

separated from the vine. The imagery does not suggest that God initiates a person's separation from Christ any more than a vineyard owner causes a branch to wither on the vine. Rather, removing the branch finalizes the separation that has already occurred. This corresponds to the idea that people place themselves under divine judgment by separating themselves from the love that the Father provides through the Son (3:16-18). The passage assumes that the vine dresser will determine when a branch's relationship to the vine has ended. Final judgment belongs to God rather than to members of the community.

The alternative to being removed (*airō*) is to be pruned (*kathairō*), which seems only somewhat better. After speaking about the faithless being cut off, Jesus now speaks about the faithful being cut back. One might find some assurance in the fact that pruning is God's corrective judgment rather than a final condemnation. At least the branches remain in the vine. But one wonders what pruning means. Initially one might assume that God "prunes" people by subjecting them to painful experiences in order to strengthen their faith. If taken this way, the passage would mean that people are to shoulder their afflictions, believing that God has sent them hardship for their own good. But this is not what Jesus says about God the vine dresser.

Jesus describes God's action with a word that has a double meaning. The term for pruning (*kathairō*) also means cleansing, and cleansing is God's response to human sin. In John's Gospel sin is rooted in unbelief. And the vine dresser prunes away sin through words that identify sin and call people to faith. This is why Jesus goes on to explain that the disciples have already been "pruned" or "cleansed" (*kathartō*) "by the word" that he has spoken to them (15:3). Pruning does not describe the various kinds of suffering that believers experience. Rather, it depicts the way that God the vine dresser addresses sin through the words of Jesus.

The vine dresser's goal is that the branches bear fruit, and the fruit that God desires is love. For the branches to show love, they must receive love, and this comes from Jesus the vine (15:4, 9). Sin or unbelief interferes with fruitbearing because it saps away the strength of the relationship between the vine and the branches, between Jesus and his followers. Therefore, the words that God has given Jesus to speak can act as a cutting tool to remove sin. When Jesus' words identify and confront sin, they cut to the heart of a relational problem. The words do this to make the branches draw more fully on the love that the vine offers, so that they might bear the fruit of love in relationships with others (see pp. 195-96).

God of the Cross and Resurrection

Thus far we have focused on the way God is made known through Jesus' words and signs. It would be easy to stop here, before considering the crucifixion, which brings violent death into the story. It might also be natural to move quickly to the resurrection, treating the crucifixion as a tragic end to Jesus' career, which God soon rectifies by raising him from the dead. Yet the crucifixion raises pointed questions about God, and the Fourth Evangelist does not allow readers to evade them. The Gospel's presentation of God involves both the cross and the resurrection. We will see that according to John, Jesus goes to his death because his opponents condemned him and the power of Satan was operative (see pp. 70-72, 76-80). Yet this raises major issues. If Jesus' death is the result of human sin and demonic evil, does that make the cross a victory for sin and evil? Ultimately a reader is expected to say no, since Jesus is raised from the dead. But if life wins in the end, then why is Jesus crucified at all? Is it because God is unable to prevent it? Does God get caught off-guard by his opponents? Or does God play a role in the crucifixion? John's understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection has multiple dimensions, which will be considered below (see pp. 108-32). Here we will concentrate on God's role in the process.

Restraining Evil

The crucifixion is, in part, the result of human opposition to Jesus. During Jesus' ministry his Jewish opponents insist that he violates the will of God by healing on the Sabbath. He also uses the expression "I Am" for himself in a manner that recalls the name of God. To Jewish hearers, this sounds like blasphemy (8:58-59). By calling God his Father, they argue that he is elevating himself to divine status, making himself equal with God, which is sin (5:17-18; 10:33). Moreover, by restoring the dead man Lazarus to life, Jesus seems to be fomenting a popular movement that could lead to a disastrous revolt against Rome (11:48). In order to prevent this from happening, Jesus' opponents determine to kill the one who gives life to the dead.

One might want to ask why God allowed Jesus' opponents to put him to death. But before getting to that question, the Gospel writer addresses another: Given the intensity of the opposition, why was Jesus able to continue working for so long? One might have expected him to be put to

death much sooner. Here the evangelist suggests that God's hand restrains evil during Jesus' public ministry. This is reflected in the theme of the "hour" appointed for Jesus' death. Although Jesus' words and actions provoke angry responses from many people, the Gospel says that no one could arrest him because his "hour" had not yet come (7:30; 8:20).

