AN EXPLORATION OF THE HOLISTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
GRACE, TRUTH AND LOVE IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

By

Thoa Nguyen
Student number 20036967

Qualifications
B. Pharm, M.Div (Hons.)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Theology)

Stirling Theological College
University of Divinity
28 June 2013
ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with an observation that our understanding of “grace upon grace” and “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” demands revelation beyond human imagination. Grace, as God’s undeserved kindness, speaks of the truth, Jesus Christ, as self-giving love. This is the consistent testimony of Jn. 1:14-18—that grace and truth cohere in the person Jesus Christ. The portrayal is complete, which John then expounds in this completeness.

My thesis is that John presents the completeness of grace and truth in many dialogue sequences, which are either misunderstood or rejected, yet the Gospel per se remains a living testimony to articulation of grace upon grace in its reception and experience of fullness. What John presents for such reception can only occur by believing that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” and that through believing you “may have life in his name.” That is, John presents grace and truth as complete in Jesus Christ and received by believing accordingly.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the holistic relationship between grace, truth and love in relation to the Christ Jesus revealed in the Fourth Gospel though several selected sequences.

In approaching this thesis, various themes will be examined through a composite interpretive approach, using the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jean-Luc Marion, and Kelly and Moloney as a premise to engaging those selected dialogues of the Gospel. What is of particular interest in these works is their focus on the whole form of Jesus Christ as God’s demonstrative expression of grace and truth that is engaged at a theological level akin to aesthetics—seeing the form as beauty or glory (von Balthasar) or love as gift given in excess (Marion) or yet the drama of glory disclosed in grace and truth (Kelly and Moloney), which are also pervasive in John. The beauty of grace and truth is unreservedly given in love but only become tangible in the experience and lives of the beholders of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father.
Chapter 1 – Introduction
Outline of thesis, aims and resources

Chapter 2 – Methodology
Modern biblical-historical interpretation calls into question the reliability of the gospel stories and subsequently the portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth. Attempts to reconstruct a historical Jesus often end up with Jesus without the Christ or vice versa. This chapter provides a brief survey of the historical-critical approaches to biblical interpretation and its progress. Survey of the quests for a historical Jesus and alternative approaches will also be looked at in order to arrive at a working method.

1. Reason, Historical Method and the Quest for Jesus
The four traditional components of the scripture namely canon, text, composition and hermeneutics have always been under scrutiny since antiquity. These have also been the substance for modern historical critical approaches to biblical interpretation and in the quests for Jesus.

2. Alternative Approaches
Alternative approaches seek to stay truthful to the theological priority of the Fourth Gospel, at the same time, fulfil the demand for academic discipline.

   a. By Balthasar
   The expression of the inner reality of God which presupposes an understanding of a totality, is understood aesthetically by Balthasar as the form of Christ. Surrendering oneself to the form, the seer is confronted and drawn into the mystery of its aesthetic radiance to behold the form.

   b. By Kelly and Moloney
   While being both theocentric and systematic, the experience of God becomes Kelly and Molony’s epistemological guiding model.
c. By Marion
The Christ phenomenon is counter-intuitive, saturated yet enrapturing and beautiful.

3. Composite Interpretive Approach
This approach offers an alternative paradigm as an expansion of reason that exceeds the traditional historicist’s view of truth.

Chapter 3 – The Form of Christ: Glory Is Disclosed as Grace upon Grace
The Word is the definitive expression of God, becoming flesh as grace and truth in love.

1. Understanding the Prologue’s Structural Presentation
The Prologue’s structural presentation functions as a witness focusing on the phenomenon of Christ and human sensory experience, informing the remaining of the gospel.

2. The Form of Christ: The Word in the Beginning
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1-2).

   a. Creator
   All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing which has become, became (Jn. 1:3).

   b. Logos
   God’s disclosure of grace and truth is Jesus Christ, the Logos of God.

   c. Redeemer
   In him was life and that life was the light of humankind (Jn. 1:4).

3. The Drama of Glory Is Disclosed as Grace upon Grace: The Word Became Flesh
In the coming of the Word with its fullness, human existence is brought into the radiant field of its divine origin and God-ordained destiny.

   a. Incarnation
   Transcending human hope and expectation, infinite freedom is given as human beings enter into a relationship with God through the incarnation.
b. Making the Father Known
In Jesus Christ, the Gift which is truth and the source of grace, the Father is disclosed.

c. Radiating God’s Glory
i. As Love in Grace
God’s revelation of grace and truth given in excess through Jesus is accessible to all humanity as grace upon grace.

ii. As Love in Truth
Jesus Christ is the only authentic expression of the truth of God’s love for humanity.

Chapter 4 – Seeing the Form: The Word Is the Revelation of Love, Truth and Light Cohere in Jesus Christ, Given in Excess (Jn. 3:1-26, 4:5-42)

1. Given as Love in Excess (Jn. 3:11-17)
God’s love is given in excess in the definitive form of the incarnate Jesus and is experienced in and through the Holy Spirit. Although facing rejection and misunderstanding, John testifies that without such gift, salvation remains an impossible possibility.

To arrive at the truth means to be set free from bondage. The revelation of the “I am” allows true worshippers to enter into new depth of truth whereby the location and character of worship coincide in him – grace and truth tabernacling among humanity. God’s truth is disclosed and completed through Jesus as the embodiment and disclosure of the Triune God and is now continued to be in and through the Spirit as he leads believers into all truth.

3. Light for the Blind
John’s testimony to the completeness of God’s grace and truth through the love Jesus has for the world is again rejected and misunderstood but the newness of God’s revelation in Jesus brings about irreplaceable reality of God’s encountering.

Chapter 5 – Beholding the Form
1. Encountering God’s Glory: The Resurrection and the Life
God’s glory is definitively demonstrated in the miracle of raising Lazarus to life and ultimately Jesus’ own death, resurrection and exaltation – the complete presentation of God’s love in grace and truth.

2. Participating in God’s Glory
   a. Falling into the Ground
      Humanity is continued to be transformed into the full image and likeness of God. While the image is revealed through Christ, the likeness will involve one’s incorporation into Christ’s life to be like-Christ.

   b. Children of Light
      By virtue of faith, one is given the right to be and intimately involved in the Trinitarian life though Christ as children of light.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion
As a saturated phenomenon, the form is given to all as a gift given in excess which can only be seen by the believing ones. John’s testimony to the completeness of grace and truth in love through Jesus as grace upon grace is often misunderstood or rejected, yet for those who believe, experience of such grace in its fullness awaits.

Bibliography
Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis begins with an observation that our understanding of the two phrases from John’s Prologue – “grace upon grace” and “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” – demand revelation beyond human imagination, for the voice of truth is finally not a relative issue among compelling perspectives. Grace, as God’s undeserved kindness, speaks of the truth – Jesus Christ, as self-giving love. This is the consistent testimony of Jn. 1:14-18 — that grace and truth cohere in the person Jesus Christ, who is the Word en-fleshed and exhibited in generosity and veracity. The portrayal is completed, which John then expounds as complete through a succession of testimonies.

My thesis is that John (from here on, John refers to the Fourth Gospel and not a presumed author unless otherwise stated), presents the completeness of grace and truth in many dialogue sequences, which are either misunderstood or rejected, yet the Gospel per se remains a living testimony to articulation of grace upon grace in its reception and experience of fullness. What John presents for such reception can only occur by believing that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name.” That is, John presents grace and truth as complete in Jesus Christ, expressed through love and received only by believing accordingly.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore the holistic relationship between grace, truth and love in relation to the Christ Jesus revealed in the Fourth Gospel through several selected sequences. With its focus on the form of Christ (Balthasar) as the beauty of the living God manifest perfectly in Jesus as grace, truth and love, I propose to engage Jn. 1:1-18, 3:1-26, 4:5-42, 7:37-39, 9:38-41, 11: 25-27, 12:23-26, 36c in this exploration.

For John, God is only known through believing in the person Jesus Christ. He was in the beginning with God and was God who has become flesh and lived among us (Jn. 1:1-5, 14). Jesus Christ is the visible exposition of the invisible God (Jn. 1:18). The believer has seen his glory as of “the Father’s only Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Yet the Word remains an offence to his world which does not accept him (Jn. 1:14-18).

Unlike Synoptic writers, the writer of John, also known as the Fourth Evangelist did not begin his work with a historical narrative of Jesus’ beginnings as in Matthew and Luke, or even as an adult starting his ministry as in the case of Mark’s gospel. Instead, he introduces his audience to the Word with unique particularities. Before all worlds were formed, the Word was in the beginning. This same Word of God, who became flesh as a tangible person with particular proclamation and deeds, is the centre of Christian theology which informs every Christian era. For John, Jesus Christ is at once
saving grace and judgment that calls forth for human response in transformation through the Spirit given without measure and by whom the Word is known and experienced in heart and mind of the believers (Jn. 1:12, 3:6).

While Jn. 1:1-18 deals with the form of Jesus, John also introduces the Word as and by the testimony of the Father, of the Son himself who is “close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn. 1:18), and through the Hebrew tradition of which John the Baptist is the representative and whose testimony sums up the history of revelation. These testimonies invite readers to enter into the realm of light made possible by “the Word made flesh among us” and call forth faith as they offer the credibility of the One who testifies and is being testified.

Flowing from such testimonies, Jn. 3:1-21 with particular attention given to vv.11-17, deals with a different kind of testimony, which essentially threw the history of religious experience into disarray. For the realm of God could only be entered by the action of God from above which will transform things from the flesh of the world (Jn. 3:5-6). Within that realm, the world is to be judged by and only by God’s love (Jn. 3:16) through Jesus’ unreserved acceptance (Jn. 3:18).

Chapter 4 as a whole and Jn. 4:13-14, v.26 in particular expounds further the gift of God, “living water,” which dissolves all boundaries, speaking of the outreach of God’s all inclusive cosmic love through his incarnate presence or self-revelation in Jesus, “I am He” who opens the gate of heaven in order for the believers to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Chapter 7:37-39 explores yet another dimension of God’s grace when the living water is finally given at the expense of Jesus’ life. When he is lifted up on the cross the glory of God then is fully revealed as self-giving love, without measure. In Balthasar’s language, “nothing else can be believed; nothing else ought to be believed. Love alone is credible.”

The miracle of healing the blind man in chapter 9 explains the work of “the light of the world.” It is the contact with the “living water” flowing from Jesus – the Sent One that brings about healing and enlightenment into an otherwise hopeless situation. The contrast between light and darkness, seeing and not seeing, above and below unambiguously clarifies what Jesus has said before in Jn.

---

1 Anthony Kelly and Francis Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 74. The authors observe that Nicodemus’ interpretation of Jesus mission by assimilating it with how things are known to be, conceals an effort to fit him in a ready-made religious worldview. Consequently, his concern for the past is blocking his receptivity for the new.

"No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again, from above." A new birth, new vision, new witness and new worship are beckoned only by the grace, truth and love of the Father’s only Son. Once again, the face of resistance echoes John’s warning in the first chapter, “the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not understand it.”

The account of raising Lazarus in chapter 11 is understood by John and the audience as a definitive revelation of Jesus’ absolute power over death and the decisive factor, leading to the Jews plotting to kill Jesus. It is yet another testimony, presenting the completeness of truth and grace expressed in Jesus’ love for the world, even to the point of death. Jesus’ declaration, “I am the Resurrection and the Life” is fulfilled in the act of raising Lazarus from the dead and in his own pending resurrection and exaltation when the hour comes. From seeing the form, the moment of encountering God’s glory has arrived when the believer is apprehended by its beauty, radiated as grace and truth expressed in Jesus’ kenotic love.

Further into chapter 12, John envisions the fruits brought about by the falling into the ground and dying of a grain of wheat. The grace of God through the truth of the Christ and his perfect love is fully and gloriously yet paradoxically shown through the cross he bears, which calls forth for a response in love and faith from the believer who “serves me must follow me, and where I am, there shall my servant be also” (Jn. 12:20-26).

Bearing in mind that John’s purpose is to present the truth of Jesus Christ, the Word in such a way that “you may come to believe”— such disclosure must be given without measure as the initiative of God’s disclosure and overture of love in excess. In so doing, it also points out for those who do not believe, that the Gospel remains for them an offence and darkness. This could be seen more clearly when we investigate the selected sequences mentioned above.

In approaching this thesis, these themes will be examined through a composite interpretive approach, using the works of Balthasar, Marion, and Kelly and Moloney as a premise to engaging those selected dialogues of the Gospel. A composite interpretive approach recognises the fact that there is no one satisfactory method which can be used comprehensibly to engage these dialogues. What is of particular interest in the works of these authors/writers is their focus on the whole form of Jesus Christ as God’s demonstrative expression of grace and truth that is engaged at a theological

---

3 Oliver Davies, “The Theological Aesthetics,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139. Davies notes in this essay that within Balthasar’s synthesis of theological aesthetics, he understands Jesus himself to be the one in whom absolute Being makes its appearance (seeing the form) and through an act of perception, both theological and aesthetical, the Christian faithful come to behold the revelation that existence is in truth the self-communication of the Trinitarian Creator God through Jesus as the ultimate revelation.
level akin to aesthetics—seeing the form as beauty or glory (Balthasar) or love as gift given in excess (Marion) or yet the drama of glory disclosed in grace and truth (Kelly and Moloney), which are also pervasive in John. The beauty of grace and truth is unreservedly given but only become tangible in the experience and lives of the beholders of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father (Jn. 9:39). In this context, Jesus’ question for Thomas remains today a challenge and comfort for us, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (Jn. 20:29).

Within this thesis, I will commence firstly by formulating a working method. In so doing, it is important to look at issues concerning method within modern historical critical approaches to biblical interpretation, primarily in a brief survey of the quest for the “historical Jesus,” along with methods used by Balthasar, Marion and Kelly and Moloney. A comparison between such approaches is necessary in formulating a suitable working method which I shall employ principally for the work of this thesis. Secondly, Jn. 1:1-18 with its Christological focus will be studied with emphasis on certain understanding of the form of Christ (Balthasar) as the glory of God disclosed in grace and truth. Within this chapter, it is necessary that the structure of the Prologue will be investigated albeit briefly as it lays the foundation for further understanding the function of the form expressing through the holistic relationship between grace, truth and love. Thirdly, specific attention will be given to John’s testimony as premises to seeing the form as grace, truth and love cohere in the Word or the beauty of God given in excess of which one is confronted with the decision to behold the form. Fourthly, in the very act of beholding the form the beholder is led into the personal experience of encountering the glory of God via the resurrected Christ as his child and is invited to participate in God’s glory. Misunderstood or rejected, John remains a living testimony to articulation of grace and truth expressed as grace upon grace in its reception and experience of fullness.
Chapter 2 – Methodology

In the modern era, the correlation between text and reality in the contexts of faith and history has become a subject of continuous discussion and argument. While the debate is first focused on the relationship between biblical text and reality, the endeavour to relate history and faith in respect to the story of Jesus of Nazareth from the gospels in particular, comes to a decisive point of departure with Strauss’ *Das Leben Jesus* (1835-36) – *Life of Jesus* (SCM, 1973). Strauss questions the historical reliability of the gospel story, especially its supernatural elements, as mythical – a product of “unconscious folk poeticizing.” Distinctively, myths are a product of a particular mental tendency (i.e. religious enthusiasm of a certain community). As myths, they are unhistorical and fictitious. Strauss’ proposal steers the discussion away from hermeneutical to historical, with particular attention paid to the reliability of the text and forces much deeper reflection on the relationship between “the certainty of faith” and “the relative events of history.” Strauss’ findings make explicit the difference between the Synoptic and the Fourth Gospel and consequently, suggest a different way of thinking about the Gospels. While the Synoptic gospels provide a reasonable bulk of material useful for comparison and subsequent historical categorization, the Fourth gospel eludes much on comparative analysis. Indeed, its unique difference in presentation, which categorically suggested by Strauss as myth, invites a composite engagement of the whole form as excess (Marion) or the complete form (Balthasar) by contrast to the reductive leverage that historicist approaches have had with the Synoptic gospels.

1. Reason, Historical Method and the Quest for Jesus

At the heart of the “Age of Reason” – the period between the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries – is a conflict between religion and the inquiring mind that wanted to certify knowledge through reason based on evidence and proof. Powerful intellectual forces challenged many basic, foundational religious assumptions and traditions. In addition, the emergence and widespread acceptance of a scientific world view and systematic philosophical reason epitomised the urge for a major paradigm shift in religious thinking and theological enterprise as a whole. In this new world view, empirical science became the golden standard and reason dominated all knowledge. As a

---


result, only that which could be shown to be universal and reasonable by the standard of rationalism was deemed acceptable thus believable.

At the same time, science was reaching out to encompass new horizons of knowledge. The crucial discoveries of Galileo and Newton have laid the foundation for the eventual development of the empirical sciences and a new worldview that placed prominent emphasis on the empirical character of matters operating by a mechanical system of cause and effect. This new outlook made no appeal to purpose, either divine or human. It was expected that anything that happened would be conformed to general law and could be explained scientifically. There was certainly an atmosphere of scepticism about the possibility of miracles, Jesus’ divinity and most certainly his resurrection. While the church was losing its grip as the traditional source of authority, the Bible as a whole came to be treated as a collection of documents whose truth could not be understood apart from such matters as authorship, dating, circumstance of writing and relationship with previous oral and written materials.

In the seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries the seeds of “modern study” of the historical Jesus were emerging. Attempting to negate traditional interpretation of all biblical concepts with his Theological-Political Treaties, Spinoza (1632-1677) was credited as among the first who pioneered the discipline of modern biblical criticism. Within this work, he set out to undermine the “inspired” and “inerrant” claim of the Bible with regard to the divine truth. Only what could stand the standard of rationalism would be accepted. He set the course for modern biblical criticism by introducing a threefold logical progression of the basics of modern historical-critical biblical interpretation which included the interpreter becoming the narrative source of truth within a pious moralism that exhibited the true meaning of the bible. By changing the subject, the focus is shifted from the referent to the history of the text. The complex and rich biblical conception was being substituted by the new exclusively physical conception of the modern era. By making oneself the norm and source of all truth, reason has assumed the elevation of ultimate authority in place of the bible or tradition. And finally, to satisfy the searching souls of the day, the bible is reduced simply to a moral imperative – to love God and your neighbours as yourself.

---

7 David L. Dungan, A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition and the Interpretation of the Gospels (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 198-260. Within his Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670), Spinoza sets forth the most important principle of an interpretation that is at once rational and historical critical which was to be developed over the course of the eighteenth century, by negating the traditional interpretation of all major biblical concepts and redefining them in accord with the worldview of seventeenth century mechanistic science. Further, he also pioneers new methods of historical biblical interpretation and reinforces a simple, moralistic view of the bible.
The era of the Enlightenment – mid seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, marked a shift in epistemology. Within a new epistemological consciousness, reason no longer gave a snapshot of reality. Instead the emphasis was placed on reason within perspective in time and space. This shift also marked the beginning of a new historical consciousness together with its tools – critical methods of historical study, which sought to separate genuine history from mythological accretions, potentially challenged the authority of the Scripture as received truth and called into question its reliability. The Enlightenment fundamentally transformed every institution in western society. Its influence on biblical research was also evident. As modern rational scepticism continued to undermine the church’s most cherished tradition, reverberating around different areas of biblical hermeneutics were emerging concerns about the purity and stability of the gospel text, calling into question the reliability of the text, the authority of the canon, and then the composition of the written text.

According to Frei, before the rise of historicism in the eighteenth century, western reading of the bible was traditionally realistic. The meaning of the bible was doctrinal and edifying, yet at the same time historical and literal. The words and sentences meant what they said and because they did so, they accurately described real events and real truths that were rightly put only in those terms and not others. In other words, literal readings of biblical stories assume their historicity and all biblical stories are woven parts of a cumulative story. Traditional biblical interpretation incorporated extra biblical thoughts, experience and reality into one real world detailed and made accessible by the biblical stories but not the reverse.

Within the Enlightenment, the Deist’s influence in England and the subsequent rise of historicism, there was an increasing awareness of a break in the cohesion between the literal meaning of the biblical narratives and their references to actual events as there is a logical distinction and a reflective distance between the stories (biblical world) and the reality (real historical world) they depict. No matter whether the depiction was thought to agree or disagree with reality there was an observed separation both in thought and in sensibility.

---

8 Dungan, *A History*, 145-170. Dungan’s History provides a comprehensive discussion on the widespread effect of the Enlightenment on many arenas of life including political, social, economic and religious front.
11 Frei, *The Eclipse*, 3. Given that an original sense or literal meaning remains intact, an earlier story was interpreted as a figure of the latter one. Consequently, the several biblical stories narrating sequential segments in time must fit together into one narrative, embracing the differences in the Old and the New Testaments thus taking for granted the experience of any present age and reader.
As things gradually unfolded, historical-critical scholarship began to be applied in earnest in attempts to reread the canonical Gospels. Historical-critical disciplines often combined both literary and historical approaches to the biblical texts. While literary critical method studies the types of languages and the content of the writings, historical criticism looks at the origins and the reliability of the texts as historical documents.

Ancient or modern, scripture has always been subjected to some form of reduction, whether by canon, text, composition or hermeneutics; the effect of this is to diminish the whole form as greater than any aggregate of various components methodologically reduced. In the case of the New Testament, the challenge is even more acute for several reasons. Firstly, the person and events that it records left for the most part no recoverable physical traces. Secondly, there was virtually no evidence which could be found outside the New Testament to bear on the question of its historical reliability. Essentially, evidence is empirical. Attention is now turned to the isolated gospel witnesses and the reliability of their testimonies. Not for long, all the principles of rational enquiries began to be earnestly applied to the Bible and the person Jesus, which up to this point had traditionally been regarded as the supreme “Word of God” and Jesus as the “Son of God” and therefore beyond rational scrutiny. In this milieu, new historical methods raised a serious and critical theological question regarding the historicity of the Gospel accounts, “Could the records of Jesus be rewritten in the light of more objective evidence?” And so it began, the successive quests for the historical Jesus – a project utilising historical reductive methods to reconstruct an historical portrait of Jesus.

