

Studies in Hermeneutics: A festschrift
in honor of Theodore G Stylianopoulos

ed) E Pateric, J Fotopoulos
B. Beck

Holy Cross Orthodox Press
Brookline MA

2016

313-347

16

THE APOCALYPSE OF
THE CROSS:
The Gospel of John and the
Beginning of Christian
Theology¹

John Behr

ST. VLADIMIR'S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY, CRESTWOOD, NY

It is my great pleasure to offer this essay in honor of Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos. His teaching for many decades at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology was an inspiration for many generations of students and his writings were an inspiration for countless others, like myself, who never had the pleasure of hearing him teach. He was a pioneer amongst Orthodox scriptural scholars, showing how one could engage with contemporary critical scholarship and still remain faithful to the traditions of the fathers. It is in this same vein that the present essay is offered.

IN TWO ARTICLES, published some fifty years ago, Ernst Käsemann asserted that "Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian

theology,"² and by doing so set off many debates in the following decades. By "apocalyptic" he specifically meant the enthusiasm engendered by the possession of the Spirit as a pledge of the imminent Parousia, "nourished theologically from the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic," and the sense of a corresponding ambassadorial authority for its mission thus kindled.³ Unlike Albert Schweitzer and his followers, "who got in their own way by trying to turn the whole question into a problem of research into the life of the historical Jesus and to explain the very early history of dogma in terms of the delay of the Parousia" — landing up in a cul-de-sac on both counts — Käsemann suggests that we should take seriously "post-Easter apocalyptic" as being "a new theological start," the first chapter, the beginning of dogmatics itself, not the concluding one as has since become the traditional dogmatic approach.⁴ "The heart of primitive Christian apocalyptic, according to Revelation and the Synoptists alike, is the accession to the throne of heaven by God and by his Christ as the eschatological Son of Man."⁵

Käsemann concludes his essay by tracing how various hopes were dashed, such as those of the "Petrine party," who, in Matthew 16:18–19, appropriate to their leader what is promised to the whole community in Matthew 18:18, thereby making themselves a sect, thinking they could defy the gates of hell, but "unable to resist the sands of time which buried them." Käsemann asks if this episode is an "archetype of what is always happening in the history of the Church," and "has there ever been a theological system which has not collapsed? Have we been promised that we should know ourselves to be in possession of a *theologia perennis*?" Clearly not, is the answer his rhetorical question demands. Rather it is "only certain theological themes in the proclamation [that] are carried on from one generation to the next and thus preserve the continuity of the history of theology." And chief among these themes is "the hope of the manifestation of the Son of God on his way to enthronement; and we have to ask ourselves whether Christian theology can ever survive in any legitimate form without this theme, which sprang from the Easter experience and determined the Easter faith."⁶

Käsemann's thesis is provocative and generated much debate in the following decades. But it is also fairly limited, primarily

because he develops his reflections almost exclusively out of the Synoptic Gospels, with an occasional nod to Paul (more attention is given to Paul in his essay "Apocalyptic," but even there only to the Corinthian correspondence) and the book of Revelation, and this is because he has already determined what is to count as "Apocalyptic:" that is, "the expectation of an imminent Parousia." His central claim and concluding question are, nevertheless, worth bearing in mind, and I will return to them later.

The decades since Käsemann wrote have seen a burgeoning in scholarship on Second Temple Judaism and intertestamental literature. As a result of this scholarship, it is now acknowledged universally that it is simply inadequate to speak of "Judaism" as a single phenomenon: there were, rather, many rich and varied seams in the centuries prior to the establishment of rabbinic Judaism. This has spurred on many to what has been called a "new *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*," which has as its quest to understand the Jewish roots of Christology by looking to Jewish speculations about a "second power" in heaven alongside God (most concretely seen in the figure of Metatron in *Third Enoch* or *The Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch*).⁷ This is not directly my topic here, though it is part of the background for this paper. More importantly, this scholarship has also given us a greatly enhanced understanding of the role of "apocalyptic" in the intertestamental period and its significance for understanding Christianity.⁸ Although we tend to think of "apocalyptic" primarily in terms of eschatology (an "imminent Parousia"), usually described in nightmarish imagery portraying cataclysmic events (and, that is how the term is indeed used in popular parlance), modern study of the phenomenon has made it clear that apocalyptic writings are in fact concerned with much more.⁹

I: THE STRUCTURE AND FRAMEWORK OF APOCALYPTIC

Christopher Rowland suggests that the guidelines laid down in the Mishnah (Hagigah 2.1) indicate the broad scope of apocalypse:

The forbidden degrees [i.e., Lev 18:6ff] may not be expounded before three persons, nor the story of creation [i.e., Gen 1:1ff] before two, nor [the chapter of] the chariot [i.e., Ezek 1:4ff] before one alone, unless he is a sage that understands his own knowledge. Whoever gives his mind to four things it were better for him if he had not come into the world: what is above? what is below? what was before time? and what will be hereafter?

Eschatology, as this passage suggests and as is clearly demonstrated from the abundant apocalyptic literature, is only one of the topics covered (or uncovered) by apocalyptic.¹⁰

Apocalyptic writings are concerned with the beginning and the end, and with the realm above and below, and, specifically, draws out correspondences between these dimensions, as do almost all early Christian writings (Adam and Christ; "on earth as it is in heaven," etc.).

With regard to the form of apocalyptic writings, John Ashton, building upon Rowland and Collins, defines "apocalypse" in this way:

An apocalypse is a narrative, composed in circumstances of political, religious, or social unrest, in the course of which an angelic being discloses heavenly mysteries, otherwise hidden, to a human seer, either indirectly, by interpreting a dream or vision, or directly, in which case the seer may believe that he has been transported to heaven in order to receive a special revelation.¹¹

With this description of the genre, form, and structure of apocalyptic writings, Ashton proceeds to examine the ways in which the Gospels, and the fourth Gospel in particular, though not apocalypses, are yet in fact "profoundly indebted to apocalyptic" in four key aspects: two of which are temporal—two ages (mystery) and two stages (dream or vision)—and two are spatial—insiders/outside (riddle) and above/below (correspondence). It will be beneficial to review some of Ashton's conclusions (drawing in insights also from J. Louis Martyn), before turning to the early

Fathers and considering the theological implications of these conclusions more generally.

MYSTERY

The first aspect is that of "mystery," a word which occurs extensively in apocalyptic writings (in Daniel, in the Qumran scrolls, in the Enochic material), and which is the very heart of apocalypse, dividing time into two ages: what was once a mystery, a hidden secret, has now been revealed. And this is, of course, of structural importance for the very self-articulation of Christianity, perhaps nowhere more clearly than the concluding verses to Paul's letter to the Romans:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the apocalypse of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now made manifest and made known through the prophetic writings [κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰώνιαις σεσηγημένου φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν...γνωρισθέντος], according to the command of the eternal God, to all the nations, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory for evermore. (Rom 16:25–27)

The Gospel is preached as a mystery, hidden throughout the ages in the writings of Scripture, but now apocalyptically revealed. The revelation of this mystery, this apocalypse, is nothing less than the turn of the ages, marking out two distinct eras, distinct not in content, but in terms of clarity: the revelation of what had been hidden. An essential difference between this mode of apocalypse (shared also by, for instance, the Qumran Commentary on Habbakuk), on the one hand, and the Enochic material on the other hand, is that in the former there is no new revelation, but rather an exposition, or unveiling, of the real meaning of the ancient and authoritative Scriptures.

This imagery is developed most extensively in Ephesians: the mystery of the will of God from before the foundations of the world

was to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:1-10), to bring about one new human being instead of the two, "reconciling us both to God in one body through the cross" (Eph 2:15-16); this mystery, made known to Paul "by an apocalypse," has now been "apocalypted" to all those who are fellow-heirs, for this is the grace given to the apostle, "to make all see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for the ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:1-10).

