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The Johannine Jesus and the Synoptic Jesus

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By way of introduction to this lecture, I should say that it is concerned with the problem of the diversity of the Gospels - but with this problem not as a historical problem but as a canonical problem. The issue is not how historians may get behind the diversity of the Gospels to a reconstructed historical Jesus, but what the diversity of the Gospels means for the church that reads these Gospels as the reliable religious access to the reality of the real Jesus. That modern biblical scholarship has scarcely addressed this issue is a symptom of its obsession with reconstructing history behind the texts and its neglect of the religious function of the texts as canonical scripture within the church.

I shall use the term 'the real Jesus' to refer to the reality of who Jesus really was and is, and in the present context mostly: who Jesus really was in his earthly history. But need to make it clear that the real Jesus is not the so-called historical Jesus, the Jesus reconstructed by historians. Historical reconstruction cannot render the full reality of any persons or events, still less the religious significance of this historical person. So the real Jesus is the historical but at the same time more-than-historical Jesus.

I The Gospels and the 'real' Jesus¹

How do the four Gospels, in their respective distinctiveness, relate to 'the real Jesus'? It seems that the diversity of the Gospels was a problem virtually from the time when they began to be read as a collection. Certainly it was a perceived problem by the end of the second century. One solution to the problem which remained popular until the modern period also originated in the second century: the production of a Gospel harmony. Tatian's Diatessaron wove the four Gospels into a single continuous narrative. That it did not replace the Gospels in the emerging NT canon is significant, as is the fact that Marcion's attempt to canonize just one Gospel, Luke's, was not taken up by the church's canonizing process. The criterion of apostolicity - invoked both against Marcion's reduction of the canon to a single apostle and against the proliferation of Gnostic gospels, only spuriously apostolic - ensured a canon comprising a diversity of witnesses reliably received from the apostolic age. It was no doubt thought that, since the four Gospels were the form the apostolic witness itself took, they should not be superseded by a secondary compilation, even if it preserved in some way the contents of all four. But the diversity of the Gospels

¹My use of this term alludes to L. T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

seems to have remained more of a problem than a perceived advantage. Tatian's solution had many successors especially in the early modern period, when harmonies were not of course envisaged as replacing the canonical Gospels as authoritative Scripture, but must in fact have functioned to supersede the Gospels in the practice of those who used them.

In the patristic period (and again in the early modern period?) the problem of the diversity of the Gospels seems to have taken the form of such historical discrepancies as differences in the order of events and differences in the parallel accounts of the same event. The most obvious of such problems were found in the differences between the Synoptics and John. The larger problem of diversity in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus - again most obvious in the contrast between the Synoptics and John - emerged as a major issue only in the nineteenth century, when the anti-dogmatic stance of Liberal scholars made the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of Jesus the least palatable of the four. From the nineteenth-century Liberals to Käsemann and the Jesus Seminar, John came to be seen as historical fiction in the service of an alien interpretation imposed on the real Jesus. Developments in Gospels studies in the second half of the twentieth century have increasingly stressed the diversity of the Gospels' portrayals of Jesus, in line with a relentless insistence on the theological diversity of the NT writings. While these developments have stressed, more strongly than previously, the distinctiveness of each Gospel, the greatest gulf still looms between the Synoptics and John. It is widely accepted even by those whose evaluation of the Fourth Gospel is strongly positive.

Harmonization - once regarded as desirable, even necessary - has come to be regarded as a practice critical scholarship should shun, associated as it is with dogmatic conservatism, even fundamentalism. Much contemporary NT scholarship has exaggerated the theological diversity of the NT by equating difference with incompatibility or even polemical opposition. The Gospels are sometimes seen as competitive propaganda for the versions of the Gospel story that validate the identity of different communities or interest-groups. At the same time, over-specialization (such that, for example, Johannine studies seem often to be pursued in complete disregard of Synoptic studies, and vice versa) impedes the kind of competent comparative studies that could produce appropriately nuanced accounts of unity and diversity. Unharmonizable diversity has become a critical dogma which is constantly asserted without adequate study of the evidence.

