

WORD AND WISDOM IN ST. JOHN—II

The first part of this study of the fourth gospel (*Scripture*, Jan. 1967) concentrated on the key concept of the Word in order to show the basic continuity between the thought of St. John and the Old Testament doctrine of the word of the Lord which was his inspiration in presenting Jesus as the revealer par excellence, the one who had always been in the bosom of the Father, and who now made known to the world the secret of the Father's heart: his loving design to save the world through the giving of his Son. This was meant to afford an overall, synthetic view of the whole gospel. The purpose of the present essay is to analyse the gospel part by part, and try to show the organic harmony of its structure. What is suggested here is merely a plan for reading the text according to certain simple and obvious indications that the sacred author himself provided.

The first thing to remember when reading St. John's gospel is that it is a *gospel*, just like the three that precede it, and that it has certain structural elements in common with them, without which it would not be a gospel at all. That is to say, there is a definite pattern that came to be established in the very first age of Christianity for telling the story of the life and work of Jesus, and above all for announcing to the world the significance of that life and work. This pattern in its essentials includes the following elements: the ministry of St. John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus' coming; the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan; the preaching and teaching of the Lord, accompanied by miracles to confirm his word; description of a group of followers of Jesus which grows proportionately smaller as hostility from his enemies increases. Following upon this as a separate unit which is nevertheless strictly connected with what went before as its necessary outcome, is the story of the redemptive death and resurrection of the Lord and his mandate to his disciples to go and make the whole world share in the salvation he has procured for it. Now all these basic gospel elements are present in St. John, even if they are in some cases not immediately narrated in historical form but only alluded to in connection with something else. For example, the baptism of Jesus by John is not described for us as it is in the other gospels, but is referred to within the framework of the Baptist's testimony about the identity of Jesus (1.32-34). We shall see how typical of St. John's procedure it is to go beyond the event itself in order to emphasize the inner meaning of the event.

This is the first thing that we must grasp then: there is only one gospel, one kerygma, one announcement of the good news of salvation,

and it has come to us in four forms. St. John's, although it differs in many ways from the others as to its expression of the subject matter, is still the unique work of salvation that God has sent into the world in sending his Son. If this is so, then it is no surprise to see that the fourth gospel immediately falls into two large divisions: chapters one to eleven, which tell of the public life of the Lord; and chapters twelve to twenty, which deal with the Passion and Resurrection. (The twenty-first chapter is an appendix added later, either by St. John himself or by his disciples who received from him in some way the material it contains.) Within these two large sections the data are, as we have seen, substantially the same as those of the other gospels, but what a profound difference in the way in which the author related them. We sense almost at once that this is the testimony of one who was not merely an eyewitness, but who has also penetrated to the depth of mystery contained in every word and deed of the Lord and who was anxious to communicate that mystery to others. This means of course that the fourth gospel not only contains a new and engrossing dimension of revelation, but also that it entails special difficulties, not all of which have been definitively resolved. Nevertheless, certain key features clearly present themselves and offer sure guidance for understanding the gospel.

If the concept of the Word dominates the Prologue, this gives way in the body of the gospel to the two other leading ideas it contains: life and light. These two realities become as it were the two poles of the axis around which the rest of the gospel rotates. This is especially so in the first eleven chapters, which are structurally arranged so as to present the person and doctrine of Jesus under these aspects: chapters three to six dealing primarily with Christ as life, chapters seven to ten with Christ as light. Chapter eleven crowns this part of the work as the supreme example of what has been presented before it. This whole first part can be understood as the manifestation of Jesus to the world, while the second part reveals his glorification. This does not mean that the first part does not know of the glory of Christ; on the contrary, his very first miracle is aimed at revealing his glory to his disciples (2, 11). But his glory is as it were hidden and veiled beneath the garment of his flesh, which is subject to all the weaknesses and suffering that are proper to human nature; the light which is in him is still struggling with the powers of darkness that seek to overcome it. The second part however is entirely dominated by the thought of Jesus' glorification: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12, 23). This glorification is not limited for St. John to the resurrection alone: the glory of Jesus comprises his suffering and his triumph, considered as one indivisible whole. Jesus is already exalted when he is "lifted up" on the cross (12, 32). The glory of the resurrection then comes as the full

and final manifestation of the Lord's "exaltation", the total and definitive constitution of that life and light which are henceforth sent out from the risen Saviour as a layer of redemption on the whole world. Let us now try to trace the development of these two ideas as St. John has left them for us in his gospel.