Various reductive methods through canon and text have been deployed in the quest of the historical Jesus beginning in the middle to the late nineteenth century in Europe – a project that seems antithetical to John’s declaration of the explicit form of Jesus in which we behold his glory. From reducing elements of the life of Jesus as witnessed by the gospel’s message to creative myths told by the Evangelists,12 to isolating him as either the Jesus of history or the Christ of faith, historical-critical methods, have in so far adopted a minimalist approach toward studying the subject. Ranging from studying the source, analysing the literary constructs of the text or the redactional elements involved, or a combination of all just to name a few; even with the aids of new archaeological and manuscript data, such approaches tend toward limiting the portrayal of Jesus and diminish our

12 Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 2nd ed. (Illinois: IVP, 1997), 9-13. Witherington gave a brief but comprehensive overview of the quests especially the third one in this expanded volume of his work, calling for a renewed commitment of the readers to continue their own pilgrimage toward Jesus as both Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the Christian faith whom the gospels proclaimed.
capacity to see the whole form that the Gospel has envisioned within its testimony. At best, historical-critical methods have accomplished likely probabilities, but failed to prove with certainty to as to what actually happened. While the intention of such methods in this case is to establish a so-called historically authentic and accurate account of the life of Jesus, such methods easily ignore the distance from ancient subjects, and that historicist approaches work in the realm of possibility rather than certainty.

The quest for an historical Jesus divorced from Christian dogma is a prime example of the modern desire to establish knowledge on the basis of evidence. It has undoubtedly generated a theological tradition which separates Jesus from Christ of which Balthasar referred to as being methodologically blind. Ultimately, it ended up with Jesus without the Christ or Christ without Jesus. To reduce the life of Jesus as witnessed in the canonical gospel’s accounts through historicist approaches does diminish the whole form as witnessed in the gospels – of our particular interest is the Fourth gospel, and disregards the place of faith in the midst of the ever-present risen Christ whose grace, truth and love transforms existence and produces faith.

Further, the synthesis of the historical Jesus is a product of historicist approaches to the Synoptic gospels whereby reduction of the kerygma by categorisation and/or assimilation is evident. What cannot be reduced is often conveniently cast into some form of mytho-poetics by historical critics. Such approach showcases the limitations of the critics in their attitudes and method, of which Kähler considered as "blind alley." He comments, “The historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ.” The Fourth gospel’s unique presentation resists such speculative reduction as it does not fit neatly into such a framework. As a whole, this gospel presents an alternative view which does not negate historical interest but anticipates engagement on its own term rather than resorting to myth. It is thus necessary that the development of the historical quest for Jesus so far is looked at within this thesis. While this work does not give a comprehensive view of the quest, it nevertheless provides a brief overview that informs the background of my current study into the Gospel of John and the theme of interest, the holistic relationship between grace, truth and love in the Fourth Gospel. A comparison between the approaches used by Balthasar, Marion and Kelly and Moloney will provide a point of entry to establish a working method for this particular thesis.

---

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) was perhaps the first to give voice to anything substantially different from the tradition and teaching received in the church for seventeen and a half centuries before his essay entitled, “On the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples” was posthumously published in 1778. Given the background development so far, Reimarus essentially argued that the supernatural element of the Gospels which was traditionally and universally accepted was now deemed unacceptable by rational people.

Reimarus’ rationalist view assumed two essential truths: the existence of a wise and good Creator and the immortality of the soul. He believed that these truths were discernible by reason and constituted the basis of a universal religion which could lead to happiness. Evidently, this belief is irreconcilable with orthodox Christianity which believes in the revealed truth about Jesus Christ. Reimarus set out to discredit the origins or Christianity by attempting to show that Jesus was an unsuccessful political messianic pretender whose disciples went on to steal his body after the crucifixion in order to create “the empty tomb” theory to support the story of resurrection, and subsequently invented Christianity. The whole gospel story, in Reimarus’ opinion was totally a tale of falsehood. Perhaps the significance of Reimarus’ work does not lie in what he set out to do, that is to discredit the Jesus of the Christian faith; rather it has had a great impact on our understanding of the nature of the Gospel narratives. Although his view was not universally accepted and often viewed as anti-dogmatic, the fact that it could be expressed gave confidence to others to continue asking purely historical questions about Jesus.

Of course, Reimarus did not think in a vacuum. Not long before his time, English Deists such as Toland (1670-1722), Collins (1676-1729) and Woolston (1670-1733) were among the first ones to emerge as particular critics of the gospels. It was John Toland who shone the searchlight of sceptical reason squarely on the Gospels by claiming that the final selection of no more than four Gospels by the Roman Catholics was undoubtedly an error and the decisions of the church councils was but prejudiced conclusions, “designed to protect a narrow orthodoxy based on incomplete evidence.” Although no form of recognisable literary or source criticism was then produced by them; their

16 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 3rd ed.*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black Ltd, 1910), 13-26. Schweitzer credited Reimarus’ work as ‘the most splendid achievement in the whole course of the historical investigation of the life of Jesus.’ By arguing that the content of Jesus’ teaching and preaching were politically driven and the world of thought in which Jesus moved was essentially eschatological, Reimarus postulated that eschatology was earthly and political in character. Reimarus’s makeshift hypothesis has become the driving force for subsequent researches into the historical life of Jesus.
strong conviction that the Jesus of the New Testament is but a product of imagination probably sowed the seeds for subsequent historical Jesus research.\textsuperscript{18} John Locke, Matthew Tindal and Thomas Chubb, whose work \textit{The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted} was published in 1738, were probably among the very first people to have an impact on the world’s culture of the historical Jesus research as they were already on their journey searching for a “reasonable Christianity."\textsuperscript{19} In addition, the fact that Jesus left no writings behind and neither did any contemporary historian leave anything except for passing references to him makes the task of reconstructing his life so difficult. In other words, the gap between what really happened and what was read is extraordinarily significant which demands serious attention. Consequently, if one accepts the Enlightenment view of history as a “quest to reconstruct what actually happened” then it follows suit that it is necessary to assume a “creative element in the tradition” in the Gospel narratives. Reimarus in this sense stands a pioneer of those who have applied a “hermeneutic of suspicion” in approaching the life of Jesus and the Gospels.

Following Reimarus, David Friedrich Strauss in his large and infamous work \textit{Das Leben Jesus – Life of Jesus} (1835-1836) called for an “unbiased” historical-critical research to be done on the life of Jesus predicated on his basic belief that the evangelist’s point of view and usage of myths in retelling the story of Jesus did not truly reflect what had happened. As they are in their raw form, the gospels could not be treated as unvarnished historical records. For Strauss, the Gospel narratives to a large extend are an expression of “myths” and in their present form they cannot be understood as “historical” as the course of the narration is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events. Myth is interpreted by Strauss as something that had not actually happened but arose from the misplaced faith of the early Christians.\textsuperscript{20}

Together with the aid of modern methods of biblical interpretation, Strauss’ finding was the driving force of the development of the so called “Markan hypothesis,” which assumes Mark’s gospel characteristic of its vivid and simple language was the earliest. Moreover, it was the closest in point of time to the original eyewitness and could therefore be considered a reliable historical record of the ministry of Jesus. Strauss was the first scholar who seriously reflected upon the criteria for establishing historicity which in this context refers to the historical authenticity of the person or

\textsuperscript{18} Markus Bockmuehl, ed., \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Jesus} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141.
\textsuperscript{19} James Charlesworth, \textit{The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 2. Contrary to the common belief of many that Reimarus was the one who started \textit{The First Quest} – the period between 1738-1906, Charlesworth credits the English Deists with their much earlier publication in 1738 as the “real precursors” of critical Jesus study.
\textsuperscript{20} Strauss, \textit{Life of Jesus}, 88.
event in question. He argued that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet whose claims on nineteenth century Europe were minimal and thus faith and scholarship were not at all agreeable.21

The next decades saw the mass of the publications dismissing the supernatural elements of the gospels and supporting the view that as a whole they are better understood as mythological stories which embodied the beliefs of the early Christians rather than reliable historical information about Jesus’ life.

Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) and Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) were perhaps the dissenter voices during this period. While Edersheim contended that the Gospels present a reliable portrait of who Jesus really was, Weiss argued that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who expected the end of the world. Evidently, the full impact of Weiss’s thesis was experienced later on as it was taken up and developed further by Albert Schweitzer whose works have decisively ended the first quest for the historical Jesus.22

The fundamental principles of the two-document hypothesis were first expounded by Heinrich Holtzmann (1832-1910). During this period, Mark was considered as a source of unexpected value, Q was also identified as a reliable, independent source about Jesus while John and the rest of the gospel traditions were more open to question.23 However, Wilhelm Wrede (1859-1906) with The Messianic Secret in the Gospel postulated the idea that the Markan narrative is not just a vivid and simple historical record as previously postulated. It is actually permeated throughout with the evangelist’s theological conception. Wrede demonstrated that Mark had organised his material around a particular idea – The Messianic Secret, holding the view that the historical Jesus had never declared himself as the Messiah.

Writing a little while after Wrede was Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) whose thinking was widely influenced by J. Weiss. In his publication The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, Schweitzer defended the historical character of the messianic secret in opposition to Wrede, saying that the historical Jesus actually declared himself to be the Messiah but required that it be kept secret.24 In 1906, with the launch of his The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to

Wrede, Schweitzer maintained that the historical Jesus was a heroic figure who preached the apocalyptic end of the world and had no intention of founding any stable and lasting church. While Weiss identified Jesus’ teaching as the main eschatological feature in his research, Schweitzer viewed everything about Jesus as apocalyptic. Teaching a form of “interim ethic,” Jesus catered for those who were living in the last day. He faced his death in the knowledge that it would usher in the end of time. Schweitzer’s approach undoubtedly put the eschatological Jesus into the centre of scholarly discussion and showed that the First Quest had wrongly minimised the eschatological and apocalyptic dimension of Jesus’ life, teachings and actions thus leading to significant distortion of what the historical Jesus was like. With this development, Schweitzer argued that Jesus was “no longer to be viewed as a synthesising element, but rather a divisive krisis in the relationship between God and the world; a krisis which calls for judgment and decision.”

Convicted by such finding, Schweitzer had decided to close the door to further theological scholarship in pursuit of his missionary work in the medical field.

Kähler, writing at the same time as Schweitzer, pointed out the inherent methodological problem of any quest for the historical Jesus by stating that the historical Jesus’ legacy is the faith he evoked in his disciples and that this faith was confessed – the Christ preached is none other than the Christ of faith. The confession of the true humanity of Jesus forms the substance for apostolic faith in the “Word made flesh” and not the product of historical scholarship. Further, he commented that modern historical-critical methods cannot answer questions relating to the divinity of Christ nor the resurrection, which are important issues concerning the historical Jesus. Kähler believed that it was quite impossible to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith simply because the Christ who is now preached and worshipped is the one who has influenced history. In the eschatological mission and message of Jesus, history and theology come together. He repudiated the attempt to make faith dependant on historical research, pointing out that the challenge facing modern scholarship was not to choose between either theology or history as a vantage point, but rather to grasp the eschatological significance itself as the bridge between God and the world.

For the next forty years, the dominant opinion was that it was impossible to disentangle the Jesus of faith and the historical person Jesus. Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) held the view that it was neither necessary nor possible to historically break through the theological images overlaid by the evangelist

---

25 Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, 94.
26 Houlden, *Jesus*, 174
28 Houlden, *Jesus*, 175
because the subject of Christian’s faith is the Christ rather than the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. More importantly it is not what Jesus as the historical person said or did but rather what God has done through him through the cross and the resurrection. Evidently, Bultmann does not adequately address the relation between the historical Jesus and Christian faith and subsequently the continuity between history and kerygma.

By contrast, a Bultmann’s student, Ernst Käsemann (1953) argues that as kerymatic documents, the gospel narratives contain reliable information regarding the historical Jesus and that such knowledge is relevant and essential for authentic Christian faith. Access to the historical Jesus is through the kerygma which functions as witness to report and appeal to faith in Christ. Käsemann’s new focus was instrumental in tracing the connections between the historical Jesus and the early church affirmation about him.

The search for an historical Jesus has continued well into the twentieth century with diverse works, among them were the works of The Jesus Seminar featuring Marcus Borg and others such as Graham Twelftree and Geza Vermes whose prime motive was to attack and discredit American fundamentalism and the images of Jesus it offered. The scope of this study limits further investigation of their work.

Within this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that for an understanding of something to take shape, there is the definitive need to accept what is given as it is, as understanding is given in acceptance of that which gives it, the Gift of a presence. And the Word of God demands none less than that. In the context of the Fourth Gospel, all that one needs to know is given definitively in the Word. John’s

29 Charlesworth, The Historical Jesus, 7.
30 Witherington, The Jesus Quest, 93-108. Witherington observes that while Marcus Borg’s evaluation of Jesus was that of a spirit-filled person, who does not merely believe in God, but also knows and experiences God personally, Geza Vermes’ portrayal of Jesus was more of a hasid – a pious and charismatic Jewish figure who worked wonders and operated outside the channels of usual religious power and authority. However, these works showed some serious flaws as some of the Jewish literature they used came from a much later time than that of the Gospels. Further, only part of more publicized portraits of Jesus were featured and they failed to deal with the eschatological and apocalyptic dimensions of Jesus’ life.

31 Jean-Luc Marion, Prolegomena to Charity, trans. S. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 124-153. Marion expounds the meaning of the ultimate Gift, Christ himself. By giving himself to the very point of death, even death on a cross without any blessing, Christ has given the present of his presence without any condition, but so long as the world does not receive him, he remains totally misunderstood, thus rejected and disfigured (Jn.1:11). The presence of Christ, which gives itself by grace and identifies itself as gift can only be seen in being received, and be received only in being blessed. This does not mean that the blessing of humankind constitutes the present of his presence, rather such action constitutes the possibility of him being recognised by them. So long as the world does not bless God, the present of his presence remains an offence.
testimony of “The Word became flesh, dwelt among us” encapsulates the reality of Jesus Christ – the Form given in excess (Marion) and how it is possible that Jesus Christ can express God’s truth in the categories of human language as truth that is disclosed when the beauty of God is unveiled (Balthasar) and experienced (Kelly and Moloney). Consequently, John remarks that recognition of the truth requires a commitment to the truth for to exist otherwise is a form of contradiction. The truth graciously invites the responsive hearers and calls forth responsible commitment. A closer look at alternative approaches adopted by Bathasar, Marion, Kelly and Moloney is necessary to support this claim.

2. Alternative Approaches

a. By Balthasar

It is observed that while fulfilling the demand for academic discipline, Balthasar’ monumental work as a whole never departed from its theological priority – the personal God as the first and last subject matter. In order to set the ground for any further discussion on methodological approaches, in the opening statement of volume I of his Exploration in Theology, Balthasar firmly states his position, “Scripture is the word of God that bears witness to God’s Word .... God is apprehended in the act of self-communication.” Categorically speaking, the gospels were not written primarily as history or biography. They are witnesses to the work and life of the Lord Jesus Christ as the risen Lord of the church, reflecting how the church remembered him. In essence, they were indeed the evangelists’ preaching materials and thus were primarily used by the evangelists to proclaim and deepen the faith of the believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah. Taking this position seriously, Balthasar insists that to avoid building its house on sand, theology will have to take ownership of the task of reflecting seriously on the challenge of the historical-of-Jesus scholarship which is more or less a product of modern biblical historicism in its earnest.

In essence, historicism reflects a particularly popular historical consciousness among many in the nineteenth century and most part of the twentieth century. It presupposes that truth by nature is scientific and the facts of history are meaningful and verifiable. Its approach to historicity is therefore by means of historical-critical methods. All historical critical methods assume almost exclusively that the meaning of a text can only be discerned by understanding the historical context and reference of such text. In other words, historical critics usually contend that the “true meaning” of a text is the one that the author intended in its composition. In order to understand a text, the

task of a historical critic is to get behind the text to its origin. Not only is the origin of the text important, its development of the document itself through the history of its transmission is also imperative for the historical critics.³⁴

For Balthasar, the *Gestalt Christi* (the form of Christ) “presupposes an understanding of totality that is spiritual and not literary and philological.”³⁵ Christ is the touchstone of reality who animates and gives meaning to everything else (Jn. 1:3). Access to God is made possible through him being made visible in the human history of Jesus Christ. Neither the world as a whole nor humanity in particular can provide the measure for what God wishes to say to humanity in Christ; God’s word is theological, or better theo-pragmatic, i.e. what God has to say to humanity is a deed on our behalf, a deed that interprets itself before humanity and for our sake.³⁶ The act of revelation is grounded in God alone and is not derived from anthropological data.

What particularly captures my interest is Balthasar’s development of theological aesthetics which basically follow two phases: the visual and enrapture.³⁷ The visual phase concerns aesthetics as “seeing the form” which simultaneously confronts and draws the seer by the mystery of its aesthetic radiance as “the light shines in the darkness.” This leads to the recognition or perception of God’s self-revelation in and through Jesus followed by the phase of enrapture. Balthasar comments:

> Form is by definition the expression of the interior; it therefore needs the exteriors both as a protective shell as well as the medium for its own self-communication if it is to be an interior reality at all. The inner factor does not merely rule and control but also gently indicates and refers. And only in a surrender, in a handling oneself over to the material, does the spirit (the idea) give shape to the inner reality.³⁸

The enraptured phase thus convicts and convinces. Subsequently it requires the seer to make a decision to “behold the form.” In beholding the form, the beholder is opened to configure and participate in splendour and glory of the Beautiful. He is captivated by the self-disclosure of the Beauty of God through the eyes of faith, a faith that directs himself further and deeper into the future of God’s truth. Balthasar describes the experience:

> The deeper a creature is allowed to encounter God’s glory, the more this creature will long to extol this glory as being exalted over itself and over all creation ….. The deeper a creature is

³⁵ Houlden, *Jesus*, 113.
³⁷ Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 125.
allowed to penetrate into God’s open realm, the more it will understand grace to be grace. And the more deeply it attains to a real, cognisant understanding of God’s divineness, the more clearly does it realise that God’s love transcends all comprehension.  

In the light of God’s self-revelation, to see is defined as the removal of one’s place from darkness to light, the movement of one from what is not true to the truth, from being disgraced to being graced with love and truth, from being lost to being found. And this is the “seeing the form” experience of the blind man (Jn. 9). Further, his seeing experience leads him to the conviction that in beholding the form, he is gracefully being brought into encountering the depth of the splendour of beauty and elevated to participate in God’s splendour and glory:

I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see ..... We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opens the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing (Jn. 9:25-33).

Through the eyes of faith the act of enlightenment takes place. His healing experience and testimony reaffirm the beauty of grace and truth which is unreservedly given but only becomes tangible in the experience and lives of the beholders of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father (Jn. 9:39).

In contrast, critical evaluation of gospel writings in quest of the historical Jesus evidently assumed that with the appropriate application of historical-critical methods, it is possible to determine and conclude what Jesus actually did and said more than two thousand years ago; a point Balthasar strongly contests. Indeed, the crux of Balthasar’s critique is not in the historical-critical methods themselves, but in the historicist’s attitude, assuming to have gained control over the text by contextualising it, utilising the Enlightenment presuppositions of historical criticism, which are presumably to be diligent, open-minded, objective, value-free and scientific in nature.

Within historicist presupposition, some scholars adopt a “diachronic approach” whereby they operate on a cluster of historical-critical bases coupled with a few newer approaches, strategically borrowing from different fields such as that of social history, cultural anthropology, rhetoric and/or modern archaeology. Some would adopt different approaches and pursue these in isolation creating

fragmented methodological insularity and polarisation. Consequently, texts are whittled down to fragments and made to speak the minds of the scholars/researchers instead of fidelity to “the good news of God.” Ironically, as a deeply historical faith Christianity could potentially be seen as undermining its own power and reality by some individuals approaching its own history with sceptical methods.

Further, it is important to recognise that while the historical Jesus and his ministry is intrinsic to the substance of the Christian faith, it should not be based on the ever-shifting tides of New Testament scholarship as what is true about the historical Jesus and what historical methods can demonstrate are not the same. As Witherington rightly asserted, “the latter will always at best be a truncated version of the former.”

Balthasar observes that there is a lively dynamic between the plurality of biblical way of access to the mystery of revelation and the contribution of exegesis. Regardless of how neutral exegesis is as a philological discipline which can be practiced by either believing or non-believing scholars, the person, work and deed of Jesus demands a radical yes or no to his claim. Interestingly, this is also the point the Fourth Gospel endorses (Jn. 1:12).

b. By Kelly and Moloney
Kelly and Moloney emphasize the accumulated, living experience of God which surpasses human comprehension and speech as one continues to “gaze upon his glory, disclosed in grace and truth” (Jn. 1.14). They insist that the exercise of merely thinking about God can lead to the possibility of understanding the meaning of doctrinal formulations and while possibly missing the encounter of experience, rendering faith ineffective and irrelevant. Without reclaiming the experience of God inscribing in the Christian life, with utmost certainty, the doctrine of faith will appear to be superficial, abstract and irrelevant for the life of the believers. Consequently, historicist forms of engagement with theology can appear to be a sophisticated distraction from the gift which the gospels bear witness to – a point Balthasar also emphasises. For this reason, Kelly and Moloney are content to steer their method in the direction determined by the fundamental concern of the Gospel and of Jesus Himself, that is to be lead into a living experience of God (Jn. 17:3). The concreteness of such experience is a living, irreplaceable reality which cannot be simply read from a text. By

---

41 Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, 12.
42 Revelation 3:15-16 (NRSV)
entering the realm of love and life, which emanates from the Father through the Son in complete existential commitment, it is a reality waiting to be discovered: being loved and in love to discover love, gaze upon his grace to discover the giver of grace, to be immersed in the truth of the Gospel to discover the gift which is truth as witnessed by the Gospel, “but to all who received him, to them he gave the right to be the children of God, to those who believe in his name .... and of his fullness we have received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1.12-16).

The richness of the Johannine tradition, particularly the Fourth Gospel evidently influences Kelly and Moloney’s method, drawing particular attention to the experience of God in grace upon grace, as grace and truth unfold in the incarnate Son of God. The believer yearns for such experience as part of the journey to discover the God of Love self-given in excess through the person and work of the Son, and to respond unreservedly to the Giver of life.

While giving the gospel a comprehensive theological and systematic treatment, Kelly and Moloney’s approach also conveys a fresh alternative to the gospel, suggesting an interdisciplinary approach beyond the entanglement of historical methods and at the same time being faithful to the Gospel’s voice and kerygma by emphasizing the believer’s experience of encountering God. Ultimately, it is the experience of God which becomes the epistemological guiding model for their approach to studying the Gospel.

