

COMMENTARY ON
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

Prooemium

Vidi dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, et plena erat omnis terra maiestate eius, et ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum. Is. VI, 1.

Verba proposita sunt contemplantis, et si capiantur quasi ex ore Ioannis Evangelistae prolata, satis pertinent ad declarationem huius Evangelii. Ut enim dicit Augustinus in libro de consensu Evangelist., caeteri Evangelistae informant nos in eorum Evangeliiis quantum ad vitam activam; sed Ioannes in suo Evangelio informat nos etiam quantum ad vitam contemplativam.

In verbis autem propositis describitur contemplatio Ioannis tripliciter, secundum quod dominum Iesum est tripliciter contemplatus. Describitur autem alta, ampla et perfecta. Alta quidem, quia vidi dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum; ampla quidem, quia plena est omnis terra maiestate eius; perfecta, quia ea quae sub ipso erant replebant templum.

Circa primum sciendum quod altitudo et sublimitas contemplationis consistit maxime in contemplatione et cognitione Dei; Is. XL, 26: levate in excelso oculos vestros, et videte quis fecit haec. Tunc ergo homo oculos contemplationis in excelso elevat, quando videt et contemplatur ipsum rerum omnium creatorem. Quia ergo Ioannes transcendit quicquid creatum est, scilicet ipsos montes, ipsos caelos, ipsos Angelos, et pervenit ad ipsum creatorem omnium, ut dicit Augustinus, manifestum est, quod contemplatio sua

PROLOGUE

I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the whole house was full of his majesty, and the things that were under him filled the temple. (Is 6:1)

1 These are the words of a contemplative, and if we regard them as spoken by John the Evangelist they apply quite well to showing the nature of this Gospel. For as Augustine says in his work, *On the Agreement of the Evangelists*: “The other Evangelists instruct us in their Gospels on the active life; but John in his Gospel instructs us also on the contemplative life.”

The contemplation of John is described above in three ways, in keeping with the threefold manner in which he contemplated the Lord Jesus. It is described as high, full, and perfect. It is high: **I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne**; it is full: **and the whole house was full of his majesty**; and it was perfect: **and the things that were under him filled the temple**.

2 As to the first, we must understand that the Height and sublimity of contemplation consists most of all in the contemplation and knowledge of God. “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things” (Is 40:26). A man lifts up his eyes on high when he sees and contemplates the Creator of all things. Now since John rose above whatever had been created—mountains, heavens, angels—and reached the Creator of all, as Augustine says, it is clear that his contemplation was most high. Thus, I

altissima fuit; et ideo vidi dominum. Et quia, sicut ipse Ioannes dicit: haec dixit Isaias quando vidit gloriam eius, scilicet Christi, et locutus est de eo, ideo dominus sedens super solium excelsum et elevatum, Christus est.

In hac autem contemplatione Ioannis circa verbum incarnatum quadruplex altitudo designatur. Auctoritatis, unde dicit vidi dominum, aeternitatis, cum dicit sedentem, dignitatis, seu nobilitatis naturae, unde dicit super solium excelsum, et incomprehensibilis veritatis, cum dicit et elevatum. Istis enim quatuor modis antiqui philosophi ad Dei cognitionem pervenerunt.

Quidam enim per auctoritatem Dei in ipsius cognitionem pervenerunt; et haec est via efficacissima. Videmus enim ea quae sunt in rebus naturalibus, propter finem agere, et consequi utiles et certos fines; et cum intellectu careant, se ipsa dirigere non possunt, nisi ab aliquo dirigente per intellectum dirigantur et moveantur. Et hinc est quod ipse motus rerum naturalium in finem certum, indicat esse aliquid altius, quo naturales res diriguntur in finem et gubernantur. Et ideo cum totus cursus naturae ordinate in finem procedat et dirigatur, de necessitate oportet nos ponere aliquid altius, quod dirigat ista et sicut dominus gubernet: et hic est Deus. Et haec gubernandi auctoritas in verbo Dei demonstratur, cum dicit dominum; unde in Ps. LXXXVIII, 10 dicitur: tu dominaris potestati maris; motum autem fluctuum eius tu mitigas; quasi dicat: tu es dominus et universa gubernas. Hanc cognitionem manifestat Ioannes se habere de verbo, cum dicit: in propria venit, scilicet in mundum; quia totus mundus est suus proprius.

Alii vero venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex eius aeternitate. Viderunt enim quod quicquid est in rebus, est mutabile; et quanto aliquid est nobilius in gradibus rerum, tanto minus habet de mutabilitate: puta, inferiora corpora sunt secundum substantiam et secundum locum mutabilia; corpora vero caelestia, quae

saw the Lord. And because, as John himself says below (12:41), “Isaiah said this because he had seen his glory,” that is, the glory of Christ, “and spoke of him,” the Lord **seated on a high and lofty throne** is Christ.

Now a fourfold height is indicated in this contemplation of John. A height of authority; hence he says, **I saw the Lord.** A height of eternity; when he says, seated. One of dignity, or nobility of nature; so he says, **on a high throne.** And a height of incomprehensible truth; when he says, lofty. It is in these four ways that the early philosophers arrived at the knowledge of God.