After the Prologue, the gospel proper begins with the witness borne by John the Baptist (1,19f.) and that of the disciples (1,35f.). Both series of texts constitute a kind of messianic acclamation of Jesus, principally in the form of the announcement, where the Baptist is concerned, or realisation, in the case of the disciples, that in Jesus of Nazareth the plan of God revealed in the Old Testament is at last fulfilled. He is the one before whom God sends his messenger to cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (1,23) and who is the lamb of God sent to take away the sins of the world (1,29). The disciples, led to Jesus by John, recognise him as the Messiah (1,41), the prophet promised by Moses (1,45), and the King of Israel (1,49). But while he acknowledges that he is all these things the Lord declares that he is something greater still: by his allusion in v. 51 to Jacob's vision (Gen. 28,10f.) he reveals his purpose to attach this world to God himself; Jesus is the ladder leading to God.

With the second chapter St. John plunges us into the real heart of his subject and paves the way for the structure of the rest of the gospel. For in this second chapter, Jesus performs the first two of his "signs", which are to plot the way through the first part of the gospel like so many landmarks, and both of them point to his glorification which is achieved in the second part.

What is a sign in St. John's gospel? Very often the term refers to the miracles of Jesus; but the miracles, whether in St. John or in the other gospels, are not merely feats of extraordinary power. Their purpose is always to elicit faith, to cause a response of gratitude and love to a manifestation of God's presence in the world. The Old Testament prophets had used symbolic actions to indicate a divine decision about the fate of the chosen people. Ezekiel for example constructs a miniature breastwork to announce the forthcoming siege of Jerusalem and this "is a sign for the house of Israel" (Ez. 4,1-3). In the same way we find Jesus in the fourth gospel performing actions which are pregnant with meaning, a meaning which is not always apparent to the bystanders, but which bear heavily on the whole of Jesus' mission and which become clear only later (cf. 2,22; 12,16; 14,26). Thus the cleansing of the temple (2,13f.) is a sign of Jesus' resurrection, and his washing of the disciples' feet (13,2f.) a sign of that love which was

causing him to lay down his life for them, and which they in their turn were to imitate.

Thus the sign of itself does not connote the miraculous, although it may be performed within the context of a miracle. In the second chapter the two signs placed side by side point to the passion of the Lord and to his resurrection: the first is a miracle, the second is not. The important thing is that both are charged with a significance beyond what actually occurs. The water changed into wine reminds us of the blood poured out on the cross; the action in the temple is the prelude to the raising up of the new temple which is to supplant the old. "But he was speaking of the temple of his body" (2,21). We shall see that for St. John all the signs of Jesus ultimately point to the last and supreme sign of the Lord's exaltation; everything leads to the realisation that "the time had come for him to pass out of this world to the Father" and "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13,1). It is completely in accord with St. John's mind to paraphrase here: "he would give them the supreme sign of his love", by dying and rising for them.

The sign therefore is a work of God (12,37), a messianic indication of the relation between the visible things of this world and the invisible realities of God. In this way St. John's understanding of the sign is placed in the much wider context of the meaning of created reality as a whole and of the events of history, especially of those particular events which comprise the life of Jesus and are extended throughout time and space in the life of the Church and in the expression of that life, the sacramental order. That is why the events in the history of Jesus and the things he teaches are embodied in signs which are renewed in the life of the Church, once again as signs, until they give way to the last reality they signify, the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. Thus history is the actual playing out of the real events in time and space whose principle comes from outside themselves and to which they are being led by the hand of God which appears in the flesh of his Son. This means that the unseen and eternal destiny of man is being worked out by God Himself who has entered into man's history and become a part of it so that he may lead back to the sheepfold (10,1f.) the precious creature that had strayed. By this very fact of God's entrance into history all created material reality receives its definitive value: it is the sign of God's presence and activity among men. In this way creation is rescued from the sphere of the myth and placed squarely in the reality of God, who has willed, out of pure love, to meet man and carry on with him the dialogue of sacred history. And so everything that happens in the world, but especially certain chosen events which are planned and

executed by God are signs of this encounter. The supreme summit of history and of all creation—and therefore of all signs—is the flesh of the God-man Jesus Christ. Whoever sees him sees the invisible God who dwells in light inaccessible, but who has made Himself known in His Son, and wills to be called Father, that is, the one who gives life to His Son and to all who become sons in him.

