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Completing the circle

The Resurrection according to John

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THE 'CLOSE FIT'¹ between the Prologue of John's Gospel and his account of the resurrection of Jesus in chapter 20 has often been observed in recent years. The reverberations between the two sound so clearly that at least one scholar takes it as proof that the chapters were composed with each other in mind, obviating the need to argue that the Prologue was a late addition to the Gospel from another source.² With John 20, the Gospel comes full circle, and necessarily so.

Without John 20, the magnificent claims of John 1 would be just that — claims: but they may in fact be nothing

more than unsubstantiated assertion, wishful thinking of cosmic proportions on the part of John. The resurrection provides the vital proof that the claims were not empty. 'Until', as George Beasley-Murray wrote some years ago, a person 'is reasonably sure of the veracity of these events it is useless to build a theology on them, let alone stake one's life on them.'³ That is why, as Wright has written much more recently, 'it matters for John that Easter actually happened'.⁴ Without chapter 20, John's Gospel would be like an unfinished symphony whose music was left suspended mid-score, waiting for the final closing chords.⁵ With John 20 the Gospel is brought to completion. The hope of the earliest chapter is fulfilled, the cosmic claims

1 N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 417.

2 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 417.

3 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Christ is Alive!* (London and Redhill: Lutterworth, 1947), p. 24.

4 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), p. 668.

5 Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 668, uses the metaphor to make a somewhat different point.

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of the Word are found to be rooted in human reality, resurrected human reality. God provides convincing evidence that he is able to deliver on the claims. This is not simply superb literary artistry but historical and theological necessity.

The context of the discussion

C. K. Barrett commented that chapter 20 'is permeated with theological themes of a Johannine kind: seeing and believing, and the ascent of Jesus to the Father'.⁶ But he did not explore the suggestion further, except to conclude that this undermined our ability to assess the historical value of the chapter. His concern was to reconcile John's account of the resurrection with that of the Synoptics.

It is only with the advent of literary criticism, particularly narrative criticism, in more recent times that the issue has been more fully explored. In this respect the work of R. Alan Culpepper in his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* is seminal.⁷ Culpepper's initial publication did not pick up the fit between the beginning and ending of John's Gospel but a subsequent work did, pointing out the importance of Thomas' confession of faith and the recognition scenes as the complement

to issues that John has introduced in the Prologue.⁸

Beverley Gaventa assumes the relationship, rather than proving it, as she explores the ending of John's Gospel. In a scintillating article on 'the archive of excess', she asks why John appears 'to reach a conclusion twice'. Since John 20, especially verses 30-31, makes a perfectly good ending, why was John 21 necessary? Dissenting from those who think that John 21 was a later addition, she concludes that it is best to understand them as 'two separate endings, relatively independent of one another, each of which brings the Gospel to a kind of closure'.⁹ They parallel each other in a number of ways, even though chapter 20 focuses on the resurrected Jesus and chapter 21 on the disciples.¹⁰

But the real difference between them lies in their approach. The former chapter brings the Gospel to an end by using the circular technique that is commonly employed in novels. It picks up from the opening and ties up the loose ends. 'The first ending takes readers back to the Gospel's Prologue, completing the circle begun there by

⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 466.

⁷ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). For a critique of his position see, D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (London & Grand Rapids: IVP & Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 63-68.

⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 85 and p. 243.

⁹ Beverley Roberts Gaventa, 'The Archive of Excess: John 21 and the Problem of Narrative Closure', *Exploring the Gospel of John: in honour of D Moody Smith*, R. A. Culpepper & C. Clifton Black (eds.) (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996), p. 246. In arguing for the independent validity of both endings, Gaventa differs from many (e.g., Wright, NTPG, p. 417) who argue that chapter 20 was the original ending of the Gospel.

¹⁰ Gaventa, 'The Archive of Excess', p. 248.

the appearance of the Logos. Here the ascent of Jesus to the Father (20:17) completes the action begun in 1:10 as the Logos comes into the world, and especially in 1:14 as the Logos becomes flesh.¹¹ She helpfully points out a number of other connections between the Prologue and John 20 but not in an exhaustive ways since her real interest lies elsewhere and her centre of attention is chapter 21.