Further, Kelly and Moloney suggest that experience is not a slippery term when it comes to serious theological treatment. Rather, it reflects the learning adventure of the believing person, coming progressively to the tangible reality of faith, leading to another level of synthesis and transformation in personal and communal lives while living in obedience to God. Thus, inherent in the experience are elements of meanings cognitively, constitutively, communicatively and effectively in the life of the individual as well as the community of faith.44

44 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 55-57. Using the four elements from Lonergan’s model of the meaningful world namely the cognitive, the constitutive, the communicative and the effective, Kelly and Moloney further articulate these in relation to the Word from the perspective of the believer’s experience of God. In the cognitive dimension, the Word enters our experience as an objective datum, which provokes questions of or about the nature of God and how he is revealed. In the constitutive dimension, the Word informs and constitutes in the believers an awareness of themselves as children of God and recipients of grace and truth. In and through the Word, the believers’ identity is established. In the third dimension, the Word is communicative. In and through the Word, the meaning of God is also communicative. Within this dimension, the experience of the Johannine community in particular and the community of believers in general reflect the way people see God revealing in Jesus Christ affecting their experience of communication and community. The fourth dimension recognizes the meaning of the Word is effective, enabling the believers to be transformed and transform the world they live in by their
In the context of the Fourth Gospel, rather than providing thematic study of the apparent issues Kelly and Moloney's method offers a theocentric treatment of experience as something real and tangible, which leads the reader to authentic encountering of the living God through the person of Jesus, God's definitive expression of love and truth and grace, who can only be known relationally. This fresh, insightful and challenging approach not only allows the text to be handled as a complete and comprehensive unit on its own, but also provides the necessary space to listen to the text speaking into our own inner lives with ever new experiences. It takes away a rationalist, all-surveying and potentially arrogant attitude of the interpreters and replaces it with an excitement of venturing into the unknown land of faith, “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), whereby one can get access to another level of reality beyond the domain of empirical science, metaphysics or reason. Here, the audience is invited into the realm of divine experience as, “no one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (Jn. 1:18).

c. By Marion

In recent years, Jean-Luc Marion has steadily established himself as one of the most important thinkers within the phenomenological tradition of his generation. Defining phenomenology as the attempt to allow phenomenon to show itself, Marion further explains that what shows itself must first give itself. In essence, phenomenology is simply a reduction to givenness. Marion’s phenomenology of givenness is indeed congruent to Balthasar’s metaphysical theme of beauty of which he explains that something is beautiful because it gives off its radiance; simply because it is something, because it exists.”

Central to Marion’s approach is his development of the theory of saturated phenomena of which the notion of givenness, the gift and love are also being explored. He describes a common phenomenon as what one experiences intuitively within a set of previously shaped concepts in contrast to a saturated phenomenon which refers to intuition one has neither experienced before nor has had a previous concept. With common phenomena, one recognises an object because one has an existing stock of concepts which match the recognition intuitively. Saturated phenomena occur when what one experiences is beyond prior knowledge, understanding or comprehension of a previous experience of God. Careful articulation of these four dimensions provide a valuable tool in interpreting the experience of God as attested to in the writing of this particular gospel.

45 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, trans. A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 1-8. Beauty is Balthasar’s key theological concept whereby he assimilates it theologically to God’s glory—the radiance which shows itself and arouses our sense of transcendence through the communicative form of a finite being.
framework. Marion’s theory of saturated phenomena arises from the development of his phenomenology of givenness – that which shows itself, gives itself with no *a priori* condition. The given shows itself and gives itself from itself and therefore truly reveals itself. A saturated phenomenon is thus that which exceeds the intentional consciousness, is counter-intuitive and thus revelatory.

The Christ’s event is thus phenomenologically a saturated phenomenon *par excellence* – the gift of a presence, given in excess, a demonstration of phenomenology in it most compelling, enrapturing and beautiful. According to Marion, Christ’s presence is given as a gift; a gift which is characterised by the owner’s gratuitous givenness, offered without reason, without motives or purpose other than the desire to give and expect nothing in return. Καὶ ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο is a saturated phenomenon and God’s definitive revelation for humanity. It follows then as a gift, it is brought to the presence of its recipient i.e. the gift is a present and it is a given i.e. it is assumed. To express it in another way, a gift is a gift because it is free and it is present.46 It reveals the absolute free gift of God’s non-proportional agape, which does not depend on the merits of those who receive it but on its own accord and calling. By giving himself to the point of abandoning himself, to the point of death, even death on a cross,47 the concreteness of the incarnation is revealed and elaborated in excess. Love is fleshed out as *grace upon grace*. The invisible God is seen through the Logos, *given for many*, entering into phenomenality in a way that is counter-intuitive, yet enrapturing and beautiful, overexposed and overwhelming to the point that “the world did not know him, his own people did not accept him” (Jn. 1:10-11). But for those who accept the gift, it is a given. The beholder of the gift is entering into transformational relationship whereby (s)he is participating in the realm of the glory of God (Jn. 1:12, 14).

Inherently, Marion’s theory of saturated phenomena is deeply Johannine. It offers an alternative paradigm that exceeds the traditional historicist’s view of truth being limited to the verifiable truth of the natural sciences and insists on an excess beyond what one can grasp and understand. It is this excess that opens up new possibilities for philosophical thinking about genuinely transcendent revelation.

The Fourth Gospel’s testimony is consistent with Christian revelation that God opens up himself in love through Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16) – the gift of a presence, with veracity given in sheer generosity –

47 Phil 2:8 (NRSV).
a saturated phenomenon. John also clearly shows that the more God opens Himself up through Jesus, the more the people addressed are misled or confused or hostile; the Word remains hostile to his world (Jn. 1:10). This is also consistent with Marion’s observation that a saturated phenomenon can be overwhelming and thus unbearable as the excess in manifestation overflows the realm of expectation. In other words, without faith, saturated phenomena in many occasions can be experienced as overwhelming or even incomprehensible. It follows that for an understanding of something to take shape, beyond reason, there is the definitive need to accept what is given as is, by faith. And the Word of God demands none less than that. This observation is also consistent with the message of the Fourth Gospel, whereby John presents the completeness of grace and truth through the person Jesus Christ in many dialogue sequences which were either misunderstood or rejected.

Further, Marion insists that rather than a move beyond reason, a saturated phenomenon is an expansion of reason whereby things can be understood without understanding, experienced without experiencing. He disagrees with the opposition between faith and reason, stating that one does not have to prove by reason what one already believes by faith. For even in the realm of reason, one’s common frame of understanding is too narrow and there are limitations to the kind of rationality one needs intuitively to engage a common collection of concepts. This evidently leaves behind what one cannot rationalize with empirical concept or framework such as emotion, desire, commitment …. This is something that not only Pascal once suggested, “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”\(^{48}\) but also observed in Jn. 9:39, “I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

Marion’s approach evidently opens up a new phenomenological pathway in the study of John. The phenomenon of Christ as testified in John is not a one-time event and so neither is the experience of such a phenomenon. It is an eternal truth which enters reality in the living experience of the believers as a gift given in excess. To put thing into context, since the resurrection of Christ, one must relearn everything as the Christ brought all newness in bringing Himself\(^{49}\) and that precisely is the gift of a presence – His presence.

3. Composite Interpretive Approach

In seeking to reconstruct a historicist portrait of Jesus from the New Testament writings, modern historicism intends to rediscover an objective and historically reliable Jesus, who functions as both


\(^{49}\) Marion, *Prolegomena*, 125.
the basic (Jesus of Nazareth) and the modified content (Christ, Son of God) of faith. For several decades now, elements of the criteria of authenticity such as multiple attestations, dissimilarity, embarrassment and coherence have been employed as the chief tools of choice for most scholars. Apart from constituting a winnowing fork to separate the pre-Easter materials from the later materials, these criteria have failed to lead to any uniformity of result as the gap between what happened and what one can show to have happened is enormous. While the standards of criteria presuppose clear distinctions between authentic and ahistorical, often the line between fiction and nonfiction often can be indistinct. As a result, the results go in many different directions. Allison Jr. observes that in trying to recover the Jesus of history, the endeavour of applying criteria to individual items for the task is seriously defective and problematic.

The New Testament writings as a whole and John in particular function as witnesses to God’s revelation in Jesus; its content is kerygmatic and proclamational. Therefore to identify this with a modern critical reconstruction of a historicist portrait of Jesus is to miss the point of these writings. An apparent distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus who could be at best only partially and imperfectly known from the Gospel accounts is obvious. Historicist approach to Jesus and the accompanying demythologization can be blinded to a fully formed expression of the truth of Jesus as testified in the kerygma of Scripture as demonstrated. It is of particular importance to understand and appreciate the nuances and benefits brought about by the historical-critical scholarship which sought at best to make interpretive judgment from past events however fragmented or disentangled they could be from the context of faith, traditions and testimonies of the New Testament writings. Equally, it is also important to respect the traditions of faith which testify to the ever presence of the Lord Christ Jesus to every generation of Christians as Childs comments:

The Church approaches its Scripture in the confidence that in spite of its total time-conditionality the true witness of the gospel can be heard in the sacred text through the continuing work of the Spirit. The New Testament is not a dead document needing to be purified, but a living voice waiting to be heard.

Kähler, Historical Jesus, 10-13.

Dale C. Allison Jr, “The Historians’ Jesus and the Church,” in Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage, eds. B. Gaventa and R. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 79. A tradition is more authentic if it is being attested by two or more independent sources – thus the term multiple attestations - compared to one that is attested singly. The criterion of dissimilarity seeks to identify materials that are not typical of and therefore different from Jewish or early Christian tradition. The criterion of embarrassment seeks to identify the originality of a tradition by way of distinction whether or not the tradition is likely to discomfit early Christians. Finally if a tradition coheres with other traditions which have already been regarded as genuine then the criterion of coherence for that particular tradition is met.


On that note, faith is defined neither by certain religious rituals or regulations one observes, nor as a state of blissful gullibility but as a trust that directs itself toward a future, justified by God’s love, grace and truth, expressed definitively in and through Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{54} It rests in the “folly” of the Cross as divine wisdom, the crucified one is the exalted one who is worthy of one’s trust to such a point that one is willing to risk his life in a fantastic future which has been revealed in and through Jesus Christ which simultaneously demands the individual of his/her personal commitment and conviction to live it out. Faith thus cannot and need not look to history for its vindication. It is important to be mindful that the respect one has for reliable history cannot and should not be historical positivism. Reconstruction of the Jesus of history from the engagements of the historical Jesus’ studies at best is but a close approximation with many vital links missing of the Christ of faith.

While genuine faith in Christ transforms lives in hope and love, faith without historical groundings can lapse into superstition which brings fear and legalism within a rigid religious frame of reference. It is thus methodologically naïve to try separating history and faith from each other as both are necessary and inseparable in Christian faith and testimony.

In taking seriously the proper theological context in which we stand, it should be made clear that “the rule of faith set for the community of faith remains continually the object of critical scrutiny but subordinates to its subject matter who is Jesus Christ,”\textsuperscript{55} the intimate reality of God who has appeared in the fullness of time, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14) as witnessed by the writings of the New Testament and of the Fourth gospel in particular; He who is also proclaimed and heard through every pages of the sacred writings by every generation of Christian faith and community as present realities (Jn. 20:31). As such, it continues to serve as a medium through which future generations who have not encountered the earthly Jesus are challenged to “receive and believe in his name.”

A composite interpretive approach recognises that we are unable merely to work within a singular method in interpreting the Fourth gospel. As selected themes will be examined through this particular approach, the works of Balthasar, Jean-Luc Marion, and Kelly and Moloney will be used as an alternative premise providing perspectives and insights to engaging the previously mentioned selected sequences of the Gospel. What is of particular interest in these works is their focus on the whole form of Jesus Christ as God’s demonstrative expression of grace and truth that is engaged at a theological level akin to aesthetics—seeing the form as beauty or glory (Balthasar) or love as gift given in excess (Marion) or yet the drama of glory disclosed in grace and truth (Kelly and Moloney),

\textsuperscript{55} Childs, \textit{Biblical Theology}, 67.
which are also pervasive in John. With such notes on method, chapter three will look at how it is possible that Jesus Christ can express God’s truth in the categories of human language in the context of the Fourth Gospel.
Chapter 3 – The Form of Christ: The Drama of Glory Is Disclosed as Grace upon Grace

Jn. 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 This one was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing which has become, became.

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind.

5 And the light shines in the darkness but the darkness did not understand it.

6 There was a man having been sent from God, named John.

7 This man came for testimony, to bear witness concerning the Light that all men might believe through him.

8 He was not that Light, but came to bear witness concerning the Light.

9 It was the authentic Light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world knew him not.

11 To his own people he came, yet his people received him not.

12 But to those who received him, who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become the children of God;

13 who were born not of blood or of the will of a man but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and resided among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only-begotten from the father, thoroughly endowed with grace and of truth.
This chapter looks at how John, through the first eighteen verses, presented Christ – *The Word in the beginning* – as the Beauty of the living God manifested. By *becoming flesh*, the Word unveiled himself as grace, truth and love in the categories of human language, in a way comprehensible and compatible within the human realm. It is important to mention here albeit briefly that although John does not make explicit connection between the Word and Jesus until v.17, from the Prologue itself and the gospel’s context, the readers come to understand that this Word that exists from the beginning is Jesus in the flesh. In the incarnation of Christ Jesus, the Beauty of God is revealed; love, grace and truth are united. This is also what Balthazar recognised – *seeing the form as beauty*.

John’s statement, “no one has ever seen God” (Jn. 1:18a), echoes the experience of Moses56 and many other Old Testament figures.57 Yet, at the same time, his affirmation, “the only Son, who is in the Father’s bosom, he has made him known” (Jn. 1:18b), seems contradicting and attracts more questions about the nature of the Son. Further, Jesus’ own word, “whoever sees me, sees the Father” (Jn. 14:9) in itself raises questions about the form of Christ, “Who is he who has seen the Father and manifesting the Father as his agent?”

Departing from the Synoptic tradition which more or less begins with an historical account of the earthly Jesus, the Fourth Evangelist begins his gospel with eternity in perspective, *in the beginning …. Uniquely, two key points stand out from the Fourth Gospel. Firstly, *the Word became flesh*; the incarnation unifies history and eternity in and through Jesus – the embodiment of God’s glory, grace and truth, light, love and life is expressed through Jesus in the category of human language. Secondly, *it is finished* – Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross reveals the heart of God’s self-sacrificing

---

56Exd. 33:20 (NRSV).
57Judg. 13:22 (NRSV).
love for mankind. In and through his death, man is being reconciled, redeemed, and restored and the complete presentation of love, grace and truth is fully revealed. Cousar observes, “The grace of God and the crucifixion belong together, to deny either one is to deny the other one.”

Evidently, John’s Jesus cannot be read and understood in isolation; rather, the entire narrative is experienced and participated as the story of God ... in the beginning. At the centre of John’s focus is a series of testimonies showing how Christ, the beginning of all things becomes Jesus of Nazareth and how Jesus, God’s disclosure of grace and truth is the Christ for humanity. Subsequently, John remarks that recognition of the truth requires a commitment to the truth; to live otherwise is a form of contradiction.

Further, the Fourth Evangelist saw the inseparable relationship between event and interpretation, narrative and discourse, and presented the deeds of Jesus and the significance given to those deeds by the Holy Spirit in various diverse themes which are interwoven into various patterns. It is the Spirit that gives significance to these events (Jn. 6:63). It is observed that John’s materials were thematically arranged in such a way that every recorded event is accompanied by meaningful interpretation given by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Gospel, the person and work of Jesus bring all the themes together into a tightly knit unity. John presents the completeness of grace and truth through Jesus in many dialogue sequences which are either misunderstood or rejected. Yet the Gospel remains a living testimony to articulation of grace upon grace in its reception and experience of fullness.

Recent movements in the area of Johannine criticism have led to wider scope of approaches and major shifts in the area of research into the relationship between the synoptic and the Johannine writings. While evidence for decisive answers may never become available to us, as it stands, the Leuven conference in 1990 opened up new evaluation of the relationship between the synoptic and the Johannine writings in particular the Fourth Gospel. Dunn observed that the discussion brought to the fore not only the question of history and literature but also of theology.
Of particular importance to our understanding the theology and thereafter interpretation of the Fourth Gospel is undoubtedly its Prologue. While introducing the Gospel in a lucid and engaging way, it functions as the Gospel’s conceptual centre from which its many facets radiate, informing the readers of what follows. In that sense, the Prologue functions as an introduction to the rest of the Gospel. Within the structure and its content, it presents itself an initial thesis statement of which, its centre was developed to become the interpretive theological, Christological backbone that informs the rest of the Gospel that follows. Such structure is imperative for our understanding of the Johannine theology. Hengel explains:

The evangelist wants to bring out the true essence of Christ and his task .... by addressing one decisive point: Jesus Christ, in the Prologue God’s Word of revelation and Son from eternity, is sent into the world by the Father to free men and women from the power of sin and death to give them eternal life. Therefore the Johannine Jesus describes his task around fifty times as being sent by the Father ..... This concentration on the unique relationship and unity of the Son as the personified Word of God to the Father, his sending into the world, the incarnation, which includes the passion, takes place most impressively in the Prologue.62

In other words, all one needs to know for interpreting John is given right in the beginning of the Gospel via the Prologue. Further, Anderson notes: “The Prologue, as a composition growing out of community worship experience and reflecting the aspirations and convictions of the Johannine Christians, thus becomes a fitting introduction to the Gospel narrative.”63 In relation to the Johannine theology and Christology and its theological implication, the Prologue has nonetheless occupied a central role in the history of the debate. It has been said that the Prologue is the most influential Christological text in the New Testament. It leads us into the Johannine Christology and cannot be separated from it. Moreover, it showed the early church the way to Christological truth.64

theological insights and significance have been overlooked. At the theological level, the difference between the Synoptics and John presents some problems concerning the continuity/discontinuity, development and diversity of the four Gospels. It is important to recognize that as the Gospels have always been at the centre of Christian faith; the theological rationale is that they guarantee the continuity and ongoing consistency between Jesus, history, individual Christian faith and the church collectively. When all that is challenged, the authenticity of the Gospels in also under pressure. The question often asked is that whether or not this difference would indicate a fundamental inconsistency in the basic testimony regarding the basic figure of the Christian faith and/or given that whether Christian's claim to a definitive revelation in and through Jesus is a valid one. It is therefore imperative that such challenge is recognized and addressed; further theological questions and debates regarding the relation and difference between John and the Synoptics needed to be given more attention.

64 Hengel, "The Prologue", 289. In this essay, Hengel points out that the Prologue of John is one of the most influential Christological texts of the New Testament. It functions as a witness to a salvation history
Johannine theology or more precisely Christology which is reflected through the structure and content of the Prologue thus will be the focus of this chapter.

Although scholars hold different opinions about the form and thus the precise function of the Prologue (Jn. 1:1-18), they are on the same page agreeing that it provides an inseparable link with the rest of the Gospel. Within the first eighteen verses which provide the framework for God’s salvation history and the narrative that follows, major themes of the gospel such as light, darkness, witness, glory, truth, love, revelation... were introduced which form the basic backdrop for further understanding of the entire narrative. Indeed, Hengel further comments:

The Prologue is a hymn or psalm to the Logos, composed with great linguistic art and deep reflection..... As a whole, it relates to the Gospel and can come from the Evangelist himself, who describes in stage the saving revelation of God through his Word. The climax and goal is the incarnation of the Word in v.14. It is the key to the twenty-one chapters that follow.66

By looking firstly at Jn. 1:1-4, 14-18, this chapter focuses on the form of Christ as the beauty or glory of the living God manifesting perfectly in Jesus as grace, truth and love. In other words, “The Word became flesh,” bringing “grace upon grace.” Not only did the Fourth Evangelist pen the identity of Christ as the Word, but also as God the Creator, the Redeemer who became flesh as a human being, manifesting the beauty/glory of the living God by bringing into the world he entered eternal grace and truth, and to those who received him, unreservedly he gives them the power to become children of God.

1. Understanding the Prologue’s Structural Presentation

In search of the original source which was used or adapted by the Evangelist, the Prologue has long been the subject of discussion. Hitherto, no one satisfactory outcome has generally been accepted. While the majority of scholars tend to agree that the Prologue resembles a hymn or psalm to the Logos with its rich poetical nature, they have several ideas regarding its structure which provide important clues for the understanding the Prologue itself and its relationship to the rest of the Gospel and the whole bible on a wider scope. Some argue that its structure was developed as a collection of successive ideas chronologically in a linear fashion. This model does not do justice to which brings together the Old and the New Testament – the whole of God’s saving work from creation to consummation which hinges on the pinnacle event of the incarnation. In so doing, it seeks to serve as a signpost pointing us to the knowledge of the love of God that has been manifested in the Christ. Further, he explains that the roots of the Johannine Christology lie in the personal mystery of Jesus, in his relationship with the Father which is foundational for his activity, suffering and resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

the double presentation of the Baptist’s witness (Jn. 1:6-8, 15). The argument that it was added into
the original hymn for polemical reasons is weak and not convincing as it leaves unanswered the
questions of why those verses are placed where they are and why the necessity of drawing attention
to the Baptist’s witness twice. Others disagree, preferring literary models such as chiasms or
parallelisms which provide a more structural balance as well as a reasonable explanation for the
double presentation of John’s witness.

Hengel explains that in relation to the Prologue, these two passages were written in the same style
as the hymn and have been inserted to clamp it to the rest of the Gospel. With some resemblance
to the beginning of I John and as a whole, it relates to the Gospel and can come from the Evangelist
himself, who with great linguistic skill and deep reflection, describes in stages the saving revelation
of the Father from creation to consummation through his Word which reaches its climax and goal in
and through the Incarnation in Jn. 1:14-18. From here onward, as the Gospel unfolds, God’s final
work is achieved step by step in and through the life and death of Jesus, the all-fulfilling gift. Jesus’
final words on the cross - It is finished (Jn. 19:30), is the victorious declaration of the completeness of
God’s work in creation and the fullness of God’s revelation for human beings; the fullness of a gift
which is truth.