Seen against this background the teaching of Jesus takes on sharp relief in the fourth gospel; the insistence on light and life, which might have been purely notional, can be integrated into the very structure of the account because the ideas are embodied in signs, in concrete material realities which transform the ideas into simple, stark reality. Thus the first major bloc we deal with is chapters three, four, five and six, which teach that Jesus comes to bring life to the world. Two signs designate this life: the water of spiritual rebirth with which chapters three, four and five are concerned; the bread of life which we find in chapter six. It is interesting to note this harmonic ordering of the text even though the unfolding of events would suggest that chapter six should be read after chapter four and before chapter five: in 5,18 we have the first evidence of the designs against Jesus' life and so the beginning of chapter seven would quite logically follow chapter five. No matter; the present arrangement of the text seems to have been designed precisely to make the teaching on life more coherent even at the expense of chronology pure and simple: first we are told of the water that gives life, then of the bread which sustains it.

Two important themes accompany the teaching on the water and the bread: the Spirit and faith, and these two are closely connected with one another. In the New Testament the word Spirit (*pneuma*) always refers either to the third Person of the Blessed Trinity or to the world of operations and effects accomplished by this Person. It never means a human accomplishment in the intellectual or moral order such as we think of when we use the expression "thes pirit of man". This is the reason why Spirit and faith are so bound up with one another: the Spirit is the gift of God, the free grace poured into man's heart to bring him to new birth as a son of God. But this grace, this Spirit is only able to bring man to birth if he opens his heart to receive it in an attitude of free, personal response, if he goes out to meet the one who comes to him, and this opening of man's heart to let in the life and light of God is called faith.

Hence in the conversation with Nicodemus in chapter three, Jesus insists that man is powerless to effect his own salvation: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (3,6); man can draw out of himself only what is already there, the weakness of human nature, its tendency to

corruption and death. But if man is born of water and the Spirit, then he enters the kingdom of God (3,5-8J, which is the kingdom of everlasting life. This birth in water and the Spirit is however a heavenly reality, and can be attained only by the man who believes (3,12). The reception of the Spirit itself is dependent upon belief in Jesus (3,12; cf. 3,18 and 7,39). Faith therefore in Jesus brings the action of the Spirit, the action of spiritual rebirth, of entrance into spiritual life. But Jesus says a man must be born of *water* and the Spirit. What part can such a common material reality as water have to play in this sublime and deeply interior activity? The answer to this lies in the whole theology of the sign which we saw above: the divine and invisible realities which constitute the Christian economy are not cut off from the created material world about us, but in virtue of the Incarnation of the Son of God, all of creation has been purified and brought into the service of man's redemption. For man to enter the kingdom of God he must believe in the one whom God has sent and open himself to receive the sanctifying Spirit. But this does not happen without reference to man's actual incarnate state: man's faith and God's gift of the Spirit are embodied in the water of baptism. This is the living water that Jesus promises to the Samaritan woman, (4,10-15), living because it contains and is activated by the Spirit and because in the one who receives it, it springs up into life everlasting. The signs of Jesus' earthly life were historical events which came and went; but he has left other signs for all those who were to believe in him without seeing him. Throughout all the ages of the world the sign of water and the Spirit would bring to birth the sons of God who believe in the Lord's name. This theme is sustained throughout the following passages. After the Samaritan episode, Jesus cures the royal official's son who is at the point of death (4,46-54), thus proving that he is the master of life. The cure of the paralytic (5,1f.) who had sought healing in the water of the pool points in the same direction for as a result of it Jesus gives his first great discourse in the gospel (5,17-47) in which he reveals the central purpose of his mission: "Amen, amen, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has life everlasting and does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5,24); "for as the Father has life in himself, even so has he given to the Son to have life in himself" (5,26) and "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will" (5,21).