3 Some attained to a knowledge of God through his authority, and this is the most efficacious way. For we see the things in nature acting for an end, and attaining to ends which are both useful and certain. And since they lack intelligence, they are unable to direct themselves, but must be directed and moved by one directing them, and who possesses an intellect. Thus it is that the movement of the things of nature toward a certain end indicates the existence of something higher by which the things of nature are directed to an end and governed. And so, since the whole course of nature advances to an end in an orderly way and is directed, we have to posit something higher which directs and governs them as Lord; and this is God. This authority in governing is shown to be in the Word of God when he says, Lord. Thus the Psalm (88:10) says: “You rule the power of the sea, and you still the swelling of its waves,” as though saying: You are the Lord and govern all things. John shows that he knows this about the Word when he says below (1:11), “He came unto his own,” i.e., to the world, since the whole universe is his own.

4 Others came to a knowledge of God from his eternity. They saw that whatever was in things was changeable, and that the more noble something is in the grades of being, so much the less it has of mutability. For example, the lower bodies are mutable both as to their substance and to place, while

nobiliora sunt, secundum substantiam immutabilia sunt; secundum autem locum tantum moventur. Secundum hoc ergo evidenter colligi potest, quod primum principium omnium rerum, et supremum et nobilius, sit immobile et aeternum. Et hanc aeternitatem verbi propheta insinuat, cum dicit sedentem, idest absque omni mutabilitate et aeternitate praesidentem; Ps. c. XLIV, 7: sedes tua, Deus, in saeculum saeculi; Hebr. ult., 8: Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula. Hanc aeternitatem Ioannes ostendit dicens: in principio erat verbum.

Quidam autem venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex dignitate ipsius Dei: et isti fuerunt Platonici. Consideraverunt enim quod omne illud quod est secundum participationem, reducitur ad aliquid quod sit illud per suam essentiam, sicut ad primum et ad summum; sicut omnia ignita per participationem reducuntur ad ignem, qui est per essentiam suam talis. Cum ergo omnia quae sunt, participant esse, et sint per participationem entia, necesse est esse aliquid in cacumine omnium rerum, quod sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, idest quod sua essentia sit suum esse: et hoc est Deus, qui est sufficientissima, et dignissima, et perfectissima causa totius esse, a quo omnia quae sunt, participant esse. Et huius dignitas ostenditur, cum dicitur super solium excelsum, quod, secundum Dionysium, ad divinam naturam refertur; Ps. CXII, 4: excelsus super omnes gentes dominus. Hanc dignitatem ostendit nobis Ioannes, cum dicit: et Deus erat verbum, quasi: verbum erat Deus, ut ly verbum ponatur ex parte suppositi, et Deus ex parte appositi.

Quidam autem venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex incomprehensibilitate veritatis. Omnis enim veritas quam intellectus noster capere potest, finita est; quia secundum Augustinum, omne quod scitur, scientis comprehensione finitur, et si finitur, est determinatum et particularizatum; et ideo necesse est primam et summam veritatem, quae superat omnem intellectum, incomprehensibilem et infinitam esse: et hoc est Deus. Unde in Ps. VIII, 2 dicitur: elevata est magnificentia tua super caelos, idest super omnem intellectum creatum, angelicum et humanum. Et hoc ideo, quia, ut dicit apostolus, lucem habitat

the heavenly bodies, which are more noble, are immutable in substance and change only with respect to place. We can clearly conclude from this that the first principle of all things, which is supreme and more noble, is changeless and eternal. The prophet suggests this eternity of the Word when he says, **seated**, i.e., presiding without any change and eternally. “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Ps 44:7); “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). John points to this eternity when he says below (1:1), “In the beginning was the Word.”

5 Still others came to a knowledge of God from the dignity of God; and these were the Platonists. They noted that everything which is something by participation is reduced to what is the same thing by essence, as to the first and highest. Thus, all things which are fiery by participation are reduced to fire, which is such by its essence. And so since all things which exist participate in existence (*esse*) and are beings by participation, there must necessarily be at the summit of all things something which is existence (*esse*) by its essence, i.e., whose essence is its existence. And this is God, who is the most sufficient, the most eminent, and the most perfect cause of the whole of existence, from, whom all things that are participate existence (*esse*). This dignity is shown in the words, **on a high throne**, which, according to Denis, refer to the divine nature. “The Lord is high above all nations” (Ps 112:4). John shows us this dignity when he says below (1:1), “the Word was God,” with “Word” as subject and “God” as the predicate.

6 Yet others arrived at a knowledge of God from the incomprehensibility of truth. All the truth which our intellect is able to grasp is finite, since according to Augustine, “everything that is known is bounded by the comprehension of the one knowing”; and if it is bounded, it is determined and particularized. Therefore, the first and supreme Truth, which surpasses every intellect, must necessarily be incomprehensible and infinite; and this is God. [Hence the Psalm (8:2) says, “Your greatness is above the heavens,” i.e., above every created intellect, angelic and human. The Apostle says this

inaccessibilem, I Tim. ult. 16. Huius autem incomprehensibilitas veritatis ostenditur nobis, cum dicit et elevatum, scilicet super omnem cognitionem intellectus creati. Et hanc incomprehensibilitatem insinuat nobis Ioannes, cum dicit: Deum nemo vidit unquam.

