

# THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

## V. CHRIST'S HOUR OF GLORIFICATION

ONE OF THE FASCINATIONS of biblical theology is to see the holy Spirit working through different men. The same message is expressed in different ways because the human authors are real authors and think in the way that is natural to them, each expressing the truth in function of his own sort of imagery, his own prepossessions, temperament and intellectual background. This being so, it is hardly surprising that John, by origin a fisherman of Galilee, though he lived to a great age and continued always to meditate and deepen his teaching, should have a different approach from Paul, the fiery, cosmopolitan rabbi, who was as comfortable with popular stoic philosophy as with pharisaic teaching of the Law. In the last issue of *The Way*, a short study was made of the importance of the resurrection for Paul's view of Christ. Briefly, he thinks of the resurrection as constituting Christ Lord of the universe and Head of creation, the source of harmony and growth to creation and especially to the Church, of which he is the Head in a special way. In John, the emphasis is also on these two points, the exaltation of Christ and his union to the Church. With Paul, however, it is the universal Lordship which tends to dominate; with John, it is union in the christian community. Ethos and atmosphere are richly different.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus is looking forward to his hour. At Cana, he at first refuses to reveal his glory through a miracle, because 'his hour has not yet come' (2,4). When he is teaching in the temple, no one lays a hand upon him because 'his hour has not yet come' (7,30; 8,20). What this hour is becomes clear with the imminence of his passion: the hour has come that he should be glorified (12,23; cf 13,1; 16,32; 17,1). Whereas the synoptic evangelists look on the passion as a time of humiliation, out of which Christ is vindicated by the resurrection, John sees the passion and resurrection as one 'hour', a single moment of glorification. With typically johannine *double entendre*, it is the time when the son of man will be 'lifted up', in the basic, immediately intelligible sense of being raised up onto the cross (like the brazen serpent lifted up in the desert, 3,14); but also in the sense of exaltation into glory (3,14; 8,28; 12,32-34). In this vein, the passion is represented, through subtle editorial nuances, as a triumphal procession. His enemies cannot arrest Jesus until they have twice fallen back in awe before him as he pronounces the divine name.<sup>1</sup>

Only when he permits it, can they take him into custody (18,11-12). When it comes to carrying the cross, Jesus bears it alone, as a standard of triumph (19,17). Finally, despite the protests of the jews, Pilate has fixed to the cross the unqualified proclamation, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews', written in

<sup>1</sup> The Greek expression *ego eimi*, besides its banal meaning 'It is I', also suggests the divine name, to translate which it is frequently used in the Old Testament.

the three world-languages, so that it becomes a proclamation to all mankind. In John, the elements of humiliation almost disappear. There is no agony in the garden; the mockery at the high priest's house is reduced to a single slap in the face (18, 22), which only serves to emphasize Jesus's serenity;<sup>2</sup> whilst the horse-play by the roman soldiery becomes a recognition of his claim to be king (19, 2-3). Furthermore, one possible sense, indeed the more correct and obvious translation, of 19, 13 is 'Pilate led out Jesus . . . and seated him in the place of judgment', so that in the very moment when sentence is being pronounced, Jesus is seated as judge; and it is in fact the jews who are being condemned for betraying their messianic hopes.<sup>3</sup> Thus for John the triumphant hour of Christ begins, not at the resurrection, but at the start of the passion.

It is also John who insists perhaps the most on the glorification of Christ at the resurrection. When Mary is not allowed to cling to him it is because he is still, so to speak, in the process of being glorified, of being raised up to the right hand of God (20, 17). In John, again, the transformation effected by the resurrection is clearest, though the continuity with his earthly body is underlined by the marks of the wounds. Not only do the disciples fail to recognize him at first, but he enters the upper room without passing through any opening (20, 19). Most significant of all, he breathes his spirit on the apostles (20, 22), just as God breathed the spirit of life into Adam (Gen 2, 7). At the divine command, Ezekiel had breathed the spirit of life symbolically into the dead bones of Israel (Ezek 37, 9); but here Christ is giving the Spirit of God, which is also his own Spirit, independently, in a way which surely shows that he is exercising on his own a divine prerogative. It is indeed in the other appearance in the upper room that he is, for the only time in the New Testament, directly hailed as God, when Thomas confesses him as 'My Lord and my God'.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's and John's concepts of the exaltation of Christ have very different emphases. Paul concentrates on the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God (an allusion to Psalm 110), where he is declared Lord and seen to be Sovereign of the universe. He is the first in every way, first-born of creation and first to be born from the dead, and as such he is the Head. This whole mode of expression draws, or at any rate leans, upon a political mode of thought; one might almost say of power-politics. Even the image of head of the body, from which the body draws its nourishment, is used in ancient times of the body-politic; and Paul must have been aware of this dimension. John, on the other hand, thinks far more in terms of glory. This is a much more religious concept, very deeply rooted in the Old Testament idea of God. Glory is properly God's alone, and it is so awesome that one cannot see God's glory

