

The Cosmological Vision of John: The Evangelist as Observer and Interpreter

Mary L. Coloe

Advances in science begin with rigorous observations, which are then interpreted within a living tradition of knowledge. Hypotheses are made; experiments are trialed and with further observations and testing the scientific academy may come to accept the hypothesis, which then becomes the basis for further observation and reflection. Within this process a type of “faith” is called for: faith in the accuracy of the data; faith in the logic of thought processes and equations. As Elizabeth Boyle comments, “Both scientists and theologians make acts of faith as they explore parallel paths in the land of mystery.”¹ At times even scientists balk from such faith when their results appear to lead to impossibilities. Most famously, Einstein doubted his General Theory of Relativity as it would suggest a universe in a constant state of expansion from a singular point—something beyond even his imagination. Sixty years later his initial findings were confirmed by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, who “overheard” the cosmic radiation from this initial “big bang.” Sometimes science calls for faith in something not yet discovered but whose existence is required to make sense of available data. This was the case when the Higgs-Boson particle was proposed in the 1960s as a theoretical possibility to account for mass in sub-atomic particles where such mass was not expected. What was once only imagined was finally discovered in July 2012 using the large hadron collider at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN).

Theology, known in the Middle Ages as the “queen of the sciences,” advances through similar processes of observation followed by interpretation within a living tradition of knowledge. Where science engages with the physical world in its materiality, theology engages with the world in its relationality and asks questions about the human person in relation to other persons, to the world and to an experience of a transcendent reality called in the Judeo-Christian tradition “God.” As in the case of science, interpretations are validated through time and continued coherent experience. Just as science continues to change and develop through new discoveries and better technological skills, so too theology changes in response to new situations, new archeological and manuscript discoveries, and new questions. As with science a certain “faith” is

1 Elizabeth Michael Boyle, *Science as Sacred Metaphor: An Evolving Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), xii.

required, particularly faith in the validity of one's experience of the transcendent that is then able to relate to a tradition wherein one's experience can be recognized and validated.²

The Gospel of John did not develop in a vacuum;³ it emerged from the complex matrix of first-century Judaism, which in turn had its theological roots in the experience of the Babylonian exile and the unfulfilled hopes of the exiles on their return to the land of Israel/Palestine. Observation of their post-exilic socio-political reality called for a radical rethinking of Israel's world view, giving rise to a new genre of biblical literature in response to the historical crisis of ongoing domination by world powers.⁴

1 The Crisis of Domination: How Can God Save Us?

When Babylonian power declined, the Persian Empire came to rule in the Middle East from 539 BCE for the next two centuries. Cyrus, the Persian emperor, allowed the exiles to return to their own lands, and some of the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem. The Prophets had spoken of this return with glowing images of a re-created Israel (Ezek 37), a rebuilt Temple (Ezek 47) within a world where God's peace flourished (Isa 55:12–13). But the reality was far different. Although the Temple was rebuilt, probably by 500 BCE, it failed to express the splendor of Solomon's sanctuary. While Persian rule allowed greater religious freedom, nevertheless Israel was no longer an independent nation. When Alexander's armies overcame Persia in 331 BCE, Greek rule curtailed and at times suppressed religious freedom. The post-exilic time seemed a far-cry from the glorious hopes promised by Isaiah and Ezekiel. The long experience of oppression by the Greek and then the Roman Empires led to a new conceptual paradigm of this world and its history.⁵

2 A helpful discussion between the goals and methods of science in dialogue with the goals and methods of religion can be found in Fritjof Capra, David Steindl-Rast, with Thomas Matus *Belonging to the Universe: New Thinking about God and Nature* (London: Penguin, 1992).

3 Alan Culpepper claims that "biblical interpretation never proceeds in a vacuum." I add to this, nor do the biblical works emerge from a vacuum. See, R. Alan Culpepper, "Children of God': Evolution, Cosmology, and Johannine Thought," in *Creation Stories in Dialogue: The Bible, Science, and Folk Traditions*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Jan G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3.

