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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN, ACCESS TO GOD, AT THE OBSCURE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

For eighteen centuries the Christian church believed that the fourth gospel was drawn up by the son of Zebedee, John, when the latter lived in Ephesus in his old age. As Clement of Alexandria suggests (II-III century) the beloved disciple wanted to emphasize the divine nature of the Son of which the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke had marked the historical insertion and the human nature.¹

For centuries, ever since theologians, Protestant and Catholic, became historians, the difficulties of this excellent, too excellent, solution have come to light. How can we explain the

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposes*, VI, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, VI, 14, 7.

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considerable differences between the three synoptic gospels and the gospel of John, if the author was an eye witness (we are reminded of the sayings of Jesus centered on the *Kingdom* in the synoptics, on the *Son* in the fourth gospel)? Moreover, what proof is there that the gospel of John *completes* the synoptics? And if he was determined to *correct* them by making Jesus much more divine than the latter did? The exegetists have drawn attention to the Johannine accounts of Gethsemane and the Passion in which any trace of Jesus's fear, indeed his suffering, is eliminated (see John 12, 23-28 and John 18, 19). And the church historians teach us that the first commentators of the fourth gospel were marginal Christians, Gnostic Christians, attached to the spiritual meaning of the texts, hostile to history and the incarnation.² We must also not forget that John's gospel is the fourth in the New Testament and always has been: this is an indication of a certain delay in the process of canonization. It could be that the Christians of the high church had finally admitted a gospel in their collection of sacred writings of which they wanted to deprive the Gnostics and correct the interpretation. Then the questions multiply: first, what is the *origin* of this writing and its authors; second, what is its *aim*; and third, what *message* did they want to transmit?

I. AT THE ORIGIN OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

The first Christians loved each other and favored communal life. But contrary to what is often believed, if the unity of the Church was in a certain sense founded on Christ, on the historical and practical level it had to be sought. Far from being an accomplished fact, it had to be conquered. That is, primitive Christianity was not monolithic: its history is that of dispersed groups, separated by distances that no jet airplane could cover in an hour, cut off from each other by linguistic barriers (Aramaic, Greek, later Coptic and Latin), then ethnic, after the mission took the risk of opening the doors of the Church to non-Jews. Through the Acts of

² Particularly the Gnostic Heracleon. Cf. J.M. Poffet, *La méthode exégétique d'Héracléon et d'Origène commentateurs de Jn. 4: Jésus, la Samaritaine et les Samaritains* (Paradosis 28), Fribourg, Switzerland, 1985.

the Apostles and the Pauline letters, historians know two of these primitive Christian groups: the one of the Twelve that undertook the evangelization of Palestine from Jerusalem, that is, Aramaic-speaking Jews, and the Hellenistic group, with which must be associated Barnabas and Paul, who addressed the gospel to Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem but especially in Antioch, and then to the Greeks (see Acts 1-12). We know the efforts agreed upon by the various groups to arrive at a certain unity, especially with regard to the mission (see Acts 15; the Jerusalem conference decided that it was no longer necessary to be a Jew in order to be a Christian). But we also know through the argument of Paul with Peter (Galatians 2, 11-14) that unity was not easy to maintain, the Judeo-Christians always being capable of a relapse into Judaism and the pagan-Christians of backsliding into laxity and syncretism. The Western churches, Catholic or Protestant, are heirs of this bi-polar Christianity, Jerusalem-Antioch, Peter-Paul. But there were other Christian groups: we know from the New Testament that there were Christians in Galilee (traditions attest to this in the synoptic gospels), others in Samaria, but we are not well informed on them (Acts 9, 3 and 8, 4-25). Communities were undoubtedly established in eastern and southern Palestine, in Syria, in Egypt and elsewhere: unfortunately they have left few traces, not having obtained the victory.³

There are many scholars today who are convinced that John's gospel is the product of one of these mysterious communities. First, some think that this Johannine group or church lived in close contact with the mother church in Jerusalem (this is the opin-

³ On the beginnings of Christianity in Syria see H. Köster, "Gnomai Diaphoroi: Ursprung und Wesen der Mannigfaltigkeit in der Geschichte des frühen Christentums." *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 65, 1968, pp. 160-203. Reprise in H. Köster and J.M. Robinson *Entwicklungslinien durch die Welt des frühen Christentums*, Tübingen, 1971, pp. 107-146. The article first appeared in English in the *Harvard Theological Review* 58 1985, pp. 279-318. The work of H. Köster and J.M. Robinson also exists in an English version. On early Christianity in Egypt see B.A. Pearson, "Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations," in B.A. Pearson and J.E. Goehring, *Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, 1) Philadelphia, 1986, pp. 132-160; A.M. Ritter, "De Polycarpe à Clément; aux origines d'Alexandrie chrétienne" in ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ *Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert*, Paris, 1987, pp. 151-172.