Mark Stibbe, in his application of narrative criticism to John, is one of those who argues that John 20 is 'the original conclusion because it forms such an obvious inclusio with John 1'.¹² He supports his contention by reference to five thematic and linguistic parallels, which takes him beyond the connection between John 20 and the Prologue proper, into the rest of John 1. They vary, it seems to me, in the weight that should be given to them. Passing over some of the more major echoes of John 1, he points to Jesus standing among his disciples (1:26; 20:19, 26); the passing of days (1:29, 35 and 43; 20:1, 19, 26); 'turning around' (1:38; 20:14, 16) and the question, 'Who are you seeking?' (1:38; 20:15). While the repetition of single words might be important in John's Gospel, since it is so carefully crafted, it is the highlighting of major themes which might be more interesting and in that regard he picks up only one matter of first rank Johannine significance, namely the theme of the Holy Spirit (1:29-34; 20:22).¹³

Tom Wright also asserts, 'The original ending of the book (chapter 20) picks up the Prologue at point after point...' ¹⁴ but then, only cursorily lists a few examples by way of illustration, even though they are of more major import than those referred to by Stibbe.

In spite of these evocative suggestions, it seems that no thorough, systematic treatment of the way in which the chapters resonate with each other has been attempted. The issue has all but been ignored by the standard commentaries whose concerns usually lie elsewhere, probably because most of them pre-date current literary approaches. They are usually more concerned to debate the historical validity of John's resurrection narratives, or to discuss their literary authenticity, or to attempt to reconcile them with the synoptic accounts of the resurrection. But little or no attention is given to examining in depth the internal textual relationship between the Prologue in particular or the complete first chapter in general and John 20. The absence of this is surprising, in view of the way in which the John 1 can illuminate the meaning of the resurrection, buttress its historical necessity and bring John's theological portrait of Christ to a fitting climax.

In seeking to set out the reflections of John 1 in John 20 two cautions must be born in mind. First, as Gaventa comments, 'some elements of chapter 20 do not fit neatly within the circular movement...' and they must not be forced into doing so. John 20 has validity in its own right, not just in relation

11 Gaventa, 'The Archive of Excess', p. 246.

12 Mark Stibbe, *John, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 198-9.

13 Stibbe, *John*, p. 199.

14 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 417.

to John 1. Secondly, we should not think that the connection between the beginning and the end of John's Gospel means that the middle is unimportant. The themes, as we shall see, that are highlighted there are themes that are found scattered throughout the Gospel. Yet, there is a particular and tight complementarity in the way in which these chapters are composed and it is true to say that the themes, traceable throughout the Gospel, 'find their eventual destination' in John 20.¹⁵

Twelve echoes may be readily identified between John 1 and John 20. The order in which we shall explore them will be determined by the order in which they are raised in the first chapter.

Creation and re-creation 1:3; 20:1

John 1 is self-consciously written to imitate Genesis 1. Both speak of the beginning, and of the coming of creation into being. In Genesis 1, God is himself the agent of creation. In John 1, the Word who was with God and who, in reality, was God, is the agent of creation. 'Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made' (1:3). The first act in the sequence of God's creative activities was to dispel the darkness and let light shine (Gen. 1:3). In like manner, with the coming of the Word into the world, the light shone again in the darkness (1:5).

How is that echoed in John 20? As with all the Gospel writers, John begins

his resurrection narrative with Mary going to the tomb of Jesus 'early on the first day of the week' (20:1, cp. Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2 and Lk. 24:1). They refrain from using the phrase that might have been expected to denote the time. 'On the third day' is the expression that had been frequently used in the predictions of Jesus' suffering (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Lk. 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:21 and 46) and was subsequently to be used again by the apostles (Acts 10:40; 27:19; 1 Cor. 15:4). But when it comes to the resurrection the Gospel writers speak of 'the first day of the week'. In John, its use is emphasized by its repetition in verse 19.

Why did John (and the other Gospel writers) choose this particular terminology? D. A. Carson tentatively suggests that 'it may have to do with the desire to present the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of something new'.¹⁶ N. T. Wright is less inhibited. Jesus, he argues, was condemned on the sixth day of the week, rested in the tomb on the seventh and rises early on the eighth — the first day of the new week.¹⁷ This day of the week is the marker of a new beginning. Just as the first creation began on the first day of the week, so Jesus initiates the new creation through his conquering death and coming back to life again on the first day of another week.