4 In this paper I will focus on one movement in Second Temple Judaism—apocalyptic eschatology. Space will not allow exploration of the "Wisdom" movement discussed in Culpepper's essay, "Children of God,'" in this volume.

5 Foreign rule was only momentarily relieved by Maccabean success against the Greeks in Jerusalem (164 BCE) and the line of Hasmonean Jewish rulers (143–63 BCE).

Gradually, faith in the fulfillment of God's promises shifted to a more distant future. In the words of Craig Evans, "Over centuries, however, it became clear that Israel (and later Judah) could not bring about the perfect Kingdom of God . . . Yet future expectations and the hope for a better world did not die; instead, the horizon shifted to the end times."⁶ It is this historical crisis of ongoing political oppression that led some Jews to a new way of imagining the world that is known as apocalyptic eschatology.⁷ This consciousness understands that the world is now under the dominion of evil powers manifested in both human sinfulness and political oppression, where the oppression is linked to a cosmic struggle between God and other powers (e.g., Isa 24:17–23; Dan 7:1–8).⁸ The eschatological age comes to a close with a savior figure who achieves victory and ushers in the final resurrection from the dead and judgment.⁹

It is important to state here that there is no single, unified doctrine of the end times. Some views allowed for an end-time resolution of this oppression within history, while other lines of thought, particularly within the apocalyptic tradition, placed such resolution beyond history, when this world or this age is brought to an end and a new age comes into being.¹⁰ What is consistent is the conviction "that human failure has so corrupted life on this earth that only a radical transformation initiated by God alone could make things right."¹¹

6 Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, "Introduction," in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, SDBSRL (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 1–2.

7 There were many different forms of belief among first-century Jews. Grabbe offers the following caution: "Some Jews had strong eschatological interests; others evidently did not. We have to be careful about generalization." See Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism: History and Religion of the Jews in the Time of Nehemiah, the Maccabees, Hillel and Jesus* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 105.

8 Evans and Flint, "Introduction," 2.

9 There is no clear definition of "Apocalypticism"; there are a number of elements found in Jewish and Christian literature that are identified as "apocalyptic." For lists of these elements see David C. Sim, "Coping with the Present by Inventing the Future: Jewish Apocalyptic Texts as Crisis Management Literature," in *Ancient Jewish and Christian Texts as Crisis Management Literature*, ed. David C. Sim and Pauline Allen, LNTS 445 (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 33–36; and Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism*, 88.

10 Hultgren comments: Eschatology concerns itself with "a future coming age, a period of transformed existence that God will bring about—either within history or beyond it." See Arland Hultgren, "Eschatology in the New Testament: The Current Debate," in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 67.

11 Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 122.

Apocalyptic eschatology provides both the theological and cosmological matrix for late second-temple Judaism and first-century Christianity.

Within the Synoptic Gospels this theological framework lies behind the expression “the reign of God” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), an expression found only twice in John’s Gospel (John 3:3, 5).¹² The Fourth evangelist, writing from within the same theological/cosmological framework, offers a different approach.¹³ In his role of interpreting the meaning of the Jesus event, this evangelist drew upon Israel’s multiple reflections on creation, and, writing towards the end of the first century, he presents the Jesus story as a “creation” narrative encompassing the entire cosmos.

2 The Gospel of John

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 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 modeled on the first chapter of Genesis.¹⁴ 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 (Gen 2:4b–25). The two Genesis creation accounts therefore frame the Gospel’s narrative and by this structural artistry identify this Gospel as a narrative of creation.

2.1 *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

12 “The synoptic identification of Jesus with the kingdom is therefore an accurate reflection of the eschatological expectations of early Christians.” See, Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus’ Vision of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 138.