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ion of the majority of Catholic exegetists, from F.M. Braun to A. Jaubert, who have recalled the presence of the great traditions of Israel in the fourth gospel.⁴) Second, others, mostly Protestant, among them E. Kaesemann and I. Schottroff, believe on the other hand that the Johannine group was heretical: John's gospel would be one of the first gnostic writings preserved and Johannine Christology naively Docetic (the gospel presenting Jesus as a divinity rising above historical events).⁵ Third, O. Cullmann and others are no doubt correct in believing in the marginal nature of the Johannine community but one that showed no hostility either in the gospel, the epistles or the Apocalypse (all these writings being the production of the Johannine group) with regard to the Petrine Christianity of Jerusalem and the Pauline Christianity of Antioch. To affirm the difference does not impose a belief in division.⁶

There is no religious movement that does not have at its origin a person of note. The Church was no doubt faithful in memory in associating the son of Zebedee with the genesis of the fourth gospel. The Johannine group is thus the result of John's mission (he had lost his brother, James Major, victim of a persecution in 41-44). Since the book of Acts mentions the presence of John in Samaria (Acts 8, 14) and that John's gospel is concerned with Samaria (John 4) the first field of activity must have been in this marginal area that was ill thought of and criticized by Judaism. It is in this region that certain traditions about Jesus were brought together and used in missionary preaching (it suffices to recall the Samaritan woman, John 4) the baptismal and eucharistic catechism (which is reported in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3); the dialogue on the bread of life; the polemics (here it is worthwhile to re-read the disputes on Abraham's descendants, recorded in John 7, 8, that is, who are the real peo-

⁴ F.M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien (Études bibliques)*, 4 vols., Paris, 1959-1972; A. Jaubert, *Approches de l'Évangile de Jean (Parole de Dieu)* Paris, 1976.

⁵ E. Kaesemann, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, Tübingen, 1971; L. Schottroff, *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, 37) Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970.

⁶ O. Cullmann, *Le milieu joannique. Sa place dans le judaïsme tardif, dans le cercle des disciples de Jésus et dans le Christianisme primitif* (Le Monde de la Bible), Neuchâtel-Paris, 1976.

ple of God?). It also seems that the true bond of Jesus with John the Baptist preoccupied John himself and then his disciples. From this come the importance of traditions relative to John the Baptist in the fourth gospel. If we recall that the Samaritans only recognized the Pentateuch as canonical, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament, we understand that the attention of Johannine Christianity was little drawn by the Prophets and that the Messianic prophecies had not provoked disputes.

This Johannine group in Samaria of 40-60 A.D. had perhaps also spread to Syria, but in any case, like all the Palestinian world of that time, it was cruelly marked by the zealot revolt and the Jewish war against Rome in 66-70. All the Christians of the region asked themselves at that moment: is it our duty to participate in the struggle? The answer of all was the same: our hope is not identical with that of the Jews, it is not nationalist nor tied to the Promised Land. The dialogue between Jesus and Pilate testifies to this: the Christians have a king, but his kingdom is not of this world and there is no obligation to revolt against Roman power (John 18. 33-38). Rather martyrdom than violence.

Eusebius of Caesarea tells us that the Christian community of Jerusalem fled to Transjordan, to Pella,⁷ when the capital was menaced by the Romans. We have every reason to believe that the Johannine community or part of it, directed by its spiritual head, if he was still living, preferred to leave the area of military operations. Three things make us think that they found refuge in Ephesus: first, the ecclesiastic tradition that placed the composition of John's gospel and the apostle's death in Ephesus;⁸

⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, III, 5, 3. See M. Simon, "La migration à Pella. Légende ou réalité." *Recherches de science religieuse* 60, 1972, 37-54, reprise in M. Simon, *Le Christianisme antique et son contexte religieux. Scripta varia* II (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 1. Reihe, 23) Tübingen, 1981, pp. 477-494.

