

01. The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple



George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem. Used with permission.

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1John 1:1-3

‘We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have communion with us; and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus, the Messiah.’



George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
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The Author

This Gospel expresses something of the faith of the Christian community of the **Beloved Disciple**.

The appendix to the Gospel (chapter 21) composed after the death of the Beloved Disciple, records a scene with the following disciples in a boat on the lake.

‘Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples’ (verse 2).

One of them is the ‘Disciple whom Jesus loved’. When the Risen Jesus appears, it is he who ‘said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7).

The Author

The Beloved Disciple is first named at the Last Supper. ‘One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to Jesus’ (John 13:23).

We are reminded of this in the Appendix: ‘He was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”’ (John 21:20).

He is described as the key witness whose testimony guarantees the truth of what is expressed in the Gospel: ‘This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true’ (John 21:24).

Having described the piercing of Jesus’ side with a lance and the outpouring of blood and water, the author writes: ‘He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth’ (John 19:35).

Irenaeus, writing towards the end of the second century, identifies the author of the Fourth Gospel as 'John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leant back on his breast '(Against the Heresies 3.1.2, quoted by Eusebius, History of the Church 5.8).

Likewise **Origen** in his commentary on the Gospel (c.240AD) writes: 'It is likely that the one reclining on Jesus' breast, one of the disciples whom Jesus loved, was John, who wrote the Gospel' (32.260).

Augustine in his First Tractate on John preached c.410AD says: 'John reclined upon the breast of the Lord and drank that which he might give to us to drink' (1.7.2).

The Author

The use of the Gospel by the Gnostics made its acceptance by the Christian community problematic. This was resolved by the end of the second century, and the Beloved Disciple was identified as John.

John was a common name at the time. Is the Beloved Disciple the John who was one of the Twelve? From the other Gospels it appears that this John did hold a special place among the Twelve. Jesus chose him along with his brother James and Peter to witness the raising to life of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), and his own transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and agony (Mark 14:33). It would seem fitting that he would be described as '**the disciple whom Jesus loved**'.

In the Acts we find John linked with Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 3-4) and also in Samaria (Acts 8:14). This fits with the presentation in the Gospel where the Beloved Disciple appears with Peter except at the cross where Peter is absent.

‘If the Johannine community which produced the Gospel saw itself in traditional continuity with Jesus, we are in a position to perceive in the ‘we’ of the prologues of both Gospel and Epistle, not the apostolic eye-witness per se, but a community which nevertheless understood itself as heir of a tradition based upon some historical witness to Jesus’ (Statement quoted with approval by Raymond Brown, page 32).

The Beloved Disciple seems to have been a companion of Jesus whose evidence is central to the community, and who has been idealised by them.

Eusebius (*History of the Church*, 3.39) quotes Papias as mentioning that there were two Johns, both buried in Ephesus, one the apostle (whom Eusebius assumes is the writer of the Gospel) and the other a presbyter.



Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, writing c.190AD, identifies the Beloved Disciple as John the Presbyter (Eusebius, History 5.24).

The attributing of the Gospel to John the Apostle may have arisen because of a confusion between these two Johns.



Be the 'Beloved Disciple'

George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
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Gospel composed in Ephesus

The centre (and chief bank) of the city was the Temple of Artemis, surrounded by 128 columns each the gift of a king.



Accordance Bible lands photo guide. Used with permission

The Asian Games in honour of Artemis



Accordance Bible lands photo guide. Used with permission

The theatre seated 56,000 persons.

Portrait of Jesus given us by Paul

‘We proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

‘I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through the faith of Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead’ (Philippians 3:8-11).

Portraits of Jesus in the **Synoptic Gospels**.

Presentation of Jesus' words and actions

plus an interpretive commentary.

The fact that these Gospels were treasured, copied, and read in the Christian assemblies in the East, in Egypt, in Asia Minor, in Greece and in Rome, is the source of our confidence that in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, and in the three together we are seeing and hearing the real Jesus.

Portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple

Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν Exodus 3:14

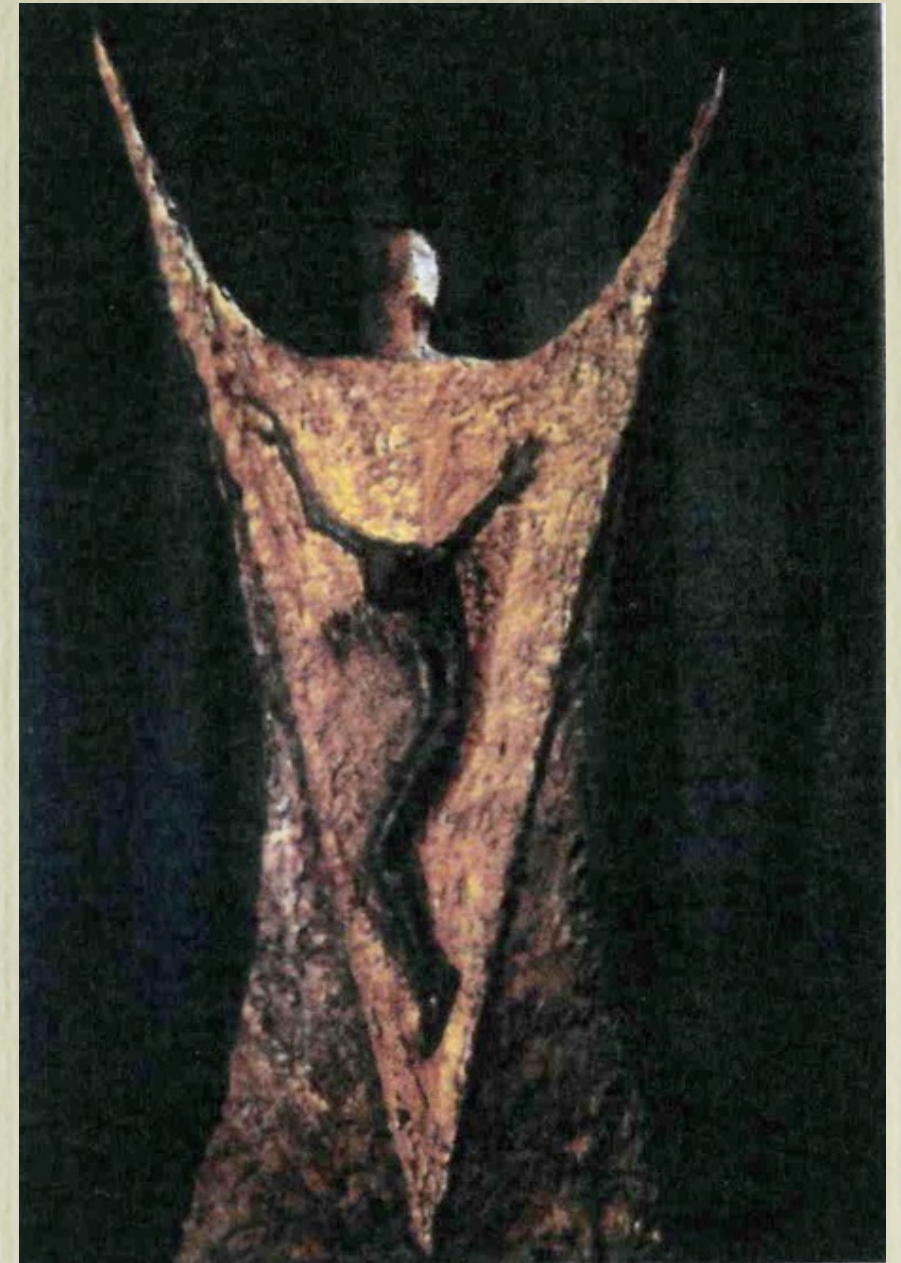


George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
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The focus of this gospel is on Jesus' divinity, that is to say, his special intimacy with God whom he addresses as 'Father'.

It was Jesus' communion with God that was the source of his life.

At the Last Supper, with a broken heart, he said: 'You will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone' (John 16:32). He went straight on to add: 'Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.'