Sic ergo contemplatio Ioannis alta fuit et quantum ad auctoritatem, et quantum ad aeternitatem, et quantum ad dignitatem, et quantum ad verbi incomprehensibilitatem, quam nobis in suo Evangelio tradidit Ioannes.

Fuit etiam ampla. Tunc enim contemplatio ampla est, quando in causa potest aliquis considerare omnes effectus ipsius causae; quando scilicet non solum essentiam causae, sed etiam virtutem eius, secundum quam se ad multa diffundit, cognoscit. De qua diffusionem dicitur Eccli. XXV, 35: qui implet quasi Phison sapientiam, et quasi tigris in diebus novorum; Ps. LXIV, 10: flumen Dei repletum est aquis, quia divina sapientia altitudinem habet quantum ad cognitionem omnium rerum; Sap. IX, 9: ab initio est tecum sapientia quae novit opera tua.

Quia ergo Ioannes Evangelista elevatus in contemplationem naturae divini verbi et essentiae est, cum dicit: in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum, statim virtutem ipsius verbi secundum quod diffundit se ad omnia, nobis insinuat, cum dicit: omnia per ipsum facta sunt. Ideo contemplatio sua ampla fuit. Et ideo in auctoritate praemissa, postquam dixerat propheta vidi dominum sedentem, subiungit de virtute eius et plena erat omnis terra maiestate eius, id est tota plenitudo rerum et universi est a maiestate eius, et virtute Dei, per quem omnia facta sunt, et cuius lumine omnes homines venientes in hunc mundum illuminantur; Ps. XXIII, 1: domini est terra, et plenitudo eius.

in the words, “He dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). This incomprehensibility of Truth is shown to us in the word, **lofty**, that is, above all the knowledge of the created intellect. John implies this incomprehensibility to us when he says below (1:18), “No one has ever seen God.”

Thus, the contemplation of John was high as regards authority, eternity, dignity, and the incomprehensibility of the Word. And John has passed on this contemplation to us in his Gospel.

7 John’s contemplation was also full. Now contemplation is full when someone is able to consider all the effects of a cause in the cause itself, that is, when he knows not only the essence of the cause, but also its power, according as it can extend out to many things. Of this flowing outward we read, “It overflows with wisdom, like the Pishon, and like the Tigris in the days of the new fruits” (Sir 25:35); “The river of God is full with water,” since the divine wisdom has depth in relation to its knowledge of all things (Ps 65:9). “With you from the beginning is wisdom, who knows your works” (Wis 9:9).

Since John the Evangelist was raised up to the contemplation of the nature of the divine Word and of his essence when he said, “In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God,” he immediately tells us of the power of the Word as it extends to all things, saying, “Through him all things came into being.” Thus his contemplation was full. And so after the prophet had **said, I saw the Lord seated**, he added something about his power, **and the whole house was full of his majesty**, that is, the whole fullness of things and of the universe is from the majesty and power of God, through whom all things were made, and by whose light all the men coming into this world are enlightened. “The earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (Ps 23:1).

Fuit etiam contemplatio eius perfecta. Tunc enim contemplatio perfecta est, quando contemplans perducitur et elevatur ad altitudinem rei contemplatae: si enim remaneret in infimis, quantumcumque alta ipse contemplaretur, non esset contemplatio perfecta. Ad hoc ergo quod sit perfecta, oportet quod ascendat et consequatur ipsum finem rei contemplatae, inhaerendo et assentiendo per affectum et intellectum veritati contemplatae. Iob XXXVII, 16: numquid nosti semitas nubium, idest contemplationes praedicantium, quod perfectae sint? In quantum firmiter per affectum et intellectum inhaerent summae veritati contemplatae.

Quia ergo Ioannes non solum docuit quomodo Christus Iesus, verbum Dei, est Deus super omnia elevatus et quomodo omnia per ipsum facta sunt, sed etiam quod per ipsum sanctificamur, et ei per gratiam quam nobis infundit, inhaeremus, dicit: de plenitudine eius omnes accepimus gratiam pro gratia. Ideo apparet, quod sua contemplatio perfecta fuit. Et haec perfectio ostenditur, cum subdit et ea quae sub ipso erat, replebant templum. Nam, sicut dicitur I Cor. c. XI, 3, caput Christi Deus. Quae ergo sub Christo sunt, sacramenta sunt humanitatis, per quae fideles replentur plenitudine gratiae. Sic ergo ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum, idest fideles qui sunt templum Dei sanctum, sicut dicitur I Cor. III, 17 in quantum per ipsius sacramenta humanitatis, fideles Christi omnes de plenitudine gratiae ipsius accipiunt.

Fuit ergo Ioannis contemplatio ampla, alta et perfecta.

