

An Exegetical Study of The Prologue of John (John 1:1-18)

By Richard Van Egmond

Master of Theological Studies (MTS) in Religion/Religious Studies, McMaster University

Introduction

In the opening verses of each of the four Gospels, the evangelists provide initial clues to the interests that will govern their respective accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Mark's opening is the most compact, recounting Jesus' baptism in order to establish his identity as Son of God. Matthew's opening genealogy identifies Jesus as a descendant of both Abraham and David as well as supplying his credentials as Messianic king, while Luke's introduction sets a detailed account of the announcements and actual births of both John the Baptist and Jesus against the backdrop of the wider Roman world. Of the four, however, John makes the most dramatic use of the prologue form in shaping the contours of a particular Christological emphasis. In his recent treatment of the Johannine writings, R. Alan Culpepper comments that "By any standard the prologue to the Gospel of John is one of the most profound passages in the Bible. As simple as its language and phrases are, its description of Jesus as the Logos has exerted a lasting influence on Christian theology." He concludes:

All the prologues...serve to educate or prepare the reader for the rest of the Gospel. Important themes are signalled and the identity of Jesus is established at the very outset by means of Christological titles, divine portents or the manner of Jesus birth...All the prologues therefore are Christological affirmations, but John is the only Gospel to speak of Jesus' pre-existence as the Logos and the only Gospel to include a poetic prologue.¹

In a very real sense, the prologue provides a profound and highly developed theological summary that has a structural integrity of its own, while also introducing many of the key themes of the Gospel account that follows. A careful examination of this material repays any student of John's Gospel many times over.

Sources and Themes

A key question among interpreters is the original source of the Prologue, and, as a corollary, its relationship to the rest of the Gospel. Scholarly opinions vary as to the exact genre of the prologue, with some writers arguing for a source in the hymnic traditions of the early church (Beasley-Murray) or the Gnostic faith (Bultmann, [1971]), while others downplay the apparent lyric form and argue that even the more overtly poetic sections of the prologue (e.g. 1:1-5) are "rhythmic prose" (F. F. Bruce) or "elevated prose" (Morris)². While a protracted examination of the issue is not possible here, a brief consideration of the issues is useful.

Most objections to identifying early Christian hymnody as the source of the poetic sections of the Prologue rest on the assumption that the form of this material can only be positively identified as, at best, stylistic prose. Scholars who defend the hymn-like qualities of major parts of 1:1-18 vary in the details of their division of the Prologue into lyric and prose sections. Yet this difference of opinion should not be taken as evidence against the thesis that the evangelist has incorporated an early hymn here. Moreover, despite differences in the division of the passage, there still seems to be a fairly broad consensus concerning the genre of the material, provided subjective assumptions are held lightly³. Moreover, Raymond Brown points out that there are parallels of both form and content to the hymnic material of 1:1-5, 10-12b, 14 and 16, in Colossians 3, Philippians 2, Hebrews 1 and I Timothy 3:16.⁴ The Evangelist's prose insertions provide (in turn) an assessment of John the Baptist's role (1:6-9), an explanation of soteriology (12c-13), a comment on John the Baptist's relation to the Logos (15), and an expansion of the phrase "love in place of love" (Brown) or "one blessing after another" (NIV, 1:16) in 1:17-18, all of which play an important role in linking the poetic sections together.

The origin of these poetic materials is explained in various ways. Following earlier attempts to locate the hymn (and particularly the Logos theme) within the broader Hellenistic world, Bultmann sought to trace the hymn's origin to Gnostic circles, via a sect of John the Baptist's adherents. He argues that the hymn was originally directed to John, and only later adapted to Christian usage, when the final editor of the Gospel set it here to introduce the work as a whole.⁵ Ridderbos, however, rightly points out the numerous problems inherent in this suggestion. Besides the fact that the Gnostic texts Bultmann works from post-date the Gospel by several centuries, and the lack of evidence

suggesting that such Gnostic movements were even current at the time of the fourth Gospel's composition, the contexts of redemption described in Gnosticism and the Prologue are mutually exclusive and too incompatible to allow for such adaptation from one to the other.⁶ Brown's proposal that the hymn-like sections were written independently of the Gospel itself – but within the same Christian circles as that of the Evangelist – best explains both their apparent independence from the rest of the Gospel and their intrinsic similarities to the theology both of the Gospel and of the Johannine Epistles.