The evangelist understands that there is a divinely appointed hour for Jesus' death, and until that time Jesus can work with impunity.¹⁵ For example, when Jesus decides to go to Judea, where people want to stone him, he says "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" (11:9). In antiquity the day was always divided into twelve equal parts, winter and summer. The first hour was at dawn, the sixth hour at noon, and the twelfth hour at sunset. Each day had a fixed number of hours. The implication is that Jesus has a "day" or fixed span of time in which to work.

The Gospel tolls Jesus' hour at the beginning of the passion (12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Night falls when the day of his ministry ends and the betrayer departs into the darkness (13:30). Behind the scenes God has held back Jesus' adversaries, but at the appointed hour he allows their will to take its course. Only when God's timing permits it can they arrest Jesus and bring him to trial. During the interrogation, Pilate claims to have the power to do as he wishes with his prisoner. Yet Jesus replies that Pilate has no inherent authority to do as he pleases. He can act against Jesus only because it has been granted from above, from God (19:11).

References to the Scriptures being fulfilled by the events surrounding Jesus' passion also reveal that God knew there would be hostility to Jesus and wove this into his plans. The evangelist observes that when Jesus' public ministry ends there is widespread unbelief among the people. He says this fulfills what Isaiah said: "Lord, who has believed our message" and "He has blinded their eyes" (Isa. 53:1; 6:9; John 12:37-40). To be sure, these fulfillment passages do not suggest that God wills unbelief. According to John, God does not blind people by immersing them in darkness. Rather, human blindness occurs when God sends them the *light* (9:5, 39). The evangelist does not quote the Scriptures to relieve people of responsibility for rejecting the truth and light that Jesus brings. Rather, they show that the unbelief is divinely foreknown. This is underscored when Jesus later says that his words and actions leave people without excuse for their unbelief, for the Scripture said, "They hated me without a cause" (15:22, 25; cf. Pss. 35:19; 69:4).

The betrayal is also brought within the sphere of God's purposes through the citation of Scripture. Referring to the betrayal, Jesus cites the

Scripture passage, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9; John 13:18). He later refers again to the betrayer by saying that none of those whom God gave him was lost, "except the son of destruction, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (17:12). The use of Scripture has sometimes been taken to mean that Judas was predestined for his role as betrayer and doomed to destruction because God willed it. English translations sometimes render "son of destruction" (*ho huios tēs apōleias*) as "the one *destined* to be lost" (NRSV) or "the one *doomed* to destruction" (NIV). But note that the English words in italics do not appear in Greek, and adding them actually runs counter to the theology of the Gospel. The expression "son of destruction" means that Judas belongs to destruction and that his actions are characterized by destruction. The reason is that he is allied with the powers of destruction, just as the comparable expression "sons of light" is used for those who belong to the light and are allied with the light because they believe in the light (12:36). There is no suggestion that God destines Judas for destruction.

Popular treatments of Jesus' passion sometimes assume that God needed a betrayer to carry out his purposes, and that Judas happened to be the unlucky person God selected for the task. Yet the idea that God wills the betrayal does not fit the wider context. Throughout the Gospel Judas is given the same favor that the other disciples receive. Jesus includes him among his twelve disciples, even though Judas is already a devil (6:70-71). He washes Judas's feet even though Judas remains unclean (13:10-11). He even feeds Judas, only to have Satan enter him (13:27). The betrayal is explicitly said to come from the devil, not from God (13:2).

In John's account, Judas and other agents of evil can best be understood in light of two theological questions. First, were the powers of evil able to thwart the will of God? John insists that the answer is "no." He says that Jesus knew from the beginning who would betray him and that Judas departs only after Jesus gives him leave to do so (13:27). We will see that at the time of the arrest Jesus subdues the opposition by uttering the divine "I Am," and he secures the release of his disciples before going along willingly with the soldiers. According to the Fourth Gospel, it is clear that the powers of evil do not prevent God's purposes from being accomplished (see pp. 117-20).

The second question is: Was God responsible for the betrayal? After all, Judas fulfilled the Scripture, so perhaps the betrayal was ultimately God's doing (13:18). The evangelist's response, however, is again "no." The Gospel consistently ascribes betrayal to the powers of evil, and says that at each

juncture Christ responded to evil with graciousness. None of this suggests that Judas was a victim of a malicious God who destined him for his role.