Yet, while recent scholarly emphasis on diversity may be exaggerated, few could now be happy with achieving harmony by Tatian's method. Conflation of the four narratives into one denies each Gospel the integrity of its own distinctive portrayal of Jesus. It creates harmony too soon, before the diversity has even been noticed. Yet the problem remains: How do the four Gospels, in their respective distinctiveness, relate to 'the real Jesus'? An alternative solution, of course, is the quest of the historical Jesus in any of its forms or phases. The real Jesus is then sought in the historical facts behind the four (or more) Gospel versions of his story. This usually means that whatever is distinctive of each Gospel is stripped away (often along with much else). The process is inevitably reductive and results, just as much as Tatian's solution, in a replacement of the four Gospels. Where harmonization substitutes an artificial conflation for the diverse Gospels, the historical quest substitutes a historical reconstruction for the diverse Gospels. If this reconstruction

has any theological interest, then it will be an interpretation of Jesus that parallels and competes with the Gospels' own portrayals of Jesus.

The more purely historical an historical reconstruction of 'the real Jesus' is, the more obvious it becomes that such a Jesus is bound to be *less than* the Jesus of any of the Gospels. But if 'the real Jesus' is the person the Gospels, in their very diversity as well as their commonality, portray for us and enable us to know, then the real Jesus must be *more than* the Jesus of any of the Gospels. An important function of the plurality of the Gospels is to keep us constantly aware of this. If each of the four is in its own way a valid portrayal of Jesus, then we cannot evade the fact that none is complete, that the perspective of each is just one perspective among several. The 'real Jesus' is not in but beyond the texts. From various perspectives they point to him, but they do not capture him. Of course, it is always the case that a person is more than any literary portrayal of him or her. Persons exceed and escape any portrayal and any number of complementary portrayals. This would be true of Jesus even if we had only one Gospel. But the plurality of the Gospels requires their readers to recognize this fact. By presenting us with four portrayals that are not harmonized already for us, the texts keep us seeking the Jesus to whom all four portrayals are reliable but not exhaustive witnesses. Seeking the 'real Jesus' to whom all four Gospels point us, we cannot rest content with Jesus as a literary character in any of these texts, but must seek the living Jesus who transcends his literary portrayals.

II Reading the Gospels in canonical relationship

That there should be four different accounts of Jesus, not incompatible but complementary, is in principle entirely possible, but are the character and content of the four Gospels in fact of this kind? In offering some approaches to this issue, we shall focus on the differences between John and the Synoptics, since the Fourth Gospel is undoubtedly the most distinctive of the four and raises problems that do not arise in the comparison of the Synoptics themselves.

(1) The explicit incompleteness of the Fourth Gospel.

The extent to which John presupposes traditions about Jesus which he does not record is not often noticed. Whether the evangelist's intention was in some sense to complement one or more of the Synoptic Gospels is not important for our present purposes, though there is quite a strong case to be made for the view that he presupposes his readers know Mark. It is more important to notice that John's Gospel is explicitly incomplete in aspects which, in the canonical collection of the four Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels supply. Contrary to the assumption made by most contemporary Johannine scholars, the Fourth Gospel does not represent itself as the only and sufficient repository and interpretation of the traditions about Jesus. We cannot here appeal to the last verse of the Gospel (21:25), which does not necessarily imply the existence, still less the desirability of other records of Jesus' ministry, but there are several other features of the Gospel which suggest its explicit incompleteness and implicit complementarity.