Sed notandum quod diversimode diversae scientiae istos tres modos contemplationis sortiuntur. Perfectionem namque contemplationis habet scientia moralis, quae est de ultimo fine; plenitudinem autem scientia naturalis, quae res a Deo procedentes considerat; altitudinem vero contemplationis inter scientias physicas habet metaphysica. Sed Evangelium Ioannis, quod divisim scientiae praedictae habent, totum simul continet, et ideo est perfectissimum.

8 The contemplation of John was also perfect. For contemplation is perfect when the one contemplating is led and raised to the height of the thing contemplated. Should he remain at a lower level, then no matter how high the things which he might contemplate, the contemplation would not be perfect. So in order that it be perfect it is necessary that it rise and attain the end of the thing contemplated, adhering and assenting by affection and understanding to the truth contemplated. Job (37:16) says, “Do you not know the path of the clouds,” that is, the contemplation of those preaching, “how perfect they are?” inasmuch as they adhere firmly by affection and understanding to contemplating the highest truth.

Since John not only taught how Christ Jesus, the Word of God, is God, raised above all things, and how all things were made through him, but also that we are sanctified by him and adhere to him by the grace which he pours into us, he says below (1:16), “Of his fullness we have all received - indeed, grace in return for grace.” It is therefore apparent that his contemplation is perfect. This perfection is shown in the addition, **and the things that were under him filled the temple**. For “the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). The things that are under Christ are the sacraments of his humanity, through which the faithful are filled with the fullness of grace. In this way, then, **the things that were under him filled the temple**, i.e., the faithful, who are the holy temple of God (1 Cor 3:17) insofar as through the sacraments of his humanity all the faithful of Christ receive from the fullness of his grace.

The contemplation of John was thus full, high, and perfect.

9 We should note, however, that these three characteristics of contemplation belong to the different sciences in different ways. The perfection of contemplation is found in Moral Science, which is concerned with the ultimate end. The fullness of contemplation is possessed by Natural Science, which considers things as proceeding from God. Among the physical [natural] sciences, the height of contemplation is found in

Sic ergo ex praemissis colligitur materia huius Evangelii; quia cum Evangelistae alii tractent principaliter mysteria humanitatis Christi, Ioannes specialiter et praecipue divinitatem Christi in Evangelio suo insinuat, ut supra dictum est: nec tamen praetermisit mysteria humanitatis; quod ideo factum est, quia postquam alii Evangelistae sua Evangelia scripserunt, insurrexerunt haereses circa divinitatem Christi, quae erant quod Christus erat purus homo, sicut Ebion et Cerinthus falso opinabantur. Et ideo Ioannes Evangelista, qui veritatem divinitatis verbi ab ipso fonte divini pectoris hauserat, ad preces fidelium, Evangelium istud scripsit, in quo doctrinam de Christi divinitate nobis tradidit, et omnes haereses confutavit.

Patet ergo ordo istius Evangelii ex verbis praemissis. Primo enim insinuat nobis dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, in prima parte, cum dicit: in principio erat verbum. In secunda vero parte insinuat quomodo omnis terra plena est maiestate eius, cum dicit: omnia per ipsum facta sunt. In tertia parte manifestat quomodo ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum cum ipse dicit: verbum caro factum est. Patet etiam finis huius Evangelii, qui est ut fideles templum Dei efficiantur, et repleantur a maiestate Dei; unde et ipse Ioannes XX, 31: haec autem scripta sunt, ut credatis quia Iesus est Christus filius Dei.

Patet etiam materia huius Evangelii, quae est cognitio divinitas verbi. Patet ordo, patet et finis.

Sequitur conditio auctoris, qui quidem describitur in praemissis quantum ad quatuor: quantum ad nomen, quantum ad virtutem, quantum ad figuram, et quantum ad privilegium. Quantum ad nomen, quia Ioannes, qui huius Evangelii

Metaphysics. But the Gospel of John contains all together what the above sciences have in a divided way, and so it is most perfect.

10 In this way then, from what has been said, we can understand the matter of this Gospel. For while the other Evangelists treat principally of the mysteries of the humanity of Christ, John, especially and above all, makes known the divinity of Christ in his Gospel, as we saw above. Still, he does not ignore the mysteries of his humanity. He did this because, after the other Evangelists had written their Gospels, heresies had arisen concerning the divinity of Christ, to the effect that Christ was purely and simply a man, as Ebion and Cerinthus falsely thought. And so John the Evangelist, who had drawn the truth about the divinity of the Word from the very fountain-head of the divine breast, wrote this Gospel at the request of the faithful. And in it he gives us the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and refutes all heresies.

The order of this Gospel is clear from the above. For John first shows us **the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne**, when he says below (1:1), “In the beginning was the Word.” He shows secondly how **the house was full of his majesty**, when he says, “through him all things came into being” (1:3). Thirdly, he shows how the **things that were under him filled the temple**, when he says, “the Word was made flesh” (1:14). The end of this Gospel is also clear, and it is that the faithful become the temple of God, and become filled with the majesty of God; and so John says below (20:31), “These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

The matter of this Gospel, the knowledge of the divinity of the Word, is clear, as well as its order and end.

