as the Synoptic understanding. That is, should we understand "eternal life" in John as the "life of the age to come"? And if "eternal life" is the "life of the age to come," how can the Johannine Jesus say, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has *eternal life*; they do not come into judgment, but *have passed from death to life*." The promise of the present possession of "eternal life" seems virtually to preclude the Jewish and Synoptic understanding of "eternal life" as "life of the age to come." And yet it is probably true that a majority of scholars today believe that precisely this understanding of "eternal life" forms the necessary background for understanding the Gospel of John.¹¹ Some, however, do dispute it. Schnackenburg, for example, in responding to Dodd, writes that Dodd's view that "eternal life" is connected with the Jewish idea of the life of the age to come "can hardly be right."¹² Schnackenburg takes this view because he sees the contrast in John between "life of this world" and "eternal life" not in terms of temporal succession, but in terms of a qualitative distinction between the earthly and heavenly realms from which come the two vastly different kinds of life.¹³ Stated otherwise, the Synoptic dualism is temporal, but Johannine dualism is spatial.

Schnackenburg has correctly noted that for John "life" is "eternal" because it is brought from above, from God. And yet one may lodge two caveats here. First, even Jewish thought does not think of the "age to come" only in future or temporal terms. There is a spatial element to Jewish "dualism" as well as a temporal element.¹⁴ Second, although Schnackenburg argues that nowhere in John is life relegated entirely to the future, so that it *must* be understood as life "of the age to come," it nevertheless remains true that the *resurrection* is understood to be future. The Johannine eschatology, while emphasizing what is present now for believers, does not lose its future aspect. We shall take this up below in section IV.

Briefly, we must turn to a discussion of another word that John uses, also translated in English as "life," and that is the word *psychē* (10:11, 15, 17, 24; 12:25 [2x]; 12:27, translated "soul;" 13:37, 38; 15:13). Its usage in these cases sheds light on the more pregnant term *zōē*. In every case, *psychē* denotes human life which can be given up. Jesus thus lays down his life (*psychē*; 10:11, 15, 17, 24); Jesus' audience is challenged to give up its life (*psychē*) to gain "eternal life" (*zōē aiōnios*; 12:25); Peter promises to lay down his life (*psychē*) for Jesus (13:37, 38); and in the well-known words of 15:13, Jesus asserts that "No

one has greater love than this, that they lay down their life (*psychē*) for a friend."

John's use of *psychē* helps to define *zōē*. In contrast to *psychē*, which one can give up or lay down, *zōē* is life which cannot be taken away, life which is imperishable. *Zōē* cannot be lost, since it is true, heavenly, God-given life. But *psychē* can be lost, since it is bound to this world, which is temporal and passing way. Yet this should not be taken to imply that the *psychē* which human beings possess is any less the gift of God than the "eternal life" granted to believers. John's dualism is not absolute but, as it is often described, modified. All life comes from God. And yet while all human beings may have *psychē*, not all have *zōē*. This leads us directly to the second main question to be investigated, namely, how does one receive life which is properly designated eternal, *zōē*?

III. HOW DOES ONE RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE?

In pursuit of an answer to the question of how or why "life" images "salvation" in the Gospel of John, it will be helpful to first answer the question, How does one receive eternal life? For how one receives eternal life tells us much about what that life is. If, for example, one holds that salvation is received through gaining information, then ignorance is the "plight" to which "knowledge" is the solution. If one is saved through physical healing, then the state from which one is to be rescued is disease, and salvation is health. In any case, the way in which salvation is effected and mediated helps to resolve the problem of what salvation is. We may test this as we seek to answer the question, How does one receive eternal life? The answer to this question is two-fold: (a) One receives eternal life as a gift from God, who is the source of all life; and (b) One receives eternal life through the mediation of the Son, Jesus Christ. Indeed, hidden within these simple statements is John's whole "theology" of eternal life. Therefore, each of these statements demands more detailed discussion and development.

1. God as the source of eternal life

First, we must note that John bases his view of eternal life upon the understanding that God is the *living* God. Two sets of statements in John make this clear. On the one hand, there are statements which explicitly link "life" with God. Thus in 5:26 it is said that "the Father has *life* in himself." In 6:57, Jesus speaks of the "*living* Father." And there are statements which imply the eternal existence of God. For example, 1:1 evokes the "beginning" of Gen 1:1. In the prayer of consecration of John 17, Jesus speaks of the glory that he had with God "in thy own presence . . . before the world was made" and, again, in 17:24, refers to the love God had for the Son "before the foundation of the world." God is the God who is alive eternally.

This conception of God can be found in the OT, in Jewish sources prior to and contemporaneous with John, and in the NT as well. John does not need to argue for this understanding of God; indeed, it is precisely what he assumes. A few examples must suffice to illustrate what could be documented much more extensively. From the OT come the expressions the "living God" (Deut 5:26; Jer 10:10), the "everlasting God" (Isa 40:28), or various combinations, such as "the living God and everlasting King" (Jer 10:10). God lives forever (Deut 32:40; cf. Isa 48:12; Ps 41:14, 106:48). God is the source of life (Ps 36:9; Jer 2:13; Ezek 37:1-4). The LXX translates the "I am who I am" of Exodus 3:14 as "I am the one

who is" (*egō eimi ho ōn*). Philo echoes the LXX at this point, repeatedly referring to God either as *ho ōn* and, more frequently, *to on*, "that which is." Indeed, Philo's emphasis at this point has led one writer to comment that for Philo "God is just existence."¹⁵ The conception of God as living is also thoroughly rabbinic.¹⁶ The Apocalypse of John predicates eternal existence of God when it speaks of God as the one "who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17). Taken together these references point to a conception of God as eternal and imperishable, in short, the "living God."

Second, the living God is the *creator and source of life*. As numerous writers have noted, eternal life is virtually synonymous with "divine life."¹⁷ Life is eternal precisely because it comes from the God who is eternal, the God who lives. Thus the Father is the ultimate source of life, even for the Son: "As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26). And, again, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (5:21). It is not enough to say that God gives only "eternal life." For if we go back to the prologue of the Gospel, we read that "All things were made through [the Word], and without him was not anything made" (1:3). And yet not all things that were created can also be said to have "eternal life." For "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3:6), and "it is the Spirit that gives life" (6:63; cf. Isa 31:3). In other words, God is the source not only of eternal life, but of all life, including natural or physical life.

