

**The Glory and the Hour of Jesus: Realized
Eschatology in the Fourth Gospel**

by

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John and Peter - Albrecht Dürer (Magnoliabox.com)

Peter, until you get the Word we are going to keep going over this! At supper Jesus said:

*“Father, the hour has come; glorify your
Son so that the Son may glorify you.”*

ST. JOHN

John wandering over the face of the earth

.....

And Him evermore I behold
 Walking in Galilee,
 Through the cornfield's waving gold,
 In hamlet, in wood, and in wold,
 By the shores of the Beautiful Sea.
 He toucheth the sightless eyes;
 Before him the demons flee;
 To the dead He sayeth: Arise!
 To the living: Follow me!
 And that voice still soundeth on
 From the centuries that are gone,¹
 To the centuries that shall be!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

A ROCK OPERA

Sometimes music, or a movie, or maybe words show up to portray or carry the weight of what life is all about – and maybe transform poetry into the same thing. It took me awhile to find the place where the music and words keep sounding (pounding) in my ears. I keep hearing “the power and the glory, the power and the glory” – it didn’t take me long to find it the Rock Opera “Jesus Christ Superstar” - which Jeanne and I saw in New York city back in the early 70’s.

There is a vivacious, spirited, and animated dance by the ensemble titled “Simon Zealotes” in the play handout and these words with the music will forever float around in my head:

There must be over fifty thousand
 Screaming love and more for you...
 You will rise to a greater power
 We will win ourselves a home
 You’ll get the power and the glory
 You’ll get the power and the glory
 For ever and ever and ever
 Amen! Amen!

Then, next Jesus in his song “Poor Jerusalem”
 Neither you Simon, nor the fifty thousand...
 Understand what power is
 Understand what glory is...
 To conquer death you only have to die
 You only have to die

¹ The highlight reflects the term eschatological with “that voice still soundeth” – alive then, alive NOW.

Here we go!

More than one commentator has compared John with a stream or pool of water: “I like the comparison of John’s Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim” (Morris, 1971, p. 7) and “The Gospel according to John has been described as a stream in which a child can wade or an elephant can swim” (Anderson, 2011, p. 1)². This paper will expand the pool or stream and visualize it as a length of life (or time) that goes from the Alpha to the Omega. The length then could be a minute, an hour, four-score and ten, or a life time but at the same moment it could be from Jesus’ time to the present now. The point is on the one hand we can count the minutes and days in an historical era or we can count the cosmic time of the era as in God’s time. This idea will play an important part in understanding the word “eschatology” as this cosmic time in John’s Gospel could have happened in Jesus’ time but it could also happen in the now – and be the same event ”...the learner (believer) will find the 1st century Words I AM (ἰμ) leave us with no disadvantage now” (Clark-Soles). Therefore, on either end of the stream of water and either 2,000 years ago or today, the words “I that speak unto thee, am He” is the same Jesus.

Let me say again what I just said in the first paragraph – this methodology above was the whole paper. We are talking about stories in the Fourth Gospel and we can get into the stories as deep as we want to because the water goes from shallow to deep. This same stream of abundant life is as live today as it was in the beginning of time. Therefore the clock is in cosmic or God’s time. We will discuss our/The eschatological hero of the New Testament (Jesus) and review some of the stories and verses – especially those that include the words “Glory” and “Hour” as these just didn’t happen in history but they are as eschatological today as they were when Jesus walked on earth. What this means is we will go from His Glory and His Hour in the shallow water (perhaps) to deeper water in the stream and see and feel the abundant life Jesus was tasked to reveal to us...eschatologically this is the same stream then as it is now and it is the same offer of life to us today as was to the people in Jesus’ time.

Plan

As we explore St. John in the timeless stream of life be aware of the neo-theological influence of commentators like Bultmann, Knox, Kysar, and others. Be aware of the short but significant remarks on the differences in John and the Synoptic Gospels. I shall work on dealing with these authors and issues in sections but they may appear to be scattered and I apologize; however, the plan is to go from shallow to deep with the words “Glory,” “Hour,” and “Realized Eschatology.” Some of the questions in this paper deal with:

1. What is the significance in the words “glory” and “hour” in John’s Gospel?
2. What was the task of Jesus in John’s Gospel? When did he achieve his “Glory”?
3. What is the judgment of Jesus? What event was his Exaltation? What was His story?

² Anderson cites Augustine, Pope Gregory the Great, and Paul Brackman to this statement.

Dictionary for “**glory**” [; doxan = honor]

Noun as high renown or honor won by notable achievements. Synonyms:
renown, fame, prestige, honor, distinction, kudos, eminence, acclaim, praise, celebrity, recognition, reputation, exaltation, radiance, halo

Noun for magnificence or great beauty. Synonyms:
magnificence, splendor, resplendence, grandeur, majesty, greatness, nobility, opulence, beauty, elegance

Examples to test/comprehend/understand the deep meaning of the word “glory.”

1:14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his **glory**(eminence), the **glory** (nobility) as of a father’s own son...

5:41 I do not accept **glory** (fame) from human beings...⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept **glory** (acclaim) from one another and do not seek the **glory** (recognition) that comes from the one who alone is God?

7:18 Those who speak on their own seek their own **glory** (renown); but the one who seeks the **glory** (honor) of him who sent him is true...

17:4 I **glorified (exalted) you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ So now, Father, **glorify** (honor) me in your won presence with the **glory** (grandeur) that I had in your presence before the world existed.

Examples for “**hour**”

2 ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My **hour** has not yet come.”

4 ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the **hour** is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...²³ But the **hour** is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”

5 ²⁵“Very truly, I tell you, the **hour** is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

8 ³⁰Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his **hour** had not yet come.

12 ²³Jesus answered them, “The **hour** has come for the Son of Man to be **glorified**.

12 ²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this **hour**’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this **hour**.

13 ¹Now before the festival of the Passover, **Jesus knew** that his **hour** had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.

18 ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?"

19 ²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."

The Scripture quotes are a start to show just about how many and of what kind of "Glory" and "Hour" the Book of John is dealing with. The questions asked earlier will be explicated in the pages out of Bultmann's book II of "Theology of the new Testament." These pages as I will say are the most succinct pages in his works.

Let it be said I am not trying to change, proselyte, or convince anyone with the stand taken in this paper or am I trying to change or manipulate any reader; however, this paper rendering will probably be more helpful to me than anyone as the spiritual growth has been rewarding. Of course, I hope it is rewarding to you. It is "written so that you might come to believe."

Herr Bultmann reads like a grandfather to me and listening to him for all these years has led me to have great appreciation for his professorial and neo-theological insight in taking the Greek and making determinations where someone has added in their own or ecclesiastical comments. For sure, when we see in John the words for instance "on that day" we know – thanks to Bultmann – that the words were added or redacted.

Bultmann has reordered the chapters and I have this reorder on my Web site – for what it is worth.

The title is toward the study of "Glory" and "Hour" and deals with the term "Realized Eschatology." I feel these have been covered to at least set us up to bash or maybe just comment. What was not given openly but kind of stuck in covertly was the use of the Power Point presentation on Judgment and the one page paper on "Too Late."