11 Then follows the condition of the author, who is described above in four ways: as to his name, his virtue, his symbol, and his privilege. He is described as to name as John, the author of this Gospel. “John” is interpreted

auctor fuit, Ioannes autem interpretatur in quo est gratia, quia secreta divinitatis videre non possunt nisi qui gratiam Dei in se habent; unde I Cor. II, 11 dicitur: quae sunt Dei nemo cognovit, nisi spiritus Dei.

Ioannes ergo vidit dominum sedentem, quantum ad virtutem, quia fuit virgo: talibus enim competit videre dominum; Matth. c. V, 8: beati mundo corde.

Quantum ad figuram, quia Ioannes figuratur per aquilam. Et hoc quia cum alii tres Evangelistae circa ea quae Christus in carne est operatus, occupati, designentur per animalia, quae gradiuntur in terra, scilicet per hominem, vitulum et leonem; Ioannes vero, supra nebulam infirmitatis humanae sicut aquila volans, lucem incommutabilis veritatis altissimis atque firmissimis oculis cordis intuetur, atque ipsam deitatem domini nostri Iesu Christi, qua patri aequalis est, intendens, eam in suo Evangelio, quantum inter omnes sufficere credidit, studuit praecipue commendare. Et de hoc volatu Ioannis dicitur Iob c. XXXIX, 27: numquid ad praeceptum tuum elevabitur aquila? Idest Ioannes; et infra: oculi eius de longe prospiciunt, quia scilicet ipsum verbum Dei in sinu patris oculo mentis intuetur.

Quantum ad privilegium, quia inter caeteros discipulos domini Ioannes magis fuit dilectus a Christo: iste est enim discipulus ille quem diligebat Iesus, sicut ipsemet non exprimens nomen suum dixit; et ideo, quia amicis revelantur secreta, ut dicitur ibid. XV, 15: vos autem dixi amicos, quia omnia quaecumque audivi a patre meo, nota feci vobis, secreta sua huic discipulo specialiter dilecto specialiter commendavit. Unde Iob XXXVI, 32 dicitur: immanibus, idest superbis, abscondit lucem, Christus scilicet divinitatis suae veritatem, et annuntiat de ea amico suo, scilicet Ioanni, quod possessio eius sit etc., quia ipse est, qui lucem verbi incarnati excellentius videns, ipsam nobis insinuat, dicens: erat lux vera et cetera.

as “in whom is grace,” since the secrets of the divinity cannot be seen except by those who have the grace of God within themselves. “No one knows the deep things of God but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11).

As concerns his virtue, John **saw the Lord seated**, because he was a virgin; for it is fitting that such persons see the Lord: “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Mt 5:8).

He is described as to his symbol, for John is symbolized by an eagle. The other three Evangelists, concerned with those things which Christ did in his flesh, are symbolized by animals which walk on the earth, namely, by a man, a bull calf, and a lion. But John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart. And gazing on the very deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he is equal to the Father, he has striven in this Gospel to confide this above all, to the extent that he believed was sufficient for all. Concerning this flight of John it says in Job (39:27): “Will the eagle,” that is, John, “fly up at your command?” And further on it says, “His eyes look far away,” because the Word of God is seen in the bosom of the Father by the eye of the mind.

John is described as to privilege since, among the other disciples of the Lord, John was more loved by Christ. Without mentioning his own name John refers to himself below (21:20) as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” And because secrets are revealed to friends, “I have called you friends because everything I have heard from my father I have made known to you” (below 15:15), Jesus confided his secrets in a special way to that disciple who was specially loved. Thus it says in Job (36:32): “From the savage,” that is, the proud, “he hides his light,” that is, Christ hides the truth of his divinity, “and shows his friend,” that is, John, “that it belongs to him,” since it is John who sees the light of the Incarnate Word more excellently and expresses it to us, saying “He was the true light” (below 1:19).

Patet ergo materia, ordo, finis et auctor huius Evangelii beati Ioannis, quod prae manibus habemus.

Now the matter, order, end and author of this Gospel of the blessed John are clear.

Prologus S. Hieronymi

Hic est Ioannes Evangelista, unus ex discipulis Domini, qui virgo a Deo electus est, quem de nuptiis, volentem nubere, vocavit Deus.

Cui virginitatis in hoc duplex testimonium datur in Evangelio; et quod prae caeteris dilectus a Deo dicitur: et huic matrem suam pendens in cruce commendavit Dominus, ut virginem virgo servaret.

Denique manifestans in Evangelio, quod erat ipse incorruptibilis Verbi opus inchoans, solus Verbum carnem factum esse, nec lumen a tenebris comprehensum fuisse, testatur, primum signum ponens quod in nuptiis fecit Dominus, ostendens quod ipse erat, ut legentibus demonstraret, quod ubi Dominus invitatus sit, deficere nuptiarum vinum debeat: et veteribus immutatis nova omnia, quae a Christo instituuntur, appareant.