(a) Other signs. That Jesus performed many more miracles than the Gospel records is clearly asserted (2:23; 3:2; 4:45; 20:30). The small number of miracles John narrates (eight including the walking on the water and the miraculous catch of fish, neither of which the Gospel calls 'signs' as it does the other six) contrasts with the much greater number in all of the Synoptics. They have evidently been carefully selected from those known in the traditions: they are the most impressive of their kind (a huge quantity of wine; healing at a distance and at the point of death; lameness that had persisted for thirty-eight years; blindness since birth; food for five thousand people; a man already dead three days) and in the variety of symbolic meaning they offer (wine; healing on the Sabbath; blindness and sight; bread; life for the dead). But they are also representative. Most Synoptic miracles, with the exception of exorcisms,² could easily be classified as similar in kind to one or more of the Johannine 'signs.' Thus John's extreme selectivity, which allows him the scope to narrate each sign at greater length than most Synoptic miracle stories and to expound the meaning of the signs in discourses and dialogues attached to them, should not be understood as excluding other miracle stories his readers know, but as representing them. Readers who learn from the Fourth Gospel the Johannine manner of understanding the meaning of Jesus' miracles will have no difficulty in reading other miracle stories in the same way.

(b) Teaching the crowds. It is sometimes remarked that, unlike the Synoptic (and especially the Matthean and the Lukan) Jesus, the Johannine Jesus is not a teacher. He teaches his disciples at length in the farewell discourses, but in the chapters which describe his public ministry his words are largely debate, often with the Jewish authorities, sometimes with the crowds, about his mission and his identity, which are also the subject on the rather rare occasions on which he takes the initiative in speaking (e.g. 7:37-38; 8:12; 10:1-18), rather than responding to questions and criticisms. The kind of teaching to the crowds, as well as to the disciples, that is familiar from the Synoptics is lacking in John. Yet it is *presupposed* by references to Jesus as Rabbi (which John explains as meaning 'Teacher': 1:38) or Teacher (1:38; 3:2; 6:25; 9:2; 11:28; 20:16) and to Jesus teaching a general audience in both the Temple and synagogues (7:14; 18:19-21). It is unlikely that this refers to the discourses and dialogues that this Gospel attributes to Jesus. These have an intense Christological focus, which is the aspect of Jesus' ministry that John has selected for attention and exposition in line with his Gospel's purpose (20:31). But it does not in any way disallow or denigrate, rather it explicitly leaves space for Gospels with other and broader purposes to recount the traditions of Jesus' teaching.

(c) Galilean ministry. One of the most obvious differences between John and the Synoptics is that most of the former's account of Jesus' public ministry is located in Jerusalem and only a relatively small amount in Galilee (4:43-54; 6:1-7:1).³ Yet John's own chronology (see 6:4; 7:2) makes it clear that about six months is covered

²A possible explanation of the lack of exorcisms in John is that the signs are all understood as events in the physical realm that symbolize salvation in the spiritual realm. Exorcisms would not easily fit this pattern.

³2:1-12 precedes the beginning of the public ministry.

by the uninformative statement: 'After this Jesus went about in Galilee' (7:1a).⁴ This is as long as the period in which all the events narrated from 7:2 to the end of the Gospel take place. Clearly John's narrative does not displace the rich traditions about Jesus' ministry in Galilee which his readers know from other sources; rather it leaves an explicit place for them. (His own concentration on Jerusalem is no doubt at least partly due to his focus on Jesus' debate with and escalating conflict with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem.) Conversely, as has often been noted, Matthew and Luke imply visits to Jerusalem by Jesus prior to the only one they narrate (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34).

(d) Other Johannine omissions. At least three other Synoptic events - all of key importance in the Synoptic narratives of Jesus - are not simply absent in John, but notable precisely by their absence. In the first place, the baptism of Jesus, not narrated, is presupposed as prior to the start of John's narrative by John the Baptist's reference to what he had seen (1:32). Secondly, the twelve appear for the first time in the Gospel at 6:67, with no account of their appointment as a group of twelve by Jesus. Thirdly, a place for the trial before Caiaphas is left vacant in John's narrative, which contrives to say nothing of what happens to Jesus after he is taken to Caiaphas and before he is taken from Caiaphas to Pilate (18:24, 28).