All this is repeated and intensified in chapter six. The same end, the bestowal of life; the same means, a sign; the same agents that make the sign effective, the Spirit and faith. First comes the preliminary sign, the multiplication of the loaves, which is probably meant to be a

foreshadowing of the Eucharistic discourse: the miracle takes place after Jesus has given thanks (*eucharistēsas*). That is why the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd is repugnant to Jesus. Men labour for the food that perishes, whereas he wants to give them that which endures for life everlasting (6,27).

The sequence of the material from this point on in chapter six is somewhat difficult to follow, and most scholars hold that there are probably at least two different discourses which have been brought together because of their common theme. At any rate the message as a whole is clear.

Everything is centred on faith. This is clear not only through the use of the word *believe*; there are a number of other expressions which signify the same reality and they fill the text: to come, to listen, to learn. It would be necessary to quote the whole passage to do justice to the profusion of terms. The episode is therefore primarily a lesson in the necessity of faith, for faith is both the cause (6,40) and the result (vv. 44-47) of eternal life in man. Man can have no life if he does not believe. This is the great "work of God" (v. 29), not man's own achievement (v. 28) but that which God inspires in him: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (v. 44). Into this basic framework is woven the teaching on the bread of life.

Despite the miracle of the loaves the Jews ask Jesus for a sign by which they may believe in him, a sign such as the manna God gave their fathers in the desert (Ex. 16,1f.). In reply the Lord declares that he is himself the true bread which comes down from heaven (v. 35): he alone can fill all man's desire. The manna was perishable food, destined to nourish perishable bodies; whoever believes in Jesus is filled with the nourishment that preserves his life forever, since "this is the will of my Father who sent me, that whoever beholds the son and believed in him shall have everlasting life" (vv. 40-47).

And then with no apparent break in the narrative or the line of argument there is a sudden shift of meaning which lifts the entire discourse to a new and unheard of level of reality. Jesus has made some very serious claims: that he is the messenger of God, that he comes to do the will of God and save all men, that this salvation is open to all who believe in him, that man can live by adhering to him because life is intimately connected with his own person. These are important and far reaching statements, but they might have been said by any man, they do not go too far beyond what could be found in a great human personality, although it would be a rare and mystically inspired personality. But now the Lord speaks as no man has ever spoken or could ever speak. Jesus is the bread of life, and he will give this bread to men

to eat, but it is no mere metaphor: "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world . . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day" (vv. 52 and 55).

St. John's first readers, accustomed by Eucharistic practice to the realism inherent in the Lord's words, would have found them perfectly comprehensible and felt their great impact; we who share their faith also find here the consolation of drinking at the divine source of the mystery of faith. What is important to realise is the connection made by St. John between the Christian sacraments and the exaltation of Jesus. This appeared already in the teaching on baptism in chapter three, where the conversation with Nicodemus finds its natural climax in the words, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that those who believe in him may not perish but have life everlasting" (3,14-15). And immediately the evangelist goes on to comment, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (3,16). The word "gave" takes on special significance in this respect: it is the formal act by which God delivers his Son to death for our sake. (cf. 18,11.) If one reads chapter six with this in mind, the constant use of the word "give", with its many shades of intensity, becomes especially striking. The central affirmation comes in Jesus' own promise to give himself for the life of the world (6,52). The same sense is evident in 10,11. This is strengthened if we reflect on the orientation of the whole gospel even just up to this point, not to speak of what follows, towards the solemn giving or handing over of the Lord: his function as the Lamb of God (1,29 and 36); changing of water into wine, which should certainly be seen as parallel to the bread of life episode in chapter six, and its immediate sequel, the word about the raising of the temple (chapter two entirely); the baptismal episode of chapter three, just mentioned; the reference to the Passover at the beginning of the bread of life scene, pointing to the sacrifice of the paschal lamb (6,4): all this makes it abundantly clear that Jesus' donation of himself in accordance with the Father's loving will to save mankind is no descriptive metaphor, but the supreme reality of love which sacrifices itself to the very end (cf. 13,1). Small wonder that the Eucharist, which renews and re-presents that same sacrificial love of the Lord's death "until he comes" (1 Cor. 11,26) should be not only a memorial (although it is that too) but a real sharing in the Body and Blood given for the life of the world.