Lyn Constable Maxwell MRBS Used with permission

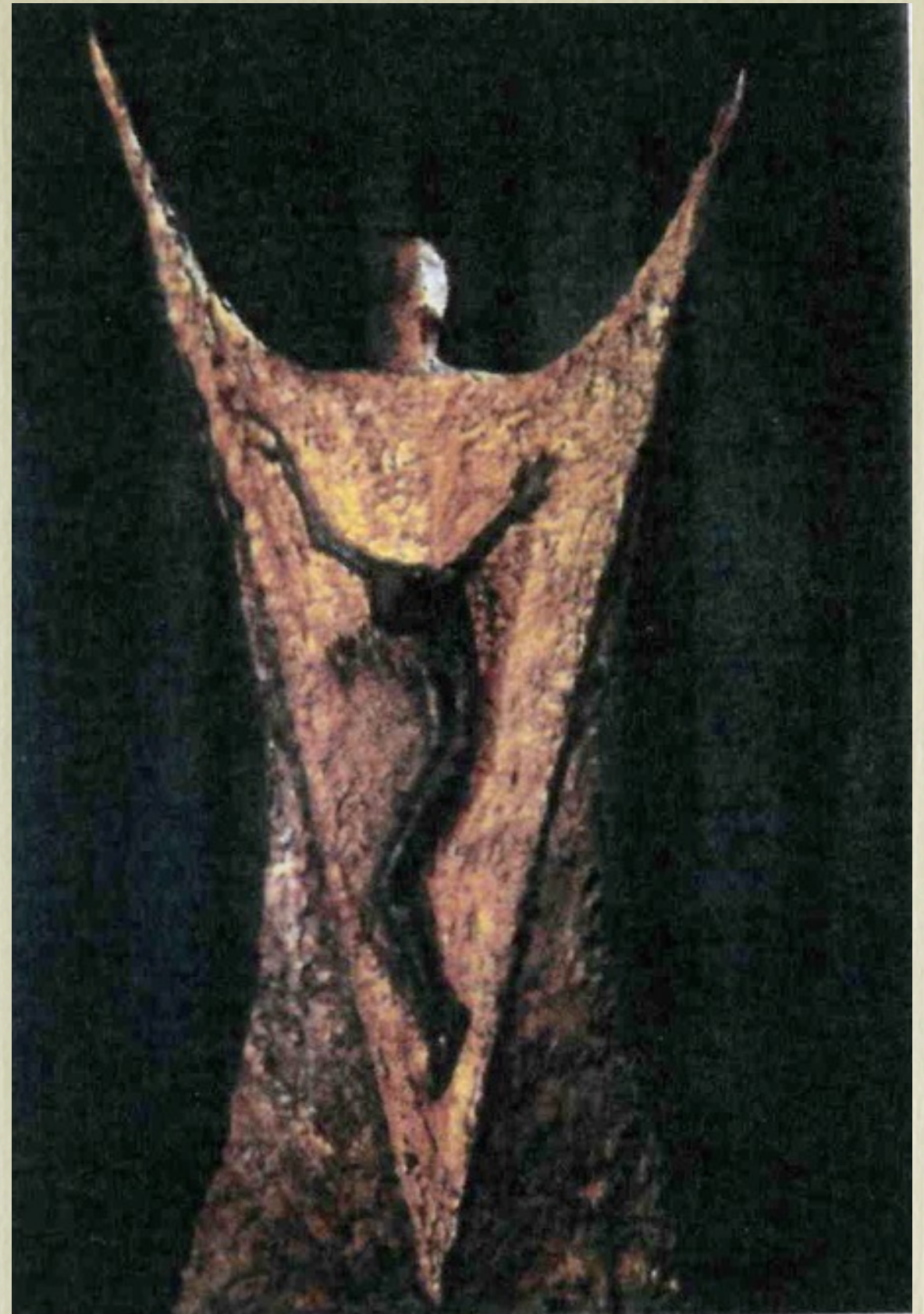


- ‘I am in the Father and you are in me and I in you’ (John 14:20).
- ‘I pray that they will be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me’ (John 17:21).

George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
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Everything Jesus said or did came from this special communion. John writes: ‘The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands’(John 3:35).

His special communion did not protect him from the suffering that is part of the human experience, but it sustained him, and the fruit of this communion was a loving that his disciples had never previously experienced: a love for them, indeed for the world, that flowed from his loving communion with God.



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John wants to bring out the significance of the real Jesus in a way that is truthful to the mystery of Jesus' person and to the wonder of what Jesus revealed. He is also concerned to remain faithful to the tradition which he and his community have received. Of course, as with every historian, he is giving his interpretation of the facts. However, the acceptance of this Gospel by the wider Christian community gives us confidence that through this beautifully coloured window we are looking at the real Jesus.