(e) Ethical teaching. In 14:15 and 15:10 Jesus refers to his 'commandments' (plural) that the disciples must keep. Elsewhere in the farewell discourses he gives them 'a new commandment' (singular) (13:34; 15:12; cf. 15:17): to love one another as he has loved them. It is not obvious to what the plural 'commandments' refers. The only commandment, besides the 'new' command to love one another, that Jesus in this Gospel gives the disciples is the command to wash one another's feet (13:14-15), clearly an instance of loving one another as Jesus has loved them. But readers of John who know other Gospels or Gospel traditions will surely think, when they read of Jesus' commandments (14:15; 15:10), of the ethical teaching of Jesus in such passages as the Matthean Sermon on the Mount. Such teaching is summed up by the Johannine Jesus in the one command to love one another as he has loved his own, just as it is by the Synoptic Jesus in the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. The Johannine summary in the 'new commandment' gives a particular - christological and ecclesial - interpretation to the ethical teaching of Jesus, but it need not make the Synoptic sayings of this type redundant. The references to 'commandments' (14:15; 15:10) provide, as it were, a Johannine rubric under which sayings of Jesus not recorded by John may be placed.

(2) The Fourth Gospel's exposition of selected motifs

We have already noticed that, in comparison with the Synoptics, the Gospel of John is highly selective in the events it includes in its account of Jesus' ministry. The same can be said of themes in the teaching of Jesus. It is not really the case that what the Johannine Jesus says is completely different from what the Synoptic Jesus says. Rather, particular themes which may occur only briefly and without extensive development in the Synoptics, are selected for fuller exposition in John. These are

⁴No doubt some period of ministry in Galilee is implied between 4:54 and 5:1, but it is not possible to tell how long.

especially themes with christological implications, but not only those, as the following examples will show:

(a) Prayer. The Synoptic saying, 'Ask and it will be given you' (Matt 7:7a; Luke 11:9a), is the text that is interpreted by the Johannine Jesus' teaching on prayer (14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24).

(b) The Paraclete. The Paraclete sayings in John (14:16-17, 25; 15:26-27; 16:7-14), along with the context of persecution (15:18-16:4), are developments of the Synoptic Jesus' promise that, when the disciples are persecuted and brought to trial, the Spirit will enable them to bear testimony (Matt 10:17-20; Mark 13:9-11; Luke 21:12-15). The latter is the only context in which the Synoptic Jesus speaks during his ministry of the role of the Spirit with his disciples after his resurrection. The term 'Paraclete' itself most likely reflects the courtroom context of this Synoptic teaching, and so the intertextual connexion between the Paraclete passages in John and these Synoptic passages explains the fact that this term for the Spirit is limited in John to these passages in chapters 14-16.

(c) Eternal life. The explanation for the oft-remarked absence of the term 'kingdom of God' from John (only in 3:3, 5), by comparison with its prominence as the central theme of Jesus' message in the Synoptics, is that 'eternal life' or 'life' is the Johannine substitute for it. The beginning of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is designed precisely to make this clear to the reader. By means of the saying, 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above' (3:3; with variation in v 5), the Johannine Jesus effects a transition from 'the kingdom of God' to 'eternal life' (3:15-16). Entry into the kingdom is by means of birth from above or from the Spirit, but the purpose and consequence of birth is life. Seeing the kingdom - or, at least, the aspect of it on which this Gospel focuses - is thus equivalent to eternal life. From now on, the Gospel thus indicates to its readers, the subject of 'the kingdom of God' will be developed under the aspect of the 'life' or 'eternal life' that Jesus gives. Nor is this transposition in terminology without warrant in the Synoptic traditions themselves: in Mark 9:43-48, the phrase 'enter into life' (vv 43, 45) is used in parallel with 'enter the kingdom' (v 47). The Fourth Gospel can therefore be seen as selecting and developing this aspect of the kingdom of God. In John, therefore, Jesus' miracles all signify, in different ways, the eternal life that Jesus will give, just as in the Synoptics the miracles are indications of the kingdom of God that is coming through Jesus. The contrast between the Synoptics and John at this point is not, as often supposed, between the significance of the miracles for the coming of the kingdom in the Synoptics and the *christological* significance of the miracles in John. In the Synoptics also the miracles raise the question of Jesus' own identity (Matt 11:3-6; Mark 2:6-10; 4:41); John simply makes this more explicit and emphatic. The real difference is that in the Synoptics the miracles relate to the kingdom of God and to Jesus as the one who inaugurates the kingdom, while in John they relate to eternal life and to Jesus as the one who gives eternal life.

