

Chapter 23
"The Word Became Flesh":
Theology of the Gospel of John

The theology of the Gospel of John is stated clearly by the author himself at the end of his Gospel: "This is written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." The declaration is couched in simple words of one and two syllables. Yet this Gospel is the most complex of all the Gospels, both in its theological understanding and in its form and organization. It is important therefore to keep this single purpose in mind: through this book the reader will come to comprehend the uniqueness of the activity of God in Jesus Christ and, as he does, he will share in the life which God shared with God's Son. Jesus.

In order to see what this Gospel has to tell of Jesus, we have to consider its theology from a number of perspectives.

I.

The book begins by listing seven titles given to Jesus by his first followers. Each was given to show the significance of Jesus and to relate him to God's activity as seen through the Old Testament.

Jesus was called "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (1: 29). The term means "a young horned ram," and it may refer to the lamb that was sacrificed at the Jewish Passover through whose sacrifice the Israelite was forgiven his sin; or to the passage in Isaiah 53 in which the suffering servant of God was pictured as a sheep who before his shearers was silent, and John may have meant that Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament idea of a servant who suffers; in Jewish circles there was even a statement that the messiah would come as the bellwether of the flock to make an end of sin by removing it. In Jesus, the "lamb of God" had come to take away the sins of the world."

"He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:33) was a second title for Jesus. John the Baptizer had introduced a new activity into Jewish life, that of baptism with water. His baptism was a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." But the Christ, when he came, was to introduce something even more important into Jewish life, "baptism by the Holy Spirit." Hints of this activity had been given in the Old Testament. The spirit of God had come upon the leaders of the people of Israel, especially upon men like Moses and David. The prophet Joel had even looked forward to a time when this spirit would be

poured upon all the people, young and old, servants as well as masters. With the coming of Jesus, this great event transpired: the spirit of God in Christ was offered to everyone who participated in his life.

He was also given the name of "Rabbi." The rabbi was a teacher of the faith of Israel and, with the development of the synagogues as a center for worship and instruction, rabbis had begun to take a leading part in Jewish life. The word itself meant "my greatness," a term of honor for the one who did the teaching. Jesus fulfilled the function for his followers and the term fit him well.

He was called "The Messiah" (1:41). Denotatively, this meant "the anointed one," someone set apart by God for a special purpose. In the Old Testament it had come to mean "the son of David who will sit again on the throne of Israel." This expectation began with Isaiah of Jerusalem in the seventh century B.C. and was picked up by other prophets. By the time of Jesus, the hope for a messiah was strong in Jewish life. The Pharisees hoped for someone who would inaugurate the new age of God's reign of law over all the earth; the zealots longed for a military leader to drive the Romans out of the sacred land. These hopes and dreams began to center upon Jesus. So he was called "The Christ," which, like the word messiah, meant "the anointed one" and was an exact translation of the Hebrew concept into the Greek language.

Jesus was also called "Son of God" (1:49). At the time the word had merely overtones of divinity; it was not used to designate a divine being but rather a person who was a representative of the divine one. When John had earlier spoken of Jesus as "son," he used an unusual term, "monogeneis." The monogeneis was the eldest son who was legally able to represent his father fully and completely in the father's dealing with other parties: this son spoke for the father, acted for the father, and was able to bind the father to legal contracts with other parties. He had, in short, his father's power of attorney. In using this term, John meant to say that Jesus bore the power of attorney of God and could speak and act authoritatively for God in any human situation.

"King of Israel" (1:49) was another title given to Jesus, and it was nearly synonymous with "Messiah." By the time John employed the term, Israel had no king and had not had one for more than five hundred years. Was the title used primarily by the zealot underground in Judea who hoped by rebellion against Rome to set up a new king who could challenge Caesar? Or was it used by religious circles who recognized that Israel had no king but God and that anyone called "King of Israel" would be the new religious leader sent by God to carry out God's will and work?

"Son of man" (1:51) was another name applied to Jesus. Oddly enough, this was the title given to express the divine nature in Jesus. Like the other titles, "Son of man" had an Old Testament history. It was first used in Psalm 8, where it simply meant "man." But when

Daniel in his prophecy wanted to refer to a divine figure who would come at the end of the age, he called this strange one "the son of man" and described him as a pre-existent heavenly man who descended onto earth, entered fallen humanity, and ascended again to the glorious realm of the Father. Jesus accepted this designation for himself primarily, I believe, because it was not as well defined as the others, and he could make the title mean what he chose to make of it. As given in John's Gospel, Son of man meant that Jesus was the ideal type of the new humanity who are reborn through him; Jesus and his new community now replaced the people of Israel as God's representatives on earth.