One more passage needs to be considered, the three short verses in 7,37-39, which are the quintessence of the doctrine on the Word as the life of men. It is so transparently a synthesis of everything that has been

said on the subject that it requires no comment but only the greatest admiration and contemplation. Everything we have seen is here: the new life given in the Spirit to those who believe, all as a result of the glorification of Jesus. These words can never be read enough nor their depths sufficiently plumbed. "Now on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me; and let him drink who believes in me. As the Scripture says (of me) Forth from his bosom shall flow rivers of living water' (cf. Ez. 47,1; Is. 55,1; Zach. 14,8). He said this of the Spirit which those who believed in him would receive. For as yet there was no Spirit since Jesus had not yet been glorified". (After the word *Spirit* in the last sentence the Latin translator added "given" to insure the correct interpretation: St. John, obviously aware of the eternity of the Spirit, is only concerned here with emphasising the connection between the bestowal of the Spirit and the glorification of Jesus.)

Chapter seven, which contains this passage that so admirably sums up the whole idea of Jesus as the life of the world, shows at the same time the attempt on the part of his enemies to stifle that life and we are presented with the constant refrain of their attempts to seize him and put him to death: vv. 1,19,25,30,32,33,44,51. By one of those effortless and masterful transpositions of his thought, St. John makes this refrain the subject of a whole new mode of understanding the Lord. In 8,12, which should be considered as the immediate sequel to 7,45-52, Jesus declares that he is the light of the world. (Note—the beautiful and meaningful passage about the adulterous woman, 7,53-8,11 interrupts the closely knit continuity of St. John's narrative, and in fact was not written by him. It is certainly inspired Scripture, but it does not belong where it is at present located. In some manuscripts of the New Testament it is found after Luke 21,38, where it fits the context perfectly.)

In the first part of the gospel St. John has shown that Jesus is the life of the world. But in the Prologue he has also said that "the life was the light of men" (v. 4). This light came into the world to "enlighten all men" (1,9) so that they are able to see the Father (1,18) with the eyes of faith (14,9-10). This identification of the life and light of God in Jesus and the struggle of the powers of darkness to overcome the light and extinguish the life is the subject of all of chapter eight. Here we find perhaps the most concentrated account in the gospel, outside of the Passion narrative, of the struggle between the light and darkness. Jesus promises that whoever follows him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (8,12). This light will beget knowledge of the truth: (8,31-32) the truth that Jesus has been sent by God and that he is

one with the Father. This is to be the object of much of Jesus' discourse on the night before his death (cf. 14,6-9; 15,23; 16,15). This possession of truth in its turn will set man free from the slavery of sin; here of course we touch upon the sombre core of the whole light-darkness conflict. The tense, dramatic dialogue between Jesus and "the Jews" (8,31-59) is built out of the confrontation of the author of truth and the father of lies; it is the perfect and tragic image of the creature's shutting itself off from God, the complete refusal, the closing of all doors that might let in the saving light. This is the "world" that Jesus abhors and does not pray for (17,9): not the created universe, nor the human race as such, for these are the blessed things that God has made and which Jesus has come to save, but that element in human nature which is rebellious to the point of murder. "The Jews" stand here for all of sinful humanity; we are all of us "the Jews" who seek to kill Jesus, who are in fact responsible for his death when by sin we seek to extinguish the light of God.

By means of the pattern with which we are now familiar, St. John clothes the doctrine on Jesus as the light with the account of a sign that fully illustrates it. The opposition to the light in chapter eight came from the religious aristocracy of Israel: the Pharisees, the chief priests, the "vested interests"—for it is to these people that St. John refers when he speaks of the Jews. The man born blind whose healing is recounted in chapter nine is one of the people of the land, one of the poor, contemptuously referred to by Jesus' enemies as "this crowd, which does not know the Law" (7,49). It is to the poor man sitting in darkness that Jesus comes. Because he is blind, Jesus gives him sight. Those who proudly claim that they can see are the ones who are really blind, blinded by sin; they feel no need of enlightenment and so they remain in their sin (cf. 9,39-41). In their pride they cast out the poor man (v. 34) who in his simplicity has sensed the holiness at work in his cure (vv. 30-33). Then follows the moving passage, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out and when he had found him said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you'. And falling down he worshipped him." (vv. 35-38). Jesus seeks the one who is cast out; the healing of the blind man's eyes was only the prelude to a far greater gift, something like a symbol of that supernatural vision which he bestows on the heart of the believer, that faith by which man is able to see the things of God. What could better express the meaning of the light that Jesus is for the world than this attitude of adoring faith gazing up into the brilliance that has illumined its darkness and turned night into day.