(d) Christological terms and titles. It is often noticed that the Johannine Jesus talks much more about himself than the Synoptic Jesus does. It is less often noticed that the terms and titles he uses correspond closely to those the Synoptic Jesus uses. Like the Synoptic Jesus, the Johannine Jesus never calls himself Messiah (with the one exception: 17:3, comparable with the Synoptic exceptions: Matt 23:10; Mark

9:41), although others and the narrator do, as they do in the Synoptics. Like the Synoptic Jesus, the Johannine Jesus uses the enigmatic term 'Son of man' of himself, almost always in riddling references to his coming death and resurrection, which is one category of the Synoptic usage. Rarely does the Johannine Jesus call himself 'the Son of God' (5:25; 10:36; 11:4; cf. 3:16), but he frequently speaks of himself as 'the Son' in relation to 'the Father.' This too corresponds to Synoptic usage, though the latter is limited to two sayings (Matt 11:17; 24:36; Mark 13:32; Luke 10:22). In other words, when the Johannine Jesus speaks of his unique relationship with the Father, as he does often, he does so in the same terms as the Synoptic Jesus does, on the rare occasions when he does.

(e) The Son sent by his Father. John's 'agency christology' combines the idea that Jesus is the Son of his Father with the idea that he has come into the world as his Father's agent, commissioned and sent by the Father to represent the Father and to accomplish his Father's work. Both ideas - that Jesus is the Son of his Father and that Jesus has been sent as God's agent - occur in the Synoptics, though the latter is as rare as the former (Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16, a saying which actually occurs in John: 13:20). The two ideas of sonship and agency come together in the Synoptics only in parabolic form in the Parable of the Vineyard (Matt 21:37; Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13). But most of the Johannine Jesus' lengthy exposition of the meaning of his sonship to the Father can easily be read as exposition of these three Synoptic sayings: about the Son and the Father (Matt 11:17; Luke 10:22), about Jesus as the one sent by God (Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16) and about the son sent by the father to the tenants of his vineyard (Matt 21:37; Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13). Once again it is in the selection and concentrated exposition of a theme, not in the theme itself, that John is different.

(f) Most distinctive of the Christology expressed by the Johannine Jesus are the two sets of seven 'I am' sayings. These are the 'I am' sayings with predicates ('I am the bread of life' etc.), and the absolute 'I am' sayings, which either by double entendre or less ambiguous reference echo the divine self-declaration ('I am he') in Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 40-55. The absolute 'I am' sayings declare who Jesus is in his divine identity, while the 'I am' sayings with predicates declare what he is in his salvific work as the one who gives eternal life. The absolute 'I am' sayings correspond to and give a Johannine interpretation of the 'I am' of Mark 6:50 (= Matt 14:27), a saying which appears in John (6:20) as one of John's seven. The 'I am' sayings with predicates are all christological interpretations of parabolic actions (6:48; 11:25) or parabolic sayings of Jesus (8:12; 10:7, 11; 14:6; 15:1), most of which occur in the Synoptics (for the parabolic sayings, see Mark 4:21; Matt 18:12-13 = Luke 15:3-6; Matt 7:13-14 = Luke 13:23-24). At this point those who are used to studying the Synoptics without reference to John may well question the legitimacy of John's christological reading of these aspects of the Jesus traditions. It is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the christological concentration common to the whole Fourth Gospel (which can be observed even in category (a) above). But for a canonical reading of the four Gospels, John can be read as making explicit - or bringing to light and to full expression - the Christology implicit in the Synoptics. That the salvation Jesus gives is inseparable from Jesus himself and his divine identity is implied in the whole of each Synoptic portrayal of Jesus.