⁸ Polycrates of Ephesus, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, V. 24, 2-3 and III. 31, 2-3; Iraenius of Lyons, *Advertus haereses*, III, 1, 1, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, V, 8, 4; Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, VII, 25, 16 (see also III, 39, 6; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, II, 1, 1 and 23, 1-19; *Théophanie* IV, 7; Jerome *De viris illustribus*, 9 etc; see E. Junod and J.-D. Kaestli, *Acta Johannis*, (Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 1-2) II, Turnhout, 1983, p. 707; 713-715; 564-580; 720-723. These two authors are rather skeptical about the solidity of this tradition. See J.-D. Kaestli, "Le rôle des textes bibliques dans la genèse

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second, the list of churches, all located in Asia with Ephesus at the head, in the letters of chapters 2 and 3 of the canonical Apocalypse of John; third, the presence of Christian disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus according to Acts 19, 1-7. Thus at the end of the first century there were at least two distinct Christian communities in Ephesus, the one founded by Paul in 54 (Acts 19, 1-20) and the community directed by John (who arrived around 70).

To resume, John's gospel was drawn up within a community that was neither Petrine nor Pauline but Johannine, marked by John, son of Zebedee. This community first located in Samaria-Syria was later installed in Ephesus. Marked by the message of John the Baptist and the gospel as preached by Jesus, this community used traditions later collected into the gospel for its missionary, catechetical and cult life.⁹

Now we must turn toward the genesis of the gospel before examining the doctrinal message that these Christians wanted to transmit to us.

II. THE GENESIS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

Two events served as motivation for Johannine traditions: the prophetic activity of Jesus on the one hand, his death and especially his resurrection on the other. Before evoking the influence of gnosis or that of Judaism, as is too often done, it is assuredly the impact that Jesus of Nazareth exercised on his disciples and his tragic destiny that must be recalled.

In the great Johannine discourses, we find vivid traces of the teaching in word and act of Jesus of Nazareth. John the apostle and later his disciples did not forget those fulgent maxims of Sem-

et le développement des légendes apocryphes, le cas du sort final de l'apôtre Jean," *Augustinianum*, 23 (1983) pp. 319-326, especially p. 323, n. 18 (which goes up to p. 324).

⁹ See J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Kapitel 1-10 (Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament, 4, 1). Gütersloh-Würzburg, 1979, pp. 40-51; R.E. Brown, *La communauté du disciple bien-aimé*, translated from the English by F.M. Godefroid (Lectio Divina, 115) Paris, 1983; P. Bonnard, *Les Épîtres johanniques* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament, 2nd series, 13c); Geneva, 1983, pp. 9-13.

itic flavor that we also know through the synoptic gospels: the absolute love of God that goes so far as to give up one's life: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." (John 12, 25); the new and original love that Jesus came to propose and introduce among men: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (John 13, 34).

Among the symbolic acts of Jesus must be pointed out the purification of the Temple, the centurion of Capernaum, the multiplication of the loaves, walking on the water, the anointing in Bethany that we know also from the other gospels.¹⁰

What struck the Johannine community, in addition to the ties uniting it to John the Baptist and the development of the ministry, was the death of Jesus and the questions it posed. For John as for the Synoptics, the cross is inseparable from the resurrection. In fact, it is Easter morning that gives a meaning to the cross and, beyond the cross, a clarification of the proclamation of Jesus.

Since there was a double testimony to the resurrection of Jesus in Palestine—in Jerusalem and in Galilee—through apparitions and the empty tomb, Christians began to report the events of Holy Week and a relation of those events gradually developed an account that was no doubt retold on solemn occasions, perhaps annually on the same days of Jesus's suffering (such is no doubt the origin of the Christian festival of Easter). Thus the genesis of the final chapters of John's gospel (Chapters 18-20) is explained, which have so many points in common with the Synoptics,¹¹ because Peter's disciples and John's disciples were marked in the same way by these fundamental events.

It was not just for historical and biographical reasons that these men and women commemorated the Passion; it was also because they believed that their salvation, that is, their hope for their own resurrection and certitude of everlasting life, had its source there.