This interpretation, Wright justifiably maintains, is consistent with John's interest in creation for he is 'at

¹⁵ Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 666.

¹⁶ Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, p. 635.

¹⁷ Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 667.

his very heart, a theologian of creation'.¹⁸ The world is a matter of concern because God is its creator who works through the Word to bring life into being and who then sustains it by his ongoing activity (5:17). In John, the physical constantly points to the spiritual, though the material world is not rendered insignificant as a result. It still matters! Jesus demonstrated a concern for physical health, as in the case of the man born blind or the raising of Lazarus, as well as spiritual. It is in the arena of time and space that he reveals his glory. God works in the realm of creation to secure salvation.¹⁹

So, now the same Word brings resurrection life into being and opens up a way for others to follow. (This, of course, is a theme developed in different ways both by Rom. 6:12-17 and 1 Cor. 15:35-57). Here is the dawning of the new age. The final stage of creation's story that will climax in the recreation of all things is begun. The old creation, marred by sin and hence on its way to corruption, is being replaced by a new creation, made possible as the Lord of Life conquers the physical destruction involved in death and burial and rises, himself, with a different, yet undeniably physical, incorruptible body.

It is also all of a piece with the themes of life and light to which further reference will be made.

Life and death 1:4; 20:31

The Word is both life and life-giver. 'In him', says the Prologue, 'was life' (1:4). He is the very essence of life, the very origin of life and the very generation of life. He communicates that life to all humanity. Unlike any other human being, the Word is not a creature and does not derive his life from any human parent. The Father has granted him the privilege of being self-sufficient as far as life is concerned (5:26). He longs to impart his life to others. He does so in the sense of providing physical existence to all humanity but even more in the sense of imparting 'eternal life' to those who believe in him (5:24). This 'eternal life' is not to be defined from the viewpoint of time as a life of unending and everlasting existence. It is rather a reference to a quality of life that goes far deeper than mere existence and is lived to the full (10:10) in close harmony, even intimacy, with God the Father (15:1-11).

Yet, this life is to be experienced everlastingly. Eternal life includes resurrection life, the life that follows the physical death of those who have faith. Resurrection life entails a new dimension of physical life,²⁰ which Wright,

¹⁸ Wright, *Resurrection*, p.667.

¹⁹ See further, Stephen Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 237.

²⁰ Beasley-Murray, says in *Christ is Alive*, p. 160, 'We are therefore to avoid two errors in thinking of the resurrection: that of regarding the new body as mere spirit, in which case the term "body" is purely metaphorical; and that of looking on it as composed of resuscitated particles of flesh. The risen body of the Lord was neither, and his resurrection was the pattern of ours. Resurrection is not so much a re-forming of matter that once made our body but a new embodiment of the principle of existence that formerly held in unity the body.'

aptly capturing the incorruptible aspect of its nature, has recently termed 'transphysical'.²¹ The miracle of the raising of Lazarus (11:1-46) is a pointer in the right direction, though not to be identified with the resurrection of those who follow in the train of Jesus after his resurrection. It illustrates the claim of Jesus to be 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25). He is the one who conquers death, the antithesis of life, which seems regularly to lurk in the background of John's Gospel.

The theme of death being overcome by the resurrection of Jesus is implicit throughout John 20. The 'transphysical' nature of the resurrected body of Jesus is demonstrated in the paradoxical way locked doors proved no barrier to his appearing among them (20:19 and 26)—the 'trans' element—, yet he invites Thomas to examine his physical wounds (20:27)—the 'physical' element. The resurrection hope, as seen in Christ, is decidedly not about the survival of the soul but about the resurrection of the body to life.

The obvious, but largely unstated, theme of death and life receives just one explicit mention in the chapter, in its final verse, verse 31. John comments that 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples...' The phrase 'other signs' may primarily refer to the signs recorded in chapters 2-12 (These chapters are often referred to as the 'Book of Signs' because they contain the seven miracles recorded by John). But

the phrase reads rather oddly at this point if, as many suppose, the signs referred to were done and dusted by the end of chapter 12. If that were so, the readers would be required to skip back over eight momentous chapters (13-20) as if they were unimportant.

