

IN THE BEGINNING... AND IN 2004


The Gospel of John begins simply and reads simply, but the themes that it touches and the truths that it reveals are deep and mystical. In order to see and, therefore, enter into them, there is a need for revelation and experience. The simplicity of the language in the Gospel, perhaps in part, accounts for its popularity among Christians at all stages of spiritual growth. From the newest believers, who have only recently been regenerated by the divine life (3:6), to those being trained by the pruning of the Father to abide in the Son, the vine (15:1-4), this Gospel is returned to repeatedly. Surely this is a book whose words are spirit and life.

But equally as sure, it is a book that the Body of Christ has failed to fully appreciate and understand. The theme of life, the life of the Triune God, runs throughout the book. A proper understanding of this life requires that we move beyond the low understanding that eternal life involves living our human life forever in "heaven." Even the redemptive emphasis that derives from the truth of God giving His only begotten Son is misunderstood and, therefore, misemphasized. In this regard it should not escape notice that this revelation is presented as early as verse 16 of chapter three—surely John goes on to speak of deeper and higher purposes related to the divine life in the ensuing eighteen chapters.

As John went on, we also will go on, over the course of the two issues of *Affirmation & Critique* in 2004, to consider this Gospel primarily from the perspective that it is a Gospel of the life of the Triune God, from its impartation to its glorification. A basic tenet in our consideration of this Gospel is that the divine life of the Triune God cannot be separated from the Triune God Himself. When the life of the Triune God is imparted, the Triune God is imparted; when the life of the Triune God is received through believing, the Triune God is received through believing; and when the life of the Triune God functions within the organic Body of Christ, the Triune God is functioning and being expressed. "In this," as Jesus says, "is My Father glorified" (15:8).

The articles in this issue will focus on some of the crucial points in this Gospel, and of these articles, two will be continued into the next. These articles do not cover small points that can be casually glossed over. They introduce an interpretive perspective that is in need of recovery through affirmation. In many respects they introduce several critical notions that are necessary to conceptualize the operation of the Triune God in His economy in such a way as to preserve the distinct but mutually interdependent actions of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

While we hope to provide a rudimentary conceptualization of the economy of the Triune God as revealed in the Gospel of John, an element of mystery will always remain. But if we approach our goal, then perhaps the Body will not balk, dissemble, and prevaricate when it comes to such "problematic" verses: "As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (6:57); "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:39); "I and the Father are one" (10:30); "he who has seen Me has seen the Father" (14:9); "even the Spirit of reality,...because He abides with you and shall be in you" (v. 17); "in that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20). All of these verses point to a divine economy of impartation and, ultimately, incorporation.

It is our sincere hope that the articles in this year's issues will provide a basic understanding and entrance into this economy. At the same time we are aware that many more volumes could be written of our wonderful Savior who has brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel, so much more that not even the world itself could contain the books. And so we also pray that the light of life will shine upon, within, and even through all who would continue on with us in our theological and spiritual discussion of the One who alone has words of eternal life. Grace and reality to you. 

The Editors