What, then, is the relationship between physical and eternal life? Frequently the relationship between "natural" and "supernatural" life is taken to be such that the former symbolizes the latter; the giving of physical life provides a natural image or analogy to the granting of spiritual or eternal life.¹⁸ On the other hand, the assertions of Corell are well-taken when he writes, "Zōē in the Fourth Gospel is not opposed to physical life: it is life in its perfection, including physical life. For there is only one 'life'—life given in creation. The [new birth] of which St John speaks is no metaphysical re-creation, but the realization and fulfilment of created life."¹⁹ The prologue, deliberately echoing the creation account in Genesis, sets the story of the Gospel in a cosmological framework and simultaneously informs us about the meaning of life.²⁰ All life, in short, comes from God; but God alone has it eternally.

Third, then, it is implied that those who have eternal life *share in something that characterizes and comes from God alone*. They share in God's own life. Thus John writes "This is eternal life, that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (17:3). Some scholars deny that 17:3 should be construed as a *definition* of eternal life, and the point is well taken.²¹ For eternal life is the more comprehensive term. And yet John does not write that knowing God is prerequisite to or leads to eternal life; rather, knowing God *is* eternal life. As Ernst Haenchen puts it, "True life is living in harmony with God."²² Only those who know God, who live in fellowship with God and in harmony with the purposes of God, have eternal life, not because living in fellowship with God merits eternal life as a reward, but because fellowship with the eternal God is already to have a share in God's own life.

This understanding of eternal life as knowing God leads to the Johannine understanding of election. Chapter 6 especially links together God's gift of life with God's calling. "My father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world. . . . All that the Father gives me will come to me; and whoever comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will

of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:32, 37-40, 44).

This passage underscores four main points: (a) Ultimately it is God who gives life; (b) through the Son who has been sent; (c) to those who have been "drawn" by God; and (d) who believe in the Son. It is the first and third point that are of interest here, for they point to the fundamental question of the Gospel of John, namely, the question of God. John is ultimately concerned with *theology* in its proper sense, with the question of who God is and how God is known. Thus he is also concerned with the question, who are those who truly know God? The absoluteness of revelation through the Son (1:18), which surpasses all other revelation, including that through Moses and the Torah (1:17; 5:39), suggests that because God is revealed fully only in the Son, then only those who know the Son know God. And since, as the statement of 17:3 suggests, knowledge of God is eternal life, only those who know the Son share God's eternal life. In short, only those who know the Son can claim to be the elect of God. For now that the Son has come into the world, "living in harmony with God" means to live in harmony with the Son. If once God fed the people with manna in the wilderness and mediated the Torah through Moses, now God's purposes are to be seen in the giving of bread from heaven and the incarnate Word. "Salvation is from the Jews," but it is now mediated through Jesus Christ. Only those who are drawn to Christ are drawn by the Father.

In the predestinarian tone of the Fourth Gospel we hear the claims of the Johannine community. But we hear a theological statement as well as a sociological one. That eternal life is God's gift, given to those whom God has "drawn," suggests that life is not attained by personal achievement.²³ Rather, it is received as a gift from the hand of God. In this way, the ultimate gift of "eternal life" mirrors what is already true of the gift of sustenance or physical life. Life is received in continual dependence on God.²⁴

Indeed, if eternal life is knowing God, fellowship with God, then it demands a continual, ongoing, mutual relationship. Life is not an object to be seized apart from the Giver, and precisely in the continuing knowledge of the Giver of life does one find and know God's own life, eternal life.

The dialogue with Nicodemus affords a good opportunity to examine John's conception of how eternal life is gained. Several items in this discourse merit comment. First, statements about Jesus' identity point to his soteriological role. Jesus is indeed a teacher come from God (3:2), who can instruct Nicodemus about the "new birth" made efficacious by the Spirit. But he is also the descending Son of man (3:15), who not only brings knowledge about heavenly things, but eternal life itself. He is the mediator between heaven and earth, the realm above and below. He brings Spirit to flesh, love to the world, God to earth.

Second, the dualism expressed here is not a cosmological schema but a soteriologically oriented construct.²⁵ The world "above" belongs to God, the Word, life, truth, Spirit, and to those who share in that world through faith, who have passed from death to life, who have been born anew by the Spirit. Earth cannot ascend to heaven; but heaven can come down. Flesh cannot become Spirit, but Spirit can vivify flesh. Those who have died cannot live, unless they are born anew, from above, and "live" by the vivifying power of that realm. And it is in the Incarnation that the two worlds are linked in such a

way that those who have been bound in death to the world below can participate in life in the world above. The Johannine dualism, then, also sheds light on the meaning of eternal life, for it reminds us that the life which is sought and available is God's life, brought from a realm to which human beings cannot attain on their own, by the one who shares the life of God.

Third, one shares the life of God only by being born of the Spirit, for one is not born to such life naturally. Although the Johannine phrase *gonnao anōthen* can be translated either "born anew" or "born from above" it is clear that the emphasis falls on the fact that the birth which makes one a child of God happens solely by the initiative and action of God's own Spirit (cf. 1:12-13): "new birth" is "birth from above." And the image of birth is in itself instructive. As an image of salvation, "birth" suggests not monism or identity or mystical union with the Creator, but rather dependence upon the Creator for existence, sustenance, and life.²⁶ In keeping with the conception of "birth from above" is the Johannine designation of believers as "children of God." God nourishes those who depend upon him. God gives living water; provides the bread of life, and tends the vine so that the branches may bear much fruit. Indeed, in the image of the vine and branches the Johannine conception of life is graphically portrayed: God is ultimately responsible for the health of the vine; Jesus himself is the vine; believers are the branches, who live only as long as they cling to the vine. This image not only points to God as the source of life and Jesus as the mediator of life, it also shows that life means continued dependence on and relationship to the one who gives it.

In this brief look at some statements from chapters 3 and 6 we are already anticipating the mediatorial role which Christ exercises in bringing God's life to human beings. We are, therefore, led to a consideration of the Christological dimension of eternal life in John.

2. *Christ as the Mediator of Life*

(a) Christocentric or theocentric?