The reason for this is to show what Jesus' task was/is from my point of view. He, as I have said for about 50 years "points toward God" as everything he does is about God – and Himself making clear to ask the question "Do you believe?" (see Martha in 11:26; Philip in 14:8-11; Thomas in 20:27-29). The red letter answer to that is also the question to "What if you don't believe?" and this is what Jesus came to do. He was commanded to do so. This is the whole of John. Only this question: "Do you believe?"

The answer to this – done pretty well in the Power Point, by the way – is a NOW thing. You can have life and have it abundantly or you can stay in the dark. The best example is the lady at the well who figured it out pretty quick and ran and got some folks to come and see Jesus. Now my confession is – and my not letting up on John or Bultmann, this theology is way over and ahead of the Atonement Church (the rest of the world – save the progressives...God help them) so I have no problem pushing John over Paul and the other three Gospels...am not sorry about that!

Jesus is not coming back - He is here. Jesus didn't die for our sins - we have to believe Him and go on! Just that simple.

Too Late!: 7.33-34

The authorities learn of what has happened (v.32) - the Evangelist is not interested in how they learn this - and they send servants to arrest Jesus. The assumption of v. 45 is that the servants arrive on the scene immediately, although this is not stated in so many words. Indeed the whole account is extremely sparse in such details: the only thing of importance is Jesus' saying (v. 33). This refers directly to the authorities' intention to arrest him (v. 32). Their real intention, of course, is to remove Jesus altogether (according to 5.18). Jesus replies to this in words of terrible irony. His opponents, like the Jews in v. 27, are right. He must be removed! Yet they are as fatally mistaken as those Jews; for they do not even suspect how right they are, and what Jesus' removal will mean.

***I am with you for only a short time
and then I am going to the one who sent me
You will look for me but you will not find me
and where I am you cannot come****

It is not Jesus whom they will destroy, when they remove him, but themselves. Fundamentally, it will not be their work if they kill him, but his deed, his return to the Father who sent him. Yet his return to the Father is not seen here in terms of his exaltation and glorification, and of what that means for the believers, but in terms of his departure from the world, and of what that means for the unbelievers, namely that it is too late. His departure from the world means that the world is judged, and this judgment will consist in the very fact that he has gone, and therefore that the time of the revelation is past. Then "they will seek him," they will long for the revelation, but in vain; for then it will be too late; he will no longer be accessible to them.

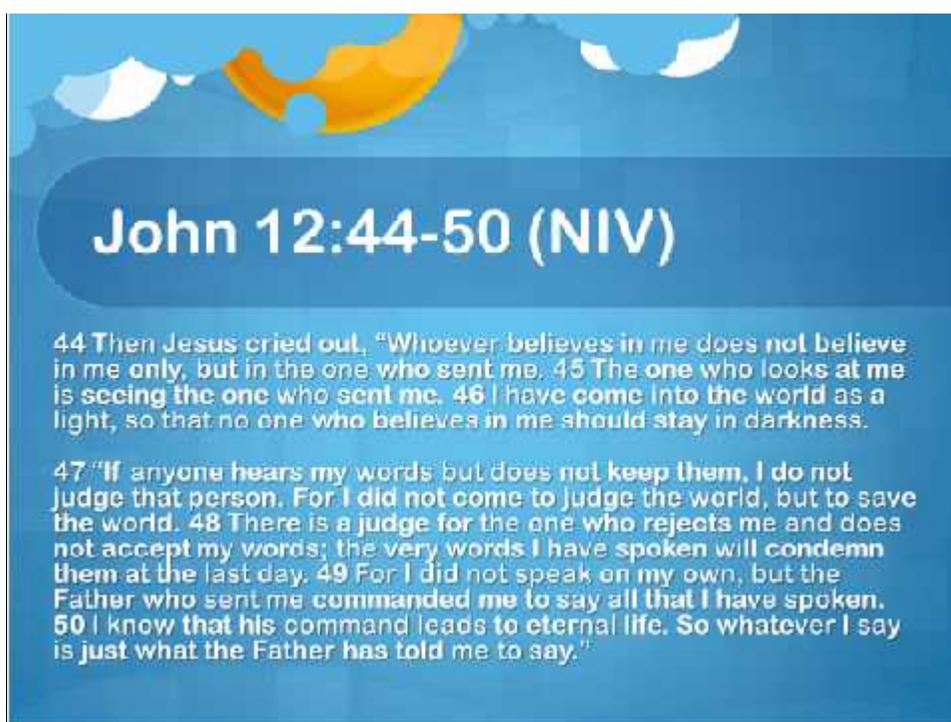
Thus it is *the historical contingency of the revelation* which throws this terrible weight of responsibility on the hearer of the word. For the revelation is not generally available, but presents itself to man only at a certain limited time of its own choosing. It does not consist in universal truths, which can be grasped at all times and for all times, nor in dogma which one could invoke at any time, but it confronts man in time, it is in every case the present moment in a personal history. Should one neglect the opportunity, when confronted with the challenge of the Revealer, then the verdict applies: too late! (pp. 306-308).

* *Bultmann's rendering is in Greek.*

*(100) Bultmann, Rudolf (1971). The Gospel of John. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press.

(A Power Point Presentation – you be the clicker...)

Now...And not yet. Both/And.



Don't you wonder:

- o Why is Jesus yelling?
- o What does judgment/condemnation mean?
- o When is the last day?
- o What happens to people who are condemned?
- o Who does the judging?



Jesus Is Yelling

Because **this** is the point of the whole gospel! Choose well!

Jesus =

- o Jesus is **One with God** (1:1, 10:30)
- o Jesus is **light, life, grace, truth, living water, bread, the resurrection, the way, the I AM**
- o Jesus came to **save the world** (12:47, 3:17)
- o To believe in Jesus is the way to **eternal life** (20:31)
 - o thesis statement of the Gospel of John
 - o To believe is always a verb in John, also "to do truth"