<sup>2</sup> Compare the reaction of Paul when he is threatened with this identical humiliation - Acts 23, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> I. de la Potterie, 'Jésus, roi et juge d'après Jn 19, 13, in *Biblica* 41 (1960), pp 217-47.

<sup>4</sup> Cf Jn 20, 26. On the rarity of the use of the title 'God' of Jesus, see *The Way*, Vol 13, no. 2 (April, 1973), pp 149-52. It is used unequivocally of Jesus only on two other occasions in the New Testament: Jn 1, 1 and Heb 1, 8.

and live. When God reveals himself to Moses and lets his glory pass, he has to shield Moses with his hand in a cleft of the rock (Exod 33, 20-23), and even so Moses' face is henceforth scaly,<sup>5</sup> and must be kept veiled because of the 'radiation'. The same awesomeness is seen in Isaiah's reaction to his inaugural vision, which tries to convey an impression of the terrifying and overwhelming impact of an encounter with God. The only possible reaction on the part of man is to fall as one dead (Isai 6). When John says, then, 'we have seen his glory' (1, 14), it is with the deepest reverence, for it is an awe-inspiring experience that he is describing, frightening as well as comforting and inspiring. The glory to which Jesus looks forward is properly divine: 'Glorify me, Father, beside yourself with the glory which I had beside you before the world began' (17, 5). So he is to be transformed by the divinity that is his.

The explicit references to his glorification at the hour of the passion and resurrection are by no means the only ways in which the importance of the exaltation of Christ at the resurrection are in evidence in John. Already during Christ's earthly life, the atmosphere is suffused with this glory. John does not keep clearly distinct the two times in Christ's existence. He already sees him as the risen Lord when he is depicting pre-resurrection scenes. This is because in fact throughout the gospel, John knows that it is the risen Christ present to his Church that he is depicting. The earthly life of Christ has taken on the colouring of the later state because Christ active in the life of the Church reflects the earthly life of Christ. One can say either that the activity of Christ in the Church is the reflection of his work on earth, or that his work on earth was the foretaste of his activity in the Church. Through John's allusive method of writing, full of double senses and half-perceived overtones, one receives the impression that in some sense the Christ who gives bread to the multitudes is already the Bread of Life who will be received in the Church; that the Christ who gives light to the blind man, and so brings him to faith, is already the Christ who baptizes in the Church. The interpenetration of these two states is clearly seen by those sayings in which the two times are combined: 'The hour is coming *and now is* when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (4, 23); or, 'when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live' (5, 25). That the effects of the passion and glorification are already present is seen by the immediately preceding saying: 'He who hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life, and does not come to judgment, but *has already* passed over from death to life' (5, 24). And yet in a way it is the future tenses that are more realistic; for John is also careful to stress that the Church is born from the side of Christ crucified, in the flow of blood and water, and that the Spirit is given to men when Christ breathes forth his spirit (19, 30). The only way out of this paradox is to accept that the future life of the Church is represented as

<sup>5</sup> Or horny, but not horned in the way represented by Michelangelo's Moses; it is a horny covering rather than protruding horns.

present during Christ's earthly life. John, so to speak, projects the future into the past.

In Paul, almost equally important as the Lordship and Sovereignty which the resurrection effects in Christ is his position as head and source of life to the Church. In John, one could say that the emphasis is reversed; Christ's glory at the resurrection is thought of primarily in terms of the transformation which it effects in men. The point of the change which takes place in Christ at the resurrection is that he is now available to all men, not merely to those with whom he came in contact during his earthly life. This lesson is pointed in all the stories of the resurrection appearances. Mary Magdalen is prevented from clinging to him because he has not yet ascended to the Father: her idea of contact with him is too narrow and restricted. When he meets the disciples in the upper room for the first time, Jesus breathes upon them the Spirit which is to be the means, as we shall see, by which he is to touch all men. At his final appearance in the upper room – originally the last scene in the gospel before the appendix of chapter 21 was added,<sup>6</sup> he concludes with a blessing on those who have not enjoyed his physical presence and yet have come to believe.

