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The Johannine Prologue: Divine Initiative in Salvation

By

Constantine P. Papathanassiou¹

It is acknowledged that the John's Gospel is for the beginner in faith and for the mature Christian. It's the text with a great immediate appeal, which seems never to be failed. Although it's a single Gospel, its depth of interpretation is like swimming in the deepest part of the sea. Exactly every reader of this Gospel is in front of one of the most serious texts of the New Testament and its theology².

The prologue of the Fourth Gospel is like an *overture*, a kind of introduction to the whole Gospel³; above all it's the theological story that combines some serious statements, essential concepts, a few events and their theological explanation. Among the coming of John the Baptist as a witness of Jesus (Jn 1:6-7), the sacred author refers mostly to Jesus Christ as the Word (Io,goj) and the being with God the Father and to its central historical event, the becoming "flesh" (v. 14)⁴.

"Hardly any other passage of the New Testament has attracted so much scholarly attention as the Prologue to John's Gospel. It is, in fact, one of the most fascinating texts of the New Testament, so familiar and yet totally strange. It has played a crucial part in the formation of the church doctrine and was also popular amongst heretics"⁵.

In this important story of the Gospel, one of the most magnificent pieces of religious literature ever written, Jesus is confined to historical considerations and to the history of

¹ Rev. Fr Constantine Papathanassiou is Dr. Theology of the National and Capodistrian University of Athens. His dissertation was written in the field of Johannine Theology. He has also written many articles on John's Gospel. As a priest of the Greek Orthodox Church belongs to Holy Metropolis of Nea Smirni (in Athnes, Greece).

² For the Commentaries on the 4G, see the essential ones: C. K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St. John. An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd edit. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978). G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco: Word Books Publ., 1987). R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1: I-XII, Vol. 2: XII-XXI, AB 29/29A (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 1970). R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, transl. by G. Beasley-Murray et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971). E. HAENCHEN, *John 1-2*, edit. & transl. by R. Funk, HCHCB (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC, repr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987). F. J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, SP 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998). L. MORRIS, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, rev. edit. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1995). H. N. RIDDERBOS, *The Gospel According to John. A Theological Commentary*, transl. by J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1997). R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John. Vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on Chap. 1-4. Vol. 2: Commentary on Chap. 5-12. Vol. 3: Commentary on Chap. 13-21*, transl. by K. Smyth, C. Hastings, D. Smith et al., HTCNT (London: Burns & Oates, 1968-1982). R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium, IV. Teil: Ergänzende Auslegungen und Exkurse* (Freiburg: Herder, 1984). For further commentaries, see: G. VAN BELLE, *Johannine Bibliography 1966-1985. A Cumulative Bibliography on the Fourth Gospel* (Louvain: Leuven UP, 1988), 147-167.

³ HAENCHEN, *John*, 1:101.

⁴ BARRETT, "The Prologue", *Gospel*, 149-170. BEASLEY-MURRAY, "The Prologue (1:1-18)", *John*, 1-17. BROWN, "The Introductory Hymn (i 1-18)", *Gospel*, 1:3-37. BULTMANN, "1.1-18: Prologue", *Gospel*, 13-83. HAENCHEN, "Prologue: Introduction", *John*, 1:101-140. LINDARS, "Prologue: Jesus in his Cosmic Setting (1.1-18)", *Gospel*, 77-100. MOLONEY, "The Prologue (1:1-18)", *Gospel*, 33-48. MORRIS, "The Prologue (1:1-18)", *Gospel*, 63-113. RIDDERBOS, "The Prologue", *Gospel*, 17-59. SCHNACKENBURG, "The Prologue", *Gospel*, 1:221-281.

⁵ A. S. JENSEN, "The Prologue: John 1:1-18", in *John's Gospel As Witness: The Development of the Early Christian Language of Faith* (Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies; Aldershot: Ashgate Publ., 2004), 69-93, here 69.

salvation⁶. This is perhaps the desire of John, who wants to place Jesus in the cosmic setting of his relationship with the God Father⁷. This statement is taking place in the world, “in this world (8:23; 16:33 et al), and so the 4G presents itself not only as a vigorous attack on unbelief, but also as a solid witness to the truth of Church’s proclamation⁸.

The johannine prologue refers to salvation as the whole Gospel intends to bestow the evidence that Jesus is indeed the Christ, “the savior of the world (o` swth.r tou/ ko,smou; 4:42). This is its serious theological purpose, although it’s not stated in “expressis verbis”. Käsemann’s deduction is that the purpose of the 4G is the “proclaiming the world-wide and saving-historical dimension of christological event”⁹. In this prologue the term salvation (swthri,a) is not in use, but we can see the traces and the background of salvation. Morris argues that salvation is due to the divine initiative, as he writes:

“The thought of the divine initiative in salvation is one of the great doctrines of this Gospel, and indeed of the Christian faith. People like to feel independent. They think that they come or that they can come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility.

No one, no one at all can come unless the Father draws him”¹⁰.

This comment is referring to Jn 6:44a, that the Evangelist records the Jesus words: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”. As Marshall writes for the 4G “salvation is entirely due to God’s initiative”¹¹. So, can we only speak about the divine initiative in salvation? How can we understand this statement in the johannine prologue? Is it the divine initiative the only presupposition for salvation? Let’s see the real facts concerning the initiative for the salvation¹².

A. The Initiative for the Salvation

The notion of salvation (swthri,a) we can see under the main theme of the 4G. It’s undoubted that we have here the presentation of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God who came into this world in order to bear witness to the truth and to give his life, so that everybody

⁶ R. A. BURRIDGE, *John: A Guide for Reflection and Prayer*, DBC 4 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publ., 2007), 30.

⁷ So LINDARS, *Gospel*, 76.

⁸ See L. R. FARLEY, *The Gospel of John: Beholding the Glory*, OBSC (California: Conciliar Press, 2006), 9.

⁹ E. KÄSEMANN, *The Testament of Jesus. A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, transl. by G. Krodel, NTL (London: SCM Press, 1968), 23. See also the theologies: C. R. KOESTER, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). D. LEE, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad Publ., 2002). I. H. MARSHALL, *A Concise New Testament Theology* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 186-201. I. H. MARSHALL, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 491-528.

¹⁰ MORRIS, *Gospel*, 328-329.

¹¹ MARSHALL, *Theology*, 521.