Beyond the Fourth gospel, the Prologue functions as a witness to Scripture and Christian theology
which reflects on such Christological truths, bringing together the promises from the old and the
fulfilments from new covenant. Being a witness, its testimony is characterized by its focus on
hearing, seeing and experiencing which are known as human sensory experience. Observed closely,
this focus is also the experience of the Johannine community reflected in and through the Fourth
gospel and the wider Johannine writings. Interestingly, Coloe proposes a structural suggestion
whereby the Prologue is seen as a parallel model, consisting of a bipartite form within an
introduction (Jn. 1:1-2) and a conclusion (Jn. 1:18) that emphasizes these characterizations and thus

---

67 Mary L. Coloe, God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel (Minnesota: The Liturgical
Press, 2001), 16-7. In surveying attempts by various commentators to analyse the poetic structure of the
Prologue in search of an original source which was adapted by the Fourth Evangelist Coloe identifies two
basic approaches. One fashions the Prologue as a succession of ideas in a linear or chronological manner.
Evidently, the major problem this approach must deal with is the double presentation of John the
Baptist’s witness. The other uses literary models of chiasms or parallelism to analyse its structure.
Although this approach offers a more structural balance in the double mentioning of John’s witness, both
approaches fail to give a convincing answer as to why attention was given twice for John’s witness in the
Prologue.

70 Coloe, Temple Symbolism, 23.
71 I John 1:1 (NRSV). The writer recalls the things that the community has experienced in the past, things
that they have seen, they have heard and they have touched.
affirms the accessibility of the divine, pre-existent Logos, coming into the world he created with veracity and generosity. The following diagram is a simple schematic presentation of Jn. 1, which will provide a map for my further study of the Prologue. The aim of this map is to focus on the key features of the divine Logos as definitive expression of God, as experienced and accessed by the Johannine community reflected in the Prologue. The focal point is the Jesus — ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, the definitive expression of God’s glory or beauty who is also the Creator, the Logos and the Redeemer.

Within the structure of this diagram, the Prologue is seen to reflect the Christological necessity that informs the remaining of the gospel in the experience of the Johannine community and in the life of the believers. Such experience recognises the centrality of the Word became flesh which defines the

72 Coloe, Temple Symbolism, 18-21. Coloe divides the Prologue into three parts structurally. Part one is the introduction (Jn. 1:1-2) concerning the Logos/Theo relationship in eternity. Part two (Jn. 1:14-17) subdivides into two parts, story and testimony. Between the story and the testimony there is a strong development and connection of hearing, seeing and experiencing, echoing the introduction of I John 1. Part three (Jn. 1:18), which recapitulates and develops the opening verses.
totality of the experience of knowing God in grace, truth and love as the Creator, the Redeemer, the Light and the giver of Light in the heart and mind of the believers who by faith in the Word have been empowered to become the children of God.


   a. **Creator**

   John begins by introducing the audience to the Word: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn. 1:1). All one needs to know is profoundly given in the very first words: *In the beginning*. Before all worlds were formed, he was in the beginning and he was with God and he has the same status as God. The opening verse of the gospel not only informs the readers of the beginning of all beginning, it also constitutes a foundational setting for time and space of and about the subject matter: the Word. It indicates the existence of the Word otherwise *in the beginning* (Ἐν ἀρχῇ) of all beginnings. In a world otherwise, from time other than ours, in eternity, the Word was, independent of the events of Genesis’ creation account; as it stands, the subject λόγος has the article ὁ, and the predicate θεός does not, thus the correct translation is not God was the Word, but The Word was God (θεός ὁ λόγος). In other words, what God was, the Word was. The expression neither conveys a conception of a mythological idea of the existence or the beginning of two divine beings alongside each other, nor a sense of one being subordinate to the other. Rather, it affirms the status of the Logos as one of equality to God: καὶ θεὸς ὁ λόγος.

   It then follows that God is to be disclosed only by reference to the Word who is outside time and creation. He does not belong to this temporal world. He was not a created being who God created at some point in time as the “first created being” and so consequently, was not eternal. Here the Logos is presented as the Creator of the world who from the beginning was with God and was God (Jn. 1:1-2). Further, John affirms that with, “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing which has become, became” (Jn. 1:3).

   John’s introduction of the Word boldly looks to the very beginning of all beginnings, even before the beginning of Genesis which marks Scripture’s beginning of the created world and presents this gospel with eternity in mind. Within this introduction, Kysar observes that there are at least three Christological expressions that come immediately to mind: “The form of God (Phi. 2:6), the image of God (Col. 1:15) and the reflection of God’s glory and exact imprint of his very being (Heb. 1:3).”

---

73 Kysar, *Voyages with John*, 28. In looking at the unique contribution of the Prologue to New Testament Christology, Kysar asserts in this essay that the Christology of the Prologue is one which developed as the
Clearly, this Christological focus has become the guiding principle governing how the evangelist arranges and presents the materials of his gospel to convey this message. However, within this presentation, a distinctive tension over the divinity and humanity of the Son can be observed at the offset.

Interestingly, as the Prologue unfolds, God was not presented immediately as the Creator, but remaining in communion and communication with the Word, and out of this dynamism, the existence of the universe came into being, as “all things were made through him” (Jn. 1:3). Kelly and Moloney assert:

The Logos is the genetic and unifying principle of the universe. The diversity of creation is a “uni-verse” because of its origin and coherence in the Word. All of creation is a field of divine communication, being “Word-ed” into being. This is the fundamental “logic” of the Gospel: nothing has meaning outside the divine Logos. Nothing and no one stands in its own right outside the primordial Word.

At the level of being, there is complete unity, what God was, the Word was. Thus, by his presence in the world, God’s glory is revealed definitively. Indeed, in his own identity and deity, he is the glory or the beauty of God (Jn. 10:30; 17:22). Further, by being God’s functionality (Jn. 5:19), he communicates God’s divine nature which is love and truth in grace through the very act of becoming flesh as he continues the work of God among his people since the beginning. Through the Word, the world is created and the disclosure of God’s character and love and life giving purpose for the world is demonstrated as a gift given in excess, both in present reality and future eschatological hope through his work of creation, salvation and redemption.

b. Logos

While many scholars recognise that John’s language of creation resembles that of Genesis 1:1, Kelly and Moloney point out that in the Genesis’ account, time was used as a reference and God is introduced as the creator of everything in the beginning of creation, whereas in John’s account, as previously noted God is to be disclosed in reference to the Word, “what God was, the Word was” (Jn. 1:1c). The eternal Logos however stands in utter originality outside time and creation as πρὸς τὸν θεόν, and is the source of revelation of, from and about God.

Johannine community confronted real and difficult experiences in the life of the church. It reflects their view as they tried to respond to the crisis at hand and seek to express their faith and understanding in Christ.

74 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 35.
75 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 31.
At the heart of the Johannine Christology is the collection of testimonies confessing how Christ – the beginning of all things, becomes Jesus of Nazareth and how Jesus – God's disclosure of grace and truth and love, is the Christ for humankind. It is important to note that inherent in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel such testimonies which represent themselves as the key to unlock historical belief and confessional faith cohere and relate inextricably. Bauckham observes, “The concurrence of histographical and theological concepts of witness in John’s Gospel is wholly appropriate to the historical uniqueness of the subject matters.”

Jesus’ unique identity is first and the focal point of John’s agenda in speaking about God – the Word. Jesus, the Christ of God is the appearing and the exposition of the Father’s love for humankind, “The Logos is identical with the God who reveals himself and takes on personal character by virtue of the fact that this Logos has truly become human in Jesus.” Further, Kelly and Moloney explain that in his humanity through the person Jesus, God is invoked, engaged and revealed. The Word is thus the very presentation of God within creation.

As ὁ λόγος is the subject of both sentences, the translation stands as and the Word was with or turned toward God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν), and the Word was God (καί θεὸς ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος). While positing a relationship between the two characters, God and the Logos, the usage of the articular and anarthrous form of God serves as a point of identification as well as differentiation. The articular noun (ὁ λόγος) functions as the subject while the anarthrous noun (θεὸς) is clearly the predicate which grammatically functions as an adjective. In other words, John is clear that the Logos is identical with the God who reveals himself in the form of human flesh, yet at the same time, this Logos is divinely God. Turning toward God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) he is distinct from God, nonetheless he is God.

This very Word is John’s Logos who became flesh and lived among us as a human being who is also the locus whereby the glory of the begotten Son is revealed. “The Word became flesh” is the primal foundation of God’s love, expressive in the flesh via the incarnation, tabernacling among humanity, καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (Jn. 1:14a). It also reflects his particular nature/being in a specific time in history/event. Balthasar understood this conceptually and aesthetically as the perception “the
beauty of the form of God’s self-revelation” in and through the Logos. In other word, the Logos is the presentation of the whole form. He then developed the idea aesthetically into a two-fold theology – theology of vision and theology of rapture or seeing the form and beholding the form.\(^{80}\) While a theology of vision deals with the aesthetics as a theory about the perception of the form of God’s self-revelation – seeing the form, a theology of rapture deals with aesthetics as a theory about the incarnation of God’s glory or splendour and the subsequent elevation of man to participate in that glory – beholding the form.

Further, Balthasar explains that in a philosophical sense, the world depends on a certain idea or form to understand its reality. In the same way, the concrete life of Jesus of Nazareth is the theological form upon which the world understands its existence theologically. This very form consists of splendour or glory as its fundamental configuration which Balthasar terms as beauty. He explains: “In a world without beauty, even the good and the true stand under threat of incomprehension.”\(^{81}\) In order to radiate its beauty, the form needs the referential ability to point beyond itself, a faculty that paradoxically, lies within itself.\(^{82}\) He then develops this concept further and analogises beauty as God’s very being, expressed concretely as love, grace and truth through the Logos, using this particular framework – the form.

In order to experience beauty as God’s being, the beholder is required to renounce and subject himself to the gravitational pull of beauty, expressed in specific time and space. In an aesthetic encounter, the disclosure of beauty occurs whereby the form is first experienced. Through this form, the beholder is brought into an encounter with the depth or the splendour (lumen) of being and the mystery of the form, which is accessible to the consciousness of faith, gives itself for the sake of many, exhibiting in salvation history.

It is important to note that in a formal sense, Jn. 1:14 does not associate the Logos’ becoming flesh with any information concerning the concrete human form of the one who became flesh. However, as the narrative gradually unfolds, the Prologue serves as an overture, and the humanness of the Logos is presented in the form of life, ministry and death of Jesus the Christ through which contact

\(^{80}\) Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 125.
\(^{81}\) Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 19.
between God and the world acquires concrete form. Not only so, he himself who became a human being is also in constant contact with God – the Father, to make him known in the world.83

Balthasar’s insights resonate explicitly with Jn. 1:1-18. The Fourth Gospel presents Christ – *The Word in the beginning* – as the manifested beauty of the living God, who unveils himself as grace, truth and love in the categories of human language, in a way that is tangible, comprehensible and compatible within the human realm – *the Word became flesh*. Bultmann terms this as the offence of the gospel, arguing that for revelation which is an other-worldly event to have any significance for men, it needed to be taking place within the human sphere. In revealing God-self, the Word became flesh, in form recognisable and communicable to human, the δόξα is peculiarly hidden in the σάρξ and precisely in this hiddenness, God’s revelation is really present amid humanity.

In becoming flesh, the Word presents to the world he came to a great paradox or stumbling block: God’s revelation is revealed in the hiddenness. John points out that humanity’s tendency is to look for his divinity elsewhere by looking away from the reality of *the Word became flesh* and falling victim to appearances (Jn. 1:10-11). This is precisely the hiddenness of God’s revelation. In his freedom, love expressed in grace and truth through Jesus is revealed and freely gives of itself. In the incarnation of Christ Jesus, the beauty of God is revealed; love, grace and truth are united. By making its appearance, the incarnate Word offers humanity *his presence* – the medium, the presentation and the reality of God’s grace and truth in excess of common phenomenality. The Fourth Gospel emphasizes this encounter as the truth of being is revealed through the Logos, the person of Jesus, “We have beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father, thoroughly endowed with grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). In other words, no other God is known but the Father revealed intimately by the Son (Jn. 1:8). In and through the Logos, the abstract is made concrete; the invisible made visible, the intangible is made tangible. God exposes God’s self in order to bring man eternal life (Jn. 1:18). Balthasar’s *Engagement with God* looks at the divine involvement reaching its consummation in the man, Jesus of Nazareth. In and through him, “God’s word to us becomes simultaneously man’s response to him. The God who chooses becomes mingled with man, who is the object of this choice.”84

---


In so doing, the incarnation also set before each individual a decisive question of accepting or rejecting the Word – seeing the form as beauty and being apprehended by it. Balthasar notes that the revelation of beauty as Being requires the beholder to renounce himself in order to experience Beauty; an experience that John echoes: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12). The Word became flesh is the very translation of God in human dimension in order for man to see the form and to experience the transformation in the spiritual as well as the physical realm. In beholding the form, the beholder first encounters the vision; Beauty illuminates in the nature of God – the Creator, Logos and the Redeemer.

c. Redeemer

Inherent in the first few verses of the Fourth Gospel is the notion that the Logos is not only involved in creation but also is the Redeemer of his created world, “In him was life and the life was the light of all humans. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (Jn. 1:4-5). In other words, according to John, the Word is our source of life and light which is also identified as life in him, given directly and intentionally in the Word itself as the Life-giver. This is consistent with the Christological focus in the Johannine writings elsewhere (Jn. 12:36). Amidst inherent darkness, pending rejection and suffering however, the evangelist expresses a serene confidence that the light will continues to shine with inextinguishable radiance albeit inevitable conflict. Sin, understood from the Johannine perspective is an attitude of rejection of God and his goodness (Jn. 3:36) and this is a representation of darkness which has not and could not overcome light, in him was life and that life was the light of humankind. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. In the coming of the Word with its fullness, human existence is brought into the radiant field of its divine origin and God-ordained destiny upon which humankind is to experience grace upon grace.

In him was life is also consistent with the gospel’s impetus elsewhere whereby life is given Christological focus rather than Christ or the Word being reduced to a dimension of creation. Life in John is one of the most basic themes (Jn. 20:31) and is often used with reference to “real life” or “true life” rather than “natural” or “biological” life. It is probable that John’s remark, “through faith in him, you might have life” implies eternal life which emphasizes a quality of existence when God rules (Jn. 17:3) rather than everlastingness, that life was the light of all humankind. Through

85 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 41.
86 Newman and Nida, Translator’s Handbook, 11. The word ‘life’ is used thirty six times in John carries the meaning of ‘real’ or ‘true’ life, denoting a reference of quality of life over longevity. There is no evidence that the concept of everlastingness is excluded but this is not a primary emphasis for John.
this fullness we all have received “grace upon grace.” This has been made clearer by the introduction of John the Baptist, who himself is not the light but sent from God with a God-given mission (Jn. 1:6), he came to solely witness the coming of the light which enlightens everyone.

From the outset, it looks and sounds like the flow of the Prologue has been interrupted by the introduction of John the Baptist and his purpose of being a historical witness to the historical fact that the Word was coming in the midst of the human world, dwelling among us, John and his community indeed see the need to present the story from another perspective, whose authority to witness is given by God and for the purpose God has ordained:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world (Jn. 1:6-9).

The evangelist continues to expound on further aspects of God’s redemptive activity through Jesus as the Christ who alone has seen God, and made him known (Jn. 1:18). On the one hand, the description of redemptive activity is continuing as the flow of “grace upon grace” is experienced (Jn. 1:16) through Jesus Christ as God’s saving revealing work – the Word, the light and the Father’s only Son. On the other hand, inherent in such redemptive action is its escalation of such activity whereby “the Law was indeed given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17),” is completed in the pinnacle event of the cross. The climax of which is none other than making God known in a world that refuses to accept him. For those who receive him, to them also the empowerment to become the children of God is given. They are invited to enter into the realm of light, made possible by the Word became flesh and lived among us (lit., “pitched his tent” or “tabernacling”). Interestingly, the shift from third person plural (πιστεύοντες) in v.12 to first person plural (ἡμῖν ἐθεασάμεθα) denotes a preference of active participation over that of a distant observer or reporter of news. At this point, Balthasar’s experience of the glory of the Lord is driven home whereby in experiencing God’s glory or beauty one must first see the form – the Creator, the Logos and our Redeemer, and consequently be apprehended by it.

3. The Drama of Glory Is Disclosed in Grace: The Word Became Flesh
   a. Incarnation

Human existence is marked by relationships between fellow human beings. Such relationships reflect their fundamental freedom however finite, and are comprehensible in human terms. While human beings relate to one another as one to another, in his absoluteness, God is the One without compare and would never enters such relationship if it was not for ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. The
Prologue proclaims this Word is God, the Father’s only Son, sent by the Father to the human race in order that through him human beings can enter into a similar relationship with God and to be given a fulfilment to infinite freedom that transcends all human hope and expectation.

God’s glory or beauty is defined as the dignity and justification proper to God, or God himself in the truth; in the capacity or in the act in which he makes himself known as God. In other words, it is the embodiment, the becoming visible of all divine perfection, and he does this by loving. Balthasar notes, “God is not God because he is beautiful. He is beautiful because he is God.” 87 The mystery of God’s freely given love – beyond majesty and humility, is expressed by grace in truth and love in and through Jesus Christ who is the perfect representation of God’s glory of which John has announced, “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:16). In and through which, humankind is given a home, being brought back to God at once and into her/his own depth and the true fellowship of others, which can only be endured through Christ, (s)he is empowered to genuine transcendence to her/his own true being, which was always intended for her/him.

The incarnation is the revelation of God’s absolute freedom of eternal self-giving, out of unfathomable love. It provides the necessary point of reference against which God’s self-giving love is revealed and demonstrated definitively. Without such divine overtue of love, human being gropes in the darkness of limited experiences of phenomena and concepts and God remains unknowable in character and intimacy. Balthasar considers this as the final self-disclosure of the glory of God, or the “super form” which radiates its beauty, recognisable in light of the free love of God which justifies humankind. 88 The true purpose of God’s disclosure of his glory is to demonstrate his Trinitarian love in and through the unique Christ event. He comments: “The incarnation has accordingly no other ultimate purpose than the cross ….. To speak of incarnation is already to speak of the cross.” 89

As the true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world, the Word is now presented and en-fleshed in our worldly existence, making his dwelling among us. Jesus the Christ is now the tabernacling presence of the divine Word in our world (Jn. 1:14). Despite every seemingly impossibility, God’s divine revelation is now disclosed in this fleshly, finite and transitory presence. Through his poverty and self-abandonment in the passion and resurrection he submitted his destiny

---

89 Balthasar, The New Covenant, 212.
to the Father. Paradoxically, the Word that disappeared in the flesh become truly the Word in the beginning with God, revealing his countenance to humankind and at the same time enables believers to be part of the authentic expression of the divine mystery (Jn. 1:12). He is light, not from the outside, but rather from within our earthly domain. Balthasar observes, “By becoming man, he enters into what is alien to him and there remains at the same time true to himself.” The flesh was imagined and experienced to be most separated and alienated from God is now being appropriated by the Word as the hinge of salvation and the domain to channel life, in him was life (Jn. 1:4).

In Jesus Christ, God’s generosity is disclosed as “grace upon grace” as human existence is now no longer under the threat of being cut off or alienated from God, but rather being illumined by new meaning and direction to fulfil its God-ordained destiny. God in his absolute freedom chooses to reveal God-self and his ungraspable love through the person of Christ. By radiating love, God expresses himself to man as love in grace and truth. With divine intention, the incarnation gives new shape to the human condition but not in such a way that it negates or overwrites that condition. Balthasar explains that if God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognise, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other. The inner reality of love could only be recognised by love. Such disclosure could only be expressed in and through the unique Christ-event. The glory of God is now disclosed fully in the Word en-fleshed for it is God’s choice to be made man through Jesus in order to communicate his divine self-giving overflowing love for humankind (Jn. 3:16). In so doing, he is calling and creating a people for himself – those by seeing and are being apprehended by the beauty of the form through the act of seeing, consequently responding in faith, the empowerment to become children of God (Jn. 1:12).

The Incarnation defines the totality of the relationship between the Word and the world. Everything that exists has its origin from the Logos (Jn. 1:3), the Word that has power to create and transform. Not only the world exists through him, but he also became one among his created world – the Word became flesh, bound by time and destined to die. Balthasar refers to this as a dramatic play of divine communication, an event of total originality lying at the heart of the Johannine experience of God. Further, Balthasar notes, “when God becomes man, then man as such becomes the expression, the valid and authentic expression of the divine mystery.” All human dimensions,

---

91 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 81.
92 Balthasar, Love Alone, 75.
93 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 10.
94 Balthasar, The Word Made Flesh, 70.
known or unknown are taken up and used to express this absolute person. Balthasar assimilates this with the experience of a baby, responding to his/her mum’s love by smiling back at her mother as a result of his/her mum’s devotion of love day in and out. Just as the child is being awakened by love from love, the human heart can come to the understanding of God’s love by the free gift of his grace – His only Son.

Kelly and Moloney observe that the incarnation of the Word also signifies the fulfilment and the excess of the divine gift which is described as “truth” – a key word right through John’s narrative, which exhibits various meanings as it reveals God and God’s character, righteous in truth and gracious in love.95 Truth in John offers freedom (Jn. 8:32), engenders new life, calls to faith, nourishes and forgives, brings life and effects judgment (Jn. 1:14, 17; 3:21; 14:6; 17:17).

The Johannine experience testifies to a reality of the incarnation as a gift from God in which God gives God-self in relationship with persons unconditionally as grace upon grace for without God’s initiative to self-disclose in such intimacy the world remains in darkness in its “knowing” God. Without such revelation God remains ultimately unknowable. Further, as a gift saturated with love, the incarnation is given to humankind freely without any condition, even the condition to take it. It thus risks the possibility of being misunderstood or rejected, he came to what was his own and his own people did not accept him (Jn. 1:11).

In and through the incarnation, God’s mighty act of liberation through Jesus’ obedience to “the point of death, even death on a cross”96 is achieved. Beyond human understanding or phenomena, in Christ crucified and risen, God moves toward humanity decisively as grace and truth. Humankind is being liberated through the cosmic power of sin, from estrangement to God and from death itself, it is brought back to the space of divine freedom. Balthasar comments: “Had Jesus in fact being merely a man, he would never have been able to have been himself the very embodiment of God’s mighty act of liberation.”97 Within the physical, alienated and finite realm of humanity, the Word is brought forth specifically and scandalously in the flesh as the domain of salvation, reconciling the world to the Father (Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 6:31b; 14:6).

95 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 48.
96 Phil. 2:5-11 (NRSV).
97 Balthasar, Engagement, 27.
b. Making the Father Known

Central to John’s witness is the relationship shared between the Father and Jesus – an eternal reality, existing from the beginning. The personal distinctiveness yet the essential oneness with God were held in balance with the preposition \( \pi\rho\omicron\omicron\varsigma \) (Jn. 1:1c). Within this context, it also refers to a personal relationship rather than a proximity. For John, an awareness and understanding of this particular relationship right from the beginning is important as it gives substance to the rest of the gospel and provides the key to understanding all that Jesus says and does (Jn. 5:19b).

