

Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John*

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Abstract: Scientific advances have led to an understanding that we live in an ever-expanding and evolving universe. In the light of this cosmic consciousness new soteriological models are needed. The Gospel of John can provide the basis for a new thinking about the meaning of the Jesus event. This article shows that the Fourth Gospel begins and ends with the theme of Creation, with implications for developing soteriological models more relevant to the twenty first century.

THE OPENING WORDS OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL establish one of the major themes that will be developed across the following narrative. The Gospel of John and the Scriptures of Israel begin with the fundamental experience of life and the faith affirmation that life has its origins in God. On reading the words "In the beginning..." the reader is reminded immediately of the creation account in Genesis 1. A careful reading of the Prologue will reveal that the introductory verses of the Johannine Prologue are closely modelled on the first chapter of Genesis.¹ The final chapters of John return to Genesis and situate the Johannine Passion and Resurrection within the iconography of Eden, the garden of the second creation account. The two Genesis creation accounts therefore frame the Gospel's narrative and by this structural artistry confirm the Gospel's proclamation – "I have come that you may have life, life in abundance" (John 10:10). This article will begin by examining the beginning and ending of the Gospel of John to see how these "bookends" situate the theme of *creation* within the Gospel. This will be followed by asking the question – what are the theological

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1. For further details see Mary L. Coloe, "The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1", *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997): 1-11.

implications of the Gospel's narrative structure within our current understanding of an evolving and expanding universe?

THE PROLOGUE

The first eighteen verses of John introduce the reader to the major theme and perspective of this Gospel. Jesus, the enfleshed Word, has his origins in God (1:1) and with God the eternal Word brings forth all creation (1:3). Creation then becomes the dwelling place of the Word (1:14) who enters human history where some reject him (1:11); but some receive him and through him are drawn into the life of God and become children of God (1:12). This is the basic story-line of the following narrative which begins with the gathering of disciples (1:19-51) and concludes with these disciples, now called "my brothers and sisters" (20:17), gathered around the risen Jesus (20:24-29) who is still embodied but has passed through death and now transcends the limits of material creation.²

The Prologue outlines this story-line twice, first in reported speech, but then at verse 14 the perspective changes and the report becomes a testimony spoken in the first person by those who experience it: the Word became flesh and dwelt among *us*, and *we* saw his glory (v. 14); John cried out, "This man was the one of whom I said, He who comes after *me*, came before *me*, for he was before *me*" (v. 15); from his fullness *we* have all received a gift instead of a gift (v. 16).

Both major parts of the Prologue, the report (vv. 3-13) and the first-person testimony (vv. 14-17) can be set out showing how each part follows a similar movement in three stages with parallel themes. In the first stage, vv. 3-5 speak of life and light shining in the darkness. When story becomes testimony v. 14 proclaims "*we saw* his glory". The Word, present as the life-force within creation, has become visible. Light has brought perception. The second stage moves from seeing to hearing with the witness of John, at first simply told (vv. 6-8), and then John testifies in his own voice (v. 15). The third stage recounts what happened when the Word entered human history. In this stage we learn of two responses. Some, his own people, did not receive him (v. 11), but some came to believe in his *name* and these are given power to become children of God (v. 12). When this account becomes first person testimony we hear of two gifts, the Law given through Moses, and a gift called a true gift that *we* have received. The parallelism

2. Along with many Johannine scholars I consider chapter 21 a later addition to the original narrative that had its ending at 20:21. For a brief discussion on the place of chapter 21 see Francis J. Moloney, *John, Sacra Pagina 4* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier Liturgical Press, 1998), 62-66, 545-47. Moloney concludes: "There is a crucial element of discontinuity between John 1-20 and John 21 that calls for the former's being regarded as "the Gospel" and the latter as "the Epilogue" (p. 564).

establishes that the “name” is Jesus (v. 17, c.f. v. 12), and the true gift is to become God’s children. These parallel stages clearly enunciate the pain and conflict of the following narrative. Jesus came to his own people, the children of Israel, who had received the gift of the Law. But in Jesus another gift is being offered, “a gift instead of a gift” (v. 16),³ which some within Israel will accept, but others will choose the Law, and not see in Jesus the fulfilment of its promises.

These parallel accounts are introduced by identifying the central character as the Word existing in eternity with God. The accounts conclude by identifying the central character again, only now, having told the story of the Word coming into human history, this character is given a human face as the only Son in the heart of the Father.

