

## THE "GLORY" MOTIF IN THE JOHANNINE CORPUS

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An oft-quoted statement from one of the most well-known catechisms of the Christian faith answers the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer: "The chief end of man is to glorify God. . . ." Most would agree with this response, but the thoughtful person will raise yet another question that is not addressed by the catechism. What is meant by "glorify God"? And, even more basically, what is the glory of God? It is the purpose of this paper to examine John's contribution to the doctrine of glory, but before this can be done these other prior questions must be faced.

### I. BRIEF REVIEW OF THE PRIMARY TERMS

1. *Its meaning in secular and Biblical usage.* Our primary interest is with the word "glory" and more particularly with the Greek term *doxa*. In introducing the word-group with which *doxa* is cognate Kittel makes the following observation:

The historical problem in relation to this word-group is that in the biblical usage of the LXX and the New Testament the verb *dokeō* more or less fully maintains the general Greek sense with no development in content, whereas there is a significant change in the meaning of the noun [*doxa*], which both loses part of its secular sense in biblical Greek and also takes on an alien and specifically religious meaning shared by the verb *doxazō* rather than *dokeō*. It is because this substitute verb is present that *dokeō* can retain its original meaning. The process is helped by the fact that the formal relationship between *doxa* and *dokeō* is not too clear and also by the addition to the secular sense of *doxa* of a special biblical sense which is not so clear in the case of *dokeō* (*doxa* in the sense of "reputation" from *dokeō* "to count for something").<sup>1</sup>

These comments give us the first significant clue to our understanding of *doxa*. It is a word in transition as it moves from secular to Biblical usage.

In light of its roots in *dokeō*, the classical usage of *doxa* took two primary directions.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand it had the sense of expectation, referring to one's own opinion, while on the other hand it meant reputation, referring to the opinion of others about oneself.

Josephus uses the term in these senses but also introduces the idea of honor or glory in some examples. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of the OT on

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, 2. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Attractive as the idea may be, Deissman's suggestion that the earliest meaning of *doxa* is "light" or "radiance" has little to commend it. It is a completely unproven hypothesis since there is not one example of such a usage in secular Greek prior to Judeo-Christian influence. Cf. TDNT, 2. 235.

his thinking. In the LXX *doxa* is the translation of *kābōd*. The Hebrew term refers to that which is weighty or impressive and may be used of man or God. When used of man it may describe his impressiveness due to significant wealth or position. When used of God it seems to refer to the impact made on man from God's self-manifestation. Thus Kittel can write: "In the LXX and therefore in the Bible generally *doxa* acquires its distinctive sense as a term for this divine nature or essence either in its invisible or its perceptible form."<sup>3</sup> The LXX, then, becomes a significant background of influence on the NT in the use of *doxa* to refer to the visible brightness or splendor issuing from God's presence or to the honor and glory that come to him through the manifestation of his character.

When the translator of the Old Testament first thought of using *doxa* for *kābōd*, he initiated a linguistic change of far-reaching significance, giving to the Greek term a distinctiveness of sense which could hardly be surpassed. Taking a word for opinion, which implies all the subjectivity and therefore all the vacillation of human views and conjectures, he made it express something absolutely objective, i.e. the reality of God.<sup>4</sup>

There is no question that the NT usage of *doxa* keys from the LXX rather than from secular Greek. The idea of "opinion," whether good or bad, has dropped from sight. When used ethically to mean "reputation" it always has a positive note. On those occasions when it is used in a visible sense it seems to mean "radiance" and is especially related to the light that radiates from God's presence.

From a theological standpoint it is the ethical usage that is most significant. The glory of God, conceived of as the revelation of his character, is the loftiest of truths. As Ramm points out so aptly: "The glory of God is not . . . a particularized attribute like the wisdom of God but an attribute of the total nature of God, virtually an attribute of the attributes."<sup>5</sup>

While the noun is predominant in the NT and is our primary concern, brief mention should be made of the verb *doxazō*. Since it is derived from *doxa* it "shares in full its distinctive linguistic history."<sup>6</sup> It is formed by adding the causative *-azō* ending to *doxa* and so means to cause a *doxa* or, as Kittel puts it, "to have or give a share in a *doxa* or in the *doxa*."<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that in modern Greek the participial form of *doxazō* means "celebrated."