In his exploration of beauty, Balthasar points out that the perception of beauty consists of both the recognition of the form and the hidden reality it points toward. In other words, the appearance of the form cannot be taken separately from its revelation of the hidden depths; both belong together, inseparable and must be taken seriously. It is through the contemplation of the \( \Lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron\varsigma \) in the fleshly form that the beauty of God is perceived and that carries through to the contemplation of the cross. He comments:

> We can never attain to the living God in anyway except through his Son become man, but in this Son we can really attain to God in himself, so too, we ought to never speak of God’s beauty without reference to the form and manner of his appearing which he exhibits in salvation-history.98

The close communion between the \( \Lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron\varsigma \) and the \( \theta\epsilon\omicron\omicron\varsigma \) introduced in Jn. 1:1c and Jn. 1:2 is now expressed and experienced in the human relationship that exists between a father and son as the fullness of the gift is realised. In term of time, the verb \( \gamma very \) in Jn. 1:1 describing the Logos is indefinite and thus indistinct (in the beginning). From the state of infinity, the Logos-Theos relationship has been shifted to mortal finitude with the introduction of \( \sigma\alpha\rho\varsigma \) (flesh) and the use of the aorist \( \epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\tau\omicron \) in a human relationship that exists between a father and a son, which is definite in time and historical in place. Jesus, who explains and interprets the nature of the Father, is indeed the translation or exegesis of the Father. Therefore, to know Jesus is to know God (Jn. 14:9b). Inherent in the different usage of the verb to be is the subtle differentiation between the creative activities as one time event in contrast to the continuous existence of the Logos.

Earlier in Jn. 1:12, the gift has been described as the empowerment for believers to become the children of God, which is now fully expressed in the father-son relationship through the en-fleshed Logos, and this is precisely the “glory of the Lord.” Balthasar’s explains:

---

98 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 124.
What is called God’s *kenosis* is certainly acute in the unique life and suffering of Jesus, but it is also in this context the revelation of God’s own way of eternal being: it is according to God the Father’s very mode of being to ‘abandon’ his Son, ‘to pour out’ his Pneuma, in order that he might be his own ‘divine form’ in this act of self-surrender.99

In Jesus Christ – the gift which is truth, the source of grace, the Father is disclosed. The invisible mystery of God is made known by his Word and Son as he entered the human world and became a matter of history. Access to the fullness of God’s revelation is made possible to believers because of their relationship with Jesus and his unique relationship with God for *no one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known* (Jn. 1:18).

c. Radiating God’s Glory

i. As Love in Grace

By beginning this gospel with the origin of the Word, his relationship with God, his identity and his work in creation and beyond, the writer has laid the foundation for claiming absolute reliability and trustworthiness of his words and works.100 While Jn. 1.1-18 deals with the form of Jesus, John magnificently introduces the Word as and by the testimony of the Father, of the Son himself “who is close to the father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn. 1.18). God’s divine involvement is made possible through Jesus’ becoming flesh and in the act of self-communicating God is apprehended. The Father is to be found in and through him, “the Son is the exegesis of the Father.”101 All that is human in Christ is a revelation of God and speaks to us of him. Being the gift which is truth, Jesus is the definitive expression of the Father. By showing itself to humankind, the beauty of God gives itself phenomenally in excess to us. Balthasar notes, “In Jesus of Nazareth, God’s word to us becomes simultaneously man’s response to him, the God who chooses becomes mingled with man who is the object of his choice.”102 By becoming flesh and living among us, God took the initiative to reveal his agenda to human in a way that is comprehensible and communicable in human terms (Heb. 11:40). Balthasar refers to such an event as the invasion of nature by grace, ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. In other words, the ultimate revelation is when God reveals God-self in love. In giving himself by tabernacling among humankind, the Word made himself available in time and space historically relevant to us. What was beyond human’s reach, he made available.103 Balthasar further remarks:
The Son gives himself, through God the Father, for the world’s salvation. The Sinless One changes places with sinners. While, in principle, the Church Fathers understand this in a radical sense, it is only in the modern variation of the theories of representation that the consequences are fully drawn out. Man is thus set free – ransomed, redeemed, and released. More than this, he is initiated into the divine life of the Trinity. Consequently, the whole process is shown to be the result of an initiative on the part of divine love.104

Ontologically, we know things as they appear to us. In their appearing or being, they are disclosed to us in their physical proximity. In other words, they show themselves phenomenologically in their being, beauty or reason. The Word is disclosed in and through becoming flesh, and lives among humankind, we have seen his glory, glory as of an only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth – a saturated phenomenon. As it appeals excessively beyond one’s limited faculty of reasoning or intuition, one is left surrounded with an overwhelming influx of love, grace and truth beyond comprehension – an experience Balthasar refers to as seeing the form. John’s description of the Word became flesh is phenomenologically perceived as a gracious gift, given in excess for many (Jn. 1:29). Consequently, one is confronted with a decision either to remain unchanged or get involved decisively – beholding the form. While seeing the form and being apprehended by the form is an act of God, brought about decisively by God’s divine revelation though the incarnation, God’s beauty or glory could only be experienced in its fullest as grace upon grace in the heart and mind of the believer as a result of his/her decisive involvement in the salvation plan by beholding the form. Balthasar explains:

Glory would not be glory if it merely sent forth an external radiance without affecting internally the being that is the recipient of grace. If grace is repeatedly likened to living water that springs up out of God (Jn. 4:14; 7:37), then the meaning is not merely that man should bathe externally in this, but that he should come in thirst and immerse himself in it by drinking. Grace, together with its beauty, can belong internally to the creature to the extent that the latter is ready to return the gift.105

Interestingly, the proclamation of the incarnation is a vivid reminder of the Exodus narrative, in which God was experienced by his people precisely as dwelling or tabernacling among them as they dwelt in tents during their sojourn in the wilderness.106 The Word became flesh and took his dwelling among us reminds John’s audience of YHWH’s faithfulness in grace and in truth to keep his covenantal promise to the children of Abraham then, and continues to bring his perfect plan to

106 Exd. 29:45-6 (NRSV).
fruition through the Word. The Holy One of Israel who is to be among his people at the same time remains Lord of all.

Not only does the incarnation mark the event the Creator entered into the realm of his created world, but in the act of becoming flesh he made himself known to us and made it possible for human beings to partake in the mystery of his-story tangibly. The Johannine Logos does not appeal to the human common sense of logic. Rather, as a saturated phenomenon it defies human efforts to try to objectively categorise or compartmentalise phenomena. As a pure givenness, it is a gift which its excess floods and overwhelms our intuition. This revelation is not a concept of religion resulting from within the limits of reason, rather it is a credible testimony, self-authenticating in its own right as John seeks to proclaim, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. The incarnation also unveiled a limitless God in his sovereign freedom whose gratuitous love for humanity has bounded him to be limited to the fate of a human being in order to give himself completely and allow others to be. This in itself is also a pure givenness, a gift called love, which enters into phenomenality through the Logos in a way that is counter-intuitive, shocking and even unacceptable for some (Jn. 1:11). It brought the Infinite to the finite, spatial and temporal world to express God’s divine unconditional love in allowing others to freely be and brought to the fore the true meaning of human existence in all dimensions, known and unknown. It also reflects the fundamental relationship between divine creativity and human receptivity. The Word of God which was previously understood and experienced in prophetic sense but never as God himself, is now become \((\varepsilon\gamma\varepsilon\nu\tau\omicron)\) flesh in all concreteness of human frailty, limitation, vulnerability and above all, mortality. The Word became flesh is God’s demonstrative expression of God’s primal essence, that is grace and truth, in autocharis for human beings and hence it is quite simple, beautiful and glorious.107 While \(\sigma\alpha\rho\xi\) in John often refers to that which is natural, powerless, and superficial (Jn. 1:13), the Word became flesh has brought about changes. He who willingly embraced suffering out of loving obedience, surrendered to God’s will in his human powerlessness to be lifted up for the sin of the world, is drawing \((\epsilon\lambda\kappa\upsilon\sigma\omega)\) people to himself (Jn. 12:32). That which was natural and powerless has now become supernatural, powerful as only in the Word became flesh, divine glory shines through: In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it (Jn. 1:4-5).

Through the Word became flesh, the “vision” of the invisible God is made available. His divine being is revealed. This divinity of the Invisible which radiates in the visibleness of being of the world is

---

immediately reckoned as “the glory of the Lord.” Further, the fullness of God’s revelation in and through Jesus – the fleshly being of the Word, is made available to all those who believe in his name (Jn. 1:12). There is an apparent tension between the two divine gifts: the law and Jesus - grace and truth personified. However the relationship between the two here is one of fulfilment. The graciousness of God which is from everlasting to everlasting (Mi. 7:18; Jer. 32:40) was once given in the law and has now manifested perfectly in Jesus as grace and truth. While the law was given (δόθη) through Moses grace and truth became (γενέτο) through Jesus. As a gift, the law was given as a source of grace for the wandering people of whom Moses was the representative. John’s usage of the aorist passive of the verb δέχεσθαι gives clear indication that Moses was given the law of which he received and passed it on as instructed by YHWH. On the contrary, the indicative aorist γενέτο carries an active voice, indicating that Jesus is the meaning of grace and truth expressed in love in the very act of becoming flesh. In other words, the full meaning of grace and truth could only be experienced through Jesus personally, from his fullness we all have received, grace upon grace. While Moses was remembered as the representation of law reinforcement, grace and truth was lived by Jesus Christ – God’s revelation of grace and truth given in excess and accessible to humankind as grace upon grace. Further, while in and through Jesus, grace and truth offers transformation and abundant life, grace upon grace suggests that grace cannot be pinned down by any one of its specific expressions; rather it displaces the diminished, binary expressions of grace affected by partisan interests.

ii. As Love in Truth

Jesus’ uniqueness including his origin as God, his relationship with God the Father as the Father’s only Son enables him to reveal God’s saving purposes for his creation. Here in the first eighteen verses, among others, his role as God’s Revealer, the fulfilment of the law and prophecies, the mediator by empowering believers to be children of God is mentioned. John consistently testifies that as no one has ever seen God, it is in the revelation of the incarnate son, by virtue of faith that the glory of God is ultimately declared in its fullness as well as his fidelity is definitively revealed and experienced. Balthasar observes:

The Incarnation of the Word means the most extreme manifestness within the deepest concealment. It is manifestness because here God is explained to man by no means other than himself – not primarily through words and instruction, but by his own being and life .... It is concealment because the translation of God’s absolutely unique, absolute, and infinite Being into the evermore dissimilar, almost arbitrary and hopelessly relativised reality of one

---

108 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 429-33.
individual man in the crowd from the outset appears to be an undertaking condemned to failure.109

The saturated phenomena of Christ being at once God and man holds in tension the paradox of manifestness and concealment or revelation and hiddenness, which may indeed reveal different dimensions of Jesus’ humanity, yet at the same time could only be understood and resolved as functions within the Trinitarian economy. In other words, his humanness relativity does not appear to oppress or violate the simultaneous absoluteness of his divinity. In his witness to the Father, he has also had the Father’s witness to him, “the Father and the Son are one” (Jn. 10:30) and “whoever sees the Son, sees the Father” (Jn. 14:9); Yet, John surprises the readers with a constant sense of contradiction which pervades the whole of the Gospel, the Father is greater than the Son (Jn. 14:8). Although the Son has the same power as the Father, he can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing (Jn. 5:19, 30). In another place John affirms that knowledge of the Father could only be experienced by a personal relationship with Jesus. To know Jesus is to know the Father, to see Jesus is to see the Father. In other words, Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of the Father, the Word who took flesh in order to witness, represent and be in the flesh, the grace and truth of God, “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (Jn. 14:7). In John’s vivid language, God is made known, revealed, experienced and related personally in and through the incarnate Son as no one can come to the Father except through me (Jn. 14:6). Through Christ, God reconciles us to himself .... (II Cor. 5:18). It is in this unique relationship and out of willing obedience that the Son was able to reveal the Father’s love for the world. Balthasar further explains that just as one does with human presence and identity, the identity of Jesus is often taken for granted or distorted for Logos and Wisdom both describe divine activity:

Since God has in himself the eternal Word that expresses him eternally, he is most certainly expressible; and since this very Word has taken the human form and expresses in human acts and words what is in God, it is capable of being understood by man.110

In the oneness of the Father and the Son, the Father expresses his paternal lordship and glory as the son himself affirms the activity of the Father in him. As the visible Son in his work and word glorifies the invisible Father – the Father who appears in the Son, his servant form is manifested as the Father’s lordship and beauty. John testifies to this existential paradox as the Son does not do his will but only does what he sees the Father doing (Jn. 4:34; 5:19; 6:38). In other words, the very aim of his being is to fulfill the will and purpose of God. Only God can express God authentically, and for this

109 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 456.
reason, the truth of God’s love for humanity can only be authentically experienced in and through the form which makes expressive the relationship in God himself and between God and humankind.111

For John, love that is practised contains the ability to demonstrate itself as truth which is the eternal reality and its revelation. By virtue of God’s incarnation, the creative power of God through Jesus’ kenotic love is revealed on the cross and through the resurrection as love and the glory of God. Truth is thus what happens when the beauty of God is unveiled as Balthasar recognised. Subsequently, John remarks that recognition of the truth requires a commitment to the truth; and when there comes a time words alone are not enough, the witness of the whole person is imperative, to live otherwise is a form of contradiction. While the law calls forth actions to conform or risk consequences, grace that comes by Jesus Christ is the gift of truth by God’s initiative which convinces and convicts, calling for transformation in faith and love, inviting one to participate in a history whose content is formed primarily by God’s kenosis to the world.

As John testified, Jesus Christ is at once saving grace and judgment that calls forth for human response in transformation through the Spirit given without measure and by whom the Word is known and experienced in heart and mind (Jn. 1:12; 3:6). John’s designation of Christ as the incarnate Logos, revealing himself kenotically as gracious, divine agape, divinely beautiful and precisely for such reason as the truth,112 which can only be comprehended within the complexity and mystery of relationships such as that of a father and son. There is no equivalent substitution. The Word made flesh among is God’s invitation to light and life abundant in grace and truth, calling forth faith as the credibility of the one who testified is offered .... In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (Jn. 1:4-5).

111 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 613.
112 Balthasar, Love Alone, 55.
1. Given as Love in Excess (Jn. 3:1-26) – translation provided for Jn. 3:11-17

---

John 3:11-17

13 No one has ever gone up into heaven except for the one who has come down from heaven – the Son of Man.

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone believing in him may have eternal life.

15 For God loves the world so much that he gave the Son, his only begotten, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but may have eternal life.

16 For God did not send the Son into the world so that he might judge the world, but through him the world might be saved.

---

Jesus’ appearance and teaching must have left a lasting impression on Nicodemus’ mind, which persuaded him to come to Jesus at night with further questions. As a leader of the Jews, a Pharisee and a scribe, Nicodemus was identified in detail, by name, his relationship to his people and his religious affiliation. This suggests that Nicodemus might be the representative of a certain group. The language he used, we know, gives the impression that he was not alone in his assessment of Jesus’ status. But the fact that he came to Jesus by night also suggests that not everyone shared his opinion about Jesus.

In Nicodemus’ traditional religious worldview, it is a fact that God is with him who was able to do these astonishing signs. Having been witness to Jesus’ authoritative teaching and deeds, Nicodemus was able to make this connection with conviction. Nicodemus’ statement of affirmation, and perhaps also of admiration, confirms firstly the origin of Jesus who is a teacher coming from God and secondly, Jesus’ spiritual status – always in the presence of God. These are indispensable as the source of Jesus’ divine authority and mission (Jn. 3:2), enabling him to be the wonder-working rabbi and to perform signs which no one else could.
Inherent in that statement of affirmation of *the teacher of Israel* is Nicodemus’ secret desire to know or even to be at Jesus’ spiritual level – always be in the presence of God or more simply, to see the kingdom of God. Elsewhere, (Jn. 3:36; 8:51), the verb “to see” can also be taken to mean to experience, to share in or to have a part of. Thus the expression “to see the kingdom of God” can be understood as “to be a part in God’s kingdom” or “to have a share in God’s ruling.” The core of Nicodemus’ concern that led him to seeking Jesus for an answer is thus one of salvation.

He then came to Jesus at night to get his confirmation. The notion “by night” is considered by some as an expression of Johannine dualism of “light” and “darkness,” symbolic for the realm of God and the world. Others argue that this was the case because of the anticipated dangers of being seen associating with Jesus. Still others argue that first-century rabbinic debates were typically conducted at night and so Nicodemus’ simply was just doing what was habitually done. Whether or not these are the cases, Nicodemus came representing some others who shared the same curiosity about Jesus and their assumption about Jesus was evidently made from previous stock of intuition or past experience which phenomenally termed as common phenomena.

Jesus’ reply, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born anew from above” stated clearly that the condition of entry to the kingdom of God is to be born anew from above and that religious experience cannot provide a humanly possible answer or solution as to how to enter the rule of God. Salvation is given as grace upon grace via the divine Logos who came with a mission (Jn. 3:16-17; 14:6). For Nicodemus, this physically impossible possibility dashes his secret and noble desire as he could perceive no possible way for this to happen. *Unless a man is born anew from above* states uncompromisingly that there is no possibility of a human being per se being included in the sphere of the kingdom of God or to gain salvation with his/her own effort. Regardless of such noble desire to be in the presence of God, or to see the kingdom of God, to be born anew from above and being always in the presence of God is, as Jesus declares, an impossible possibility. Yet at the same time, it was hinted that to be born anew from above is a possibility for humankind inasmuch as to be in the presence of God. For that to come to pass, humankind is to be given a new origin and a new identity. This is not a deliberate attempt of a person to authenticate by self-improvement; rather it is the work of the Spirit which gives itself to the measure that it reveals itself to the fullest phenomenally. Such is a miraculous act of God beyond human sphere, a

---

gracious gift given in excess for many. From his existing stock of intuition, he is conditioned to think that it is intellectually illogical and physically impossible for a human being to enter the mother’s womb a second time and be born again as opposed to the first physical birth. His direct question in response to Jesus’ reply was not about how to attain the second birth, rather it emphasises the impossibility of such a thing. It never crosses his mind that Jesus was talking about changes of origin and identity beyond a physical birth which enables a person not only to see the rule of God but also to enter into the divine life that God has to offer. For Nicodemus, regardless of his background as a teacher of Israel, such revelation is overwhelmingly saturated, exceeding his religious intuition and/or intentional consciousness, preventing him from seeing the whole form any further.

Jesus’ teaching cuts to the core of Nicodemus’ assumption and uproots his preconceived knowledge of and about God, and at the same time offers an impossible possibility of a saturated phenomenon. By addressing Nicodemus with the condition of “seeing the kingdom of God” is to be born anew from above, Jesus defines the rules of God with a revelation which threatens to turn all Nicodemus’ religious experience into disarray. Through the course of the conversation, Jesus reveals scandalously that this could only be achieved by being “born anew from above” (Jn. 3:3). The term ἀναθεματικόν is potentially ambiguous as it can mean “again”; “from the beginning” or “from above.” While “being born anew from above” is not necessarily the tidiest translation, it certainly carries the meaning of a rebirth or a second birth, which is not a mere repetition of the natural birth, rather a regeneration from above to create anew – a God’s initiative through which God is intimately disclosed in love, truth and grace (Jn. 3:16). This as Jesus affirms is the work of the Holy Spirit and is no less than a miracle. By picking up the same word Nicodemus was using “no one,” Jesus further emphasises that whoever wishes to enter the kingdom of God which is where Jesus comes from, must be like Jesus, the one who came down “from above” (Jn. 3:5-6).

The unique dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus unfolds a range of deeper issues relating to Christian faith. Firstly, Nicodemus’ conversation with Jesus reflects a crucial understanding that Christian faith is not about believing in God in a certain way or according to certain religious past experiences over and above other religious perspectives. Rather it is about whether or not God can be believed at all. John’s testimony at the beginning of this narrative suggests that the starting point of faith is the sensual perception of the man Jesus – seeing the form which Nicodemus refers to as we know. Yet it is the Father in Jesus that is the object of faith perception following that initial stage of recognition (Jn. 12:45) – beholding the form. Following the movement of the narrative closely, John’s audience is gradually made aware that despite Nicodemus’ knowledge he shows no faith
recognition of God’s involvement as the source of the new birth. His interaction clearly exhibited an incomprehensibility of such revelation.

Secondly, as John gradually unfolds, God’s active involvement in human history reveals the true meaning of freedom and salvation and his abiding love for humankind which revealed and expressed definitively in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16-17) and is completing in the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:39, 14:26). God’s love is given in excess in the definitive form of the incarnate Jesus and is experienced in and through the Holy Spirit. Kysar observes that the testimonial nature of John conveys a comprehension of the Johannine pneumatology as a function of Christology and of the eschatology of the gospel. Characteristic of this function is John’s testimony of the close association between the Spirit and the Word (Jn. 6:63) as the pneuma is the peculiar power by which the Word becomes the words of eternal life and is decisively communicated. In other words, the Spirit who will lead believers into all truth (Jn. 16:13), is seen as another “form of appearance” of Christ without which it is impossible to recognise Jesus as the God-sent Revealer.

Interestingly, the dynamic relationship of faith and human freedom is often explored explicitly in John as the evangelist on several occasions recognises faith as a gift from God (Jn. 6:37, 29), yet elsewhere he also suggests that the reasons for the failure to believe include firstly the inability of the human mind to perceive God through the ambiguity of the revelation of the ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο, secondly the hiddenness of revelation itself until after the crucifixion (Jn. 3:12; 12:32). As it turns out during the course of conversation, Jesus places before the teacher of Israel and John’s audience likewise, two possibilities of existence - σάρξ and πνεῦμα. While σάρξ refers to the human mode of being, πνεῦμα refers to the other-worldly divine mode of existence whereby God’s presence and movement remain above and beyond human-derived conventions: “the wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” In John’s audience is led into a spiritual truth that by giving birth to a person, the Spirit has in effect in his freedom, given that person a new origin and new identity and new mode of being as a gift. Further, without God’s gift of grace and truth given definitively in and through Jesus Christ, salvation remains an impossible possibility. As a result, humanity remains groping in the dark, looking but not seeing. From the horizon of givenness, such a gift is outside any economy, causality or agency and difficult to recognise in its appearing. As what shows itself gives itself phenomenologically, only an act of

---

116 Kysar, Voyages with John, 133.
117 Jn. 3:8 (NRSV).
faith can determine such a gift as a gift. Within Nicodemus’ stock of knowledge, such divine revelation is counter-intuitive, humanly impossible and overwhelmingly incomprehensible. It is an act of God, a gift from God, given by God’s Son.

