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OCZAMI ORŁA: SYMBOLIZM I GŁOSZENIE WIARY W CZWARTEJ EWANGELII

WITH THE EYES OF AN EAGLE: SYMBOLISM AND THE PROCLAMATION OF FAITH IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Abstract

Paolo Prospero, in „With the Eyes of an Eagle: Symbolism and the Proclamation of Faith in the Fourth Gospel”, meditates on how St. John’s portrayal of Jesus teaches the faithful to behold in the flesh of Christ the Father’s love for the Son. Through his use of symbolism, St. John faithfully remembers the concreteness of Christ’s life in a way that is maximally revelatory of its inner truth. Prospero brings to light how the symbol bears the form of the divine love it mediates, inviting the believer’s contemplative participation in this same love. „Love is *gift*, one that draws some of its generosity precisely from the fact that the lover, in offering himself, gives to the beloved the ability to collaborate in the consummation of the gift itself”

Keywords: Mediation, theology, God, faith, symbolism. St. John, love

Streszczenie

Paolo Prospero w artykule „*Oczami orła: symbolizm i głoszenie wiary w czwartej Ewangelii*” rozmyśla o tym, w jaki sposób obraz Jezusa przedstawiony przez św. Jana uczy wiernych dostrzegania w ciele miłości Chrystusa, miłości Ojca do Syna. Poprzez posługiwanie się symboliką św. Jan wiernie pamięta o konkretności życia Chrystusa w sposób który

maksymalnie objawia jego wewnętrzną prawdę. Prospero ukazuje, jak symbol przybiera postać Bożej miłości, która pośredniczy, zachęcając wierzącego do kontemplacyjnego uczestnictwa w tej samej miłości. „Miłość jest darem, który czerpie część swojej hojności właśnie z faktu, że kochający ofiarując siebie, daje ukochanemu możliwość współpracy w spełnieniu samego daru”

Słowa kluczowe: Pośrednictwo, teologia, Bóg, wiara, symbolika. św. Jan, miłość

„In love, the one who is not disposed to shed blood cannot drink the wine of true joy”

There is only one positively beautiful person in the world, Christ, and the phenomenon of this limitlessly, infinitely beautiful person is an infinite miracle in itself. (The whole Gospel according to John is about that: for him the whole miracle is only in the Incarnation, in the manifestation of the beautiful.)
– Fyodor Dostoevsky

His singular ability to grasp the whole and at the same time miss none of the smallest details of a composition suggests a comparison with an eagle who from his great height can see as far as the horizon and yet single out the tiniest detail of the landscape.
– Heinrich Neuhaus (on Sviatoslav Richter)

La métaphore, comme le raisonnement, rassemble, mais de plus loin. [The metaphor, like reasoning, reunites, but from farther away.]
– Paul Claudel

Can the Christian message be proclaimed fully and efficaciously without symbolic language? What is, or what should be, the place of symbol in the communication of the mystery of the faith?¹ As the title suggests, the present essay presupposes that no

¹ On the function and meaning of symbolic language in general, see Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1923, 1925, 1939); Gerard de Champeaux and Dom Sebastien Sterckx,

one can help us respond to these great questions better than John the Evangelist, who was the theologian of the Incarnation par excellence but also a poet and iconographer of the highest genius, as is being better understood today². In the present context, I cannot give a complete presentation of Johannine symbolic theology³.

Le monde des symboles. Introduction au monde des symboles (Saint-Leger-Vauban: Editions Zodiaque, 1966); Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interpretation. Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960); Paul Ricoeur, *La symbolique du Mal* (Paris: Editions Aubier-Montaigne, 1960); Paul Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interpretations* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969); Antoine Vergote, „Le Symbole”, *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 57 (1959): 197 – 224. On the symbol in religions, see Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997); Mircea Eliade, *Trattato di Storia delle Religioni* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008). On the symbol in anthropology and depth psychology, see Gaston Bachelard, *La psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1938); Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les reves* (Paris: Editions Corti, 1942); Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les reveries du repos* (Paris: Editions Corti, 1949); Gaston Bachelard, *La poetique de l'espace* (Paris: PUF, 1960); Charles Baudouin, *Psychanalyse du symbole religieux* (Paris: Fayard, 1957); Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* (Grenoble: Bordas et Dunod, 1960). On the symbol in the Bible and in theology, see Pierre Grelot, *Il linguaggio simbolico nella Bibbia* (Rome: Borla, 2004); Marc Gerard, *Symboles bibliques, langage universel: Pour une theologie des deux Testaments ancree dans les sciences humaines*, 2 vols. (Montreal: Editions Mediaspaul, 2016). On the symbol in theology, see Gerald O'Collins, „La teologia della rivelazione dopo la *Dei Verbum*: prospettive e problemi”, *RTE* 8 (2004): 123 – 31; Charles Andre Bernard, *Theologie symbolique* (Paris: Tequi, 1978); Charles Andre Bernard, *Tutte le cose in Lui sono vita. Scritti sul linguaggio simbolico* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo Edizioni, 2010); Giorgio Mazzanti, *I sacramenti. Simbolo e teologia*, vol. 1: *Introduzione generale* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1997).

² As one of the foremost contemporary Johannine scholars writes, „I like to compare the Johannine image of Christ to a Byzantine icon: it shows the image quite directly facing the observer (as the Gospel does in Jesus' I am sayings). But the image is painted on a golden background and surrounded by the aura of his divine glory, thus visualizing what is not visible to the sheer physical perception. Thus, the Johannine text visualizes the hidden glory of the crucified one, and its subtle narrative technique and didactic strategy can be observed throughout the Gospel. This is... the textually observable reason for its ongoing fascination and spiritual impact” (Jorg Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018], xx – xxi).

³ The bibliography on the topic has become vast. Among others, one may fruitfully consult the following: Xavier Leon-Dufour, „Towards a Symbolic

Such an endeavor would require a highly articulated treatment, the details of which I cannot enter into here. The end that we have in mind is more limited, or, if you will, basic. In what follows, we intend to show how an adequate comprehension of the *ratio* that governs John's use of symbolic language allows for the clearest and most profound possible answer to the questions posed above. With that said, let us enter immediately *in medias res*.

1. „They will look upon him whom they have pierced”

Let us begin by considering a question even more basic than that posed above: What is the core of the Christian message? Of what exactly is the disciple of Jesus a witness? I am convinced that if we could ask the author of the fourth gospel, he would respond more or less as follows: the center of the message is the fact that in the love „to the end” of Jesus – the love of the Cross – the love of God for the world appeared *in all of its glory*. For John, this is the good news: „For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16)⁴. But this also means that, for John, believing means receiving eyes capable of seeing the flesh of Jesus crucified precisely as a symbol, that is, as the translucent image of the love of God for the world.

Reading of the Fourth Gospel”, *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980 – 81): 439 – 56; Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Jorg Frey et al., eds., *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). One might say that there has not been a recent commentary or study on John's gospel that did not dedicate a more or less ample section to symbolic language. Despite this outpouring of scholarship, there has been no comprehensive interpretation of Johannine symbolic theology. The considerations proposed here are based on a precise interpretation of this theology. Given the scope of the present article, I cannot but take for granted, in a way analogous to the assumption of postulates in mathematics, the hermeneutic principles and the foundational ideas on which my singular exegetical choices are based. I am currently working on completing a volume that would, among other things, propose to show the plausibility of those principles and ideas.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE).

As a matter of fact, is this not exactly what John intended when he wrote in the prologue that „the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14)? Certainly, this expression signifies, as the Church Fathers understood well, that the divine person of the Word has assumed human nature. However, here John is saying more. He is solemnly giving testimony to the fact that the *ultimate word* with which God fully revealed himself to man was not a *spoken word*, but *flesh*: the flesh of the pierced one raised on the Cross⁵. It is by looking at this word, to use an instance of synesthesia, that one can know God.

Furthermore, in what sense exactly does the flesh of the uplifted and pierced one reveal or explain (ἐξηγήσατο, Jn 1:18) God? Many exegetes have limited themselves to answering that, by looking at the pierced one, the believer sees the definitive sign of God’s merciful love for the world. This is certainly correct, but John does not stop there. Unfortunately, there is no space in the present context to enter into the details of what I call the Johannine „second navigation” We will simply state the central idea: for John, to look at the transfigured one with the eyes of faith means to see not only the glory of the love „to the end” of the Lord for his friends, but also the symbol of the eternal love of the Father for the Son. In fact, the first is like a mirror image of the second: „As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you [Καθὼς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ Πατήρ καὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ἠγάπησα]” (Jn 15:9).

Rarely is the weight of this Johannine affirmation of Jesus properly appreciated⁶. Effectively, with this phrase Jesus clearly affirms that a *likeness* (Καθὼς) exists between the love shown by Jesus toward his friends and the love of the Father for the Son. The first is an *image* of the second. The shocking conclusion that derives from this statement is that if we want to arrive at the least imperfect image possible of the eternal life of God, then we must look to the *most dissimilar symbol* that can be imagined, to use Dionysian vocabulary⁷ The gushing of blood and water that

⁵ Astute observations on this point have been made by Richard Bauckham in *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (London: Baker Academic Press, 2015), 50 – 52.

⁶ Important in this regard are the findings of Jorg Frey in *The Glory of the Crucified*, 303-12, esp. 309-12.

⁷ Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* 2.2.

bursts forth from the side of the pierced one is not just a symbol of the act of love by which the divine bridegroom generates the Church⁸. An even more profound mystery, manifested as though through a play of mirrors, becomes visible here to a certain extent: the mystery of the act of love through which the Father eternally gives the Son all his glory (Jn 17:24)⁹. God did not only love the world as he loved the Son. God is agape-love (1 Jn 4:8, 16); there is nothing in God other than agape: pure and total gift of self of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father in the shared breath of the Paraclete. This means, inversely, that to become like God, to raise oneself to the heights of God, means to love with that radical love which in Christ was made visible: „Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

With this foundation in place, we can now directly engage the question posed at the beginning, attempting to discern the response, or, better, the responses, that the fourth evangelist might have given. Why can the Christian message not do without sym-

⁸ Cf. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannem* 15.8 (see also 122.2); Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.17; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 3.21.

⁹ This idea requires greater precision, specifically that the image of the pierced one at which all are invited to look cannot be an arbitrary or generic image, precisely for its extreme importance. It is on the image of the uplifted and pierced one, given by the Father himself to the world as a symbol of the mystery of his love, that the eyes of every disciple must be fixed. They cannot be fixed on an image created by his own subjective fantasy. It is for this reason that the beloved disciple attributes such crucial importance to his own testimony (Jn 19:35): that image can be shown only by the one who (1) has seen it with his own carnal eyes, and (2) has received from God the task and the light necessary to depict or describe it. In effect, scholarship is still far from grasping the epiphanic importance that the icon of the raised and pierced one, depicted concretely by John in his gospel, occupies in the theology of Johannine revelation (Jn 19:17 – 37). Now, this „narrated icon” says, through symbolic language, much more than has been typically recognized on the metaphysical structure of the same agape and, for this reason, of the content of the life of God that, through the pierced one, is communicated to the believer. For John, the pierced one is not only the font from which divine life (*aiōnios zoe*) breaks into the world communicating itself to man; he is also the concrete image of the content and the form of this life. For an initial exploration of this crucial theme, I recommend my essay „This Mystery Is Great (Eph 5:22): Reflections on the Fittingness of the Nuptial Analogy in Trinitarian Theology”, in *Enlightening the Mystery of Man: Gaudium et Spes Fifty Years Later*, ed. Antonio Lopez (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018).

bolic language in order to be fully and efficaciously spoken? The *first response* is contained implicitly in all that has been said up to this point: the symbolic image stands not only at the beginning, but also at the apex of the theological edifice, above all because the synthetic word in which God revealed to man the mystery of his love was itself a symbol¹⁰. For if by „symbol” we mean a sensible reality (signifier) that has the power¹¹ and the function¹² to

¹⁰ There has not been enough meditation on the importance of the fact that the evolution of christological dogma concludes, *de facto*, with the Second Council of Nicaea and with the solemn affirmation of the representability of the human face of God. On this point, few Church Fathers merit to be attentively reread more than Theodore the Studite, who writes in one of his letters, „If someone were to say, ‘In the moment in which I need to spiritually venerate (Christ), it is superfluous to venerate Him in His icon,’ he should know that, in this way, he denies himself also the spiritual veneration of Christ. In fact, if he does not see with his spirit Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father in a human form, he does not have any veneration towards Him. On the contrary, he denies that the Word has become flesh. Instead, his icon is a faithful testimony that the Eternal Word became equal to man” (*Epistolarium* 65 [PG 99, 1288]).

