

# **“In Him was Life”**

The Mysterious Christology and Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel

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Christology

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*“For God so loved the world, that He sent his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Few passages are so well-known and well-loved by Christians, even if only as a bumper sticker, a bracelet, or T-shirt proclamation, and yet few would perplex the wearer so much if he were asked what it meant. Everyone blithely assumes that “eternal life” sounds like a pretty good thing, and never takes their thought much past there. They probably have some vague notion that it means, well, that our souls will live forever. But as soon as the thought is articulated, it is clear that it can’t mean simply that, since our souls will live forever in any case; the question is where and how. Plus, the now-befuddled Joe Christian may be further flummoxed when we ask him why here and elsewhere the emphasis is so firmly on the present possession of eternal life—it is not that the one who believes will experience eternal life in the distant future, but that he *has it now*. If future existence were the main object in view, why not simply say, “should not perish but will live forever”? And as if all that were not enough, we might further insist that our poor bracelet-wearer tell us what the precise connection between the main clause and the result clause are in this verse—how is it that the sending of the Son causes believers to have eternal life? “Well, since Jesus died for our sins, now we’re free from sin and we’ll live forever,” Joe may reply, at last confident of something, but this hasn’t really provided a clear answer to either of our questions.

If, seeking an answer to these questions, one were to search the other pages of John’s Gospel, one would find that John is obsessed with the idea of “life”: the word appears 36 times in the Gospel (about ¼ of all NT uses), and 66 times in the entire Johannine corpus (nearly half of all NT uses). The word forms and inclusion around the Gospel of John (1:4 and 20:31) and

around his first epistle (1:2 and 5:20). Unfortunately, as with most Johannine themes, these uses appear in a bewildering variety of contexts, many of them steadfastly enigmatic. Jesus Christ, we learn, is fundamentally the life-bringer; indeed, he is Life Itself, and offers to believers the opportunity to share in this life which He gives and which He is. This participation in the life of the Word is something which Protestants have rarely reflected on in a systematic manner, though the Eastern Orthodox Christology and soteriology have traditionally highlighted this Johannine theme.

I shall analyze certain key passages in John in order to uncover more precisely in what sense Christ is life and how he gives life, using a number of commentaries but also seeking to go beyond them. Several new questions will be provoked by the text along the way, but I shall try to offer at least provisional answers for all of these. We shall find that John sees the life of the Son as a participation in the divine life of the Father, into which he invites believers to participate. The eternal life then that is repeatedly offered in John is a sharing in the very life of the Trinity. This sharing is made possible by becoming united to Christ in his humanity, for his divine life so thoroughly animates his human flesh that it becomes our access to God himself. Yet, in some mysterious sense, Christ's full entry into "eternal life" is completed at his death and resurrection, at which point the mortality of his human flesh is overcome and transformed into a glorious participation in divine life. It is because of this that Christ can promise that all who are in him will never die; through him, the power of death in them is already destroyed and death becomes the gateway to further glorification. Though none of these conclusions offers anything entirely novel, a thorough reflection on these themes offers a different angle on Christology and soteriology from that which most Protestants have traditionally highlighted.

John begins the “life” theme almost immediately in his Gospel, in 1:4. Having just explained that all things were made through the Word, he says, “*In Him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men.*” Several questions jump out at us immediately from this short verse. What does it mean that “life” was in the Word? We sense clearly that it does not simply mean animated existence in the basic sense with which we are all familiar, as if this were simply saying, “The Word was alive.” It also seems rather shallow to take it in the sense of heightened vitality, as we might say, “The rest breathed new life into him,” though perhaps this is getting closer. We might also ask what it means that the “life was the light of men”—how is life “light”? How is that light the light “of men”? We cannot answer all of these questions fully here, but one thing is clear from the linkage of these two phrases—whatever the life is that subsists in the Word, it is not merely an internal life, but a life that flows outward, that manifests itself, for it becomes the light of men.

A number of commentators, their pens still fresh at this early point in the Gospel, have a fair amount to say about this passage, but are generally surprisingly unhelpful.

Older commentators seem to think that the doctrine of providence, specifically preservation, is in view here. For example, John Calvin says: “The simple meaning is, that *the Speech* of God was not only the source of life to all the creatures, so that those which were not began to be, but that his *life*-giving power causes them to remain in their condition; for were it not that his continued inspiration gives vigour to the world, every thing that lives would

immediately decay, or be reduced to nothing.”<sup>1</sup> Aquinas seems to concur with such a reading, saying,

“*In him was life*, by which he could not only produce all things, but which has an unfailing flow and a causality for producing things continually without undergoing any change, being a living fountain which is not diminished in spite of its continuous outflow; whereas collected water, that is not living [i.e., running] water, is diminished when it flows out, and is used up....The second reason is to show that things are governed by the Word.”<sup>2</sup>

Both, perhaps, have derived this idea from Chrysostom, who said in his fifth homily on John, “He remains the same, sufficient for them all not merely to produce, but also to control them after their creation. For the word ‘Life’ here refers not merely to the act of creation, but also to the providence (engaged) about the permanence of the things created.”<sup>3</sup>

Though it makes sense, in the context of the creation-language that these first verses of John invoke, to infer a theology of providence here—“All things are created through the Word; all things hold together through the Word”—and though such an idea is certainly present elsewhere in the New Testament, such as Colossians 1, it is not clear that this idea is intended by John here. For one thing, this does not seem to square well with any of the other uses of “life” in John. Life, as we shall see throughout the Gospel, resides in Christ but is shared with his people. If by “life” is meant “the power to uphold the universe,” it is difficult to see how this quality can be shared by Christ with his people, as it repeatedly is throughout John (3:15-16, 4:15, 6:57, 10:10, etc.) It is of course possible that the meaning John attaches to the word changes considerably depending on context, but, when it is clearly a unifying theme of the Gospel, we

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, in *Calvin's Commentaries* (vols. 17-18), trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17:31.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980), 1:58.