The 'signs' referred to must surely at least include a reference to the specific 'sign' of Jesus' appearance to Thomas, and probably entail a reference to the greatest sign of all, that of the resurrection.²² The purpose of recording these signs, he says, is 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing *you may have life in his name.*' The resurrection, then, means not only life for Jesus himself but also a life, of an eternal, incorruptible and everlasting quality, for all who trust in him.

Light and darkness 1:4-5; 20:1

The claim of the Prologue was that 'the light shines in the darkness...' (1:5). Throughout his ministry, Jesus, 'the light of the world' (8:12, 9:4), constantly fought back the darkness, which is presented as the natural habitat for people whose lives are riddled with evil (3:19), and set people free to walk in the light (8:12; 12: 46). But the means by which he defeated the darkness is the crucial issue. He did not do so by the forceful imposition of light but by his embracing of the darkness in his own person on the cross.

²¹ Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 477, 606f.

²² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John, Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p. 387.

Jesus spoke of his own crucifixion in terms of coming darkness (9:4; 12:35). And John plays powerfully on the metaphor in his passion scene. When Judas left the upper room to betray Jesus, he notes with dramatic simplicity, 'and it was night' (13:30). In this regard it is surprising that John does not report the blackening of the sun and the darkness that covered the earth as Christ was crucified. Perhaps to do so would have sat somewhat in tension with his portrayal of Christ as in control, going on his road to suffering as if on a royal progress tour.²³ Perhaps, too, the point has been sufficiently made in other ways through the Gospel.

Little is made of darkness and light in the resurrection narrative, but brevity of reference must not be thought to indicate it is not significant. In fact, brevity sometimes makes for greater impact. John's point is clear and unmistakable. 'Early on the first day of the week, *while it was still dark*, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance' (20:1). Her going led her to discover the secret of the darkness being dispelled. The tomb was empty. The Lord was risen. Evil was defeated. The light, which people had constantly tried to snuff out, was irrepressible. It had triumphed once and for all.

Sending and sent 1:6; 20:21

The merest echo may be caught between the two chapters in the idea of messengers being sent on a mission. In 1:6 John the Baptist is referred to as 'a man who was sent from God' to bear witness to the light that had come into the world. When, after his resurrection, Jesus breathes on his disciples with the Holy Spirit his action was prefaced by the remark, 'As the father has sent me, so I am sending you' (20:21). The resurrection led to their commissioning as his agents in the world. They, now, like John before them, were to bear witness to the light that had come into the world and was still at work illuminating its darkness. Not for nothing does N. T. Wright entitle the chapter on John's Gospel 'New Day, New Tasks', in his recent *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

The interpretation of the resurrection that is common in many churches emphasizes that in rising from the dead Christ opened a door into heaven for believers to enter into personal eternal salvation. But a more honest reading of the resurrection accounts, not least in John, suggests that the resurrection has not only more to do with a restored creation but also with the new task given to his disciples on earth than with their securing places in heaven. They are now the sent ones.

Rejection and recognition 1:10-11; 20:8,16 and 28

One of the great mysteries highlighted in John's Prologue is that when the Creator came to make his home among his people they did not recognize him. Their inability to recognize him is

²³ See Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p.109 and Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), pp. 168-75.

unexplained, although 1:11-13 hints at the reason. He was not recognized because he was not received and he was not received because people rejected his teaching, doubted his claims and rubbished his person. The refusal to believe in him was what lay behind the failure to recognize him.

One must have some sympathy, however, for those who found it hard to work out who Jesus was, since John presents him as a puzzling, enigmatic figure, who conducts himself in mysterious ways and speaks conundrums that cause even his followers, let alone his opponents, to repeatedly misunderstand him. The theme of rejection and recognition weaves its way through the Gospel. Some thought they could dismiss him because they knew where he came from (7:27). Others were baffled by him but concluded he was blasphemous and so sought to get rid of him (8:48-58). Still others repeatedly interrogated what they were seeing and tried to piece together a more positive appreciation of who Jesus was and even gained some measure of illumination in doing so (5:37-43; 9:1-41). Not even his disciples made too much sense of him during the period of his earthly ministry (14:5-13).