Most surprisingly, perhaps, it is equally present in Galatians (an epistle left aside by Käsemann, as not betraying any sense of an imminently impending Parousia). The letter begins with Paul speaking of Christ as having delivered us "from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4; a common theme in apocalyptic writings), warning against angels from heaven (Gal 1:8; again, another common theme), before presenting his own credentials as one who was not taught by men, but "through an apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12), and who had been set apart before he was born, so that when God "was pleased to apocalypse his Son in me" (Gal 1:16: ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν ἐν ἐμοί) he might begin preaching among the Gentiles. And the essence of the apostle's message is that he will not boast of anything "apart from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the cosmos has been crucified to me and I to the cosmos; for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:14-15). As J. Louis Martyn has pointed out, in his profound exploration of the apocalyptic dimensions of Paul, the antinomies of the old creation (male/female, slave/free, Jew/Gentile - circumcised/uncircumcised) are now done away with, as belonging to a different era; with the revelation of Christ, the world is structured anew, indeed is a "new creation," with its own antinomies - the Spirit and the flesh - resolved and brought together in Christ, the Church, and the Israel of God.¹²

More specifically, it is the cross of Christ which constitutes the focal point for the revelation of the mystery and for the turning of the ages. Martyn further expounds this by reference to the new creation in Christ spoken of in 2 Corinthians 15:16-17:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view [κατὰ σάρκα]; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view [κατὰ σάρκα], we no longer know him that way. So, if anyone is in

Christ, he is a new creation: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

To know "according to the flesh" is to know on the basis of sense perception, in the realm of the old, now passed, age. But, in contrast to this, and especially striking given his words in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul does not appeal instead to a "spiritual perception:" it is his opponents, the spiritual enthusiasts in Corinth who were doing this, claiming to have seen God, perhaps even face to face. Paul had resorted to such an appeal in his first letter to the Corinthians, but now realized that he could not do so again. He appeals to the new creation, but, as Martyn points out, "he is careful...to imply that the opposite of the old-age way of knowing is not that of the new age - this point must be emphasized - but rather the way of knowing which is granted at the juncture of the ages."¹³ He does not speak of seeing the face of God, nor of knowing by the Spirit, for he, as everyone else, does not yet live in the new age. As Martyn puts it, "the implied opposite of knowing by the norm of the flesh is not knowing by the norm of the Spirit, but rather knowing *kata stauron* ('by the cross')."¹⁴ Until we are, in actuality, raised with Christ in the new age, "knowing by the Spirit can occur only in the form of knowing by the power of the cross. For until the parousia, the cross is and remains the epistemological crisis, and thus the norm by which one knows that the Spirit is none other than the Spirit of the crucified Christ... The cross is the epistemological crisis for the simple reason that while it is in one sense followed by the resurrection, it is not replaced by the resurrection."¹⁵ The old has indeed passed away, and the new has indeed come, but this is only seen through the faith, the new eyes, of those standing at the juncture of the ages. A new community is being formed, not by knowledge but by active love, as the body of Christ. "Christ defines the difference between the two ways of knowing, doing that precisely in his cross."¹⁶

TWO STAGES

This first aspect of apocalypse - the revelation of a hidden mystery - leads naturally into the second aspect, that the revelation itself

creates two stages: in the first everything is obscure and in shadows, while in the second everything is now revealed. The classic image used to describe this, from Daniel to the Apocalypse, is the book being shut up until the time is ready for it to be opened, to reveal its content, with the specification, in the Apocalypse, that the only one who has the authority to do so is the slain Lamb (Rev 5:1-10). It becomes a matter of paramount importance, therefore, that the "person" and the "time" of the scriptural texts becomes clarified. The Ethiopian Eunuch, reading through Isaiah, did not approach Philip asking him to explain the "meaning" of the text, but rather inquired "about whom does the prophet say this?" (Acts 8:34). Or as the First Epistle of Peter puts it:

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time [εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν] was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was apocalypted [ἀπεκαλύφθη] to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you [ἃ νῦν ἀνηγγέλη ὑμῖν] by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet 1:10-12)

The apocalypse is made again through the Scriptures, clarifying the person and time about which their predictions spoke, that is, about the passion of Christ. Apocalypted to the prophets, these things are now "announced" to Christians by those who preach the Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. As Ashton points out, "the role assigned in apocalyptic literature to the *angelus interpretes* is now assigned to the preachers of the gospel."¹⁷

The term ἀναγγέλλειν functions in apocalyptic literature and elsewhere as a technical term meaning "to expound," "to explain." The dreams had by Nebuchadnezzar are given an explanation by Daniel (τὴν σύγκρισιν ἀναγγέλλειν Dan 2:4, 9, 16, 24). What the prophets spoke in veiled form, is given an interpretation by the preachers of the Gospel (1 Pet 1:10-12). And most strikingly in the

Gospel of John it is precisely the role of the Spirit to "reveal" or "interpret" the person of Christ himself and that which is to come: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will explain (ἀναγγελεῖ) to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and explain (ἀναγγελεῖ) to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and explain (ἀναγγελεῖ) to you." (John 16:13-15). If the preachers of the Gospel seem to take the place of the *angelus interpretes* in the usual apocalyptic narrative, it is in fact the Holy Spirit who is himself the true *angelus interpretes*, the one by whom the evangelists speak.

RIDDLING DISCOURSE AND MESSIANIC SECRET

When we turn from the *proclamation* of the Gospel, as an apocalyptic revelation of the hidden mystery and the inauguration of a new creation, to the *dramatic depiction* of the Gospel in the narratives of Scripture, we encounter a further utilization of a key element of apocalyptic, that of riddling discourse (*rätselreden*). While the proclamation of the Gospel, as in the concluding doxology of Romans, might seem to imply that the mystery is now clearly known to all (though Paul, of course, recognizes that there are those upon whom the veil of Moses remains; 2 Cor 3:12-4:6), a common feature of Jewish apocalyptic literature is that the division between the wise and the foolish remains, even when the hidden mystery is revealed (cf. 4 Ezra 12:35-38). This division is reinscribed in the narratives of the Gospels. It is particularly clear in this passage from Mark:

And he said to them, "To you [those about him with the twelve] has been given the mystery [τὸ μυστήριον] of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables [ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα], so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven." (Mark 4:11-12)

The parabolic sayings of Christ, his riddling discourse, divides human beings into two groups: the disciples, the insiders, to whom the "mystery" of the kingdom has been given, and outsiders, to whom everything, the whole of created reality, is enigmatic. Even when the insiders occasionally fail to understand the parable, an interpretation is immediately given (e.g., Mark 7:14-23); the parable and explanation go together, as with Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 17:1-21, esp. vv. 2 and 12).