Beyond human thought, religious experience and worldly phenomena represented by Nicodemus, John focuses sharply on the revelation that the truth of Being is love, given in excess, come for the purpose to save the world and not to condemn it (Jn. 3:17). As he testifies to what he has seen and heard from above, whoever has accepted his testimony has certified that God is true (Jn. 3:33). For this reason, he is precisely the truth. Bultmann explains: “the Cross was the Jews’ last definitive answer to Jesus’ word of revelation, and whenever the world gives its final answer in the words of unbelief it “lifts up” the Revealer and makes him its judge.”

He is not merely the one who brings down the message of salvation. He is the Son of God who has secured salvation for those who believe in his name by his sacrificial death on the cross of which a parallel is drawn from the Old Testament story of the bronze serpent (Jn. 3:14-17; Num. 21:8). In the account in Num. 21:8, Moses was instructed to make a bronze serpent and put it upon a pole as a symbol. Anyone who was bitten by a serpent, looked at that symbol will live. John’s imagery here is shifted to “those who believe in him will have eternal life.” From vision to faith, John’s testimony is consistent right through from the Prologue pronouncement in Jn. 1:12 to the end (Jn. 20:31).

Further, Newman and Nida point out that in John, the verb “to lift up” is only used for the Son of Man and always has a double point of reference – his imminent crucifixion and subsequent glorification. Further, the phrase, “must be lifted up” depicts an emphatic prophecy referring to the fashion of how Jesus would be killed, rather than an obligation to be imposed onto the Son (Jn. 10:18). In the act of being “lifted up,” his self-gift of life as the revelation of God, is given for the life of the world out of his love for the world – grace upon grace. Love which discloses itself offers itself in humility and simplicity, making concrete freedom and love. Such sacrificial, unconditional, gracious love not only expresses the mystery of the finite being i.e. the incarnated Christ, but also points toward the Source of being – the love that God is which shines through the world (Jn. 3:16).

In Jesus Christ God is given wholly in particularity in time and space relevant to the human sphere of understanding. The inexhaustible fullness and splendour of God’s truth appears concretely and individually. Revelation of such truth requires the mutual loving surrender of the Revealer and the

---

118 Bultmann, John, 350.  
120 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 5.
revealed, the giver and the receiver. God is disclosed as love and truth in grace intimately in Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:17). The form is seen by genuine openness to the Other with a desire to know and to be known in hearing and responding to the Word, other than any word from within human common phenomena (Jn. 3:19). It is by the grace and the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit that gives us this new origin and thus identity. He makes the life of love well up, like living water, not in front of us or above us, but in us, and thereby empowers us to glorify through our life the glory that has been given to us by Jesus Christ as our own. Kelly and Moloney observe “a rupture in the history of religious experience” as one enters into the experience of seeing the kingdom of God.121 We are drawn to the sphere of the glory which has emanated in and through Jesus Christ whereby the love of God is given in form of love, for love and to be consumed by love (Jn. 3:16). This is that love in excess, love that endures him to be lifted up to make eternal life accessible for the believers, those who love the light and live by the truth (Jn. 3:14-21).

2. Disclosed as Truth (Jn. 4:5-42 and Jn. 7:37-39) – with translation provided for Jn. 4:13-15, 26 and Jn. 7:37-39)

John 4:13-15

13 Ἄπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· πᾶς ὁ πίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου διψήσει πάλιν·

14 ὃς δὲ ἀν πίη ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος οὐ ἔγω δῶσω αὐτῷ, οὐ μὴ διψήσεις εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑδωρ ὧν ἔδωκα αὐτῷ γεννηται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγὴ ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

John 4:26

26 λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

John 7:37-39

37 Ἔν δὲ τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ μεγάλῃ τῆς ἑορτῆς εἰσῆλθε ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔκραξεν λέγων· ἐὰν τις ὁ διὰ ἐρχέσθω πρὸς με καὶ πινέτω.

121 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 75-76.
38. As the scripture said, the one believing in me, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water."

39. But he said this concerning the Spirit, whom the believers were about to receive for as yet there was no Spirit because he was not yet glorified.

Although there are similarities between this narrative and Nicodemus’ experience in the previous chapter in that they both show a sense of leaning toward the literal meaning of the conversation, both exhibit misunderstandings that need further explanation on Jesus’ part. However, unlike Nicodemus whose conversation and intuition seem to block his receptivity for Jesus’ revelation, the Samaritan woman was drawn into facing her own moral and spiritual shortfalls to identify with and be immersed in the comprehensive expression of “the gift of God” given in excess. Regardless of her compromised characterisation, Jesus’ promise to her about the abundant availability of living water and the possibility of true worship of God is both generous and radical, 122 which she accepted with faith and expectation from the Messiah. Even though time after time the context of the text reflected only limited understanding on her part. As the text unfolds, while Jesus speaks about a limitless spiritual water that will quench the thirst of the receivers once and for all, her vision is limited to the depth of the well and a kind of physical water where she has to labour to draw with a bucket.123

As the conversation unfolds, so does the identity of the Messiah. The grace of “eternal life” is linked with the image of “living water” that flows from the source of Being, given as a gift to satisfy the believers’ thirst and springs up from within them into eternal life. The provision of the living water not only fulfils God’s promise of eternal life and demonstrates his love for all humanity but also gives the Spirit, by which this revelation is internalised as truth in the heart and mind of the believers.

The engagement with “the gift of God” brought by Jesus has brought the Samaritan woman to a new spiritual revelation where she is able to leave behind her ethnic antipathy and her initial preoccupation with Jacob’s Well to accept the gift of living water that Jesus offers. In seeing the

122 Tricia G. Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-scientific Perspective* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2003), 133. The mediterranean honour/dishonour motif considered the honour of a divorced or widowed woman to be precarious since she was often no longer embedded within the honour of some male figure in her life which could be her father, husband or brothers. The narrative brings out a marginalised portrayal of the Samaritan woman whose sexual history among other things, is dishonourable. This renders her characterisation as compromised on the basis of her gender, ethnicity, ritual impurity and moral conduct.

form, she recognises the Messiah and is subsequently being apprehended by such encountering. Engaging with Jesus’ revelation at the well she also faces God’s revelation of his gift in the flesh in excess of her thought and expectation. While the phrase “the gift of God” denotes the totality of that which God bestows on humanity for its wholeness or salvation, the image of water is often used as an image of God’s revelation as well as of the Spirit.  

As entry into the kingdom of God is through “water and Spirit” (Jn. 3: 5), the question of the place of worship is no longer about the location. Rather it is about its character – in spirit and truth. The link between spirit and truth suggests genuine worship as well as a common nature shared between the One worshipped and the worshippers. Here Jesus is suggesting that what is necessary in spirit and in truth, have come in him whereby the location and character of worship coincide (Jn. 1:14, 18, 51; 3:19, 21). True worship depends on true knowledge of the Father which is only possible in and through Jesus, grace and truth tabernacling among humanity (Jn. 1:14, 18; 8:38a; 14:6). In God’s sovereign divine freedom he opens up himself in grace so that humanity might encounter him and in such encountering one finds his/her true being that God has always intended for him/her to be. The Samaritan woman’s conversation with Jesus brings her out of the depths of her past and into the realm of truth and grace revealed by the Messiah. From seeing the form, she is now stepping into pure grace and sheer glory radiated from the “I am.” Moving on from her previous framework of concept of “prophet like Moses,” the Samaritan woman is now standing in excess of light facing the “Messiah who reveals all things.”

Further, the revelation of the “I am” has enabled her to step into the realm of truth and spirit whereby true worshippers enter into new depth of truth and experience the infinite light and love of the triune God by divine revelation rather than by entering an earthly location. Her experiencing God has led her to be a true worshipper who worshipped in spirit and in truth and compelled her to go and tell about her engagement with grace and truth. Truth that expresses itself in grace in all beauty as immeasurable, flowing fullness that is nonetheless illuminated and formed in the finite but shows itself and gives itself freely and graciously to humanity even beyond its expectation. From seeing the form and being enraptured by it, she is now covered by pure grace, sheer beauty and glory. Encountering the Giver of water that will raise up to eternal life and being given such “eternal water” the Samaritan woman is now carrying within herself the form of Christ’s own efficacy – a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

124 Whitacre, John, 104.
The connection between water and God’s promise, water and the Spirit and the activity of the Spirit with eternal life is explicitly found in Jn. 6:63; 7:37-39 and also in many OT passages (Is. 12:3, 44:3; Ezk. 36:25-27, 47:1-5). Following the events that took place at the feast of Tabernacles in the temple (Jn. 7:37-39), Moloney observes an inherent eschatological significance of water as a gift in the expectation of a messianic figure, which is symbolically presented in the feast of Tabernacles and identified with God’s covenantal care and guidance during the Exodus wilderness experience and beyond.125

Within the context of the feast of the Tabernacle, water libation ritual was celebrated to remind people of the promise of the coming Messiah who will repeat the Mosaic gift of water and of a biblical tradition in which the Temple and Jerusalem are the source of living water. Jesus’ proclamation allows audience to identify him as the new source and content of living water. Speaking in the temple publicly without any hindrance from the authority, once again Jesus refused to be understood simply within the Jewish messianic categories. He stayed true to his claim of Messiahship, conveying the fullness of his relationship to the Father (Jn. 7:16-18, 29). He perfects and transcends all the elements of the feast. There is no longer the need to build tabernacles in memoriam of the time when YHWH journeyed with his people in the desert during the day as a pillar of cloud and at night as the pillar of fire because he is now tabernacling decisively among humanity. No longer is there the need to carry water from the pool of Siloam for the daily water libation ritual as he is the origin of living water for all who believe in him. No longer is there the need for the ceremony of light as he is the light of the world. No longer is there the need to face the temple to praise God as the true God, as he is God en-fleshed. Jesus’ presence as ὁ λόγος σώρε ἡ γένετο has perfected all that has been promised and symbolically celebrated in the elements of the feast of the


The celebration of the feast of the Tabernacles lasts for seven days. Its ritual is highlighted by the building of tabernacles and dwelling within them for a period of seven days, representing the Exodus tent experience of the Israelites in the desert and involves three main elements: (1) The water libation ceremony in which a procession is led by priests and singing Levites, chanting the words of Isa. 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the well of salvation.” The procession then goes up to the temple through the water gate to march around the altar waving lulab and ethrog. At its climax, the priest would go up the ramp to the altar and pour the water into a silver funnel through which the water flows to the ground. The ceremony is held every morning over the course of the seven days feast and repeated seven times around the altar on the seventh day of the feast. (2) The ceremony of light which lasts almost through the night for each of the seven days of the feast. (3) The rite of facing the temple whereby a procession of priests depart to the East gate of the temple and gaze away from the temple at cockcrow of each of the seven days. Then at the moment of sunrise, they turn west toward the temple praising YHWH as the one true God to whom all praise and allegiance was due. Moloney notes the difficulties of dating rabbinic traditions but is confident that the elements of the feast have been associated with eschatological and messianic expectation as found in Zechariah 14. On the eighth day which John refers to as the last and the greatest day, all celebration and procession cease and the day is dedicated to Israel’s request for superabundance of rain as a sign of YHWH’s continuing love and faithfulness for his people.

64
Tabernacles. The definitive expression of God has presented himself as an excess given which transcended all attempts to understand him within the category of Jewish messianic expectation.

Kelly and Moloney’s emphasis on the believer’s experience of encountering God through the four elements of the meaningful world namely the cognitive, the constitutive, the communicative and the effective adopted from Lonergan provides a useful tool to a better appreciation of this particular expression. Entering into one’s experience cognitively as an objective datum, Jesus provokes questions from the crowd about the nature of God and how he is revealed and mediated. Constitutively, the believer is led into an awareness of her/himself as a child of God and a recipient of grace whereby a movement toward (προς με) and faith in him (εις εμε) are the only criteria for receiving life-giving water from Jesus himself as he has just proclaimed for he has incarnated all that was celebrated through the feast of the Tabernacles. Effectively, as John testifies, “out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

Moloney notes that John’s usage of the future tense for the flowing of the rivers ἔρευνον in Jesus’ proclamation in v. 38b is important as immediately after that the audience is informed that the river of living water, to which Jesus referred to, was actually God’s Spirit which came after Jesus was glorified (Jn. 7:39). The implication here is that the experience of God’s Spirit in the life of the believer is rested upon a decisive future moment marked by Jesus being lifted up or raised to glory. As mentioned before, besides the meaning of being raised to glory, the term “being lifted up” is often used in John to mean being crucified. Further, John’s audience has already been informed in the Prologue that the gift of truth came though Jesus (Jn. 1:17). Therefore, it is clear that Jesus’ glorification when the hour comes will lead to the giving of the Spirit as the complete and

---

126 Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 85-86. Although my focus concerning Jn. 7:37-39 is not exegetical, it is useful to note the nuances involved especially for the task of responsible interpreting. Moloney notices three major interpretive problems associated with the passage namely punctuation, meaning and origins of the text referred to in v.38. In terms of punctuation and thus meaning, a full stop after let him come to me and drink renders the flow of living water out of the believer’s heart. On the other hand, if the full stop is placed after the one believing in me it would suggest that Jesus intends the scriptural quotation in v38 to refer to himself as the source of living water and Spirit. In other words, Jesus apparently intends the scripture to refer to himself and asserted himself as its fulfilment for all believers. However, it is still possible that living water might flow from the inside of the believer who has gone to Jesus and drunk as a result of his/her association with Jesus. Further, biblical scholars are still debating the origins of the biblical text referred to in v.38.

127 Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 87-88.

128 Stephen Smalley, John: Evangelist and Interpreter (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1994), 290-297. Smalley suggests that John speaks about the Spirit in two ways, although ultimately these belong together. First is his influence in the life of the individual believer as the agent of regeneration in the ‘born again anew’ experience. Since the Word became flesh, the new age of the Spirit has been inaugurated thus acting as the agent of regeneration. Second is his sustaining role given to the common life of believers after the resurrection as mentioned here in Jn. 7:39.
continuing disclosure of truth. Smalley observes that the Johannine Spirit is both one with God and “at one” with man who not only leads the believers into all truth but also is sent to them by the Father upon the Son’s request, and dwells in their hearts and minds.129 John describes the Spirit as one with God and with the glorified Christ, revealing their nature (Jn. 10:30; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7a, 15) further supports this observation. It is important to note that the incarnation implies the notion that Christ became temporal in his humanity, yet as the reality of God in the world his presence is perpetual. Thus the giving of the Spirit who interprets in endless ways the love Jesus has for the Father, the love of the Father for the Son and the Father’s love for the world, is the subsequent eternal presence of the temporal incarnate Logos.130

The Prologue presents in stages before the audience the newness and fullness of God’s revelation in relation to the law given through Moses (Jn. 1:16-17), indicating that God is behind the gift of the law through Moses then and the gift of grace and truth in and through Jesus Christ now. The relationship between the two gifts is one of fulfilment. There is a direct line from God through Moses to Jesus, thus any claim of a direct line back to God without accepting the living grace and truth offered through Jesus is rendered a breach of Moses’ law and failing to do the will of God. Nevertheless, John’s testimony is typically met with rejection. The audience on many occasions is informed of schisms or divisions following Jesus’ teaching or discussion. Those involved seek to kill him because they accept neither the truth of his teachings nor his divine authority.131

Truth denotes a reality that is firm, solid, binding and hence true. In relation to persons, it denotes their actions, speech or thought process which suggests integrity. In relation to the law, it refers to the actual truth as shown by facts, which demands recognition by all people as reality. Truth therefore is not a relative issue among compelling perspectives and to arrive at the truth means to be set free from bondage. Truth alone is genuinely liberating. John testifies to a redemptive reality of grace and truth with the coming of the Word in the fullness of time as the ultimate fulfilment of the law which was given to Moses as means of grace. Our understanding of grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ demands revelation beyond human imagination and contingency. For within this reign of truth, he who is the source of all truth (Jn. 1:17; 14:6; 17:17) and from whom “all things came into existence” (Jn. 1:3) also testifies to truth. Jesus’ word is truth because he speaks the word of God and all that is true in the world holds together in him (Col. 1:17). His kingdom is not of this world and those who belong to the truth hear his voice (Jn. 18:37) and arrive at worshipping

129 Smalley, John, 229-30.
131 Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 77.
God in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23). God’s mighty act of liberation is embodied in and through Jesus Christ, to liberate humanity that has fallen prey to death into the space of divine freedom – though the dying and rising with Christ – (born anew) into the freedom of God as no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. God’s truth is disclosed and completed as the Beauty of God, revealed in and through Jesus Christ, as the embodiment and disclosure of the triune God and is now continued to be in and through the Spirit as he leads believers into all truth.

3. Light for the Blind Jn. 9 – with translation provided for Jn. 9:38-41

**John 9:38-41**

38ο δέ ἐφη· πιστεύω, κύριε· καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ.

39Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς· εἷς κρίμα ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν κόσμον τούτον ἠλθον· ἵνα οἱ μὴ βλέποιτε βλέπωσιν καὶ οἱ βλέποιτες τυφλοὶ γένωται.

40ηκουσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων ταῦτα οἱ μετ’ αὐτῶν ὄντες καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ· μὴ καὶ ἤμεις τυφλοὶ ἐσμεν;  

41εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· εἰ τυφλοὶ ἦτε, οὕτως ἵνα ἐξηκοσμήτε ἀμαρτίαν· νῦν δὲ λέγετε ὅτι βλέπομεν, ἡ ἀμαρτία ὑμῶν μένει.

And he said: “I believe, sir.” And he worshipped him.

And Jesus said: for judgment I came into this world, that the ones not seeing may see and the ones seeing may become blind.

Being with him and hearing some of this, some Pharisees said to him: “Are we also blind?”

Jesus said to them: “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

The image of light was used early on in the beginning of the Prologue as the writer of the gospel describes the Word as the life was the light of all people. Light which emanates from the Logos manifests the creative and sustaining power and the presence of God himself. Interestingly, this image is only used in the first twelve chapters of the gospel. Often paired with darkness, life and death, seeing and being blind, the last time it is mentioned is when Jesus summarises his teaching (Jn. 12:44-50) before washing the disciples’ feet.

Jesus also uses this image to speak of himself (Jn. 8:12; 12:46) and demonstrates what it means by revealing the divine glory through his words and deeds which are totally dependent on what he hears and sees from the Father (Jn. 8:38). Koester observes that John recounts at some length the debates over Jesus’ identity which form the literary framework disclosing several facets of light’s meaning:
Jesus claimed to be the light of “the world,” not just the light of Israel, and the imagery is consistent with the message. The intricate arguments about Jesus’ status as rabbi, Messiah, and prophet, as well as the connection between light and the Feast of Booth, presuppose a certain familiarity with the Old Testament and Jewish traditions, but the divine character of light was recognised by people throughout the ancient world. Readers unfamiliar with Jewish traditions would have discerned the divine connotations in Jesus’ claim, yet in the Gospel they find that Jesus is not one light among many. He is “the light,” and the evangelist makes clear that those who reject Jesus remain in darkness.132

By speaking of himself as the light of the world which presupposes a metaphysical dualism of light and darkness, his words are of promise and invitation and at the same time judgment (Jn. 3:17-17). While the revelation of the light brings with itself in the “I am” the reality of life-force and divine word, the absence of it means the world is in total darkness (Jn. 1:3-5).133 John’s light statement begins with a Christological focus but gradually moves to discipleship whereby those who faithfully accept the revelation by following after the light - ὁ ἀκολουθεῖν will have the light of life and by no means walk in darkness (Jn. 8:12). Bultmann comments:

*He is the light of the world* not because he gives us brightness by which we can light up those things in the world which we need and which interest us, but because he gave us the brightness in which existence itself is illumined and comes to itself, comes to life. Without this revelation the world is in darkness.134

Although bearing some resemblances to the two independent healing of the blind episodes in the Synoptics (Mk. 10:46-52 with parallels in Matt. 9:27-31, Matt. 20:29-34 and Lk. 18:35-43, and one healing involving Jesus’ use of saliva in Mk. 8:22-26), the story of healing the blind man and the narrative that follows in Jn. 9 is unique to John as it bears remarkable differences.

Stylistically, the healing in the Synoptics is a miracle Jesus performed in compassion, responding to the request of the sufferer whereas here Jesus is seen taking the initiative to heal so that the works of God might be revealed. Jesus takes the physical disability as a given, which provides the arena for God’s salvific work (Jn. 9:3). While the disciples were puzzled with questions as to the how and why of such suffering when seeing a man who has never experienced light or sight, whose blindness is

---

133 Bultmann, *John*, 342. τὸ φῶς here is used with two different kinds of genitive – objective genitive and genitive of source. While the objective genitive means *light for the world* (τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου), the genitive of source or exegegetic genitive brings out the specific meaning of *light which is life* (τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς).
congenital thus physically irreversible, Jesus was seen seizing the opportunity to heal him on what appeared to be a Sabbath day (Jn. 9:14). Bultmann observes that the very detailed description of Jesus’ preparations for the healing are likely intended to show Jesus’ breaching the Sabbath laws, which would further intensify the conflict between him and the authorities hereafter. Cutting across all accepted explanations and theological correctness, Jesus transcends the discussion by shifting its point of reference from human responsibility to God’s creativity. Further, it also calls into question what it really means to see and the consequence of beholding of such a faith in Jesus.

While it is possible that the very act of healing and healing on the Sabbath which was recounted very briefly in two short verses can further provoke hostility of the opposition, the rest of the narrative describes the consequences of the aftermath for the man and his community. In the process, a theological presentation of the symbolic revelation of Jesus as light of the world was constructed in order to elucidate the meaning and the consequence of professing faith in that light. John brings the audience back to the consistent testimony of Jn. 1:4-5; 9-12, 14 reminding them that seeing the form can take the shape of a personal encountering, containing within the personal sphere or existential experience whereas the act of beholding the form can involve the wider community with consequences of exposure to possible disbelief and rejection.