The failure to recognize who he is dominates the Gospel until the resurrection occurs. Then things change. John 20 is a sequence of recognition scenes.²⁴ The empty tomb provokes the 'other disciple' to see (perceive) and believe (20:8). Mary Magdalene does not at first recognize Jesus, mistaking

him for the gardener (20:14-15). But when he spoke her name, recognition occurs. His appearance to Thomas is, in this respect, the climax of the Gospel, for when that takes place it calls forth from Thomas the unqualified confession that Jesus is, 'My Lord and my God'. At last they recognize his true *persona*. He is both sovereign and divine, none other than God himself among them. The enigma has been resolved. The perplexities, at least to those who have faith, are past. Here is the true and full identity of the one they have lived with and puzzled over.

Perhaps, as D. Moody Smith, has pointed out, it was not possible for who Jesus was (and is) to be known purely on the basis of his incarnate life, in spite of the numerous signs which were present. For that, it was necessary that the resurrection should occur and Jesus should be encountered in his transformed body. Only then would his full glory be revealed and only then could believers have a true perception of his real nature.²⁵ Resurrection was essential for recognition.

Fathers and children, 1:12-13; 20:17, 28

Family imagery permeates the Prologue. First, it is said that those who exercise faith in Jesus are given 'the right to become children of God' (1:12), not in the sense that they are procreated in the natural way but in the spe-

²⁴ John 21:1-14 contains a further recognition episode.

²⁵ D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, New Testament Theology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 167.

cial sense of being granted the privilege of membership of the special family of grace. Jesus expands on the image both in John 3:6 and 8:41-42. Here again it is made clear that it is not natural parenthood or human (racial) lineage that is significant, but the rebirth brought about by the operation of the Spirit, which manifests itself in a love for Jesus. The second use of family imagery in the Prologue draws attention to Jesus' own unique relationship with God as his Father and the intimate relationship that he and the Father share.

Both these aspects find an echo in John 20:17 when Jesus explains to Mary that he has yet to return to 'my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'. The words neatly balance identity and difference. On the one hand, at last, the fulfilment has arrived and those who believe may enter into their status as sons and daughters of God, thus sharing in the status of Jesus himself.²⁶ The resurrection has made it possible. Yet the careful distinction Jesus makes between 'my' and 'your' Father means that his unmatched relation as a unique son (1:18) is preserved. The resurrection finally establishes the family of God in its true colours.

Word and flesh, 1:14; 20:24-28

John 1:14 makes the magisterial statement that 'The word became flesh...' John 20:24-28 affirms that the flesh of

Jesus they saw standing before their very eyes was, in truth, the Word.

The one who was with God and, indeed, was God had lived an embodied existence among his people for the past thirty or so years. His disciples had observed him closely in the flesh for two or three years. They had observed his miraculous signs, listened to his penetrating, if puzzling, teaching, wondered at his claims and witnessed his real humanity as they learned of his tiredness (4:6) and observed his emotions (2:12-17; 11:33-35) being expressed. They had seen his tortured flesh crucified. There was no doubt that the Word had genuinely been flesh and died in the flesh.

But what would happen post-resurrection? Would it all unravel and prove to have been a fantasy after all? Would the Word cease to be flesh? Would the Word become some ethereal spirit, removed from true humanity? No. He remains human flesh and carries that humanity with him into his exalted state at the right hand of the throne of God where he advocates the cause of his disciples to his Father (1 Jn. 2:1; Heb. 1:3; 4:14-15; 7:23-25). It is Thomas' confession that gives voice to this in the account of the resurrection. Invited by Jesus to touch his wounds, Thomas apparently remains satisfied with what he sees rather than touches. He is convinced this is the real embodied Jesus that stands before him, albeit in a body which has some significantly different characteristics from his pre-crucifixion body. And he affirms that the embodied person he sees before him is 'My Lord and my God' — the Word indeed.

N. T. Wright explains the significance of this. 'The disciples, with

²⁶ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 417.

Thomas (of all people!) as their spokesman, have confessed that the “flesh” they had known, and now know again in a new way, was also in truth “the Word” who was one with the father.²⁷ And since John was a theologian of the incarnation it was imperative that it should happen this way: that as Thomas looked at Jesus’ battered body ‘he should be looking at the living god in human form, not simply with the eye of faith... but with ordinary human sight, which could be backed up by ordinary human touch...’²⁸ Anything less would not do. It would leave a doubt as to whether the human Jesus really was the eternal Word.