The author gives creative expression to his faith-insights into the real Jesus.

Facts are important to him for it is his belief that God is revealed in the real Jesus of history.

He uses a poetic and dramatic medium because he judges that it is the best way to communicate the truth about the Jesus he came to know.



Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross,
Society of Mary Generalate Building, Rome, Photo Nicole Trahan.



Pat O'Carrigan msc

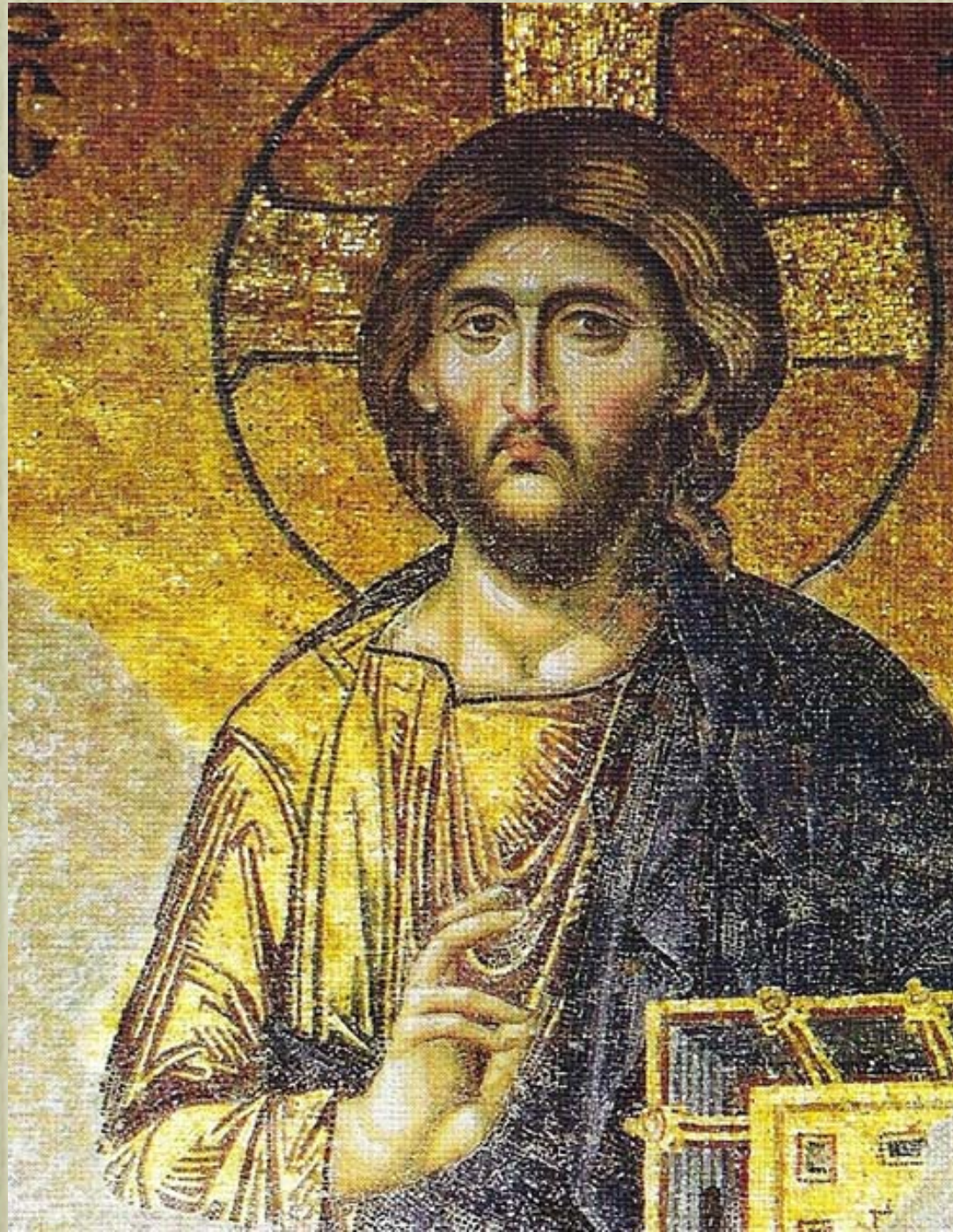


Jules Chevalier, *The Sacred Heart* 1900

‘From the Heart of Jesus pierced on Calvary, I see a new world coming forth – a great and life-giving world, inspired by love and mercy: a world which the Church must perpetuate on the whole earth.’