(g) Anguish in the face of death. It may seem surprising to treat Jesus' spiritual struggle in Gethsemane as a Synoptic motif on which John enlarges, since

the Gethsemane narrative itself is absent from John's passion narrative, but John in fact depicts Jesus in deep distress at the prospect of his approaching passion at three earlier points: in the story of the raising of Lazarus (11:33, 35, 38), at the end of his public ministry (12:27) and at the last supper, before predicting his betrayal (13:21). In chapter 11, with its exceptional stress on Jesus' emotions, the point is that Jesus knows his raising of Lazarus from death is going to provoke the course of events that will lead to his death. His sympathy with the bereaved is mixed with anguish on his own behalf. In order to help the family he loves by restoring their brother, he must initiate the process of his own suffering and death. (In this way, John depicts the raising of Lazarus as the event which prefigures Jesus' willingness to die for the sake of those he loves: cf. 10:11-18; 13:1-3.)

Then there is John 12:27, which reads: "*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say. 'Father, save me from this hour'?*" No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." Sometimes commentators see a contrast between the Synoptics and John, in the sense that the Synoptic Jesus asks the Father to save him, whereas the Johannine Jesus raises the possibility of such a prayer only to reject it. I don't think there is really such a contrast. Jesus' question in John, '*what should I say - "Father, save me from this hour?"*,' asked in great distress, really entertains the possibility it raises. It is out of real struggle, depicted in this question, that Jesus submits to what he knows to be the divine purpose for him. Conversely, in the Synoptics, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is accompanied from the start by his acceptance of the Father's will ('*not what I want, but what you want*'). The impression that the Synoptic Jesus has to struggle long and hard with accepting the Father's will, whereas the Johannine Jesus resolves any struggle as soon as it comes into view, results from isolating 12:27 as John's equivalent to Gethsemane and ignoring the fact that the Johannine Jesus' anguish at the prospect of the passion begins in chapter 11 and continues through 13:21, where Jesus is said to be 'troubled in spirit' as he declares that one of the disciples will betray him. Here the anguish accompanies a further step in Jesus' active acceptance of God's will for him: his sending Judas away to do what he must.

(h) Voluntary death. It is often said that in the Johannine passion narrative Jesus is depicted as in sovereign control of the situation, voluntarily and deliberately laying down his life - as though this were a contrast with the Synoptics. In reality, it is a feature of the Synoptic passion narratives which receives especial emphasis in John. In Mark it is clear that Jesus knows of the fate to which he is travelling when he goes to Jerusalem (2:30; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; 12:6-8; 14:8, 18-21, 24, 27). That he voluntarily embraces this God-given destiny is displayed in Mark especially when, after struggling with and accepting God's will in Gethsemane, he wakes the disciples with the announcement that the 'hour has come...Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand' (Mark 14:41-42; cf. Matt 26:45-46). Instead of fleeing, he goes deliberately to meet his betrayer. It is no accident that these seemingly insignificant words, 'Get up, let us be going,' occur also, word for word, in John 14:31, following Jesus' assertion that he goes to his death, not because the devil has power over him, but because he obeys the Father's command. The words from the tradition are cited by John as an indication that Jesus went voluntarily to his death. By comparison with Mark, the theme is heightened, in different ways, by both Matthew and Luke. Matthew's Jesus meets Peter's attempt to save him from arrest by pointing out that, if he chose, in defiance of his scriptural destiny, he could ask the Father to send an army of angels to his aid (Matt 26:53-54). Luke's Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51) in deliberate fulfilment of the destiny he knows he must accomplish (13:32-

33). John's further development of the theme consists especially in placing before the whole passion narrative an emphatic declaration by Jesus that he is going to lay down his life for others in obedience to his Father (10:11-18). The sense in which his death is voluntary is that he chooses to go to Jerusalem, walking with open eyes into mortal danger, since he knows that the opposition of the authorities is now such as to ensure his death if they can. Then, whereas on previous occasions he has eluded arrest, now he goes to meet it (13:31; 18:1).