Each of these remarkable titles, given only to the most exalted personages of Israel, was applied to Jesus, and each in its own way contributed to the understanding of his identity. But there was a reverse side to the process as well. Not only did Jesus accept these titles but, by the force of his own person, he changed them. Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of Man; at the same time, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of Man was Jesus, this one who was born in a particular place, carried on his own distinctive ministry, and died a particularly brutal death. By placing these titles at the beginning of his Gospel, John was saying that we know the meaning of Jesus when we think of him in terms of these titles; he was also telling us that we know the meaning of these titles only as we see them fulfilled in Jesus.

More than any other Gospel, John made an attempt to relate Christ to both Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. Mark had made a beginning to this, but John's Gospel carried it through with rigor and precision.

He introduced this concern in the first line of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." The phrase for "Word" in Greek was "logos," and it meant one thing to the Jew who read it and a different thing to the Greek. The Jew in reading this phrase would immediately be struck by its relation to the first line in Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and earth." His thoughts would go back to the creating Word of God which brought the world into being and which later called Israel out of Egypt, and to the Word of God spoken through the prophets when Israel was disobedient to its Lord. When John said, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," the Jew would understand that in Jesus this creating, calling, judging Word of God, revealed in the Old Testament, had incorporated itself into the person of Jesus. But to the Greek logos meant something else; it meant "the very structure of the reality of the universe, that in the universe which is really real," the form behind all the appearances of life; this word had had that meaning in Greek philosophy for over four centuries. We still use it this way when we speak of anthropo-logy, the logos of humankind, the study of the inner structure of human life and society; or zoo-logy, the study of the structure of animal life; or bio-logy, the study of the structure of all of life. The Greek therefore would understand John as saying that Jesus is intimately related to the inner structure of the universe itself; and when "the word became flesh" in Jesus, his life and person revealed the

inner reality of the universe. In this way John related the event of Jesus Christ to the life of both Jew and Gentile.

In John's Gospel, unlike the synoptics, the exact moment of Jesus' decision to go to the cross also came in connection with the Gentiles. Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Some Greeks came to Philip and asked if they could see Jesus; presumably they were "God-fearers" from the synagogues of the Diaspora who had already heard of him and wanted to talk with him personally better to understand his aims and intentions. When this was announced to Jesus, he in turn announced that the hour of his death was at hand. The coming to him of these Gentiles convinced Jesus that his mission and message was not limited to the locale around Jerusalem or to the Jewish people only; his ministry was for Greek as well as Jew, for all the people of the world. The coming of Gentiles occasioned Jesus' decision to accept crucifixion at the hands of his tormentors.

The influence of Jesus upon Jew and Greek was also seen in a single unique line John added to the account of his crucifixion. When Jesus was placed on the cross, the charge against him was nailed to the scaffolding above him. This was normal procedure: Roman authorities wanted everyone to know why persons were crucified in order to dissuade others from committing similar acts that could lead them to a similar fate. In the instance of Jesus' execution, something unusual was added to the procedure. The charge was written in three languages, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, respectively the language of religion, of law and government, and of culture. By drawing attention to this feature of the crucifixion, John was remarking on his own understanding of the relation of God to the world. On the one hand, these languages spoke of the remarkable achievements humankind had made. They had produced an estimable religion in the Hebrew faith; in the Roman state the most just of governments and most comprehensive of legal systems; and in Hellenism, with its poetry, drama, music, philosophy, and architecture, the finest and most meaningful of cultures. John recognized this for the achievement that it was. At the same time, he pointed to the irony of the situation confronting Jesus. For it was not the worst of religions but the best--not the worst of cultures but the best--which joined hands to crucify Jesus Christ. Not humankind at its worst but humankind at its best needs the redemption of God through Jesus Christ, said John: "For God so loved the world that he gave his son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life."