¹² There are a lot of significant and specific works or articles about the johannine prologue. In addition to the titles of note 2, see: C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 263-265, 294-296. C. H. DODD, “The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and Christian Worship”, in F. L. CROSS (ed.), *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (London: A. Mowbray, 1957), 9-22. C. S. KEENER, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publ., 2003), I: 331-363. K. WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium. I. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10*, TKNT 4,1 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000), 35-43. Furthermore, C. BARRETT, “The Prologue of St John’s Gospel”, in C. K. Barrett, *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), 27-48, that he gives a history of interpretation and the views of R. Bultmann, J. Bernard, C. Burney, E. Käsemann, R. Brown, R. Schnackenburg, J. Jeremias and others. He concludes that the johannine prologue is necessary for the gospel as the gospel for the prologue. M.-É. BOISMARD, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean*, LD 11 (Paris: Du Cerf, 1953), which is a special monograph for the johannine prologue. P. BORGES, “Logos was the True Light. Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John”, *NovT* 14 (1972), 115-130 [repr. in D. E. ORTON (ed.), *The Composition of the John’s Gospel. Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum*, BRBS 2 (Leiden: E. Brill, 1999), 107-122]. P. BORGES, “Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John”, *NTS* 16 (1969-1970), 288-295. R. BULTMANN, “The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John”, in J. ASHTON (ed.), *The Interpretation of John*, SNTI, 2nd edit. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 27-46. M. ENDO, *Creation and Christology. A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts*, WUNT 2/149 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). A. FEUILLET, *Le Prologue du Quatrième Évangile. Étude de Théologie Johannique* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968). E. HARRIS, *Prologue and Gospel. The Theology of the Fourth Gospel*, JSNTS 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield AP, 1994). M. HOOKER, “John the Baptist and the Johannine Prologue”, *NTS* 16 (1969-1970), 354-358. P. LAMARCHE, “The Prologue of John”, in J. ASHTON (ed.), *Interpretation*, 47-65. E. L. MILLER, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John. The Significance of John 1:3-4*, NTSup 60 (Leiden: E. Brill, 1989). J. PAINTER, “Christology and the History of the Johannine Community in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel”, *NTS* 30 (1984), 460-474, who argues that the prologue comes from a sectarian Jewish hymnic source. H. RIDDERBOS, “The Structure and Scope of the Prologue to the Gospel of John”, *NovT* 8 (1966), 180-201 [repr. in D. ORTON (ed.), *Composition*, 41-62]. J. SANDERS, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John” καὶ “The Prologue of John”, in J. SANDERS, *The N.T. Christological Hymns. Their Historical Religious Background*, SNTS MS 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971), 20-25 καὶ 29-57 correspondingly. T. VON AQUIN, *Der Prolog des Johannes-Evangeliums. Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura (Caput I, Lectio I-XI)*, Übersetzung, Einführung und Erläuterungen von W. Klünker (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1986). For further specific bibliography, see also BROWN, *Gospel*, 1:36-37.

who believes in him might have the opportunity of receiving eternal life. This eternal life is nothing else than the life in Christ, and as he is an eternal being with the God the Father, so the believer receive the gift of the same eternal life, the gift of salvation.

This is also the special teaching of salvation in 4G. It's not only the general concept of salvation in Christianity as the state of being saved from the power of evil, nor the way of protecting somebody from danger, disaster or loss, but the state of receiving the eternal life of Christ, who "so much loved the world... in order that every man who believes has the eternal life" (Jn 3:16). So, Brown says that "the Prologue is a description of the history of salvation in hymnic form"¹³.

1. *The divine persons.* The fact of salvation and the johannine prologue begin with the divine persons as the protagonists. The opening lines of the prologue echo the beginning word of the book of Genesis and hence of the entire Old Testament. However, the words "in the beginning of John differ from the same words of Genesis; it's not simply an "exposition of Gn 1:1ff. as Borgen has argued. The beginning of John is deeper and more essential; the reader of the Gospel is guided to the throne of the Godhead, not only in the beginning of the creation, as in the OT. So the johannine beginning has a broader meaning than that which is found in Genesis¹⁴ and the 4G refers to the something behind the Genesis, to the solemn Godhead.

Jn 1:1ff. constitutes God's revelation and at the same time the beginning of mankind's salvation by the Word. He is the main person of God's revelation and through him the humans receive God the Father's revelation. The existence of the Word is "with God and he is "God" and "he was in the beginning with God (v1-2). No further details are given here on the character of his relationship to God Father. The johannine portrait of Word is completed in the following lines, with other divine attributions. So, the first feature of the Word is his divine and antecedent existence.

As for the god initiative in salvation we can also add that these first verses of the 4G have great significance, especially the thrice-repeated "he was", because the Evangelist will relate salvation with the only person of Word. Co instantaneously, with that very simplicity the Evangelist speaks for the Word in a Christological sense and his utterly unique relationship of oneness with the Father. It is apparent in the whole gospel, that the Word as the Son of God is completely united with the God Father and in complete agreement with him. So, this state of being defines the kind of salvation as one unique for mankind.

2. *The creation as the first step of initiative.* The presentation of divine Word is followed by his very first important work for the salvation, the creation of the world. The Word is now presented as God's agent in creation; "all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (Jn 1:3). This cosmological perspective and accurately the act of creation by God point the first step of divine initiative in salvation.

Although this creation belief can be paralleled in Jewish, Hellenistic and Christian sources, John wants to give emphasis upon the role of the Word. So, the Word is not an occasional or accidental mediator in creation, nor merely an instrument or servant used by the Father, but he is the co-Creator with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Gn 1; Ps 32:6.9; Heb 1:2). In this way we

¹³ BROWN, *Gospel*, 1:23-24. O. Hofius calls this prologue as "Logos-Hymnus" ("Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1,1-18", in O. HOFIUS & H.-C. KAMMLER, *Johannesstudien. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*, WUNT 88 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996], 1-23). The beginning of 4G is due to "a gifted hymnist in the community" (HAENCHEN, *John*, 1:101).

¹⁴ RIDDERBOS, *Gospel*, 24. He writes later that "for between Genesis 1 and John 1 lies the Christ-event, and therein lies the 'plus' (if one may call it that) of John over Genesis" (*Gospel*, 25). See also C. M. CARMICHAEL, *The Story of Creation. Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996). M. ENDO, *Creation and Christology. A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts*, WUNT 2/149 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). D. A. S. FERGUSSON, *The Cosmos and the Creator. An Introduction to the Theology of Creation* (London: SPCK, 1998). W. F. HAMBLEY, "Creation and Gospel. A Brief Comparison of Genesis 1,1-2,4 and John 1,1-2,12", *StudEv* 5 (1968), 69-74.

think that will, operation and power are one in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that the created universe is the work of all three divine persons¹⁵.

Furthermore, the making of the world by God is a revelation of God's love for humanity. The existence of people in general, their state of being real and their fact of living are coming from the love of God and took place through the act of creation. So, the creation as an act of love by God not only happened in the past, but it continues in the present: it's the presence of life and light in the human story that takes place continually through the Word (Jn 1:3-4). The Word in God is the life and the light of men, which shines in the darkness; he becomes the light of the world (8:12).

3. The fact of salvation - the bringer of salvation. The initiative in salvation is culminated in the incarnation of the preexistent Word. The fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" is really the high point of the Prologue as the revelation "of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (v14). Here we have the revelation of God in human situation, the revelation of the glory and mercy of God; as Barrett says, now we have "the Economy of Salvation"¹⁶. The distinction between the Word before the incarnation and after this is a clarity fact. The "lo,goj a;sarkoj" (the Word without flesh) is now the Word in flesh, "lo,goj evn sarki,". So, the Word is the revealer of the light, of life and the bringer of salvation.

In the whole 4G we see that God sent his Son into the world in order to save it (3:17; 12:47a.o.). He didn't send him to judge the world; the main notion of this gospel is that God loved the world and he sent his only Son into the world as the bringer of salvation for all mankind, in order "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (v3:16). So, those who believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, "they may have life in his name" (v20:31). In the prologue this statement is the same as "to receive him and "to become children of God (v1:12). In any case, the salvation is effected by Jesus Christ and it is offered through him to men. This first glance of salvation is mainly the God revelation into the world, which in the following chapters of the 4G is described not only as removing from the sin (a`marti,a), as "the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world" (v29), but also as knowing the God, knowing the truth¹⁷, as the eternal life is "to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3).

B. The Purpose of Salvation

The coming of the Word is forcefully connected with the purpose of salvation, which is always in close association with the humankind.