In summary, the two sections (1) and (2) above indicate respectively how John may be read in the light of the Synoptics (1) and how the Synoptics may be read in the light of John (2). In neither process is the distinct integrity of each Gospel violated. The intertextual readings are additional to innertextual reading of each Gospel.

(3) **Incarnational-revelatory Christology in the Fourth Gospel**

In sections (1) and (2) we have noticed many of the specific divergences between the Synoptics and John in their respective portrayals of Jesus. But is not the *overall impression* the Fourth Gospel gives of Jesus irreconcilable with the Synoptics? Has not the Fourth Gospel's incarnational interpretation of Jesus robbed him of the human reality he has in the Synoptics? Does not this Gospel, the only one explicitly to use the word 'God' of Jesus, allow his divinity to crowd out his humanity? In contrast to the Synoptics, is the Johannine Jesus, in Ernst Käsemann's oft-quoted phrase, 'God walking the earth',⁵ his human features no more than a temporary costume he has donned for the purpose?

The reply has often enough been made that the Fourth Gospel actually lays some stress on both Jesus' human physicality (4:6-7; 19:28) and his human emotions (11:33, 35, 38; 12:27; 13:21). He has particular human affections for friends (11:5; 13:23), while his farewell discourse to the disciples, with its concern to console them for the suffering awaiting them, is a sustained expression of sympathy. In view of this it is hard to see how his 'emotional responses,' 'noticeably different from those ascribed to him in the other gospel narratives,' convey 'a sense of distance and aloofness.'⁶ If he acts and speaks with authority, so does the Synoptic Jesus. Jan Du Rand maintains that 'his emotions and conduct are motivated by his missionary' - or, as he also says, "'professional'" - 'convictions.' This is an odd way of putting what is surely equally true of Jesus in all the Gospels: that his whole life is given over to fulfilling the mission he has from the Father. This is no less true of the 'compassion' for the crowds and the sick which the Synoptic Gospels ascribe to Jesus than it is of the 'love' Jesus shows for his disciples in the Fourth Gospel. In both cases Jesus' emotional attitude stems from his relationship with the Father and belongs to his mission to enact God's love for the world.

⁵E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (tr. G. Krodel; London: SCM Press, 1968) 7.

⁶J. A. du Rand, 'The characterization of Jesus as depicted in the narrative of the fourth gospel,' *Neot* 19 (1985) 29.

At the heart of the claim that John's Jesus is divine in a way that contradicts the Synoptic portrayal lies the peculiarly Johannine development of the idea of Jesus' 'glory' and its relation to the passion narrative. The issue is very important because it is decisive for the way we understand what is doubtless the most distinctive aspect of John's Christology: the incarnation as revelation of God, Jesus as the one in whom we see God's glory. Käsemann takes glory to be the opposite of the suffering and humiliation that characterize the passion in the Synoptic Gospels. Since the glory of Jesus is manifested from the beginning of John's story (rather than in the resurrection), the passion (argues Käsemann) becomes a problem, which John solved by transforming it into glory. Instead of humiliation, the cross becomes a triumph for Jesus. However, more attentive reading of the Fourth Gospel will find that only by turning Käsemann's view on its head can justice be done to John's passion narrative. What John has done is not to dissolve the passion in glory, but to redefine God's glory by seeing the suffering and the humiliation of the cross as the high point of its revelation. It is remarkable that Käsemann can claim that the passion narrative, 'apart from a few remarks that point ahead to it,' appears only at the end of the Gospel, like 'a mere postscript.'⁷ In fact, in no other Gospel is there so much reference to the cross throughout the story, for those who can penetrate the riddles in which Jesus refers to it (1:29, 35, 51; 2:17-22; 3:14; 6:50, 62; 7:33, 39; 8:21, 28; 10: 11, 15, 17-18; 11:51; 12:7-8, 23-24, 32-33). If Jesus' glory begins to be manifested from the start, it is also true that the shadow of the cross falls across the narrative from the start. The issue of their paradoxical coincidence is in view from the start, though only resolved at the end.