It has become commonplace now for scholars to note the "radical Christocentricity" of the Gospel of John, and this judgment applies equally to the Gospel's conception of "eternal life." For example, Franz Mussner comments that John's understanding of eternal life as a present reality is a consequence of Johannine Christology.²⁷ This judgment has been frequently echoed.²⁸ Because Christ has come to the world, and because he is "eschatological salvation," then salvation, construed as eternal life, is truly present in the world. But this formulation already suggests that it would be better to speak of "eternal life" not as a consequence of John's christology, but rather as flowing naturally from his soteriology.²⁹ For when John takes up the theme of eternal life, his main concerns are how one has it and who has it. And these are best termed soteriological issues. This is not simply a matter of terminology; there is an important point at stake here, namely, the definition of eternal life. Although there are clearly formulations in John which say that Jesus is life, it is best to paraphrase these by saying that Jesus is the mediator of God's life to human beings.³⁰ Moreover, since knowing God constitutes salvation or eternal life, then faith in Jesus is penultimate in the scheme of Johannine soteriology. Life should be construed primarily *theologically*, since life comes from God, and soteriologically, since Jesus comes to bring what God desires to give, and directs our gaze and faith to God.

That Jesus *is* life means that Jesus *brings* life.

It should be noted that this keeps John's concept of eternal life firmly in line with the Synoptic description of the kingdom. The kingdom, after all, is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. Jesus is the messianic plenipotentiary, the intermediary who brings or administers the kingdom; he even embodies the kingdom in the world (Luke 17:20-21). But the kingdom comes from God, and those who are called by Jesus are called to live in obedience to the God whose kingdom it is, to live under the reign of God. John's preference for the terminology of life does not abandon the Synoptic view that salvation is from and will be achieved by God. Thus when the incredulous disciples ask, "Who can be saved?" Jesus answers, "All things are possible with God" (Mark 10:26-27). And when an equally incredulous Nicodemus queries, "How can these things be?" Jesus answers that they can come to pass only by the power of the Spirit of God (3:4-5).

(b) "I am" sayings with predicate

The "I am" sayings of the Gospel support the twin assertions that in John life comes from God through Jesus Christ. In John 6, Jesus asserts "I am the bread of life," and "I am the living bread." As the Son of man, he can give "food which endures to eternal life" (6:27). But he gives such food "because on him has God the Father set his seal." It is the "work of God" to believe in Jesus. Jesus' Father gives "the true bread from heaven." The bread of God "comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And, as has been pointed out above, those who come to Jesus are given to him by the Father (6:37), whose will it is that they should have eternal life and be raised at the last day. God feeds people with the bread of life.

Embedded in the great Tabernacles discourse of John 7-10 we find, twice, "I am the light of the world" as well as the saying about Jesus as the good shepherd who comes to give his sheep life. As the world's light, Jesus supersedes the light brought through Judaism (7:37-8:1). He heals the blind man. And he will lay down his life so that his sheep may know fullness of life. This he does of his own volition (10:17-18). The light Jesus brings enables people to know God (8:19; 9:39), because he is from the world above (8:23, 26-27, 38, 42; 9:30-31, 33) and does the works and will of God (9:3, 10:18). Indeed, the healing of the man born blind is not the work of Jesus, but the work of God (9:3). Through Jesus, God brings light to the world, and "light" in the Fourth Gospel is "the light of life," that is, the light which confers or leads to life.

The saying "I am the way, the truth, and the life" further demonstrates that Jesus' role in bringing life consists primarily in mediating fellowship with God. The second half of the statement—"no one comes to the Father but by me"—explains the first half, the "I am" saying. And the next verse continues by way of explanation, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also." That is, Jesus is the way to the Father, because he mediates knowledge of the Father.³¹ Therefore, he is also the mediator of truth and life. Both the exclusive nature of Jesus' claim and his function as the mediator of knowledge of God and so of life come to the fore.

The "I am" sayings with predicate are really soteriological in their focus. They do not so much answer the question "who are you?" as they do the question "what do you bring?" Jesus brings life because he lives even as God lives.³²

(c) The absolute claim "I am"

That the Son participates in the existence of God is the point of the somewhat enigmatic absolute "I am" sayings of the Gospel. There is an echo here of the LXX translation of Exod 3:14, "I am the one who is" (*egō eimi ho ōn*). God is. And God therefore gives life. In John 8, when the theme of life surfaces again, we see that Jesus participates in the life of God and therefore in God's purposes of giving life to the world. Life is contrasted sharply with death (8:21, 24). Whereas it is Jesus' mission and intention to bring life (8:51-52), it is the intent of his opponents, those who are "from below," to bring death, especially to Jesus himself. Jesus, in fact, makes the bold promise that he can give eternal life (8:52). The Jews correctly understand that Jesus is making a claim about the kind of life that he lives. But they misunderstand the statement when they construe it in terms of *chronological* age. They hear him saying that he existed prior to Abraham. He must indeed be older than fifty! But Jesus is making a claim to have quite another kind of life in himself, and that is eternal life, divine life, the very life of God. Therefore, he can confer it upon them.

Thus the contrast between the Son and Abraham (8:58) is between the kinds of life that they have. "Before Abraham was [came into being, was born], I am [exist, am alive, continue to live]." Abraham's life has a beginning point, but that of the Son does not. His existence is like that of God. He is "greater than Abraham" and greater than the prophets, precisely because "they died" (8:52-53), but Jesus is. There may be a reference to the divine "I am" of the OT in the claim of 8:58, but it is allusive or indirect. Jesus does not say "I am the I am." It is not until he makes the claim "to have seen Abraham," that is, to share in an eternal kind of life, that the people react. Now he is claiming to have what God alone has. Thus the link between Jesus' statement and the divine, OT "I am" is through the middle term, life. Jesus claims to share in God's kind of existence, eternal existence, existence which does not "come into being," but which simply "is" (8:35; 1:1, 2). This life he has from the *living* God (5:26; 10:18).

(d) The life-giving work of Jesus

In connection with the theme of "life," any one or all of the signs in John could be scrutinized, for, according to John, the signs are to lead people to faith so that they may have life (20:31), and the signs themselves image the gift of life that God bestows. Because Jesus shares in the very life of God, he also shares the prerogatives of God to bestow life. Perhaps the most interesting and helpful material in understanding life is provided by the sign and discourse of John 5.

The discourse is introduced by two healings, that of the official's son (4:46-54) and that of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9). The boy is in imminent danger of death; the man is not. And yet both come to "life." Jesus' command to the boy's father, "Go; your son will live" is both prophecy and promise—and yet it is more. It is a life-giving word. The command to the man at the pool, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk" is no less a life-giving word. For although not threatened by death, in his thirty-eight years of suffering he has enjoyed less than the fullness of life, which includes physical wholeness, as the OT makes plain and promised in the messianic age. Thus two stories where someone "hears the word of Jesus" and so lives (5:25), introduce the claim that Jesus grants life.