The structure can be shown schematically as:

Bi-Partite Structure⁴

Introduction (1-2) <i>logos/theos</i> in eternity		
Part 1 (story)		Part 2 (testimony)
A (3-5)	have seen	A' (14)
B (6-8)	have heard	B' (15)
C (9-13)	have experienced	C' (16-17)
Conclusion (18) <i>Son/Father</i> in history		

The bipartite structure shown above, with three sections framed by an introduction and conclusion, is found in the creation account of Genesis 1. In this account, following a brief introduction (Gen 1:1-2), creation happens over seven days. The first three days describe three acts of separation: day one, light from darkness (vv. 3-5); day two, waters above from waters below (vv. 6-8); day three, water from dry land (vv. 9-13). In the following three days God acts to populate what was created in the first days. On day four the darkness is filled with the stars and the moon, while the day is regulated by the Sun (vv. 14-19). On day five the waters below are filled with living creatures while the firmament above is filled with birds (vv. 20-23). On day six land creatures, including humanity, appear on earth (vv. 24-31). These six days bring God’s creative activity to an end, “the heavens and earth

3. In ordinary Greek usage, *anti* means “instead of” and *charis* usually means gift. Therefore the expression *charin anti charitos* should be translated in its Johannine sense as a “gift instead of a gift”. Translators frequently impose the Pauline sense of *charis*/grace upon the Johannine text. See the discussion by Ruth Edwards, “XAPIN ANTI XAPITOS (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 3-6; also Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 46-47.

4. For a summary of other ways of structuring the Prologue see Coloe, “The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1”, 40-43.

were finished" (Gen 2:1) and the seventh day is the Sabbath of Divine rest. The writer then concludes the account, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (Gen 2:4a).

The Johannine Prologue thus mirrors the structure of Genesis 1, as the following diagram demonstrates:

Genesis	Johannine Prologue
Introduction (1-2)	Introduction (1-2)
A (3-5) light/darkness sun, stars A' (14-19)	A (3-5) Light A' (14)
B (6-8) heaven/earth birds, fish B' (20-23)	B (6-8) B' (15)
C (9-13) land/waters animals, humans C' (24-31)	C (9-13) children of God C' (16-17)
Climax: The Sabbath (2:1-3)	
Conclusion (2:4a)	Conclusion (18)

As this diagram shows, the parallel structure of the Prologue is similar to the structure of Genesis 1, except that the Prologue has no seventh day, no Sabbath. It remains incomplete in itself, and we will hear in this Gospel that God is still working (John 5:17) and that creation has not yet been finished. I will return to this point later.

As well as the structural parallel between Genesis 1:1-2:4a and John 1:1-18, following the brief introductory verses, both passages introduce the theme of light shining in the darkness. "God separated the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:4); "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). The opening phrase, "in the beginning", the significance of God's word in both accounts, the initial theme of light and the structural parallels indicate that the Prologue deliberately evokes the first creation account to introduce readers to the Gospel narrative.

THE HOUR

The creation theme is particularly significant in the Passion/Resurrection narrative.⁵ Only in John do we read that Jesus is arrested in a garden, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden" (John

5. In the Fourth Gospel death and resurrection are one event termed the "hour". Death, in Johannine terms, marks an ending for the enfleshed Word, but this moment is but a transition into glorification. In the words of Karl Rahner, "It is death into resurrection." See, Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 266. In what follows I will use the expression "Appearance Narratives" to speak of the events recorded in John 20.

18:1).⁶ Only John narrates that Jesus is buried in a garden, “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid” (John 19:41). The garden therefore frames the crucifixion and John emphasises that the cross is in the centre, “So they took Jesus...to the place called the place of a skull.... There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle (19:17-18).⁷ The Johannine addition, “in the middle (*meson*)” echoes the phrase in Genesis where God plants “the tree of life in the middle of the garden” (Gen 2:9).⁸ The evangelist depicts the Crucifixion with the iconography of Genesis 2: there is a garden, and in the middle of the garden is the cross, the tree of life, and at the foot of the cross stand a man (the beloved disciple) and a woman, who is never named but called only “woman” (John 2:4; 19:26) and “the mother” (2:1; 19:25). These were names given to the first woman: “She shall be called Woman” (Gen 2:23). “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). These unique features of the Johannine Passion, when taken together, suggest a deliberate evocation of the primordial Garden of Eden, and a theology of creation.