The notion that the Johannine passion narrative could be read as a triumph *rather than* as a narrative of abject humiliation is intrinsically very unlikely. Everyone in the ancient world knew that crucifixion was an excruciatingly painful way to die, and that - even more important for the social values of the time - the most shameful way to die, the fate of slaves, enemies of the state and others who were treated as subhuman, deserving of this dehumanizing fate. This is why none of the Gospel narratives needs to say explicitly that Jesus suffered physical pain or to point out the humiliation of such a death. The mere telling of the familiar tale of events entailed in death by crucifixion - familiar to people from observation, though rarely recounted in ancient literature - was more than enough to convey the agony and the shame. There are in fact as many references to physical violence against Jesus in John as in the Synoptics (a little noticed fact⁸ which betrays how easily a prejudice about the difference between John and the Synoptics can blind readers to what the texts themselves say). However, John also has a more powerful means of stressing the humiliation of the cross. His passion narrative begins with Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet. No action was more characteristically and exclusively that of a slave. Jesus adopts the role of a slave on the way to his death by the form of execution reserved for slaves. The footwashing signifies the voluntary self-abasement that took Jesus to the ultimate humiliation of the cross. Of course, John has Jesus ironically

⁷Käsemann, *The Testament*, 7.

⁸I owe it to H. C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSS 161; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 192-194, who provides the evidence.

proclaimed king, in the title on the cross, at the same time as he dies like a slave, while after his death he receives a burial fit for a king. But the irony does not mean that the glory cancels the shame. Only through a reversal of values in which kingship acquires a different meaning from that assumed by Pilate and the chief priests can the paradox be resolved. God's glory and Christ's kingship embrace the pain and the humiliation of the cross in such a way that their true nature is thereby revealed as self-giving love - or 'grace and truth' as John's Prologue puts it(1:14), his version of the Old Testament's classic revelation of the character of God ('abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness').

Luke Johnson characterizes the difference between the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptics thus: Jesus 'in John appears as more a symbolic than a literal figure. He bears the narrative burden of revealing God in the world.'⁹ He means that John's Jesus in his humanity signifies God in the world, and that John's Jesus, unlike the Jesus of the Synoptics, explicitly claims this. However, Jesus' 'symbolic' function, as revelation of God, would be meaningless unless Jesus were also a 'literal' figure. To the extent that the symbolic replaces the literal it is self-defeating. For those who suppose that this happens in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus reveals only that he is the revealer of God. But then there is no revelation, only an empty tautology. Only if Jesus retains his human particularity and story - only in his miracles, his human emotions and relationships, his suffering and humiliation in his death, his resurrection: the story John shares with the Synoptics - can Jesus be revelation of God. The glory is revealed in the flesh, which could not occur were the glory to overwhelm the flesh or be merely disguised in the flesh. Thus the integrity of John's portrayal of the human character and story of Jesus is essential to his christological project, and a sensitive reading will show that he does not dissolve the literal in the symbolic. The 'metahistorical' aspect of John's story - in that Jesus comes from God and returns to God - does not deprive the historical of its reality, but interprets its meaning.

John is, however, as I have repeatedly stressed, very selective. Only by reducing the 'literal' story to key moments and indispensable sequences - told, indeed, in relatively lavish detail - has John allowed himself space to expound the 'symbolic' meaning of it all. Yet, if we take John's Christology seriously as exposition precisely of the 'symbolic' meaning of it all, then there is no reason why we should not include the much fuller stories the Synoptics tell in this 'all.' In this way - which has been the predominant way the church has read the Gospels in the past - we may develop the complementarity of the Synoptics and John that I proposed in sections (1) and (2) into a more comprehensive interrelatedness. The Synoptic abundance of 'literal' human particularity will prevent us taking the Johannine 'symbolism' in a docetic direction (a danger not unknown in the tradition), while the incarnational-revelatory Christology of John provides the most all-encompassing theological framework for reading Jesus' story, in all the Gospels, as the story of God with us.

⁹L. T. Johnson, *Living Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998) 183.