1. To become "children of God". The divine initiative in salvation is now concentrated to the humankind and the divine power and promise te,kna qeou/ gene,sqai, "to become children of God (Jn 1:12). This is the key condition, having the divine gift of salvation. First of all, this verse doesn't refer to all people, but to all these who received Christ. So, the revelation of Christ is the first important initiative for the people to receive him. They have to go against the general pattern by which the world thinks, lives and acts. If they continue remaining into

¹⁵ See the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* of Cyril of Alexandria and John Chrysostom, in J. ELOWSKY (ed.), *John 1-10*, ACCS IVa (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 20-21. H. D. LEWIS, "The Idea of Creation and Conceptions of Salvation", in S. BRANDON (ed.), *The Saviour God. Comparative Studies in the Concept of Salvation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1963), 97-116. C. S. VOULGARIS, "The Holy Trinity in Creation and Incarnation", *GOTR* 42 (1997), 245-258.

¹⁶ BARRETT, *Gospel*, 150. We can relate the Jn 1:14 to Phil. 2:6ff. (HAENCHEN, *John*, 1:119). E. KÄSEMANN says for "the purpose of proclaiming the world-wide and saving-historical dimension of christological event" (*The Testament of Jesus. A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, transl. by G. Krodel, NTL [London: SCM Press, 1968], 23). We see here that John, like Paul, has "anthropological and soteriological orientation" (R. BULTMANN, *Theology of the N.T.*, transl. by K. Grobel, 2nd impr. (London: SCM Press, 1968), 1:190-191).

¹⁷ BARRETT, *Gospel*, 78-82. Also C. DODD, "The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and Christian Worship", in F. CROSS (ed.), *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (London: A. Mowbray, 1957), 9-22. C. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 263-265, 294-296. P. ELLIS, *The Genius of John. A Composition - Critical Commentary of the Fourth Gospel* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1984), 19-28.

“this world”, they never could have the ability to receive the Christ, in order to live his salvation in this world.

We can also describe the people who received him (the Christ), as those “who believed in his name”, which is connected with the “witness” of John the Baptist (1:7), the “true light of Word (v9), then he “became flesh (v14). In any case, people should recognize him (v10), accept him and believe in him; that is the fact of salvation and the purpose of the whole gospel (20:31).

So, the salvation of the people is the possibility of them to become children (τέκνα) of God¹⁸. This points the exclusive relationship to God; they can not approach the God Father, unless they receive the God Son (14:6). So, salvation is not only the acceptance of the revelation of Christ, but also the relationship with the Father. Furthermore, the children of God are rooted in the new birth of God, to be “born of God (1:13), “born again (3:3f), “born of water and the Spirit”. In all these, salvation is the new exclusive relationship of people with the God Father and God Son and God Spirit. The humankind has now the power, the right and also the promise to receive the salvation of Christ reaching the realm of the Holy Trinity.

2. The imitation of Christ. The continuation of the Christ salvation is the human effort to imitate Christ. In the prologue we don't have any exact term about this, but the event of salvation for every people is accurately the act of being a member of God's family, to imitate the Christ, to be in fellowship (κοινωνία) with Christ, to belong to Christ.

In the 4G we can see that the imitation of Christ is to become “his disciple” (μαθητήν ἐκείνου or αὐτοῦ/), to be his disciples (γενήσθε ἐμοί. μαθηταί; 1:38; 4:1.31.33; 6:11; 9:28; 13:35' 15:8; 18:2 a.o.). This means for the Christ disciple to receive the call of God, to follow him and to have in mind his destination, the unity and fellowship with the God. In this way to go after God we can refer the following notable points: the reception of the Holy Spirit, the regeneration, the believing in Christ, the knowing of Christ, the love, the newness of life and the true worship. So, for John the imitation of Christ is actually to “abide in my love” or to “abide in his love” (μένει/τε ἐν τῇ/ ἀγάφῃ μου or αὐτοῦ/ ἐν τῇ/ ἀγάφῃ; 15:10).

We see that in the throughout Scripture salvation is portrayed as both corporate and individual. The same can somebody see in John with the common expression “abide in”, which combines the two aspects; the believer abides in personal union with the risen Christ and he also abides in the body of Christ, the church.

3. To live “in the sacramental Now”. As the salvation can never be achieved by human works, as Paul writes (Rom. 3:20; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), the need of the comprehensive divine “inworking” is essential. For this need John refers to this prerequisite of salvation, that the believer has to live “in the sacramental Now”¹⁹. This is due to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, which is transferred to the Church only after the glorification of the Christ.

It's known that the New Testament sacraments are symbolic acts. However, the believer has to know what these represent. First of all, the 4G refers to the baptism as the kind of “rebirth” or “regeneration”. The conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus is the classical johannine reference (3:3ff). The conversion of man in order to become a disciple of Christ

¹⁸ AS RIDDERBOS (*Gospel*, 45) notes, in John, unlike elsewhere in the NT, the believers are not called “sons”, but only “children of God”, while “son” is used only of Christ. See BARRETT, “Salvation”, *Gospel*, 65-68. BULTMANN, *Theology*, 2: 49-59, 75ff. E. LEE, “Salvation”, *The Religious Thought of St. John* (London: SPCK, 1950), 157-190. J. ROSS, “The Conception of Σωτηρία in the Johannine Literature”, *The Conception of Σωτηρία in the N.T.* (Chicago: χ.έ., 1947), 260-283. G. STEVENS, “The Way of Salvation”, *The Theology of the N.T.*, I.T.L., 2nd edit. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 586-592. G. STEVENS, “The Johannine Doctrine”, *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, I.T.L. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 93-110. M. WILES, “The Gospel of salvation”, *The Spiritual Gospel. The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960), 148-157.

¹⁹ CAIRD, *Theology*, 219. Especially, see R. BROWN, “Sacramentalism”, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edit., upd., introd. and concluded by F. J. Moloney, ABRL (N.Y.: Doubleday, 2003), 229-234. CAIRD, “In Christ and the Spirit”, *Theology*, 203-213. C. S. VOULGARIS, “The Sacraments of the Church as means of Salvation”, *ΕΕΘΣΑ* 37 (2002), 283-304.

presupposes a new birth²⁰, and this rebirth happens through “water and Spirit” (evx u[datoj kai. pneu,matoj; v5).

Apart from the baptism, the salvation event is closely connected with the Lord’s Supper, although the 4G contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, neither rite is explicitly mentioned. Also, the evidence of this gospel is often misinterpreted; and some scholars argue that John is a “sacramentalist and some others “antisacramentalist”²¹. Nevertheless, in the chapters 3 and 6 of the 4G we find sacramental allusion that is undeniable. Jesus’ declaration is most clear: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (6:53). In addition, Jesus remains the “bread of life” (o` a;rtoj th/j zwh/j; v35 o.a.), and the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of the Son of man are necessary to salvation²².

We can conclude the above with the theological thought of Strecker, who writes:

“As the death of Jesus makes atonement for the world (1:29; 11:50-51; 18:14), so the sacraments established by Jesus’ death have a soteriological sense for the human beings. Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper mediate the eschatological reality of salvation. The appropriate response to salvation mediated by the sacraments is faith, which appeals to the seeing, knowing, and testifying of the eyewitness (19:35)”²³.

C. The Experience of Salvation

The experience of salvation is an event that takes place in the Church, as the New Testament refers to this. The use of the Greek term *ekklēsia* (evkklhsi,a) or the English word “church denotes traditionally the Christian Church and today the assembly or the congregation of the Christians as the body of Christ with the common worship. In NT the Church is par excellence the community of believers in Christ and the place of the Holy Spirit. In particular, John does not use the above term, as Matthew does (16:18; 18:17), but others terms and symbolic images. And the salvation-event is connected with the Church on condition that “you are truly my disciples, if you abide in my word” (8:31).