Following the scene where Jesus alters the relationship between his mother and disciple to one of mother and son, the narrator states that Jesus knew “that all was now finished”. Then, after receiving the vinegar Jesus states, “It is finished (*tetelestai*)” (19:30). The verb *teleō* reiterates God’s judgement at the completion of his six days creative work – “thus the heavens and the earth were finished (*sunetelesthesan*).... And on the seventh day God finished (*sunetelesen*) the work” (Gen 2:1-2).⁹ God’s work, which was begun in creation, is brought to its completion at the cross as Jesus dies and breathes down the Spirit to the couple standing beneath the Cross. In the next verse we are told that it was the day of Preparation before the Passover and the eve of Sabbath, and the narrator notes “that Sabbath was a great Sabbath” (John 19:31). In the Hour, Jesus brings the work he was sent to accomplish to its conclusion. Throughout the Gospel Jesus had claimed that God in fact was still working (5:17), that the creative work of God had not yet been completed, and that he has been sent to

6. Mark and Matthew name the place Gethsemane; Luke names it the Mount of Olives.

7. The Synoptic Gospels mention the two criminals crucified with Jesus “one on the right and one on the left” (Mark 15:27; Matt 27:38; Luke 23:33), but only John adds, “and Jesus in the middle”.

8. LXX: *kai to xulon tēs zōēs en mesō tō paradeisō*. This phrase, “in the middle of the garden” is repeated in Gen 3:3. For further discussion on the “garden imagery” see Marie-Emile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *L’Évangile de Jean*, Synopse des Quatre Évangiles en Français III (Paris: Cerf, 1977), 452; Frédéric Manns, *L’Évangile de Jean à la Lumière du Judaïsme*, SBFA 33 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), 426-7.

9. Martin Hengel, “The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 104 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 393-94.

complete (*teleō*) this work (4:34; 5:36; 17:4). In discussing the Prologue and its close structural relationship with Genesis 1, I noted that the Prologue has no equivalent to the seventh day, the Sabbath, and I made the point that in this Gospel God is still working. It is only with the death of Jesus that Creation can hear the words, "it is finished", and these words usher in the "great Sabbath", marking the completion of God's creative work that has been in process since the dawn of time "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1).

In the first chapter of Genesis, God's final work on day six is the creation of humankind, and this too is Jesus' final act. When he speaks to his mother and the disciple, he changes their relationships. The disciple becomes "son" to the mother of Jesus, and so the disciple is now in a new fraternal relationship with Jesus. The disciple is reborn as brother to Jesus and is therefore incorporated into his sonship. Through Jesus' words, the disciple is "born anew" as child of God, as the Prologue had promised (John 1:12). The narrator then states that the disciple "took her to his own – *eis ta idia*" (19:27). This phrase repeats the words of the Prologue describing Jesus coming to his own, *eis ta idia* (1:11) and the consequences that some reject him, but others receive him and are given "the power to become children of God" (1:12). The phrase "to his own" forms an *inclusio* that looks back to the promise given in the Prologue and now marks its fulfilment at the Cross.

THE APPEARANCE NARRATIVES

In one sense the Gospel is completed at the cross. The cross is the moment of Jesus' exaltation. In death he has been lifted up and glorified. Disciples have now become brothers and sisters of Jesus, and children of God, as the Risen Jesus confirms when he says to Mary Magdalene: "Go to my *brothers and sisters* and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and *your Father*, to my God and your God'" (20:17). This leads to the question about the function of chapter 20 in this Gospel. Why is this chapter needed? I will return to this question following the examination of the Johannine account, giving particular attention to some of the details that are not present in the Synoptic accounts.

i. The First Day

Two time markers are given: the first day of the week (20:1, 19) and eight days later (20:26). The first day is the day after the Sabbath which commemorates the completion of God's creative activity; the first day therefore signifies the start of a new creation. It is appropriate that the narrative begins in darkness (c.f. Gen 1:1) when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb; as the events unfold, a new day – the first day – dawns. In