2. *The main aspects of its meaning.* Although the primary NT sense of "glory" has been identified above, one need not read far before he finds that the term has a broad range of meaning. In the Johannine literature, with but few exceptions it is used predominantly of the glory of God or the glory of Christ. Fry, referring to the entire NT, suggests that there are three aspects to the meaning of the word as used of God and Christ.<sup>8</sup> In listing his suggested catego-

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>5</sup>Ramm, *Them He Glorified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 18.

<sup>6</sup>TDNT, 2, 253.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>E. Fry, "Translating 'Glory' in the New Testament," *Bible Translator* 27 (October 1976) 421-425.

ries only Johannine references will be noted out of the larger numbers found throughout the NT. 1. Brightness or splendor, Rev 15:8; 21:11, 23. When used in this way the emphasis seems to be on God's presence. 2. Great power and strength, John 2:11; 11:40; 12:41. The emphasis here is on his action. 3. Majesty and honor, John 1:14; 17:1, 5, 24; Rev 1:6; 7:12; 19:1. It is position that is in view in these passages.

## II. USAGE IN THE JOHANNINE LITERATURE

Several preliminary observations of a general nature are in order before proceeding to the body of the study. While both the noun *doxa* and the verb *doxazō* are found in the gospel and the Apocalypse, neither occurs in the Johannine epistles. Of the sixty-one times the two terms occur in John's writings only five relate to a being other than God.<sup>9</sup> In all but two of the remaining fifty-six instances the glory is directed toward the Father or the Son. The two exceptions involve believers who may receive glory from God or Christ (John 5:44; 17:22).

1. *The primary objects of glory.* With the two exceptions noted above, every other example finds glory directed toward the first or second Person of the Godhead.

The Father is seen bringing glory to himself (John 12:28; 17:5) or to the Son (John 8:54; 12:16; 13:32; 17:1, 5, 10, 22, 24). He glorifies himself through the life, death and exaltation of Jesus Christ, for in the incarnate Savior we have the most concentrated revelation of the moral perfections of God. Likewise he glorifies his Son by providing him with full equipment for his earthly life and service, by vindicating him in his death, and by restoring him to that position of majesty and honor he had originally before the incarnation.

Second, John presents the Son as glorifying the Father (John 7:18; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1, 4). He does it as a pattern of life rather than erratically, and this becomes a demonstration of the genuineness of his prophetic ministry. It takes place through his earthly life and ministry, through his passion, and through his high-priestly work as he answers the prayers of his disciples. The Lord expressly states that he does not glorify himself (John 8:50, 54), although John notes that the sign he performed at Cana had the effect of "manifesting his glory."

Third, Jesus indicates in John 16:14 (cf. 15:26) that one of the significant ministries of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord. This is especially meaningful in light of the statement of v 13 to the effect that his ministry is neither of his own initiative nor to his own advantage.

Finally, it is to be noted that the Father and Son are glorified by various created intelligences. Men in general, even the unbelieving, may bring glory to God (John 9:24; 13:31; Rev 11:13; cf. 16:9). Perhaps the most striking example of this is the glory brought to Christ by Judas' betrayal. To be more precise, it was what issued from the betrayal (his death and all that is associated therewith) rather than the ignominious act itself that was the occasion for the Son of Man's glorification.

<sup>9</sup>*Doxa* occurs 19 times in John and 17 times in the Apocalypse; *doxazō* occurs 23 times in John and twice in the Apocalypse. Four of the nontheological uses relate to men and one to an angelic being.

More particularly, believing mankind may glorify them in various ways (John 11:4, 40; 15:8; 21:19; Rev 1:6; 19:7). God is glorified through his disciples' lives when they bear "much fruit." He is also glorified through their sickness and death, as with Lazarus whose death became the platform for a miraculous restoration to life and as with Peter in the manner he would die. On the other hand, the Son of God is also glorified by Lazarus' sickness, is the object of John's doxology in the light of who he is and what he has done, and will in the future receive glory as he assumes his rightful place as Sovereign and takes to himself a bride.<sup>10</sup>

In the end times angelic beings (Rev 4:9, 11; 5:12; 7:12) and "every created thing in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them" (Rev 5:13; cf. 19:1) will proclaim his glory in light of his great works of creation, redemption and judgment.