1. The newness of life in the light of Christ. The divine initiative and the experience of salvation are now expressed in the newness of life of the believer in the light of Christ. We must say that for the 4G Jesus is no absentee Christ, residing in heaven until his Parousia, but Christ is present with the worldly congregations of his people, his disciples²⁴. So, the Christ disciples should show the experience of salvation, achieved by Jesus in the Cross, in their life. And this is to live “in the sacramental Now”, as we saw it previously.

This is the special meaning of eschatology in the 4G; the eschatology is transposed into Christology, since the End is totally identified with Christ²⁵. The believer who read this gospel

²⁰ See STRECKER, *Theology of the New Testament*, edit. and completed by Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, transl. by M. Eugene Boring (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 509.

²¹ See CAIRD, *Theology*, 230. R. BROWN, “Sacramentalism”, *Gospel*, 1:cxi-cxiv; Also, “The Johannine Sacramentary”, in M. TAYLOR (ed.), *A Companion to John. Readings in Johannine Theology (John’s Gospel and Epistles)* (N.Y.: Alba House, 1977), 225-246, 279-280.

²² A. SCHWEITZER, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 2nd ed. (London: Black, 1956), 352. Further readings, in G. VAN BELLE, *Bibliography*, 373-374.

²³ STRECKER, *Theology*, 510.

²⁴ For BULTMANN “the entire salvation-drama –incarnation, death, resurrection, Pentecost, the parousia– is concentrated into a single event: the Revelation of God’s “reality” (ἀλήθεια) in the earthly activity of man Jesus” (*Theology*, 2:58). CAIRD, *Theology*, 221. SCHNACKENBURG, *Gospel*, 1:160: “In John, Christ is really the “eschatological present””.

²⁵ For the johannine eschatology, see D. AUNE, “The Present Realization of Eschatological Salvation in the Fourth Gospel”, *The Cultic Setting of Realised Eschatology in Early Christianity*, SNT 38 (Leiden: E. Brill, 1972), 45-135. BARRETT, “Eschatology”, *Gospel*, 56-58. BROWN, “Eschatology”, *Gospel*, 1:cxxv-cxxi. CAIRD, “The Meaning of “Eschatology””, *Theology*, 243-250, 263. A. CORELL, “The Unique Character of the Johannine Eschatology”, *Consummatum Est. Eschatology and Church in the Gospel of St John*, transl. by the Order of the Holy Paraclete (London: SPCK, 1958), 101-109 (mostly). J. FORESTELL, “Eschatology”, *The Word of the Cross. Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, AB 57 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 126-134. W. KÜMMEL, “The Future and the presence of Salvation. The Johannine Writings”, *The Theology of the N.T.*, transl. by J. Steely (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1973), 327- 330. R. KYSAR, “The Eschatology of the Gospel”, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel. An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1975), 207-214. G. LADD, “Eternal Life in John: Eschatological-Present”, *A Theology of the N.T.*, 3rd print. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1977), 256-259. LEE, “The Last Day”, *Thought*, 164-169. B. LINDARS, “Realised Eschatology”, *John*, NTG (Sheffield: Sheffield AP, 1990), 69-70. L. MORRIS, “Eschatology”, *N.T. Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 255. J. PAINTER, “Eschatological Faith in the Gospel of John”, in R. BANKS (ed.), *Reconciliation and Hope. N.T. Essays on Atonement and Eschatology presented to L. L. Morris on his* [Footnote continued on next page ...]

discovers that the traditional terms associated with the Last Day, they find now their total fulfillment in the incarnate life of Jesus. So, the life in the light of Christ means to believe in Christ and live in his light, as he is the light of the world; to make the journey from death to life eternal, as he is the life; to hope for the eternal life, as he is the resurrection. In other words, the person and the deed of Jesus Christ is the salvation-event and at the same time the eschatological-event.

2. The true worship in grace and truth. In the experience of salvation we have to address the true worship of God “in grace and in truth (εὐν καὶ ῥιτὴ καὶ ἀληθεῖα) or “in spirit and in truth (εὐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεῖα) which came through Jesus Christ (1:18; 4:23.24). As we know that no one can see the nature or essence of God, the only access is through his Son, his only One who is himself divine and can see and declare him.

The johannine worship is one and true. John turns the attention to the One we worship, to God himself. And he says that the Father is worshiped “in spirit”, which means in the Holy Spirit, and adds in “truth”, which means in Christ himself, as in Christ we have the revelation of truth and of the true God (4:23.24). So, the experience of salvation is than those who receive the Holy Spirit and believe in Jesus Christ can worship the God Father with purity of heart.

3. The sovereignty of grace. This is the result of divine revelation as “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (1:16). The Word is “full of grace and truth (v14) that means salvation is the receiving of the divine grace and truth. What is actually this grace and truth? We can say that grace is Christ’s uncreated energy to the believer through his love and mercy; and the truth includes his faithfulness to his promises and to the covenants and to the reality of his words and gifts²⁶.

We can say that that the Son’s grace is the culmination of his saving work in humankind. This is not only his divine grace, but also grace “from his fullness”, “grace upon grace (v16). Here the 4G confirms that God’s grace can fill the human nature to the extent of deifying it. So, deification of the human nature is the divine initiative for the salvation of humankind. Now, every believer can have “eternal life” (αἰώνιον ζωὴν; 3:16). And this is due to great love of God for the whole world.

D. “This World as separation from the Salvation-event

In contrast to the experience of salvation is standing in “this world” with the distinctive johannine notion. The Evangelist is depositing his testimony and he makes use of the term *kosmos* (world, cosmos) with great frequency and with several semeiological meanings²⁷. This is quite obvious from the interpretative approach on Jn. 1:10.

60th Birthday (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1974), 36-52, 36-52. SCHNACKENBURG, “The Realised Eschatology”, *Gospel*, 1:159-160. SCHNACKENBURG, “Excursus 14: Eschatology in the Fourth Gospel”, *Gospel*, 2:426-437, 532-534. D. SMITH, “Life as eschatological gift and goal”, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, NTT, repr. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 149-151.

²⁶ See, *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 1421.

²⁷ For the “world” in the 4G, see: J. BLANK, “Kosmos (Der johanneische Kosmosbegriff)”, *Krisis. Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie* (Freiburg: Lambertur - Verlag, 1964), 186-198. BROWN, “Appendix I: Johannine Vocabulary. 7. Kosmos”, *Gospel*, 1:508-510. BROWN, *The Epistles of John. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 30 (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 323-328. H. CONZELMANN, “World and Man (The Disclosure)”, *An Outline of the Theology of the N.T.*, transl. by J. Bowden, NTL (London: SCM Press, 1969), 352-355. K. GRAYSTON, “Jesus and the Kosmos”, *The Gospel of John*, EC, 2nd impr. (London: Epworth Press, 1998), xxiii-xxv, 17-19. D. GUTHRIE, “The World”, *N.T. Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 130-135. D. HAWKIN, *The Johannine World. Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel and Contemporary Society*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of N.Y., 1996), 119-124. C. KOESTER, “Symbol and the World”, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel. Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd edit. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 277-286. LADD, “Kosmos”, *Theology*, 225-227. MORRIS, “Additional Note B: The World”, *Gospel*, 111-113. MORRIS, “The World”, *Theology*, 279-281. C. NORTH, “world”, *IDB* 4:873-878. A. REINHARTZ, *The Word in the World. The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLMS 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 20-28, 38-41. H. SCHLIER, “The World and Man according to St John’s Gospel”, *The Relevance of the N.T.*, transl. by W. O’ Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 156-171. F. SEGOVIA, “The Love and Hatred of Jesus and Johannine Sectarianism”, *CBQ* 43 (1981), 258-272. E. STAUFFER, “The coming of Christ and the World’s distress”, *N.T. Theology*, transl. by J. Marsh, 3rd print. (N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1961), 140-142. STEVENS, “The sinful World”, *Theology*, 187-198. J. STOTT, “Additional Note: The meaning of ‘the world’”, *The Letters of John. An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 19, 2nd rev. edit. (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 106-110. R. TRENCH, “κόσμος, αἶών”, *Synonyms of the N.T. With Some Etymological Notes by A. L. Mayhew*, new edit. (London: Kegan Paul, 1915), 200-205.