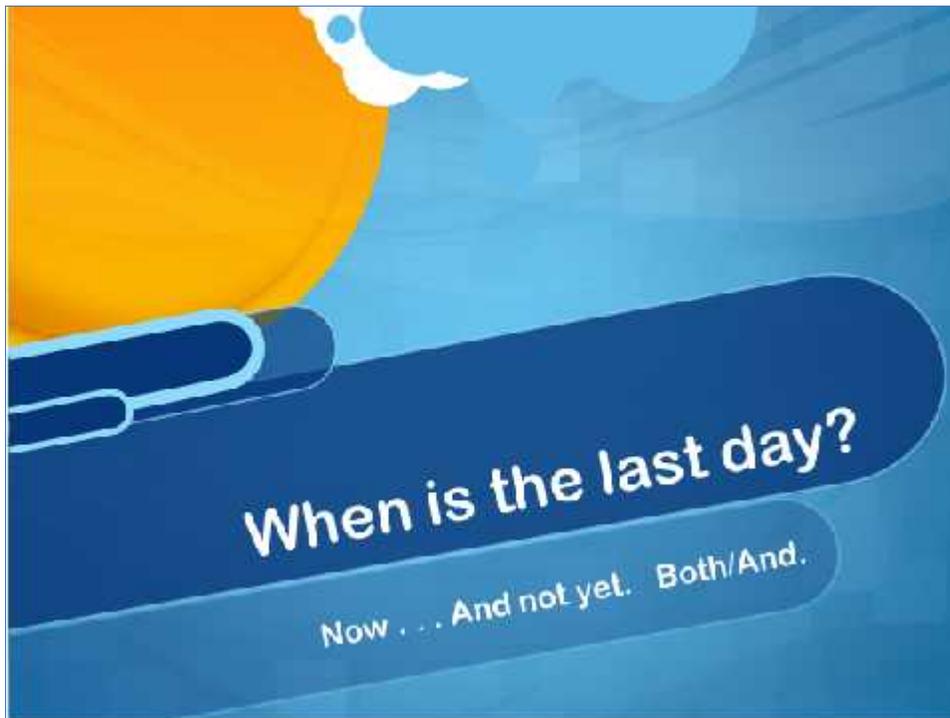
(Re) Define: Judgment

Kri,nw krino

- o Verb
- o To **judge or condemn**
- o Other translation options:
 - o Discern, conclude
 - o Propose, intend
 - o Decide, choose or select
 - o Express an opinion
 - o To ensure justice is done

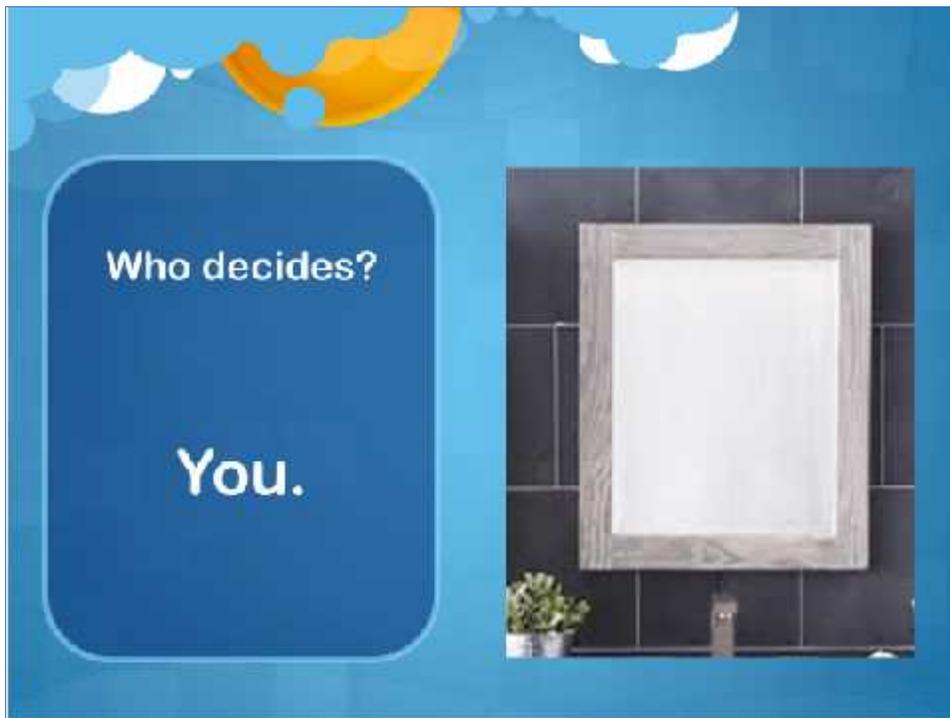
Kri,sij krisis

- o Noun
- o Crisis, judgment, condemnation
- o Other translation options:
 - o Time of decision
 - o Separation or division
 - o Justice, righteousness
 - o Legal process of judgment
 - o Administration of what is fair



Now...And not yet. Both/And.





Again: You be the clicker...

(Re) Define: judgment

Discernment

- Weigh the evidence & choose:
 - What is life-giving?
 - What is true?
 - What is good?
 - What is loving toward God and neighbors?
- Purpose:
 - Healing
 - Salvation
 - Fulfilling relationships with God and neighbors
 - Abundant life – both now and eternally

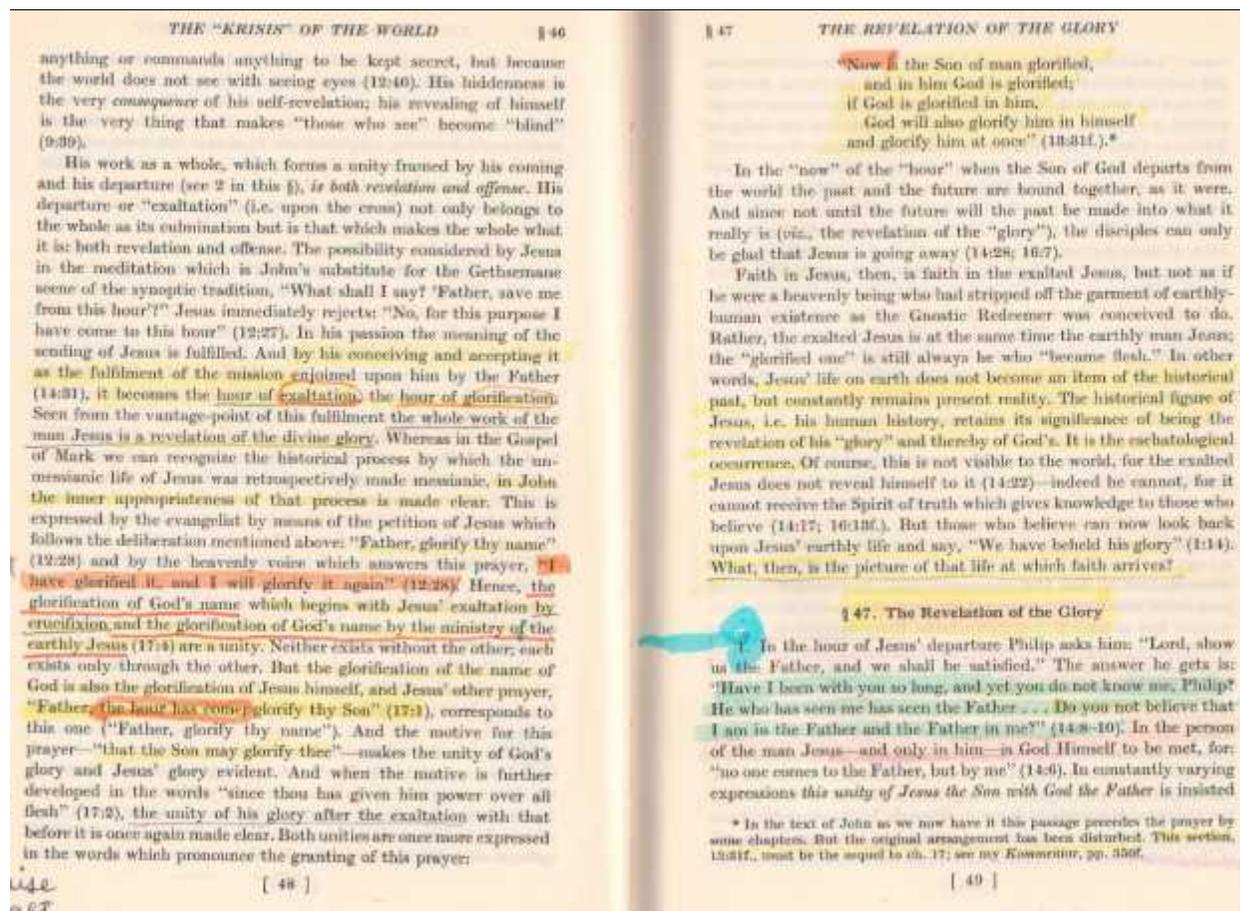


John 12:44-50 (Message)

44-46 Jesus summed it all up when he cried out, "Whoever believes in me, believes not just in me but in the One who sent me. Whoever looks at me is looking, in fact, at the One who sent me. I am Light that has come into the world so that all who believe in me won't have to stay any longer in the dark."