John's use of the term "*Logos*" (1:1-2; most frequently rendered "Word" in modern English translations) continues to draw much attention. A survey of commentaries suggests that the term is deeply rooted in Old Testament thought (e.g. Genesis 1, Proverbs 8). Further, the role of the Johannine *Logos* parallels in some ways that of personified Wisdom in a number of traditions within Judaism (e.g. Sirach 24). As Ridderbos points out, however, Wisdom and the *Logos* cannot simply be identified with each other, since the former is a creation of God (Sirach 1:9), while the *Logos* is said to be pre-existent and Divine.⁷ At the same time, the Evangelist's use of such language within a first century Mediterranean setting could scarcely have avoided associations with current Hellenistic thought, where the term "*Logos*" played a key role both in Stoic thought and in the work of Hellenistic Jewish thinkers such as Philo.

Some have argued that the Greek world provides the main source for its interpretation. Indeed, Bultmann stresses Hellenistic sources to the virtual exclusion of Hebraic antecedents for John's use of the word "*Logos*."⁸ While recognizing both influences, C. H. Dodd argues that John's adoption of the term deliberately reflects the ambiguity of the word in Judaism, employing a Greek philosophical term that captures both immanent and transcendent dimensions of meaning, all within a decidedly Christian framework.⁹ Others, such as Ladd, Morris, Beasley-Murray, and Ridderbos, extensively develop Old Testament and Wisdom backgrounds.¹⁰

They argue, moreover, that while the Hellenistic connotations are inevitable and useful for drawing the attention of a wide range of first-century audiences, these associations are secondary and in some respects incidental, since the Fourth Gospel's employment of the term

turns out to be quite contrary to a Hellenistic worldview, as well as in some ways quite distinct from previous Jewish uses. Leon Morris puts it this way:

John could scarcely have used the Greek term without arousing in the minds of those who used the Greek language thought of something supremely great in the universe. But though he could not have been unmindful of the association aroused by the term, his thought does not arrive from the Greek background. His Gospel shows little trace of acquaintance with Greek philosophy and even less dependence on it. And the really important thing is that John, in his use of the Logos, is cutting clean across one of the fundamentals of Greek ideas.[11](#)

Beasley-Murray agrees, and sees Johannine usage as indicative of the Evangelist's acumen in communicating the Gospel and its distinctive message within the philosophical and cultural context of his time:

The remarkable feature of this presentation is that it employs categories universally known, possessing universal appeal, which would attract and have attracted alike Jews, Christians, pagans, Hellenists and Orientals in their varied cultures, followers of ancient and modern religions, philosophers and people of humble status who were seekers after God.[12](#)

Here we might also notice the relationship of the Prologue to the rest of the Gospel. It is unmistakable that a number of Johannine terms are being introduced here ("life," "light," 1:5; "believe," 1:7; "world," 1:9; "children of God," 1:12; "flesh," 1:14; "truth," 1:14). The author of the Prologue incorporates these important concepts in an introductory fashion, and also identifies their relationship to the Logos, whose portrayal is decidedly at the centre of his concern.

The Prologue also introduces the figure of John the Baptist (1:6). He is apparently known by the community being addressed and held in high regard by them, so that a clear delimitation of his role and status in relationship to the Logos is needed (1:6-8, 15, and later 1:19-28). Yet in some ways these explanatory comments interrupt the flow of the earlier liturgical sections, raising questions of composition. If we accept Brown's explanation that the Gospel was composed in several stages,[13](#) and see the hymn material of the Prologue (1:1-5, 10-12, 14, 16)

as a late addition of a final redactor to a work that originally began with 1:6 and 19, a possible explanation emerges. That is, it becomes possible to see the interspersing of these comments regarding the Baptist within the hymn-like material of the Prologue as an attempt to interweave together the earlier and later introductory materials. While such a proposal is necessarily speculative, the logical progression of thought between 1:6-8 and 19 appears to support such a suggestion.¹⁴ In addition, there are Old Testament parallels for beginning narrative accounts with a construction similar to the one we find in 1:6 (e.g., Judges 13:2; 1 Sam 1:1). This leaves open the possibility that in its earliest form, the introduction to John's Gospel may have begun with 1:6-8.