John, then, begins by saying, ‘the Word became flesh’ and ends by saying, ‘this flesh is the Word’.

Seeing and believing, 1:14,18; 20:29²⁹

John stakes his opening claims about Jesus on the basis of what he had observed with his eyes. It was because he and his fellow disciples had ‘seen his glory’ (1:14) that they believed the invisible God had become visible in the life of Jesus (1:18). The eyewitness nature of his testimony to Jesus is repeated and expanded further in the opening words of his First Letter (1:1-3). Seeing, in John’s theology, does not devalue believing. One does not believe

in spite of what one sees, but because of it. For him, seeing is a legitimate step on the way to believing. A faith that is rooted in experience is an established faith.

Seeing in and of itself however is not enough since it may remain on the level of a purely sensory experience.³⁰ It does not necessarily result in faith. So Jesus expresses some impatience with those who were merely sensation seekers (4:48, 6:26) and John admits freely that merely seeing miracles performed does not automatically lead to belief (12:37). Nonetheless, sensory perception may lead to a deeper, faith perception, one in which the observer looks beyond the act to its significance, especially in terms of the significance of the one who performs it. Seeing miracles in this way — so that it calls forth a belief in Jesus as the Son of God — is commendable (14:9-11).

Given John’s approach, it should not be thought that Jesus was rebuking Thomas when he said to him, ‘Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe’ (20:29).³¹ When Thomas confesses faith because he sees the evidence of the wounded, yet raised, body of Christ standing before his very eyes he is treading a path that has been consistently opened up ear-

²⁷ Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 668.

²⁸ Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 668.

²⁹ On this section see Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 78-96.

³⁰ John uses a variety of words for ‘seeing’ that, in a general but not altogether consistent way, indicate different levels of perception. See, R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XIII*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 501-3.

³¹ Contra R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 1045-6.

lier in the Gospel. He is using his physical eyes to provide him with a reason to believe that Jesus is Lord and God. He does not use his physical eyes to titillate his curiosity, nor wallow in sensationalism, but to lead him to a mature faith perception, the outcome of which is the worship of the risen Christ.

Of course, Jesus points out that those who have not had the opportunity of encountering the evidence firsthand, as Thomas had, but who come to the same position of mature faith on the basis of what they have heard preached to them are blessed. The beatitude Jesus pronounces confers on them a special status of happiness in relation to God.³² The primary objective of the Gospel was to persuade people who had not been eyewitnesses to 'believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31). But that is not to deny the validity of Thomas' quest, nor his faith.

Once more, the Gospel has come full circle. The 'seeing' of which the opening chapter spoke has come to a climax in the seeing which Thomas experiences in his encounter with the resurrected person of Jesus. The claim made at the beginning of the Gospel as to what the novice disciples saw, is corroborated by what sceptical Thomas saw that night behind the locked doors, a week after the resurrection. It is a seeing which, if there is any integrity, leads one down the road to believing.

With this we finish our examination of what is strictly the Prologue. But

further similarities have been noted between John 20 and the later verses of John 1.

Reuniting and standing, 1:26; 20:19, 26

Mark Stibbe points out the remarkable similarity of wording that occurs concerning Jesus 'standing among them'. It would have been sufficient for John to have used a word for 'appeared' or something similar, whereas he seems deliberately to combine 'standing' (*histemi*) with 'in the midst' (*mesos*).³³ In 1:26, John the Baptist, referring to the eminence of Jesus, says to his listeners that 'among you one stands you do not know'. In the account of his resurrection appearances to his disciples the phrase 'Jesus came and stood among them' is used not once but twice (20:19, 26). Unlike on the occasion of his baptism, however, he is not now unrecognized. As we have seen, the recognition process reaches its climax with the resurrection and his disciples, both with their natural eyes and the eyes of faith, perceive the figure among them to be Jesus the Lord.

The phrasing is not incidental. The disciples were afraid, with good reason, that they would also find the hostility that Jesus had experienced directed at them. So they huddled together for protection behind locked doors. It has often been suggested by redaction critics that John's Gospel was written to encourage members of the supposed Johannine community who were experiencing antagonism,

32 20:29 is one of only two 'beatitudes' in John's Gospel. The other is in 13:17.