47-50 "If anyone hears what I am saying and doesn't take it seriously, I don't reject him. I didn't come to reject the world; I came to save the world. But you need to know that whoever puts me off, refusing to take in what I'm saying, is willfully choosing rejection. The Word, the Word-made-flesh that I have spoken and that I am, *that* Word and no other is the last word. I'm not making any of this up on my own. The Father who sent me gave me orders, told me what to say and how to say it. And I know exactly what his command produces: real and eternal life. That's all I have to say. What the Father told me, I tell you."

Rudolf Bultmann's "The Revelation of the Glory" (from my ole marked up book...)



12:27 "...for this purpose I have come to this hour." The meaning for his sending.

14:31 "...but I do as the Father has commanded me..." This becomes the hour of exaltation, the hour of glorification. "...the whole work of the man Jesus is a revelation of the divine glory." (Bltm, p. 48)

12:28 Read the commentary of the heavenly voice down to 17:1 "Father, the hour has come."

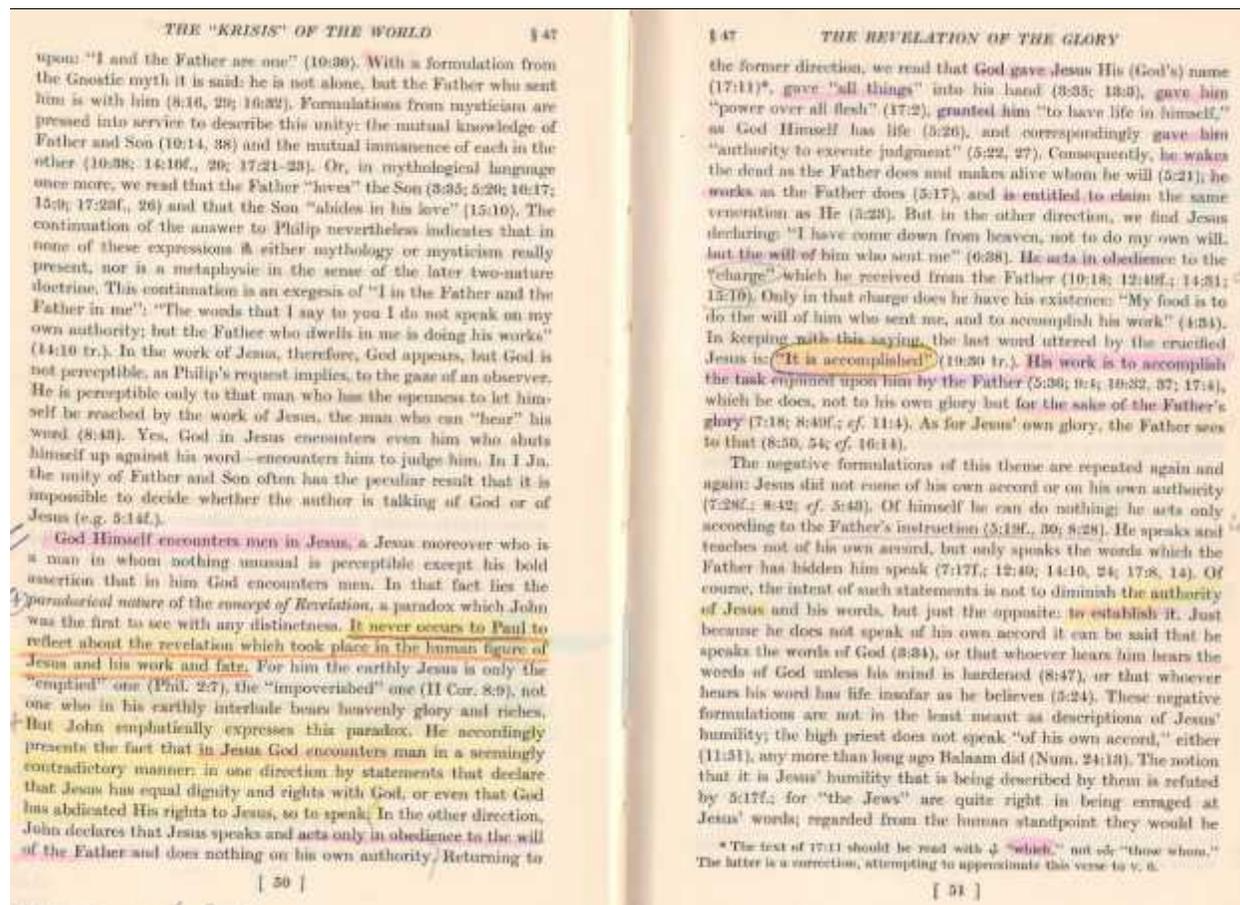
13:31 "Now the Son of man has been glorified..." "The past and the future are bound together." Note yellow highlighted two sentences ending with "It is the eschatological occurrence." (p. 49)

1:14 We have beheld his glory.

The Revelation of the Glory (pp. 49ff)