In the Synoptics, nevertheless, the true identity of Christ remains hidden even to the disciples until after the Passion: it is the "messianic secret" known to the Evangelist himself and also to reader of the Gospel, but not, importantly, to the disciples prior to the passion.¹⁸ Only through the passion is the identity of Christ finally revealed: this is the defining, and definitive—"once for all"—event. In Mark, the culminating point is not the disciples' recognition, but the confession of the centurion at the foot of the cross, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39); in the shorter ending of Mark, the disciples remain perplexed at the empty tomb, while the longer ending concludes with the appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples and his enthronement at the right hand of God. In Matthew and Luke, the disciples' encounter with the risen Lord is presented in a fuller fashion. Of particular importance is the manner in which the disciples come to recognize Christ on the road to Emmaus: He is known specifically as the Christ who must suffer these things to enter into his glory, an identity made known through the opening of the books, preparing their eyes to be opened in the breaking of the bread, to see Christ, who then disappears from physical sight ("no longer known according to the flesh," as Paul puts it) as soon as he is recognized.¹⁹

When we turn to the Gospel of John, however, things are quite different. As Ashton points out, while only one of Jesus' sayings is actually called a "parable" (παροιμία rather than παραβολή), John 10:6, the parable of the Good Shepherd, his words continually perplex not only the outsiders, but the insiders. In fact, the situation is the inverse of what we see in the Synoptics. In John, Christ asserts that "I have spoken openly (ἐγὼ παρρησίᾳ λελάκηκα) to the world...I have said nothing in secret (ἐν κρυπτῷ)" (18:20). It is to the disciples, rather, that Christ

speaks in figures and cryptically; when he finally says, in 16:25, "I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly (οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμίαις ... ἀλλὰ παρρησίᾳ) of the Father" (16:25) the disciples respond, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly not in any figure!" (16:29). Yet they have in fact misunderstood once again: what Christ says in 16:27-28, he has already said in 16:5: the openness or frankness (παρρησίᾳ) that he refers to in 16:25, still looks forward to "the coming hour," to "that day" (16:25, 26), that is, to his final departure and sending of the Spirit; the one who, in the role of the apocalyptic *angelus interpres*, will remind the disciples of Christ's truth and lead them into a full comprehension of this truth, the "many things I have to tell you, but which you are not yet able to bear" (16:12).

This inversion is heightened by the fact that what is known to the disciples only at the end of the Synoptics, with the opening of the books, is apparently known to the disciples at the very beginning of John: already in the opening chapter, Philip tells Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). The question, already at the beginning of John, concerns the proper interpretation of the Scriptures which are thus already open; against those who understood the Scriptures to speak of Jesus, but only as the son of Joseph, Christ responds, and does so apocalyptically: "You shall see greater things than these... you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51). The importance of correct scriptural interpretation regarding the Christ is reiterated throughout the Gospel of John. When the Spirit is finally bestowed, to "bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 15:26), this is done by remembering *what had been written*: for instance, the disciples did not, at the time, understand Jesus' action of entering Jerusalem upon an ass, "but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and done to him" (John 12:14-16; citing Zech 9:9). The coming of the Spirit corresponds with the departure of Christ, and as such his words, and Christ himself, cannot be understood until his glorification: "for as yet there was no Spirit (οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα), because Jesus was not yet glorified."²⁰

CORRESPONDENCE AND TWO-LEVEL
DRAMA

The effect of Christ's riddling discourse and the messianic secret, whereby the readers of the Gospel know, and therefore see, more than the disciples within the narrative, is to set up a two-level drama in a framework of correspondence. This is the final element of the apocalyptic genre mentioned above. It is found in most apocalyptic literature, especially clearly in the "Similitudes" of the Enochic material. Although there is some debate about how to translate the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ethiopic terms, Ashton is probably right to suggest that "correspondence" is the best rendering, not least because it brings out a further element of the riddling discourse of Christ: *παράβολή* literally means a "juxtaposition," with a consequent "comparison" or "analogy," so entailing a "correspondence."²¹ In the Enochic material, the term "correspondence" is used to compare and liken things on earth and things in heaven, establishing connections between the realm above and the realm below (cf. esp. 1 Enoch 43:4). Or, as it is put in the *Ascension of Isaiah*: "as it is on high, so also is it on earth; what happens in the vault of heaven happens similarly here on earth."²² It is important to note, as Ashton points out, that "for Enoch, and for apocalyptic writers generally, there are not two worlds but one: or rather the whole of reality is split into matching pairs (rather like the biological theory of DNA) in which one half, the lower, is the mirror-image (albeit in this case a distorting mirror) of the higher. That is why a revelation of what is above is not just relevant or related to what happens or is about to happen on earth: rather what happens on earth is a reenactment in earthly terms of what has happened in heaven: a correspondence!"²³

In his investigation of the context of the relationship between the community around John and others, both the Jewish community and other Christian communities, J. Louis Martyn came to a very similar insight into the dynamics of what he calls the "stereoptic vision" of John:

John did not create the literary form of the two-level drama. It was at home in the thought-world of Jewish

apocalypticism: the dicta most basic to the apocalyptic thinker are these: God created both heaven and earth. There are dramas taking place both on the heavenly stage and on the earthly stage. Yet these dramas are not really two, but rather one drama.... One might say that events on the heavenly stage not only correspond to events on the earthly stage, but also slightly precede them in time, leading them into existence, so to speak. What transpires on the heavenly stage is often called "things to come". For that reason events seen on the earthly stage are entirely enigmatic to the man who sees only the earthly stage. Stereoptic vision is necessary, and it is precisely stereoptic vision which causes a man to write an apocalypse: "After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an *open door!* And the first voice, which I had heard...said, 'Come up hither and I will show you what must take place after this.'"²⁴

In his analysis of how this stereoptic vision is enacted in the Gospel of John, Martyn points to three modifications from the correspondence found in apocalyptic literature. First, both levels of the drama are enacted on earth, between the life of Christ and the life of the Johannine community. Second, the temporal extension does not parallel the heavenly with the earthly, but, again, the two stages, or times, of Christ's own life and that of his body, the community. And third, "John does not in any overt way indicate to his reader a distinction between the two stages."²⁵ Moreover, he points out that although John obviously does not write an apocalypse but a Gospel, yet "the relation of his Gospel to the Apocalypse should probably be reexamined in the light of the way in which he presents his two levels."²⁶ Such a reexamination would increase in significance if we were to accept Rowland's suggestion that the Apocalypse should be dated, not, as is usually done, in the last decade of the first century, but around AD 68.²⁷

Once we take seriously how an apocalyptic framework is essential to Christianity, as we have discussed above, we are forced to move beyond taking the Gospels as primarily biographies or "lives of Christ." It is not even enough to speak of the Gospels as "kerygmatic biographies," as Hengel proposed.²⁸

Whatever the case is with regard to the Synoptic Gospels, in the case of John, Ashton, whose work (together with Martyn's) we have largely followed in the above, argues convincingly that "the fourth evangelist conceives his own work as an apocalypse—in reverse, upside down, inside out."²⁹ Rather than a human visionary or seer ascending into the heavens to be shown, by an *angelus interpretis* who interprets for the mystic what he sees, what is to come, on earth as it is in heaven, in the Gospel of John the Son of Man, known from Daniel (and perhaps Enoch), arrives from the heavens, bringing the heavens down with him, uniting heaven and earth, to show what must be, and so establish the glory of God upon earth, to return to the heavens, promising to send the Holy Spirit, who, as the *angelus interpretis*, reminds the disciples of what they saw, but did not in fact see, by showing how the formerly closed book speaks of the slain Lamb who alone opens the book. And, as Ashton points out, "when he returns, exalted (ὕψοθεῖς), to heaven—this is surely John's most remarkable conceit—he is stretched out on the cross."³⁰

II: THEOLOGY IN AN APOCALYPTIC KEY

So, Käsemann may well be right—"Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology"—not because of the pressing demands of a supposed imminent parousia, but because apocalyptic opened up the space or perspective for seeing the work of God. And this is especially clear in the case of the Gospel of John, recognized from the time of Clement of Alexandria as being "the spiritual gospel," whose author soon after was specifically designated "the theologian."

Seen as a "reverse, upside down, inside out" apocalypse, the Gospel of John challenges many of our modern theological assumptions, yet, at the same time, intriguingly opens up or clarifies certain aspects of the theological reflections of the Fathers, and even the conciliar statements. There are three aspects in particular to which I would draw attention; the first concerns "salvation history"; the second, the subject of Christ himself; and the third, what it means to establish the glory of God upon the earth.