Jesus, the light of the world, seeks the one who was cast out—because he is the good shepherd. The far-reaching and all penetrating light goes out into the darkness to look for the lost sheep. This is the new expression of the Saviour's image which St. John introduces in chapter ten. It is a somewhat gentler image than that of the light, more humanly appealing, and this is in accord with the author's concern to present the Lord as he really was, in his total reality, both divine and human. He is both the shepherd who cares for his flock, and the door by which it can enter into life and have access to the pastures of salvation (10,1-10). The multiplicity of images should not trouble us; this is simply a repetition in a new form of the truth that has met us at every turn throughout the gospel. Jesus is the one who gives life, the one who protects and conserves that life once given. And the means by which he does this is always the sacrifice of his own life: "I am the good shepherd . . . and I lay down my life for my sheep" (vv. 14-15; v. 28). But this sacrifice is an expression of his love, coming from the supreme liberty of the one who is master of life and death, and who out of that liberty willingly lays down his life for his own, not only to die, but to live again and to give life to those for whom he has died: "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down and to take it up again" (vv. 17-18).

This mastery over life and death is once again expressed by a sign, the last of Jesus' signs before the greatest sign of all, his own death and resurrection. Chapter eleven, the raising of Lazarus, is the climax and summary of all that has gone before. It is also the crucial turning point in Jesus' own life; for as a result of this miracle the chief priests and Pharisees hold a council in which they finally and definitively decide that he must die. But in this they were unwittingly helping the Lord in his work of giving life and gathering together his sheep, "the children of God who were scattered abroad" (vv. 50-52).

The eleventh chapter is dominated by the author's sense of the power of Jesus, both in his supernatural knowledge of the course which events are to take and in his actual direction of the events to their conclusion. At the same time his most fully human aspect is revealed; he weeps over the death of his friend. In this combination of the divine and human in Jesus we find once again the key to understanding what happens. It is the divine Word who gives life, but the Word that was made flesh, who knew human love and sorrow from within, from his own experience of them. The way he speaks of death gives us a glimpse of how his almighty power went hand in hand with a perception of the simplest human realities: he is so much the master in the face of death

that he refers to it as sleep (11,11, cf. Mk. 5,39). Death is no master over Jesus for he is free before it. He can lay down his life and take it up again at will (10,18). For this reason the central statement of the chapter is found in verse 25: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die". In his own person Jesus holds that power over life and death; because he is life itself death must always give way before him, and whoever believes in him participates in this victory. In the same way, the reference to light in verses 9 and 10, although their most obvious meaning is that of a simple parable taken from human activity, must surely be connected with the general doctrine we have seen of Jesus as the light of the world; by his death Jesus illumines the world with the light of life.

Thus the ideas of light and life which have run like twin themes throughout the gospel thus far are epitomised in this last and greatest of Jesus' signs. In obedience to the Father's will he had come to draw all men into that life which he had with God before time was. This sign of the victory of life over death is to be the clear proof of the Lord's mission, and is meant to evoke faith in that mission, which in fact it does: "Many therefore who had seen what he did believed in him" (v. 45). But some did not and out of their unbelief comes the council of those who want to put Jesus to death (v. 46). The council is well placed here, showing as it does the raising of Lazarus to be the last straw, the sign that surpasses all the many signs Jesus has done thus far. Nothing remains but the fulfilment of all of them in the Lord's own death and resurrection.