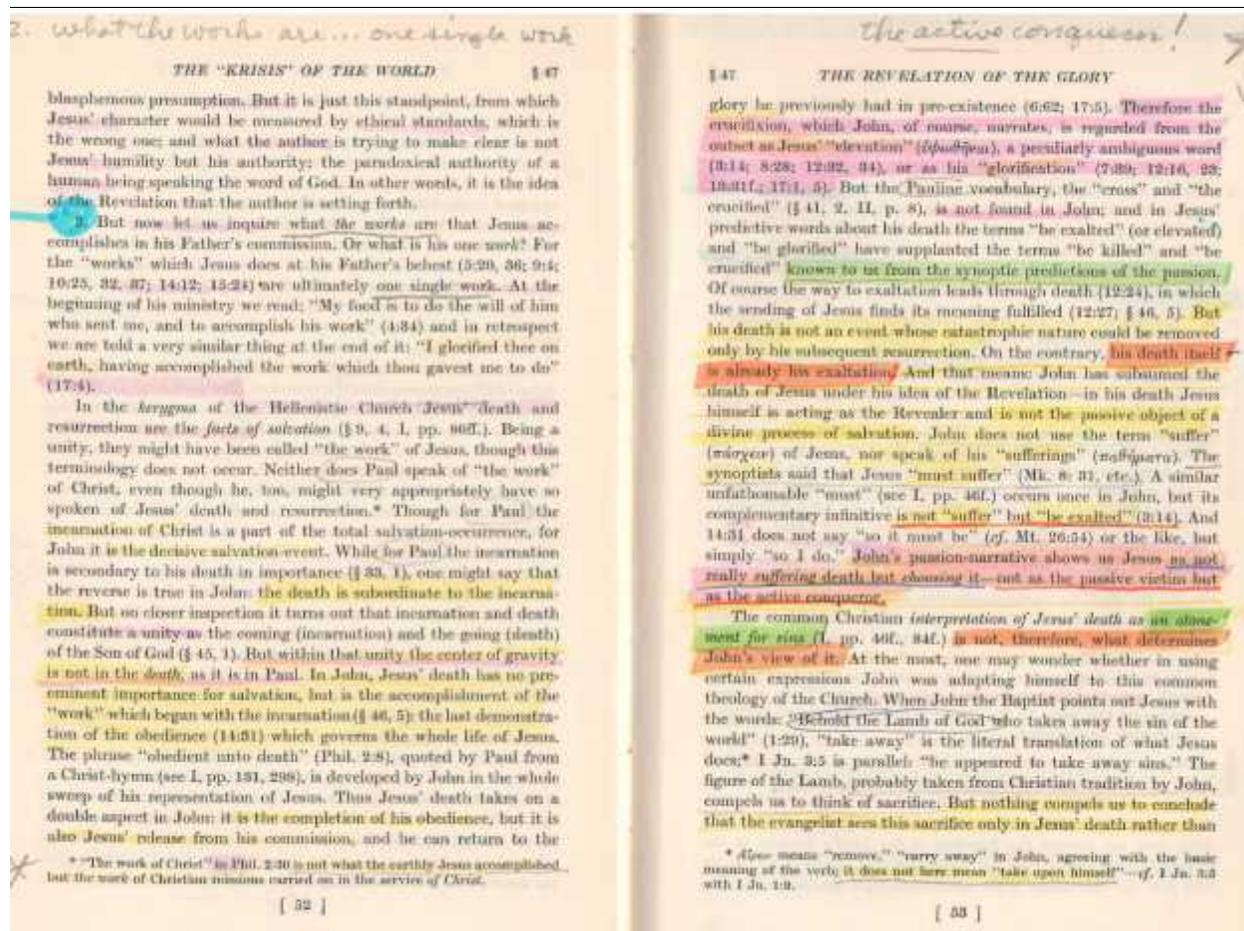
Of course this part of Bultmann's commentary is the heart of Glory and the Hour and is, it seems to me, to be the absolute most penetrating discussion in his whole book. This section is one to be hung on the wall and read every day; for sure, these few pages are the critical part of John and the most poignant expression of Bultmann's neo-theology. God bless his word too...

“In the hour of Jesus’ departure” Phillip gets the attention of Jesus with his **“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?”** (14:8-10). **“no one comes to the Father but by me”** (14:6). Dr. Clark-Soles says the verb “believe” is used 93 times in the book of John. This paper will push the idea of the word ‘believe’ and you just saw the usage in the Judgment slides (Jn 12:44).



Phil 2:7 "...but emptied himself..." See above on page 50 from "God Himself encounters men in Jesus" and note how he promotes how John expresses a paradox. Also, you will see in the Knox paper this same verse being used. I promise you this will be interesting on how the dots get connected.

“He acts in obedience to the ‘charge’ which he received from the Father (10:18; 12:49f.: 14:31; 15:10. His last words **“It is accomplished”** (19:39). “His work is to accomplish the task enjoined upon him by the Father (5:36; 9:4; 10:32, 37; 17:4)...”

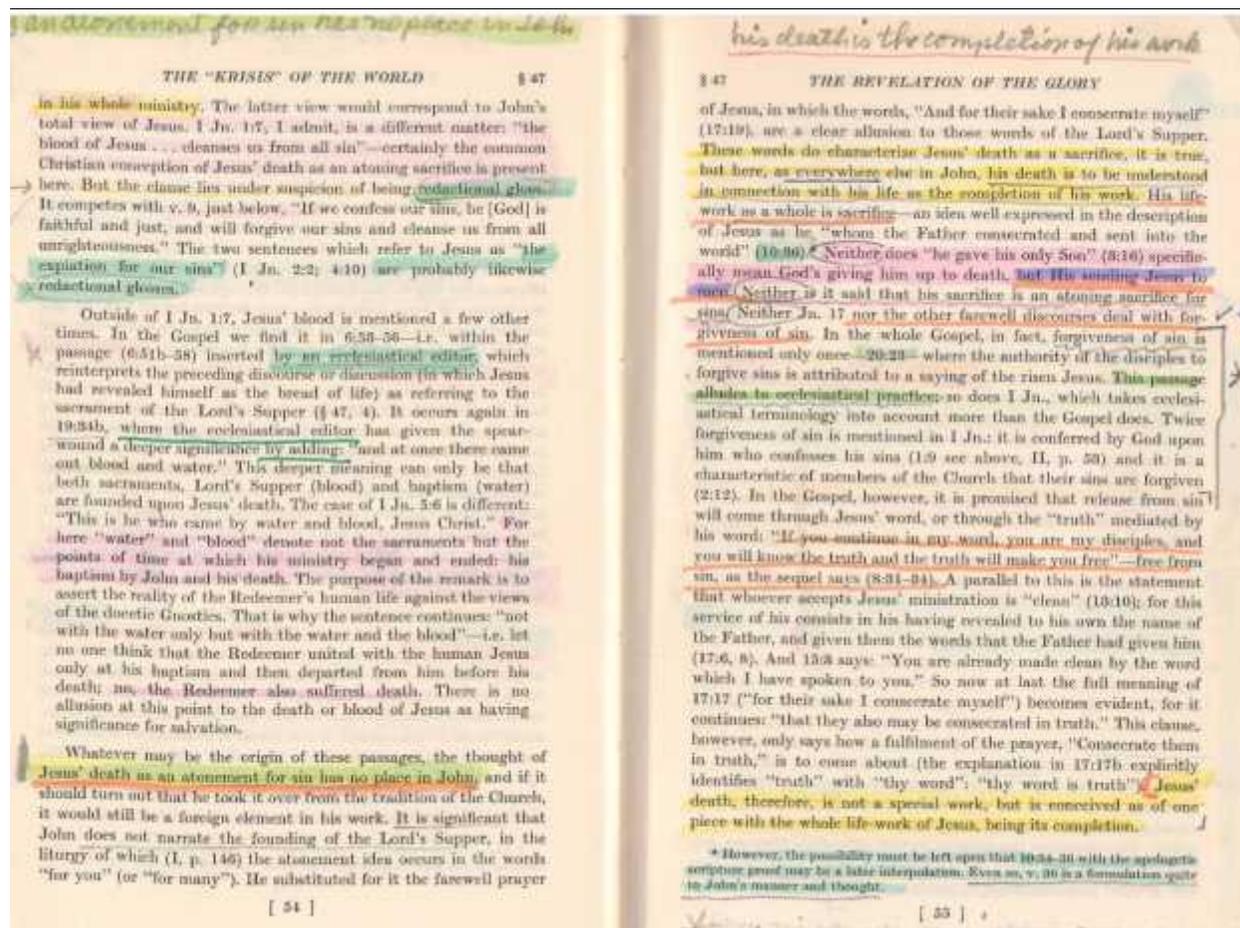


Note the discussion on 2. Above: "what the works are that Jesus accomplishes..." Then, last sentence of this paragraph "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do" (17:4).