At first, the narrative appears to engage an important question concerning the relation between physical handicap and sin. Later, as the interplay between light and darkness take central stage as fundamental features of human existence, John’s audience is drawn into the narrative themselves with their own human experience whereby divine initiative in salvation and human freedom in cooperation becomes one of the main theological concerns among others. Schneiders observes that a typical Johannine literary technique is to draw the audience in as participants rather than observers by using a nameless representative figure. Such a figure provides an empty space that allows readers the opportunity to transpose their names instead as they become involved as participants in the action of the text. Further, the healing itself functions as a Johannine sign pointing toward the identity of Jesus. The man’s congenital blindness is considered symbolic of the universal congenital, systemic incapacity for divine life that must be overcome through birth anew from water and the Spirit.  

---

135 Bultmann, John, 332.

In John’s view, such a miracle is seen as the work of God and is demonstrative of Jesus’ own power—he who gives sight to the man born blind is the Light of the world (Jn. 9:4-5).\textsuperscript{137} Even more so, with this particular miracle, John’s audience is shown how Jesus is the life-giving water as declared previously during the feast of the Tabernacles when the blind man was sent to the pool of Siloam—meaning Sent, and was cured of his blindness. Schneiders also notes that John often refers to “the Sent One” as a proper name for Jesus on many occasions. While the healing is initiated by Jesus, it is only completed by the washing in “the Sent One.”\textsuperscript{138} Ferreira observes that John’s concept of sending often carries Christological and soteriological significance.\textsuperscript{139} Further, Jesus’ deed which brings about healing and enlightenment into an otherwise hopeless situation also bears witness to his own revelation to be the light of the world in the previous chapters and also here in Jn. 9:3-5.

The dualism of light and darkness, seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing provide a sharp contrast between the Pharisees and the newly emerged, defenceless disciple of Jesus. While God’s work has been judged to be limited and contained in the knowledge of the guardians of the Law, the evidence of the miraculous seeing demands a divine revelation. The notion of \textit{the gift in excess} is an important watermark of John as the usage of irony which Culpepper interprets as “covert but stable” is exploited. Generally, the use of irony in John provides an appropriate vehicle for the evangelist to express his theology of revelation, testifying to a unique vision of Jesus Christ and drawing the audience into affirming the perspective sketched in the Prologue as well as to provide a powerful incentive for the audience to grow in the Christological truth that, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”\textsuperscript{140} Without the perfection of the gift by the coming of grace and truth in and through Jesus, the Mosaic gift of Law is now becoming a blind spot, blocking the very vision and the experience of

\textsuperscript{137} Bultmann, \textit{John}, 330-1.
\textsuperscript{138} Schneiders, \textit{Written that You May Believe}, 153.
\textsuperscript{139} Johan Ferreira, “Johannine Ecclesiology,” \textit{Journal for the Study of the New Testament}, Supplement Series 160 (1998) : 199. Ferreira explains the two words \textit{ἀποστέλλω} and \textit{πέμπω} are often used to describe the concept of sending which is found about 60 times in John. Most scholars agree that those two terms are synonymous in John. They serve to identify who Jesus is and define the purpose of his divine mission. As with Jesus, the sending in the Johannine community – a community that does not belong to this world but owes its existence to the one who sent it, also defines its identity and purpose.
\textsuperscript{140} Alan Culpepper, “Reading Johannine Irony”, in \textit{Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith}, ed. R. Alan Culpeller and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 193-207. Citing the work of D. C. Muecke and Wayne Booth, Culpepper provides a brief sketch for understanding the two types of ironies: stable and unstable. While unstable ironies do not provide a platform for stable reconstruction out of the storyline provided by the ironies themselves, stable ironies are intended, covert, which means reconstructions are required, stable and finite. Once a certain reconstruction has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions. Any further work of reconstruction/demolition on the reader’s part that renders the irony unstable is considered irrelevant. Culpepper notes that the six themes which are treated ironically in John included (1) the rejection of Jesus, (2) the origin of Jesus, (3) Jesus’ identity, (4) Jesus’ ministry, (5) Jesus’ death, (6) discipleship. John 9 involves at least four of these whereby the reader is repeatedly able to reconstruct the veiled meaning with reference to the Prologue and is invited to move to a higher plane of understanding.
truth and grace expressed in love.\footnote{Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 209.} Beyond prior knowledge, expectation or religious preconception, the excess of such manifestation of the perfection as grace upon grace however overflows the realm of expectation and is incomprehensible and unbearable for the world (Jn. 1:5; 9:29). Further, John constantly reckons with such failure to see individually or collectively at every level of cognition, attitude and action which is imputed in the authorities as leaders of people. Clearly, a claim to superior knowledge of God has detached them from an obedience that remained open to Jesus as the manifestation of God’s incomprehensibility. Their arrogant attitude has indeed blinded their ability to subjectively see the objective evidence thus leading to misapprehension of the form which in itself is the decisive judgment wrought on themselves.

Contrary to his persecutors, who entrench themselves progressively in their blindness, the blind man’s openness to Jesus’ revelation and his courageous assumption of responsibility for the gift of light he has been given, helps him to make steady progress in his knowledge of the identity of Jesus Christ. From identifying Jesus as the man called Jesus, he grows in understanding to recognise him as a prophet from God, to Son of Man and then Lord (Jn. 9:38).

The healing of the man born blind redefines the meaning of seeing. Interestingly, the notion of faith is picked up when ὁ ἄνοιγμα τῆς ἔννοιας - the following one (Jn. 8:12) is now replaced by ὁ πιστεύων - the believing one (Jn. 12:46). No longer the object that one sees when seeing, rather it is the obedient faith that opens the eyes for the person to seeing the whole form and being apprehended by it. Prior to meeting Jesus, the blind man did not see due to his congenital disability but his cooperation with Jesus’ order enables him to see things that other people with no such disability can see and even more. From total darkness, the encountering with Jesus – the Light of the world, opens up hope and a dream for a miracle which can only be completed in full when he hears and acts accordingly with faith. The experience of the newness of God’s revelation in Jesus has inscribed in the life of the once blind man an encountering with God’s reality, gazing upon his grace to discover the giver of grace and immerse in the Light of the world to discover the gift of sight.

As readers recognise themselves participating in the narrative as those “born blind,” they are drawn into the centre of a colluded sphere of intense trials between the man born blind and the authorities whereby a decision driven by the conviction of faith can lead to further division and rejection which determine the course of their faith journey and its destination. The trials intensify the contrast between light and darkness, seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing. Seeing now
transcends the physical contact to a deeper and more intimate understanding of the revelatory insights. Jesus remains an offense to the world he came to tabernacle in at the end of the narrative unambiguously clarifying John’s testimony previously in Jn. 1:5. The face of rejection reflects scandalously the inability of the world to comprehend the saturated nature of the Christ phenomenon which includes not only the subjective inability to see the form but also the objective misapprehension of it. Balthasar suggests that either in whole or part, anyone who rejects the form of Christ has objectively misapprehended it, failing to hear what is being said and seeing what is being shown.142

Kelly and Moloney notes that the fact that the blind man was cured from his congenital disability by Jesus on the Sabbath makes the question of God’s involvement in Jesus’ action and Jesus’ relationship to God inescapable.143 For those who identify themselves with the once blind man, the truth beckons with further revelation of truth. The Fourth evangelist however does not answer them directly; instead he subtly draws them back to the testimony in the Prologue in order for them to figure their own seeing. The dialogue sequence in chapter nine is a repeated prototype of John’s testimony to the completeness of grace and truth which once again is rejected and misunderstood by the world. However for those who received and believed accordingly, the completeness of grace and truth expressed through love in Jesus Christ is experienced in its fullness as grace upon grace.

In John, light’s imagery is often used in close association with life; the motif of light and life versus darkness and death seems to be interconnected.144 Since the Word was the power through which all things came into being (Jn. 1:3), this “life” has a physical dimension. Nevertheless, John also emphasizes the theological meaning of life whereby to have the light means to have him who is the Light of the world, the “I am.” He gives light and at the same time he is light. The One who makes God the Father visible and accessible, in him was life and the life was the light of all people. John shows that those who receive Christ enter into a relationship with God that endures beyond the death of the physical body and life in this sense is synonymous with “eternal life.”145 To reject this light is to remain in darkness and persist in sin (Jn. 12:46). If it was to be grace, the revelation of light must also be judgement. Although Jesus does not come to judge the world, the very action of...

142 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 509.
143 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 210. The experience of encountering God is lived through the texture of the text, it is gathered that Jesus cannot be a sinner otherwise God won’t listen to him and there would be no miracle. Biblically speaking, such an unprecedented cure could only be from the God of creation. The audience is now being drawn back to the testimony of Jn. 1:1-4 & 14 whereby their spiritual blindness is being cured by faith in the Word introduced in the Prologue and their journey of experiencing God has truly begun: these are written that you may go on believing that Jesus is the Christ.
144 Smalley, John, 181.
145 Koester, Symbolism, 143.
rejecting light thus remaining in darkness becomes the very judgment for those who made such decision. At the level of being, John perceives that there is a complete unity between God and the Word even before time. For this reason, he is able to reveal the glory of God in his very being as well as in his functionality as what God was, the Word was.
Chapter 5 – Beholding the Form (Jn. 11:25-27; 12:23-26, 36c)

1. **Encountering God’s Glory: The Resurrection and the Life**

**Jn. 11:25-27**

25 Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life, the one believing in me will live even if he should die.

26 and everyone living and believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

27 She said to him, ‘Yes Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world.

Human existence is always threatened by the reality of death – a reality no one can be exempted from. It has the potential power to say the final word on a person’s life and thus to sever his/her fellowship with others and with God. Death imposes itself as the first and the last crisis which characterises the inescapable impossibility of existence yet it could not go so far as to become the final judgment because by silencing any judgment, it fails to execute the truth. Serving as a bridge between the signs and the passion narrative, reflecting the solemn assurance that the Father and the Son are in complete control of the circumstance, the raising of Lazarus completely dominates the landscape of Jn. 11:1-12:19. The narrative brings the audience face to face with the cruel reality of sickness and subsequently death. At the same time, it reinforces a central theme of this gospel which has been testifying elsewhere that is, “just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, the Son will in the same way raise the dead and give life to those he wants to” (Jn. 5:21). By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus has demonstrated publicly that he has power over death as he had previously asserted. His declaration, *I am the resurrection and the life* (Jn. 11:25), indicates an intrinsic difference between the resurrection and the life, yet emphasises that he is both who himself has power over death and brings about the resurrection. He is the one who has the ultimate authority as the gospel testifies to the miracle of raising Lazarus, and then later his own resurrection, defeating death and subsequently restoring life by the life-giving power of God, anticipating an eschatological expectation of what will take place in the last day. Interestingly, it also shows that all

---

146 Marion, *Prolegomena*, 112.
who were involved misunderstood Jesus and failed to respond positively and fully to Jesus’ invitation to transcend death and believe in him as the “resurrection and the life.”

Consistent with the typical pattern brought out by other Johannine signs, the news of Lazarus’ sickness is met with Jesus’ declaration in Jn. 11:4 that the final result of Lazarus’ sickness will not be his death, but the means by which the Son will receive glory when his true life-giving power is revealed in the raising of Lazarus from the death (Jn. 11:4). By mentioning Jesus’ delay in coming, John continues to remind the audience that the death of Lazarus is the mean by which they anticipate glimpses of his glory. But more importantly, it is for the glory of God that the miracle of raising Lazarus becomes the primary precursor that triggers the process leading to Jesus’ own death – an event that supremely reveals the glory of the Lord to humanity (Jn. 11:45-57). Further, the excitement and interest generated in this particular instance has brought the authority to deciding that not only Jesus should be put to dead, but also Lazarus – the clear evidence of Jesus’ power over death and his authority as the Father’s son, should also be removed (Jn. 12:10-11).

Elsewhere, John testifies that Jesus’ glorification come when he is lifted up (Jn. 3:14, 12:32, 34). In other words, his glorification comes through his death, resurrection and exaltation. Glorification according to John points to the revelatory aspects of Jesus’ death on the cross. Within such framework, John’s audience begins to see the potential meaning of that time has drawn near for the glorification of the Son of Man (Jn. 12:23). Within the dynamic of John’s testimony, the audience understands that not only Jesus is glorified by raising Lazarus from the death, but the act of

147 Moloney, Signs and Shadows, 154-177. Moloney points out that as the narrative progresses, the misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission and person intensified. John’s audience understands that Lazarus has died and the purpose of Jesus going to Bethany was to wake him up from the sleep of death whereas his disciples were under the impression that Lazarus could recover from his illness without Jesus’ intervention. By going back to Judea, Jesus seeks belief from his disciples while they were still thinking of dying (with him). As for Martha, her misunderstanding of Jesus as a miracle worker who has special access to God was corrected by Jesus himself by affirming that his work transcends the Jewish traditional eschatological understanding, and the centre of his person is the resurrection and the life. Even Mary who also joined with the Jews in tears in mourning her brother’s death showed only a partial understanding of Jesus’ person and mission. As for the Jews, they have not moved from the messianic expectations expressed during the feast of Tabernacle, they continued to ignore his identity as the Son of God and his promise of resurrection and life. Unprepared to move away from their own criteria for judging, they are now sinking further in the crisis of disbelief and confusion: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

148 Brendan Byrne, Lazarus: A Contemporary Reading of John 11:1-46 (Homebush: St Paul Publication, 1991), 19-44. In looking at the literary form of John 11:1-46 and the uniqueness of Johannine signs, Byrne observes that despite considerable differences in structure and details, those signs seem to presuppose preliminary revelations of Jesus as the Messiah according to Jewish expectation, culminating in the hour of the cross whereby the deeper reality of Jesus’ presence is realised. Further they also presuppose a progression in the journey of faith, from one considered inadequate to a fuller understanding of the form leading to more radical faith in the Johannine sense.
raising Lazarus leads to Jesus’ own death, resurrection and exaltation and thus revealing the glory of the Lord (Jn. 11:4, 40; 12:10).

Prior to Jesus resurrection, it was impossible to fully comprehend either his word, deed or his life giving power. By being raised to life, the life-giving Word returns to the life and glory he has always with God beyond the beginning of this temporal world, “I am the life.” Jesus’ resurrection bears witness and demonstrates powerfully of the life giving power of God. Through his resurrection to life, the promise that he gave to those who believe in him will come to pass, they will live also (Jn. 14:19). The gift of life expressed in Jesus as σὰρξ ἐγένετο is now completely given phenomenally as what shows itself, must first give itself. God through Christ is revealed to humanity not as a luminous icon but through a beautiful sacrificial act, entering the abyss of death by the momentum of his perfect obedience to the Father. In so doing, he brought with himself newness to render humanity into a new creation. The believers are now not only given access to the superabundant economy of the gift of living water, light and life but also permission to enter into the movement of Christ’s mission.

Further, in beholding the form, the believer hold on to the promise of life and resurrection which have been demonstrated through Jesus’ crucifixion and his subsequence resurrection – the ultimate miracle of all which made visible God’s glory, dignity and justification proper to God in divine perfection. The portrayal is complete as grace and truth is expressed through the love Jesus has for the world, the ultimate sacrifice is given to indemnify humanity as the hour has arrived. The saturation point has been reached whereby Jesus is given phenomenally and excessively. The believers are invited to expand their horizon of reason and enter into the experience of God whereby things are understood without understanding, and experienced without experiencing. Balthasar comments:

God can only be known in his Lordliness and sublimity, in what Israel call Kabod and the New Testament Gloria, something can be recognised under all incognitos of human nature and the Cross. This means that God does not come primarily as a teacher for us (true), as a useful redeemer for us (good), but to display and radiate himself, the splendour of his eternal triune love in that ‘disinterestedness’ that true love has in common with true beauty. For the glory of God the world was created, through it and for its sake the world is also redeemed. And only the person who is touched by a ray of this glory and has an incipient sensibility for what disinterested love is can learn to see the presence of the divine love in Jesus Christ.

149 Marion, Prolegomena, 120.
150 Hans Urs von Balthasar, My Work: In Retrospect (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 80-82. Balthasar explains briefly the fundamental ideas that inform his monumental synthesis of Glory of the
While John’s audience understands that God’s involvement as form is actualised as revelation in Jesus Christ, humanity’s participation in beholding the form is lived out as faith. If only of the perception or beauty is considered when thinking of “aesthetic” then one is missing the point by succumbing to a static view and does not do justice to the phenomenon.\textsuperscript{151} Balthasar explains further that the perception of beauty begins with an appreciation of the form as it appears and the hidden deeper reality it points toward. Such experience of seeing the form subsequently draws the beholder into the experience of being enraptured by the splendour and glory which lie beneath the form itself.\textsuperscript{152} Further, he argues that neither of these two phases can be developed separately or independently of each other nor apprehended or interpreted outside the realm of grace; a point John also articulates in completeness (Jn. 1:12, 16). The narrative of raising Lazarus is a narrative of triumph of life over death with which the promise of resurrection to life for those who believe is an integral part. Love and truth, grace upon grace is explained not on the part of the believers, rather in reference to what God does through Jesus Christ, transcending all hope and expectation. What born of flesh is flesh. Without God’s loving initiative, humanity is powerless to effect its own resurrection. Those who are dead have no life in themselves if it were not for him who creates, sustains, redeems, and gives new life. Martha’s confession however exalted it might be is typical of the traditional Jewish expectations of the coming Messiah, demonstrating a shortfall in the understanding of the identity and divine vitality that Jesus incarnates.\textsuperscript{153} Transcending Martha’s expectation of the Jewish conventional hope of a resurrection of the dead in the last day, Jesus himself explains, “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live” (Jn. 11:26a). In other words, believing in him – the source of life for the world, means liberation from the dominion of death. In beholding the form, the believers are invited into the experience of living in the light of the Lord and influence his unique development of aesthetic theology stating that the unspeakable mystery of God’s love opens itself to reverence and adoration on the part of the subject. That means God’s glory reveals and authenticates itself definitively precisely in its own apparent antithesis as love selflessly serving out of love.


\textsuperscript{152} Balthasar, \textit{Seeing the Form}, 119.

\textsuperscript{153} Moloney, \textit{Signs and Shadows}, 159-170. Moloney’s discussion of Martha’s partial understanding of Jesus’ identity and work is supportive of John’s presentation of Jesus as grace and truth in its fullness articulating as grace upon grace which are often misunderstood or rejected. Firstly, Martha’s understanding of Jesus as a rabbi from God who does wonderful signs because God is with him echoes that of the man born blind and Nicodemus. In other words, Jesus is better known as a miracle worker. Secondly, believing in a resurrection in the last day, it never crosses her mind that Jesus would raise Lazarus at any moment in time even when he has declared: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Thirdly, her confession of Jesus as Christ, Son of God stemmed from the traditional Jewish expectation of the Messiah. Failing to recognise Jesus as who he is, his authority and power to conquer death, she hesitates to obey Jesus’ order to remove the stone at the tomb. The irony of the Fourth Gospel continues to unfold before John’s audience: even at this point in time when grace and truth is unfolding toward its completeness at the expense of Jesus’ life, he still remains an offence to the world into which he came.
fullness of the gift, which is truth and have the confidence in the unconditional radical reality of the gift of life they have received here and now and perpetually (Jn. 12:26).

Jesus not only has God’s power to raise the death as in the case of Lazarus, he himself is the resurrection and the life as proclaimed. Death cannot hold him back. Not only does he bring light and life to the world, he himself is the life and the light of the world as the scripture and John in particular has witnessed. The superabundant fulfilment of the promise demonstrates the power and glory of the begotten Son who has made the Father known as the Prologue confessed. As the Son gives himself, he reveals himself phenomenally. There was no moment in his life that the humiliated, crucified Christ is not the Exalted One and even in his exaltation, the shadow of humiliation never departs.154 The promise is now realised congruently with Jesus’ word and deed as God’s purpose for humankind is completed in and through Jesus – the en-fleshed Word. The gift is now given completely for those who hear and believe in Him who sent.

As a reality yet in the future, John mentions the two different kinds of resurrection one can potentially wake up to. One is of life and the other is of condemnation (Jn. 5:28). While the resurrection of life is eschatologically realised for those who hear my word and believe in him who sent me, who have passed from death to life (Jn. 1:12, 5:24), the resurrection of condemnation is for those who have done evil (Jn. 5:28), who do not believe in the light and remain in darkness (Jn. 3:18-20). John reflects a common shared belief in a future eschatological event between the Johannine community and Judaism in which God’s imminent intervention offers rescue and salvation from this present age. On the one hand, the completion of divine intervention including judgment, resurrection and eternal life remain in the future when Jesus returns as the messianic king and eschatological judge (Jn. 5:28-29, 6:39-40, 12:25), and on the other hand, Jesus’ resurrection impinges in the life of the beholders their own resurrection in Jesus’ gift of the Spirit155 as it offers an understanding of glory which can comprehend the reality of sin and alienation from God. In the presence of Jesus the eschatological event of death, resurrection, judgment and eternal life are brought forward to the present moment. Eternal life is now realised with a new meaning which

155 Byrne, Lazarus, 23-26. Although they shared with Judaism a belief for a future eschatological event whereby the end time will come with God’s divine intervention to mark off a clear division between the present age and the ‘age to come,’ Byrne observes that early Christian community particularly the Johannine found themselves living in an ‘in between’ time where Jewish eschatological belief no longer fitted in. A tension exists as faith in Jesus as the Messiah necessarily implies that the eschatological event has already underway, and is completed in the parousia. Eternal life in the here and now available through the beholding of the form is thus John’s distinctive theological contribution to the understanding of the early Christian community’s realised eschatology.
implies also the personal transformation of the present existence, brought about by seeing the form, and subsequently being apprehended by it.

God himself through Jesus in the flesh has lived out the ultimate experience of this world which through its freedom has the possibility of accepting or denying God. Not only that, he also experienced every dimensions of the world including death, even dead on a cross. Divine beauty is not simply revealed in the incarnation, but ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν and speaks to the aspirations of all humanity to forgive, redeem, reconcile, restore, fulfilling the promises inherent within creation. While the Word of God is dead, the Father is inaccessible (Jn. 1:18), but in his resurrection, his own words, “I am the resurrection and the life,” ring true. He alone can contradictorily and scandalously constitute the form of God who dies not and of human being, who does not rise again.156 Thus, in the hiatus of death, redemptive possibilities are offered; the Crucified Christ who exonerates the guilty became the measure upon which all human existence tends (Jn. 12:32). In the lifting up of the Son is the becoming visible of all divine perfection and the complete presentation of the beauty of God in grace, truth and love offered up for all humanity in the life of the individuals and of the church likewise (Jn. 12:30-36). Christ’s appearance on the human stage is, as John describes, grace and truth, so glorious, so beautiful that it evokes human response in beholding. In the act of beholding the beholder also reflects Christ’s glory which has been revealed all along.