1. **“He was in the world”** (v10a). The world of human beings and human affairs is here indicated, the earth as the place where humans live. The presence of God in the world is taking place through: (a) The creation of the world before the Logos become flesh; (b) During the redeeming fact of the Logos of God becoming flesh and (c) After his life on the earth in the Holy Spirit within the Church.

2. **“And though the world was made through him”** (v10b). World is called the total creation made by God through the Logos, the spiritual and material world, the well organized and orderly functioning world. Due to this order and the beauty the total creation is the world (ko,smoj), i.e. an ornament, a jewel.

3. **“The world did not recognize him”** (v10c). What is this “world” specifically? It is the humanity who denies the love of God, the people who did not recognize the Logos as the Redeemer and Savior of the world and finally they didn’t accept Jesus Christ. That is why the “world” with this negative meaning of v1:10c expresses the impropriety of the creation; it dissolves and abolishes the act of God as far as its morality is concerned.

Its basic feature is the following: “He did not recognize the Logos who became flesh”. “Knowing the God bears the meaning of the revelation. It is the appearance of God, through his Son, accomplished in five basic points. The objects of ginw,skein (knowing) are the Son and the truth. The Logos in flesh has enabled us to spirituality know the real God. The gift of knowing God, the permanent and eschatological, given to the faithful is the life, the eternal life. Furthermore, knowing is closely related to pisteu,ein (believing).

The features of the “world” and its impropriety are the following: (a) Towards the Son of God. The “world” does not recognize him and hates him; (b) Towards the God Father; the same reaction and attitude; (c) Towards the Holy Spirit. Neither does the “world” distinguish the Holy Spirit or recognizes it; that is the spiritual blindness of the “world” and (d) Towards the essence of the “world”, it is the darkness and walks by night.

The Jews of those times are the characteristic example of the people of “this world”. They are its representatives. Jesus distinguishes them and says: “You are of this world”, in other words they come from “this world”, the separated from God, the sinful one.

Why there were so many people that did not know God, i.e. not christened? (a) Because they closed the eyes of their mind with their own will; (b) They rejected everything related to Logos and (c) They denied the presence of God (i.e. miracles, teaching etc). As a result of all the above comes the blindness, i.e. they stay in the darkness of sins, meaning not knowing the God.

Nevertheless, everything is related to “the coming prince of this world”. It is his sovereignty, and Jesus denounces it by saying to the Jews: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire”. He is “the evil one”, “the Satan”. And the “world” is aiming at achieving the evil, since “he was a murderer from the beginning”. He is already condemned, since the “lifting of Son of God”, i.e. the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, is the signaling of the exultant expression of the glory of God.

Summary and Conclusion

We have tried to present the divine initiative in salvation according the johannine prologue. Hence, we examined the initiative, the purpose and the experience of salvation in detail. So, we can now summarize all the above about the divine initiative in salvation the johannine prologue and to make the following conclusions:

1. The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) is basically different from the synoptic Gospels and entirely distinctive among similar Christological passages of the New Testament (Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4 a.o.). However, his framework of thought, as of the whole 4G, is decisively shaped by the Old Testament and Jewish background.

2. Thus the johannine prologue is set as the “soteriological key for the theological understanding of the johannine salvation, which the Evangelist puts from the hymnal preface to function continually till the last chapter of his Gospel. It’s like to intend the holy Evangelist to express in eighteen verses the theological content of twenty chapters of the gospel.
3. We can argue that the johannine prologue stands closer to the Jewish wisdom literature; the Word (Iō,goj) is preexistent, mediator of creation and he comes into the world. Here, the divine initiative is related with the “Logos-concept”. The Word, one of the divine persons, operated in the creation of the world and incarnated to reveal the truth and to bring the salvation. So, Jesus as the incarnate Word is the Revealer with a universal cosmic significance and the bringer of salvation.
4. The Word proclamation of salvation makes clear the purpose of the latter. The believers in Christ have to become “children of God”, imitating him and living “in the sacramental Now”. The disciplined life of this Christian community has the experience of salvation living the newness of life in the light of Christ, worshipping the only true God in the grace and truth and remaining in the sovereignty of his grace and in the Spirit of the Church.
5. In the johannine prologue does not absent the sharp dualism between God and the world, light and darkness, the true and error, righteousness and sin. Hence the expression “this World designates the separation of people from the Salvation-event. This is stated characteristic in 1:10: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him”. “This World expresses the rejection of revelation and the fundamental rejection of God.
6. The salvation-event is also connected with the johannine eschatology, which is in contrast with the atmosphere and outlook of the Synoptics. Although there are traces of the distinction between the two ages, the present age and the age to come, the eschaton has been made radically present in the sayings of Christ. Thus the present eschatology stands alongside the future and interprets the future eschatology.
7. Having reached the end of this theme, we can say that the divine initiative in salvation according the johannine prologue is something true. The salvation is, from start to finish, the main gift of the incarnate Word to the humankind. Thus salvation is entirely due to God’s initiative, not in the sense of human predestination and determinism, but in the sense that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14) and revealed the Father and gave to all believers the gift of his life, “eternal life”. So, salvation is entirely due to God’s initiative as a human possibility to response to his love and to incorporate into the life of God.

**APPENDIX: The Johannine Prologue
in Early Christian Writers and Greek Church Fathers**

This supplemental addition at the end of the previous article is a reference section that intends to provide some points of the explanation of the johannine prologue from two influential exegetes of Early Christian Church. The first one is the Origen (in Greek Ōrigénēs, b. 185, fl. c. 200-254), an early Christian scholar, systematic theologian, and one of the most distinguished of the early Christian writers, whose extensive works of exegeses focus on the spiritual meaning of the biblical text. He is one of the most representative interpreters of Alexandrian exegesis²⁸.

The second one is the Saint Cyril of Alexandria (375-444, fl. 412-444), Patriarch of Alexandria, a leading protagonist in the Christological controversies of the later 4th and 5th centuries, and one of the Church Fathers and the Doctors of the Church, whose extensive exegesis is characterized especially by a strong espousal of the unity of Christ (the one divine nature and one human nature became united in the person of Jesus, when the Son became flesh and entered into the world)²⁹.

We think that the following abstracts from the commentary on the johannine prologue are characteristic of the early ecumenical Christian tradition. In our days, such commentaries on the scripture promote the vital link of communication between today's varied Christian traditions and our common ancient ancestors in the faith³⁰.

²⁸ See, B. ALTANER, "Origen", *Patrology*, transl. by H. C. Graef, 2nd ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961), 223-235. H. R. DROBNER, "Origen", *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, transl. by S. S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 136-148. J. QUASTEN, "Origen", *Patrology. Vol. II: The Anti-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, reprint. (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1986), 37-101.

²⁹ See, ALTANER, "Cyril of Alexandria", *Patrology*, 328-334. DROBNER, "Cyril of Alexandria", *Fathers*, 461-464, 468-472. QUASTEN, "Cyril of Alexandria", *Patrology*, 3:116-142.