Genesis God plants a garden “in the East” (Gen 2:8: *kata anatas*) and in Greek *anatolē* refers to both the “East” and the “dawn” or “rising”.¹⁰ The Johannine garden, like the Genesis garden “in the East”, will experience life arising. In first century C.E. Jewish and Christian writings, the terminology of the “first day” shifted to the “eighth day” to reflect ideas about the eschatological age when God would fulfil all Israel’s longings. The “eighth day” terminology is first found in Christian literature in the Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 95-135):

He further says to them, *Your new moons and Sabbaths I disdain. Consider what he means: Not the Sabbaths of the present era are acceptable to me, but that which I have appointed to mark the end of the world and to usher in the eighth day, that is, the dawn of another world. This, by the way, is the reason why we joyfully celebrate the eighth day – the same day on which Jesus rose from the dead; after which He manifested himself and went up to heaven (Ep. Barn 15:8-9).*¹¹

The Appearance Narratives bear witness to the meaning of the crucifixion for the believers, from John’s perspective. In this Gospel the focus is more on the impact of the Resurrection for the disciples, than its significance for Jesus. The first Creation has been brought to its completion in Jesus’ death, when he gives birth to a new humanity born of God. The blood and water flowing from the side of the crucified one symbolises this moment of birth.¹² In the resurrected body of Jesus disciples glimpse the full transcendence of human personhood, now participating fully in the life of God; in *his* Resurrection we glimpse the transcendence that is in process for all creation, but for us still awaits.

10. Bo Reicke, “Anatolē”, in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 93-94. See also the fine study of the Creation theme in John 20 by Mariusz Rosik, “Discovering the Secrets of God’s Gardens: Resurrection as New Creation (Gen 2:4b-3:24; Jn 20:1-18)”, in Massimo Pazzini (ed.), *Liber Annus LVIII* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2009), 86.

11. The eschatological “eighth day” also appear in the Jewish apocalyptic source 2 *Enoch* (1st century BCE), “And I appointed the eighth day also, that the eighth day should be the first-created after my work, and that the first seven revolve in the form of the seventh thousand, and that at the beginning of the eighth thousand there should be a time of not-counting, endless, with neither years nor months nor weeks nor days nor hours” (33:1).

12. On the “birth” symbolism of the blood and water, see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 82, 152-59. Ben Witherington writes: “one needs to be aware that in ancient Near Eastern literature the word ‘water’ can be and is used as a *terminus technicus*, or at least a well-known circumlocution, for matters involving procreation, child-bearing, child-bearing capacity, or the act of giving birth itself”. See Ben Witherington III, “The Waters of Birth: John 3.5 and 1 John 5.6-8”, *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 156.

ii. The Garden¹³

The first person to encounter the Risen Jesus is Mary Magdalene and, because the tomb is situated in a garden, she thinks the person she sees is the gardener. There is wonderful irony in this appellation, once we realise the overtones of the Genesis garden that present in the events of the "hour". When we understand the Johannine evocation of the original Garden of Paradise and who the original gardener was, namely God who "planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (Gen 2:8), and like a gardener cultivated it (Gen 2:9) and walked in it (3:8),¹⁴ Mary's perception that Jesus is the gardener is ironically accurate. The Risen One has passed through death into the glory that was originally his, with God in the beginning. He returns to Mary as the Divine Gardener walking in the garden of his creation (John 1:2).

In the original garden of Eden, the woman tells the serpent that God had commanded, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, neither shall you touch (*hapsēsthē*) it, lest you die" (Gen 3:3). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch (*haptou*) me" (20:17). The use of the same verb, *haptō*, in a garden context, where the cross was placed "in the middle" (John 19:18), evokes a comparison between the woman of Genesis 3, and Mary Magdalene.¹⁵ The first woman disobeyed with the consequence of being driven from the garden and denied access to the tree of life and with it the possibility of being able to "live forever" (Gen 3:22: *zēsetai eis ton aiōna*). Mary Magdalene obeys and the consequence of her obedience is the Easter message that disciples have become brothers and sisters to Jesus and participants in his filial relationship with God (John 20:17), thereby giving them access to the gift he had promised of "eternity life" (*zōēn aiōnion*: 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 47, 54, 68; 12:25; 17:2). The woman in the garden of John 20 reverses the actions and consequences of the woman in the garden of Genesis.

iii. Eschatological Gifts: Peace and the Spirit

When Jesus comes to the disciples his first words are "Peace". The Hebrew word *Shalom* means far more than what is conveyed by its English translation, "peace". *Shalom* in the Old Testament carries the

13. In this short paper there is not the opportunity to give detailed background on the symbolic traditions of the Garden. I refer the reader to Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumière du Judaïsme*, 401-29; Ruben Zimmermann, "Symbolic Communication between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20", in Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, SBLRBL 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 221-35, and Rosik, "Discovering the Secrets of God's Gardens".