Mary at the Cross, Sculpture, St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre

God's Word-made-flesh



John 3:34

‘He whom God has sent
speaks the words of God,
for he gives the Spirit
without measure.’

The Christ Pantokrator, 13th Century Deesis Mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul,
(Photo: Guillaume Piolle, public domain, from Wikimedia Commons)

Roman Catechism, Council of Trent, 1545-1563, Preface 10.

‘The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching
must be directed to the love that never ends.

Whether something is proposed for belief,
for hope or for action,
the love of our Lord must always be made accessible,
so that anyone can see
that all the works of perfect Christian virtue
spring from love
and have no other objective
than to arrive at love.’

Teilhard de Chardin 1934

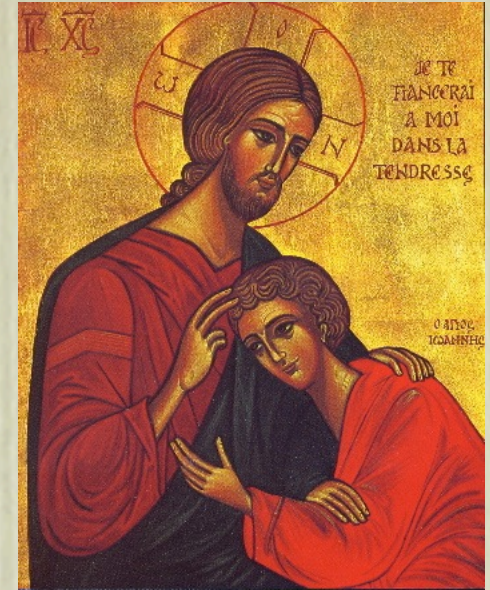
‘Some day,
after harnessing space,
the winds,
the tides
and gravitation,

We shall harness for God
the energies of Love.

And then,
for the second time in the history of the
world,
we shall have discovered fire.’

Our earliest systematic commentary on John's Gospel
comes from **Origen**, writing in Alexandria c.240AD.

‘We might dare to say that the Gospels are the first fruits of all Scriptures, but that the first fruits of the Gospels is that according to John, whose meaning no one can understand who has not lain on Jesus’ breast nor received Mary from Jesus to be his mother also. However, he who would be another John must become like John ... For indeed everyone who has been perfected ‘no longer lives, but Christ lives in him’(Galatians 2:20), and since Christ lives in him it is said of him to Mary ‘Behold your son’ (Commentary on John 1.23).



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Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross,
Society of Mary Generalate Building, Rome, Photo Nicole Trahan.

It is God who initiates communion. We call this communion 'prayer'.

Christian prayer is communion in the prayer of Jesus

God's perfect
human Word,
human realisation
of the Divine Word
of the Self-giving
transcendent God



George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John
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Communion in the
Love-Spirit that
unites Jesus and God,
sharing in the Divine
Love-communion
of the

Transcendent God

Augustine reminds us that as we attend to the words of John we keep our hearts tuned to the Lord. John is giving us the words. Our understanding must come from the same source from which John himself drew (Tractate on John 1.7.2).

John has given us this sublime portrait of the one he loves. He is sharing with us the fruit of a profound intimacy and years of contemplation. His language, therefore, is symbolic in that he came to see in Jesus' actions and words a revelation of God and he wants to draw us with him into communion with this mystery.

Before commencing his commentary, [Thomas Aquinas](#) quotes the following from Paul: 'No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God' (1 Corinthians 2:11). Let us begin by praying that the same Spirit who inspired John in his writing will inspire us in our reading.

This is the advice given us by [Origen](#) of Alexandria: 'Let us ask God to work with us through Christ in the Holy Spirit to explain the mystical meaning stored up like a treasure in the words' (Commentary on John, 1.89).

John-Paul II, Introduction to 1993 PBC document

‘The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church’ (page 19-20).

‘To arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God who is love. While engaged in the work of interpretation, one must remain in the presence of God as much as possible.’

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