³⁰ See, the series "Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture" (abbr. ACCS). See also, J. REUSS, (hrsg.), *Johannes-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche, aus Kettenhandschriften gesammelt*, TU 89 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966; abbr. *RJK*). NONNO DI PANOPOLI, *Parafrasi del Vangelo de S. Giovanni, Canto XVIII*, Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commentario a cura di Enrico Livrea (Napoli: M. d' Auria Editore, 1989).

A. Origen³¹

1. The title “Word is to be interpreted by the same method as the other titles of Christ. The Word of God is not a mere attribute of God, but a separate person. What is meant when he is called the Word?”

Let us consider, however, a little more carefully what is the Word which is in the beginning. I am often led to wonder when I consider the things that are said about Christ, even by those who are in earnest in their belief in Him. Though there are a countless number of names which can be applied to our Saviour, they omit the most of them, and if they should remember them, they declare that these titles are not to be understood in their proper sense, but tropically. But when they come to the title Logos (Word), and repeat that Christ alone is the Word of God, they are not consistent, and do not, as in the case of the other titles, search out what is behind the meaning of the term “Word”. I wonder at the stupidity of the general run of Christians in this matter. I do not mince matters; it is nothing but stupidity. The Son of God says in one passage, “I am the light of the world”, and in another, “I am the resurrection”, and again, “I am the way and the truth and the life”. It is also written, “I am the door”, and we have the saying, “I am the good shepherd, and when the woman of Samaria says, “We know the Messiah is coming, who is called Christ; when He comes, He will tell us all things, Jesus answers, “I that speak unto you am He. Again, when He washed the disciples' feet, He declared Himself in these words to be their Master and Lord: “You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am (John 13:13). He also distinctly announces Himself as the Son of God, when He says, John 10:36 “He whom the Father sanctified and sent unto the world, to Him do you say, You blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God? and “Father, the hour is come; glorify Your Son, that the Son also may glorify You (John 17:1). We also find Him declaring Himself to be a king, as when He answers Pilate's question, “Are Thou the King of the Jews? by saying, “My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is My kingdom not from hence (John 18:33.36). We have also read the

³¹ The following abstract comes from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 9, edited and translated by Allan Menzies (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), § 23 and 24.

words, “I am the true vine and My Father is the husbandman, and again, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Add to these testimonies also the saying, “I am the bread of life that came down from heaven and gives life to the world. These texts will suffice for the present, which we have picked up out of the storehouse of the Gospels, and in all of which He claims to be the Son of God. But in the Apocalypse of John, too, He says, “I am the first and the last, and the living One, and I was dead. Behold, I am alive for evermore (Revelation 1:18). And again, “I am the A and the Ω, and the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13). The careful student of the sacred books, moreover, may gather not a few similar passages from the prophets, as where He calls Himself a chosen shaft, and a servant of God, and a light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:2). Isaiah also says, “From my mother's womb has He called me by my name, and He made my mouth as a sharp sword, and under the shadow of His hand did He hide me, and He said to me, You are My servant, O Israel, and in you will I be glorified (Isaiah 49:6). And a little farther on: “And my God shall be my strength, and He said to me, This is a great thing for you to be called My servant, to set up the tribes of Jacob and to turn again the diaspora of Israel. Behold I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the end of the earth”. And in Jeremiah too He likens Himself to a lamb, as thus: “I was as a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Jeremiah 11:19). These and other similar sayings He applies to Himself. In addition to these one might collect in the Gospels and the Apostles and in the prophets a countless number of titles which are applied to the Son of God, as the writers of the Gospels set forth their own views of what He is, or the Apostles extol Him out of what they had learned, or the prophets proclaim in advance His coming advent and announce the things concerning Him under various names. Thus John calls Him the Lamb of God, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and in these words he declares Him as a man, “This is He about whom I said, that there comes after me a man who is there before me; for He was before me (John 1:30-31) And in his Catholic Epistle John says that He is a Paraclete for our souls with the Father, as thus: “And if any one sin, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he adds that He is a propitiation for our sins, and similarly Paul says He is a propitiation:

“Whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood, on account of forgiveness of the forepast sins, in the forbearance of God. According to Paul, too, He is declared to be the wisdom and the power of God, as in the Epistle to the Corinthians: “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. It is added that He is also sanctification and redemption: “He was made to us of God, he says, “wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. But he also teaches us, writing to the Hebrews, that Christ is a High-Priest: “Having, therefore, a great High-Priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession (Hebrews 4:14). And the prophets have other names for Him besides these. Jacob in his blessing of his sons says, “Judah, your brethren shall extol you; your hands are on the necks of your enemies. A lion's cub is Judah, from a shoot, my son, are you sprung up; you have lain down and slept as a lion; who shall awaken him? (Genesis 49:10). We cannot now linger over these phrases, to show that what is said of Judah applies to Christ. What may be quoted against this view, viz., “A ruler shall not part from Judah nor a leader from his loins, until He come for whom it is reserved; this can better be cleared up on another occasion. But Isaiah knows Christ to be spoken of under the names of Jacob and Israel, when he says, “Jacob is my servant, I will help Him; Israel is my elect, my soul has accepted Him. He shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any one hear His voice on the streets. A bruised rod shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He bring forth judgment from victory, and in His name shall the nations hope (Isaiah 42:1-4). That it is Christ about whom such prophecies are made, Matthew shows in his Gospel, where he quotes from memory and says: “That the saying might be fulfilled, He shall not strive nor cry, etc. David also is called Christ, as where Ezekiel in his prophecy to the shepherds adds as from the mouth of God: “I will raise up David my servant, who shall be their shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23). For it is not the patriarch David who is to rise and be the shepherd of the saints, but Christ. Isaiah also called Christ the rod and the flower: “There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall spring out of this root, and the spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and He shall be full of the spirit

of the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-3). And in the Psalms our Lord is called the stone, as follows: “The stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner. It is from the Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes. And the Gospel shows, as also does Luke in the Acts, that the stone is no other than Christ; the Gospel as follows: “Have ye never read, the stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner. Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust” (Matthew 21:42.44). And Luke writes in Acts: “This is the stone, which was set at naught of you the builders, which has become the head of the corner (Acts 4:11). And one of the names applied to the Saviour is that which He Himself does not utter, but which John records—the Word who was in the beginning with God, God the Word. And it is worth our while to fix our attention for a moment on those scholars who omit consideration of most of the great names we have mentioned and regard this as the most important one. As to the former titles, they look for any account of them that any one may offer, but in the case of this one they proceed differently and ask, What is the Son of God when called the Word? The passage they employ most is that in the Psalms, “My heart has produced a good Word; and they imagine the Son of God to be the utterance of the Father deposited, as it were, in syllables, and accordingly they do not allow Him, if we examine them farther, any independent hypostasis, nor are they clear about His essence. I do not mean that they confuse its qualities, but the fact of His having an essence of His own. For no one can understand how that which is said to be “Word” can be a Son. And such an animated Word, not being a separate entity from the Father, and accordingly as it, having no subsistence. is not a Son, or if he is a Son, let them say that God the Word is a separate being and has an essence of His own. We insist, therefore, that as in the case of each of the titles spoken of above we turn from the title to the concept it suggests and apply it and demonstrate how the Son of God is suitably described by it, the same course must be followed when we find Him called the Word. What caprice it is, in all these cases, not to stand upon the term employed, but to enquire in what sense Christ is to be understood to be the door, and in what way the vine, and why He is the way; but in the one case of His being called the Word, to follow a different course. To add to the authority, therefore, of what we have to

say on the question, how the Son of God is the Word, we must begin with those names of which we spoke first as being applied to Him. This, we cannot deny, will seem to some to be superfluous and a digression, but the thoughtful reader will not think it useless to ask as to the concepts for which the titles are used; to observe these matters will clear the way for what is coming. And once we have entered upon the theology concerning the Saviour, as we seek with what diligence we can and find the various things that are taught about Him, we shall necessarily understand more about Him not only in His character as the Word, but in His other characters also.