More than that of Mark or Matthew, John's gospel attests to an intense reflection on the meaning of the cross. If the adver-

¹⁰ John 2, 13-22; 6, 16-21; 12, 1-8; see Mark 11, 15-17; 6, 45-52; 14, 3-9; and the parallels in Matthew and Luke.

¹¹ Mark 14, 1-16, 8 and the parallels in Matthew and Luke.

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saries of Jesus did not have the last word it was because, in John's mind, the agony of Christ was not simply that of the death of a human being. It was part of a project of God himself. Meditating on this mystery, the Johannine community elaborated an entire terminology, finally an entire theology, to speak of it: the death of Jesus was not an end but a passage, a stage, an access, an elevation; that shameful event was in reality a glorification, the admission to death a return to the Father.¹²

And if God had so willed—thought the Johannine community—it was because behind the man Jesus, the one whose contemporaries, going by appearances, called the son of Joseph and Mary, there was much more than a man, there was the Son of God. The Synoptics, before John, had divined it; all the early Christians, when they called Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, confessed it. But John's gospel developed the primitive reflection on the Son of God. A title attributed to the Davidian Messiah, in Jerusalem it involved no preexistence nor relationship going beyond juridic adoption. The Johannine community said, as for itself, if the cross, this elevation, led Jesus to the Father, it was because it was a return of the one who was formerly with him. Son of God means participating in the divinity of God. Thus the conviction of the belonging of Jesus to the world of God was elaborated in the Johannine group; and all that Judaism said, not of the Messiah but of the Wisdom, the Word or the Justice of God as virtues accompanying God for all eternity and used by God to manifest himself to Israel, the Johannine community took up on its own account to explain and proclaim Jesus, the man of Galilee. We immediately think of the Prologue: "In the beginning was the Word..." (John 1, 1-18) but we also think of "God so loved the world..." (John 3, 16) or of the discourse of Jesus with regard to the bonds between Father and Son.¹³

The Johannine community did not make this reflection on the nature of the Son and his mission independently of its reflection on the destiny of the Church and its believers. The coming of the Son since creation, that he had realized, the creative Word of God up until the elevation of Easter, is closely associated with

¹² See John 13, 1.3.33; 16, 28; 3, 14; 8, 28; 12, 31-32.

¹³ For example, see John 3, 35-36; 5, 19-30; 10, 14-18; 14, 1-14; 17, 23-24.

the destiny of the chosen people and all of humanity, because the Son is the expression of the paternal love of God for humans. Through the Son, the perverted children of God are called upon to find again their origin.¹⁴ The Old Testament episode of the brazen serpent is significant in this regard: the gospel could compare the fate of Jesus on the cross to that of the serpent mounted on a pole in the desert, because when the Israelites turned toward it they were cured.¹⁵

Alongside the historical ministry, the resurrection of Jesus that was attributed to God thus profoundly marked the Johannine community and allowed it to re-read and re-interpret the death of Jesus in the sense of a victory (cf. the crown of thorns¹⁶ and Jesus's preaching on the Kingdom of God in the sense of a revelation of the Son).¹⁷

The powerful motive that was faith in resurrection for the elaboration and re-reading of traditions relative to Jesus was further nourished by the conviction that Jesus was from then on both absent and present. Absent, to the degree in which he had returned to the Father, present to the degree in which he supported his own, through the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, that is, advocate and counsellor.¹⁸

This activity of the Paraclete, announced in the farewell discourses in chapters 14-17, was intense in the Johannine community. It explains the liberty with which the discourses of John adapted and completed the received traditions. The bearers of these traditions did not hesitate to put discourses qualifying the role and nature of the Son (the famous "I am...") into the first person singular.¹⁹ For them, their own discourses were true and authentic because the resurrected Son, present in the Holy Spirit, spoke through their mouths. When Jesus speaks in the gospel,

¹⁴ See John 1, 12-13.

¹⁵ Numbers 21; John 3, 14-15.

¹⁶ John 19, 1-3.

¹⁷ John 5, 31-47.

¹⁸ John 14, 15-31; 15, 26-27; 16, 7-15.

¹⁹ John 6, 35 (the bread of life); 8, 12 (the light of the world); 10, 7.9 (the door of the sheep); 11, 25 (the resurrection and the life); 14, 6 (the way, the truth and the life); 15, 1 (the vine).