The Fourth Evangelist asks a different question: *Given the presence of evil, how will God deal with it?* God was not the source of the evil that led to betrayal. Evil is simply a given. So given that evil is present and active, what will God do with it? John will trace the way God directs the forces of evil so as to accomplish his own saving purposes. Satan may work through Judas and others to carry out evil intentions, but these hostile actions are ultimately harnessed for good, since Christ's crucifixion becomes the means for manifesting God's love to the world.

Giving Love and Life Through Crucifixion

The Gospel takes us more deeply into God's role by saying that God commanded Jesus to lay down his life. The context is the passage about the good shepherd, who lays down his life amid thieves and bandits, rather than fleeing like a hired hand. He says, "I lay down my life in order to take it up again. . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father" (10:17-18). But why would God command Jesus to do this?

God's purpose is indicated in the third chapter of the Gospel where Jesus says, "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, in order that whoever believes in him might have eternal life" (3:14-15). This passage indicates that Jesus "must" (*dei*) be lifted up in crucifixion. Yet this divine necessity must be properly understood. Crucifixion is not the goal of God's action; God's purpose is not to have Jesus put to death. Rather, Jesus must be crucified *in order that* people might believe and have life. Faith and life constitute the goal. The cross is a means to that end. For life to be received, people must be brought to faith, and the crucifixion is integral to God's design for doing this.¹⁶

The saying in John 3 reveals how something resulting from opposition to God can be transformed into a means of giving life with God. Both the serpent on the pole and the Messiah on the cross display the results of human sin and alienation from God. The serpent recalls that people of Moses' time sinned by speaking in mistrust against God and Moses in the wilderness. The result was that God sent poisonous serpents among them, and many died. The serpent on the pole was a visible reminder of sin and

God's judgment upon it (Num. 21:4-7). By analogy, the people of Jesus' time sinned by acting in unbelief against the Messiah and having him put to death. Jesus' opponents "lift him up" to die by crucifixion. This makes the crucified Messiah the visible result of sin (John 8:28; 12:32-33).

At the same time, both episodes show God transforming the result of sin into a means of giving life. In the Old Testament story, Moses puts a bronze serpent on a pole so that people can see it. When they turn to the serpent on the pole, they are confronted with what is killing them. Yet in so doing they receive life by being restored to health (Num. 21:9). In John's Gospel it is Jesus who hangs on the pole or cross. When people turn to him they are confronted with the results of the sin that is killing them. Yet as they turn to the crucified Jesus, they receive eternal life.

People receive eternal life by being brought to faith. Throughout John's Gospel, faith is the opposite of sin. Where sin brings death by alienating people from God, faith brings life by drawing people into relationship with God. When defining the idea, Jesus simply says that "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). According to the Fourth Gospel, eternal life is a present reality for those who believe, for in faith people come to know God and so pass from death to life (3:18; 5:24). Physical death remains a reality for people of faith, yet the life that faith brings is called "eternal" because it is a life lived in relationship to the God who is eternal. It begins now in faith and continues beyond the death of the physical body through the power of the resurrection (11:25-26).

By conveying the divine love that evokes faith, the crucifixion gives people eternal life. Jesus explains that the Son of Man was lifted up because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). In the Fourth Gospel the world is dominated by the evil ruler of this world, and the world's stance toward God is unbelief. Therefore, if people are to receive eternal life, their estrangement from God must be overcome. The crucifixion does this by communicating God's love for the world that hated him. It conveys the love that moved God to give his Son for a world that rejected him. And when the love of God calls forth faith, it overcomes the world's hostility by bringing people back into relationship with the One who made them.

The Fourth Evangelist recognizes that the crucifixion is the product of human sin and satanic evil, but he insists that this does not make the cross

a victory for sin and evil. It is God's will to turn the power of falsehood toward the revelation of truth, the power of hatred toward the revelation of love, and the power of death toward the giving of life.

Bringing Life out of Death Through Resurrection

The love God gives through Jesus' crucifixion is a source of life now, for it restores human relationships with God, but the problem of death remains. Those who receive the love of God in faith still face the prospect of dying. So if their relationships with God are to have a future, death itself must be overcome. This is what resurrection does for Jesus and for those who follow him.

God commanded Jesus not only to lay down his life but to take it up again (10:17-18). This means that Jesus' resurrection is the will of God. By commanding Jesus to take up his life, God empowers Jesus to do so. The idea is that God's command gives Jesus the ability to do what God asks. It is analogous to the way Jesus commands a paralyzed man to rise and to take up his mat and walk (5:8). It is also like the command Jesus gives to the dead man Lazarus, whom he tells to come forth from the tomb (11:43). The command gives the recipient the power to perform it.