14. Zimmermann, "The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20", 228. Zimmermann adds (229) that God is explicitly described as a "gardener" (Num 24:6; 4 Macc 1:29).

15. Rosik, "Discovering the Secrets of God's Gardens", 93.

sense of wholeness, or completion, and is derived from the word *shalem*, to be completed.¹⁶ Thus there is continuity between the final words of Jesus on the cross, “*tetelestai*, it is finished”, and the first word of the Risen Jesus, “Peace”. In the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament the term also has a sense of God’s final eschatological salvation.¹⁷ Not only does the word look back to what has been brought to completion, but it looks ahead to a future fulfilment. From his study of the use of the term “peace” in the Old Testament and Rabbinic usage, Werner Foerster concludes:

εἰρήνη thus acquires a most profound and comprehensive significance. It indicates the eschatological salvation of the whole man [sic] which is already present as the power of God. It denotes the state of the καινὴ κτίσις [new creation] as the state of definitive fulfillment. In this sense salvation has been revealed in the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁸

When Jesus repeats his greeting “Peace”, he breathes on the disciples and says “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22). The word translated “breathed” (*enephusēsen*) recalls God’s action in the garden of Genesis when God formed an earth creature from the dust then “breathed (*enephusēsen*) into his face” the breath of life, and the earth-creature became a living being (Gen 2: 7).¹⁹ When Jesus comes to his disciples and greets them the first time with, “Peace,” this could be understood as saying that God’s first creation has been brought to completion. When he says to them again, “Peace”, and breathes on them the Holy Spirit, this is an act of new creation, reaffirming Jesus’ words and actions at the Cross. The words of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit on Golgotha constituted the disciple as a child of God, drawing the disciple into Jesus’ sonship. In the Appearance Narratives, the “hour” of Jesus continues and when the group of disciples are gathered the Spirit is breathed and the disciples, like Jesus, are sent into the world, “As the Father sent me, even so I send you” (20:22). There are not two bestowals of the Spirit. I would rather speak of two moments within the one Hour.²⁰ In one moment the focus is on the

16. “In one form or another, the notions of wholeness, health, and completeness inform all the variants of the word.” See Joseph P. Healey, “Peace”, in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 5:206; also Gerhard von Rad, “*Shalom* in the O.T.”, in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2:402-06. For the derivation see Robert L. Thomas, “*Shalem*”, in *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, 1998), H7999.

17. Werner Foerster, “εἰρήνη κτλ.”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 412.

18. Foerster, “εἰρήνη”, 415.

19. Zimmermann, “The Garden Symbolism in John 19-20”, 233-34.

20. The unity in the hour of the crucifixion (chapters 18-19) and the resurrection (chapter 20) is evident in the Johannine insistence that the day of death is a day of

believer's relationship to Jesus, and in a second moment the focus is on the believer's relationship to the world, as the agent of Jesus in the world.²¹ For this reason the narrative describes two moments in the giving of the Spirit to the believers, a moment of birth at the Cross (19:30) and a moment of mission (20:21-23).

CREATION AND RE-CREATION: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Recognising the significance of beginnings and endings, Morna Hooker notes: "beginnings and ends not only belong together but also point forward and backward to the significance of the story that lies in-between".²² In locating the story of Jesus within the themes of original creation and eschatological recreation this Gospel proposes a soteriological perspective that focuses on life and its fullness. This is made explicit in the words of the Johannine Jesus: "I have come that you may have *life* in abundance" (John 10:10); and also in the concluding words of the evangelist: "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have *life* in his name" (John 20:31). Other New Testament writings provide a range of different images in an attempt to answer the question, "what was God doing in the Jesus event?" Paul makes use of first century Jewish and Hellenistic images to speak of justification, redemption, expiation, reconciliation and salvation.²³ In the rending of the Temple veil Mark suggests a theology of atonement (15:38), and this imagery is repeated in Matthew (26:51) and Luke (23:45). The Pauline and Synoptic imagery has dominated Western theology, leading to a very narrow focus on the human person and sin, while Anselm's theory of satisfaction has given rise to horrific images of a vengeful God. A study of Johannine soteriology may provide a much needed alternative that is more attentive to the cosmological significance of the Christ event and thus more coherent for the twenty first century person.