2. Participating in God’s Glory
   a. Falling into the Ground

   Jn. 12:23-25

23 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀποκρύνεται αὐτοῖς λέγων: ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα ὅταν δοξασθή οὗτος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

24 Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, εάν μὴ ὁ κόκκος τοῦ σίτου πεσὼν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἀποθάνη, αὐτὸς μόνος μένει· εάν δὲ ἀποθάνη, πολὺν καρπὸν φέρει.

25 ὁ φίλων τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπολλάει αὐτὴν, καὶ ὁ μισῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ εἰς ζωὴν αἰωνίου φυλάξει αὐτὴν.

23 Jesus answers them saying: The hour has come so that the Son of man will be glorified.

24 Truly, truly I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will remain alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

25 The one loving his own life will lose it, the one hating his life in this world will keep it for eternity.

156 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 67.
If anyone serves me let him follow me and where I am there also my servants will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

At the foot of the cross, the glory of the Lord is to be seen as John testifies (Jn. 12:32, 19:28); Jesus’ life is dispossessed in order to become the expression of something higher – God’s limitless agape. Balthasar explains:

What is involved is a double, reciprocal dispossession: of God into the human form and of man into the divine form, and this double dispossession contains the most concrete possible life: the life of man, which attains its form by letting itself be shattered to become the form of God; the life of God, that gains man for itself by renouncing its own form and, obedient unto death, pouring itself into the form of existence unto death. As the point of intersection of the two self-surrendering lives, Christ on the Cross and in glory is the ultimate form in which God and the world met.157

As grace upon grace is realised in the God-forsakenness reality of the Crucified One, one comes to terms with what one has been redeemed from – the definitive loss of God which is irretrievable outside of grace. The One who gives living water that wells up to eternal life, who will give to all drink from himself, is emptied completely that he himself is dying of thirst. The Logos of God, who is eternal life, is simultaneously dead.158 By giving himself selflessly as a grain of wheat falling and dying in the ground in order to bear much fruit, he achieves for humanity what they cannot achieve for themselves:

The One, whose name is Jesus Christ, must go down into the absolute contradiction of the glory of the Lord, into the night of abandonment by God and the formless chaos of Hell, so that beyond everything that man can see as form, he may be and establish the imperishable and indivisible form which joins God and the world in the new and eternal covenant.159

While humanity always posits to claim the role of a judge to carry out justice, within which the ultimate outcome remains the death sentence (Jn. 18:31), God in Christ judges no one (Jn. 3:17, 19, 5:22, 8:15, 12:47) but comes to give life abundantly (Jn. 10:10). Being free at the crisis of death, Christ introduces humanity into a completed crisis whereby the world finds itself judged by this very crisis; a judgment accomplishes not by the ambivalent meaning of the semantic given of the word κρίσις (meaning crisis or judgment) but in and through the crucified Christ who has undergone the

157 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 673.
158 Balthasar, Mysterium Pascale, 79.
“judgment of death,” for the sake of humankind and for the glory of the Lord whose love expressed in overflowing grace and truth through the person of Jesus. Marion explains, “The death of Christ provokes a crucial crisis because in it God judges the world, counts his own, announces and already realises the last judgment.”

He who has the power to lay his life down also has the power to take it up again. And he does this in an almighty freedom for the sake of submitting himself to the Father’s will, to reveal the mystery of all time: He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in his world will keep it for eternity (Jn. 12:25). This is the reason the Father loves him (Jn. 10:47). Not only is his incarnation an excess phenomenon, the deep mystery that his life and death reveals and the truth that it points toward are incomprehensible outside grace and faith. In and through him, grace and truth coincides in love. He is the complete presentation of the invisible God which John testifies to as the way, the truth and the life without which no one can come to the Father (Jn. 14:6). Bultmann further explains that through his passion, he will become accessible to all as the exalted Lord, yet the hour of glory is at the same time the hour of the passion as the seed must fall on the ground before it can produce fruit.

Balthasar’s aesthetic theological position emphasises the encountering and thus transforming aesthetic experience of human beings in response to God’s decisive movement in the appearance of Christ on the human horizon. As Christ becomes at one with humanity in all of its failure and frailness, he draws them back to their glory in him who appears in the beginning in perfect glory and beauty as grace upon grace. His incarnational involvement in human lives has awakened in them the fullest expression of their identity. Human beings are being invited to participate in such life-giving relationship by responding to his grace in love through hope and faith to the call of Christ, to be drawn into his life and mission to the service of God’s comprehensive plan:

The Christian grain of wheat possesses a genuine formative fruitfulness only if it does not encapsulate itself within a particular form set alongside all the forms of the world, an illusory form that thus condemns itself to sterility, but in imitation of the founder’s archetype.

160 Marion, Prolegomena, 116-117. John’s audience understands from the outset of the narrative that while God through Christ does not judge anyone (Jn. 5:22, 12:47), it is human beings who claim to be the judge, condemning Christ with the death sentence as their own law permits. Marion explains as he stands before the world, Christ does not judge, rather he provokes the completed and unsurpassable crisis; a crisis in which each human being must decide about God for him/herself and thus deciding about himself facing God in the Last Judgment. He who offers the way, the truth and the life also offer the path for one to decide for himself/herself through their decision about the Son and thus the Father. Here once again, John’s testimony rings true: the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

161 Bultmann, John, 424.

162 Balthasar, The Old Covenant, 99-100. The image of the mutual relationship between human beings and God through Christ is not simply an earthly image. By God through Christ becoming one of us, the mutual relationship with him is seen in the fullest possible sense as humanity’s highest calling to be intimately known as Christ’s Bride or the Body of Christ.
squanders itself and offers itself up as a particular form — without being afraid of the dread of being abandoned and of letting go of oneself. Indeed, for the world, love alone is credible.\footnote{Balthasar, \textit{Love Alone}, 137-138.}

In and through Christ, humanity is continued to be transformed into the full image and likeness of God. While the image is revealed through Christ, the likeness will involve one’s incorporation into Christ’s life.\footnote{Dominic Robinson, \textit{Understanding the “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann} (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 90.} The fullness of God’s grace is fully presented through the cross he bears which calls for response in faith and love from the believers, “who serves me must follow me and where I am, there shall my servants be also” (Jn. 12:20-26). Falling into the ground the grain of wheat shall die of the old in order to yield abundantly. In yielding new grain, the wheat grain relives and regenerates in multiple. Further, John’s audience is informed clearly that Jesus’ servants (ὁ διάκονος) are also subjected to the same law Jesus is subjected to — life is lost precisely when one decides to hold fast to it and is won exactly when it is given up. Passing from death to life and remaining in the light and life of God, an active relationship with God will place one actively participating in the realm of God in his mission in the depths of his “falling down” to the ground as well as in the heights of his “being lifted up.”\footnote{Kelly and Moloney, \textit{Experiencing God}, 256-7.} Further, one’s vocation as Christ’s disciple is defined by his presence on earth and not in one’s ascent to God, “whoever serves me must follow me.”

In the crucified, God’s beauty embraces death as well as life. And precisely in this highest self-disclosure is seen the truth of the first description of glory — the self-demonstration of his love in truth and grace in all the works of God. Not only that, in the lifting up of the Son — an act of total self-surrender to the will of the Father, God’s glory is fully revealed. God will be glorified in the glorification of the Son and assurance of divine honour is given for those who serve him by following his footsteps (Jn. 12:26). Undoubtedly, there is a seemingly unresolvable tension between the radiance of God’s glory through such divine honour and the deepest concealment of this same glory so that it becomes unrecognisable. Such tension could only be resolved through “Christ-in-you” in the openness of truth as one set out in naked faith to follow Christ in obedience, embracing the essence of his mission and ministry as, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”\footnote{Dietrich Bonhoeffer, \textit{The Cost of Discipleship} (London: SCM Press, 1959), 79.} Paradoxically, as the hour is approaching, the redemptive efficacious meaning of suffering becomes more and more prominent to John’s audience. As it falls into the ground the kernel of wheat must die in order to produce many seeds. While fellowship with God and with others is being cut off,
suffering is overcome by suffering but the promise to faith and knowledge of faith is eternal life.\textsuperscript{167}

It is within the fellowship of Christ’s suffering, one’s suffering becomes the passage way for him/her to enter into communion with God, participating in God’s glory.

b. Children of Light

\textbf{Jn. 12:36a}

\begin{verbatim}
ως το φως ἔχετε, πιστεύετε εἰς το φῶς, ἵνα νιοί φωτός γένησθε.
\end{verbatim}

While you have the light, believe in the light so that you might become children of light.

Right from the start in the Prologue, the images of light and darkness were employed extensively. The Logos was depicted as the source of life and light shining in the darkness (Jn. 1:5) which continues to do so with Jesus’ demonstration of his declaration to be the light of the world (Jn. 8:12) by healing the eyes of the man born blind (Jn. 9:4-7). Jesus’ declaration to be the light of the world at the festival of the Tabernacle presupposes certain divine characters of light which not only could be recognised by people who were familiar with the Old Testament and Jewish traditions but also by people throughout the ancient world.\textsuperscript{168}

John also establishes the basic form of its meanings by connecting the imagery of light with life, God, knowledge, truth as opposed to death, darkness, sin and unbelief. The imagery of light in John is complex and multi-faceted. Not only does it describe the concrete, particularity of physical worldly life which owes its existence to its Creator – Logos, it also is linked with the cosmic power and presence of God. Further, its connection with eternal life in God the Father through faith in Christ is explicit (Jn. 12:44-46). As noted previously, John’s audience is informed right from the start in the Prologue that those who believe, who receive this light source are given the right to be children of God (Jn. 1:12) and called to continue to behold such form concretely (Jn. 12:26a).

In beholding the form, the beholders are walking in light and are brought into new understanding of self, the world and God, realising that they are being graced by the love of God through the truth of Jesus because they are creatures made in his image. Since nothing came into being without him, life in John carries a definite physical meaning (Jn. 1:3). Further, those who receive Christ are entering into a relationship with God that endures beyond the death of the physical body (Jn. 5:24; 11:25). In

\textsuperscript{167} Bultmann, \textit{John}, 436.

\textsuperscript{168} Koester, \textit{Symbolism}, 159.
other words, the mystery of one’s existence, created in the image of God is to be reckoned concretely and relationally from the perspective of God’s love and beauty expressed in Jesus Christ – the light of the world, the very fullness and unity of God. Both lovely and love-worthy, it is given without measure as and by the initiative of God’s disclosure and overture of love in excess.

Participating in the limitless gift of God whose goodness, truth and beauty within the Godhead is love, one encounters God’s glory perceived as the dignity and justification proper to God. At the same time, one also discovers the truth about oneself and one’s world in which Christ is the measure of all things. While the light is still available, the invitation to believe in the light in order to become children of light stays open. By virtue of his being, Jesus shares in our humanity and draws others into his unique and incomparable mission. By virtue of faith, one is given the right to be intimately involved in the Trinitarian life through Christ as children of God.

As children in a family, believer’s existence is defined by and in the Light of the Word. By his sacrificial death on the cross, God’s movement in grace is decisively reckoned by a definite offering, brought before humanity. Since the resurrection, the call to decision is made clear. In the *kairos* of time, the opportunity is given *while you still have the light*. Not only the gift shows itself, it also gives itself, making itself available to all who believe. The decision to *believe in the light* entails a freedom of self-giving in faith’s obedience to behold the free love of God.
Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Beyond human imagination, the grace of God through Jesus as “grace and truth” overflowing in love as testified in John is finally not a relative issue among compelling perspectives. It is consistently presented in many dialogue sequences which together form the backbone upon which John presents the truth of the Fourth Gospel. As for John, God is only known through believing in Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, who finally will set believers free and lead them into all truth by the overture of his love.

The brief survey of the historical Jesus quests and other approaches open up some options to which method suits this project and my personal style. The basic methodological choice for this project thus is influenced by firstly Balthasar’s observation of *the whole lies in the fragment* and *seeing the form as beauty*, secondly by Marion’s “grace as gift given in excess” phenomenon and thirdly by Kelly and Moloney’s “experiencing God.”

Balthasar’s development of theological aesthetics basically follows two phases: fundamental and dogmatic. Fundamental theology is concerned with the theory of vision\(^{169}\) which deals with aesthetics as a theory about the perception of the form of God’s self-revelation – seeing the form. Dogmatic theology or the theory of rapture deals with aesthetics as a theory about the incarnation of God’s glory or splendour and the subsequent elevation of humanity to participate in that glory – beholding the form. The form is understood conceptually as the beauty of God, a concept that Balthasar explores extensively in his presentation of *The Glory of the Lord*.

Aesthetically transcending every aspect of anything considered as true and good, beauty is understood as being with the form and the splendour or glory as its fundamental configuration. In other words, in Balthasar’s thought, beauty theologically corresponds to God’s glory and the radiance that shows itself through the communicative forms of finite being. God’s glory is therefore, “God himself in the truth, in the capacity, in the act in which he made himself known as God,” and he does this by loving.\(^{170}\) It is what arouses our sense of the transcendence and ultimately founds our theology. Balthasar analogises God’s beauty and glory as being in a particular framework called the form and the manner of appearing which it exhibits in salvation history.

---

\(^{169}\) Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 125

Beauty is not a reflection of something else rather its glory radiates from the form itself which has a distinct form, completed and indissoluble. The disclosure of beauty in an aesthetic encounter with being as love, grace and truth is analogised as whereby the form (species) is first experienced. Through this form the beholder is brought into an encounter with the depth or the splendour (lumen) of being. According to Balthasar, to experience beauty one must first see the form. In order to see the form, a turning is necessary for the beholder. In other words, the revelation of beauty as being requires the beholder to renounce himself in order to experience beauty. In such instance, the moment of faith coincides with the vision of form even though the form has always been there in the beginning.

Upon seeing the form, one is confronted simultaneously with the mystery of the form and that which shines forth from the form – the splendour and is subsequently drawn into such aesthetics radiance. In beholding the form, the beholder first encounters the vision then be enraptured by it (Jn. 1:12).

Beauty illuminates its nature as God – the Creator, Logos and the Spirit life-giver. In a world without beauty, even the good and the true lose their attractiveness and stand under the threat of incomprehension. “The Word became flesh” is the very translation of God in human dimension in order for man to see the whole form and to experience the transformation in the spiritual as well as the physical realm, in him was life and the life was the light of all people. Balthasar notes that, “in his person, life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ is the form of God.” John’s presentation of Jesus and everything about him forms an aesthetic unity held together by unconditional love which presents itself not just as finite being but also as the source of infinite being.

John testifies to a pre-existent Logos who cohabited with and who is the only one who has truly seen and known the Father and was himself God (Jn. 1:1, 18; 10:30; 12:45; 14:9b). In the flesh, the glory of the Lord is visible in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), his signs (Jn. 11:40) and his crucifixion (Jn. 12:28, 33). Jesus’ declaration on the cross, “It is finished,” sums up the completeness of God’s revelation of his glory. As a saturated phenomenon, the form is visible to all but can only be seen by some. The gift is given to all (Jn. 3:16), but can only be received by those believing in such gift.

John also emphasizes the encountering experience as the beauty of God is being revealed through Logos as the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of “grace and truth.” No other God is known but the

---

171 Balthasar, Seeing the Form, 19.
172 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 4.
Father revealed in intimacy by the Son (Jn. 1:18). In and through the Logos, the abstract is made concrete, the invisible is made visible. Not only does the Logos reflect the glory of God, he is the glory of God. He is grace and truth en-fleshed, expressed in love as grace upon grace. In love he reveals himself to us as eternal love, giving himself to us as a gift and makes himself humanly comprehensible even in his incomprehensibility. The revelation of God in Moses’ law is not the end of God’s action for his people, rather it is completed in and through Jesus Christ – God’s love expressed in grace and truth; the fullness of the gift which is truth (Jn. 1:16). In the union of his divine and human nature, he is both the expression of God’s agape and the measure of every distance between God and humanity. In and through the Logos, God exposes God-self to fallen humanity with infinite possibility, to be its Redeemer, to bring eternal life.

Beauty is the gravitational pull expressed in specific time and space, making the Father known. In and through Jesus of Nazareth – the ultimate expression of God’s divine beauty became involved in human history. God becomes finally absorbed in humanity as such gravitational pull in order that human beings might then be able to consider themselves endowed with the Glory or the splendour and dignity of Godhood. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

In beholding the form, the meaning of true freedom is revealed. John insists that only in the realm of absolute and divine freedom, human freedom can be fully realized; grace, truth and love experienced and lived. From his fullness we have received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given by Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

God’s active involvement in human history reveals the true meaning of freedom and John, in the third chapter particularly, is dealing with a deeper issues relating to Christian faith: whether or not God can be believed at all. Jesus affirms scandalously that this could only be achieved by being “born anew” (Jn. 3:3) – a God’s initiative through which God is intimately disclosed in love, truth and grace (Jn. 3:16).

Beyond human thought, religious experience and worldly phenomena, John focus sharply on the revelation that the truth of Being is love (Jn. 3:16) given in excess (Jn. 3:17). The gift is given unreservedly without any restriction to how much to give and who can receive it. Revelation of the truth requires the mutual loving surrender of the subject and the object, the giver and the receiver. By genuine openness to the Other with a desire to know and to be known in hearing and responding
to the Word other than any word from within human experience or perspective, God is disclosed as love truth and grace intimately in Jesus Christ. Being born anew from above, humanity is awaken to what God intends it to be and is summons to faith out of its human logic into the sphere of God’s unending love, to appreciate his phenomenally excessive gift, that which gives itself by showing itself beyond boundary or limitation, in love and for love. Although being rejected time after time, the concreteness of the Johannine experience of such love as grace upon grace has become an integral part of its testimony.

The revelation of the Word in grace and truth is given from the living water in chapter there to the source of water in chapter seven then light for the blind in chapter nine and finally as the resurrection and the life in chapter eleven, all themes are interconnected and consistently demonstrate grace and truth overflowing through the mission of Jesus’ life on earth and finally his very life.

God’s mighty act of liberation is embodied in and through Jesus Christ, and him being crucified, to liberate humanity that has fallen prey to death, into the space of divine freedom – through the dying and rising with Christ – being born anew into the freedom of God as no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above (Jn. 3:3). When the beauty of God is revealed in and through Jesus Christ as the embodiment and disclosure of the triune God the truth is disclosed. The infinite truth of God took on the finite form of the earthly Jesus through the Holy Spirit to reveal the mystery of the Trinitarian life. It is the grace and the work of the Holy Spirit that gives humanity a new understanding and new identity. He makes the life of love well up, like living water, not in front of us or above us, but in us, and thereby empowers us to ‘glorify’ through our life the glory that has been given to us as our own. We are drawn to the sphere of the glory which has emanated in and through Jesus Christ. Participants in such mystery will finally know the truth and be set free.

The Lazarus account immediately preceding the passion narrative is a powerful Johannine testimony conveying the phenomenal truth that Jesus gives life at the expense of his own life. In his own death, Jesus imparts life giving revelation. Byrne notes that in the scene before the tomb, Jesus is observed as torn between the two powerful emotions:

The love which impels him to work the sign and the shrinking from the prospect of his own death, an outcome which he knows the raising of Lazarus will bring on. Nothing could
underline so clearly the cost to Jesus that communicating life incurs. Nothing could bring out so forcefully the love that impels the gift.\textsuperscript{174}

The beauty of God in the beauty of Jesus Christ appears therefore precisely in the crucified, but the Crucified, precisely as such is the one risen. In this self-disclosure, God’s beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy. And precisely in this highest self-disclosure is seen the truth of the first description of glory: to be the self-demonstration of his love in truth and power in all the works of God. The gift is finally given in all for many. On the cross, in the darkness of the shadow of death, grace and truth is finally given completely in love and for love. Grace upon grace is a reality to be experienced in God through his earthly presentation – Jesus Christ. Jesus’ affirmation to the Johannine community is now extended to all who believe: “I am the resurrection and the life, the one believing in me will live even if he should die and everyone living and believing in me will never die (Jn. 11:25-26b).”

Within this complete presentation of the beauty of God in grace, truth and love (Jn. 12:30-36) for all humanity, the cross he bore calls for response in faith and love from the believers, \textit{who serve me must follow me and where I am, there shall my servants be also} (Jn. 12:20-26). Falling into the ground the grain of wheat shall die of the old in order to yield abundantly. In yielding new grain, the wheat grain relives and regenerates in multiple.

John employs the concept of sending to identify Jesus and to describe the purpose of his mission. Not only sending indicates the close relationship between Jesus and the Father; it also represents the close relationship between Jesus and the community of believers. Jesus always refers to himself as the one the Father sent, that means his mission is characterised in term of sending. Like Jesus, the sending of the Johannine community defines its identity and purpose. It is a community that does not belong to this world, but exists to continue the sending of Jesus.\textsuperscript{174}

Salvation-historical dimension of \textit{doxa} always remains a cosmological dimension since the creation came into existence; something of God’s glory has been perceptible in it. The believers see through the Cross the glory of the exalted one.\textsuperscript{175} That which is widest and deepest is the most hidden of all. The more that love reveals itself in its sign, the more hidden it becomes for those who do not love. They are not merely people who do not see, but people who can see but turn decisively away from

\textsuperscript{173} Byrne, \textit{Lazarus}, 105-106.
\textsuperscript{174} Ferreira, “Johannine Ecclesiology”, 200.
\textsuperscript{175} Balthasar, \textit{Mysterium Pascale}, 79.
seeing, “For judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will turn out to be blind” (Jn. 9:39).

John sees the important role of the Holy Spirit manifesting in the life of the earthly Jesus and his disciples to complete what Jesus has started. The Holy Spirit was in fact always present all along in Jesus’ life, leading humanity into all truth. Further, John continues to expound on the experience of being apprehended by the form as a result of the experience of seeing as the manifestation of the divine love of Jesus for his followers continues in the Holy Spirit after his glorification – the whole form, grace and truth in love. Such experience demonstrates that faith holds a paramount position in the salvific experience as it replaces ecstatic vision for the intrinsic reality of beholding as the vehicle of transformation: “Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe” (Jn. 20:29).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