God's will for resurrection also extends to Jesus' followers. Jesus says, "This indeed is the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day" (6:40). The promise of resurrection means that the relationship with God that begins in faith has a future. It is not terminated by death. If God's command brings Jesus through death to life, Jesus will also bring his followers through their own deaths to life. The promise of resurrection does not mean that either Jesus or others will avoid death. Rather, it means that they are brought through death to life, for Jesus' resurrection defines the shape of the resurrection hope for those who follow him.

Resurrection is the culminating chapter in John's witness to God. The prologue identified God as the Creator, who brought all things into being through his Word. It also told of God sending the Word to people in embodied form. The resurrection shows that hope itself is to be understood in an embodied way. Jesus died and rose as an embodied person. His body is not discarded but resurrected and transformed, according to the final scenes in the Gospel, where he comes to his disciples. Believers too live em-

bodied lives. To be sure, it is common to assume that death means the end of embodied life and that future hope means a person's spirit is set free for life in heaven. But God creates people as embodied selves; God sends the Word in embodied form; and God gives the hope of an embodied future through the promise of resurrection. We will see that resurrection is not simply a resumption of bodily life with its physical frailties. Rather, resurrection involves the transformation of the whole person that God has made. It is the hope the Creator extends to those he has created and re-deemed (see pp. 179-82).

The Father

Jesus calls God his Father throughout his ministry, but we have saved this theme until the end of this chapter because God is identified as the Father of believers only at the end of the Gospel (20:17). For many readers "Father" is a familiar and meaningful way to refer to God. The Lord's Prayer addresses God as "our Father," the creeds express the church's faith in God the Father, and blessings given during worship often speak of God as Father. Others find that "Father" is a problematic expression because it might suggest that God is a male, thereby distancing God from women. It might also imply that God resembles the autocratic fathers of ancient households or the flawed human fathers known in every age. Given the disparate connotations of the word, we must explore the specific traits that John ascribes to God as Father.¹⁷

The Father of Jesus

God is primarily the Father of Jesus in John's Gospel. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus calls God "the Father" or "my Father." By referring to God in this way, Jesus identifies God in relational terms. A father by definition has children. No one is a father in isolation. Among human beings, one learns what kind of a father someone is by asking how he relates to his children, and the same is true of God. One comes to know God as Father by asking how he relates to Jesus his Son, and then how he relates to the wider community of people who are his children.

There are three major dimensions to God's identity as Father in John's

Gospel: He is a source of life, one who loves his children, and someone worthy of honor and obedience.¹⁸ Each of these has analogies to human fatherhood, which helps to make the term "father" meaningful when used for God. Yet analogies always involve similarities and differences. If God is like a human father in some ways, he is different from a human father in others.

First, God the Father is the source of life for Jesus his Son. Jesus says that "just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26). Life characterizes who God is. To say that he has life in himself means that his life is not derived from any other source. As Father, God also gives life to his Son. In this sense the term "father" fits God, since a father is a source of life for others. The Gospel, however, distinguishes the way God gives life from the way that ordinary fathers do. According to the prologue, human beings beget children through blood, human desire, and the will of a man. But this is not true of God. Referring to God as Father does not suggest analogies at the physical level (1:12-13). In John's Gospel, "begetting" is often a metaphor for God bringing people to faith. Generating faith fits the Father's relationship to believers, but it does not fit his relationship to Jesus, which is unique.

Jesus is the "only" Son (*monogenēs*) of the Father (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). God may have many "children" (*tekna*) but only one Son. The Gospel does not say how the Father gives the Son life, only that he does so. Moreover, the Father gives the Son life in a unique way. He enables the Son to have life "in himself," just as the Father does (5:26). This cannot be said of God's other children. If the Son is given life from the Father, this means that the Son is not a second source of life, alongside God. Yet the Son shares fully in the life of the Father, for he too has life in himself. This is what makes it possible for the Son to give life to others. He has received it and shares in it fully, as his Father does.