In John's Gospel Jesus was not only the judge and savior of cultural and national movements but also of individual lives. He judged human pretensions but in so doing he would save us from them. Four particular persons were depicted as types of the salvation wrought through Jesus Christ.

The first was "The Man Who Knew Too Much," Nicodemus, whose account was found in chapter 3. When Jesus met Nicodemus, the rabbi's first words were, "Teacher, we know..." A well-taught Jewish leader conversant with the law of the people and the ways of

God, Nicodemus did know a great deal. But Jesus engaged him in a conversation about the new birth and the new life, and Nicodemus grew so confused that Jesus finally had to say to him, "Are you a teacher in Israel and do not know these things?" The wisdom of God in Jesus confuses the wisdom of humankind; only as we are able to learn the truth that is in Christ will we have true knowledge of God.

Jesus met the second, "The Woman with Five Husbands," at a well in Samaria. When he questioned her about her husband, she replied that she had no husband, but Jesus observed that she had five of them. She was convinced she was speaking to a prophet and to get his questioning off ethical issues and back to religion where she felt less threatened, she asked a religious question: where should we worship, here or in Jerusalem? Jesus replied that where he is, there is the true center of the worship of God. Samaritans came out from the city and when Jesus spoke to them many believed because of what he had said. But the woman did not. She continued to say to all who would listen, "He told me everything I ever did!" and for her that was not a cause for repentance but for rejoicing! Jesus met a person whose ethical life was in disorder, and his presence judged her and offered her the opportunity for renewal and redemption.

Jesus found the third, "The Man Who Enjoyed Ill Health," chapter 5, lying by the pool of Bethzatha. People believed that there was healing power in the pool and that the first sick person to enter it after its waters had been ruffled would be healed. But this man had been lying there for thirty-eight years because of some youthful excess, with not one friend who would assist him into the waters and who then betrayed to the authorities the one man who tried to befriend and aid him. Yet, said John with something that sounded like a sigh, it was for such a one as this that Jesus himself would die.

The last is "The Man of Faith" of chapter 9 who had been blind since birth. Jesus saw his condition, made a solution of spittle and clay, placed it on the man's eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He did and he came away seeing. The Pharisees thought they had an opportunity to trap Jesus through him, so they asked the blind one what had happened. The man bore his testimony: "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see." When the Pharisees replied that no one who was a sinner like Jesus could accomplish this, the man remained insistent on one point: he had been blind, but now he saw. The Pharisees were insistent on two points: Jesus could not do this because he was a sinner, and the man had never been blind in the first place! When the man insisted that what he had said was true, they cast him out.

This story points to the paradox of Jesus' ministry: whoever comes to Jesus "sees" and whoever does not is blind. So, the blind man saw and the seeing Pharisees were blind--to life, to God, to human need, to honest human testimony--and the difference lay in the quality of one's relationship to Jesus. As he met the individual men and women of Judea and Samaria, Jesus' wisdom judged and redeemed the ambiguities of their lives; his love

judged and redeemed the most hateful of people; his light caused some to see and others to be more blind than ever before.

Another way John had of picturing Jesus' relationship to God was by means of the "I Am" statements of his Gospel.

This phrase "I Am" was the name by which God had revealed to Moses on the mountain of the burning bush and which Isaiah of Babylon had used in his prophecy of the restoration of the people of Judah to their homeland. The revealing of this name accompanied the two great moments of the history of Israel: that of their calling as a people under Moses and of their restoration under Isaiah. Now a third decisive moment was added to the others: the moment of the reconstitution of this people under Jesus. At this third critical moment the "I Am" stands forth--and the one who revealed the character of the "I Am" was Jesus.

There are a series of seven "I Am" statements in John's Gospel.

"I am the bread of life," said Jesus in 6:35; whoever eats this bread will never again hunger. "I am the light of the world," (8:12); whoever walks in my light will never stumble. "I am the door of the sheep," (10:7); whoever dwells in this sheepfold is truly of the people of God. "I am the good shepherd" (10:11) willing to lay down my life for the sheep; whoever hears my voice will be led to the Father. "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); whoever participates in my life will not die but have life into eternity. "I am the true and living way" (14:6); whoever comes to me comes also to my father. "I am the true vine" (15:1); whoever is united with me is united with the Father.