Indeed, the following discourse makes as much of Jesus' life-giving powers, as it does of the fact that the healing of the man at the pool took place on a sabbath. Together these two factors—the kind of work Jesus does and the day on which he does it—lay the basis for the following discourse (5:17-47). Jesus argues that he works even as God works: that is, he both does the kind of work reserved for God—he gives life—and he does it on the day reserved for God—the Sabbath day. This clearly evokes the creation of the world as recounted in Genesis, and probably alludes to the argument—found, for example, in Philo and rabbinic writings—that although God ceased creative work on the Sabbath, God did not cease from work that sustained the creation.³³ Even on the Sabbath God gives life to the world. Thus, says Jesus, "My Father is working and I am working still." It is the character and prerogative of God alone to give life, but Jesus exercises those powers as he bestows life.

The discourse also speaks of Jesus' power to judge. This is simply the negative corollary of his power to grant life (5:22, 27-29, 30), as the following statement makes clear: "he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." But the pairing of judgment and life is scarcely a Johannine innovation. Of particular relevance here is the Jewish speculation on the names of God, especially as that speculation is connected with the "two powers" or "two measures" of God.³⁴ These two powers are judgment and mercy, and each is understood to be expressed by one of the Hebrew words for God. The rabbis understood *Elohim* to denote the judgment of God, and *YHWH* to point to God's mercy. Philo, on the other hand, took *theos* (*Elohim*) to mean mercy and the tetragrammaton (read as *Adonai*, and translated in the LXX as *Kyrios*, Lord) to connote judgment. But the point remains that the totality of God's work was understood to be expressed by these two "measures" of his providence, that of judgment, and that of mercy or goodness. Thus when the Gospel of John asserts that Jesus brings both life and judgment, it may well be calling on the current Jewish view that God's work is merciful and just. There is the healing touch, the life-giving touch, as well as the work of God in judgment. Jesus indeed works as the Father works.

3. Summary of Section III

It may seem that up to this point we have been avoiding the topic of "salvation as eternal life" in the Gospel of John. And yet much of the answer to the question of "what is eternal life?" is implicit in this section. It will be useful, then, to summarize briefly. Central to John's understanding of God is that God is "the living God." This means that "life" uniquely belongs to and characterizes God, that God exists eternally, and that God is the creator and source of all life. "Eternal life," then, reflects this understanding of God and virtually means "the life of God," or "divine life." "Life" is something that characterizes and comes from God; the adjective "eternal" makes this plain. Thus to have eternal life means to live in relationship to and dependence on the one who gives such life. "Eternal life" can then nearly be equated with "knowing God," where "knowledge" is understood in terms of personal relationship.

Because "life" characterizes God and an other-worldly realm, it must be mediated to human beings. If at one time such life was mediated through knowledge of and faithfulness to the Torah, it is now supremely and finally mediated through knowledge of and faithfulness to the Son, who has been with and comes from God, and thus knows God,

and has also been granted life by the Father. Indeed, the Son exercises the divine prerogatives to bestow life, because he himself has been given life. This "giving" is apparently without beginning or end, for the Son exists so that he always is. He can say, as does God, "I am." Although he lays down his *psychē*, he never gives up the divine and eternal *zōē* which he possesses. So too believers are called upon to lay down their *psychē*; but those who believe in Jesus live. But what, then, does it mean to "live?"

IV. THE CONTENT OF ETERNAL LIFE

We are now led to the question, What is the "content" of eternal life in John? What does one "have" when one *has* "eternal life"? Up to this point, we might conclude that one has knowledge of, fellowship with, and dependence upon God, mediated through the person of Jesus. Yet why does John call this "eternal life"? How can one partake of the deathless existence characteristic of God and the Word? Has John spiritualized the concept of "eternality"? Is "eternal life" primarily a qualitative term, so that one experiences a better or superior sort of life in this world? And if "qualitative" or "spiritual" adequately characterizes "eternal life," then what has happened to the hope of the resurrection and the understanding that "eternal life" is also "life of the age to come?" Would John say that believers now partake of "resurrection life?" We must, then, turn to a discussion of the "content" of eternal life in John. It will obviously build and depend upon the previous parts of this essay, but we must shift the focus to ask directly, what does one have when one has "eternal life?" And, as has been noted, this question is inextricably tied up with the temporal question.

It would be easy to understand the relationship of "eternal life" to the present if we could say that eternal life is promised and assured to those who, in the present life, have faith in the one who mediates life. This is the understanding of one author, who writes, "Those passages which apparently assert the possession of eternal life here, e.g., John 5:24; 6:47; 17:3, are to be understood as referring to it in prospect, and not in reality. The believer has eternal life in prospect and promise, but not in realization."³⁵ And, "neither Jesus, nor the Bible anywhere says a believer has everlasting life right now, in this life."³⁶

But this interpretation founders on passages such as John 5:24-26: "Those who hear my word and believe him who sent me *have eternal life*," which is interpreted by the following clause, "they have passed over from death to life." Moreover, the "chain" of life which flows from the Father, to the Son, to the believer (5:21, 24, 26-7) suggests that even as the Son now has life, so the one who believes in the Son already has that life. Finally, statements which imply that those who do not believe have already passed judgment on themselves have as a natural corollary the assertion that those who do believe have already come into life.

Obviously, what it means to possess eternal life in the present depends to a large extent on what eternal life is. It is not, first of all, to be construed as a reward, whether present or future, for one's action or choice, not a *quid pro quo*, life for belief. Eternal life is, rather, a continuation into the future of a reality granted and experienced here, of which faith is already a constituent element.³⁷ John's stress on the necessity of faithfulness, as expressed in the word "abide" (*menein*) reveals his concept of the ongoing and continuing nature of the relationship in which believers stand to God. The branch must "remain" in

the vine if it is to have the vitality of life, for a branch cut off from the vine cannot live. Believers must "abide" if they wish to "know the truth" and live. They must remain in the one who is life, for apart from God, there is only death. Eternal life is not something that one has as a gift apart from God, the Giver.

On the other hand, eternal life is not merely the unlimited prolongation of the existence known here on earth. Otherwise, John might well have spoken of *psychē aiōnios*, the enduring of the individual into the age to come. But the imagery of "new birth," for example, suggests life of a different order. Similarly, statements which assert that the Spirit is now present, manna is once again given, people may know God, sorrow and travail have become joy, the glory of God is revealed, and the people of God are gathered together point to the presence of the age of messianic fulfillment, with its attendant judgment on the wicked and vindication of the righteous. Statements in John which say that the age of the messiah has come may have a polemical edge aimed at those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah. They make a "religious" statement about those who have life by participating in that age, and so have an inescapable social dimension as well. For the appearance of the Messiah means the in-gathering of the people of God, an important theme of the Gospel (10:16; 11:52; 12:24). The good shepherd must protect and gather the sheep into the pasture of life.