¹¹ Among scholars of comparative religion on the one hand and of archetypology and depth psychology on the other, it is common to say that the reference from signifier to signified is intrinsic in the symbol, in contrast to other conventional signs (allegory, for example). For more on this, see, for example, Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, „Introduction”.

¹² As studies of depth psychology have taught us, in symbolic expression, precisely for its intrinsic character, the one creating the symbol is not always necessarily aware of all the meanings insinuated or implied in the chosen image. By using the word „function”, we intend to refer here to the symbolism that John employs with awareness of his intention to communicate profound theological truths. This obviously does not exclude that something analogous to the natural and unconscious way of symbolizing could also be found in Johannine symbolism, just as it could be in Paul or any other New Testament author. On the contrary, one must or at least could suppose that in the case of the fourth evangelist there would be present that phenomenon which contemporary exegetes call subliminal or unconscious echo. Since the authors of the New Testament were steeped in biblical culture, it is possible and even inevitable that they would disseminate echoes and allusions to the Old Testament that are unintentional and yet truly active in the building up of the text, making their consideration relevant to the end of comprehending the „full meaning” of said text. An adequate evaluation of the subtle play between the conscious and preconscious symbolism that characterizes symbolic language as such in the concrete formation of biblical texts could, in this sense, perhaps offer new and interesting paths to illuminate the mystery of the interaction between the human author and the Holy Spirit in the makeup of the „total” meaning (*intentio auctoris* and *sensus plenior*) of

evoke an invisible or spiritual reality (signified), then we need to say that the flesh of Christ uplifted and pierced on the Cross is for John the great symbol that God himself chose in order to speak to man both of his love for the world and of the mystery of his intimate life.

Here we must make a *nota bene*. This symbol is unsurpassable precisely because it expresses in *human language* the mystery of love in a way that is objectively unsurpassable. The Johannine Jesus articulates this point clearly: „Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13); and again, „Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *eis to telos*” (Jn 13:1), which can be translated „to the end” but also „to perfection” It is evident, then, that in order to see the glory of the divine agape shine through the suffering and dying body of Christ on the Cross, the eyes of the flesh are not enough. Without faith, the symbol remains opaque. And yet, faith in the divine identity of Jesus is *not*, for John, the point of arrival of the journey of faith. Rather, the point of arrival is an experience that we could call synesthetic, as it is a synthesis of hearing and sight, faith in the word and vision of an image: the contemplation of God wounded by love *in the icon* of the pierced one¹³.

2. A Mystagogical gospel? on the *intentio auctoris*

At this point a problem arises. This symbol is as sublime and saturated with light for one whose eyes have been „initiated” as it is empty of beauty and splendor for the one who does not have the same vision. The light that springs forth from the flesh of the

the inspired text. For the distinction between allusion (intentional) and echo (unintentional, subliminal), see Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29ff.; Ruben Zimmermann, „Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John’s Figurative World”, in *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, 21 – 22.

¹³ Frey has put this point excellently: „This is the claim of the Gospel of John: Jesus is the exclusive and true image of God the Father, of the invisible biblical God” (*The Glory of the Crucified One*, 286). „Thus, the concern is indeed with (rightly) seeing Jesus in faith. This visual element has often been overlooked in exegetical research. Scholarship could not accept that John actually paints Jesus before his readers” (ibid.).

pierced one, we might say, paraphrasing Dionysius, is *so intense* that the uninitiated eye risks being blinded by it, seeing in him nothing but obscurity and lack of splendor¹⁴. In order to see the beauty of the pierced one, a journey of initiation is necessary: a baptism of the eyes and of the mind. The fourth gospel can be read – and perhaps this is the most fitting and profound way to read it – precisely in this way: as a true and proper *mystagogy*¹⁵

¹⁴ “The dense, divine cloud is an inaccessible light (1 Tim 6:16) in which it is said that God dwells. This light is invisible due to the excess of its splendor and is inaccessible because of the superabundance of its super-essential radiance” (Dionysius the Areopagite, *Epistolarium* 5 [PG 1073 A]). It is true that here Dionysius is speaking about mystical ignorance and not about ignorance as a defect of knowledge. What is more, the discourse here seems neither christological nor staurological. Nonetheless, I maintain that the parallelism does not stray for two reasons. First, for Dionysius there is clearly a certain likeness between the ignorance that is beyond knowledge and the ignorance that is above it; in both cases, the spirit is incapable of grasping the essence of the object of knowledge, that is, God. This applies, in my view, as a perfect analogy to the Johannine theology of the Cross. The pierced one is a „dense, divine cloud” in a twofold sense. For the uninitiated eye, the pierced one has neither beauty nor splendor because he is deprived of them (negation according to privation). For the initiated eye, the glory of the pierced one is veiled but for the opposite reason: its overwhelming superabundance (negation according to transcendence). Second, the symbolism of the divine cloud and of the super-luminous darkness invites the astute reader to recognize in the language of Dionysius a none-too-veiled reference to the biblical theology of glory/*doxa*/ *kabod*, a theology that John reinterprets in a christological and paschal sense. The common assumption that there is no communication between Dionysian mystical theology and symbolic theology (and, for this reason, Christology) is hardly beyond dispute. On this topic, see Matteo Andolfo’s observations in Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mistica Teologia e Epistole I – V*, trans. Matteo Andolfo (Bologna: San Clemente/Studio domenicano, 2011), 84 – 85ff.

¹⁵ The term „mystagogy” – which etymologically means nothing other than „leading into/introduction” (*agoge*) to the mysteries (*mysteria*) – today widely designates the catechesis of the fourth century in which the bishop (or, better, a presumably large number of bishops) initiated the neophyte to the comprehension of the profound but not immediately perspicuous meaning of the three sacraments they had just received: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. As noted, the most famous mystagogical catecheses that have been passed down to us are, in the Latin world, those of Ambrose of Milan and Hilary of Poitiers; and in the East, there are those of John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Cyril of Jerusalem. Leaving aside the obvious differences due to theological emphases and exegetical choices, what is common to all is the adoption of typological exegesis as the privileged canal to guide the newly initiated toward the discovery

aimed at giving the reader eyes capable of seeing in the uplifted and pierced one that glory which the beloved disciple saw, not so much when, at the foot of the Cross, he witnessed the agony of the Lord (Jn 19:35), but after Easter when, thanks to the help of the Spirit of truth, he began to penetrate into the *full sense* of what he had seen and heard with the eyes of flesh¹⁶. The fourth

of the sublime mystery hidden under the veil of those humble signs of water, oil, bread, and wine. To explain the meaning of baptism, for example, Ambrose and Cyril use a vast repertoire of Old Testament images or „types” (the salvation of Noah through the waters of the flood, the escape of Israel from Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, the entrance into the promised land through the waters of the Jordan, etc.) in which they saw the prefiguration of Christian baptism. In this way, the neophyte was helped to appreciate and understand more easily the „terrible greatness” of the mysteries contained in those signs that appeared humble and without splendor. Incorporated sacramentally to Christ, the neophyte was invited to sense that he was a participant in an event of salvation and liberation that, although more spiritual and for that reason hidden, was not less than what was visible in the epic stories of the Old Testament but was even greater. If we take a close look, something similar is true of the fourth gospel. The primary purpose of the evangelist is to allow his reader to reach the point of seeing that which does not appear to profane eyes due, i.e., the veiled sublimity of the most humble of all images: the flesh of Jesus uplifted on the Cross. On the mystagogical catechesis of the fourth-century Fathers, cf. Enrico Mazza, *La Mistagogia. Le Catechesi liturgiche del quarto secolo e il loro metodo* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1989).

¹⁶ There is insufficient space here to explore the important problem of how to interpret correctly the relation between history and spirit in the fourth gospel in general and in the Passion story in particular. Two succinct annotations will suffice. First, that the Johannine Passion narrative presents a transfigured vision of the facts does mean that it is not historic or, even less, that the historical element is not relevant to it. The author of the fourth gospel’s insistence that his reader consider historically accurate his account of the death of Jesus is clear from John 19:35: „The one who has seen [ὁ ἑώρακώς] gives testimony and his testimony is true [καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία] and he knows that he speaks the truth” The evangelist – whom I personally maintain to be the beloved disciple who, a few lines earlier, was standing beneath the Cross (παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ) – claims, therefore, above all, historical veracity for his narrative. Second, the object of the testimony of the author is not reducible to what he has seen with the eyes of the flesh at the foot of the Cross. The author gives solemn testimony also to another experience that presupposes the first and yet goes deeper: that spiritual vision to which the author had access after Easter when the Spirit began to introduce him to the entirety of the truth (Jn 13:25 – 26, 15:26 – 27, 16:12 – 15). With that said, one can never insist enough on the fact that, precisely because God himself has revealed his glory in a sensible form in the hour of the

evangelist, in this sense, is not only an eyewitness or a profound theologian; he is also a great mystagogical poet. For only a great poet can hope to achieve what he proposes to accomplish with his gospel: to give to the reader *eyes capable of seeing* the Incarnation of absolute beauty in an image that appears repulsive to the carnal eye. The repercussions of the eventual success of this enterprise on the existential orientation of the reader are clear, but it is worthwhile to explain them nonetheless. *To kalon kalei*, teaches Dionysius, following in the wake of Plato¹⁷: beauty calls, attracts to itself. Thus, reaching the point of seeing the Crucified as the uplifted one (Jn 3:14, 8:28, 12:32), or he who is higher than all others (Jn 3:31), absolute beauty, means, *ipso facto*, the reception of a new center of gravity, a new pole of attraction. Therein lies the importance of the contemplative experience that John claims to make available to his reader. He knows that the more the reader learns to see the Crucified *as* the uplifted one, as the king in glory, the more there will be victory over that gravitational force that pulls man down, toward the glory that men mistakenly think is authentic (Jn 5:44, 12:43). However, man needs to experience the magnetism of a new and truer highnessglory: that of absolute Love.

3. The eyes of the eagle

How does the beloved disciple execute this program concretely? At this point, the symbol enters the scene, in the artistic-literary sense of the term¹⁸. In brief, it is our conviction that the noto-

lifting up of his Son on the Cross, it is fundamental for John that one look at the concrete image of the uplifted and pierced one that he who saw – above all in the most material sense of the term – fixed in his gospel forever. See note 7 above.

¹⁷ “But the superessential Beautiful is called Beauty, on account of... calling all things to Itself [*hos panta pros heauto kaloun*], and as collecting all in all to Itself” (Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* 4.7). The false etymology goes back to Plato who, in the *Cratylus* (416B – D), already played with the assonance between the adjective *kalos* and the participle of the verb „to call” (*kaloun*).

¹⁸ It is certainly not by chance that „the disciple whom Jesus loved”, or the ocular witness who is at the origin of the fourth gospel, appears (with this name, cf. Jn 1:37ff., 18:15 – 17) before Easter only two times: 1) in the Upper Room

riously sophisticated and dense network of symbols, metaphors, images, echoes and intertextual allusions, double meanings, etc., that John employs throughout the arc of his narrative is artfully woven precisely to realize the aforementioned program. To borrow an architectural image, we might say that the fourth gospel is nothing other than a sort of „literary temple” masterfully constructed around the golden altar of the uplifted and pierced one, in such a way as to direct the most light possible toward it and, consequently, to cause its resplendence to catch the eye of the reader who is attentive to its striking beauty. These reflections help us to understand the *second response* that, in my opinion, John would have given to the original question posed. The irreplaceable role of the symbol in the proclamation and the transmission of the Gospel resides, in a Johannine sense, in the fact that there is only one principal task of the preacher and mystagogue for John: to help the listener to perceive the beauty-*doxa* of Christ uplifted from the earth, which is the prerogative of symbolic language, as we will now show. We can thus proceed to the second part of our meditation, which has a twofold aim: first, to explain what exactly is this penetrating vision that John wants to help the reader to acquire; and, second, to show the irreplaceable function of symbolic language in such a *manuductio*.