These statements show how John pictured the people to whom Jesus was sent. They were a hungry people seeking for the bread that lasts; a confused people stumbling in the darkness and not able to make their way through the dark night of the soul. They were an alienated people hunting community, and a lonesome people seeking someone who would love them: mortals, fearful of death, people who had lost their way and who had lost God. But Jesus came; and in him God acted decisively to resolve this pathetic human condition. Christ is our food: as food nourishes and sustains body and soul, so does he. Christ is our light: in his light we see the true light. Christ is the center of our community: as we are drawn to him, so do we find authentic fellowship with the others drawn to him. Christ is the love of God, a love willing to go even to death to demonstrate itself. Christ is our resurrection; having given us the opportunity to respond to him in this life, God renews that opportunity in the life to come. Christ is our way to God: when we respond to him, we are truly responding to God. Christ is God for us: united with him, we are united with the God who sent him. In Christ God acts decisively to redeem us from the ambiguities of life and to restore us to the life God had in mind for us when God conceived this human world of ours.

In these statements there is an identity of God with Christ that is more complete than anything else found in Scripture; by using the words "I Am" in connection with himself, Jesus was consciously aligning himself with the most sacred name given to God. In the person of Jesus Christ "I Am" stands revealed for all ages as a God who seeks God's people in their human condition in precisely the way Jesus sought out the people of his own day and time. Our clearest picture of God--our most accurate picture of the activity of God--comes when we see God acting in Jesus Christ.

In chapter 12:20-50, John gives us the most explicit statement in the Gospels on the meaning of Christ's death.

The explanation began with an analogy drawn from nature: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." In other words, if Jesus had failed to sacrifice his life, no one would ever hear of him again and deservedly so; for only as the grain dies to its life as grain is it able to be turned into the cereal forms that nourish human life.

The act of his death is judgment upon the world. The world's best religion, government and culture conspired to crucify the Christ. But if Christ is what he said he was--namely, the accredited representative of God--then God is judging this way of life. For despite all its pretensions about its own goodness, this world is not even sensitive enough to God to recognize his Christ when he comes but instead it has to destroy him. Is not this the judgment, that the best comes and the good has to destroy it or be destroyed by it?

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But the act of his death is also the way that men and women will be brought to Christ: "If I be lifted up, I will draw all to me." The lifting up is the act of Christ being placed on the cross. When men and women see him there--the victory he wins over evil, the love of God that cannot be put aside, the appeal God makes to us in this most compelling manner--they will be drawn to him as metal to a magnet. Not every person will be drawn to him, of course, but every kind of person will be drawn: Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, men and women, black and white, strong and weak, powerful and powerless. All human history since his crucifixion has been an illustration of the drawing power of the powerless Christ.

Before he went to the cross, Jesus made one final appeal to the people around: "The light is with you a little longer. Walk while you have the light, that you may become sons of light." The critical moment for mankind had come: the only time left to it was in the opportunity to make a positive response to Jesus Christ and to walk in the light that came from him. To use the opportunity would be life itself; to refuse it would be to choose the darkness of death rather than the light of life.

Saying this, Jesus went to the cross.

He went as the lamb of God, slain in sacrifice for the sins of the world; as the anointed of God, rejected by the world; as the teacher of the ways of God, whose own people will not hear his teaching; as the King of Israel, his only throne the cross and his only crown the circle of thorns; as the son of man, the one authentic human being; as son of God, and whoever would seek reality in life needs to search for it in him; as the revelation of God, and as he died he proclaimed that this revelation had been completed once for all. In John's Gospel Jesus spoke of the meaning of his cross and then went out to hang upon it, that we might comprehend its meaning for ourselves.

One more way to describe the relationship between God and Christ is to trace the meanings of the words "life" and "life eternal."

The line between them is hard to draw, since John frequently let one blend over into the other. "Life" is in God, as we see in 1:4, and it comes to the world as the logos becomes flesh in Christ. This life was also called "life eternal, life everlasting"; the word lying behind the phrase meant "eons," and the phrase "eternal life" is properly translated "life of the eons, life of the ages." It denotes both quantity and quality: quantity in that it is never-ending and quality in that it is the kind of life which God lives in the ages upon ages, where life is not despoiled by human sin. It is God's own quality/quantity of life which God opens to humankind in the person of Christ. In Christ, the life eternal enters the sphere of human life and this is an act of graciousness on God's part: "God so loved the world that God gave God's son, that whoever believes on him will have 'the life of the ages.' "

Jesus' prayer in 17:2-3 brings the matter to a climax: "Just as you, Father, have given to the son authority over all flesh, so to everyone whom you have given to him he shall give to them life eternal. And this is the life eternal, that they know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ." The equation is an exact one: "This is life eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ." To have this quality of life, one must know Jesus Christ.