It is not particularly helpful, then, to speak of the Johannine concept of "eternal life" as individualized or to say that John has used the concept of "life" because it was more easily adapted to the individual's participation in the gift of God. There is an inescapable social dimension to the concept of life.³⁸ Indeed, no Gospel emphasizes so adamantly the importance of love for others in the fellowship of believers. Love is not merely the human response to each other or to God; love comes from the same source as life, and these are not two entirely differentiated entities. As T.W. Manson states it, "The divine life is a self-giving life. The vitality of God overflows into the world: it is creative life and what it creates is a fellowship of love."³⁹ Not surprisingly, in the Johannine tradition those who fail to love are those who take the life of others: the devil, Judas, Cain. Love is life giving; and life produces the fruit of love. God's gift is not merely given to individual believers, but to a community: the people of the Messiah.

But it is not so much the presence of the messianic age that creates problems in understanding John's soteriological schema, as it is the assertion that the subsequent judgment and vindication have arrived. Here we come up against the temporal question and, specifically, the questions of the relationship of eternal life to the resurrection. Although eschatological hopes and conceptions in Jewish literature are far from uniform, we can with some confidence say that where there are the twin hopes of resurrection and eternal life, the resurrection precedes judgment and the inheritance of eternal life. If, then, the judgment is said to have occurred, and believers have eternal life, can we also conclude that "eternal life" is "resurrection life"? Or, even more radically, does John transmute the hope for a future resurrection into a present and spiritual experience of the believer? Ernst Käsemann, for example, writes that the Johannine community gives evidence of "an enthusiastic piety which affirmed a sacramentally realized resurrection of the dead in the present."⁴⁰ Similarly, Bultmann assigned to the Ecclesiastical Redactor all passages that refer to a future resurrection, for in authentic Johannine thought, eschatology was "historicized," and the eschatological event was fully present in the proclamation of Jesus.⁴¹ Taking a somewhat different tack, C.H. Dodd writes that "the 'resurrection' of which Jesus has spoken [in 11:26] is something which may take place before bodily

death." Dodd further states that the raising of Lazarus "anticipates the final resurrection," while it is also a "symbol of the real resurrection by which a man passes from a merely physical existence, which is death, into the life which is life indeed."⁴² And C.F.D. Moule suggests that John's view of salvation, "could very easily give rise to that individualistic heresy alluded to in 2 Tim 2:18—that the resurrection had already taken place."⁴³

If it were correct to say that in Johannine eschatology the resurrection has already occurred in the experience of the believer, then this also implies a significantly different conception of resurrection than one finds either in other documents of the NT or of Judaism. For though at times resurrection is the reward given to the righteous individual who suffers and dies, perhaps as a martyr, one also finds—and with increasing regularity by the first century—the view that the resurrection implies the raising of the *people* of God, the future vindication of the righteous.⁴⁴ Resurrection is not an individual but a social or corporate reality, for salvation is a corporate concept, and resurrection and salvation are intimately connected. If John mutes or discards the future resurrection, a logical-corollary might well be a highly individualized understanding of salvation.⁴⁵ John might well have interpreted the future hope of a people as a presently attainable possession of the individual. But John's conception of "life" is not so highly individualized as has been argued, for in John life is not given to disparate individuals, but rather to a community of believers. After all, it is the Fourth Gospel that insists there must be "one flock, one shepherd."⁴⁶ God gives life to the righteous and faithful people of God.

We may also take up the interpretation that eternal life in John is a "spiritual" reality. Here much depends upon our definition or terms. But if "spiritual" is intended to mean that the Johannine view of salvation does not draw in its train material and physical reality, then I would argue that this view is inadequate. In John life is given through material elements, such as bread and water. Physical healings serve as images of God's gift of life. The changing of water to wine is a tangible manifestation of the presence of the messianic age. God works through, not apart from, the material realities of this world in bringing salvation. Nor are these material realities to be understood merely as "symbols" of another realm of reality or life. Indeed, where all life is understood to come from the living God, then that same God touches, heals, and restores all that is. God gave and God gives life.⁴⁷

Also consonant with at least some strands in Jewish eschatology is the Johannine hope for the resurrection of the body, which suggests that "eternal life" in John ought not to be limited to the "spiritual" or "mystical" realm. The dead are raised, not "spiritually" or metaphorically, but bodily. Moreover, the present possession of eternal life does not imply the actualization of the resurrection or the internal realization of the final resurrection. These assertions may be illustrated by looking at two key passages in John 5:25-29, and 11:25-26. Although these passages are typically cited as evidence for the transmutation or reinterpretation of the resurrection hope in John, this interpretation is tenuous. Both passages testify to the expectation of a future resurrection which is not simply equated with eternal life or with a "spiritual" state of being or internal and personal experience.⁴⁸

The key question to be answered is whether the terms for "death" and "life" in these passages refer to physical or spiritual states, with the main problem being posed by the statement that the one who believes in Jesus "shall never die" (11:26). Since it seems unlikely that this refers to physical immortality, it is generally taken as a reference to an enduring of the spirit or of "true life," even beyond the grave. For example, Bernard writes of these verses, "If a man believe in Him, although his body dies yet his true self

shall live (v. 25). Or, as it may be put in other words, no believer in Jesus shall ever die, *so far as his spirit is concerned* (v. 26).⁴⁹ Another way to phrase the question is to ask whether the raising of Lazarus and the promise that the dead "will live" (5:25) refer to the raising of the physically or spiritually dead. Temple writes that the raising of the (physically) dead by Jesus "was a sign of the quickening of multitudes spiritually dead."⁵⁰ But Corell's corrective is apt: the contrast is not "spiritual life contra physical death, but life *contra* death."⁵¹

Perhaps the best evidence for the interpretation of "life" and "death" as indicating physical as well as spiritual states is the fact that Lazarus actually comes forth from the tomb, a graphic fulfillment of the promise in 5:25—already partially fulfilled by the healings of 4:46-54 and 5:1-9—that "the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."⁵² Yet this promise is not completely fulfilled in the single raising of Lazarus, nor in a spiritualized interpretation of that event. For Lazarus is only one example of what is expected yet in the future, for John also states that "the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (5:29). If the raising of Lazarus signals the fulfillment of the promise in 5:25, it does not exhaust the content of that promise. For there is yet the promise of a general resurrection, as is spelled out in 5:29. It is clear that this is a resurrection in which all who are in the tombs, and not just the faithful in Christ, will be raised. Resurrection is not to be experienced by the faithful only. As Plummer comments, "Spiritual resurrection must always be a resurrection of life, a passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. A passing from spiritual death to judgment is not spiritual resurrection."⁵³ Life, however, certainly belongs to the believer alone; death and judgment describe the fate of those who do not believe. But this time of resurrection to judgment and life is not said to be present.