(Jn 13:23), where he is the only one to hear the mysterious word (Jn 19:27: „What you are going to do, do quickly”) through which Jesus reveals not only his readiness but even his impatient desire to be handed over to death to reveal the glory of his love for his own (Jn 13:1); 2) under the Cross (Jn 19:25ff.), where he is the only among the (male) disciples to witness the outpouring of blood-water from the pierced side of Jesus. In the first case, he hears what the others have not seen (Jn 13:23ff.). In the second, he sees what the others have not heard (Jn 19:35). The correspondence is evidently not random: the two scenes constitute, in reality, two inseparable panels of a diptych, whose unifying theme is the witness given by the beloved disciple to the love *eis to telos* of the Lord. For only he who has heard and understood the word pronounced by Jesus at the end of the Last Supper can see the glory of divine love surging out of the pierced side of Jesus. Inversely, the word said at the Last Supper becomes fully comprehensible only when it is „listened to” while looking at the pierced one. On the beloved disciple as the „ideal” author of the gospel, cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2007), 73 – 92.

Let us begin with the first objective. As the very title of my reflection suggests, I find the greatest help in understanding what is meant by *Johannine vision* to be the animal that the Church has seen since the second century as a symbol of the fourth evangelist: the eagle. Why? As any documentary on eagles will attest, the two qualities universally recognized as distinctive of the eagle are its *acute vision* and the capacity to *fly higher* than any other bird. Significantly, these two characteristics interact closely with one another. In fact, the special quality that the eagle possesses with regard to visual power, beyond those beliefs found in ancient bestiaries,¹⁹ is the capacity to *see even small objects distinctly from great heights*. Our thesis is that something profoundly analogous is true of the Johannine *remembering*,²⁰ that is, of the Johannine mode of contemplating and narrating the story of Jesus in general and the agony and death of Jesus on the Cross in particular. Let us concentrate on the recounting of the facts of Golgotha. These

¹⁹ According to an ancient belief that was still popular in the Middle Ages (cf. Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto I, 46 – 48), the eagle was the only bird capable of looking at the sun for long periods of time without going blind. The belief seemed to have originated from St. Augustine's explanation for the symbolic identification of John with the king of the birds: „Vice versa, John, like an eagle, flies above the fog of human fragility and sees with the sharpest and surest eye of the heart the light of unchangeable truth” (*De consensu evangelistarum* 1.6.9). See also *ibid.*, 4.10.11; Augustine, *Tractatus in Johannis evangelium* 36.5; Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto XXVI, 52 – 54.

²⁰ I attribute a technical meaning to this term, notoriously central to the poetics of Giacomo Leopardi. It contains, in fact, a possible double meaning that captures well the process of symbolization that memory undergoes in the Johannine narrative. Remembrance means, above all, giving back flesh, bringing something back *quodammodo* to life. Precisely for this first meaning, however, one might also intend the change that past events undergo when, in „remembering”, one realizes their connection with other facts. The typical example is the gaffe of temporarily forgetting known information: I encounter a friend whom I have not seen in a long time. After an awkward beginning, I ask him, „How is your wife?” My friend does not respond and changes the subject. I knew that he had become a widower a few months prior, but, for some inexplicable reason, I forgot it. When the important detail comes back to mind, an awful sense of shame comes over me. The material content of the memory remains the same. But it is remembered – in the technical sense I am using – when now it appears as part (as a member) of a complete picture that had slipped out of my visual field and now modifies sensibly to my eyes the meaning of the event. In part, I owe the inspiration of these ideas to my friend Uberto Motta.

are events that the beloved disciple has materially seen and heard at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:35). But in his gospel those unforgettable memories are seen again from a vantage point that is profoundly diverse, so to speak. The object of his vision has not changed. What has changed, rather, is the position of the observer relative to the object. Thanks to the revelatory action of the Spirit and to long years of meditation, the beloved disciple is now in a position to contemplate the terrible scene of the death of Jesus from a position that one can justifiably define as „aerial” or, more precisely, „heavenly” This affirmation is true, as we intend to show, in two different senses.

4. Rex tremende maiestatis

The first is that, thanks to having come to know Jesus’ *true place of origin*²¹, John is able to see in the man Jesus who suffers and dies on the Cross that which he would not have been able to see when he was a physical witness of his agony: the divine Word freely descended from the heavenly heights with the specific intention of allowing himself to be destroyed on the Cross. In this sense, we can speak of „aerial footage”, meaning that the position from which John „zooms in” on all that Jesus does, says, and, above all, suffers on the Cross, is that of one who knows from where he has come and can thereby measure the vertical distance, so to speak, between the place from which the Word has

²¹ The exceptional importance that the „problem” of the place of the birth of Jesus receives in the fourth gospel (true or presumed: Jn 1:45 – 46, 4:43 – 45, 6:42, 7:25 – 29, 7:41 – 43, 8:14 – 23, 9:29 – 30, 19:9) finds, in my opinion, its most profound explanation in the ironic structure of the Johannine theology of glory. To the eyes of the one who knows from what heights Jesus has come, his stay in Nazareth and his, therefore, (relative) provenance from the humble and poor village of Galilee is, in itself, an effulgent sign of his glory „as of the only Son of the Father” (Jn 1:14), or of the radicality of the Son’s love for his Father and for humanity. To the eyes of those who do not know his provenance, his „being from Nazareth” is instead a scandal and proof of his lack of regal glory. On the importance of the theme in the fourth gospel, cf. Marianne Meyer Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 16 – 23.

descended and the Cross²². It is evident that only thanks to this „aerial footage” can John see in the image of the pierced one the radiant symbol of divine love. What is most important for our purposes, however, is the way in which John translates that which is an *interior experience* into a *sensible image*. Let us look at an example:

19:30a: When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said,
 Τετέλεσται [double entendre: it is finished/it is completed]
 19:30b: And he bowed his head [καὶ κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν],
 19:30c: and gave up his spirit [παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα]
 [double entendre: he breathed his last/he gave up his
 spirit].

It is not our present intention to offer a complete commentary on John 19:30, as it is one of the most symbolically saturated verses of the entire gospel of John. We will limit ourselves to a few suggestions, concentrating above all on the Johannine description of Jesus giving up his spirit.

Let us begin from the last word pronounced by the Johannine Jesus before his death. As has been noted, the Greek term is more or less untranslatable because of its ambiguity. In fact, the perfect „τετέλεσται” can be translated in two radically different ways, both appropriate to the context for different reasons. If we accept the first translation – *it is finished/it is the end* – the expression evokes resignation and surrender. Jesus feels death approaching and accepts remissively to drink the bitter chalice. If we accept the second – *it is finished/it is completed* – the same word acquires a profoundly different timbre: in it now resounds the satisfaction and quasi-exuberance of he who felt the desired completion of his most important work. The ambiguity is obviously not accidental. Through this subtle double entendre, John intends to render perceptible in some way to his reader an ironic paradox: that same death which Jesus seemed to suffer as a crushing destiny, decreed fittingly „the end”, is, in reality, an action,

²² Not by chance does John, unique among the evangelists, precede his gospel with a prologue that anticipates *sub specie aeternitatis* the same *historia Iesu* narrated in the rest of his gospel.

a gesture, the fulfillment of a mission that the Father had given him to complete (Jn 4:34, 5:36, 17:4)²³.

But what does this mean exactly? In order to answer, we need to move on to the next scene. As has been meticulously observed by commentators, John describes the last breath of Jesus by means of a strange circumlocution: *παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα*, which literally means „he gave up his spirit/breath” Thanks to the ambiguity present in the word *pneuma* (biological breath or Holy Spirit), one could read the periphrasis as nothing more than the last exhalation of a dying man. But it is clear even to the minimally astute reader that John does not use the verb „con-sign/give” here without a reason. The ambiguity is, once again, intended. The evangelist is using it to help the reader penetrate into the profound meaning of this death. And so, on the one hand, it is not wrong to say that the expression simply indicates the fact that Jesus truly breathed his last like every other man.²⁴ On the other hand, this ambiguity permits the reader to intuit why or in what sense this death is profoundly different from all others.

²³ I remind the reader that the *erga* (works, plural) of Jesus are, in the fourth gospel, the works done by Jesus in his public ministry. The work (*ergon*, singular) par excellence is, instead – in a crystalline example of Johannine irony – the death of Jesus. Cf. Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto, *Dizionario teologico del Vangelo di Giovanni* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1982), 235 – 38.

²⁴ Thanks yet again to the ambiguity of the word *pneuma*, which in itself could also easily mean „life breath” in a biological sense, even if it is the preferred term for the Holy Spirit in the fourth gospel. Because of this ambiguity, there is no agreement among exegetes on the interpretation of John 19:30b. If one reads *πνεῦμα* in the sense of life breath (Schnackenburg, Bultmann, Becker, Senior, etc.), the meaning of the text would be more or less the same: on the one hand, it is said that Jesus is truly dead; on the other, it affirms that he died freely, entrusting himself to the Father (cf. Lk 23:46). If, instead, one accepts that the word *pneuma* refers to the Spirit, the text begins to have a coloring that is profoundly ecclesiological (Brown, de La Potterie, Moloney, Schnelle, Zumstein, etc.): the fruit of the death of Jesus is the effusion of the Spirit on the disciples. I propose that reason lies with those who see the ambiguity as deliberate, for example Jean Zumstein, *Il Vangelo secondo Giovanni*, vol. 2 (Turin: Claudiana, 2017), 903 – 04. I would add that it is not only not necessary to choose one meaning over another, but also that it is necessary to evaluate positively the semantic interface between the two meanings, the historic and the symbolic, as we are succinctly trying to accomplish here. And in fact, it is precisely in this interaction that one must search for the *proprium* of the profound theological-poetics of John.

Jesus is not *losing* his life; he is actively giving it up for love of the Father and of his sheep (Jn 10:11, 10:18). The death of Jesus, in other words, is simultaneously an event suffered, in the first meaning of the periphrasis, and a sovereign act of love, in the second meaning. And it is precisely in virtue of the coincidence between these two meanings that his death is, paradoxically, *the inbreaking of the breath of life to the kingdom of death*, where the sons of Adam are languishing in confinement. Since what else is the breath of life if not the *pneuma*-breath of agape, of the love that circulates between the Father and the Son? Therefore, transforming his *breathing his last* into the purest *gift of love*, Jesus imbues, so to speak, death with life, disarming thereby the former from within. We can now begin to appreciate the sublimity of the Johannine image: exteriorly, Jesus seems to lose the breath of life and to fall into death. In reality, he is actively descending into death in order to give to those lying under its yoke the breath of life, which John expresses with exceptional poetry and symbolic acumen through the other visual detail at the center of the verse: the gesture of „bowing his head” That which seems to be only a sign of surrender is actually profoundly more. In reality, Jesus is *lowering himself* – descending into death – precisely so that he might *breathe the „breath of life” on those who are „beneath him”*²⁵ (cf. Gn 2:7).