The Gospel assumes that the relationship of Father to Son existed before the world was made (17:5). Yet the prologue announces this unique relationship at the point of the incarnation. The author initially speaks of God and the Word (1:1-2), but after saying that the Word became flesh, he begins speaking of the Father and only Son (1:14).¹⁹ This is appropriate because the ministry of Jesus the incarnate Son will involve giving people the life that he has received from his Father. This theme is made clear in the Bread of Life discourse. Jesus says, "just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me"

(6:57). As the living Father, God is source of life for Jesus and then through Jesus for others. The Father gives life to and through the Son.²⁰

Second, love is central to the Father's relationship with the Son. The Father gave love to the Son before the foundation of the world (17:24). This love was at work before the incarnation. It also fits the relationship of the risen and exalted Jesus to God, since the Gospel says that he is now "close to the Father's heart" (1:18). The image is like that of a banquet, where people recline around a table. The one who receives special favor lies with his head on the chest of his father, who is the host. The Gospel uses this familiar image to depict the Father's love for the Son in a manner that can be understood to some extent by human beings. At the same time, it emphasizes the unique character of this relationship. The Father loves the Son in a distinctive way, and this has implications for understanding Jesus' ministry.

Love is what binds the Father to the Son, and this love is what the Son extends to others. Although words for love convey a sense of intimacy and depth of feeling, John understands love primarily as a bond of commitment. It is what will enable Jesus to carry out the will of his Father. There is mutuality in the love between the Father and the Son. If the Father loves the Son it is also true that the Son loves the Father (3:35; 14:31). But the character of God can also be seen in that God also loves the world — and in this case the love is not mutual. God loves a world capable of hating him (3:16, 19-20), which means that God's love is more than a feeling. It is his commitment to the world. And it is out of such committed love that God sends the Son, whom he loves, to bring love into the world that is alienated from its Maker.

The Father shows his love for the Son by giving him responsibilities and the power to carry them out. The Gospel says that the Father loves the Son and puts all things into his hands, showing him all that he himself is doing (3:35; 5:20). The authority the Father gives to the Son expresses his love, and the Son uses this authority to convey love. If the Father has put all things into his hands, the Son uses his hands to wash the feet of his disciples in love. Here, love is expressed in an act of self-giving service (13:1-5). But readers find that the most radical expression of love is the crucifixion, when the Son lays down his life to convey God's love to the world.

The crucifixion both fractures and reconstitutes the familiar patterns of fatherly love. At one level the crucifixion is utterly inexplicable on the basis of love. Ordinarily, a father who loved his son would do everything

possible to protect the child from harm. No loving father would allow his son to be treated this way. Yet God is no ordinary Father and Jesus is no ordinary Son. John finds that in the end, the only thing that explains the inexplicable is love. If God truly loves the world as well as the Son, then the only way to bring the world back to relationship is by communicating love to it. And God does this in the crucifixion. The Son is *able* to bring love into the world because he receives love from his Father (3:35; 10:17). The Son is also *willing* to bring love into the world because he himself loves the Father (14:31; 15:9-10). Love is what the Father and Son share, and this love is what is given to human beings — through the life and death of Jesus. The reason is that the love that comes from God makes it possible for people to relate to both Father and Son and to become part of a community that is shaped by their love (17:23-26).

Third, the relationship of Father and Son involves honor and obedience. Honor has to do with the value that someone has in the eyes of another. To honor one's father means holding him in high regard. In this sense genuine honor is an expression of love. To love one's father means showing him respect — and the reverse is also true. A father who loves his children will respect them too. Obedience can be an expression of honor, so that honoring one's father means doing what he asks. But at the human level this becomes problematic if the obedience is coerced rather than coming from respect. Therefore, the Gospel grounds the Son's obedience to the Father in the love and honor that constitute the relationship.

The Father gives the Son commands concerning what to say and do (10:18; 12:49). There is no suggestion that the Son gives commands to the Father. Yet the Father gives these commands out of love and also gives the Son the authority to carry them out. This shows complete confidence in the Son (13:3; 17:2). By carrying out the Father's wishes, Jesus honors his Father and expresses his love for him (8:49; 15:10). Jesus can say that "the Father is greater than I" (14:28) since the Father is the source of life and love for the Son, and the Son in turn keeps the Father's word and commandments. Yet this is not a simple hierarchy since the Father grants that the Son has life "in himself" as the Father has it. When the Father gives the Son a command, he also puts all things into the Son's hands. The mutuality of love is reflected in the Father's desire that the Son be honored as the Father is honored (5:23).²¹

The Father himself gives the Son divine glory, which honors the Son — and more. The Father gave the Son the majesty of divine glory before the

world was made (17:24). The incarnate Son glorified or honored the Father on earth by obediently carrying out the works his Father gave him to do (17:4). He also revealed the power of divine glory by healing the sick and raising the dead, and finally revealed the glory of divine love by laying down his life. Yet the Father who raises the dead continues to glorify the Son by bringing him again to the heavenly glory, which he shares in love in his Father's presence (17:5).