"SALVATION HISTORY" OR "ECONOMY"?

It is clear that over the past couple of centuries theological reflection, both scriptural exegesis and systematic exposition, has worked in a historical key, rather than within an apocalyptic framework, as defined above. The primary horizon has been that of *Heilsgeschichte*, "salvation history," moving from the narratives of the Old Testament to those of the New Testament, the Gospels as biographies of Jesus followed by the acts of the apostles and their epistles. In this overarching narrative, one begins with God and his act of creation; the falling away of human beings; and then the long, slow, and patient work of God through the messiness of human history, in a gradually unfolding plan, preparing the way for the advent of Christ, the Incarnation of the Word. However, as Martyn points out, the link between the Scriptures and the Gospel for John, which is so important that Christ, in his Gospel, can affirm that, for instance, Isaiah saw the day of Jesus and beheld his glory (John 8:56 and 12:41), is *not* understood as a linear movement from the Scriptures to the Gospel:

...the fundamental arrow in the link joining scripture and gospel points from the gospel story to scripture and not from scripture to the gospel story. In a word, with Jesus' glorification, belief in Scripture *comes into being*, by acquiring an indelible link to belief in Jesus' words and deeds. ...we have simply to note in the Gospel of John the absence of a linear sacred history that flows out of Scripture into the gospel story. Indeed the redemptive-historical perspective is more than absent; it is a perspective against which John is waging a battle.³¹

Likewise with Paul: "Paul did not make his way *from* Isaiah's words about God destroying the discernment of the discerning to the foolish word of the crucified Messiah. His hermeneutic worked exactly the other way around, from the previously unknown and foolish Gospel of the cross to the previously known and previously misunderstood scripture."³² What brought Paul

to be a zealous apostle of the Gospel was not his former studies of the Scripture, but rather the apocalypse of God to him and in him (see above). And, again, it seems to be that Paul's opponents in Galatia, the "teachers," were the ones who, as with John's opponents, moved from the Law to the Gospel (in the manner of our "salvation history") rather than from the Gospel to the Scriptures in an apocalyptic unveiling of previously unknown depths.³³

This fundamental point is seen abundantly in early Christian literature. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons, describes the way Scripture is read by Christians in the following passage, which, though lengthy, forms a complete unit and is worth quoting in full as it brings together many of the points discussed above:

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures this way, he will find in them the Word concerning Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling. For Christ³⁴ is the "treasure which was hidden in the field" [Mt 13:44], that is, in this world—for "the field is the world" [Mt 13:38]—[a treasure] hidden in the Scriptures, for he was indicated by means of types and parables, which could not be understood by human beings prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of the Lord. And therefore it was said to Daniel the prophet, "Shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the consummation, until many learn and knowledge abounds. For, when the dispensation shall be accomplished, they shall know all these things" [Dan 12:4, 7].

And Jeremiah also says, "In the last days they shall understand these things" [Jer 23:20]. For every prophecy, before its fulfilment, is nothing but an enigma and ambiguity to human beings; but when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then it has an exact exposition [ἐξήγησις]. And for this reason, when at this present time the Law is read by the Jews, it is like a myth, for they do not possess the explanation [ἐξήγησις] of all things which pertain to the human advent of the Son of God; but when it is read by Christians, it is a treasure, hid in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ, and

explained, both enriching the understanding of human beings, and showing forth the wisdom of God, and making known his economies with regard to the human being, and prefiguring the kingdom of Christ, and preaching in anticipation the good news of the inheritance of the holy Jerusalem, and proclaiming beforehand that the human being who loves God shall advance so far as even to see God, and hear his Word, and be glorified, from hearing his speech, to such an extent, that others will not be able to behold his glorious countenance [cf. 2 Cor 3:7], as was said by Daniel, "Those who understand shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and many of the righteous as the stars for ever and ever" [2:3]. In this manner, then, I have shown it to be, if anyone read the Scriptures. (*haer.* 4.26.1)

The books are sealed, and what they speak about, the treasure they contain—Christ himself—cannot be understood until they are opened by the cross; if they are not read in this apocalyptic manner (and apocalyptic imagery is here explicitly utilized), they will be read as nothing more than myths and fables.³⁵ What the books contain cannot be understood until the time of their accomplishment is present and the book unsealed. Yet now unsealed, those who read the same Scriptures through a proper exegesis are themselves transfigured, to become like Moses in his descent from the mountain after his encounter with God, themselves shining with the glory of God.

Reading Scripture in this way is, to use Irenaeus' image, like beholding a mosaic depicting the face of the king, which the heretics have rearranged to form the image of a dog or fox. Scripture is a "thesaurus," a treasury of images and words used to proclaim Christ in the Gospel, or, in the analogy used by Joel Marcus, drawing from E. Gässer, it is a "paint-box" used by the evangelists in their depiction of Christ.³⁶ Richard Hays, interestingly, comes to very much the same conclusion, reflecting on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6 about the lifting of the veil lying over Moses, the text, by turning to Lord, so as to see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Hays comments that, ultimately, "Scripture becomes—in Paul's reading—a metaphor, a vast trope that signi-

fies and illuminates the gospel of Jesus Christ."³⁷ The proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ is not straightforwardly derivable from Scripture. Rather, the death and resurrection of Christ acts as a catalyst. Because God has acted in Christ in a definitive, and unexpected, manner, making everything new, Scripture itself must be read anew. The "word of the cross," the preaching of "Christ crucified" may be a scandal for the Jews and folly for the Gentiles, but it alone is the "power of God" making known "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:18-25). This preaching, the *kerygma*, provides what Hays describes as "the eschatological *apokalypsis* of the cross," a hermeneutical lens, through which Scripture can now be refracted with "a profound new symbolic coherence."³⁸

A similar point is made by Origen, in his commentary on John. It is only retrospectively that we find the Gospel in the Law and the Prophets:

Before the sojourn of Christ, the Law and the Prophets did not contain the proclamation which belongs to the definition of the gospel, since he who explained the mysteries in them had not yet come. But since the Savior has come and has caused the gospel to be embodied, he has by the gospel made all things as gospel.³⁹

So strong is Origen's emphasis upon this that he even suggests that heretics such as Marcion may have had a point: "It is indeed possible to agree with the heterodox view, that Moses and the prophets did not know the Father" (*Comm. Jo.* 19.27). As Origen points out, though there are countless prayers in the Psalms and the Prophets, none of them address God as Father, but only as Lord and God.⁴⁰ He is not, however, prepared to concede the ontological disjunction introduced by the heterodox between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Rather, having apparently conceded ground to Marcion, Origen makes a qualification which invests the designation of God as "Father" with new significance. When Christ explained the mysteries hidden in the writings of the Law and the Prophets, he revealed the spiritual sense of Scripture, and as the true meaning of their words this is, according to Origen, the meaning truly

intended by those who wrote the Scriptures. So, Origen claims, the authors of Scripture in fact already

...spoke or wrote about God as Father in secret and not in a manner intelligible to all, so that they might not anticipate the grace that is poured out to all the world through Jesus, who calls all people to adoption so that he may declare the name of God to his brothers and praise the Father in the midst of the assembly in accordance with what has been written.⁴¹

That is, if Moses and the Prophets already knew God as Father, this knowledge is nevertheless dependent upon the grace granted only through Jesus. In this way, Origen ensures the constancy of the revelation of God, and does so by viewing it exclusively through Jesus Christ.