²⁵ It goes without saying that this is not to affirm that John intended to move, historically, the communication of the Holy Spirit to the Church from the Upper Room (Jn 20:22) to Golgotha, almost as if the mother and the beloved disciple were *stricto sensu* the recipients of a sort of anticipated Pentecost. Yet, when a Johannist of such great caliber as Rudolf Schnackenburg (*The Gospel According to John*, vol. 3 [New York: Crossroad, 1975], 284 – 85) *excludes* that the entrustment of the *pneuma* could possibly allude to the communication of the Spirit to the nascent Church based only on the fact that Pentecost happens for John elsewhere (Jn 20:22), he shows the limits of an exegetical method that does not know how to integrate itself with the laws of symbolic language. It does not matter a great deal, in the eyes of our evangelist, that, from the strictly historical point of view, the disciples received the Spirit only after the Resurrection, which he obviously knows and narrates (Jn 20:22). What matters is to make evident to the reader in some way the causal relationship that exists between the free giving of Jesus' life and the disciples' reception of divine life (= *santo pneuma*). See, for example, Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Lettura del Vangelo secondo Giovanni* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1990), 1122. What is more, the symbolic anticipation of the gift of the Spirit on the Cross – anticipation that the evangelist considers

There would be many other things to say in order to clarify and enrich the exegesis of John 19:30b that I have just laid out. But for the scope of the present essay these few sketches are sufficient. Three further comments must now be made.

First, it is correct to say that what we are dealing with here is a way to narrate or depict the death of Jesus that one could easily call symbolic or poetic. Through a literary device, John is able to translate into image a reality that, in and of itself, only faith can grasp: the mystery of the sovereign freedom of Jesus' death and therefore its transformation into a majestic demonstration of power. We might speak of *symbolism of sovereignty*. This device is the principal instrument John uses to mold into image and narrative that which we have called the *vertical extension* of the eyes of faith²⁶.

Second, it would be a grave error to define this way of describing the facts as *unrealistic*. The evangelist would have certainly rebelled against such a definition (Jn 19:35) due to the fact that, *from his point of view*, he is not in the least distorting the *truth of the facts*²⁷. Rather, he is recounting the facts in such a way as to allow their hidden meaning to shine forth, a meaning that is not imposed from above but revealed to him by the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:25-26, 16:12-14). There is no doubt that the symbolic rendering of the event *in some way* modifies its historical accuracy. Nevertheless, this is no arbitrary or subjective modifi-

so important as to reduplicate it (cf. Jn 19:34) – allows the reader who has the eyes to see to contemplate in Christ raised on the Cross not only the fount and cause of salvation but also the paradoxical image of the content of salvation, of that „life” that from the „mouth” and „heart” of the Lord are communicated to his own: „Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

²⁶ As noted, the Johannine narrative of the Passion is written from beginning to end in such a way as to render most transparent, through an astute and attentive use of various literary devices, the ironic idea that governs the theology of history of the fourth gospel: despite all appearances, the hour of being raised on the Cross for Jesus is, in fact, the hour of his victory and, therefore, of his enthronement as king of the universe. The bibliography on the theme is vast. Among the most recent and authoritative interventions on the subject, Jorg Frey stands out (*The Glory of the Crucified One*, chap. 5 and 7). The following is his expression of the central idea that governs the Johannine Passion narrative: „The cross (for John) is, in reality, the regal throne and it is precisely in dying that the king obtains that *basileia* of which he spoke in front of Pilate (18:36-37)” (*The Glory of the Crucified One*, 175).

²⁷ See note 16 above.

cation. Trying to imagine how John would have justified his own way to „give testimony” (Jn 19:35), we might say that the symbolic image is here the fruit of a *fertile union* between the visual *memory* and the post-paschal intelligence of the *meaning* of that same memory. The *intellectus fidei*, penetrating into the memory, not only fills it with its light but, one might say, *impregnates it*, rendering it capable of producing a *new* image that is neither pure recollection of the fact nor subjective distortion of the fact but, rather, a *glorified* memory²⁸. As already mentioned, we propose to call this phenomenon „*re-membrance*” in order to underscore the fact that it is a remembering that brings about a sort of resurrection of the fact and not a mere *re-evocation* or *re-exhumation*. Comprehension of the deep meaning of the fact, in other words, acts on the imaginative faculty in such a way that the image of the fact left in the memory is forged into a *new image, partly similar to and partly different from the first*²⁹.

Third, the transformation of the last breath of Jesus into a powerful breath with life-giving effect is made possible by the fact that the exhalation of the last breath of a man in some cases actually resembles a true and proper active blowing of breath. In other words, the symbolic transformation of the fact is made possible by, and I would say even stimulated by, the *exterior or physical likeness* between the mere fact and the transfiguring symbol. Without this likeness, the production of symbolic images that make the profound meaning of the event transparent would be impossible. Hence, a new reason why symbolic language for John possesses an irreplaceable function in the communication of the faith becomes clear. As we already affirmed, nothing is more

²⁸ We want to suggest that a similar phenomenon takes place in the constitution of figurative modalities that Byzantine icons use to represent the Passion and death of Christ, above all in those icons depicting the Crucifixion and the deposition. On this point, Leonid Ouspensky speaks of „symbolic realism” (*Theology of the Icon*, vol. 1 [New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992], 96) – an apparent oxymoron that seems to us to be perfectly applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to Johannine „narrative painting”

²⁹ Perhaps the most glaring example of this phenomenon is the Johannine narrative of the arrest of Jesus. In this respect, see the commentary on John 18:6 in Ignace de La Potterie, *La Passione di Gesu secondo il vangelo di Giovanni* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1988), 43 – 48.

important for the beloved disciple than giving the reader eyes capable of seeing the deeper meanings of all that Jesus does, says, and above all suffers in the great hour of his being raised on the Cross. But we have seen that this deeper meaning does not appear in the mere fact. How, then, can we make transparent the hidden meaning of the fact without distorting it? For John, there is but one way: to superimpose upon the image of the fact a symbolic image that materially resembles the former and that, at the same time, has the power to evoke horizons of meaning that are concealed from the mere fact. In this way, we arrive at an initial, provisional definition of the function of symbolic language not only in the Johannine Passion narrative but in the entire fourth gospel: we might say that, for John, the symbol acts as a bridge between the sensible and recordable fact and its hidden meaning. Thanks to its simultaneous affinity with both, the symbol has the power and the mission to make transparent their mutual affiliation.

5. Figural theology: A fulfillment both awaited and unexpected

We can thus move to the „second eye” of the eagle. We said that, thanks to its exceptionally acute vision, the eagle is able to distinguish clearly a minute object from great heights. This power gives the eagle the possibility of situating the object on which his sight is fixed in the context of a notably vast landscape. The same is analogically true of the way in which the beloved disciple looks at the scene of the death of the Lord on the Cross. The single details of this atrocious scene now acquire a different aspect because the beloved disciple is able to „zoom in” on each one of them while still keeping in his visual field a twofold background: first, that of the words Jesus had said and the works he had performed during his ministry; second, that of the entire history of salvation, namely, Israel’s Scriptures. We might say that while the first eye had to do with verticality, or with awareness of the heavenly origin of Jesus, the second extends in a horizontal direction. What the eye of faith is able to see here is, in other words, the fact that all of the promises and figures of the past are fulfilled in the hour of the raising up of the Son of man.

Thus we arrive at the decisively more important area in which the author of the fourth gospel shows his extraordinary mastery of symbolic language: figural theology or theology of fulfillment. As stated at the beginning, I cannot enter into great detail about this vast and complex argument in this context. We will rather concentrate on the aspect of this theology that remains unexplored, which I will call *intratextual* figural theology. For John, the hour of the Cross is not only the hour of eschatological fulfillment of all the Scriptures of Israel³⁰, but it is also the hour that reveals the true meaning of all the words said and actions performed by Jesus during his public ministry. „I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father” (Jn 16:25). Many, if not all, scholars recognize that the hour in which Jesus is raised up from the earth is the goal or climax toward which John’s gospel tends from its beginning³¹. The problem lies in establishing the precise meaning of this affirmation. In fact, to say that the hour of Jesus’ being raised on the Cross is the *climax* of the gospel does not yet amount to a *positive interpretation* of the relation that ties the Johannine narrative of the death of Jesus to that which precedes it. In my estimation, the best way to shed light on this relation is to see the many signs through which Jesus reveals his glory

³⁰ The hammering repetition of the verb τετέλεσται (it is finished/it is complete) in John 19:28 and 19:30, together with τελειωθῆ (to fulfill the Scriptures) in John 19:28, shows with sufficient clarity that the idea of the eschatological fulfillment of all of the Scriptures in the hour of the death of Jesus is important for the fourth evangelist: „After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), ‘I thirst.’... When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished’” (Jn 19:28 – 30). The „all” (πάντα) that had been completed was certainly the mission of Jesus, but it is also the Scriptures, as the following words of the evangelist hint. For an excellent presentation of the theme of fulfillment of the Scriptures in the Johannine narrative of the death of Jesus, see Roberto Vignolo, „La morte di Gesù nel Quarto Vangelo come compimento (Gv 19,28 – 30)”, in *Opera giovannea*, ed. Giuseppe Ghiberti (Turin: Editrice Elledici, 2003), 273 – 91.

³¹ Cf., for example, Francis J. Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2013), 71, 135; Dwight Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119; Udo Schnelle, „Recent Views of John’s Gospel”, *Word and World* 21, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 352 – 559, at 357.

(Jn 2:11) in the first part of the fourth gospel as figures, or symbolic anticipations, of the final gesture in which the Lord manifests his glory openly and fully: his death on the Cross. In this way, for example in the scene of the piercing of the side of Jesus, the reader is invited to see not only a fulfillment of the Scriptures cited in John 19:37, but also of the hour in which the Lord made flow from his own breast the true wine of the wedding feast, a wine of which that other wine lavished upon the guests at Cana was but a symbol; in the same way, it is the hour in which Jesus pours out the water of which he had spoken to the Samaritan woman, and so on. Now, if this interpretation is correct³², why would John need to narrate the story of Jesus in this way?³³ *Cui prodest?* An example will help us yet again to respond to this question. Let us take up the first of the signs: the transformation of water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. For different reasons on which I cannot elaborate here, I think there are sufficient proofs of the

³² For more details on the figural relation between the book of signs and the narrative of the hour, see my essay „The Wine of the Wedding”, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 574 – 605.

³³ For a more complete treatment, see my essay „The Wine of the Wedding” Even if it is not possible to enter into the details of the question in this article, it is necessary to emphasize that the dialogue between the figural narrative and fulfillment can come about in a truly fruitful way only if one is prepared to postulate that the fourth evangelist makes generous use of that trope which Richard Hays has called *metalepsis* or *transumption*. By this he means an allusion within a text B to a passage from text A that has „the function to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interchange with text A – an interchange that involves aspects or materials of text A not explicitly cited in text B” (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 20). In brief, *metalepsis* has the function of generating a „new figure” that is the fruit of a metaphorical superimposition of two entire texts/ narratives. In my opinion, Hays convincingly shows that the Old Testament allusions sown throughout the gospels often and intentionally act precisely as a clasp between texts. See Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). The novelty of our application of Hays’s insight to the fourth gospel lies in holding that, in John, the intertextual dialogue that the *metalepsis* has the goal of activating involves frequently *at least* three texts: a text of the Old Testament, a narrative from the book of signs, and a passage from the narrative of the hour. For example, a) the servant of Abraham asks Rebecca for something to drink before a well (Gn 24:17); b) Jesus asks for something to drink from the Samaritan woman before Jacob’s well (Jn 4:7); c) Jesus asks for something to drink on the Cross (Jn 19:28).

fact that John wants (which does not mean that he imposes upon) his reader to see in the water-turned-wine (Jn 2:9) a type/figure of the blood-water of the Cross³⁴.