Analysis

1. The Word in the Beginning (1:1-5)

A. 1:1-2 The Word and God

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*¹⁵

While the focus of the Prologue is on God in relation to humankind, rather than God in relation to Himself, the first two verses are the closest to an intra-Trinitarian description that we have in this material. Even here, however, the reference to the "Word" is difficult to separate from the language of Genesis 1, with its echoes of "in the beginning" and a creative "Word" which called all things into being. Cullmann argues that their common interest in the self-communication of God establishes a clear relationship between these two texts.¹⁶ It is also quite possible, given John's tendency to use expressions that are intended to be taken in more than one way, that the phrase "in the beginning" combines both a temporal sense ("in the beginning of history") and a cosmological sense ("at the root of the universe").¹⁷

According to Ridderbos, however, the scope and implications of the Johannine introduction move well beyond Genesis:

one can say that the words "in the beginning" in John 1 have a broader meaning than they do in Genesis 1 and they refer to something "behind"

Genesis, so to speak. They refer to the Word and to the Word's existence "before the world was made," as a being distinct from God. This also implies, meanwhile, that the "in the beginning" of Jn 1:1ff. transcends by far that of Genesis 1:1ff., and cannot be explained on the basis of Genesis 1. For between Genesis 1 and John 1 lies the Christ event.[18](#)

In summary, the opening verses leave little doubt that the Logos is identified as being equal in divine status to that of God, and is fully God, so that what will be said about the Logos will be said, in the fullest sense, of God.

B. The Word and Creation (1:3-5)

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The remainder of this first section (1:3-5) is introduced by *panta*, a Greek word that figures prominently in several other New Testament hymn-like passages (Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6), all of them Pauline. These passages all describe the comprehensive character of Christ's work of redemption: here, the phrasing of 1:3 is best seen as an expansion of the activity of the Logos in creation, with the restatement of 1:3b emphasizing the all-inclusive character of the involvement of the Logos.

The word "life" (*zoe*) is one of a number of terms laden with meaning in John.[19](#) While the sense of "eternal life," its most common meaning in the Gospel, seems at first difficult to apply here, a consideration of the creational basis for this concept makes it quite acceptable, for the Logos is from the beginning, the source of all life (cf. Gen 2:7, 9; 3:22; also Rev 22:2). The use of the word directs us to the close connection between life and light in the giving and sustaining of life (John 8:12; cf. Ps 13:3; 27:1; 56:13; 89:15).[20](#)

The translation of the following verse (1:5) requires some discussion. The NIV translates the verb *katalambano* as "understood" ("and the darkness has not *understood* it"). While this is certainly within the range of word's meaning[21](#), it may be difficult to attribute the predicate "understanding" to darkness. The sense of "mastering" (NEB) or

"overcoming" the darkness (so Brown, Delling) is probably better here.²² Despite the fall of the creation into rebellion and sin, the work of the Logos was not extinguished, but rather continued. Taken in another sense, the word may refer to the opposition experienced by Jesus during his ministry, and the inability of his opponents to thwart his mission.

II. The Coming of the Word as the Light of the World (1:6-13)

A. 1:6-9 The Word and John the Baptist

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

With 1:6-8, we move to material that many, including Brown, see as an explanatory insertion displaced from its original position prior to the material of 1:19ff. Brown argues that one of the main reasons for the writing of the Fourth gospel was in order to correct a sectarian group within the writer's audience who regarded John the Baptist as the Messiah, or at least as being equal in status to him.²³ This is clearly the force of the argument presented in this section and further developed in the latter part of the chapter. This is not to say that the Gospel does not at the same time accord John and his role appropriate recognition and respect; nor should this polemical purpose be seen to eclipse other, equally important motivations for the Evangelist's writing.²⁴