Hoc autem Evangelium scripsit in Asia, posteaquam in Pathmos insula Apocalypsim scripserat: ut cui in principio Canonis incorruptibile principium praenotatur in Genesi, ei etiam incorruptibilis finis per virginem in Apocalypsi redderetur, dicente Christo: "Ego sum α et ω ."

Et hic est Ioannes, qui sciens supervenisse diem recessus sui, convocatis discipulis suis in Epheso, per multa signorum experimenta promens Christum, descendens in defossum sepulturae suae locum, facta oratione positus est ad patres suos: tam extraneus a dolore mortis, quam a corruptione carnis invenitur alienus.

Prologue of St. Jerome (translated by Joseph Kenny, O.P.)

This is John, the Evangelist, one of the disciples of the Lord, a virgin chosen by God, whom he called from the wedding when he wanted to marry.

The Gospel gives a double testimony of his virginity: (1) that God loved him more than the others, and (2) that the Lord, hanging on the cross, commended his Mother to him, so that a virgin might look after the Virgin.

Then, in the Gospel, as he showed that he was beginning a work on the incorruptible Word, he alone testified that the Word became flesh, and that darkness did not grasp the light. Describing the Lord's first sign, worked at the wedding, he showed that he was the one to show his readers that, where the Lord was invited, the wedding wine had to give out: that the old would be changed and all the new things that Christ instituted would appear.

He wrote this Gospel in Asia, after having written the Apocalypse in the island of Patmos. Thus as we observe the incorruptible principle in Genesis, at the beginning of the Canon, so we note the incorruptible End in the Apocalypse, where Christ says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

And this John, when he knew his day of departure had come, called his disciples in Ephesus, and through many miracles promised them Christ, then climbed down into the grave dug for him, prayed, and was gathered to his fathers. He suffered no pain in dying, just as he was alien to the corruption of the flesh.

Tamen post omnes Evangelium scripsit: et hoc virgini debebatur. Quorum tamen vel scriptorum temporis despositio, vel librorum ordinatio, ideo a nobis per singula non exponitur, ut sciendi desiderio collato, et quaerentibus fructus laboris, et Deo magisterii doctrina servetur.

S. Thomae in hunc prologum

In quo duo intendit Hieronymus exprimere, scilicet auctorem Evangelii, et ostendere quod ei scribere hoc Evangelium competebat. Dividitur ergo in duas partes. Primo ergo describit Ioannem quantum ad vitam; secundo quantum ad mortem, ibi hic est Ioannes. Circa primum duo facit. Primo describit auctorem operis, quantum ad dona in vita sibi collata; secundo ex illis ostendit idoneitatem ad Evangelium conscribendum, ibi denique manifestans in Evangelio. Circa primum duo facit. Primo ostendit praeconia auctoris; secundo probat, ibi cui virginitatis in hoc duplex testimonium datur in Evangelio.

Describit enim auctorem quantum ad nomen, dicens hic est Ioannes, in quo gratia; I Cor. XV, 10: gratia Dei sum id quod sum. Secundo quantum ad officium, cum dicit Evangelista; Is. XLI, 27: primus ad Sion dicet: ecce adsum, et Ierusalem Evangelistam dabo. Tertio quantum ad dignitatem, cum dicit ex discipulis domini; Is. LIV, 13: ponam universos filios tuos doctos a domino. Quarto quantum ad castitatis virtutem, cum dicit qui virgo. Quinto ab electione est electus a domino; infra XV, 16: non vos me elegistis. Sexto a modo vocationis, cum dicit, quod de nuptiis vocavit, ab illis scilicet nuptiis ad quas est invitatus Iesus cum discipulis suis, ubi mutavit aquam in vinum.

He wrote his Gospel after all the others. Yet I will not explain the temporal sequence of these writers and books, so that you may desire to learn, and that you may find the fruit of your laborious quest as God teaches you.

St. Thomas on this prologue (translated by Joseph Kenny, O.P.)

Here Jerome wishes to express two things: the author of the Gospel, and the fact that he was competent to write it. So it is divided into two parts: First he describes John's life, then his death (at "hic est Ioannes"). As for the first, he does two things: First he describes the author of the work, with regard to the gifts he receive in life, secondly, from these he shows his suitability for writing the Gospel (at "denique manifestans in Evangelio"). On the first point, he does two things: First he shows what proclaims the author's greatness, then he proves this (at "cui virginitatis in hoc duplex testimonium datur in Evangelio").

For he describes the author from his name, saying, "This is John," in whom there is grace—1 Cor 15:10: "By the grace of God I am what I am." Secondly, from his office, when he says "Evangelist"—Is 41:27 "The first will say to Zion, 'Here I am', and I will give Jerusalem an evangelist." Thirdly, from his dignity, when he says "one of the disciples of the Lord."—Is 54:13: "I will see that all your sons are instructed by the Lord." Fourthly, from his virtue of chastity, when he says "virgin". Fifthly, from his being chosen by the Lord.—below: 15:16: "You did not choose me." Sixthly, from the manner of his calling, when he says, "He called him at the wedding, namely, the wedding to which Jesus and his disciples were invited, where he changed water into wine.