At this juncture a brief summary is in order before going on to the next point in the study. Much of the material noted above relates to the economic Trinity. It is apparent that the Father glorifies himself and his Son but not the Holy Spirit, that the Son glorifies the Father but not himself or the Spirit, and that the Spirit glorifies the Son and thereby the Father but not himself. This in no way reflects on the essential worth of the third Person of the Godhead but it does speak volumes regarding the outworking of God's purposes in history and the character of the believer's ministry. Our administration of God's economy should be patterned after his. This is reflected in John's writing in that the believer is seen glorifying the Father and the Son but not the Spirit. In fact the glory of the Father and the Son are so closely related in John that it seems that the glory of the one equals the glory of the other (John 11:4; cf. 16:14-15).

There is an interesting parallel between the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son and the believer's relationship to the same two Persons. As both Spirit and believers glorify Father and Son rather than themselves, so what glory they enjoy comes from association with Father and Son as well. When God is glorified, from an essential standpoint, the Spirit is glorified as a member of the Godhead. When the believer is a recipient of glory it is God's glory he receives (John 5:44; 17:22).

2. *The focus of glory.* The glory theme in John's writings seems to fall into three rather unequal groupings. The majority of the references are Christological, a small number relate to the Christian life, and another small number are eschatological.

The Christological passages relate glory to Christ's preincarnate state, to his incarnation, to his passion, and to his exaltation.

John 17:5, 24 indicates that our Lord enjoyed a position of glory prior to the

<sup>10</sup>Our Lord's apparent disclaimer regarding the receipt of glory from men in John 5:41 must be understood in light of the context. Earlier, in v 34, he has made a similar statement regarding man's witness, which he likewise does not accept. The real key to the statement of v 41, however, is in the following verse. It is from a particular kind of man that he does not receive glory. As L. Morris notes: "His thought is that He does not set before Himself the idea of pleasing men, but that of pleasing the Father. Therefore it is nothing to Him whether men praise Him or not. He does not receive the glory that they might wish to bestow on Him" (*The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 331-332).

incarnation that was distinctly different from that which he held during his earthly life. It apparently had to do with a degree of manifestation of his intrinsic character and divine nature that was purposefully veiled and obscured by and during his earthly life.

John introduces his readers to the incarnation with a statement regarding Christ's glory (John 1:14). While this glory was to some degree dimmed by his being in flesh (17:5), and while it was not perceived as glory at all by some to whom he came because of the cloud of moral darkness that surrounded them (1:5, 9-11; 12:40-41), it was both seen and recognized for what it really was by others (1:14). John, and others with him in the first-century Church, understood that what they beheld was a kind of glory that could only emanate from "the One and Only, who came from the Father" (*NIV*). It was not merely marked by flashes of grace and truth but was filled with these qualities. Furthermore, this glory was not only observable but also shareable (17:22; cf. 1:16).

This incarnational glory issued from Jesus' sign-works and either led to or was recognized on the basis of his disciples' faith (2:11; 11:4, 40). It was the mark of his divine accreditation (8:54). As noted above, it focused on the Father and in this way verified his truthfulness and righteousness (7:18; cf. 12:28; 17:4).

In the eternal purposes of God the incarnation was designed with a view to our Lord's passion. It is not surprising, therefore, that glory would be associated therewith (12:23, 28; 13:31-32; Rev 5:12). What to the world is an occasion for shame, from the divine viewpoint is an occasion for the ascription of worth. Surely there is no way to put the majestic character of God in bolder relief than in the dazzling display of his perfections in the finished work of Christ. In the death and resurrection of Jesus is found the historical confluence of God's justice and mercy, his holiness and love, his omniscience and goodness, his omnipotence and grace, his sovereign will and infinite compassion.

The ordered ways of God show preincarnate glory preparing the Son for the incarnation, the incarnate glory giving way to his passion, and the glory of his passion leading him full circle to restoration of his original glory as he is exalted again to the Father's side. In the economy of God the exaltation of Christ has two dimensions. As to earth, the giving of the Holy Spirit was contingent on Jesus' exaltation (John 7:39; cf. 14:16-17). He is very conscious of the fact that exaltation is dependent on the Father and the fulfillment of his redemptive mission (17:1). This will provide the occasion for enlarged understanding of his person and work on the part of his disciples as the Holy Spirit inaugurates his ministry of disclosing the things of Christ to them (12:16; 16:14). As to heaven, his exaltation involves a complete restoration to the preincarnate glory he enjoyed with the Father and has the Father's glory in view (17:1, 5). Likewise his exaltation provides a pattern for ours, for he has asked the Father that the saints may enjoy conscious future existence in his glorified presence (17:24).