13 While John’s Gospel has its focus on the narrative of Jesus and so is rightly termed a “Gospel,” rather than an “apocalypse,” it does have features that align it with Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. One obvious feature is John’s use of dualism, particularly the dualism of opposing cosmic powers: God, associated with light, truth, “above”; and the Ruler of this World (12:21; 14:30; 16:11), linked to darkness, lies, “below.” This dualism plays out in the lives of human beings: in the Gospel some accept the incarnate Word, while some do not (John 1:11).

14 I first proposed this in an article, Mary L. Coloe, “The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1,” *ABR* 45 (1997): 1–11.

(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),¹⁵ who is still embodied but has passed through death and now transcends the limits of material creation.

The Prologue outlines this story-line twice, first in reported speech, 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.

*Bi-Partite Structure*¹⁶

Introduction (1–2)		<i>logos/God in eternity</i>	
Part 1. Story Told		Part 2. Testimony	
A (3–5)	light	we have seen	A' (14)
B (6–10)	John's voice	we have heard	B' (15)
C (9–13)	two responses	we have experienced	C' (16–17)
Conclusion (18)		Son/Father in history	

15 Along with many Johannine scholars I consider chapter 21 a later addition to the original narrative that had its ending at 20:31. For a brief discussion on the place of chapter 21 see Francis J. Moloney, *John*, SP 4 (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Liturgical Press, 1998), 545–47, 62–66. 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).

16 For a summary of other ways of structuring the Prologue see Coloe, “The Structure of the Johannine Prologue,” 40–43.

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 establishes that the “*name*” is Jesus (v. 17, cf. v. 12), and the true gift is to become God’s children.

11. He came to his own

and his own did not receive him.

12. But those who did receive him
he gave them the power to become
children of God,

16. From his fullness we have all received
a gift in place of a gift.

17. For the Law was given through Moses
those believing in his *name*.

the true gift came through *Jesus Christ*.

These parallel stages 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),¹⁷ which some within Israel will accept, but others will choose the Law and not see in Jesus the fulfillment 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 bipartite structure, shown above, with three sections framed by an introduction and conclusion is found in the first creation account in Genesis 1. In this account, following a brief introduction (Gen 1:1–2), creation happens

17 $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\nu \acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota \chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\omicron\varsigma$; $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota$ is usually translated as “upon” or “in addition to” giving the sense “grace upon grace.” Such translations impose the Pauline sense of $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ onto the Johannine text; $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ in ordinary Greek usage usually means gift and *anti* means instead of, in place of. See Ruth Edwards, “XAPIN ANTI XAPITOS (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *JST* 32 (1988): 3–6.

over seven days. The first three days describe three acts of separation: day 1, light is separated from darkness (vv. 3–5); day 2, the waters above are separated from the waters below (vv. 6–8); day 3, the water is separated from dry land (vv. 9–13). In the following three days God acts to populate what was created in the first days. On day 4 the darkness is filled with the stars and the moon, while the day is regulated by the sun (vv. 14–19). On day 5 the waters below are filled with living creatures while the firmament above is filled with birds (vv. 20–23). On day 6 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 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 ¹⁸	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), that creation has not yet been finished.¹⁹ I will return to this point later.

As well as the structural parallel between Gen 1:1—2:4a and John 1:1–18, there are other points of similarity. Following the brief introductory verses, both

18 The structure of Genesis has been noted by many scholars. For a recent discussion see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 20.

19 So also Culpepper, ““Children of God,”” in this volume.

passages introduce the theme of light and 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). In Genesis creation begins by three acts of separation: light/darkness; waters above/below; water/land. In John three clear distinctions are made. As already noted, there is a distinction between light and darkness (5); this is followed by a distinction between one who is the “light” and John who is “not the light” (v. 8); finally when the light comes to his own people there are some who receive him and some who do not (11–12).

The opening phrase, “in the beginning,” the significance of God’s word in both accounts, the initial theme of light/darkness, and the structural parallels suggest that the Prologue deliberately evokes the first creation account to introduce readers to the Gospel narrative.