The basic understanding of the relationship between Scripture and gospel here is not that of a continuous narrative, a "salvation history." Rather, to use Irenaeus' word, the Gospel "recapitulates" Scripture, providing a "concise word," bringing to light, through the cross, and summarizing what is contained in Scripture in a clear, and therefore new and more powerful, fashion. Understanding the relationship between Scripture and Gospel as "recapitulation," Irenaeus can maintain the newness of the Gospel (it is newly revealed, and is done so by the opening of the books) but avoid the error of Marcion, that is, separating the Gospel as something new and distinct from the ancient Scriptures. Irenaeus is able to sketch out a vision of the whole "economy" of God, the beginning and end of which is Jesus Christ himself (the beginning who appears at the end, as he puts it). But it is important to note that this "economy" should not be too readily translated as "salvation history" in the sense of a movement from and through the narrative of Scripture to Jesus Christ; rather it begins with Jesus Christ, even to the extent that Irenaeus can say: "since he who saves already existed, it was necessary that he who would be saved should come into existence, that the One who saves should not exist in vain" (*haer.* 3.22.3).

Martyn is thus not quite right when he asserts: "When the emerging great church identified Marcion's theology as heretical,

it did so, in part, by adopting a view of the relationship between scripture and gospel that, in general terms, looks rather similar to the view of the simple exegetical theologians against whom Paul and John struggled in the first century (see Justin Martyr; Rhodo; Irenaeus).⁴² Irenaeus, at least, did not understand the "economy" of God as our modern "salvation history." For Irenaeus, the "economy" of God is more akin to the "arrangement" of the tiles in the mosaic: Scripture, from beginning to end, speaks of Christ, whose face is discerned in Scripture when the books are opened by the right key, the cross. The Gospel is not simply the culminating point of a "salvation history," as Martyn rightly argues, but neither is it a proclamation separable from Scripture, as Martyn implies: it is always bound up with the apocalyptic unveiling of Scripture to reveal "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God" (2 Cor 4:4), with Scripture providing the words and images through which the Gospel is, from the first, proclaimed.⁴³

THE SUBJECT OF CHRIST

The relationship between exegesis and Christology, though often treated as separate fields, is fundamentally important. I have argued elsewhere that, after Marcion, the first theologians who read the Scriptures not so much as Scripture and its recapitulation in the Gospel, but rather as Old Testament and New Testament, with two distinct and independent narratives (between which one might, perhaps, point to typological parallels, as long as it doesn't destroy the independence of each narrative) were Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who were indeed accused by Leontius of Byzantium of Marcionism for this.⁴⁴ And, importantly, their problematic exegesis (though very palatable to modern sympathies) was intrinsically related to their dyoprosopic Christology, that is, the way in which they differentiated between the Word of God and the man Jesus, the latter conceived in the womb of Mary, and united to the Word, but with his own human prosopon and history (again, very amenable to our modern predilections). Exegesis and Christology are fundamentally intertwined, and, I would argue, a firm grasp on the unity of the

subject of Christ requires the apocalyptic approach to Scripture and theology, described above, rather than the historicizing approach of "salvation history," which inevitably ends up with a dual subject.

Our historical or narrational (*heilsgeschliche*), rather than apocalyptic, framework for doing theology has, I would suggest, changed the very subject of theology. This is shown most directly and strikingly in the fact that in our dogmatic theology (in which, as Käsemann lamented, eschatology/apocalyptic only comes in at the end, rather than the beginning), we invariably begin with the Word of God as the second person of the Trinity, the agent in creation and salvation history, until, through his birth from the Virgin Mary, the Word is incarnate as Jesus Christ. To borrow a phrase from Rowan Williams, in this approach, existence as Jesus Christ is but "an episode in the biography of the Word."⁴⁵ The subject has changed from Jesus Christ to the Word of God: the Word is treated first as a "pre-incarnate" subject (a term I have yet to find in patristic literature) or as "*asarkos*" (a term which is used, though note how in the quotation from Hippolytus below), who then, later, become enfleshed.

This approach is so ingrained in our modern approach to theology, systematic reflection as well as scriptural exegesis, that it is rather startling to note that it is not inscribed in any of the creeds or conciliar definitions: the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople do not even use the term "Word," and Chalcedonian definition only employs the term "Word" as one of the titles ascribed to the one subject, our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, during the patristic period, the one subject, following the Gospels and Paul (cf. esp. 1 Cor 8:6: "for us there is one God, ... and one Lord Jesus Christ," the basis of all later creedal statements) is emphatically the one Lord Jesus Christ. So much is this the case that the Fathers can write in ways that seem to us rather odd. For instance, in his first letter to Succensus, Cyril of Alexandria writes: "One is the Son, one Lord, Jesus Christ, both before the incarnation and after the incarnation."⁴⁶ It is none other than Jesus Christ who is the one subject, both before and after the Incarnation! The term "Word" is a title attributed to Christ as divine: "We say that there is one and the same Jesus Christ, from the God, the Father, on the one hand, as the God Word, and, on the other hand, from the seed

of the godly David according to the flesh."⁴⁷ There is one subject, before and after the incarnation, and this is emphatically Jesus Christ, who, as from the God and Father is called the Word of God.

Our tendency to begin with the "Word" of God, rather than Jesus Christ, who is the Word, stems in large measure from modifications in the approach to theological reflection arising from the systematizing of early theological debates in later centuries. Karl Rahner, as is well known, lamented the development, in the Middle Ages, of a separation between treatises on the one God and on the Triune God.⁴⁸ But a more fundamental transition occurred when the Trinity began to be treated before turning to the Incarnation, separating, the Word, as a divine person, from the historical figure, or perhaps better, the apocalyptic figure of Jesus Christ.⁴⁹ This transition, moreover, significantly modifies what is meant by the term "incarnation," especially when combined with the historicizing approach, over the last few centuries, to scriptural exegesis.

Such an approach—to begin with the Trinity and then move to the incarnation—is also, of course, apparently corroborated by the opening of the Gospel of John—the "reverse, upside down, inside out" apocalypse—that is, the Prologue. Almost all the interpretations of the Prologue given over the past century treat it as speaking about theology, relating the Word's eternal presence with God and as God, before moving to the economy to describe the becoming flesh of the Word as Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ However, this is not the way in which the first commentators on the Prologue understood these exceptionally beautiful, and profoundly enigmatic, verses.

The first Father to comment on the Prologue was Irenaeus of Lyons, rebutting the first ever commentary on the passage by Ptolemy. Ptolemy had, as it were, reified or hypostatized the different nouns in the Prologue—Word, Life, Light, and so on—to present the Prologue as an account of the derivations of the aeons within the pleroma. After quoting a long passage from Ptolemy, Irenaeus responds:

Manifest, then, is the false fabrication [παραποίησις] of their exegesis. For while John, proclaiming one God, the Almighty, and one Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten,

'by whom all things were made' [John 1:3], declares that this is 'the Word of God' [John 1:1], this 'the Only-begotten' [John 1:18], this the Maker of all things, this 'the true Light who enlightens every man' [John 1:9], this 'the Maker of the world' [John 1:10], this the one who 'came to his own' [John 1:11], this the one who 'became flesh and dwelt among us' [John 1:14], they, speciously distorting the exegesis [παρatreponτες κατά τὸ πιθανὸν τὴν ἐξήγησιν], hold that the Only-begotten, by emission, is another, whom they call the Beginning, and they hold that another became the Saviour, and another the Logos, the son of the Only-begotten, and another the Christ, emitted for the reestablishment of the Fullness. ... But that the apostle did not speak concerning their conjunctions, but concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he knew to be the Word of God, he himself has made evident. For, summing up concerning the Word in the beginning mentioned by him above [Ἀνακεφαλαιούμενος γὰρ περὶ τοῦ εἰρημένου αὐτῷ ἄνω ἐν ἀρχῇ λόγου], he adds,

'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' [John 1:14]. Yet, according to their hypothesis, it was not the Word who became flesh, since he never went outside the Fullness, but the Saviour, who was made out of all [the Aeons] and was generated later than the Word. (*haer.* 1.9.2)

Irenaeus clearly and emphatically reads the whole of the Prologue as being about Jesus Christ: He is the Word in the beginning with God, and everything thereafter speaks of him.