The Father of Believers

God is called the Father of believers after Jesus' death and resurrection. Outside the empty tomb Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (20:17). The assumption is that people know God as their Father through their relationship to Jesus. This is also the first time that Jesus refers to the disciples as his brothers. If he and his followers have the same Father, then they are members of the same family. This will have implications for the way Christian community is understood (see pp. 197-98). Because God's role as Father is shaped by his bond with Jesus the Son, these same traits are extended to those who follow Jesus.²²

First, God the Father is the source of life for believers. This is anticipated in the prologue, which speaks of people becoming children of God (1:12-13). The Gospel recognizes that all people are physically begotten through the natural processes associated with blood, flesh, and human desire. But to be born or begotten of God means believing in the Word of God, who gives life. Through this birth into faith, people become children of God. All people come into being through God's Word and are related to him as his creatures (1:4). Yet some people reject the Word while others receive and trust him (1:10-11). A relationship of faith is life-giving in a way that a relationship of animosity toward God is not. Therefore, to believe in God's Word is to be in a life-giving relationship with God, and this is what it means to be God's child in the Johannine sense. We have already seen that the Father gives life through the Son (5:21; 6:57). Later we will also find that giving life is the work of the Spirit, which is the means by which people are begotten from above and given new birth (3:3-5). This new birth is faith, and to continue making people his children through faith is the ongoing work of God (see pp. 137-45).

Second, the Father relates to his children in love. God extended his love to the world through Jesus his Son. As people come to love Jesus, they love the Father who sent him. That is what it means to be a child of God. Jesus says, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God" (8:42). The love that comes from the Father and the love the faithful show to the Father are not separable topics. Both involve the Son: "the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (16:27). Here again love can connote intimacy and depth of feeling, yet it cannot be reduced to emotion. Love is the bond in which people live.

Love from the Father is essential for the children because they are called to give their love to others. This is remarkably unsentimental. The Father's love for the Son was not his private possession but was brought into the world through the incarnation and extended through Jesus' ministry and crucifixion. Those who receive love from Jesus are called to love one another. And expressing love within a community is anything but simple. The Gospel recognizes that faith creates relationships, yet human foibles and failings remain a part of every believer's life — this is evident in the all-too-human side of the disciples in the Gospel. Given this challenge, Jesus assures those who love him and seek to keep his word that "the Father will love them" and be present with them (14:23). The love the Christian community receives from the Father and Son is not its private possession but is to be given as a witness to the world.²³ Where believers love each other the community is "one." This is not an end in itself. Jesus says that love is shown within the community "in order that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (17:23; see pp. 200-202).

Finally, relationships with the Father are characterized by honor and obedience. The Father gave Jesus commands concerning what to say and do. Jesus in turn gives a command to his followers: Love one another (13:34). To love Jesus is to keep his commandment, and those who do so experience the love of the Father (14:21). In their obedience to Jesus they glorify the Father by making his love known (15:8-10). Jesus loved by serving, even washing feet, which by ordinary social standards was considered degrading. Yet his Father regarded him with honor and glorified him. Jesus' followers are called to serve as he did. They do so knowing that though their service may not be valued by the world, it is valued by God. Jesus gives them the promise, "Whoever serves me, the Father will honor" (12:26).

CHAPTER 3

The World and Its People

The question of what it means to be human has long occupied philosophers and poets, theologians and social scientists. People have a perennial need to understand who they are as individuals and members of a wider human community. John's Gospel is a promising place to pursue this question because it presents readers with portraits of human beings who span the social spectrum, from the highly placed leaders that dominate public affairs to the hapless beggar sitting on the street. To be sure, none of the figures in the Gospel actually discuss what it means to be human. Their debates usually focus on the identity of Jesus, and whether he is from God and is doing the works of God, or whether he is a deceiver and blasphemer. Jesus often responds by using imagery to describe his heavenly origin and mission, calling himself the light of the world, the source of living water, and the bread that comes down from heaven.

As the narrative unfolds, however, the question of identity comes full circle. People may ask who Jesus is, but their encounters with Jesus also disclose who they are. If he is the light, then the world lies in darkness; if he gives the living water, then people must be thirsty; if he is the bread, then people must hunger. Each of the main images for Jesus has a corresponding image for human beings, and this allows us to ask what the Gospel might say about what it means to be human. The way that images for people are related to those for Christ reflects an underlying theological perspective, which is that people are to be understood relationally. In John's Gospel human life is seen in relation to Christ and to the God who sent him.¹