33 Stibbe, *John*, p. 199.

even to the extent of expulsion, from the local synagogues because they were followers of Jesus.

Jesus himself had prophesied (15:18-25) that his disciples would indeed experience conflict constantly in this world. By following him they were unavoidably drawn into the controversy he had provoked. If that were so, it was vital that they should equally experience his presence among them. (The closing words of Matthew's Gospel makes the same point in a different way [28:20].) His presence would strengthen, sustain and preserve them in their hours of trial. His physical absence was to make no difference to his ability to keep his promise. For the comforter he would send (14:15-3) would stand in his place. But his bodily presence among them in those fearful days immediately following the crucifixion and resurrection was an enacted reassurance that he would continue to be among them after the ascension. It signalled that he was to be the ever-contemporary one.

Spirit and baptism 1:26-34; 20:21-23

At his baptism, which marked the public start of Jesus' ministry, the Holy Spirit descended on him to empower him for his work (1:33). At the beginning of the post-resurrection ministry of his disciples, the Spirit again descended, this time to empower them for service. The first was the gift of his Father to the Son. The second was the gift of the Son to his followers.

John the Baptist claimed that the water baptism he practised would one day be eclipsed by the greater baptism

in the Holy Spirit that the Messiah would administer (1:33). The precise meaning of the phrase, 'baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit',³⁴ is much disputed, but none would dissent from Leon Morris' exposition of it as, at least, a starting point.

Jesus came that men might be brought into contact with the divine Spirit. But baptism is a figure, which stresses abundant supply. So John will mean that the Spirit leads men into the infinite divine spiritual resources. This has not been possible previously, for there is quality of life that Christ and none other makes available to men. This life is a positive gift coming from the Spirit of God. Baptism with water had essentially a negative significance. It is a cleansing from—. But baptism with the Spirit is positive. It is a bestowal of new life in God.³⁵

If the phrase, 'baptise with the Holy Spirit', has proved debateable, the meaning of the action of the risen Christ in breathing on his disciples and imparting the Holy Spirit to them has proved even more controversial, especially in its relation to the Day of Pentecost. Was there one coming of the Spirit or two? Was this a prelude to

³⁴ The Greek word is *en* usually, but not inflexibly, translated as 'in'. Although both NRSV and NIV use 'with', 'in' seems the more appropriate preposition to use since the Spirit is the medium in which Christ's disciples were immersed, just as water had been the medium in which John's disciples had been immersed.

³⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 152f.

Pentecost, is this John's version of Pentecost or is it something different altogether?³⁶

To explore this issue is not our concern here. We may simply note that the Holy Spirit is now being imparted to the disciples so that he may fulfil the ministry predicted of him by Jesus (14:15-31; 16:5-16). Again, the circle is completed by the resurrection. The Holy Spirit is in on the action at the beginning and end of the Gospel. He is first received by Jesus and finally received by the disciples of Jesus. The resurrection is going to give way to the exaltation of Christ, making it imperative that the Spirit of Truth be sent in the Father's name to act as their Counsellor.

Seeking and finding 1:38; 20:15

The identical phrase, 'who are you looking for?' occurs in John 1:38 and 20:15, although the NIV translates them differently with the result that many readers will miss the allusion. In both cases it is Jesus who asks the question, first of prospective, enquiring disciples and then of a distraught, grief-stricken Mary. In both cases they find more than they might have expected when they reply to the question. The disciples are invited to check out where Jesus was staying and spend time with him. Mary discovers not the corpse she had expected but the risen Lord.

Throughout the Gospel people are portrayed as searching — searching for answers like Nicodemus, searching for love and satisfaction in life like the Samaritan woman, searching for healing like the royal official and the lame man at Bethesda, searching for the bread of life, searching for spirit-quenching water, searching for light in their darkness, searching for sight in their blindness, searching for a shepherd in their lostness. Those who believed in him found the answers to the deep needs of their lives through him. He alone could supply those answers, as his disciples confessed (6:68).