This explains why the main burden of the discourse after the last supper is the return of Christ, after a short bereavement, to be with the disciples for ever. The so-called eschatological discourse of the synoptic gospels (Mark 13 and parallels) is in fact a sketch of the future of the Church, a vision and guideline of the theological realities of the age to come. In the same way, the great discourse in John is a collection of farewell promises for the future. It uses the well-known convention of a parting speech, by a great leader who is about to die, to the disciples who will carry on his work, and welds this with the hellenistic convention of a conversation at a meal where major teaching is conveyed. It is almost a refrain of this discourse that Jesus is going away only to return:

I am going now to prepare a place for you,  
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,  
I shall return to take you with me (14, 3).

or again,

I will not leave you orphans;  
I will come back to you.  
In a short time the world will no longer see me;  
but you will see me, because I live and you will live (14, 18).

The first of these passages, if taken alone, might be understood as a promise that the parousia and the end of the world were to occur soon; but in the second, the contrast with the world means that a presence to the disciples is

<sup>6</sup> All the resurrection-appearances in John are an 'announcement and representation of his invisible presence and action, which characterizes the whole era between Ascension and Parousia'. Feuillet, A.: *Johannine Studies* (New York, 1964), p 154.

envisaged which the opponents of Christ ('the world') will not share or realize. Other passages in the discourse<sup>7</sup> also show that attention is centred, not upon removal from the world at the parousia but on life in the world, and that encouragement is being given by the promise of his abiding presence. The keynotes of this presence will be joy (15, 11; 16, 20. 21. 22. 24; 17, 13; 14, 28), and understanding of the purposes of God or knowledge of God (14, 7. 20. 26; 15, 7. 15. 27; 16, 13. 25; 17, 3. 8. 17. 26); both of which are summed up in the new spirit of love which will then prevail among them.

The discourse after the supper promises a new relationship, and this is fulfilled in the appearances after the resurrection. Perhaps the greatest promise of all is that of friendship:

I shall not call you servants any more,  
because a servant does not know his master's business;  
I call you friends,  
because I have made known to you  
everything I have learnt from my Father (15, 15).

The fulfilment of this may be seen in the unprecedented familiarity announced by Christ's saying that he is ascending 'to my Father and yours, to my God and yours' (20, 17), and by then speaking of the disciples as his brothers. What is staggering here is not that God should be spoken of as their Father, for the jews had long referred to God as 'our Father', but that God should be spoken of as Father to Christ and to the disciples in the same breath. For throughout his teaching, according to John, Jesus had spoken of 'my Father' in a very special way, making clear that a unique relationship existed between them – e.g. 'I and the Father are one' (10, 30), or 'they have not acknowledged either the Father or myself' (16, 3). But this saying to Mary Magdalen is an explicit assertion of sharing, especially when coupled with the title of 'brothers'. One is reminded of the formula by which Ruth asserts her complete solidarity with Naomi: 'Your people shall be my people, and your God my God' (Ruth 1, 16). Christ's first act, therefore, after his resurrection is to declare that now his solidarity with his brothers, the disciples, is such that they are even brought to share the unique relationship of the Son to the Father.

Here we rejoin the pauline teaching on the divine sonship which christians share with Christ by their adoption into him. The new intimacy is actually seen operating in terms of the new understanding which the disciples now have. Sayings of Jesus which are not understood in their full or correct meaning until the resurrection: for example, the saying about rebuilding this

<sup>7</sup> E.g., 14, 28; 16, 19–20. One possible explanation of the many repetitions in these chapters, where the eagle of the evangelists seems to be circling round and round, is that the author of the gospel set out, one after the other, three different versions of John's preaching of the discourse after the last supper. One would therefore expect a large number of repetitions to occur.

temple in three days (2, 22), or living water (7, 39); nor did they understand the significance of the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey 'until Jesus had been glorified' (12, 16). It is also this new intimacy which makes possible the breakthrough in worship, which is no longer bound to a particular place: 'The time is coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth' (4, 21-23).