Notice the discussion uses Paul on the one hand and John on the other – a theme for Bultmann as a comparison with the Synoptic Gospels and John. Half way down the page he says "...the death is subordinate to the incarnation...but...incarnation and death constitute a unity and the coming (incarnation) and the going (death) of the Son of God." Note here what he says: "But within that unity the center of gravity is not in the death...In John, death has no pre-eminent importance for salvation, but the accomplishment of the 'work' ...: the last demonstration of the obedience (14:31) which governs the whole life of Jesus." Then Bultmann says the completion of his obedience releases him from his commission so "he can return to the glory he ...had in pre-existence" (17:5).

"But his death is not an event whose catastrophic nature could be removed only by his subsequent resurrection. On the contrary, his death itself is already his exaltation...is not 'suffer' but 'be exalted' (3:14)...John's passion-narrative shows us Jesus as not really suffering death but choosing it – ... as the active conqueror."

Bottom of page 53 – please the comments on “Jesus’ death as an atonement for sins...is not, therefore, what determines John’s view of it.”



See my highlights in green on redactional gloss and ecclesiastical editor. See the pink on water and blood as Dr. Clark-Soles asked this question in my class – wish I could have remembered my poetry from Dr. Bultmann...

“Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin has no place in John.”

“...his death is to be understood in connection with his life as the completion of his work...Neither does ‘he gave his only Son’ (3:16) specifically mean God’s giving him up to death, but His sending Jesus to men’ Neither..., Neither...,

“Jesus’ death, therefore, is not a special work, but is conceived as of one piece with the whole life-work of Jesus, being its completion.”

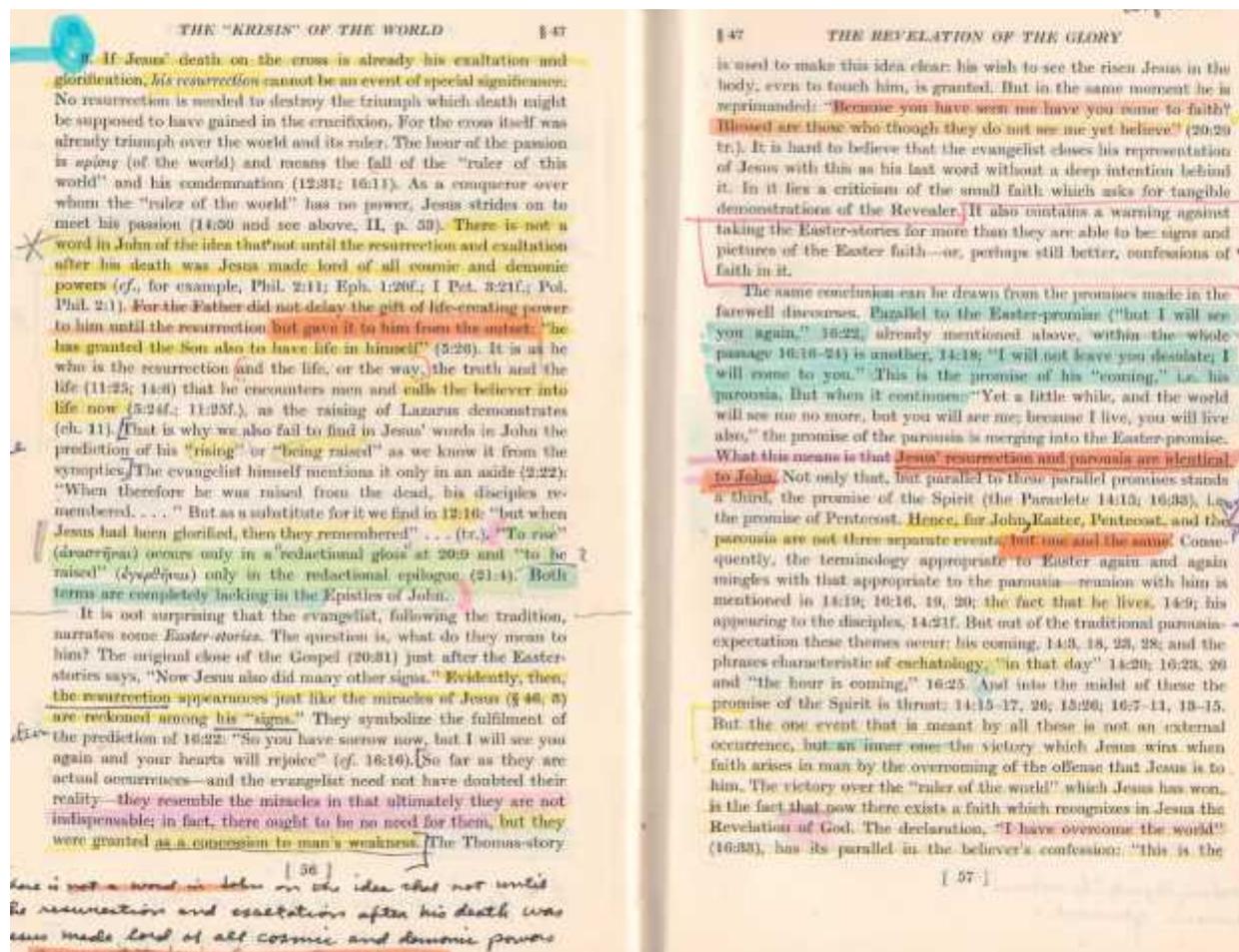
It is the last two pages that should be framed from my view – and I have said this before, but these two pages say it all. This is the hill to climb and die on. This is the hill climb and fight on.

Hang your hat on it! This is it! Bultmann at his best – and John at his most meaningful expression of what Jesus was/is about. I thank you all for reading this far. Punch line next!

3. If Jesus' death on the cross is already his exaltation and glorification, his resurrection cannot be an event of special significance...

There is not a word in John of the idea that not until the resurrection and exaltation after his death was Jesus made lord of all cosmic and demonic powers...

For the Father did not delay the gift of life-creating power to him until the resurrection but gave it to him from the outset.



On being raised the 2:22 is redacted and so 12:16 is substituted "but when Jesus had been glorified, then they remembered..

What in pink on the last line is worth remembering about miracles – at least from Bultmann?

Last page - this is 'really' it... This is the page that puts some of us in the narrow, very narrow (but Fourth Gospel Proud!) position of looking at John and seeing what the rest of the church does not believe (maybe 98+% of the people?), That's fine. Just fine.

Hence, for John Easter, Pentecost, and the Parousia are not there sperate events, but one and the same..."I have overcome the world" (16:33).

So, we have been navigating in the Johannine stream of life. We have gone past the point of swimming with the elephants if you want to know the truth. Most people won't get this deep. Most people won't fool with the Greek or with anything that just talks about 'what it says in the Bible' – and I am not picking on anyone – I just want to go deeper to the other end of the stream. Noting we are about half way from the Alpha () to the Omega (.) it is time to be either in a big ole PT boat or in a submarine as the mine fields and torpedo nets may pose a problem.