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it is the resurrected Christ who expresses himself through his disciples as much as, if not more than, the historical Jesus.

Neither a skeptical nor a spiritual judgment should be drawn from the above remarks. It would be erroneous to believe that John's gospel shows no interest in history and that the only thing that counts in it is the spiritual or symbolic meaning of the events or pronouncements it reports. The episode of the crown of thorns (John 19, 1-3) clarifies this point. The Evangelist insists on recalling the event and has no doubt of its authenticity. But at the same time he constructs a masterly sequence, the appearance of Jesus before Pilate, in seven episodes, that culminates in the crown of thorns and the purple robe, a discreet but precise allusion to the royalty of Jesus that he will assume on the cross, that is, after his accession to the Father.²⁰

Historical interest and theological meaning join and complete each other. History and truth are always present in this genesis of the gospel which, beginning with the cycle of the Passion, amalgamated the traditions concerning John the Baptist and Jesus; a cycle of signs or miracles that constructed itself; discourses of the Son elaborated from a traditional miracle (the man blind from birth, for example, John 9) or from a traditional maxim of Jesus (for example, Nicodemus, John 3); chapters 13-17, farewell discourse due to which the Johannine community located itself (in the figure of the Twelve) and specified what would be the place of Jesus after Easter; the account of the Passion and the Resurrection (John 18-20).²¹

²⁰ The sequence alternates the public scenes, outside the Pretorium, in which the Jews are the principal protagonists, and the scenes that occur inside and in which Jesus speaks with Pilate (John 18, 28-19, 16). The scene of the crown of thorns fourth in the sequence, is situated neither outside nor inside, thus occupying a particular place.

²¹ Ch. 21, which concerns the fate of the principal disciples, has an ecclesiological orientation. In the opinion of almost all the exegetists it is part of the latest stratum of the gospel. We affirm that it was an addition, thanks to several indications. The main one, the end of Ch. 20 is a conclusion and marked at one time the end of the work.

III. THE ESSENTIAL MESSAGE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

The Prologue, though theological, nonetheless uses an image. In verse 18 we read: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (*εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς*)

This image of the bosom we find again in the scene of the Last Supper. The beloved disciple signals this privileged affection through his gesture: he leans on the bosom, this time, of Jesus (John 13, 23).

It is obvious that this gesture designates the closest and most exclusive affection. In Biblical conception, knowledge and affection are equal. To know is to love. To know is also to esteem and appreciate. In saying that the only Son is leaning on the bosom of the Father, the gospel specifies the nature of the knowledge that the Son has of the Father, the kind of explanation, literally "exegesis," that he can give to the one that no man has seen. He loves the Father who also loves Him. They know each other and are united.

This verse of the Prologue is one of the most rigorous expressions of Christian exclusivity.

However, we must note still another aspect: John's gospel completes the picture and states that there is also no immediate access to Jesus. If Jesus is the privileged revealer of the Father, because of the affection that unites them, the beloved disciple, in his turn, is the revealer of the Son, thus of Jesus.

Certainly, the Johannine community did not go so far as to say no man has ever seen the Son, only the beloved disciple, the one who leans on his bosom has known him. It accepts the fact that Jesus had other disciples and that consequently other communities live in contact with Christ through apostolic witness. Nevertheless, it affirms itself in the direct continuity of the Master and the beloved disciple²² and claims for itself the right to exist.

If this community collected and transmitted the traditions relative to Jesus, first orally then in writing, it was for a decisive rea-

²² The beloved disciple is mentioned in John 13, 23-26; 19, 26-27; 20, 2-10; and 21, 7, 20.

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son in their eyes: it was convinced that its first guide, its spiritual leader, had received from Jesus himself the revelation allowing access to God. And since this beloved disciple was dead, it was essential to preserve carefully, orally and in writing, this inestimable heritage.

In their eyes, it was no less than a matter of salvation. In addition, this is what is said in the conclusion of the gospel: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20, 30-31).

Intended for community reading as for individual reading, reading for edification and missionary reading, John’s gospel claims to open a door onto eternal life, because it is the testimony of the beloved disciple collected by his community, a community that lived intimately with a master having himself had this access to and direct contact with Christ.