2.2 *Passion/ Resurrection Narrative*²⁰

The creation theme is particularly significant in the Johannine “hour.” 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 18:1).²¹ Only John narrates that he 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 emphasizes that the cross is in the *middle*, “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).²² The Johannine addition, “in the middle (μέσῳ)” echoes the phrase in Genesis where God plants “the tree of life *in the middle* of the garden” (Gen 2:9).²³ The evangelist depicts the crucifixion with the iconography

20 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, NY: Crossroad, 1978), 266. The moment of death is the moment of Jesus’ exultation when he passes into the glory he had in God’s presence “before the world came to be” (John 17:5).

21 Mark (14:32) and Matthew (26:36) name the place Gethsemane; Luke (22:39) names it Mt Olives.

22 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.”

23 LXX Gen 2:9: τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ. This phrase, “in the middle of the garden,” is repeated in Gen 3:3. Marie-Émile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *L’Evangile*

of Gen 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) which 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—τετέλεσται” (19:30). The verb τελέω reiterates God’s judgment at the completion of his six days creative work—“thus the heavens and the earth were finished (συντετέλεσθησαν) . . . And on the seventh day God finished (συντέλεσεν) the work” (Gen 2:1–2).²⁴ 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.” 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 complete (τελέω) this work (4:34; 5:36; 17:4). In discussing the Prologue and its close structural relationship with Gen 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 6 is the creation of humankind, and this too is Jesus’ final act, in creating a new quality of human life. 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

de Jean. Synopsis des quatre évangiles en français, vol. 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1977), 452; also Frédéric Manns, *L’Évangile de Jean à la lumière du Judaïsme*, SBFA 33 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), 426–27.

24 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.

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—εἰς τὰ ἴδια."²⁵ This phrase repeats the words of the Prologue describing Jesus coming to his own, εἰς τὰ ἴδια (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 fulfillment at the cross.

2.3 *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* (ἀδελφούς) and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and *your Father*, to my God and your God'" (20:17).²⁶ 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.

2.3.1 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 the tomb; as the events unfold, a new day—the first day—dawns. In first century CE, 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 fulfill all Israel's longings. The "eighth day" terminology is first found in Christian literature in the Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 95–135):

25 Translations of this idiom frequently read: took her to his own home. The addition of the word "home" minimises the theological importance of this scene, rendering it rather simply into Jesus taking care of his mother by giving her into the care of the Beloved Disciple. I prefer to translate this: "the disciples took her *as his own*." In other words, in claiming the mother into (εἰς) his own *being*, the disciple claims or receives the new set of relationships instituted by Jesus, including a new relationship with God as a child of God.

26 ἀδελφοί is an inclusive plural meaning both brothers and sisters. See "ἀδελφός" in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

He further says to them, *Your new moons and Sabbaths I disdain* [Isa 1:13]. 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).²⁷

The appearance narrative bears 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 symbolizes this moment of birth.²⁸ The birth symbolism was noted by Edwyn Hoskyns in dialogue with a number of ancient commentators. He wrote:

Thus the original believers stand beneath the cross to receive new birth very literally "from above" through the Spirit breathed upon them, and through the Water and the Blood poured out upon them . . . The water and the Blood [bear witness] to . . . the new birth of the Christians as nothing less than birth from God. The idea of re-creation and new birth therefore underlies St John's account of the death on the cross.²⁹

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.

27 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).

28 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, NY: 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," *NTS* 35 (1989): 156.

29 Edwyn C. Hoskyns, "Genesis I–III and St John's Gospel," *JTS* 21 (1920): 213.

2.3.2 The Garden³⁰

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 realize the overtones of the Genesis garden present in the events of the “hour.” Understanding 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),³¹ Mary’s perception that Jesus is the gardener is 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).