The "knowing" is not merely a cognitive act. The biblical use of "know" has to do with a commitment of the whole person: It was first used in Scripture as the act of sexual intercourse: " Adam knew his wife and she conceived." As such, it meant the complete and irrevocable commitment of one person to another in the most intimate way possible. Amos (3:2) used it to describe the relationship between God and Israel, and again it carried the sense of total commitment: "You only have I known of all the peoples of the earth." Here John uses it to describe the relationship of God to Christians through Christ: whoever makes this irrevocable commitment to God as revealed in Christ has eternal life.

And has it already: the present tense needs to be stressed. Eternal life is not introduced into human life at the moment of death; it enters at the moment of full and complete

commitment to Christ. To be committed to Christ means to make him central in life; seek his approval at all times; find in him our strength and support; construct life with him as its model; serve the causes he serves and love the people he loves. It means no longer responding to the alienation of life, its confusion, lonesomeness, lostness--all of which belong to the sphere of sin--but responding beyond these to the love of God in Jesus Christ. This is John's affirmation to men and women who fear mortality and guilt; to respond fully in all conscious ways to Jesus Christ is to have eternal life, in this life and in the life to come.

The Gospel concludes with the last beatitude Christ ever spoke, and this beatitude is addressed to us all.

It was given originally to Thomas, one of Christ's disciples, who had been especially devastated by the crucifixion of Jesus; all his hopes and dreams for Jesus had been dashed with his master's death. When Christ rose from the dead and appeared to the other disciples, Thomas was not with them. The other disciples told him of Christ's resurrection but he was not convinced and gave words to his doubt by saying, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." One week later Jesus returned to be with his disciples and in coming he announced to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands; put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not be faithless but believing." Thomas responded with the greatest confession of all: "My Lord and my God." To which Jesus replied: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."

In recounting this, John had his eye on the people of his own day. They too like Thomas wanted visible signs of the presence of Christ. John was saying to them, "If you receive such a sign, well and good; believe in Christ on account of it." But to John there was a greater blessing than that: not to see the risen Christ and still to believe on him. "Believing on him," like "knowing him," means to attach yourself to him with all your heart, build your life with him as its center, make him the central person in your life, seek his guidance in decisions, his love in the midst of hostilities, his friendship in our lostness, attaching yourselves to the fellowship of those who love him. This we can do, said John, without ever having seen the risen Christ. It is for this purpose that he wrote his Gospel: that you and I, and people like ourselves, who have heard of the risen Christ but have never seen him, can still believe on him and, believing, have life in his name.

II.

Exploring the theology of the Gospel of John is only part of the fascination of studying this unique Gospel. Another major attraction is to seek clues about its composition. Scholars have debated the subject for years, centuries even; the book is a veritable treasury of clues for the sleuths who seek solution to its intriguing mysteries.

John's methodology differed greatly from that of the synoptic Gospels. John had source material similar to that which went into the synoptic gospels — a passion narrative, accounts of Jesus' resurrection, sets of controversy stories, and blocks of teaching material — but he employed them in a far different way.

The story of Jesus and the "Man Who Enjoyed Ill Health" is an example of this. The account began with the incident of the healing; the man took up his bed and walked; Then the narrative turned into a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews who did not believe in him; but the dialogue soon trailed off into a monologue as Jesus began to explain the relationship of the Father to the Son and the way the Son must continue to do the work that presently engages the Father. This way of developing the account is paradigmatic of the way that the writer of John's Gospel organized his material. He would begin with a narrative, a story similar to one told in the synoptic Gospels. To explain the meaning of the narrative, there would follow a dialogue which brought out some of the major themes of the narrative. At some indiscernible point the dialogue would cease and a monologue by Jesus would grow out of it. At least seven sections built on this model — more, if we count the narratives within narratives — were incorporated into the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John.