It cannot be denied that the juxtaposition appears *at first glance* to be rather bizarre. To understand the reason in a more precise way, let us focus briefly on the symbolic significance of wine. It is a universal symbol of joy, in particular of that ecstatic joy in which all anxiety and pain is forgotten³⁵. Because of this connotation, for the Old Testament and for Judaism the superabundance of wine is one of the major signs of the messianic times³⁶. In the last days, the Lord will provide streams of supremely fine wine, meaning that the time of pain and affliction of his people has come to an end:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make
for all peoples a feast of fat things,

³⁴ See my essay „The Wine of the Wedding”, esp. 587 – 99. The sibylline response of Jesus to his mother must be understood as an allusion to the fact that Jesus is thinking from the beginning of the only wine for which he feels personally responsible: that of the feast of his own wedding, which will not come about until the still long-off hour of his death. There is no agreement among scholars as to whether the wine of the wedding feast at Cana is a figure of the eucharistic blood. There are good reasons, however, to see in the wine a symbol of the Holy Spirit as much as of the Eucharist. For different reasons, I hold that the wine of Cana is a figure of *both*. However, here again if one focuses too exclusively on trying to identify „what the wine stands for”, one risks losing sight of the fact that the symbol possesses an intrinsic semantic richness that asks, first of all, to be explored and evaluated *for itself*. The wine of Cana, in this sense, is above all neither a sign of the Spirit nor of the Eucharist. It is, rather, the symbol of that joy that the Lord came to give to all those who, through the faith, become capable of tasting the *sweetness of his love*. In fact, this is what the wine spontaneously evokes when drunk in a nuptial context (see below). With these bases established, it becomes clear that both the Spirit and the Eucharist lend themselves under different aspects to be figurally identified with the wine of the wedding (cf. my essay „The Wine of the Wedding”, 593-99).

³⁵ Cf. Ps 104:15; Sir 31:27-28; Is 24:7-11; Jer 48:33; Zach 10:7. „There is no rejoicing without wine” (*Pesachim* 109a).

³⁶ Cf. Is 55:1; Jer 31:12-14; Am 9:13-14; Jl 2:22; 2 Bar 29:5; 1 Enoch 10:9. See also Gn 49:11-12; Num 13:23-24. On the connection between wine and messianic times, see Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus als Weltvollender* (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1930), 28-29. The wine is also a symbol of the sweetness of Wisdom (Prv 9:2, 4b-5).

a feast of wine on the lees,
of fat things full of marrow,
of wine on the lees well refined.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever,
and the Lord God will wipe away tears
from all faces. (Is 25:6–8)

This passage sheds light on the first and most immediate reason why Jesus begins his ministry in John's gospel by the free and generous giving of good wine. With this sign he is identifying himself as an eschatological agent of the Lord. He is the one whom God has sent to begin the great banquet promised for the end times. It is also clear why the wine of Cana cannot but be seen as the figure of another wine not yet lavished on the people. For as abundant and excellent as the wine produced by Jesus is, one could certainly not identify the wedding feast of Cana with the glorious banquet promised by Isaiah for messianic times. The wine of Cana points, therefore, to a future hour, an hour in which – as Jesus himself makes known through his response to his mother (Jn 2:4) – the Lord will pour out a wine even more abundant and precious than that of Cana.

Now, if we move at once to the scene of the blood-water that flows from the pierced side of Jesus, it is impossible not to perceive an overwhelmingly frustrating contrast. Certainly, the visual resonance is present: the blood that flows from the side of Jesus is red, just like the wine. The blood is combined with water, just like the wine of Cana, the wine that the evangelist significantly referred to as „water now become wine” (Jn 2:9). At the same time, one cannot deny that, at first glance, the contrast is more pronounced than the similarity: what is it about this image that is sweet to the taste and inebriating to the sight (Ps 33:9)? Apparently nothing. On the contrary, the spectacle placed before us is painful and bitter. So are we mistaken? Not in the least. We need to dig deeper. Let us look back to the wine of Cana. Tellingly, the pericope does not speak of a generic feast but of a *wedding* feast. The wine of joy, therefore, subliminally evokes a particular type

of joy: the joy of love. And this is certainly not a coincidence: there is nothing in the domain of human experience with an inebriating power analogous to that of wine quite like the experience of love (Sg 4:12 – 5:1). The reference to the Song of Songs is essential: „Your love is sweeter than wine”, say the beloved and her lover to one another (Sg 1:3, 4:11)³⁷ This sheds light on the deeper meaning of the sign performed by Jesus at Cana. He himself is in fact the divine bridegroom who has come to make his bride taste the intoxicating sweetness of his love³⁸. At this point, the symbolic nexus that ties the wine of Cana to the blood of the Cross can come to light. Effectively, is not perhaps the blood that flows from the side of the Lord on the Cross exactly this: the sign of the *superabundant* love of the Lord for the Church, his spouse? And is it not precisely in tasting, through faith, the prodigality of this love that the heart of the believing Church fills with sweetness? In the same instant we superimpose the blood of the Cross upon the wine of the wedding, the exorbitant quantity of wine produced by the Lord at Cana in Galilee begins to unlock its otherwise imperceptible glory. The reference to the Old Testament is not enough (cf. Is 25:6-8) to explain the excess in Jesus' response to the request (Jn 2:6-7). Even more than looking backward, his gesture looks forward to the mystery of that which it was, in turn, a figure: the love of the Cross. Was the sacrifice of the Cross necessary, from a strictly soteriological point of view? Was it necessary that Jesus suffered in the way in which and to the extent to which he did suffer? To this question, the Johannine Jesus seems to respond „symbolically”: perhaps not. Perhaps God could have chosen other ways to save humanity. But this makes it even sweeter to the palate of faith (= wine of Cana) that he chose the excessive path (= the blood of the Cross).

Therefore, a second fruit of the convergence of figure and fulfillment comes to light, a fruit that is evidently the flipside of the first. Not only does the blood of the Cross illuminate and reveal the full glory of the wine of Cana. The reverse is also true: in some way, the blood of the Cross has need of the help of the wine of Cana in order to unleash all of its own glory. Obviously, even

³⁷ Cf. Sg 2:4, 7:3, 8:2c.

³⁸ See note 12 above.

without any reference whatsoever to the wine of Cana, the exorbitant nature of the gift lavished by God in the hour of the Cross would remain the same. Yet – and this is what, to the eyes of the witness John, counts the most – it would run the risk of passing unobserved or, more precisely, of not drawing attention to itself. In the same lens, seeing *in* the blood of the Cross the wine of the *wedding* of Cana, with all that the latter evokes, does not mean seeing in it only a sign of the generosity of the love of the Lord for his Church, but also a sign of his *desire to unite himself to her*. The blood of the Cross is, for John, also (and perhaps above all) the means of the union of love of the divine bridegroom with the Church³⁹ Suddenly, even the wound at the side from which blood flows begins to speak, almost contagiously. Too rarely is this sort of „visual resonance” taken seriously: What could a wound to the side by means of a spear have evoked in the mind of a Hellenized Jew or a Greek from the first century (see Jn 12:21-23)? What if not the wound of eros? What is more, was it not precisely from the side of the first Adam that God, as the man slept, drew out the woman destined to remedy his incurable solitude (Gn 2:18-22)? The preciousness of the background of the sign of Cana is thus confirmed; effectively, without that background, it would have

³⁹ See note 34 above. As will be hinted at in the conclusion, this affirmation, in my view, has implications that are rather more important and profound than is usually admitted. There is no doubt that in the last decades nuptial symbolism has become an object of growing attention on the part of scholars of the fourth gospel. Among others, see Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009); Jocelyn McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998); Ann Roberts Winsor, *A King Is Bound in the Tresses: Allusions to the Song of Songs in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 1999); Addison Hodges Hart, *The Woman, the Hour, and the Garden: A Study of Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Renzo Infante, *Lo Sposo e la Sposa. Percorsi di analisi simbolica tra Sacra Scrittura e cristianesimo delle origini* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2004); Ernesto Della Corte, *Cristo Sposo Crocifisso. Da Cana alla croce nel quarto vangelo* (Capua: Ar-tetra Edizioni, 2019). Much more remains to be done, above all on the interpretation of the function of the nuptial figure in the global vision of Johannine theological aesthetics or theology of glory.

been rather difficult for us to *see* all the meaning that had been laid out. A great deal more might be added, for example, to show how the sophisticated quality of the wine – which the guests, it must be refined, are not able to appreciate – offers even more precious insights into the glory of the blood-water that flows from the heart of the pierced one⁴⁰. We cannot enter into these points at great length here. However, at least five brief observations must be made in response to what has emerged, the first two of which simply confirm the validity of the principles already illustrated in relation to the first type of symbolization.

First, the superimposition of the symbol on a historic reality, the event of the wedding feast, even more obviously than in the episode when Jesus breathes his last, does not constitute a betrayal or a sweetening of the mere fact. The overlay, instead, allows the *doxa*, the hidden glory, to emerge. In fact, it is precisely in allowing himself to be pierced on the Cross that the Lord reveals the excess of his love, the contemplation of which is for the heart *sweeter than wine*. Symbol and reality do not become muddled as they unite; rather, the one sheds new light on the other.

Second, here too the transforming superimposition of the symbol of the „water become wine” (Jn 2:9) on the gushing blood and water coming from the side of Jesus is made possible, above all, by the fact that there is a certain physical resemblance between figure and fulfillment. Without this likeness, it would be impossible to produce a fecund union between symbol and mere reality.

Third, an analogous explanation can be given concerning the dynamism that, in the evangelist’s imagination, could have caused the fusion or synthesis of the two memories. It is not necessary, however, to dwell on this point.

We arrive thus at the fourth point. As we have seen, by superimposing the figure upon the fulfillment, the reader makes an interesting discovery: in reality, between the *wine* of love and the *blood* of the Cross, between eros and agape, more resemblance exists than there appeared to be at first sight. This point is true in two complementary ways: first, in the sense that in the sacrifice of love made by the Lord there is more *wine* than there appeared to be. For the fruit of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is the joy of

⁴⁰ Cf. Prospero, „The Wine of the Wedding”, 594ff.

intimacy without comparison for those who love him, an intimacy that the blood poured out by the Lord realizes in the most real way possible. Second, it is true in the sense that what is true of love in and of itself is shown to be supremely true of the love of Christ: the lover brings joy to the beloved in proportion to the generosity of his dedication. In love, the one who is not disposed to shed blood cannot drink the wine of true joy.

Fifth, even after the figural relation has been understood, the *contrast* between figure and fulfillment remains no less important than the *likeness*, but now it appears in a different light. We realize now, almost by surprise, that the contrast did not depend on the fact that the blood of the Cross is missing the qualities proper to a figure (negation by privation) but rather on the hyperbolic intensity with which it possesses those qualities (negation by supereminence). Love is, in fact, *always* an intertwining of agape and unitive eros. And, nevertheless, both generous dedication *to* and union *with* the beloved are realized in the mystery of the agape of the Lord with an intensity that shatters all prior imagination with its excess.

These final two observations allow us to give at least *three* new responses to the question at the heart of our present investigation: what is the function and place of symbolic language in general, and figural theology in particular, in the fourth gospel?

6. Pedagogy, anagogy, irony

Let us return to an assertion from the finale of the first paragraph. The enterprise that the fourth evangelist undertakes in writing his gospel is anything but easy: he wants to lead the reader to see the icon of absolute beauty in an image that, to the eyes of the world, „has neither splendor nor beauty” (Is 53:2). How can one hope to do so if not by merging in the icon of the pierced one all the images and figures that the „collective unconscious” of Israel, and beyond Israel all of humanity, spontaneously associates with *life, glory, highness, and dignity*? In other words, what is the reason for men’s indifference before Christ if not the fact that they are not able to see in him the fulfillment of those *figures* or *images* to which the heart is, by its very nature, most sensitive?