A Johannine soteriology will necessarily understand the presence of the Word within creation from its beginning. From this it follows that the incarnation of the Word is an irruption and manifestation of the

"Preparation". Death is not the end, but is the essential preparatory stage leading to the dawn of the eschatological "eighth day".

21. For a very clear discussion on the use of *apostellein* and *pempein* as they apply to Jesus and the disciples see G. H. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200-04. Even in this missioning moment the creation theme is still present in the New Testament *hapax legomenon*, *enephusēsen*, referring back to Gen 2:7 as discussed above. On this see also Hengel, "Old Testament", 391.

22. Morna Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 4.

23. Joseph Fitzmyer identifies ten different Pauline images used to speak about the "effects of the Christ-Event": see Joseph Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology", in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Chapman, 1990), 1397-402.

divine presence already at work within the whole of creation and human history.²⁴ In announcing that the Word became flesh (*sarx*), the divine action is not narrowed to humanity but is extended to include the entire created reality. Here it is important to note that “flesh” in the biblical usage is not understood as a substance common to animal life and therefore excluding inanimate creation; flesh is that aspect of creation that denotes finitude. Flesh is that which is bound by time and destined to end, in contrast with the eternal being of God: “All flesh is grass and all the glory of humanity as the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God abides forever.” (Isa 40:7-8). Rudolph Schnackenburg explains the term flesh, (*sarx*) thus: “it expresses that which earth-bound (3:6), transient and perishable (6:63)...in contrast to all that is divine and spiritual”.²⁵ A Johannine soteriology will therefore necessarily consider the meaning of the incarnation for all of creation and not restrict its meaning to dealing only with humanity.

Johannine soteriology will also need to describe the effect of the Christ-event on human creation not solely in terms of sin but in terms of “re-creation” as suggested by the iconography of Genesis 2, or “re-birth” (John 3:5) as indicated by the transformation of the Beloved Disciple to brother of Jesus and child of God, and signified by the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus (John 19:34). The disciple, reborn as a child of God, is now gifted with a new quality of life as lived by God in eternity, what this Gospel terms “eternal life”. The garden scenes in John 18-20 overturn the consequences of the garden scene in Genesis 3. Soteriology and a theology of creation are necessarily inseparable. Within Eastern Christianity, humanity’s participation in the life of God is spoken of as *theosis*, or deification.²⁶ A return to the Johannine Gospel and other ancient writings

24. A recent book by Denis Edwards points out that the link between creation and incarnation was central to the theology of Athanasius. Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action* (Hindmarsh S.A.: Australian Theological Forum, 2010), 109-13. Edwards’ work has been particularly helpful in my articulating a small part of the theological ramifications of John’s creation-recreation theme.

25. Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, trans. K. Smyth et al, 3 vols., HTCNT (London: Burns & Oates, 1968-1982), 1:267; for a brief summary of various aspects of Johannine anthropology see Sandra Schneiders, “The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel”, in John R. Donahue (ed.), *Life in Abundance: Studies of John’s Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 170-73.

26. Irenaeus is thought to be the clearest exponent of this thinking: “The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.” *Adversus Haeresis* 5. pref. Western Theologians are now giving more attention to this ancient Eastern terminology. Denis Edwards writes on redemption as “Deifying Transformation”: see Edwards, *How God Acts*, chapters 7 and 9; also Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) and Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (eds.), *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Cambridge UK: James Clarke & Co, 2006).

(*ressourcement*) may provide a new and better language to speak of the Christ-event within an evolutionary and cosmic consciousness.

CONCLUSION

The theme of creation and new creation frame the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus is announced as the *logos*, present with God “in the beginning” and the “hour” brings God’s first creation to its conclusion and ushers in the birth of a new creation. The Appearance Narratives witness to the beginning of this new creation when materiality is glorified in the risen body of Jesus, promising that what has begun in Jesus is already in process (i) for disciples who have been divinised in becoming children of God, and (ii) for all creation that had its origins in the Word, and now, through the eternally embodied Word, looks to its final transformation in God.²⁷

27. For a recent approach to the meaning of the Resurrection for all matter, see Edwards, *How God Acts*, esp. Chap. 9.