So, let's go ahead on ("all ahead FLANK speed") to talk about the story in John on the resurrection. This won't take long on the first example but the second one will test us all.

First. I wrote a paper back in 2015 to my family and a small group of friends and will add a paragraph to this paper to be the go between Bultmann and Knox – which means this is a fitting theological position between the two. It is titled:

“The Resurrection, Life Eternal, and Authentic Living in Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John: Literally or Metaphorically? - and for Whom?”

"The Fourth Evangelist found that the present is pregnant with possibility and wanted readers to be sensitive to those possibilities and to actualize them. Eternal life? It is yours now as you live a new kind of existence on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ. Resurrection? Being born to a new life as a result of faith in Christ is resurrection. Judgment? You are judging yourself by the kind of response you made to the proclamation of the Christian gospel. Parousia? Christ comes again when you believe in him" (Kysar, Maverick, p. 124)³.

Second, This last paper by John Knox is an intriguing report and it will take more than one reading for most of us to understand or even appreciate it; however, it is appropriate for my task in presenting my story and questions about Glory, Hour, and Eschatology.

This paper would probably be the weekly assignment in a 15 week on The Gospel of John at Perkins but there are not many folks that would read it. Hence, the challenge. First of all you don't have to read it. Knox takes us upstream in the real deep water which is cloudy and cold. Just scan it. Here are a couple of sentences to give you a feel – they are quite good:

The story is not an account of the event, but a representation of the meaning of the event.

"Did it happen?" That question may also be asked of the story, but it is not in that case the essential question.

The story came into being as a phase of the community's life and is as truly an element in the event as the community itself.

³ Kysar, R. (2007). *John, the maverick Gospel* (3rd ed.). Louisville, KY: John Know Press.

Jesus Lord and Christ by John Knox VII *The Event and the Story*⁴

1. Earlier we considered the elements which, at the least, must be regarded as belonging to the event. These were found to be the man Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, the creation of the community. None of these elements, we saw, can be omitted. What we mean by "Jesus Christ" is the whole of which these are indispensable parts. But although we had no hesitancy in affirming that the event cannot be less than this whole, we attempted, it will be recalled, no maximum definition. Indeed, we recognized that no absolute maximum, or outer, limits can be set to this or, for that matter, any other event, short of the limits of history itself.

2. But although we cannot draw an absolute line except at the ends of history, we *can* draw it there. If the reality we are considering is an historical event, by definition anything nonhistorical or "suprahistorical" is excluded from it. This does not mean, of course, that nothing nonhistorical is real; the whole purpose of the event, according to Christian faith, was to provide an historical medium for the revelation of God, who is the ultimate reality above and beyond history as well as within it. But the statement does mean that nothing nonhistorical can be an element in the event itself.

3. Now all of the elements we have proposed as essentially constituting the event are historical elements: the man Jesus, his life, teaching, death and resurrection, the creation of the church by the Spirit are all truly historical. It may be objected by some that the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit are not, properly speaking, historical since they did not occur publicly, but only within the experience of a limited group.

⁴ John Knox (1958). *Jesus Lord and Christ*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

But such a criterion of the "historical" cannot be sustained. It may well be true that nothing purely private and individual can be called historical -- the historical is essentially social -- but it does not follow from this that nothing is historical which is not universally witnessed or experienced, even by those who are physically situated to witness or experience it. As a matter of fact, if such a criterion were applied, Jesus himself, as his character is presented in the Gospels, could not be regarded as an historical person since nothing is more certain than that only relatively few of those who had some contact with him recognized this character. The indubitable fact is that the resurrection of Christ, no less than the life of Jesus, did occur, whether everybody witnessed it or not. The church is beyond any doubt historical, and its very existence is a testimony to this occurrence.

4. But as much as this cannot be said of certain other "occurrences" which the New Testament and the creeds have affirmed, such occurrences as God's sending the pre-existent Christ to earth, the ascension of Christ, and his coming again to judge the quick and the dead. These are all matters of traditional Christian belief and they all stand in some relation to the revelation, but they are matters of belief, not of empirical fact, and therefore do not belong essentially to the event itself. They stand at least one place removed from what is actually given within the experience of the community. They belong not to the event, but to the "story." This distinction between history and story is an important one and deserves more attention than has usually been given to it.

5. The story is as familiar to the average Christian as the history. Indeed, the story includes the history and many of us never think of the history except in the context which the story provides. For most purposes it is just as well that this is true, but for purposes of clear theological definition, it is important always to have in mind where the history

leaves off and the story takes up.

6. Although the story is told with some variations in the several parts of the New Testament, its general outline is clear and, in view of the general variety of New Testament religion, amazingly consistent. The story is nowhere more succinctly and effectively presented than by Paul in Phil. 2:6-11:

Though he was divine by nature he did not snatch at [did not think he had - gh] equality with God but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant; born in human guise and appearing in human form, he humbly stooped in his obedience even to die, and to die upon the cross. Therefore God raised him high and conferred on him a Name above all names, so that before the Name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and underneath the earth, and every tongue confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord," to the glory of God the Father.

7. This is the story in its briefest form. As we read it, we find ourselves filling in from Paul and others: It was out of love for mankind that Christ came into the world and it was out of love of mankind that God sent him or permitted him to come. One is led to imagine a high colloquy in Heaven between the Father and the Son as to the necessity of this sacrifice. Man, God's creature, made in his own image and for fellowship with himself, has by his disobedience, by his misuse of God's gift of freedom, become hopelessly embroiled in tragedy and death. He is held body and soul by Sin and is unable to extricate himself. Only God can save him -- and how can even God save him unless he comes to where man is and deals directly with man's enemy? Therefore, it is decided that Christ shall lay aside his heavenly status and powers and himself become man. Thus it happened that Jesus was

born, lived a brief and strenuous life of unfailing devotion to the will of God, preached the good tidings of the salvation he had come to bring, repulsed all the attacks of man's demonic enemies, carried his obedience so far as to die. But just as he had successfully resisted Sin, so he conquered Death. He arose from the dead and ascended to the Heaven from which he had come. There he now reigns with the Father and thence he shall come at the end of all things to judge the world and to save those who have put their trust in him and who thus through faith have been permitted to enter the community of those who share in his victory over Sin and Death.

8. This summary, susceptible of modification and amplification at many points, is intended only as a reminder of what is as familiar to us as the songs our mothers taught us.

9. Now it is clear that while this story embodies historical elements -- the life and death of Jesus, his resurrection, and the continuing life of the community of faith -- it also contains elements which are not historical. The pre-existence of Christ, his decision to come into this world as a man, his struggle with demonic powers and his triumph over them, his ascension to heaven, where he reigns at God's right hand awaiting the time of his return -- these are parts, not of the event, but of the story. This does not mean that they are not true, but, rather, that if true, they are true in a different way from that in which the account of the earthly life and the affirmation of the resurrection are true. These latter are true in the sense that the earthly life and the resurrection actually took place; but one can hardly use the term "take place" in connection with "occurrences" which transcend time and place altogether. These belong, indeed, not to the sphere of temporal occurrences at all, but to the sphere of ultimate and eternal reality. The story is not an account of the event, but a representation of the meaning of the event. The story is true if that

representation is true and adequate; it is false only if the meaning of the event is misrepresented or obscured.