Sed contra est, quod dicitur Matth. c. VI, 21, quod vocatus est cum Iacobo fratre suo de navi, non autem de nuptiis. Ad quod dicendum est quod diversae fuerunt vocationes apostolorum. Primo enim vocati fuerunt ad familiaritatem Christi, sed ultimo vocati ad discipulatum, quando scilicet relictis omnibus, secuti sunt Iesum. Quod ergo Hieronymus dicit, intelligendum est de prima vocatione, qua Ioannes ad familiaritatem Christi de nuptiis est vocatus; quod vero Matthaeus dicit, intelligendum est de ultima vocatione, qua de navi vocavit cum Iacobo fratre suo, quando scilicet relictis omnibus, secutus est Christum.

Consequenter cum dicit cui virginitatis in hoc duplex testimonium datur, probat praeconium virginitatis Ioannis duplici signo. Primo, signo maioris dilectionis. Et quantum ad hoc dicit cui, scilicet Ioanni, in hoc, scilicet Evangelio, duplex testimonium virginitatis datur in Evangelio, idest ex verbis Evangelii, sive quae continentur in Evangelio, quod et prae caeteris discipulis a Deo dilectus dicitur; infra XXI, 24: hic est discipulus ille qui testimonium perhibet de his et scripsit haec. Causa autem huius specialis dilectionis fuit munditia, quae ad dilectionem provocat, ut dicitur Prov. XXII, 11: qui diligit cordis munditiam propter gratiam labiorum, habebit amicum regem. Secundo probat idem signo commendationis matris, cum dicit: et huic, scilicet Ioanni, dominus, scilicet in cruce pendens, matrem commendavit, ut dicitur Io. XIX, 27, ut virgo, scilicet Ioannes, virginem matrem congrue servaret.

Deinde cum dicit denique manifestans in Evangelio, etc. ostendit quod Ioanni competebat Evangelium scribere; et hoc quantum ad quatuor. Primo quantum ad principium Evangelii, quod incipit a verbo incorruptibili, de quo non nisi incorruptum tractare oportuit. Et quantum ad hoc dicit denique manifestans, scilicet Ioannes, in Evangelio, quod ipse erat incorruptibilis verbi opus inchoans, solus verbum carnem factum esse, nec lumen a tenebris comprehensum fuisse testatur.

But an objection comes from Matthew 6:21, that John was called with his brother James from the boat, not from the wedding. An answer is that there were different callings of the apostles. First they were called to familiarity with Christ, but lastly to discipleship, when they left all and followed Jesus. Jerome is talking about the first calling, when John, at the wedding, was called to familiarity with Jesus. Matthew's description is of the last calling, when Jesus called him with his brother James, when they left all and followed Christ.

Then, when he says "cui virginitatis in hoc duplex testimonium datur, he proves the proclamation of his virginity by two signs: First the sign of greater love. Regarding this, he says "to whom", that is John, "in this", that is the Gospel, a double testimony of his virginity is given. This refers to the verse that says he was loved by God above the other disciples, and at 21:24: "This is the disciple who bore witness to these things, and has written this. The reason for this special love was his purity, which attracts love, as is said in Proverbs 22:11: "He who loves purity of heart, because of gracious speech, will have the king as his friend." Secondly, he proves this by the sign of his Mother's commendation, when he said: "And to him, that is John, the Lord, hanging on the cross, commended his mother (Jn 19:27)," so that the virgin John might fittingly serve his virgin Mother.

Then, when he says "denique manifestans in Evangelio", he show that John was competent to write the Gospel, and that for four reasons. First, as for the opening of the Gospel, which begins from the incorruptible Word, which requires an incorrupt author to describe. Regarding this, he says, "denique manifestans", that is, John, in the Gospel, who was beginning the work of the incorruptible Word, was the only one to testify that the Word became flesh, and that the darkness did not grasp the light.

Secundum quantum ad miraculorum exordium. Incipit enim miraculorum ordinem texere a miraculo quod Deus in nuptiis ostendit, quando scilicet aquam mutavit in vinum, ut patet Io. II, 1-11, in quibus vinum nuptiarum defecit, vino novo, scilicet virginitatis, restituto. Et quantum ad hoc dicit primum signum, id est miraculum, quod in nuptiis facit dominus, ponens, scilicet in principio aliorum miraculorum, ostendens quod ipse erat, scilicet virgo, ut legentibus demonstraret quod ubi dominus invitatus sit, deficere vinum nuptiarum, id est coniugii delectatio, debeat; et veteribus immutatis, id est antiqua aqua in novum vinum, nova omnia quae a Christo instituuntur, appareant; quia scilicet homines conversi ad Christum, debent exuere veterem et induere novum hominem, ut dicitur Col. c. III, 10, et Apoc. XXI, 5: dicit qui sedebat in throno: ecce nova facio omnia.

Sed contra. Videtur per hoc quod dicit, quod ubi dominus invitatus est debeat deficere vinum nuptiarum, quod quicumque Deum amat, et diligit, debet cessare a coniugio: non ergo licet uxorem ducere.