The second part of St. John's gospel begins in 11,55 with the announcement of the Passover. In the history of the Jews the Passover was always the feast of feasts, the commemoration of the liberation of Israel from Egypt. It was certainly also a sign in the Johannine sense, for as a liturgical celebration it pointed beyond itself to that supreme reality for the chosen people, the steadfast love of Yahweh whose first fruits were given in the days of Moses, but which had lasted throughout all of the people's history and was destined to remain with them forever. This concept must be kept in mind in reading St. John's account of the Passion, for it is clear that the Passover of the Jews has reached its definitive state in the sacrifice of the Lord and in his victory over death. In this way the sign of the whole order of Old Testament religion is not rejected but on the contrary taken up and transformed in the new economy of salvation, or rather, in the new and eternal phase of the one plan which God had had from the beginning. Hence,

besides the reference to the Passover in 11,55 and 12,1 we find a number of direct quotations from the Old Testament (vv. 15,38,40). Along with this the vocabulary of glorification and exaltation (vv. 16,23,32) becomes more intense. Lastly, there is a restatement in the strongest possible terms of the light and life doctrine (vv. 23-26; 31-36; 44-50). This is the last explicit pairing of these two themes; from here on the struggle of light and darkness, of life and death is expressed no longer in words but in the action of Jesus' exaltation.

At this point the question may be raised as to the exact nature of the Passion story as told by St. John. We have seen that all the signs performed by the Lord in the course of this gospel seem to gravitate naturally to the account of the paschal events, both explicitly through the references to the Lord's glorification (e.g., 2,22; 7,39) and implicitly through the signs that were later understood in connection with the Christian sacraments (e.g., chapters 2, 3, 6 etc.). The resurrection of Lazarus has just been characterised as the last and greatest of Jesus' signs, the one that immediately prefigures his own death and resurrection. Is the paschal mystery then no longer a sign? Is it to be understood as the reality towards which all the signs have been leading, beyond which nothing more is to be expected? The answer is twofold: insofar as it is the summit towards which all the signs have been tending, the exaltation of the Lord is an end in itself, the goal that Jesus has been striving for and the purpose of his whole life and mission. This does not prevent it however from also being a sign, an absolutely unique and definitive sign, The God-man lifted up on the cross into glory, crucified and risen from the dead, is the supreme revelation of the love of the Father, who did not spare his only Son, but gave him for the life of the world, that those who believe in him as the Saviour may share in his eternal life. The Passion and glorification of Christ stand before the world as the permanent and irrevocable sign of God's will to save mankind. It is the image, in the ancient sense of term (*eikon*), of the love of God for man, a reality which does not merely represent, but which contains within itself the reality it signifies. It is from this vantage point that we can understand the whole economy of the sacraments in Christianity, and why the signs of Jesus in the fourth gospel are not only concrete manifestations of a particular case of the divine will to save, but are also foreshadowings of the life of the Church.

The centre of this last part of St. John's gospel is in the opening words of the great prayer in chapter seventeen: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee". This is the basic notion of the whole account of the suffering and death of the Lord, the mutual giving of glory that passes between the Father and

the Son, the reflection of that eternal exchange of love and glory which Jesus has come to reveal to the world and into which he transports the world in virtue of his obedience to the Father. His whole life has been centred on doing the Father's will; his affirmations of this run like a constantly recurring theme throughout the gospel: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (4,34); "I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (5,30); "This is the will of my Father who sent me, that whoever beholds the Son and believes in him shall have everlasting life" (6,40). The citations could be multiplied. It is clear that they all point in the same direction: Jesus is the ambassador of God who brings salvation by means of his own self-sacrifice in obedient love. He loves men because his will is identified with that of the Father; he is glorified because he has always had the glory of the Father, and now the hour for the triumph of that glory has arrived, the hour he had so longed for, and which was determined by the Father and subject to his will (cf. 2,4; 7,30; 8,20).

In this solemn hour the Lord gathers about him his own, those chosen disciples whom he had always kept close to him and to whom he now imparts his most intimate confidences about himself and the work he has come to do and what they will have to do after he is taken from them. It is a scene in which two sharply distinct attitudes are clearly characterized: the sorrow and lack of comprehension of the disciples, and the serene calm of the Master. This appears first of all in the sign of the washing of the feet (13,7). The disciples, with their narrow and insufficient understanding of the difference between God's glory and that of men, cannot recognize the greatness of their Lord when he bends down to wash their feet. They are appalled at the thought that their own high places in the messianic kingdom must take just this form of humble service to one another. But this is the new order of things, that the greatest must become the least; this is the order of charity, expressed in the new law, the new commandment: "If I, the Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet . . . a new commandment I give you, that as I have loved you, you also love one another". (13,14 and 34.) This is the way God is glorified (13,31): not in the spectacular destruction of his enemies, but in the loving movement whereby he empties himself of the glory which is his due, in order to bestow that glory and the fulness of life and joy it implies upon those for whom he gives himself.