The much-discussed command spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene, “Do not touch me” (20:17), may also reflect the Genesis motif of Jesus as the “tree of life,” discussed above, in reference to the placement of the cross “in the middle.” In Eden, when the woman explains to the serpent God’s prohibition, about eating from the tree “in the middle of the garden,” she adds to God’s command the phrase, “and you must not touch [LXX ἄψησθε] it” (Gen 3:3), where God’s original command was simply not to eat of the tree (Gen 2:17). The LXX uses the verb ἄπτω, which is the same verb found in John 20:17 (μή μου ἄπτου). Whereas the first woman’s disobedience in touching the tree brought death, Mary Magdalene’s obedience brings the Easter proclamation of life as children of God.³²

30 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’Evangile de Jean*, 401–29; Ruben Zimmermann, “Symbolic Communication between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19–20,” in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, SBLRBL 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 221–35. While the Gospel uses the term κήπος and not παράδεισος, which is the term used for the garden in Gen 2:8, these two words are interchangeable, and the word κήπος, to mean the original garden, is found in Ezek 36:35 and later Greek translations. On this point see the arguments of Jeannine K. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal in the Gospel of John,” *CBQ* 72 (2010): 280; Hoskyns, “Genesis I–III and St John’s Gospel,” 214; and Manns, *L’Evangile de Jean*, 405–07. Manns also notes a long patristic tradition of associating the garden of Jesus’ arrest and burial with the Garden of Eden (402–7).

31 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).

32 Mariusz Rosik, “Discovering the Secrets of God’s Gardens. Resurrection as New Creation (Gen 2:4b–3:24; Jn 20:1–18),” in *Liber Annus LVIII*, ed. Massimo Pazzini (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2009), 93.

The primary meaning of God's garden is the dwelling place of God's presence, which leads to the association of the Garden of Eden and the Temple in much Jewish thought. This is made explicit in the *Book of Jubilees*: "And he knew that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, and the dwelling of the Lord, and Mount Sinai the center of the desert, and Mount Zion—the center of the navel of the earth" (*Jub.* 8:19). In Eden, God was present "walking [*hlk*: *hitpa'el*] in the garden in the cool of the evening" (*Gen* 3:8). This same verbal form is used to describe God's "walking about in a tent and a tabernacle" (*2 Sam* 7:7).³³ The Temple was elaborately decorated with carvings of trees, flowers, and animals to depict the world of nature: cedars, cypress, gourds, olivewood, palm trees, pomegranates, oxen, lions, and a great laver of water. Just as kings in the ancient East established their palaces surrounded by gardens, so God's temple was to be God's garden.³⁴

In the Gospel of John, one of the primary Christological symbols of Jesus' identity and mission is that of the Temple. In chapter 2 Jesus identifies himself as the Temple when he states, "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19), and then the narrator explains, "He spoke of the temple of his body" (2:21). This symbolism then continues across the narrative, culminating at the cross with the raising up of a new "household" of God's children.³⁵ The situating of the first appearances of the risen Jesus within a garden continues this narrative strategy, only now the Temple is depicted in terms of the garden of Paradise.

2.3.3 Eschatological Gifts: Peace and the Spirit

When Jesus comes to the disciples his first words are "Peace." The Hebrew word שְׁלוֹמִים (*shalom*) means far more than what is conveyed by its English translation, "peace." *Shalom* in the OT carries the sense of wholeness, or completion,³⁶ and

33 Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 66.

34 Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," *BAR* 26 (2000): 36–47. Rosik, "The Secrets of God's Garden," 82–83, also describes the significance of the garden for burial sites for kings in the Ancient Middle East.