While providing a transition into the hymn materials to follow, 1:9 also draws attention once more to "light," a prominent Messianic theme in the Old Testament prophetic tradition (esp. Isa 9:2; 42:6; 40:1-2; cf. Matt 4:16). As one commentator notes, the description of the light as "true" (Gr., *alethinon*) is at first puzzling, since the term has no foil in the Fourth Gospel; that is, a "false" or lesser light. Perhaps the best explanation for John's use of this description is the well-established tradition in Judaism that regarded the Torah as symbolized by light, to which the evangelist now contrasts the final and true (that is, the real and eternal) revelation of God's light.²⁵

B. 1:10-13 The World's Response to the Word

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Interpreters have understood 1:10-12b in a number of quite different ways. If the passage is read as referring to the Old Testament presence of the Logos among his people (whether in the Torah or through divine spokespersons such as prophets and leaders), it forms a chronological bridge between the Creation strophe of 1:1-5 and the Incarnation reported in 1:14. Yet such a reading would interrupt the chronological sequence of the Prologue, since John the Baptist has already been mentioned in 1:6-8. It would also seem to suggest that the final redactor (rather surprisingly) misunderstood 1:10-12b when he placed it here. A further problem, as Ridderbos points out, has to do with believers becoming "children of God," which elsewhere in John's Gospel seems to be exclusively connected to the coming of Jesus. If this is the case, this section cannot refer to anyone other than believing Christians in John's own audience, and certainly not to Old Testament believers.²⁶ On the other hand, Dodd argues that the Old Testament does sometimes identify the people Israel as the "children" (Deut 14:1) or "son/sons" of God (Ps. 82:6, Hos 1:10), or collectively as his "Son" (Hosea 11:1). Moreover, the concept of sonship in the Old Testament is closely related to obedience and faithfulness, not merely to filial relationships themselves.

A second possibility is that we find here an initial reference to the career of Jesus of Nazareth, and in particular to the contrast between lack of recognition on the part of Jesus' enemies and detractors (e.g. John 9:35-41) and recognition of the Incarnate Word among the Johannine circle (as in the classic statement of 1:14). On such a view, verses 10-12b parallel the career of Jesus (e.g. compare 1:11b with 4:44; 12:37) and provide a short summary of both the Book of Signs (John 2-12) in 1:11, and the Book of Glory (John 13-20) in 1:12. The objection that such a reading of the poetic materials ignores Old Testament background material is not as telling as it first sounds, since both Phil 2:6-11 and Col 1:15-20 do much the same thing. This is a difficult problem, and both readings appear possible. If one sense must be chosen, the second proposal seems the stronger of the two, though it is also likely that the

writer did not have the first very far from his mind. Those who argue that the evangelist had a dual purpose, referring simultaneously both to the relationship of the Logos with creation and Israel, and to its Incarnation in the ministry of Jesus, may well be right.[27](#)

The word *kosmos* ("world"), first introduced in 1:9, is now explained further, in a resumption of the staircase poetic structure from 1:1-5. The word is repeated three times, in order to explain that the creation of 1:3 (and here particularly the human domain of that creation) rather painfully and inexplicably rejected the Logos on his appearance.[28](#) This lack of recognition (not "seeing"), by some in Jesus' audience will be an important theme later in the Gospel (e.g. 9:35-41; 11:9, 40; 12:37-45; also 1:14). In contrast to the Gnostic conception of "*kosmos*" as inherently evil in its very existence and origins, John has in view a qualitative or ethical interpretation of the *kosmos* both here and in reference to darkness (Gr. *skotia*) in 1:5:

Rather, men are *kosmos* and *skotia* by virtue of their being God's creation and the place and object of the saving revelation; they are *kosmos* and *skotia* because they have made themselves independent of God, and correspondingly the *skotia* is the darkness of lies and sin.[29](#)