In the long and beautiful passage that follows (chapters fourteen to sixteen) Jesus explains in great detail how this love is to operate in the destiny that awaits him, and how its effects will reach not only those who are listening to him at that moment, but how through their

ministry of humble and loving service in imitation of him, it will reach all who learn to believe in him through their words (cf. 15,16; 17,20). But more than anything else he comforts them, strengthening them against the darkness and sorrow of the hour that is coming, in which they will see their lord and master reduced to the most abject suffering and in which they will themselves abandon him. In a special way he prepares them for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the consoler who will teach them the truth and open their hearts to understand the divine reality that is in Jesus and in which they are to share (14,26; 15,26; 16,12-16). The whole of chapter seventeen is devoted to the prayer of Jesus, his last will and testament, we might call it, which is centred on the Lord's great desire that all who believe in him and to whom he has given everlasting life may be united among themselves even as he is united to the Father. It is the love of God which is the root of this unity and which is destined ultimately to draw those who believe in Jesus into that glory which he had with the Father before the world existed and which he is now about to manifest in his suffering and glorification.

The story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus follows closely the pattern set in the synoptic gospels, but couched in typically Johanne terms and including certain details not narrated in the earlier accounts. Two episodes in particular are worthy of special attention. The words of the dying Christ to his mother, and the emission of blood and water from his side. The two of them are intimately connected.

The question of the Mariology of St. John is a long and intricate one which cannot be discussed here; it is excellently done by Jean Galot, s.J., in *Marie dans l'Évangile*, Louvain 1958, pp. 98-189. The important thing to remember is that St. John places the mother of Jesus in a key position both at the beginning and at the end of her Son's ministry of salvation. It is as a result of her solicitude that the Lord first manifests his glory at Cana by changing water into wine. This is meant to be a foreshadowing of that maternal care which she is to exercise in behalf of all men, and to which she is as it were formally and solemnly committed by her Son on the Cross. That is why in both places Jesus addresses her as "Woman". Jesus is the new Man, the last Adam, and Mary is the new Eve, the mother of all the living, those who live the new life of the Spirit, which Jesus delivers to the world when he dies (19,30). Standing at the foot of the cross, voluntarily uniting herself to the redemptive sacrifice of her Son, Mary is the prototype of the Church, the woman who begets the new children of God in the Spirit

(cf. Apoc. 12). She does nothing of herself for the redemption of mankind; she only leads men to her Son and helps to bring about in them the fundamental dispositions of Christian life: faith in Christ and obedience to his will. Hence the Church is present in Mary, we are there with her at the foot of the cross; and this is manifested when water and blood flow from the side of the dead Christ to signify the sacraments by which the Church brings everlasting life to men. Once again we find the familiar pattern: a presentation of doctrine and its manifestation in a sign. The economy of salvation which is to be preserved and extended throughout time and space in the sacraments of the Church is here shown in its pure and divinely ordained source. The Church is taken by God from the side of Christ in his sleep of death, just as the rest of the human race was drawn from the side of the first Adam in his sleep. The old things have passed away and God has made all things new.

This newness is revealed in the glory of the risen Christ (chapter twenty): the first word of the Lord to his disciples is *peace* and the result of that word is joy (20, 19 and 20). These are the gifts of the risen Christ to his own, the results of the gift he has made of himself in his total devotion to the will of the Father. To assure the permanence of these gifts he breathes upon the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit, which they in their turn are to pass on in a chain of giving which is to last until the end of time. For the Spirit is given also to all those who believe without seeing, and the words of Thomas are the words of all of us who come after him and share his faith: My Lord and my God.

One of the greatest doctors of the Church said at the end of his life that all he had written now seemed to him nothing but straw. In a sense that was true; no one can really explain the ineffable. Inevitably we try, in our human way, to order, to arrange, to systematise, and this is good and even necessary: we must make use of all that God has given us in order to come closer to an understanding of his word. But in the end the only way to read a book like the gospel of St. John is on your knees. Prayer alone is the true key to opening the secrets of Scripture.

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