It is in this sense that we must understand the delicate task of figural theology: to show how the crucified and pierced one does not negate these images. Rather, they are fulfilled *modo subliomore*: in a measure that is superabundant and in a way that is surprising; surprising to the point that, without the help of the mystagogue John, we would not even be able to see that it has taken place. The function of Johannine figural theology, from this point of view, is twofold: on the one hand, the goal that John has in mind is the same as that of any competent composer of metaphor⁴¹,

⁴¹ As Aristotle already wrote, „By far the greatest thing is the use of metaphor. That alone cannot be learned; it is the token of genius. For the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblances present in dissimilar realities” (*Poetics* 1459a5 – 8). Even such a master of the symbol as Paul Claudel said something similar: „The metaphor, like reasoning, reunites, but from farther away” (*Journal*, vol. 1: 1904 – 1932, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade 205 [Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968], 42). On the cognitive value of metaphor, Paul Ricoeur remains indispensable: *La metafora viva. Dalla retorica alla poetica: per un linguaggio di rivelazione*, 5th ed. (Milan: Jaca Book, 2010). The metaphor has enjoyed growing attention in the last century from both philosophers and linguists. Both fields of research offer precious insights and tools to the exegete of the fourth gospel. See, among others, Max Black, „Metaphor”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954): 273 – 94; „More about Metaphor”, *Dialectica* 31 (1977): 431 – 57; William Bedell Stanford, *Greek Metaphor: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936); Douglas Berggren, „The Use and Abuse of Metaphor, I”, *Review of Metaphysics* 16, no. 2 (December 1962): 237 – 58; „The Use and Abuse of Metaphor, II”, *Review of Metaphysics* 16, no. 3 (March 1963): 450 – 72; Warren Shibles, *Analysis of Metaphor in the Light of W. M. Urban’s Theories* (Le Haye: Mouton, 1971); Colin Murray Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Michel Le Guern, *Semantique de la metaphore et de la metonymie* (Paris: Larousse, 1973); Jacques Derrida, „La mythologie blanche. La metaphore dans le texte philosophique”, in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), 308 – 24; Donald Davidson, „What Metaphor Means”, in *On Metaphors*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Israel Scheffler, *Beyond the Letter: A Philosophical Inquiry into Ambiguity, Vagueness and Metaphor in Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). On metaphor in the gospel of John, see Jan van der Watt, „The Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel of John”, *SNTSU A* 23 (1998); *The Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Mogens Stiller Kjargaard, *Metaphor and Parable: A Systematic Analysis of the Specific Structure and Cognitive Function of the Synoptic Similes and Parables qua Metaphors*, *Acta Theologica Danica* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Zim-

namely to conjure affinity and likeness where there seems to be but contrast and dissimilarity. This scope may be called *pedagogic* or *cognitive (third response)*. Konersmann's words about metaphorical knowledge in general apply perfectly to Johannine figural theology: „Metaphorical knowledge is an orienting knowledge: it shows how to imagine facts that are strange, inaccessible, too complex or otherwise hidden from evidence”⁴². On the other hand, however, John does not intend to diminish or make an illusory attempt to eliminate the distance between symbol and reality, between wine and blood. Rather, he wants to transform that distance into the key to perceive the supereminent glory of the second with respect to the first. We could say there is here an *anagogical* goal in the Dionysian sense (*fourth response*): John wants to allow the reader to sense the perfume, so to speak, of the superabundant glory of the uplifted one, which goes beyond all expectation.

Let us now consider a *fifth response*. As can be intuited from the example chosen, fulfillment may seem surprising not only because it realizes the figure in a superabundant way, but also because the reader could have an idea that is out of focus or empty of those goods that the figure symbolizes. Once again, an example would be spousal love. Who could exhaust the question about the true nature of love? Everyone knows what it is, and yet at the same time we know so little! This observation leads us to another important task of Johannine figural theology: the uplifted and pierced one does not limit himself to the fulfillment of beautiful and clear figures. He reshapes them, meaning that he clarifies them, purifies them, and strips them of ambiguity; at times, he even radically subverts their comprehension. It is in this respect, we propose, that the Johannine Jesus intends to use the phrase „light of life” (Jn 8:12; cf. 1:4-5). The Christ of John's gospel does not limit himself to giving „eternal life” (Jn 3:16, 17:3, etc.); he reveals it. In other words, he

mermann, „Imagery in John”, in *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, 16 – 20; Ruben Zimmermann, „Metaphoric Networks as Hermeneutic Keys in the Gospel of John. On the Example of the Mission Imagery”, in *Repetitions and Variations in the Gospel of John*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle and Petrus Maritz (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2009).

⁴² Ralf Konersmann, *Worterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 15.

unveils its intimate nature, and in doing so he shows how the idea of „life” that predominates in what he calls the „world” is inconsistent with it. We could speak here of the critical or ironic character of Johan- nine figural theology⁴³.

In synthesis, we can say that the strength of Johannine figural theology is that it operates in two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, John uses figures to make the glory of the Lord visible. To use an image, we might say that the figures are like candles placed beside a golden mosaic that is immersed in shadow. In the same instant we approach it, the gold in the mosaic begins to shine forth. At the same time and inversely, *illuminated* by the figures, the Lord then becomes the candle that casts light on the otherwise hidden gold in the figures. The one who comes to see in the wine of the wedding feast a figure of the blood of the Cross will not see the wine of love as he did before. The initiation has changed his gaze forever, not only because now he sees in the blood of the Cross that which he had not seen before, but also because he now sees in the wine of human love, and even in the same material wine, spiritual mysteries that he was previously unable to grasp⁴⁴. With recourse to Johannine theological grammar, we might say that the fruit of the union of the metaphoric superimposition of figure and fulfillment is a sort of *reciprocal glorification* of the two through unity (Jn 17:1b).

⁴³ The bibliography on the use of irony in the fourth gospel has become so vast today that it would be impossible to give an exhaustive account of it. We recommend, at the very least, the valuable monograph by Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985); R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 169-80. Although the studies on the ample use John makes of the literary device of irony have reached remarkable results and high levels of sophistication, it seems to us that only rarely do scholars focus sufficiently on the profound connection between irony and the theology of revelation. To my knowledge, the only study that dedicates extensive space to the theme is Gail R. O’Day’s *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). As the author acutely writes, „John’s *mode of presentation* renders the object of that presentation: the literary form in which Jesus is presented as Revealer in John is inseparable from the Johannine theology of Revelation” (ibid., 32).

⁴⁴ For an illustration of the potential that the interplay in the „communication of idioms” between wine and blood (by way of the Song of Songs) has for eucharistic theology, I refer again to my article, „The Wine of the Wedding”, 601-05.

7. Amore, amore omne cosa conclama

We arrive now at another profound reason why symbolic theology, understood in a Johannine way, is exactly the kind of theology we need today (*sixth response*). For John, *the Word became flesh* not only to reveal to man *the glory of God through his flesh*, but also to reveal fully the glory that had always been hidden in all sensible realities created by God in the beginning, as Ephrem the Syrian would say, as figures or *typoi* of Christ raised up. For John, the uplifted one is not, in other words, only the revealer of the glory of the Father in a visible icon; he is also the revealer of the secret glory of the tree and the flower, of bread and wine, of light and water, of the body of man and woman, of the serpent and the worm. In fact, in the same instant in which the worm is used as a *figure* of the „sublime humility” of the Crucified (Ps 22:6), it becomes wondrously clear that what had been considered as only base and lowly carries hidden in itself a surpassing beauty, if it is true that precisely this humility is for John a reflection of the eternal glory of the agape of the Father (Jn 15:9)⁴⁵.

It thus becomes clear in what sense I consider Johannine symbolic theology particularly relevant. In short, the sickness of contemporary man is, above all, a sickness of the eyes. The drama of today’s man is not only that he has become incapable of seeing in the visible world the glory of God, but also that, for that same reason, he is losing the capacity to see the profound beauty and richness of the world itself. In this context, we can glimpse the force of John’s symbolic theology. It teaches us that seeing God at the heart of things once again – and not a generic God, but the God of Jesus Christ – does not obfuscate their intrinsic value. On the contrary, it makes that value appear in its fullness. *Amore, amore omne cosa conclama* („Love, love resounds the chorus of all things”), wrote Jacopone da Todi. Johannine symbolic theology shows us a path leading into the depths of what those words evoke.

⁴⁵ „We shall find the Mystic Theologians enfolding these things not only around the illustrations of the Heavenly Orders, but also, sometimes, around the supremely Divine Revelations Themselves. But they also clothe It in forms of wild beasts, and attach to It identity with a Lion, and Panther, and

8. A Veiled Splendor

To complete our brief journey through Johannine figural theology we cannot avoid a final question, for failing to respond to it would risk leaving the entire edifice of the presentation suspended over a void. To all that has been laid out thus far an objection could be raised: if the interpretation of Johannine figural theology proposed is correct, it is more than evident that the intent of the author cannot be *only* that of helping his reader to see (pedagogic intent). In say that it shall be a Leopard, and a rushing Bear. But, I will also add, that which seems to be more dishonourable than all, and the most incongruous, viz. that distinguished theologians have shewn it to us as representing Itself [*the Divinity*] under the form of a worm” (Dionysius the Areopagite, *Works*, vol 2: 1899, trans. John Parker [Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1897], 3 – 4). Yet again, Dionysius, with his doctrine of the superiority of the dissimilar symbol, has intuited something extraordinarily profound. If reread in the light of the Johannine doctrine of the revelation of the glory of the triune God in the icon of the one who was raised and pierced, the Dionysian doctrine reveals potentialities that are, to my knowledge, far from having been explored to their depths. They offer, in fact, a basis for a christocentric and trinitarian cosmology that, without canceling the classic doctrine of the *analogia entis* or a natural aesthetics, allows one nevertheless to bring to light the unexpected and hidden glory that is within those cosmic realities or even those realities that became ugly in the mystery of the Fall, those that to the natural eye lack „beauty to attract our gaze” (Is 53:2). fact, if this were the case the evangelist should have felt compelled to clarify the connection between figure and fulfillment, something that he does quite rarely. The objection is serious and important. Indeed, the distinctive characteristic of Johannine symbolic language is precisely its elusiveness⁴⁶. As every assiduous reader of the fourth gospel knows, there is no doubt that our „anonymous”

⁴⁶ Among the many studies that deal with this theme, one massive monograph stands out: Saeed Hamid Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

author loves to allude much more than to state explicitly, to imply much more than to place in plain sight. The question that remains is, why? Why not give more cogent signs, to go back to our main example, that the wine of Cana does refer to the blood-water of the Cross? The theme is of such importance and richness that it merits its own study. Here, however, we will limit ourselves to present, in an inevitably concise way, what we believe to be the best response to this question. In brief, John writes the way that he writes – or, more precisely, he does figural theology in the way that he does – because he wants to leave the reader the task, but also and *above all* to bestow the honor and pleasure, of *collaborating actively* in the manifestation of the „hidden glory” of the text. We might call this final „ingredient” of Johannine figural theology *dramatic*, but also *erotic-seductive*. A simple example will help to clarify what I mean by the use of these two adjectives.

Jn 13:27a: Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him.

13:27b: Jesus said to him, „What you are going to do, do quickly” [“Ο ποιεῖς ποιήσον τάχιον].

13:28: Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him [πρὸς τί εἶπεν αὐτῷ].

13:29a: Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him

13:29b: „Buy what we need for the feast” [Ἀγόρασον ὧν χρεῖαν ἔχομεν εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν];

13:29c: or, that he should give something to the poor [ἢ τοῖς πτωχοῖς ἵνα τι δῶ]].

Unable in the present context to comment in depth on this sublime text, we will limit ourselves to focusing on what is most pertinent to the theme we are currently exploring. It is difficult to deny that we are before a crystalline example of what scholars of the fourth gospel call a scheme of *misunderstanding*.⁴⁷ The first effect in the reader of emphasizing the disciples’ misunderstanding of Jesus’ words (Jn 13:27b) to Judas (or, better, to the devil

⁴⁷ On the theme, cf. Donald A. Carson, „Understanding Misunderstandings”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 59 – 91.

that has just taken hold of Judas) is that of attracting the reader's attention to the importance of the word itself – and for good reason. In fact, as in other parts of the fourth gospel, the evangelist uses the misunderstanding of the interlocutors of Jesus, or of those present, to invite the reader to reflect: What is it *exactly* that no one understands? What exactly does the Lord mean by saying, „What you are going to do, do quickly”? There is much to say on the matter. Here it is sufficient to observe that the narrator does not respond in an *explicit* way to this question. Rather, he gives his reader „the instruments” he needs in order to arrive at the answer for himself. It is not only in the interest of chronicling events that John lingers on the conjectures of the disciples as to the meaning of the sibylline words of the Lord. In reality, both hypotheses say something true – even if in a way that is rather *different and more sublime* (anagogy!) than that meant by the disciples who formulated them (involuntary prophecy)⁴⁸.