The remainder of the middle section (1:11-13) expands on this theme and narrows the focus of the "rejection" motif. The term "his own" (Gr. *idia, idioi*) is used in two senses. The first reference in the neuter plural ("that which was his own," NIV; "his own things," NRSV) refers in a general way to the place which he has made, the creation. The second use is in the masculine plural, i.e. "his own (people)" – either humanity (1:3, 4) or, more specifically, Israel – who were brought into being through him (2 Sam 5:2, Ps 33:12, Isa 1:3, Jer 31:33).[30](#) But Jesus' coming will not be met with complete rejection. The section concludes on the note of hope, emphasizing the possibility for those who believe to be born anew and recreated through the same God who brought all of creation into being. The triple negative construction ("not of human descent, nor of human decision, nor a husband's will" in 1:13, NIV) heightens the contrast between conventional, natural processes of the created world, and the newness which Jesus' ministry and salvation program brings into the world (cf. 3:3-8). It should also be noted that the term "believe in" (*pisteuein eis*) is typically Johannine and appears almost 40 times in the Gospel, most often in connection with Jesus (31 times),

and usually in reference to saving faith, as it does here in 1:12.³¹ Those who believe in the Son will thus form a new community of people who will be "his own," in contrast with those who – though they were already his own – did not recognize or believe in him.³²

Many interpreters, including Brown, see 1:13 as an editorial expansion of the original hymn on the basis of its apologetic interest and differing style, together with its focus on the believer, which contrasts with the Logos-centred emphasis of 1:1-5, 10-12 and 14. On the other hand, the content of 12c and 13 are closely connected and reinforced elsewhere in the Johannine writings (cf. 1 John 5:1).

III. The Glory of the Word in the Flesh (1:14-18)

A. 1:14 The Incarnation of the Word

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The final section of the Prologue draws together the various elements introduced to this point. Attention now shifts to the centrality of the Incarnation and its implications. For the first time since 1:1, the term *Logos*, "Word," is restated, emphasizing the movement from the cosmological dimensions of the term (in 1:1) to the temporal experience and conviction of the present Johannine community. This movement is also apparent in John's use of the verb "to become" (*ginomai*) in place of "to be," signalling that the Word has taken on a new form in a dramatic and comprehensive way. Beasley-Murray takes this language to imply a flat rejection of any sort of docetism, whether ancient or modern.³³

The meaning of "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*) has received much attention. Bultmann has contended rather forcefully for the view that the flesh is significant as the *only* locus for the glory of the Logos, much of which thus remains in a certain hiddenness.³⁴ However, the emphasis seems to be more on a juxtaposition in 1:1c and 1:14a of the *Logos* in its two different settings: paradoxically, the Word was fully God and is now completely "flesh," but both are equally true.³⁵ A second parallel can be discerned between 1:1b ("was with God") and 1:14b ("made his dwelling among us"). The verb used here – "to make one's dwelling" (Gr. *skenoo*) – draws on the Exodus traditions of a God who once lived among his people in the

Tabernacle (Exodus 33) and made his glory visible to his people there (Exodus 40:34; cf. 1 Kings 8:11, regarding the temple dedication). This theme continues in prophetic literature (Joel 3:17, Zech 2:10, Ezek 37:27, 43:7) and is weighted with associations grounded in the entire history of the Old Testament covenant with Israel.³⁶

In addition to seeing/recognition (1:10), the important concept of "glory" (*doxa*) is now introduced. This is another of the special terms that Brown identifies in the Fourth Gospel, occurring here 35 out of a total 185 instances in the New Testament. It is also deeply rooted in the Old Testament (Hebrew *kabod*), and embodies the dual sense of God's ruling divinity made visible through observable actions of great power.³⁷ While for John this glory is visible in Jesus' statements and signs (many of which fulfill or supersede important elements in the Old Testament), it is most evident in Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension in the second Book of Glory.³⁸ Moreover, a close linkage here between *skenoo* and *doxa* ("the Word... *dwelt* among us, and we have seen his *glory*") may allude to the fulfillment of the "new covenant" promises regarding the coming nearness of God to his people in a way that will replace both tabernacle and temple. Such images carry through into the apocalyptic New Testament hope (Ezek 44:4, Rev 7:15, 21:3).

The word *monogenous* has long been translated "only begotten," an expression linked closely to Trinitarian procession theology. It has recently come to be seen more in terms of Jesus' unique relationship with the Father, emphasizing obedience and faithfulness to his purpose more than ontological relationship, important as the latter may be for other New Testament texts and early Christian thought in general. The NIV renders it as "the One and Only," capturing the incomparable status of the Son in the eyes of the Father.³⁹ Together with "son" (*huios*), it reflects a characteristically Johannine way of referring to Jesus.