10. It will be recalled perhaps that in our examination of the Gospels we saw the importance of recognizing two facts about them: first, that they bring us the career of Jesus only as transfigured, and, secondly, that they are more, rather than less, true on that account. Now I should like to urge the importance of two somewhat analogous facts about the story: first, that it is a story, and, secondly, that the story is true.

11. Neglect of the fact that the story is a story betrays us not only into a sterile and irrelevant literalism, but also into an unnecessarily rigid and divisive dogmatism. The criterion of truth for a story is a different criterion from that which applies to history. In the case of an alleged historical incident, the appropriate question is, "Did it happen?" That question may also be asked of the story, but it is not in that case the essential question. One's acceptance of the story as true does not depend upon one's giving an affirmative answer to *that* question. *Hamlet* is true or false without the slightest reference to the question whether there was a Prince of Denmark by that name. Or, to take a much better illustration for our purposes, one may accept as true the story of man's creation and fall, as found in Gen. 1-3, without supposing for a moment that those chapters give us an accurate account of an actual happening. Indeed, it might plausibly be argued that the essential and universal meaning of this ancient story can be grasped most profoundly only when the story is set free from any connection with an actual occurrence in time and space. I have no interest in making such an argument, but I would insist that those who believe the story happened and those who believe it did not -- or, at any rate, do not believe that it did -- should both recognize that their beliefs at this particular point are largely irrelevant. A story is a story. You do not believe it by believing it happened, and you do not

deny it by denying that it happened. The important question about the story of man's creation and fall is whether we believe what it is trying to say about God and man and human history. To believe, or deny, a story is to believe, or deny its meaning.

12. Now the Christian story is a story, and it is of first importance that we recognize it as such.

13. But equally important is the recognition that this story is true -- and true not merely in the sense in which all true stories are true, but also in a very special sense. Stories generally are true when they *might be* true. *Hamlet*, to which reference has been made, is true in so far as the characters of the play are life-like, their motivations understandable, their actions consistent and credible. In other words, to be true the play must be true to life as life is universally experienced and observed. The more deeply it probes into the play of interests and motives, the more precisely it analyzes the subtler aspects of human relationships, the more profoundly true it is. Still, such a story is true only because it might be true.

14. But the biblical stories of man's creation, fall, and redemption would, as regards their really important significance, be false if only such truth could be affirmed of them. These biblical stories, while not being accounts of actual incidents, nevertheless have a connection with actuality which stories of the ordinary kind do not need to have. Thus the creation story is true only if God is in fact the Creator of the heavens and the earth and of man in his image, and the story of the fall is true only if man is in fact alienated from God and thus *actually* falling short of the glory of his own true nature and destiny. In other words, these biblical stories, which are not self-conscious literary creations but genuine emergents from the experience of a religious community -- these stories are attempts to express an understanding of the relation in

which God actually stands to human life, and they are true in any really important sense only if that understanding is correct.

15. This distinction is even more clear when we consider the story of Christ.

This story is not only connected with actuality in the general sense which can be asserted of the earlier biblical stories -- that is, God is *in fact* our Redeemer from Sin and Death -- but it is also related in the most intimate and necessary fashion with a specific historical occurrence. The actual life, death and resurrection of a man form the great center of the story. The meaning which the story as a whole sets forth is the meaning which was actually discovered in the event itself.

16. There is, therefore, a certain inevitability about this story, as was hinted earlier in a reference to the creeds. It cannot be replaced or, in its essential structure, modified. The meaning it expresses cannot be expressed otherwise. Metaphor can always be substituted for metaphor and parable for parable; and although one parable or metaphor may be judged more apt or effective than another, none can be thought of as indispensable. But the story of Christ is absolutely unique and irreplaceable; and this is true not only because it includes the account of an actual historical event as a part of itself but also because it is itself, in all of its essential parts, the creation of the event. The story came into being as a phase of the community's life and is as truly an element in the event as the community itself.

17. The story came into being because the meaning of the whole event, as it was realized and fulfilled within the experience of the community, was too great for merely historical terms to express it. For the event was known to be nothing less than the revealing, reconciling, redeeming act of God. God had drawn near in Christ. This was not mere metaphor; this had *happened*. But simply to affirm this is virtually to tell the Christian story; for when that story is stripped to its essential elements, is it not

seeking to say just that, and indeed only that? Thus although the event took place on earth, the story, which embodies the meaning of the event, begins in heaven and ends there. Can anyone, even now, to whom the event has occurred think of it as beginning or ending anywhere else? Can the heights and depths of the meaning of the event be expressed in any other way? To witness the event is to believe the story.

18. But the point must be made again that although the Christian will inevitably believe the story (and often we do not know how deeply we do believe it), it is important for him always to realize that it is a story he is believing. Otherwise, he is likely to become rigid and harsh in his orthodoxy, and his *conception* of Christ may become an instrument for dividing the *body* of Christ.

19. Perhaps our thinking in this perplexing area may be somewhat clarified if a distinction is made between what may be called the historical, the ontological, and the mythological. The Christian confession involves all three elements, and we properly understand the meaning of the term "mythological" in this connection only if the truth and importance of the other terms are recognized. By the "historical" element in Christian faith is meant, of course, the event we have been considering through these chapters, and it must not be forgotten that the resurrection of Christ, the coming of the Spirit, and the creation of the community (different ways, perhaps, of referring to the same reality) are as much a part of it as are the personality and life of Jesus of Nazareth. By "ontological" I mean the God, who stands above and beyond history as well as within it, who has acted in and through the event, making himself known as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By "mythological" I refer to the suprahistorical elements in the story which came into being within the Christian community as the only possible way to express this transcendent and redemptive meaning of the event.

20. Not one of these elements can be omitted or neglected without the destruction or distortion of the essential meaning of the Christian confession. Gnosticism in every form, ancient and modern, affirms the ontological and the mythological, but disparages or despises the historical: the Christian "gospel" becomes a mere story with its universal meaning. Fundamentalism in all its forms, traditionalist and sectarian, affirms the ontological and the historical, but repudiates the category of the mythological, thus manifesting either insensitiveness to the vastness of the mystery of God's being and purpose, or else ignorance of the true nature and the necessary limits of history. It is left for certain types of modernism to recognize elements historical and mythological in the Christian tradition, but to deny the reality of the God of Christian faith, thus robbing both history and story of ultimate meaning.

21. But if this last position destroys meaning, the other two seriously distort it. All three are false to Christian experience, in which history, faith and story are fused inseparably. As members of the historical community we have witnessed the event, Jesus Christ the Lord, and in faith we have received its meaning as the saving act of God, but when we try to express, or even to grasp, that meaning, neither philosophical nor historical terms will serve our purpose, and our thinking and speech, whether we recognize it or not, become inevitably mythological. But the myth, or story, in its own appropriate way, is as true as the history with which it is so intimately connected, and as the faith which it was created to express.

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