In 11:25-26 Jesus declares that he is "resurrection and life." He explains the meaning of "resurrection" when he says "he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." That is, the believer will be raised to live forever. The statement that Jesus is "life" is explained by the statement "and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."⁵⁴ Those who are presently alive *with eternal life* will not be cut off from the resurrection to life.⁵⁵ In short, those who have life now will be resurrected to life in the future, while those who are now dead will be resurrected to judgment and death.⁵⁵ The resurrection confirms the present status of the individual; it seals the relationship that one presently has to the Father and the Son.

Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection guide our interpretation here. Although Jesus dies, he lays down only his *psychē*, and never gives up his *zōē*, the eternal life that he possesses. For his life is imperishable, properly spoken of with the self-designation "I am." And in this regard his "life" (*zōē*) does not provide a complete analogy to the life (*zōē*) of the believer. For the life of the believer knows a beginning point and depends upon Jesus' own life: "Because I live, you will live also" (14:19). And yet there is a true analogy between Jesus and the believer. Just as in his resurrection Jesus takes up the *psychē* which he had laid down, so too believers will live again. In no way is Jesus' death a signal of abandonment by God, disruption of fellowship with God, or in any way a loss of the life (*zōē*) derived from God. And neither can death rob the believer of eternal life (*zōē*). Physical death is a threat to the *psychē* but not to "eternal life" (*zōē*). Even the present possession of eternal life does not eliminate the hope and need for the future resurrec-

tion, for it is the resurrection that overcomes physical death. Eternal life and resurrection are not simply synonymous. Nor does John reinterpret "resurrection" as the quality of a life (*zōē*) now available to the believer or the church. Rather, resurrection is that event which seals the believer in life eternally and removes the threat of death to one's *psychē*.

V. SUMMARY COMMENTS: SALVATION AS LIFE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Numerous summaries and explanations of "eternal life" in John can be found. Alf Corell, for example, concludes that "*zōē* or *zōē aiōnios* is the eschatological life which through faith in Christ is received and lived in the Church, and which afterwards through the resurrection reaches its fulfillment in the world to come."⁵⁷ Paolo Ricca writes that "'Eternal life' designates the life of the future, which has become present, and at the same time, is life *eis ton aiōna*, that is, life directed toward the future, expecting its final completion in the future. Eternal life in John is an eschatological reality, which is lived fully in the present and, at the same time, is fundamentally oriented towards the future."⁵⁸ Or, again, as David Aune has aptly stated it, eternal life is "more than ethical transformation, but less than ontological transformation."⁵⁹ Captured in these two descriptions of eternal life in John are several crucial elements which we have mentioned in one way or another. Now we may draw together the threads of earlier discussion.

First, eternal life is not relegated to the future, although the believer has hope for the future in the shape of the resurrection. Eternal life is present now insofar as through Christ an intimate relationship with and knowledge of God the Father is made available. In that relationship the believer acknowledges dependence upon God who is the source of all life. And in being faithful to that living God, the believer may be said to "have life." The believer does not have life "in himself," as does the Son. The Son's life is unmediated. But the believer has life in a continuing and dynamic relationship with God, through the mediation of the Son.

Thus those who have life have it only and insofar as they depend upon the source of all life. In fact, the reality known as "eternal life" is not so much something that one has alongside dependence upon God; it is almost equivalent to that dependence upon God. For from God, and only from God, who alone can give life, does life come to the believer in every form in which it comes. For this reason, commentators prefer to speak of the reality of eternal life in active and dynamic terms. Lindars, for example, writes that John prefers to say that believers "live," rather than to say that they "are saved."⁶⁰ Manson speaks of life as vitality, and Barrett as "essential energy."⁶¹ These are merely modern paraphrases of the allegory of the vine and the branches in John 15, where it becomes clear that life is not some discrete thing, but the dependence of the branch upon the vine.

At times the vitality of life takes the shape of God's mercy and goodness manifested in the physical realm. That is, healing and provision are the work of the living God to restore to wholeness and health, to fullness of life, the creation to which the same God also granted life. Life, then, is not "otherworldly," as though it does not touch the realities of the present world.⁶² The experience of physical life is analogous to the experience of eternal life, not as a symbol or picture, but as manifestation of the complete dependence that the creature has on the creator.

Neither is "eternal life" otherworldly in the sense that it is experienced only in the future. Although it is only by "new birth" that one enters into eternal life, this new birth is experienced in the present. Jesus prays not that believers be taken out of this world, but that they be preserved in this world. But how is this "new life" experienced in this world? It is experienced in and as the commitment to "live by the strength of the invisible and uncontrollable."⁶³ That is, eternal life is the appropriation, by faith, of unseen yet real divine realities, the relationship to, by faith, the unseen yet real and living God. Eternal life is living by the power of God, and the recognition that one lives alone by this power. Eternal life becomes a reality through the power of the Spirit of God.⁶⁴

Thus "eternal life" is life lived from God's perspective, by God's own values. Eternal life is life as it is lived understanding the ultimate questions of life and in relationship to the source of all that is. Such a vision may not be perfect, but as one appropriates it, one has joy and peace. These are the paramaters of eternal life. One may choose to call these "spiritual realities," but only if, again, we understand that these touch the way one lives, thinks, and acts in the world. Joy and peace are not simply feelings, but concrete expressions of one's commitment to life. That is, joy and peace are not gifts that one is given alongside life.⁶⁵ Joy and peace are experienced as one enters into fellowship or harmony with God and understands that God's purposes are being effected in the world, and that in Christ one participates in those purposes. Despite present appearances to the contrary, one sees that the powers of darkness cannot overcome light (1:5) ultimately the divine will is at work in the world; that there is and will be life out of death. Neither joy nor peace overlooks the reality of circumstances of the world; but neither do these circumstances provide the ultimate shape and definition to the life of believers.