Another unique feature is the "prologue to the Gospel" found in 1:1-18. Here John introduced a number of themes he later picked up in his Gospel: Jesus as light and life, grace and truth; his baptism at the hands of John; his coming to his own and his own not receiving him. The section was cast into poetic, almost hymnic, form and it has absolutely mesmerized scholars. Was it a Christian hymn that John used to introduce his work? Or a pre-Christian poem to the creating word of God, to which John added his own theology? Was it a poem or hymn that John himself wrote, or which was used in his community for worship of Christ? Of whatever source, it is one of the best known and loved pieces of writing of the New Testament and serves as a fitting introduction to Johannine theology.

For the central portion of his Gospel, John appears to have drawn upon different sources for the ministry of Jesus than the synoptic writers used. The most obvious difference is that the synoptics spoke of a lengthy ministry in Galilee and a short one in Judea; whereas in John most of Jesus' ministry was conducted in and around Jerusalem and he gave hints only of the ministry in Galilee. In a strange way, therefore, the two sets of Gospels complement each other and both are needed to portray the completeness of Jesus' work: the synoptics reported what he did in Galilee and the Gospel of John related the ministry in Judea.

The lengthy section that was inserted between Jesus' decision to go to the cross and the actual moment of his passion is also fascinating. It began with a supper but, instead of emphasizing the distribution of the bread and cup, John centered the supper around the

matter of foot washing. Like other significant sections in the Gospel, the narrative that introduced the episode turned into a dialogue and then a monologue and, here only, the section concluded with a prayer. There was a suggestion in the synoptics that Jesus had had a lengthy discussion with his disciples at the time of the last meal; John filled in the details of the discussion in this longest single speech attributed to Jesus in any part of our Christian writings.

John was able to use the sources available to him in a way that fulfilled perfectly the outline he had in mind for his Gospel. Beginning with the prologue, he introduced the titles given to Jesus and then in the event-dialogic-monologic episodes he set forth his understanding of Jesus' ministry and its meaning. The last of these episodes, describing the Greeks coming to him through his disciple Andrew, provided the bridge between Jesus' public ministry and his death. In the upper room following the foot-washing of his disciples, he expounded on the meaning of his passion; and from there he went forth to die. His crucifixion was detailed, as was his resurrection, and we are left to ponder about this marvelous one in whom the life and love of God was perfectly revealed.

Who was the original audience for this Gospel? We do not know for certain, but my own hypothesis is that it was written for a Jewish-Greek congregation in the Diaspora. This would help explain the use of both Jewish and Gentile terminology in describing the meaning of Jesus; the key position given in the Gospel to Diaspora-Greeks whose coming to Jesus precipitated his death; the way the Gospel conspicuously translated Hebrew words into Greek; and why the writer's knowledge of Jerusalem and its environs seems to have been that of a tourist rather than a resident. In one of the cities of the ancient world was a Christian community composed of Jews and Greeks out of whose life and thought this Gospel was written.

There is even an indication as to which city it was but to discover that we have to trace as well as we can the process by which this Gospel was written. The chief source for the unique information of this Gospel appears to be the one called in the Gospel "the Beloved disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was a shadowy figure who attended the last meal, received the mother of Jesus as his legacy and care, accompanied Peter to the grave and made the proper interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus. He appeared to have been a commanding figure with access to important persons and places in Jerusalem, which would give him credibility as a source of the Jerusalem material in this Gospel. One of his followers, a man called by other Christians "The Elder John," centered his activities in and around the Asia Minor city of Ephesus; he was the spiritual father of that community and he developed his own ministry around the reminiscences of the beloved disciple. In that same community in Ephesus was a man I can only call "The Writer John" who used the materials received from the others and who put the Gospel into the approximate form we have it today. That does not end the matter, however; there is evidence that the Gospel was worked over once more before it was put into its present form; shall we call this

redactor "The Editor John?" From this same community in Ephesus the three Johannine letters were later to emerge and earlier the city was the scene of the work of Paul. Ephesus, the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, located a few miles from the eastern seacoast of the Aegean Sea, was the cultural and commercial center of western Asia Minor, the meeting place of Hellenism and the Mideast; and from it came the Gospel of John, the simplest and most complex of the Gospels, whose theological position has given birth to a central portion of our present New Testament and has nourished the spiritual lives of Christian people from that day into our own.