The claim is extreme. We understand that it could not leave Jewish theologians and Roman authorities indifferent. The trustees of the traditions of Sinai and the holders of Roman power could only refuse this message and move toward the trial of Jesus and then the persecution of the Christians. Unless of course they became converts and admitted the truth of the gospel, prepared through the repeated appeals of Christ, Word of God, addressed to Abraham and Moses (since for the Johannine community it is the Son who from the Creation collaborates with the Father and who, as Wisdom,²³ participates in these first unfruitful efforts of revelation: “And his own received him not.” John 1, 11).

For the gospel, the Word made flesh, that is, the incarnation of the Son (John 1, 14) is the great saving gesture of God who gave his Son for the salvation of the world (John 3, 16). Come among men, the Johannine group believes, the only Son who has seen the Father, who knows who the Father is, what He is, what He wants, what He offers; this Son attests, speaks, cures, gives faith, life, knowledge, sight. All the miracles of the Son are only

²³ See Proverbs 8, 22-30; Wisdom of Solomon 7, 21-8, 1.

signs of this new relationship that is offered to believers and that the latter are called to accept through faith.²⁴

We willingly speak of concentration a propos of John's gospel. And this concentration is explained by the importance of the stakes: all the discussions turn around the person of Jesus. He is the Son, the only access to God. Everything turns around the life He offers, because it is the only truly decisive reality for the readers, the disciples. Everything turns around the truth and this testimony of the Son, transmitted by the beloved disciple because only this testimony can place the faithful on the right way. Obedience to such or such a commandment of the Law, the attitude of Jesus in such or such a circumstance, everything that has to do with detail and contingency is resolutely set aside. It is not experience that matters, nor scholarly knowledge, nor intention, nor good sense, nor traditions, but a message of revelation that cannot be demonstrated and yet imposes itself by its charge of hope, the amount of faith it arouses, the current of love it causes to circulate.

The Father loves the Son; the Son is bound throughout eternity to the Father. The Father loves the creation that is his work, a creation realized through the intermediary of the Son. Unfortunately, obscurity, disobedience, hate, violence, death prevent every human being from acceding to the love of the Father. Supreme act of the Father, following his creative act, the sending of the Son as final revealer rejected by his own but welcomed by his disciples, particularly by the beloved disciple. Thus through the apostolic message addressed to men and women, to "us" as the Prologue says,²⁵ is given the power (for knowledge and faith are love and power) to become "children of God" through faith in his name.²⁶

²⁴ To understand what the sign means (miraculous event attesting to the new world) see John 2, 11; 4, 54; 12, 37; 20, 30-31. See X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean*, 1 (*Parole de Dieu*) Paris, 1988, pp. 208-213 and W. J. Bittner, *Jesu Zeichen im Johannesevangelium. Die Messias-Erkenntnis im Johannesevangelium vor ihrem jüdischen Hintergrund* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe, 26) Tübingen, 1987.

²⁵ The "we" is used twice at the end of the Prologue (John 1, 14, 16).

²⁶ John 1, 12.

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It is this message, in fundamental agreement with the confession of faith of Jerusalem (“Jesus is the Messiah”) and that of Antioch (“Jesus is the Lord”) that the Johannine community somewhere in Samaria, in Syria and then in Ephesus, addresses to those who would hear. Such is the access to God, the unknown and known God, that no man has ever seen, but that each one can encounter, such is the access to God that, in the obscure fringes of primitive Christianity, the Johannine community offered and continues today to offer; recopied from generation to generation,²⁷ translated and preached, John’s gospel still today²⁸ rallies Christians.

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²⁷ Notice how carefully the text is copied in the oldest manuscript of John’s gospel that has come down to us, the Bodmer Papyrus II in the Bodmer Foundation in Cologny, near Geneva. This manuscript is dated around 200 A.D.

²⁸ Recent works devoted to John’s gospel are innumerable. Aside from the studies relative to the origin of the gospel and Johannine communities, already noted, I mention the formal analyses of the entirety of the gospel, particularly R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design*, Philadelphia, 1983. The reader may get information in two recent cases on the question. J. Becker, “Das Johannesevangelium im Streit der Methoden (1980-1984)”, *Theologische Rundschau* 51, 1986, pp. 1-78; and X. Léon-Dufour, “Bulletin d’exégèse du Nouveau Testament. L’Évangile de Jean,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 75, 1987, 77-96.