The only person in modern times who has dared to make such a radical, and apparently paradoxical, statement—paradoxical because of our narrativel, rather than apocalyptic, approach to theology—is Karl Barth. Working through the theme of election (rather than the apocalyptic framework of revelation with which we have been concerned), Barth asserts: "In Jn. 11 the reference is very clear: ὁ λόγος is unmistakably substituted for Jesus. His is the place which the predicates attributed to the Logos are meant at once to mark off, to clear and to reserve. It is He, Jesus,

who is in the beginning with God. It is He who by nature is God. This is what is guaranteed in Jn. 11.⁵¹ This order of predication is made more explicitly in that other "Johannine" writing, the Apocalypse, and done so even more paradoxically, or rather, again, apocalyptically: there it is of the rider on the white horse, who is "clad in a robe dipped in blood," that it is said that "the name by which he is called is the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13). It is specifically as the crucified one that Christ, the slain lamb, is enthroned with the Father, able to open the books, which turn out to speak of him, the Word of God. Rather than looking for the background to the Prologue's utilization of the term "Logos" in ancient philosophy or the figure of Wisdom in Scripture (though these are not, of course, to be excluded), we should perhaps heed Edwyn Hoskyn's suggestion that the choice of the term "Word" in the Prologue was determined by the fact that by that time "the Word" had become synonymous for the Gospel itself, so that in using the term "the Word" the Prologue already contains a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus; the Gospel, as the apostolic word, has become identified with the content of the Gospel, Jesus Christ.⁵²

While this is not the place to explore further how the Prologue as a whole is best read in the light of these findings, allow me to make a couple of suggestions.

Is it possible that the opening verse—Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος—rather than being an account of "the imminent Trinity" prior to creation, in fact summarizes or recapitulates the Gospel of John? In first place is Christ; he is "towards" God (as, Christ is, and as he repeatedly states, throughout the whole of the Gospel: I am going to the Father); and he is God (as the Gospel concludes with the confession of Thomas in 20:28).

Christ is the one in the beginning with God, and everything was either made, or happened, by him: οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν (vv. 2-3b). That Christ was active in the creation of the universe at the beginning is asserted elsewhere in the New Testament, most clearly in the "Christ Hymn" of Colossians: "in him and for him all things were created" (1:16, τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται), such that he is himself "the beginning," and is so as "the

firstborn of the dead" (Col 1:18: ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν).⁵³ However, as Ashton has pointed out, the lack of a definite article in v. 3 (it is not τὰ πάντα), suggests that the Prologue is speaking in another key.⁵⁴ Another possibility is that we should hear this verse in terms of the transition from the Synoptics—where it seems to the unenlightened disciples that Christ is forcibly put to death, so that they run from the crucifixion in fear and deny knowing Christ—to the Gospel of John, where, with the books open from the beginning, Christ is the exalted Lord throughout, one who lays down his life when he is ready, and is crucified, or rather exalted in glory, with his beloved disciple and mother standing at the foot of the cross. This transition in perspective, effected by the opening of the Scriptures in the light of the passion, is reiterated in the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom: "in the night in which he was given up, no, rather, gave himself up for the life of the world." Perhaps verse 3ab affirms something similar: everything came to pass through him, and without him nothing came to pass.⁵⁵

And what, specifically, was it that came to pass? Most of the early readings of verses 3-4, put the last two words of verse 3 together with what follows: ὁ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων: καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. What came to pass in him is life, which for John is not simply the biological life by which all animated beings on earth live, but rather the life that comes to be through the life-creating death of Christ: this is the light of human beings, shining in the dark but not overcome by it.

In the opening five verses of the Prologue, then, we have two restatements of the whole Gospel (v. 1, and vv. 2-5). A fuller account then begins, with the appearance of John the Baptist sent by God, which we will leave aside for the moment, to turn to v. 14, the verse that, together with v. 1, has reverberated most profoundly and forcefully across all later theological reflection (and, indeed, one might say, the whole of Western culture thereafter). In the light of all the above, what can v. 14 mean?

In the passage from Irenaeus quoted above, which, it must be reiterated, is the first treatment of the Prologue by any Father of the Church (and by one who has a good claim, through Polycarp, to be standing in direct and close lineage to the Evangelist

himself), v. 14 is treated in a most unfamiliar manner: in saying "And the Word became flesh," Irenaeus comments, John is "summing up concerning the Word in the beginning mentioned by him above." The becoming flesh of the Word is connected by Irenaeus with the apocalyptic recapitulation of Scripture in the Gospel. As he puts it elsewhere, using the imagery of Revelation 5:

"No one, either in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book" of the Father, "nor to look into it," with the exception of "the Lamb who was slain and who redeemed us with his own blood," receiving from the same God, who made all things by the Word and adorned them by [his] Wisdom, power over all things when "the Word became flesh."⁵⁶

The slain Lamb alone has received all power, wealth, wisdom and might (Rev 5:12), and so he alone is able to open the book, and this, Irenaeus specifies, is the book of the Father. Irenaeus very strikingly associates revelation of the content, the Word, of the paternal book by the slain Lamb with the Word becoming flesh, for it is the enfleshed, revealed, Word who alone makes known or exegetes (ἐξηγήσατο) the Father, as the Prologue of John concludes (John 1:18).⁵⁷ Just as the Gospel alone unlocks the treasures of Scripture, so also it is only in the Son, as preached in the Gospel, that the invisible and immeasurable God becomes visible and comprehensible (cf. *haer.* 4.4.2, 6.6).

A similar, and equally striking, interpretation of verse 14 is given, a few decades later, by Hippolytus:

For the Word of God, being fleshless [ἄσαρκος ὢν], put on the holy flesh from the holy virgin, as a bridegroom a garment, having woven it for himself in the sufferings of the cross, so that having mixed our mortal body with his own power, and having mingled the corruptible into the incorruptible, and the weak with the strong, he might save perishing man.

The web-beam, therefore, is the passion of the Lord upon the cross, and the warp on it is the power of the Holy Spirit, and the woof is the holy flesh woven by

the Spirit, and the thread is the grace which by the love of Christ binds and unites the two in one, and the rods are the Word; and the workers are the patriarchs and prophets who weave the fair, long, perfect tunic for Christ; and the Word passing through these, like the combs (or rods), completes through them that which his Father wills. (*Antichr.* 4)

The flesh of the Word, received from the Virgin and "woven in the sufferings of the cross," is woven by the patriarchs and prophets, whose actions and words proclaim the manner in which the Word became present and manifest. It is in the preaching of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of the one who died on the cross, interpreted and understood in the matrix, the womb, of Scripture, that the Word receives flesh from the virgin. The virgin in this case, Hippolytus later affirms following Revelation 12, is the Church, who will never cease "bearing from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving in the world," while the male child she bears is Christ, God and man, announced by the prophets, "whom the Church continually bears as she teaches all nations" (...ὃν αἰετικουσα ἡ ἐκκλησία διδάσκει πάντα τὰ ἔθνη *Antichr.* 61).

As unaccustomed (though not forced) as this "apocalyptic" reading of the Prologue may be to us, we should not forget that the occasion on which this passage is read liturgically in the Orthodox tradition is not the Feast of the Nativity (treating v. 14 as if it were parallel to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke), but rather Pascha, the apocalyptic feast *par excellence*. A similar point can be made regarding the earlier customary practice in the West of reading the Prologue after the celebration of the Mass. Jesus Christ "becomes flesh" to "dwell among us" (John 1:14) in the offering of himself: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven ... the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51), so that his disciples may indeed eat his flesh and drink his blood, and so have Christ himself abiding in them (John 6:52-56).⁵⁸ It is in this "becoming flesh" that we see his glory (cf. John 1:14), which, for the Gospel of John, is revealed paradigmatically upon the cross.

