



CLARE PRIORY CHRISTMAS 2016

THE PROLOGUE

PROGRAMME

- ▶ Introduction to John
- ▶ The history of the Prologue
- ▶ John the Baptist
- ▶ Background in Wisdom and Philosophy
- ▶ Commentary I
- ▶ **Commentary II**

SEQUENCE

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ The Prologue as Introduction
- ▶ Incarnation
- ▶ Commentary
- ▶ Contemporary reflection
- ▶ Prayer

INTRODUCTION

▶ Cicero

- ▶ One's opening remarks, though they should always be carefully framed and pointed and epigrammatic and suitably expressed, must at the same time be appropriate to the case in hand; for the opening passage contains the first impression and the introduction of the speech, and this ought to charm and attract the hearer straight away. (De or. 2.315)

INTRODUCTION

▶ **Kinds of language**

- ▶ The grand, or dignified, style (grave) stirs the emotions by making liberal use of figures of speech, rhythmic organisation, periodic construction, and devices such as impersonating the voice of the dead. It is most appropriate for ceremonial addresses, such as praise of a god or ancestors, and it allows the speaker to display the full range of his or her rhetorical skill.
- ▶ The middle style (medium), appropriate to deliberative speeches and narrative, aims to please and alternates use of plain language with more charming expressions such as metaphor or metonymy and figures of speech that play with word order.
- ▶ The plain style (subtile) seeks to teach with clarity, vividness, and persuasiveness. Its sentences tend to be staccato, and its vocabulary unadorned.

INTRODUCTION

▶ Encomium

- ▶ An encomium is a composition in prose or poetry written to praise a human being, event, or idea. In the Greco-Roman traditions, encomia were often composed to celebrate the victory of an athlete or for recital at a funeral. The proper composition of the encomium is a common theme in the classical rhetorical handbooks. Aphthonius the Sophist includes the following subtopics:

- ▶ Origins: nation, homeland, ancestors, and parents' city
- ▶ Upbringing: habits, skills, and principles of conduct
- ▶ Deeds: of mind (e.g., prudence), body (e.g., beauty), and fortune (e.g., friends)
- ▶ Comparison: superiority to someone or something worthy of praise
- ▶ Epilogue: something fitting a prayer (Progymn. 35-36)

THE PROLOGUE AS INTRODUCTION

▶ At the literary level

- ▶ (1) the Word was in the beginning (vv. 1-2; cf. 8:58);
- ▶ (2) in him was life (v. 4a; cf. 5:26);
- ▶ (3) the light of men (v. 4b; cf. 8:12 and ch. 9);
- ▶ (4) John the Baptist (vv. 6-8, 15; cf. 3:27-30);
- ▶ (5) the new birth (vv. 12-13; cf. 3:3, 5);
- ▶ (6) disciples behold his glory (v. 14b; cf. 2:11; 17:24);
- ▶ (7) only the Son who is divine has seen God and can make him known (v. 18; cf. 3:16; 6:46; 20:28).

THE PROLOGUE AS INTRODUCTION

- ▶ At the theological level
- ▶ (1) The Creator and the Redeemer are the same God. This would have answered at least a potential problem near the time when John was put in its final form.
- ▶ (2) The divine agent of creation, who has continually been attempting to communicate with creatures by means of general and special revelation but with little success, became flesh (*sarks egeneto*).

INCARNATION

- ▶ What does this mean in a Johannine context
- ▶ When was it believed to have taken place?

INCARNATION: MEANING

- ▶ In the Johannine epistles there was a recurring attempt to insure belief that Jesus Christ continued in the flesh even after the resurrection: e.g., 2 John 7 (the use of a present participle for "coming" in the flesh to imply continuation through time); 1 John 1:1 (the appeal to post-resurrection sight and touch to guarantee that the risen one was still flesh); 4:2 (the use of a perfect participle, "having come and remaining" in flesh); and 5:6-8 (the emphasis on water and blood as opposed to water only to insure that Jesus Christ's coming extended through his death).
- ▶ In three of four cases, the attempt to guarantee that the Saviour's coming in flesh extended through his passion and beyond is expressed by the use of the verb "come" in a variety of ways (2 John 7: present tense; 1 John 4:2: perfect tense; 5:6-8: by water and blood).

INCARNATION: TIMING

- ▶ (1) at Jesus' conception by the Spirit (so the textual variant at 1:13: "the one not born of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God")
- ▶ (2) At the Baptism, when the Spirit descended upon him.
- ▶ (3) After Jesus' glorification when his abiding presence indwells the community of his disciples

INCARNATION: TIMING

- ▶ Canonical reading: at conception
- ▶ Narrative reading: at Baptism
- ▶ In any case, the Word enjoyed pre-existence up to the moment of “dwelling” among us.
- ▶ In any case, a reality of continued significance for believers.

INCARNATION: CONSEQUENCES

- ▶ (1) The creator and the redeemer are the same God;
- ▶ (2) the Incarnation implies a permanent union of pre-existent Word and the human Jesus (that took place probably in connection with the water of John's baptism);
- ▶ (3) since like is known only by like, the divine Revealer is able to make God known to creatures whom he has given the power to become children of God;
- ▶ (4) the religion of the Johannine community is not a "cultural religion" but a highly thought-out prophetic and "sectarian" alternative.

COMMENTARY

A vv. 1-5

Notes

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. **2** The Word was with God in the beginning. **3** All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. **4** *In him was life*, and the life was the light of mankind. **5** And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

- ▶ Beginning
- ▶ Word
- ▶ With ("pros")
- ▶ Life
- ▶ Mastered

COMMENTARY

B

vv. 6-8

Notes

John 1:6 A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

- ▶ Sent
- ▶ Witness / testify
- ▶ Believe
- ▶ Not the light

COMMENTARY

C

vv. 9-11

Notes

John 1:9 The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognise him. **11** He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.

- ▶ Coming
- ▶ In/into
- ▶ Not recognise
- ▶ His own
- ▶ Receive

COMMENTARY

D

vv. 12-13

Notes

John 1:12 **John 1:12** But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God’s children **13** - children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband’s decision, but by God.

- ▶ All
- ▶ Received
- ▶ God’s children
- ▶ Not, or, or
- ▶ by God

COMMENTARY

C¹
v. 14

Notes

John 1:14 Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.

- ▶ Became
- ▶ Flesh
- ▶ Residence (eskēnosen)
- ▶ Glory
- ▶ Grace and Truth

COMMENTARY

B¹
v. 15

Notes

John 1:15 John testified about him and shouted out, "This one was the one about whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than I am, because he existed before me.'"

- ▶ Shouted out
- ▶ After / greater
- ▶ Existed
- ▶ Before

COMMENTARY

A¹

vv. 16-18

Notes

John 1:16 For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. **17** For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

- ▶ Fullness
- ▶ Grace upon grace
- ▶ Law through Moses
- ▶ Grace and truth
- ▶ No one
- ▶ The only one
- ▶ Made known

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTION

- ▶ Claims
- ▶ Shock then and now
- ▶ Uniquely Christian teaching
- ▶ Who is God?
- ▶ Who are we?
- ▶ Credibility today

PRAYER

God most high, your only Son embraced the weakness of our flesh to give us the power to become your children; your eternal Word chose to dwell among us, that we might live in your presence.

Grant us a spirit of wisdom to know how rich is the glory you have made our own, and how great the hope to which we are called in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit in the splendour of eternal light God for ever and ever.