First, Judas is, in some sense, sent by the Lord to procure what was necessary for the imminent feast (Jn 13:29b), if it is true that what was needed more than any other thing to celebrate the Passover was *the lamb immolated in the temple*. Obviously, the disciples cannot, at the moment, discern that in letting himself be handed over to the Jews by the hand of Judas, the Lord intends to make himself into that very thing: the paschal lamb (cf. Ez 12:10, 46; Jn 19:14, 29, 33, 36). Nor do they understand that Jesus' words to Judas express his *impatient* desire to give himself on the Cross to free his own from the servitude of sin and to unite them finally to himself⁴⁹. The reader of the gospel, however, who from John 1:29, 36 has been advised that Jesus *is* the lamb who takes away the sins of the world, possesses all the knowledge he needs in order to lift the veil of these „strange verses”. The same is true of the second hypothesis formulated by the disciples (Jn 13:29c). To the acute reader, a fact that does not go unnoticed is that precisely in the previous chapter (Jn 12:5-8) there was an

⁴⁸ This device, as has been observed, is one of the literary tropes most loved by the evangelist. Cf. Jn 7:34 – 36, 8:21 – 22, 11:49 – 52, 12:8, 12:34, 19:5b, 19:14b, 19:22, etc.

⁴⁹ prepared, they did not prepare in time to rise, so *hasty* was the Most High to liberate them”

exchange between Jesus and the same Judas concerning „giving something to the poor”:

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, „Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, „Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” (Jn 12:4-8)

In this case, even more than in that of John 13:29b, it is impossible to demonstrate *beyond the shadow of a doubt* that the evangelist intends to suggest a significant relation between the two texts. And yet it is not difficult to glimpse once again in what sense the two passages illuminate one another. Judas, as a matter of fact, is *truly* going to give something (and much more than *something*) to the poor (Jn 13:29c). In fact, in handing Jesus over, Judas involuntarily (but not for that reason without fault) becomes the courier of a donation that surpasses in value whatever sum the poor of Jerusalem could have ever dreamed of receiving. From the perspective of the other verse, the reciprocal reference between the two texts casts new light on the response that Jesus had given to Judas in John 12:8: anointing the feet of Jesus „for the day of [his] burial” (Jn 12:7b), Mary has, in reality, not taken anything from the poor. Rather, she has recognized in Jesus (another involuntary prophecy!) the presence of the one who would soon give his very body and pour out his own blood in order to satiate the hunger and thirst for the life of all humanity. The irony lies in the fact that, in John 13:29c, Judas becomes the involuntary bearer of the gift through which the Lord responds to the preoccupation – albeit insincere – expressed by Judas himself (Jn 12:5), namely that Jesus show his care for the poor!

Two further comments seem important to make. First, as mentioned above, the deep meaning of John 13:29a-b – which, to my mind, is not arduous to grasp⁵⁰ – is concealed in such a way that

⁵⁰ As confirmation of this, it seems significant that our proposal presents significant similarities to a commentary I had not seen at the time my exegesis of John 13:29 was taking shape. Mateos and Barreto comment on the same text as follows: „John plays with the double meaning of the phrases. There are two

the reader can easily refuse to admit that the evangelist had intended in that verse to recall the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' words. Indeed, the text makes perfect sense even if the reader stops at the literal meaning, as do the overwhelming majority of exegetes⁵¹. However, (second comment), whoever is familiar with Johannine writing must be on guard against embracing such a thesis too easily. One cannot deny, in fact, that the parenthesis on the vain conjectures of the disciples interrupts the narrative of an event that, for all its dramatic intensity and theological significance, has an importance comparable only to the great climax of the death of Jesus on the Cross⁵². One can and must, therefore, ask if it is plausible that the (long!) parenthesis constituted by John 13:29 is truly a simple aside without great relevance. The following scheme will help us appreciate the force of this observation:

feasts: the Jewish passover and the Passover of Jesus, the feast of death and the feast of life. In fact, Judas goes to procure what is necessary for the true feast: he prepares to sacrifice the Lamb of God, which inaugurates the definitive Passover. Such a Passover, Jesus on the Cross, will be, at the same time, a great gift made to the poor, the one who will free them from their misery. Judas, to whom the poor did not matter in the slightest, will be the involuntary means for them to escape from their situation... The disciples, without knowing it, express what is truly happening" (Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni. Analisi linguistica e commento esegetico* [Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1982]). If one accentuates the negative consideration (feast of death) of the Hebrew Passover and the counterposing interpretation of the relationship between ancient and new cult typical of this commentary – an interpretation from which we disassociate – there is no one who does not see how strong are the similarities between this and our reading, almost to the point of being identical. It goes without saying that only the reader who enjoys a certain familiarity both with the Scriptures of Israel as well as (and in this case above all) with the preceding chapters of the fourth gospel, is able to decipher the allusions of John 13:29. This does not mean that such a familiarity is enough, if it is true that, apart from Mateos and Barreto, none of the modern commentators known to me present an exegesis of the text similar to that sketched by Mateos and Barreto and in this presentation.

⁵¹ Cf. note 50.

The fact that, aside from the Passover of the Lord, the beloved disciple enters the scene and does so with the role of privileged ocular-auditory testimony *only here* (Jn 13:23ff.) and *under the Cross* (Jn 19:25-35) is more than sufficient proof of what has been asserted, whatever may be the interpretation one gives of the entire passage. For the relationship of reciprocal illumination between the two narratives, see note 18 above and note 53 below.

A.1: Then, after the morsel,
Satan entered into him.

C.1: Jesus said to him,

C.a.1: „What you are going to do, do quickly”

D: Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. D.a:
Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was
telling him, „Buy what we need for the feast”;

D.b: or, that he should give something to the poor.

A.2: So, after receiving the morsel,
he immediately went out; and it was night.

C.2: When he had gone out, Jesus said,

C.a.2: „Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God
is glorified” (Jn 13:27-31)

It is not necessary to be an exegete to sense that such a digression comes precisely to interrupt an otherwise exceptionally tight and supremely dramatic narrative, which arouses in the reader the spontaneous and legitimate question: why would our author, in the middle of an event of such importance, suddenly turn the „camera” toward totally irrelevant details – the erroneous thoughts of the disciples – if not because these details conceal a message that is anything but irrelevant?⁵³ It is necessary then to conclude:

⁵³ We are aware of the solution that was common in the era of the exclusive dominance of the historical-critical method: John 13:29 would have been a late interpolation. Thus, for example, thought Schnackenburg in *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 3, 31-32. Today, thanks to the advances made by studies that favor the synchronic approach to the fourth gospel (narratology, literary criticism), it is much more clear than it once was how often, if not always, it is risky to explain the apparent contradictions, tensions, and „ungrammaticalities” with which the Johannine text overflows through the „law” of redactional layers. As Richard Bauckham acutely observes, „Synchronic studies of the way the final form of the Gospel is constructed are steadily revealing its intricate design and unity in both literary and thematic ways... The more the the so-called aporias in the text are seen to fulfill an intelligible function in the structure and meaning of the text as we have it, the less cogent become the old explanations of them as revealing the seams at which preexisting sources have been sewn together by a redactor. The more the theological tensions in the text are understood as serving the theological strategy of the whole gospel, the less convincing become the attempts to distinguish a variety of authors and redactors engaged in adjusting

it is true that the text of John 13:29 can be read without seeing any veiled meaning hidden within. And yet, at least to avoid the admission that the one who wrote the text is simply an unskilled compiler – which today one is, justly, always less inclined to admit⁵⁴ – the attentive reader cannot but feel that there must be some deeper meaning to John 13:29, a meaning that in some way might help us comprehend the great mystery that is concealed in the sequence of events narrated by the beloved disciple in John 13:27-31⁵⁵. There is certainly responsibility on the part of the reader to attempt to establish *what* that deeper meaning might be. We have laid out here our own hypothesis, namely that, in reality, under the veil of what seems to be a parenthetical digression, is concealed the key to understand why – *precisely in that moment* in which Jesus addresses Satan with the enigmatic words „What you are going to do, do quickly” – there is already a realization of a first inbreaking of the glory of the love of Father and of the Son for the world (C.a.2). In fact, as soon as one glimpses that the impatience of Jesus has to do with this ardent desire (cf. Lk 22:15) to immolate himself for the salvation of the world, *those*

or correcting each other's theology. It should also be noticed that studies of the style of the gospel are increasingly undermining source criticism by demonstrating that no parts of the Gospel are stylistically distinguishable from others” (*The Beloved Disciple and His Witness*, 30).

⁵⁴ See note 53. We should note, to add to what was said in the previous note, that even if one were to admit that John 13:29 were a late addition, it would not in fact offer a satisfactory solution to the problem raised. It is certainly probable, and what is more, undeniable, that the fourth gospel, from a diachronic point of view, is the fruit of a long gestation, implying interventions, integrations, and additions through which the author (in my view, the same author) has, in time, touched up and in some cases reworked a (still nonreconstructible) „urtext” However, what truly counts is the fact that the *final text* of the gospel appears increasingly to us today as the result of attentive calibration and a literarily refined work of unification. On these questions, cf. Bauckham, *The Beloved Disciple and His Witness*, 9-31, 73-92.

⁵⁵ The „sandwich” scheme proposed above seems to us to demonstrate with more than sufficient congruence the carefully chosen central position that John 13:29, far from being a marginal parenthesis (as it still seems to be), occupies in the text. On the basis of an analogous reasoning, it would be simple to show also how the bowl full of vinegar on which John „zooms in” in John 19:29 *cannot* be considered void of symbolic significance – *pace* Bauckham (*Gospel of Glory*, 181).

same words that at first appeared opaque and obscure (C.a.1) almost „burst into flame”, as it were, and begin to radiate a glory that fully justifies the grandiose affirmation: „Now [v̄v]”⁵⁶ is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified” (Jn 13:31).

It will be said that this exegesis is not the only one possible. And, what is more, it will be said that it is *de facto* impossible to demonstrate that the author does intend to say all that we believed to have found in the text, if it is true that what he says materially is much less than this. This is indubitably true. But this point does nothing other than confirm the point we intended to make evident from the beginning and that, at this point, we can explicate under the form of a triple consideration. First, if our exegesis is correct, it is necessary to affirm that, in John 13:27-29, the beloved disciple is describing the revelation of a profound mystery, one that has to do with the central content of his testimony: the glorious manifestation of the agape of the Son and the Father for the world. Second, the evangelist gives to the reader *all the help he needs* in order to intuit that the text says far more than it seems to say on a superficial level. Third, the same evangelist seems at the same time interested in *deliberately veiling this deeper meaning*, confirmed by the fact that our interpretation of the text is not only not followed by all scholars, but in fact is rejected by most of them.