The couplet "grace and truth" (*charitos kai aletheias*; also in 1:17) contains the last of the richly connotative words employed in this decisive statement. The two terms echo the Hebrew pairing of "steadfast love" and "truth" (Heb. *hesed, emet*) which are central in the covenantal self-disclosure of God in the Old Testament. A full consideration of these terms is beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, the fact that for a third time the writer uses terminology that is of signal importance in Exodus (cf. 34:6) and used throughout the Old Testament

covenant (cf. also Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13), alerts us to his intentions in presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of God's previous revelation to Israel and of the hope of a second Exodus revelation.⁴⁰ Taken cumulatively, the language of 1:14 certainly validates the observation made by several that in an important sense, the writer is accomplishing here what the Synoptic gospels will set forth in their own accounts by means of the Transfiguration.⁴¹

B. 1:15 The Testimony of John the Baptist

John testifies [NRSV testified] to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'"

The use of the present tense ("testifies", Gr. *marturei*) in the introduction of John's testimony to the Christ emphasizes its enduring character, and its importance both for John's community of believers and for the audience he now addresses. The reference to John the Baptist roots the Prologue in the historical present, reinforcing the fact that the Incarnation has accomplished nothing less than to connect the eternal God with concrete people and events in human life and history that are immediately recognizable and significant to his audience. Even more importantly, however, John bears witness to the pre-existence of Jesus ("he was before me") and reinforces the contention of the Prologue that Jesus and the Logos are one and the same. By contrast, when the Synoptics record John the Baptist's words, they focus on his identification of Jesus as "the one who comes after me."⁴²

C. 1:16-17 The Superiority of the Incarnate Word

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

It seems clear that no denigration of the Mosaic law is intended either in 1:17 or elsewhere in the Gospel; instead, the focus is on the increasingly abundant grace (Gr. *charis*, not found in John's Gospel outside the Prologue; vv. 14, 16, 17) received by the believing community. The double use of the word can imply accumulation and plenitude ("one blessing after another," NIV) or even replacement, with the idea of one reality superseding another.⁴³ Here, it seems to refer to gracious blessings which now continue in the revelation of God's covenant

"faithfulness and truth" (*charis kai...aletheia*; so also 1:14) through Jesus Christ. The human and historical identity of the Logos is here revealed for the first time, near the conclusion of the Prologue, in a form similar to the hymn of Philippians 2:10-11, where it is also similarly employed as a concluding, doxological, statement.[44](#)

D. 1:18 The Revelation of the Father

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

This final verse serves both as the conclusion to the Prologue and as an introduction to the remainder of the Gospel: Jesus' task as the incarnate Son will be to make known (Gr. *exegesthai*) the Father.[45](#) In contrast to even the most revered of Old Testament figures such as Moses (Exod 32:18) and Isaiah (Isa 6:5), Jesus has seen God (John 5:37, 6:46). The NIV translation of this phrase, "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known," reinforces the total identification of Jesus and God in 1:1c. Finally, the phrase *eis ton kolpon tou patros* (NRSV "close to the Father's heart") makes concrete the intimate relationship between Father and Son referred to ontologically in 1:1b and 1:2. This type of inclusionary encapsulation is a feature of Johannine style throughout the Gospel, and here serves as a clear and emphatic reiteration of Jesus' divinity.

Conclusion

The development of the Prologue's main contours can be viewed from two angles. In one sense, John is concerned to juxtapose the eternal, supra-temporal realm of God with the historical realm that encompasses the everyday affairs of human beings, mere creatures of flesh and blood. In so doing, the Prologue lays the foundation for the development of the "realized eschatology" of the Fourth Gospel. When, for example, John will later speak of life in the sense of "eternal" life, the Prologue has already established that in Jesus, the eternal God and source of life from the beginning is present among men and women for that very purpose. The testimony of the writer is that in Jesus, God enters into all of the ambiguities, difficulties, and trials of the human condition: he comes to live among his people as one of them, revealing

God first hand, and offering new life as the source of life from the beginning.[46](#)