John's wonderfully crafted Gospel plays ironically on the theme. The Jewish authorities are among those who search for Jesus (7:11), not so that he might answer their spiritual quest but so that they might dispose of him. Their actions led to his crucifixion and consequently afterwards to his resurrection and exaltation — the means by which the eternal life for which people sought would be made available to them. It was then, when he could no longer be found on the earth, because he had ascended to his Father (7:33-36), that his ministry of answering the need of the spiritual seekers would become worldwide in its effect. Those who seek, find. Mary is the first after the crucifixion to discover it is so.

Turning and being turned 1:38; 20:14 and 16

A further linguistic resonance between John 1 and John 20 is found in the use of the Greek verb *strephein* for 'to turn'. In 1:38, Jesus turns round to see the

³⁶ For a consideration of the various views see, Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts, Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), pp. 90-102.

two disciples who were following him because they wanted to see where he was staying. In 20:14 and 16 we read of Mary twice turning, to see Jesus standing in front of her. Only when she turned again (presumably having turned away from him)³⁷ did she recognize him.

The primary issue here for John is undoubtedly that of recognition. But, is it too much to read into John's use of *strephein* more than a mere reference to the direction in which people were looking? Could the double turning of Christ towards his fledgling disciples and of Mary towards her risen Lord be spiritually significant? In Jesus, God turns to face us in our searching for him. He does not turn away from us but towards us in grace. Even so, a full and steady turning on our part, away from the false mindset and spiritual experiences offered by the world, is needed if we are to recognize him as the risen Son of God and offer him the devotion of our lives.

Conclusion

In resonance with John 1, then, the resurrection narrative of John 20, presents the resurrection as the beginning of a new creation, the channel of eternal life, the dawning of irrepressible light, the ultimate pointer to recognizing God's messiah, the confirmation of the bestowal of sonship, the affirmation that the word was indeed made flesh, the ultimate basis for a perception that leads to belief, the pledge of

Christ's continuing presence, the key to the imparting of the Spirit, the testimony that seekers find and an invitation to turn to Christ, who has first turned to us. Here is a rich and varied exposition of the resurrection which leads us to see in him the glory which his first disciples saw while he lived among them, and, like them, to believe.

Some preachers approach yet another Easter with dread; not because they do not believe the message but because they do not know how to express it in new ways, having preached it so often. However much we believe the resurrection to be a revolutionary event we all too easily speak of it with the monotonous voice of predictability. Quite apart from capturing the resurrection on the wider canvas of the New Testament, John 20 alone gives us a clue as to how our preaching need not be a repetition of superficial claims each year. Each of the themes in the paragraph above calls out for development in its own right. There is so much more to the wonder of the resurrection than 'dead man comes back to life'. There is so much more to unpack than the classic apologetic approach of providing persuasive evidence for the empty tomb, and hence the resurrection, important though that is. Firmly based in historical reality, the (trans)physical resurrection of Christ leads us into a deep and rich understanding of the way God is at work, restoring his fallen creatures and his fallen world.

The resurrection is God's 'yes' to the claims made about Jesus in John 1. It is God's 'yes' to salvation, to new life, to sins forgiven, to the restoration of creation itself. It draws from us the same reaction as it did from Thomas.

³⁷ Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 469.

When we 'see' it with our own eyes, we too want to fall down in worship and in wonder, we too affirm that Christ is indeed the divine Lord over all powers and we too are compelled to bow in loyal submission to his mastery over us.

In John's carefully woven Gospel it may well be true to say, as D. Moody Smith, claims, that 'the entire Gospel is written, and could only have been

written from the standpoint of a distinctly Christian and *postresurrection* perspective'.³⁸ Certainly all the threads find their resolution in the report of the resurrection appearances. And all the initial claims made in the Gospel's majestic opening words find their confirmation there too.

³⁸ Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, p. 102.

Christ the Mediator of the Law

Calvin's Christological Understanding of the Law as the Rule of Living and Life-Giving

Byung-Ho Moon

Christ the Mediator of the Law explores the coherence between Christology and soteriology in Calvin's theology of the law, examining its intellectual origins and his position on the concept and extent of Christ's mediation of the law. A comparative study between Calvin and contemporary Reformers –

Luther, Bucer, Melancthon and Bullinger – and his opponent Michael Servetus points out the unique feature of Calvin's Christological understanding of the law.

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