We can now leave John 13:29 aside. Regardless of the acceptance or denial of our interpretation, I believe that a question has emerged with sufficient clarity – confirmed by a consensus

⁵⁶ Rarely is the appropriate weight given to the v̄v that sits at the beginning of the solemn *logion* of Jesus on the glorification of the Son of man and of God. Here, „now” is not only referring to the beginning of that process which will lead to the uplifting of Jesus on the Cross and then to the right hand of the Father. In my view, the „now”, united to the use of a verb in the aorist, intends rather to attract the attention of the reader to the fact that, in and through the narrated events, there has already been a first in breaking of the eschatological glory of divine agape. In fact, the word through which the Lord reveals his impatient desire to be immolated on the Cross is not less indispensable to the full self-manifestation of the glory of love *eis to telos* of the Lord than his letting himself be raised on the Cross and pierced in the side by the spear of the soldier. As already hinted at, the word heard in the Upper Room and the icon exposed to the view of all on Mt. Golgotha can only contribute *together* to the central content of the testimony of the beloved disciple (cf. note 18 above).

among scholars – that a number of passages of the fourth gospel force the attentive reader to ask: Why this *intentional* playing at „hide and seek” with the reader? Why this elusive game of *speaking by symbols and enigmas* (cf. Jn 16:25)? We have already anticipated our response to the question by condensing the answer into two adjectives that in some way complement and illuminate each other. In light of the example proposed (i.e., Jn 13:29), we can now briefly elucidate their meaning. By using the adjective *dramatic*, we intend to emphasize the fact that John, writing as he does, allows the freedom and intelligence of the reader to play an active role in the manifestation of the „glory” hidden in the text. He does not want to do everything by himself, so to speak. More precisely still, speaking of the most profound mysteries in a veiled way, our writer intends to let their manifestation depend on the engagement of the reader with the text just as much as from the intrinsic radiance of the text itself. Speaking of the *erotic-seductive* intention – a formulation perhaps a bit audacious and in need, for that reason, of disambiguation – I intended to clarify the fact that this playing at „hide and seek” with the reader has nothing about it that is aristocratic or esoteric in the sectarian sense of the word, almost as if John would hide the meaning of what he says in order to make life difficult for all those readers who, not taking part in the exclusive circle of the adept, do not have the means for decrypting his text⁵⁷ What is happening, in-

⁵⁷ As we sought to illuminate, the necessary tools to arrive at the profound meaning are accessible to everyone, if it is true that they are able in the end to be boiled down to a threefold background: first, that of christological faith; second, that of the Scripture of Israel; third, that of John’s gospel itself in its totality, to which should be added, in my opinion, the synoptic gospels, above all Mark and Luke. As to the problem of the *audience* of the gospel and in defense of its universal destination, see once again the penetrating and convincing consideration of Richard Bauckham in *The Beloved Disciple*, 113 – 23. As to the relationship between John and the synoptics, we accept the thesis, today widespread among scholars, according to which John not only knows but also writes often in *dialogue* (metalepsis, cf. note 33 above) with the synoptics no less than with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. I cannot, for obvious reasons, enter deeply into this complex and controversial thematic. On the relationship between John and Mark, see Richard Bauckham, „John for Readers of Mark”, in *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel’s Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

stead, is a strategy that one can, and in our opinion must, define as stylistic and therefore aesthetic in the most genuinely artistic meaning of the word. Showing, but in a veiled way, suggesting, but elusively, speaking, but doing so „in a low voice”, there is no doubt that our witness-evangelist (himself so mysterious!) makes the task of his reader and listener more arduous to a certain extent. And yet he simultaneously accomplishes an additional precious effect: to fascinate and intrigue. This is, in fact, the power of *allusion*: it captivates the mind and fascinates the heart precisely because it simultaneously shows and hides, concedes itself and denies itself, calling forth in the reader the desire to set out on the adventure of seeking the deeper meaning for himself. This is the way to understand the second expression we used to explain the intentionally mysterious character of Johannine figural art. But another analogy can be given, one that is *figural* in its own right. Playing at „hide and seek” with the reader, one might say that John mimics the behavior of the beloved of the Song of Songs (who is none other than the protagonist of his narrative)⁵⁸, who only withdraws, after showing himself, in order to elicit in the beloved the desire to „seek him whom [the] soul loves” (Sg 3:1ff., 5:2; Phil 3:13). The analogy was obviously not chosen at random. Is it not, perhaps, the mission of the beloved disciple, at least in part, analogous to that of the beloved of the Song of Songs? Is he not *the testimony* of the love of the Lord for the Church, his bride? And if this is the case, is there any better language to give witness to love than that which Love himself uses to give witness to himself? Now, love – or at least that love to which the icon of the uplifted and pierced one offers testimony⁵⁹

⁵⁸ On the importance of spousal symbolism in the fourth gospel in general and of the backdrop of the Song of Songs in particular, see note 39 above.

⁵⁹ Even if for obvious reasons a detailed exegesis of John 19:28-37 cannot be presented here, it is worth recalling the fact that in both panels of the narrative of the death of Jesus (Jn 19:28-30 and 19:31-37), the evangelist contemplates symbolically the unfolding of the *agape eis to telos* of the Lord precisely in terms of a simultaneously oblation and erotic-receptive dynamism. On the one hand, as we have already seen, the act with which Jesus actively hands over the Spirit (*paredoken to pneuma*, Jn 19:30) follows close behind the solemn „I thirst” of John 19:28. On the other hand, in John 19:34b, the blood and water, signs of the eschatological gifts of the Lord, flow from the open wound in his side, made by the spear of the soldier (Jn 19:34a). In both cases, a symbol of kenotic, radical

– is a dynamic unity of overflowing self-effusion (Jn 19:30-34b) and thirsting receptivity (Jn 19:28-34a), of the offering of all that is one's own and of the *not less generous* desire (*agathos eros*)⁶⁰ that the gift offered might be *freely* accepted. Love is *gift*, one that draws some of its generosity precisely from the fact that the lover, in offering himself, gives to the beloved the ability to collaborate in the consummation of the gift itself. What love would it be if God forced his creature to adore him, revealing *without a veil* the overwhelming richness of his *doxa-kabod*?⁶¹ If, *ad absurdum*, he did this, his self-manifestation would be perverted ironically into a nonmanifestation of that which he wanted to reveal⁶². Vice

oblation is associated with a symbol of intense desire: the thirst in the first case, and the wounded „heart” in the other. Through this twofold symbolic coupling, the evangelist is, in my opinion, inviting his reader to contemplate the glory of divine love in terms of an „ineffable unity” of sovereignly free donation and ardent expectation of reciprocity. For a brief dive into the dogmatic and speculative implications of this extraordinary and still rather insufficiently explored contemplative intuition of John, see my „This Mystery Is Great (Eph 5:22)”, in *Enlightening the Mystery of Man*.

⁶⁰ Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.13 (PG 3, 712 A).

⁶¹ It is useful here to remember that the Hebrew term *kabod* (glory), which, as is known, lies in the background of the creative Johannine appropriation of the biblical concept of *kabod Jahueh*, means, above all, *weight*. On the manifestation of the glory of the Lord in the Old Testament, see Gerhard von Rad, „Kabod-GLORY”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 238 – 47; Claus Westermann, „כבד *kbd*, to be heavy”, in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 595 – 602 (4aff.); Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1967), 29 – 35; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 283-87, 426-29; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 6: *Theology: The Old Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 31-66; Jacques Briand, *Dieu dans l'Écriture* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 44-50; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005), B.11.2.1.

⁶² In my opinion, between the content of which he speaks/writes (that is, the glory of the uplifted and pierced one) and the way he speaks about it, there is a subtle play of reciprocal mirroring that is still far from having been adequately illuminated. Despite the recognized centrality of the theme of glory in the fourth gospel, studies on it are less numerous than one would think. On the general notion, see at least the following: Bernard Botte, „La gloire du Christ dans l'Évangile de Saint Jean”, *Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales* 12 (1927): 65-76; Jean Dupont, *Essais sur la Christologie de Saint Jean* (Bruges, Belgium:

versa, if the Cross is, for John, where the glory of the love of God *truly* shines in all of its splendor, this fact does not take away from the otherwise true and more traditional affirmation that nowhere as on the Cross does the divine majesty of Jesus appear to be hidden (cf. Phil 2:6ff.). Rather, and much more paradoxically, it is true that *a part* of such radiance depends on the fact that this glory cannot shine fully without the transformational contribution of the eyes of one who, *believing, gives it permission* to appear.

Abbaye de Saint Andre, 1951), 253-93; Willem Grossouw, „*La glorification du Christ dans le quadrième Évangile*”, in *L'Évangile de Jean. Etudes et problèmes*, Recherches Bibliques 3, ed. Marie-Emile Boismard et al. (Bruges, Belgium: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), 131 – 45; Cornelio Traets, *Voir Jésus et le Père en Lui selon l'Évangile de Saint Jean* (Rome: Libreria editrice dell'Università Gregoriana, 1967), 89 – 106; Ignace de La Potterie, *La vérité dans Jean*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 191-99; Wilhelm Thusing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 21.1-2 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1960). After the classic work of Wilhelm Thusing, there are two studies that are most consistently dedicated to Johannine *doxa*: Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten: Das Verständnis der doxa im Johannesevangelium*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen 2.231 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); and Rainer Schwindt, *Gesichte der Herrlichkeit. Eine exegetisch-traditionsgeschichtliche Studie zur paulinischen und johanneischen Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007).

Important also are the following three, more recent works: Jesper Tang Nielsen, „The Narrative Structures of Glory and Glorification in the Fourth Gospel”, *NTS* 56 (2010): 343-66; Jorg Frey, „The Glory of the Crucified One”, in *The Glory of the Crucified One*, 237-58; Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 43-75. Much more broad is the bibliography on the connection between the theology of the paschal hour and the theology of glory in John. Beyond the already cited classic work of Thusing, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2 (London: Crossroad, 1990), 398-410; Jean Zumstein, „L'interprétation johannique de la mort du Christ”, in *The Four Gospels. Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. Frans Neirynck and Frans van Segbroeck (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992); Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 80-115; Jorg Frey, „The Glory of the Crucified One”, in *The Glory of the Crucified One*, 237-58; Alexander Tsutserov, *Glory, Grace, and Truth: Ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant According to the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009). For a good summary of the different interpretations of the theme from Bultmann up to the first decade of the twenty-first century, cf. John Morgan-Wynne, *The Cross in the Johannine Writings* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 4-209. For a profound interpretation on Johannine *doxa-logica* from a trinitarian perspective, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 7: *Theology: The New Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 239-63, 374-85.

Something profoundly analogous, we want to suggest, is true of the art through which *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (Jn 13:23, 19:25, etc.) bears witness to this glory (Jn 19:35). John establishes with his reader a dialogue in which he puts a great deal before the reader's eyes. At the same time, he entrusts this „great deal” to the loving attention of the reader. As the veiling of the divine glory of the Word in the humble flesh of Jesus is, *in and of itself*, such an expression of divine generosity, so too Johannine elusiveness does not oppose the desire of the evangelist to render the glory of the Lord visible in the best way possible. Rather, it is an interior dimension of that same desire. It expresses in artistic form the „generous desire” of the author to give his reader the joy of collaborating with him in the manifestation of the „sublime riches” hidden in the text.

Having reached this point, one might venture the following conclusion, toward which the trajectory of this entire argument has been tending: John does not limit himself to speak about the mystery of divine love. He gives to his speaking *the very form of love*. For as soon as one gathers in unity at least three of the four marks that we saw are distinctive of the Johannine use of figures,⁶³ one sees that something emerges from their dynamic interplay that is extremely similar to the form of love, which is agapic, erotic, and fruitful at the same time. On the one hand, the evangelist *helps* his reader to perceive the *hidden presence* of deeper meaning in the text and offers him all the instruments he needs in order to come to grasp those meanings (pedagogic-agapic moment). On the other hand, wisely weaving together allusiveness and elusiveness, John invites the reader to collaborate attentively (dramatic-erotic moment), through the patient and loving meditation on the text, in the emergence of the „greater” things (Jn 1:52) hidden behind the veil of the letter (anagogic moment, fruit of the success of the first two moments). In brief, to the question „why speak in figures?” I would suggest that the ultimate and perhaps

⁶³ If we exclude irony here, it is not because it is a less important aspect than the others. In a certain sense, the opposite is true. It is excluded, rather, because irony has more to do with the critical or polemic character of Johannine writing than with the imitation of the „dynamic structure” of the self-revelation of spousal love.

most profound response that our evangelist might give would be the following: because the delight of the *intus legere* does not come only from the *comprehension* of a text, but also from the joy of participating, through the effort of meditation, in its manifestation, a manifestation that springs up in the intellect in a way analogous to the always unanticipatable and surprising birth of a child from the encounter between Adam and the Woman.

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