2. Christ as Light; How He, and How His Disciples are the Light of the World.

He said, then, that He was the light of the world; and we have to examine, along with this title, those which are parallel to it; and, indeed, are thought by some to be not merely parallel, but identical with it. He is the true light, and the light of the Gentiles. In the opening of the Gospel now before us He is the light of men: “That which was made, it says, “was life in Him, and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it (John 1:3-5). A little further on, in the same passage, He is called the true light: “The true light, which lightens every man, was coming into the world (John 1:9). In Isaiah, He is the light of the Gentiles, as we said before. “Behold, I have set You for a light of the Gentiles, that You should be for salvation to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). Now the sensible light of the world is the sun, and after it comes very worthily the moon, and the same title may be applied to the stars; but those lights of the world are said in Moses to have come into existence on the fourth day, and as they shed light on the things on the earth, they are not the true light. But the Saviour shines on creatures which have intellect and sovereign reason, that their minds may behold their proper objects of vision, and so he is the light of the intellectual world, that is to say, of the reasonable souls which are in the sensible world, and if there be any beings beyond these in the world from which He declares Himself to be our Saviour. He is, indeed, the most determining and distinguished part of that world, and, as we may say, the sun who makes the great day of the Lord. In view of this day He says to those who partake of His light, “Work while it is day; the night comes when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:4-5). Then He

says to His disciples, “You are the light of the world, and “Let your light shine before men. Thus we see the Church, the bride, to present an analogy to the moon and stars, and the disciples have a light, which is their own or borrowed from the true sun, so that they are able to illuminate those who have no command of any spring of light in themselves. We may say that Paul and Peter are the light of the world, and that those of their disciples who are enlightened themselves, but are not able to enlighten others, are the world of which the Apostles were the light. But the Saviour, being the light of the world, illuminates not bodies, but by His incorporeal power the incorporeal intellect, to the end that each of us, enlightened as by the sun, may be able to discern the rest of the things of the mind. And as when the sun is shining the moon and the stars lose their power of giving light, so those who are irradiated by Christ and receive His beams have no need of the ministering apostles and prophets –we must have courage to declare this truth– nor of the angels; I will add that they have no need even of the greater powers when they are disciples of that first-born light. To those who do not receive the solar beams of Christ, the ministering saints do afford an illumination much less than the former; this illumination is as much as those persons can receive, and it completely fills them. Christ, again, the light of the world, is the true light as distinguished from the light of sense; nothing that is sensible is true. Yet though the sensible is other than the true, it does not follow that the sensible is false, for the sensible may have an analogy with the intellectual, and not everything that is not true can correctly be called false. Now I ask whether the light of the world is the same thing with the light of men, and I conceive that a higher power of light is intended by the former phrase than by the latter, for the world in one sense is not only men. Paul shows that the world is something more than men when he writes to the Corinthians in his first Epistle: “We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men (1 Corinthians 4:9). In one sense, too, it may be considered, the world is the creation which is being delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, whose earnest expectation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. We also draw attention to the comparison which may be drawn between the statement, “I am the light of the world, and the words addressed to the disciples, “You are the light of the world.

Some suppose that the genuine disciples of Jesus are greater than other creatures, some seeking the reason of this in the natural growth of these disciples, others inferring it from their harder struggle. For those beings which are in flesh and blood have greater labours and a life more full of dangers than those which are in another real body, and the lights of heaven might not, if they had put on bodies of earth, have accomplished this life of ours free from danger and from error. Those who incline to this argument may appeal to those texts of Scripture which say the most exalted things about men, and to the fact that the Gospel is addressed directly to men; not so much is said about the creation, or, as we understand it, about the world. We read, “As I and Thou are one, that they also may be one in Us, and “Where I am, there will also My servant be (John 17:21). These sayings, plainly, are about men; while about the creation it is said that it is delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. It might be added that not even when it is delivered will it take part in the glory of the sons of God. Nor will those who hold this view forget that the first-born of every creature, honouring man above all else, became man, and that it was not any of the constellations existing in the sky, but one of another order, appointed for this purpose and in the service of the knowledge of Jesus, that was made to be the Star of the East, whether it was like the other stars or perchance better than they, to be the sign of Him who is the most excellent of all. And if the boasting of the saints is in their tribulations, since “tribulation works patience, and patience probation, and probation hope, and hope makes not ashamed (Romans 5:3-5) then the afflicted creation cannot have the like patience with man, nor the like probation, nor the like hope, but another degree of these, since “the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but on account of Him who subjected it, for hope” (Romans 8:20). Now he who shrinks from conferring such great attributes on man will turn to another direction and say that the creature being subjected to vanity groans and suffers greater affliction than those who groan in this tabernacle, for has she not suffered for the utmost extent of time in her service of vanity— nay, many times as long as man? For why does she do this not willingly, but that it is against her nature to be subject to vanity, and not to have the best arrangement of her life, that which she shall receive when she is set free, when the world is

destroyed and released even from the vanity of bodies. Here, however, we may appear to be stretching too far, and aiming at more than the question now before us requires. We may return, therefore, to the point from which we set out, and ask for what reason the Saviour is called the light of the world, the true light, and the light of men. Now we saw that He is called the true light with reference to the sensible light of the world, and that the light of the world is the same thing as the light of men, or that we may at least enquire whether they are the same. This discussion is not superfluous. Some students do not take anything at all out of the statement that the Saviour is the Word; and it is important for us to assure ourselves that we are not chargeable with caprice in fixing our attention on that notion. If it admits of being taken in a metaphorical sense we ought not to take it literally. When we apply the mystical and allegorical method to the expression “light of the world and the many analogous terms mentioned above, we should surely do so with this expression also.

B. Cyril of Alexandria³²

1. *But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, to them that believe on His Name (Jn 1:12).*

A right judgement verily and worthy of God! The firstborn, Israel, is cast out; for he would not abide in oneness with God, nor did he receive the Son, Who came among His own, he rejected the Bestower of Nobility, he thrust away the Giver of Grace: the Gentiles received Him by faith. Therefore will Israel with reason receive the wages of their folly, they will mourn the loss of good things, they will receive the bitter fruit of their own ill-counsel, bereft of the sonship; and the Gentiles will delight themselves in the good things that are through faith, they shall find the bright rewards of their obedience and shall be planted out in his place. For they shall be cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and be grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree. And Israel shall hear, Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel

³² The following abstract comes from CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, “Interpretation or Comment on the Gospel according to John (translated by P. E. Pusey)”, in *Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (London: Walter Smith, 1885), 104,116-120.

unto anger: but one of Christ's disciples shall say to the Gentiles, But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous Light. For since they received the Son through faith, they receive the power to be ranked among the sons of God. For the Son gives what is His alone and specially and of nature to be in their power, setting it forth as common, making this a sort of image of the love for man that is inherent to Him, and of His love for the world. For in none other way could we who bore the image of the earthy escape corruption, unless the beauty of the image of the heavenly were impressed upon us, through our being called to sonship. For being partakers of Him through the Spirit, we were sealed unto likeness with Him and mount up to the primal character of the Image after which the Divine Scripture says we were made. For thus hardly recovering the pristine beauty of our nature, and re-formed unto that Divine Nature, shall we be superior to the ills that have befallen us through the transgression. Therefore we mount up unto dignity above our nature for Christ's sake, and we too shall be sons of God, not like Him in exactitude, but by grace in imitation of Him. For He is Very Son, existing from the Father; we adopted by His Kindness, through |105 grace receiving I have said, Ye are gods and all of you are children of the Most High. For the created and subject nature is called to what is above nature by the mere nod and will of the Father: but the Son and God and Lord will not possess this being God and Son, by the will of God the Father, nor in that He wills it only, but beaming forth of the Very Essence of the Father, He receives to Himself by Nature what is Its own Good. And again He is clearly seen to be Very Son, proved by comparison with ourselves. For since that which is by Nature has another mode of being from that which is by adoption, and that which is in truth from that which is by imitation, and we are called sons of God by adoption and imitation: hence He is Son by Nature and in truth, to Whom we made sons too are compared, gaining the good by grace instead of by natural endowments.