As distinctive to "life" as peace and joy is love. The divine perspective on life necessarily includes the social dimension, expressed in Johannine parlance by the simple "love." In the Gospel of John—although not necessarily in the Johannine community—the focus is on love for each other in the community, because this is the community of life. It is the elect community, those to whom God has granted the fullness of life, eternal life. In love for each other, the community puts into action now the final unity that will be experienced in the resurrection to life.⁶⁶ Thus those who experience life now can never will death, in any sort or form, for others. Those who have life must be committed to life for the world, whether through the proclamation of the one who is life, the alleviation of physical pain, or the healing of emotional distress. The promise of "salvation" in John 3:16 is paralleled by the call to love of one's fellow believer in 1 John 3:16-18. Reception of life demands a commitment to life.

Understanding those who have life as those "elect" or graced by God also means, in John, that this state of living in dependence upon the life of God continues into the future, when after physical death one is brought again to life. In the future there is yet a fuller vision of God, which consummates our present understanding, just as there is the transformation of the believer (1 John 3:2). Aune writes that, "the final goal of eschatological salvation, according to John 17:24, is 'to see the glory of Jesus' in a protological and eschatological unity with the Father."⁶⁷ These realities are truly experienced now, as believers "behold the glory of the only Son" (1:14), and so enjoy unity with God through Christ; but John does not say that believers are presently with Christ in the heavenly abiding places (14:2-3). The enjoyment of life with the Father, as the Son knows it (1:18), lies in the future.

In summary, "life" is a term which connotes the totality of salvation. No more en-

compassing term could be imagined. One can attempt to describe life and to suggest what one enjoys when one has life. For example, one can speak of deliverance from sin and judgment, radical transformation and enrichment of existence, fellowship with God, or the experience of the "unification of one's life."⁶⁸ But if one insists on understanding life as something one can get, something apart from the Giver of life, one does not fully understand life. Perhaps one ancient writer said it well when he wrote, "And is it not life eternal to take refuge with Him that is, and death to flee away from Him?"⁶⁹

NOTES

1. On the equivalence of these terms, see below, "The Johannine Vocabulary of Life."
2. See C.F.D. Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 5 (1962) 171-90.
3. On the appropriateness of speaking of "mysticism" in John, see F. Mussner, *ZOE. Die Anschauung vom "Leben" im vierten Evangelium* (Munich: Karl Zink, 1952) 145; H. Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel: Interpreted in its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* (Amsterdam: B. R. Gruner, 1968) 268; C. J. Wright, *The Meaning and Message of the Fourth Gospel*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933) 148-96. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978] 85-87 argues that the term "mysticism" does not aptly describe Johannine thought; cf. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972) 58. For descriptions of "life" in John as "spiritual", see R. W. Thomas, "The Meaning of the Terms 'Life' and 'Death' in the Fourth Gospel and in Paul," *SJT* 21 (1968) 201; L. Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 194, 196, 198. A. Corell, *Consummation Est: Eschatology and Church in the Gospel of St John* (London: SPCK, 1958) 142, speaks of "eternal life" as "purely religious."
4. C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 144-50, 366; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, (New York: Scribners, 1951, 1955) 2:11; and "zaō," in *TDNT* 2 (1964) 871-72; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury Press, 1980, 1982), 2. 359-360.
5. For "eternal life" as a "timeless" state or quality, see, in addition to the references in the previous note, J. N. Sanders and B. Mastin, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 359 n. 3; and R.H. Charles, *Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963) 426-28.
6. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970) I, lxxxv. While the question of John's emphasis on "realized eschatology" is not identical with the question why he so stresses "life," they are obviously related, for in John's view what one has in the present is "life."
7. Bultmann, "zaō," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 871-72.
8. A thorough and well-documented survey of "life" and "eternal life" can be found in David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 163-201.
9. See Barrett, *John*, 80.
10. See T.W. Manson, *On Paul and John* (London: SCM Press, 1963) 110-111; Hill, *Greek Words*, 192; Thomas, "Meaning of Life and Death," 203; D. G. Vanderlip, *Christianity According to John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 41; J. C. Davis, "The Johannine Concept of Eternal Life as Present Possession," *Restoration Quarterly* 27 (1984) 166.
11. For example, Paolo Ricca, *Die Eschatologie des vierten Evangeliums* (Zürich/Frankfurt: Gotthelf-Verlag, 1966) 195; Brown, *John*, 2:505-508; Hill, *Greek Words*, 195; D. E. Aune, *The Cultic Set-*

ting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 105; Lindars, *John*, 158; Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 204.

12. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:521 n. 5; Dodd, *Interpretation*, 146.

13. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:353.

14. See Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel*, 293-94; Aune, *Cultic Setting* 58 n. 2, 106. Although Hill (*Greek Words*, 181-82) comments that in Jewish thought, "the Age to come is conceived of as eternally existent: it always is in the heavens and we awake to it at death," he later speaks of Jewish dualism as "temporal" (p. 196).

15. E. Uehrbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 40. Some examples of Philo's emphasis on the existence of God can be found in *Det.* 160; *Mut.* 10-12, 17; *De Som.* I.230-231.

16. For example, in *b. Ber.* 28b Johanan ben Zakkai is quoted in describing God as "the Holy One, who lives and endures forever." See also the chapter on "God and the World," in G.F. Moore, *Judaism*, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken, 1927) I.357-385.

17. For example, Manson, *On Paul and John*, 111-113; Simon, "Eternal Life," 109; Odeberg, *Fourth Gospel*, 258; Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 106.

18. See P. Borgen, *Bread From Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 172; Brown, *John*, I.506; Thomas, "Meaning of Life and Death," 201; Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 194, 196, 198.

19. Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 140.

20. See Barrett, *John*, 157: "The Prologue claims no more than the rest of the gospel, but sets first in a cosmological aspect what later will appear in a soteriological."

21. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 3.173; Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 140; contrast Barrett, *John*, 503; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco: Word, 1987) 296; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 719.

22. E. Haenchen, *John*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) I.114.

23. Simon, "Eternal Life," 104; Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 195.

24. Hill (*Greek Words*, 168) writes, "We may reiterate what is perhaps the most significant aspect of the Hebrew understanding of 'life,' namely, its dependence on God. Wherever there is life, it is God's gift. . . . That life in all its aspects should be so dependent on God need not surprise us, for the God of the Old Testament is himself the Living God, active and creative. He is the 'Living One.' . . . Life here and now, life after death, are given and sustained by him."