35 On the Temple and Household symbolism in John see Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), and *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

36 "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 *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 5:206; also Gerhard von Rad, "שְׁלוֹמִים in the O.T.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel,

is derived from the word “*shalem*,” to be completed.³⁷ Thus there is continuity between the final words of Jesus on the cross, “τετέλεσται, it is finished,” and the first word of the Risen Jesus, “Peace.” In the Hebrew and Greek OT the term also has a sense of God’s final eschatological salvation.³⁸ Not only does the word look back to what has been brought to completion, but it looks ahead to a future fulfillment. From his study of the use of the term “peace” in the OT and Rabbinic usage, Werner Foester 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.³⁹

When Jesus repeats his greeting, “peace,” he breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22). The word translated “breathed” (ἐνεφύσησεν) recalls God’s action in the garden of Genesis when God formed an earth creature from the dust then “breathed (ἐνεφύσησεν) into his face” the breath of life, and the earth-creature became a living being.⁴⁰ When Jesus comes to his disciples and greets them the first time with, “Peace,” this could be understood as saying: 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 are sent into the world as children of God, “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,”⁴¹ one

Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 2:402–06.

37 Robert L. Thomas, “שָׁלֵם, Shalem,” in *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1998), H7999.

38 Werner Foerster, “εἰρήνη,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 412.

39 *Ibid.*, 414.

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

41 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 “Preparation.”

moment where the focus is on the believer's relationship to Jesus, and a second moment where the focus is on the believer's relationship to the world, now able to continue the mission of Jesus as the children of God.⁴² 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).

3 Conclusion

Morna Hooker wrote:

The correspondence of beginning and endings is a feature of a great deal of literature, both ancient and modern... Tidy endings often take us back to where we began: a skillful use of what the literary critics call *inclusio* reminds us that it was, after all, the writer's purpose all along to lead us to precisely this point... The end which brings us back to the beginning forms a satisfying conclusion.⁴³

The Fourth Gospel opens and closes with allusions to the two creation narratives of Genesis. This is not merely a literary device but also serves the theological purpose of enclosing the Jesus narrative within a "beginning" time, whenever that may have been, and the "eighth-day" of a new creation. This structural design means it is not enough to interpret the Gospel solely within the framework of salvation; this Gospel interprets Jesus within cosmic dimensions. In this essay I have restricted myself to the beginning and ending of the Gospel, but the narrative in between resounds with affirmations of Jesus as the one offering eternity life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον), an expression I interpret as meaning an entirely new quality of life, the life God enjoys in that eternity which is beyond space and time.⁴⁴

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

42 Even in this missioning moment the creation theme is still present in the New Testament *hapax legomenon*, ἐνεφύσησεν, referring back to Gen 2:7 as discussed above. On this see also Hengel, "Old Testament," 391.

43 Morna Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 3–4.

44 The expression ζωὴ αἰώνιος *ktl.* occurs in 3:14, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2; and ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ in 17:3. I use the expression "eternity life" in an attempt to put the emphasis on the qualitative nature of the life Jesus offers, and not simply its extension in time as never-ending life. Dodd understands this expression in the Fourth Gospel to mean "the life of the Age to Come, qualitatively as well as quantitatively

I began this essay by comparing scientific and theological methods, noting that both have as their starting point the observation of data. It is important to remember that the Gospels, and the theology which they express, have their origins in the lived experience of human beings. As Sandra Schneiders reminds us:

... it was a particular *lived experience* of union with God in the risen Jesus through his gift of the Spirit/Paraclete within the believing community (spirituality) that gave rise gradually to a particular *articulated understanding* of Christian faith (theology). This theology was encoded in the Gospel text, and through it we gain access to the experience, the spirituality, that gives this Gospel its unique character.⁴⁵

The experience of Jesus provided the earliest believers with the raw data that they used as the basis of their reflection. As the first believers were primarily Jewish, they interpreted their experience in the light of their Jewish traditions and Scripture, and within their first-century cosmological framework. Those reflections that stood the test of time and further experience were eventually “canonized” to form the New Testament. When we can acknowledge the experiential basis of religion then perhaps science and religion can find a common language and a common cause for respectful dialogue. As 21st century science moves further into the invisible worlds of holons, quarks, and dark-matter, perhaps science and religion can both acknowledge the need for metaphor, imagination, and faith in exploring the mystery of our being.

different from this life.” See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 144–49.

45 Sandra Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1999), 48.