Respondeo dicendum quod homo invitatur a Deo dupliciter: quantum ad communem gratiam et sic non est necesse deficere vinum nuptiarum; et quantum ad speciale contemplationis fastigium: et sic oportet deficere vinum nuptiarum. Cuius rationem apostolus assignat I Cor. VII, 34: quia mulier, quae nupta est, cogitat quomodo placeat viro, et ideo oportet quod ab actu contemplationis impediatur, quae autem nupta non est, cogitat quomodo placeat Christo.

Vel dicendum quod diligentibus Deum, et habentibus ipsum per gratiam, deficere debet vinum nuptiarum ab effectu vini, ut scilicet non inebrientur delectatione carnali, quae tanta posset esse, et cum tanta libidine exerceri, quod etiam in coniugatis esset peccatum mortale.

Tertio quantum ad ordinem descriptionis libri. Nam post omnes alios libros sacrae Scripturae, hoc Evangelium est scriptum. Cum enim canonica Scriptura

Secondly, regarding the beginning of miracles. For he begins his narration of the miracles with that which God worked at the wedding, when he changed water into wine (Jn 2:1-11), when the wedding wine ran out, and the new wine of virginity was put in its place. Regarding this, he says "the first sign", or miracle "which the Lord made", putting it ahead of the other miracles. He shows that he, the virgin, was the one to show his readers that, where the Lord was invited, the wedding wine, that is conjugal pleasure, had to give out: that the old would be changed—old wine into new—and all the new things that Christ instituted would appear, because people converted to Christ would have to put off the old man and put on the new man, as said in Colossians 3:10 and Revelation 21:5: "He who sat on the throne said, 'See, I make everything new'."

But there is an objection. Where he says: "Where the Lord was invited the wedding wine had to give out..." it seems that anyone who loves God must give up marriage, and that it is not licit to marry.

I answer that man is invited by God in two ways: (1) in the ordinary way of grace, and here the wedding wine need not cease, and (2) to a special task of contemplation, and here the wedding wine must give out. The Apostle gives the reason for this in 1 Corinthians 7:34: "A woman who is married thinks how she may please her husband," and thus she is impeded from the act of contemplation. But the unmarried woman thinks how she may please Christ.

Or we could answer that for those who love God and have him by grace, the wedding wine should lose the effect of wine, as they they do not become drunk with carnal pleasure, which can be so strong, and take place with so much lust, that even for married people it can be a mortal sin.

Thirdly, regarding the order of the book. For this Gospel was writing after all the other books of Sacred Scripture. Since the Canon of Scripture begins

incipiat a libro Genesis et terminetur in Apocalypsim, Evangelium istud conscriptum fuit postquam Ioannes revocatus est a Pathmos insula Asiae, ubi ad preces episcoporum Asiae hoc scripsit Evangelium. Non tamen ordinatur ultimo, licet ultimo scripserit. Ex quo congruentia scribendi Evangelium ostenditur ut cui in principio canonis, idest sacrae Scripturae, ubi dicitur: in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram, incorruptibile principium praenotatur in Genesi ei etiam incorruptibilis finis per virginem in Apocalypsi redderetur, quantum ad ordinem librorum, non quantum ad ordinem Scripturae.

Deinde cum dicit et hic est Ioannes, describitur auctorem: et circa hoc duo facit. Primo ponit praeconia suae laudis quantum ad mortem; secundo concludit ex his congruentiam ordinis huius Evangelii, ibi tamen post omnes Evangelium scripsit.

Privilegium autem mortis admirabile et speciale est, quia nullum dolorem sensit in morte; et hoc Deo faciente, ut qui a corruptione carnis extitit penitus alienus, esset a dolore mortis extraneus.

Congruentiam auctoris ad fidem ostendit, dicens tamen post omnes Evangelium scripsit. In libris sacrae Scripturae duplex ordo consideratur, unus scilicet temporis quo scripti fuerunt, et alius dispositionis, quo in Biblia ordinantur.

with the book of Genesis and ends with the Apocalypse, this Gospel was written after John was called back from the island of Patmos to Asia, where, at the request of the bishops of Asia he wrote this Gospel. It is not put at the end of the Bible, even though it was written last. This shows the fittingness of writing this Gospel, because at the beginning of the Canon of Sacred Scripture we see, in the words "In the beginning God created heaven and earth", there is advance mention of the incorruptible Principle. Likewise, through a virgin, we see in the Apocalypse the incorruptible End. We are speaking of the order of the books, not the order of their writing.

Then, when he says "et hic est Ioannes," he describes the author. Here he does two things: First, he proclaims his praise over his death, secondly he concludes the fittingness of the place of this Gospel, at "tamen post omnes Evangelium scripsit."

The privilege of his death is admirable and special, because he felt no pain in death. That is God's doing, so that, being completely alien from corruption of the flesh, he was also exempt from the pain of death.

He shows the fittingness of the author, saying that he wrote his Gospel after all the others. In the books of Sacred Scripture there is a twofold order: one, the order of the time in which they were written, and the other, their position in the Bible.