The agent of this new intimacy with the Father and of Christ's action among his disciples is, in most of the gospel, the Spirit: the Spirit is the means of rebirth by which one enters the kingdom (3, 6); it is in the Spirit that man will worship God truly (4, 24), and will understand the saying, of Jesus (6, 63; 7, 39). In another way, it is the presence of Jesus himself which makes the new intimacy: he is the vine and we are the branches, and it is his presence which makes us bear fruit (15, 1-7; cf 6, 56-57). But in the discourse after the last supper, there is a series of sayings which refer to the Paraclete. This mysterious term occurs in the New Testament only in John, and all attempts to explain it by reference to other appearances of the term (it occurs in second century A. D. Jewish writing, meaning the angel or spirit who defends the dead man at the heavenly tribunal), or the etymology of the Greek word (by which it would mean 'helper' or 'comforter'), are of limited use in accounting for John's use of the term. It must be considered primarily as it occurs in the gospel. In 14, 26 the Paraclete is identified with the holy Spirit; but there is a slight doubt about the textual accuracy of this ('holy' omitted by some versions); in any case it is methodologically better to see first what is said about the Paraclete before seeking an identification. He is closely connected with Jesus, since the Father sends him in Jesus's name (14, 26), at his request, as *another* Paraclete (14, 16); which can mean only that he is replacing Jesus, since the whole context is Jesus's departure and subsequent care for his disciples. He will make clear and remind the disciples of everything which Jesus told them (14, 26); and it will be Jesus whom he glorifies because everything he teaches will be from Jesus (16, 14).

These sayings suggest that the Paraclete will take the place of Jesus when Jesus has been exalted to the Father. But other sayings insist that Jesus himself will return and remain with the disciples. We are tempted to object that either Jesus himself is present, or the Paraclete does his work for him; it cannot be both. But the solution perhaps lies in a difference in the concept of personality familiar to the Jewish mind. In the Old Testament, there are several pairs of figures, the second of which continues the work of the first, takes up his mantle, as we say (the current English metaphor is of course drawn from one of these pairs - Elisha with reference to Elijah's mantle). Jesus takes up Moses's work, is endowed with his spirit, and is represented as a sort of second Moses. Nearer to the New Testament, the prophet Malachi says that Elijah will come again (4, 5-6). And Jesus says that in John the Baptist he has come (Mt 11, 14). Although the Baptist's different point of view leads him to deny that he is Elijah (he is thinking of the Messiah himself as the Elijah who will immediately precede the day of the Lord), he gives no

indication that the question of the embassy to him asking whether he is someone who is long dead is absurd. Similarly Ezekiel (34, 23) announces the future messianic king as David: not as someone like David or a second David, but as David himself. The psychological background of this is perhaps the result of less emphasis than we would put on originality and pride in individual achievement, together with a greater awareness of standing in a tradition and putting the emphasis on the function fulfilled rather than on the individual fulfiller. Thus the Paraclete can be represented as being a person in his own right, while yet being Jesus. The groundwork is thus laid for the later elaborations of the doctrine of the Trinity and the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, with the distinction of persons but the unity of the *operationes ad extra* of the Trinity. Raymond E. Brown is not quite accurate when he contends that 'John presents the Paraclete as the holy Spirit in a special role, namely, as the personal presence of Jesus in the christian while Jesus is with the Father';<sup>8</sup> for, while Jesus is indeed made present by the presence of the Paraclete, the personal presence is that of the Paraclete. But of course the terminology of 'person' and 'personal' was not evolved to cope with such a unique situation.

The major difference, however, from Paul's theology of the presence of the Spirit, is precisely that John's sees Jesus as present in the operation of the Paraclete in leading the disciples into all truth etc. For John, the hour of exaltation is the moment and means of Jesus becoming present in this way which is so much less confined and more diffused. For Paul, the spirit of Jesus is less clearly personal,<sup>9</sup> and is thought of more as the spirit which vitalizes the body of Christ, flowing from Christ as head into his members. Another interesting difference in their treatment of the Spirit is that Paul concentrates far more than John on the active works of the Spirit and its power, shown both in signs and wonders and in the works of love. John, on the other hand, dwells more contemplatively on the disposition of love, on understanding and on truth.

Thus in various ways two great, inspired theologians of the first generation of christians interpret to us the effects of the resurrection for Christ himself and – indissolubly linked – for his Church. The two visions are diverse and individual, but richly complementary.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Gospel according to John* (London, 1971), p 1139.

<sup>9</sup> Though of course the doxologies show that the Spirit too is divine.