Another group of passages relates the glory theme to the area of Christian life and death. The pattern is given in Rev 1:5b-6 with the Johannine doxology. Our lives will be a fitting doxology to Jesus as we acknowledge and confess his ongoing love for us, his completed redemptive work for us, and our investiture as priests in his kingdom. More specifically, believers may glorify the Father and the Son by receiving answers to prayer offered in Jesus' name (14:13), by bearing much fruit (15:8), by being led into the truth by the Holy Spirit (16:13-14), by

the kind of death they die (21:19). One significant result of the fact that believers are common shareholders of his glory is their unity (17:22).

Finally, there is a series of doxological passages in the Apocalypse relating to the end times (Rev 4:8-11; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 15:4; 19:1-2, 7). The settings and occasions out of which each instance arises are varied. Some scenes are in heaven, some are on earth. Some doxologies are prompted by judgment, others are elicited in response to the majestic character or gracious works of God. There is also variety in the kinds of beings who will extol his virtues. Sometimes it is the angelic hosts who glorify him, or it may be the ungodly sobered by their fear of the God of heaven, or it may be the great company of the saints in heaven.

Despite the great variety, however, there are several instructive similarities about these doxologies. Without exception it is the God of reality who is the object of honor. Several designations for God are used, with each one highlighting a different aspect of his character but all contributing to a common truth. He is extolled as God, emphasizing his deity; as Lord, emphasizing his dominion; as the Almighty, emphasizing his omnipotence; as the God of heaven, emphasizing his transcendence; and as the King of nations, emphasizing his sovereignty. Each of these concepts serves to underscore his right to reign in the universe and is summed up in the returning Christ who is designated as Sovereign over all kings and Master over all lords (19:16).

Another common note is that in each case appeal is made to one or more of God's perfections (attributes) as the reason for the ascription of glory. His righteousness is in view four times, his holiness twice, and his eternity, creative will and power, and veracity once each.

But more than all these things, one common theme stands behind each doxology just as it stands behind the entire Apocalypse. The great *hallel* of the end times is that Yahweh is bringing his eternal purposes to a consummation. Glory is due his name for the fruition of his judgmental purposes (19:1-2; cf. 20:10-15; 21:8) and of his benedictory purposes (19:7; cf. 21:2-7, 9-27; 22:1-5).

One last observation regarding eschatological glory relates to the new Jerusalem. We are told that when the city comes down out of heaven it will have the glory (visible brightness or splendor) of God (21:10-11). Later in the same section John indicates that the city will be illumined by supernatural rather than natural illumination and that the specific source of that light is the Lamb (21:23). This same concept, as related to the moral realm, is set forth in 21:22 where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are said to be the temple of the city. Moral light is essential for spiritual life (v. 22) just as material light is essential for physical life (v. 23). The principle behind this fact (that as the lamp of the city the Lamb is the glory of God) is found in John 14:9. There Jesus declared to the perplexed Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." As the embodiment of God he is the embodiment of glory.

### III. CONCLUSION

The focal point of much contemporary theology is man. In marked contrast, the theme of a genuinely Biblical theology is the God of reality. Among the NT writers John's theology is Christological in emphasis, and one of the chief themes of his Christology is the incarnation. This particular emphasis is highlighted in

the introductory section of John's three major works (the gospel, the first epistle, and the Apocalypse).

Thus John's intent is not merely to call our attention to God as God but to his personal self-disclosure. God is not only known through Torah, through prophetic utterance and record, or through apostolic revelation. He is also known through his Son, Jesus Christ. So in saying that John's theology is incarnational we are saying that it is revelational, which is another way of saying that the glory of God is central to Johannine thought. The radiance of God's many-splendored character is seen in his redemptive work (the gospel), in the life of his redeemed people (the epistles), and ultimately in the triumph of the kingdom of God in history and beyond (the Apocalypse). It does not seem extravagant, then, to say that "glory" is not merely a motif *in* the Johannine corpus, but rather that it is the motif *of* the Johannine corpus.