2. *And of His fulness have all we received (v16).*

The Evangelist in these words accepts the true testimony of the Baptist, and makes clear the proof of the superiority of our Saviour, and of His possessing essentially the surpassing every thing originate,

both in respect of glory itself (whereof he is now more especially speaking) and of the bright catalogue of all the other good things.

For most excellently, says he, and most truly does the Baptist appear to me to say of the Only-Begotten, For He was before me, that is far surpassing and superior. For all we too, who have been enrolled in the choir of the saints, enjoy the riches of His proper good, and the nature of man is ennobled with His rather than its own excellences, when it is found to have ought that is noble. For from the fullness of the Son, as from a perennial fountain, the gift of the Divine graces springing forth comes to each soul that is found worthy to receive it. But if the Son supplies as of His Natural fullness, the creature is supplied: how will He not be conceived of as having glory not similar to the rest, but such as will beseem the Only-Begotten of God, having the superiority over all as the fruit of His own Nature, and the pre-eminence as the Dignity of His Father's Being? And I think that the most wise Paul too when defining as to the nature of all things, was moved thereby to true ideas, so as hence at length to address the creature, For what hast thou that thou didst not receive? For together with being, the well-being after such and such wise, is God's gift to the creature, and it has nothing of its own, but becomes rich only with the munificence of Him Who gives to it. But we must note again that he says that the Son is full, that is, All-perfect in all things, and so greatly removed from being lacking in anything whatever, that He can bestow even on all, refusing diminution, and preserving the greatness of His own excellence always the same.

3. And grace for grace, for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (v17).

Having said that the glory of the Only-Begotten was found more brilliant than any fame among men, and introducing the greatness in holiness incomparable above all saints that is in Him, he studies to prove this from those who have mounted up to the height of virtue. Of John then the Saviour saith, Verily I say unto you, Among them that are horn of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. But this so great and exalted man, he brought forward but now, as himself says, crying and saying with a loud voice, He that cometh after me is preferred before me for He was before me. But since John's glory was inferior and gave place to the Only-Begotten, how must one not needs suppose that no one of the saints besides is

brought up to equal measure with the Saviour Christ in regard of the glory which appears in the splendour of their actions? The Saints then that lived at the time of the Advent, not being able to surpass the virtue of John, nor mounting up to the measure that accrued to him, will with him yield the victor's palm to Christ, if the blessed Baptist gaining the highest summit in what is good, and having failed in no manner of excellence, receives not through the voice of another the judgment of inferiority to Him, but himself sealed it against himself, speaking, as a saint, truly. But since it was necessary that Emmanuel should be shewn to be greater and better than the saints of old, needs does the blessed Evangelist come to the hierophant Moses first; to whom it was said by God, I know thee before all and thou didst find grace in My sight. For that he was known before all to God, we shall know by this again: If, he says, there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches. The all-wise Moses having therefore so great excellence above the elder saints, he shows that the Only-Begotten is in every way superior and of more renown, that He might be shown in all things to have the pre-eminence, as Paul said: and therefore he says, And grace for grace, for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ: for I think that the blessed Evangelist would indicate something of this kind: The great Baptist, he says, made true confession declaring openly respecting the Only-Begotten, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me, for of His fullness have all we received. And let no one suppose that the Only-Begotten surpasses John or the rest of the saints who belonged to the times of the Advent, but came short of the glory of the elder saints, who were illustrious in holiness in the times before the Advent; for he will see Him, says he, far surpassing the measure of Moses, although he possessed the superiority in holiness as compared with them; for the Lawgiver clearly affirmed that He knew him before all. John then was convicted by his own mouth of coming behind the glory of Christ: he comes short of His splendour, and there is no question at all about him, or anything to embarrass the finding out of the truth.

Whence then shall we find that the hierophant Moses himself also came short of the glory of the Lord? Let the student, he says, diligently examine the evangelic grace given to us by the Saviour, in contrast with the grace of the law that was through Moses. For then will he see that the Son was as much superior, as He is proved to be the Lawgiver of better things than the polity of the law and introducing things superior to all those which were through Moses. For the law, he says, was given through Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. What then is the distinction between the law and the grace that comes through the Saviour, let him again see who is fond of search and an ally of good labours; we will say a little out of much, believing that boundless and vast is the number of the thoughts thereto belonging. The Law therefore was condemning the world (for God through it concluded all under sin, as Paul said) and shewing us subject to punishments, but the Saviour rather sets it free, for He came not to judge the world but to save the world. And the Law too used to give grace to men, calling them to the knowledge of God, and drawing away from the worship of idols those who had been led astray and in addition to this both pointing out evil and teaching good, if not perfectly, yet in the manner of a teacher and usefully: but the truth and grace which are through the Only-Begotten, does not introduce to us the good which is in types, nor limn things profitable as in shadow, but in glorious and most pure ordinances leads us by the hand unto even perfect knowledge of the faith. And the Law used to give the spirit of bondage to fear, but Christ the spirit of adoption unto liberty. The Law likewise brings in the circumcision in the flesh which is nothing (for circumcision is nothing, as Paul writes to certain): but our Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver of circumcision in the spirit and heart. The Law baptizes the defiled with mere water: the Saviour with the Holy Ghost and with fire. The Law brings in the tabernacle, for a figure of the true: the Saviour bears up to Heaven itself and brings into the truer tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. And it were not hard to heap up other proofs besides, but we must respect our limits.

But we will say this for profit and need. The blessed Paul in few words solved the question, saying of the law and of the Saviour's grace, For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For he says

that the commandment by Moses is the ministration of condemnation; the grace through the Saviour, he calls the ministration of righteousness, to which he gives to surpass in glory, most perfectly examining the nature of things, as being clad with the Spirit. Since then the Law which condemns was given by Moses, the grace which justifies came by the Only-Begotten, how is not He, he says, superior in glory, through Whom the better things were ordained? The Psalmist then will also be true, crying aloud in the Spirit that our Lord Jesus Christ surpasses the whole illustrious multitude of the saints. For who, he says, among the clouds shall be made equal unto the Lord? or who shall be likened unto the Lord among the sons of God? For the spiritual clouds, that is the holy Prophets, will yield the palm to Christ, and will never think that they ought to aim at equal glory with Him, when he who was above all men known of God, Moses, is brought down to the second place: and they who were called sons of God at the time of the Advent, will not be wholly likened to Him Who is by Nature Son, but will acknowledge their own measure, when the holy Baptist says that he himself is far behind, of whom He That knoweth the hearts says, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. True therefore is the blessed Evangelist, saying that he has seen His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, that is, which beseems the Only-Begotten Son of God the Father, and not rather those who are called to brotherhood with Him, of whom He is Firstborn.