Approaching the Prologue, and indeed the Gospels, in this manner, also suggests a way forward for the impasse in which

much twentieth-century scholarship found itself, regarding the question of the relation between history and revelation. It is not simply by "seeing" the historical Jesus, "according to the flesh," that we contemplate the revelation of God, for those who looked on him (and, for that matter, even those who saw the risen Christ) did not truly know him, in his identity as the eternal Son of God. It is, rather, through his Passion, his passage from this world to be enthroned with God in heaven, by turning back to the Scriptures under the guidance of the Spirit, that we finally see him. As Ignatius of Antioch put it, "our God, Jesus Christ, is [now] all the more apparent, being in the Father."⁵⁹ The revelation of God in Christ is not subsumed within the horizon of this world, but rather opens for us, apocalyptically, a door into heaven, enabling us to see the glory of God.⁶⁰ Yet, paradoxically, as noted above, this glory is now established on earth.

THE GLORY OF GOD

Finally, then, what is this glory of God established upon earth? The Gospel of John leaves us in no doubt that it is the Crucified Christ, ascended in glory upon the cross as the Lord of glory, revealing to us the glory which he eternally has with the Father. Christ's word from the cross in the Gospel of John, and only there, takes us one step further in understanding this glory: "it is finished" (John 16:30: *τετέλεσται*).

As is clear, the opening of Prologue parallels the opening of Scripture itself: "in the beginning." The first chapter of Genesis continues by describing how God spoke everything into being with a divine fiat: Let there be...! Everything is spoken into existence, is concluded, and is good. Then, in Genesis 1:26, God begins a very different work, described with a subjunctive rather than an imperative: "Let us make a human being in our image, after our likeness." This is the only thing said to be God's own work, his own particular project, as it were, for the accomplishment of which everything else was merely spoken into existence as the background.

Yet, as evidenced by the early Fathers, this work is not yet complete. Consider, for instance, the words of Ignatius to the Romans, urging them not to intervene in his coming martyrdom:

It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. ...Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being [*ἄνθρωπος*]. Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God. (Rom 6)

"Birth pangs" (a typical apocalyptic motif) are upon Ignatius; he is not yet born. In fact, he is not yet alive: he urges the Romans not to wish him to die by keeping him "alive" by obstructing his martyrdom, his birth.⁶¹ Only in this way, when he will have received the pure light, will he become, finally, a human being, in the stature of "the perfect human being" (*Smyrneans* 4.2), according to "the economy leading to the new human being, Jesus Christ" (*Ephesians* 20). Moreover, following Christ, "the faithful martyr" (*Revelation* 1:5), in himself undergoing martyrdom, Ignatius hopes to become "a word of God": as he tells the Romans, "If you are silent about me, I will become a word of God [*ἐγὼ λόγος θεοῦ*], but if you desire my flesh, I will once again simply be a voice [*φωνή*]" (Rom 2).

It is in exactly the same perspective that Irenaeus, a few decades later, asserts that "the glory of God is the living human being" (*haer.* 4.20.7). He is not speaking, as we might today, of "living [this] life to the full." He is speaking, instead, of the martyr, the one living, no longer by the flesh or its breath, but by the Spirit of God, bringing together into unity the flesh and the Spirit, the two antinomies, as we saw above, Martyn describes as being established by the apocalypse of the cross. As Irenaeus put it:

For it is testified by the Lord that as 'the flesh is weak', so 'the Spirit is ready' [Mt 26:41], that is, is able to accomplish what it wills. If, therefore, anyone mixes the readiness of the Spirit as a stimulus to the weakness of the flesh, it necessarily follows that what is strong will prevail over what is weak, so that the weakness of the flesh will be absorbed by the strength of the Spirit, and such a one will no longer be carnal but spiritual because of the communion of the Spirit. In this way, therefore,

the martyrs bear witness and despise death: not after the weakness of the flesh, but by the readiness of the Spirit. For when the weakness of the flesh is absorbed, it manifests the Spirit as powerful; and again, when the Spirit absorbs the weakness, it inherits the flesh for itself, and from both of these is made a living human being: living, indeed, because of the participation of the Spirit; and human, because of the substance of the flesh.⁶²

In the very death of the martyrs, imaging Christ, who is himself the image of God, the handiwork of God is perfected as a truly living human being bearing witness to the paradoxical words of Christ that his strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). The martyr now, finally, becomes flesh, inherited by the Spirit who possesses it in such a manner that the flesh itself adopts the quality of the life-giving Spirit, and so is rendered like the Word of God (cf. *haer.* 5.9.3.). The paradigm of the living human being — flesh vivified by the Spirit — is the martyr.⁶³

The very life of God, revealed in Christ, is precisely that of laying down one's life for the sake of others. It is this divine life to which the handiwork of God, men and women, are called, and in doing so, they become, according to Ignatius and Irenaeus, human beings. Scripture, which opens by announcing the project of God, to make human beings in his image, is only concluded at the cross (which, as we have seen opens the Scriptures), with Christ's word, "it is finished," witnessed to, in a delightful irony, by none other than Pilate (and, again, only in John): "Behold the human being" (John 19:5). As Christ shows us what it is to be God by the way he dies as a human being, we in turn are the ones who must give the "fiat" to the only work said to be God's own project, in this way ourselves becoming human beings in the stature of Christ. The four dimensions of apocalypse, above and below, the beginning and the end, are thus brought together by John in the figure of the cross.

Notes

1. This is a paper I prepared for a seminar I gave in Athens. It will be published in *Synaxis* (one of the main theological journals in Greece).

2. Ernst Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," first published in ZKT 57 (1960), 162–85; translated in *ibid.* *New Testament Questions for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969), 82–107, quotation on p. 100. See also *ibid.* "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," first published in ZKT 59 (1962), 257–84; translated in *New Testament Questions*, 108–137.

3. *Ibid.*, 92; "Apocalyptic," 109. n.1.

4. *Ibid.*, 101–2.

5. *Ibid.*, 105.

6. *Ibid.*, 107.

7. Cf. Jarl Fossum, "The New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule: The Quest for Jewish Christology," SBLSP 1991, ed. E. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 638–46. For material in this vein, amongst many others, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, SJLA 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Jarl E. Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); the parts by Christopher R.A. Morray-Jones, in Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Murray Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). In many ways the various works by Margaret Barker fall within this category.

8. See especially Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroads, 1982); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998 [1987]); and the part by Christopher Rowland in Rowland and Murray Jones, *The Mystery of God*.

9. See Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1–42, for an important discussion of the different ways in which the word "apocalyptic" can be used, to refer to a literary genre, a social movement ("apocalypticism"), an apocalyptic eschatology, and apocalyptic language. As will become clear in this paper, I primarily use the term with reference to apocalyptic language, and the complex of themes that it opens up.

10. M. E. Stone, 'List of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature', in F. M. Cross, et al., eds., *Magnalia Dei* (New York, 1976), 414–52.

11. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, New Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1991]), 310.

12. J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies," in *ibid.* *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 111–123.