25. Mussner, *ZOE*, 54-56; Hill, *Greek Words*, 196; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2.353.

26. Simon, "Eternal Life," 105; Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 107; Barrett, *Gospel of John*, 85-87; Lindars, *John*, 58.

27. Mussner, *ZOE*, 145-47.

28. Vanderlip, *John*, 43; Ricca, *Eschatologie*, 82, 90, 92, 98, 128; J. Blank, *Krisis: Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Breisgau: Lambertus-Verlag, 1964) 15, 38-39, 125; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2:353, 355, 426-27; Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 16.

29. The judgment that John's eschatology is essentially a function of his Christology is disputed, on different grounds, by Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 86 and D. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 52-59.

30. See, for example, the comments of Beasley-Murray on John 14:6 in *John*, 252.

31. See Barrett, *John*, 458; Brown, *John*, II.628; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 252.

32. As Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 192, comments, "To say that someone is living is easily understandable; to say that he is life is not." For John, there is not such a great distinction. That the Son is "living" means that he has life, the is is "life" means that he enables believers to live;.

33. See the discussion and references in Dodd, *Interpretation*, 320-23; Barrett, *John*, 256.

34. On the "two powers" of God, see the discussions in Moore, *Judaism*, I.386-400; A. Marmorstein, "Philo and the Names of God," *JQR* 22 (1931-32) 295-306; Dodd, *Interpretation*, 320-23; N.A. Dahl and A. F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *JSJ* IX (1978) and A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Uehrbach, *The Sages*, 448-61.

35. G. N. Woods, "Commentary on 1 John" in *Gospel Advocate Commentary* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974) 317; cf. L. van Hartingsveld, *Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Assen:

Van Gorcum, 1962) 60ff; 74-80.

36. G. N. Woods, "Commentary on John," 105.

37. Or, perhaps better, eternal life extends from the future back into the present. Obviously there is some difficulty in speaking of a beginning point for "eternal life," yet the believer does not share in the "timeless" aspect of eternity, as do God and the Word, for the decision of faith marks the "beginning" of "eternal life." In this sense, everlasting is the more accurate description of the temporal dimension of life for the believer, but it does not offer an adequate parallel to God's own life or capture the qualitative superiority of "eternal life."

38. W. H. Rigg, *The Fourth Gospel and its Message for Today* (London: Lutterworth, 1952) 86; Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 78, 146-50, 202; Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 105-121; Thomas, "Meaning of Life and Death," 205; D. Wenham, "Spirit and Life," *Themelios* 6 (1980) 8; David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) 44.

39. Manson, *On Paul and John*, 113.

40. *Testament*, 15; cf. 20, 75.

41. *John*, 261; *Theology*, II.37-40; cf. Haenchen, *John*.I.:88-89, 253-54; J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 2 vols. Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981) 1.235-36, 2.358-60.

42. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 148, emphasis added; cf. Barrett, *John*. 396; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) 2. 387-88.

43. Moule, "Individualism," 184; B. W. Bacon, *The Gospel of the Hellenists*, ed. C. Kraeling (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1933) 162-64, 337.

44. Sometimes the resurrection of the righteous (as in *Ps. Sol.* 3:16, 14:2ff) is part of a general resurrection (as in *Dan* 12:2, 1 *Enoch* 51:1; 2 *Bar* 30:1-5, 50:1; 4 *Ezra* 7:32; *m. Sanh.* 10:1; *m. Aboth* 4:22; *m. Ber.* 5:2; *m. Sot.* 9:15), when all people are raised to be judged according to their deeds. Texts which speak of the resurrection of the "righteous" and/or the "wicked," meaning not individuals but a plurality of persons suggest a "corporate" understanding of resurrection. See G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Oxford, 1972); E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 2.539-547, and the bibliography in n. 90; Moore, *Judaism*, II.279-322.

45. See Moore, *Judaism*, II.319, who writes that "the ultimate salvation of the individual [understood as eternal life] is inseparably connected with the salvation of the people."

46. *Test Jud* 25:2 promises that in the resurrection, "you shall be one people of the Lord, with one language." 2 *Bar* 30:3 speaks of the "souls of the righteous" appearing together, "in one assemblage, of one mind." For the gathering of the dispersed, see *Tobit* 13:5, 13; *Sir* 36:1-17; *Ps Sol* 11:3-8.

47. Barrett, *John*, 80, aptly summarizes, "The miracles in particular show figuratively what salvation is—the curing of the sick, the feeding of the hungry, the giving of sight to the blind, and the raising of the dead. Salvation, that is, means the healing of the ills of mankind, and the imparting of light and life." I would, however, delete the word "figuratively," for the signs are manifestations of the work of God to bring life in all its fullness.

48. Those scholars who suggest that in John the resurrection is already a present fact do not necessarily deny that John also holds to the hope of a general, future resurrection. See, e.g., W. Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (London: Macmillan, 1955) 182; Dodd, *Interpretation*, 364-66; Morris, *John*, 550; Bernard, *John*, 2:386-88; Vanderlip, *John*, 40.

49. Bernard, *John*, 2.388, emphasis added.

50. Temple, *Readings in John*, 113; Brown, *John*, 1.215; Vanderlip, *John*, 35, 40; Haenchen, *John*, 1.252. Thomas, "Meaning of Life and Death," 208; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 76.

51. Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 148.

52. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 59, 120-21.

53. A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 139-40.

54. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 365; J. R. Michaels, *John*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 188; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190. "Resurrection" and "life" are not equivalent, as some have held, e.g. Bultmann, *John*, 403; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2.331; Becker, *Evangelium*, 2:359-61.

55. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 191; Van Hartingsveld, *Eschatologie*, 50-56; Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 120-21.
56. It should be noted that John does not spell out in detail the nature of the judgment and death to be experienced by the unbeliever.
57. Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 149; cf. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 109, 112, 134.
58. Ricca, *Eschatologie*, 120-21.
59. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 109, 134; Simon, *Eternal Life*, 106.
60. Lindars, *John*, 160.
61. Manson, *On Paul and John*, 113; Barrett, *Gospel of John*, 158.
62. Contrast Schnackenburg, *St. John*, II.361.
63. Bultmann, *Theology*, II. 7
64. However, the experience of life is not simply equivalent to the experience of the Spirit, contra Wenham, "Spirit and Life," 6.
65. Mussner, *ZOE*, 186-87.
66. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 109.
67. Aune, *Cultic Setting*, 90.
68. These helpful terms come from Vanderlip, *John*, 37.
69. Philo, *Fug.*, 78.

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