In another sense, there is also development in this description of the Logos as coming into steadily closer proximity to His people. Beginning in the realm of cosmology and ontology, the writer relates the Logos in turn to God (1:1, 2); creation (1:3-5); the world and its response (1:6-9); his own people (10, 11); his children (12-13); a specific circle of disciples and witnesses (1:14); and a particular historical person, Jesus Christ (1:17). Finally, in v. 18 the intimacy of the relationship of the Logos to the Father is re-emphasized in language similar to that used in 13:23-25 to describe the intimacy between "the beloved disciple" and Jesus himself.[47](#)

Contemporary Implications

The Prologue addresses the contemporary reader in a number of respects. From the outset, it sets out the scope of the redemptive plan of God as being closely connected with God's creative activity. The *Logos* in whom "all things" were created is now the one who comes in human form for the redemption of that creation through his death and resurrection. It is in doing this that he is fully glorified. Here, then, is a clear statement of what Paul will explain further in Colossians 1:19-20: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things." Just as John's careful use of the term *Logos* is addressed to the Gnostic reader, leaving open no possibility of cosmological dualism, so today the implications of Jesus' work have the power to bring new life and light to all dimensions of human life that have been darkened by sin. In his now classic assessment, the British writer Harry Blamires has lamented the loss of "the Christian mind," arguing that Christians in this era have allowed the application of Christian truth to become too narrow. Instead, he says, we need to see that "to think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to [human] eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God."[48](#) Utilizing terminology and language that communicated widely across diverse ways of first century thinking when it was first written, the Prologue is a model and a summons to the contemporary Christian to think carefully and deeply

about the implications of the Incarnation and to apply this concept in all its comprehensiveness to the issues of our day.

John's presentation of the *Logos* who is Jesus Christ moves from God who is the Creator in the beginning, to God who reveals the Father because He knows the Father intimately. The way to sharing in this intimacy with the Father and becoming children of God (1:12) lies in believing (Gr. *pisteuein*). Throughout the Fourth Gospel, this belief (often to believe *in, eis*) is understood as an active commitment, one which "involves a willingness to respond to God's demands as they are presented in and by Jesus."⁴⁹ This willingness to respond to Jesus is depicted here in the Prologue (1:12,13); repeated throughout the gospel (e.g. 2:11, 22; 3:16-18; 4:39, 53; 5:24; 7:31, 38 ; 8:30; 9:38, 10:42; 11:40; 12:42; 20:8), and reiterated in one of the two summary statements at the end of the book (20:30-31). For all its broad, cosmic scope, the Prologue presents a direct and personal question to readers of all times: will the one who reads believe, and share in the fullness of grace given by the One who has come from the Father to dwell alongside us?

WORKS CITED

Beasley-Murray, George. *John*. Waco: Word, 1987.

Blamires, Harry. *The Christian Mind*. London: SPCK, 1963.

Brown, Raymond E. "The Gospel According to John." In *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997. 333-382.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John*. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Bruce, F. F. *The Message of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John*. Tr. G. R. Beasley Murray *et al.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971.

Bultmann, Rudolf. "αληθεια"; "ζαω." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; tr. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985. 37-40, 290-296.

Culpepper, R. Alan. *The Gospel and Letters of John*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Delling, G. "λαμβανω." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; tr. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985. 495-97.

Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Gingrich, F. Wilbur. *A Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Ladd, G. E. "The Fourth Gospel." In *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974. 213-309.

Longenecker, Richard N. *New Wine into Fresh Wineskins*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.

Longenecker, Richard N. "The One and Only Son." In *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*. Ed. Kenneth L. Barker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. 119-26.

Marshall, I. Howard. "John, Gospel of." *New Bible Dictionary, Second Edition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982. 606-12.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

Morris, Leon. *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.

O' Day, Gail R. *The Gospel of John*. The New Interpreters Bible. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

Ridderbos, Herman. *The Gospel According to John*. Tr. John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Sanders, J. M. "John, Gospel of." *Interpreters Dictionary of The Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. 11.632-46.

Smalley, Stephen S. "John, The Gospel According to." *Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993. 373-77.

Smith, D. M. "John, Gospel of." *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.482-86.