13. J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," in *Theological Issues*, 89–110, here p.107.

14. *Ibid.*, 108.
 15. *Ibid.*, 108-9.
 16. *Ibid.*, 110.
 17. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 317.
 18. Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16 is the exception which proves the rule: the identity of Christ is not known to Peter through "flesh and blood," but "apocalypsed" by the Father, and misunderstood by Peter, who is called "Satan" by Christ for attempting to prevent Christ from going to Jerusalem to suffer (Mt 16:17-23). The epochal study which shifted investigation into the "messianic secret" from the horizon of Jesus' own psychology and personal development, to the evangelists' account of Christ is W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge and London: James Clarke, 1971 [1901]), though see the insightful comments on Wrede and subsequent scholarship by H. Räisänen, *The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel*, trans. C. Tuckett (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1990).
 19. Luke 24:12-35. On this see Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him And He Became Invisible To Them," *Modern Theology* 18:2 (April 2002), 145-52.
 20. John 7:39: this is consistently mistranslated as "for as yet the Spirit had not been given"; the Greek is unambiguous.
 21. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 325.
 22. *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:10, trans. by R. H. Charles, rev. by J.M.T. Barton in H. F. D. Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 797.
 23. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 327.
 24. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd edn. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003 [1968]), 130, quoting Revelations 4:1, emphasis Martyn's.
 25. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 130-1.
 26. *Ibid.*, 130, fn. 198.
 27. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 404.
 28. Hengel, "The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ," in C. Horton ed., *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels: The Contribution of the Chester Beatty Codex P45* (London and New York, 2004), 13-26, at 22. The literature on the genre of the Gospels is of course immense, and must await another occasion for full examination. See esp. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 24-27.
 29. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 328-9.
 30. *Ibid.*, 328.
 31. J. Louis Martyn, "John and Paul on the Subject of Gospel and Scripture," in *Theological Issues*, 209-34.

32. *Ibid.*, 221, 224. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 475: "Although it would be expected in advance that the conception of the plight should precede the conception of the solution, Paul's thought seems to have run the other way."
 33. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible vol. 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 117-126, #7 "The Teachers."
 34. Following the Greek preserved in the *Catena in Matt.* (cf. SC 100, 712); the Latin simply has *Hic*, and similarly the Armenian.
 35. For a full exposition of Irenaeus' understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Gospel, see Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128-140.
 36. Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 1992), 2.
 37. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 149.
 38. Hays, *Echoes*, 169.
 39. *Comm. Jo.* 1.33. The point is repeated a few lines later: "Nothing of the ancients was Gospel, then, before that Gospel which came into existence because of the sojourn of Christ" (*Comm. Jo.* 1.36). Cf. *Princ.* 4.1.6: "We must add that it was after the advent of Jesus that the inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual nature of Moses' law came to light." For Origen's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Gospel, see J. Behr, *Way to Nicaea, Formation of Christian Theology*, 1 (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 169-84.
 40. *Comm. Jo.* 19.28. Cf. *On Prayer*, 22.
 41. *Comm. Jo.* 19.28, which concludes by citing Psalm 21:23 (LXX), already applied to Christ in Hebrews 2:12.
 42. Martyn, "John and Paul," 225. See also Douglas Harink, "Partakers of the Divine Apocalypse: Hermeneutics, History, and Human Agency after Martyn," in Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink, *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 73-95, esp. 87-8.
 43. Cf. Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 108. "New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament has a Christological starting point. The Old Testament is not read in the New Testament in a straight-line continuum from unambiguous expectation to irrefragable fulfillment. Rather, the entire Old Testament is reread through the lenses of the crucified Messiah." However, he adds the important nuance that this too is not a unidirectional exploitation of Scripture, but a process in which the evangelist also deepened his understanding of Christ: "The movement of thought, then, is not *exclusively* from Christ to the Scripture but also

from the scripture christologically construed to a deeper understanding of the events surrounding Christ."

44. Leontius, *Deprehensio et triumphus super Nestorianos* (PG 86A.1372c). Cf. J. Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and Their Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28–47, 66–82.

45. Cf. Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 2nd edn. (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1987), 244. Frances Young likewise points out that "There is no possibility of a 'narrative' in *theologia*, but narrative constitutes *oikonomia*; one is in time, the other beyond time." *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 143.

46. Cyril of Alexandria, *First Letter to Succensus*, 4: εἰς οὖν ἐστὶν υἱός, εἰς κύριος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ πρὸ τῆς σαρκώσεως καὶ μετὰ τὴν σάρκωσιν.

47. Cyril of Alexandria, *That Christ is One* (M.83): ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν εἶναί φαμεν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἐκ Θεοῦ μὲν Πατρὸς ὡς Θεὸν Λόγον, ἐκ σπέρματος δὲ κατὰ σάρκα τοῦ θεοσπεσίου Δαυεὶδ.

48. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Burns and Oates, 1970 [German edn 1967]), 15–21.

49. Cf. Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ's Origin* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 25–27.

50. For a full survey of scholarship and analysis of the Prologue, see Michael Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos: Studien zum Verhältnis des Johannesprologs zum Corpus des Evangeliums und zu 1 Joh* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1988).

51. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2.2, The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 96. Perhaps not surprisingly, Barth also echoes the statement from Irenaeus given above ("Since he who saves already existed,..." *haer.* 3.22.3) in his repeated insistence in CD 1.1, that what is given in the revelation of Christ, Christ is already "antecedently in himself."

52. E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd rev. edn., ed. F. N. Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 159–63.

53. Cf. Behr, "Colossians 1:13–20: A Chiastic Reading," *SVTQ* 40:4 (1996), 247–65.

54. cf. Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 494, fn. 7: "πάντα is usually translated (wrongly) as if it referred to the created universe. But the term for this, in both LXX and the New Testament, is τὰ πάντα." Cf. John Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom," in Ashton, *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18–21.

55. A parallel text, itself a paraphrase of the Prologue, is given in the Gospel of Truth, 37.21 (trans. H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae):

"Nothing happens without him nor does anything happen without the will of the Father."

56. *Haer.* 4.20.2; Rev 5:3, 6, 9; John 1:14.

57. As Rolf Noorman (*Irenäus als Paulusinterpret* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1994], 451) notes, Irenaeus does not differentiate too sharply between the "Incarnation" and the "Passion," neither as "events" nor in terms of their effects; both are embraced in the "coming" of Christ in the last times. Cf. *haer.* 3.16.6; 4.10.2; 5.17.3. All the "works" of God throughout the economy are only told from the perspective of the opening of the books in 'the last times' and so are embraced together in this apocalyptic revelation.

58. See Michel Henry's intriguing conclusions, from his phenomenological reflections, that Christ has "two fleshs": his human flesh that suffers on the cross, and the "Arch-Flesh," the Bread of Life, that is united to the righteous in the deification which is their salvation. "L'Incarnation dans une phenomenology radicale," in Michel Henry *Phénoménologie de la vie*, IV, *Sur l'éthique et la religion* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 145–54, at 154. And more fully, Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

59. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, 3: Ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐν πατρὶ ὦν μᾶλλον φαίνεται.

60. Here the work of Michel Henry has much to offer regarding the phenomenology of revelation has much to offer, as does the saturated phenomena of Jean-Luc Marion, but exploration of this must wait for another for another occasion. Cf. J. Behr "Reading the Fathers Today," in J. Mihoc and S. Aldea eds. *A Celebration of Living Theology: Festschrift for Fr Andrew Louth*, (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 7–19.

61. See again the intriguing phenomenological insights of Michel Henry: "To be born is not to come into the world. To be born is to come into life." *I Am The Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003 [1996]), 59.

62. *Haer.* 5.9.2. Cf. PO 12.5, 738–9 (frag. 6); TU 36.3, 14–19 (frag. 10).

63. Cf. H. J. Jaschke, "Das Martyrium ist die Grundform christlicher Existenz" ("Pneuma und Moral: Der Grund christlicher sittlichkeit aus der Sicht des Irenäus von Lyon," *Studia Moralia* 14 (1976), 239–81, at 256); Behr, *Irenaeus*, 198–203.