<sup>3</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. and trans. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 23.

would expect to find a unifying core of meaning, especially in this, John's first use of the word. It simply would not make sense to introduce a *leitwort* like this in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter with a meaning attached that had to be entirely avoided in subsequent uses of the word.

Chrysostom points us in a more promising direction with his further remark that "It also lays down before hand the doctrine of the resurrection,"<sup>4</sup> and refers to the dissolution of the power of death through Christ's coming. Certainly, the significance of the resurrection permeates John; the resurrection is the final, full manifestation of the power of life that was in Christ, a power that ultimately triumphs over death. If this is in view here, in some way, that certainly fits with other passages in John that use the word "life," where a connection to the resurrection life that overcomes death would make good sense. We should certainly keep this meaning in mind; however, it seems that something broader, perhaps, is in view here.

William Barclay offers one broader articulation, saying,

*life* is the opposite of destruction, condemnation, and death... There is that in Jesus which gives a man security in this life and in the life to come... Until we accept Jesus and take Him as our Saviour and enthrone Him as our King we cannot be said to live at all. The man who lives a Christless life *exists*, but he does not know what *life* is. Jesus is the one person who can make life worth living, and in whose company death is only the prelude to still further life.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, this is all rather vague—we learn only that to say "in Him was life" is to say, "in Him was that which gives a man security in this life and that which is to come, which makes life worth living." However, we can take something valuable from this exposition. The life that is in the Word, which he will offer to men, is something that enables fallen man to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), I:21-3.

realize his created potential, to live as he was truly meant to live. This is perhaps part of what “the life was the light of men” means.

Leon Morris also makes a couple of rather unhelpful remarks about this verse.

Life in John characteristically refers to eternal life, the gift of God through his Son. Here, however, the term must be taken in its broadest sense. It is only because there is life in the *Logos* that there is life in anything on earth at all. Life does not exist in its own right. It is not even spoken of as made ‘by’ or ‘through’ the Word, but as existing “in” Him.... The life of which John writes is in the first instance the kind of life that we see throughout this earth. But this will call to mind that spiritual life which is so much the more significant that John can speak of it as “the life.”<sup>6</sup>

He seems here to echo something like Calvin’s view that the work of providence is in view here—Christ is life because he is the means by which all other living beings subsist. Christ is He who preserves all other beings in their physical life. But Morris suggests that, as is frequently true in John, a second meaning is also in view, “spiritual life,” which he then leaves undefined.

Beasley-Murray, though he has little to say about this passage, offers a brief remark that seems to point us in the right direction—that the life here is to be understood as the life of new creation: “*Zoe* (life) and *phos* (light) include the life and light which come to man in *both* creation *and* new creation. Our Gospel emphasizes the latter aspect, since it is concerned with the saving action of the Logos-Son for humankind, but the new creative work presupposes the original creative action of the Logos and its goal.”<sup>7</sup> C.K. Barrett offers some substantiation for such an emphasis by reviewing the OT and intertestamental use of the terms *life* and *light*, which,

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 82.

<sup>7</sup> George Beasley-Murray, *The Gospel of John*, 11.

he concludes, are central to God's creative work in the beginning, and to the eschatological expectation of the age to come.<sup>8</sup>

This makes more sense, I submit, than understanding it primarily in light of the preservation of the old creation. The first chapter of John is steeped in creation language, setting the tone for the whole work, which is supposed to be a story of new creation. The first three verses of John 1 clearly identify the Word as the agent of the original creation—"without Him nothing was made that was made." Verse four, I would suggest, marks a shift—from the Word now proceeds light, which shines in the darkness. This is of course familiar to us as the opening scene of creation in Genesis 1, and what we then have here is a new outpouring of light through the Word which created in the beginning, signaling the beginning of a new creation. Just as through the Word, all things were brought to life in Genesis 1, so the Word appears as a new source of life to this new creation. As the new creation is not simply physical, but nor is it anti-physical, so this new life made available is not merely physical, but is not merely spiritual either; it is a life of the physical elevated into union with a new spiritual life. If this is what it means that "*in Him was life, and the life was the light of men,*" then, though we are still very much in the dark, we have something that can help make sense of the later passages where Christ's life comes to men and where it is associated with the Resurrection.

What conclusions, then, has John 1:4 suggested about life? First, that life is a crucial part of the preincarnate Word's identity. Second, that this life, through the coming of the Word, overflows to be shared with men, like light in that the source is never dimmed or diminished even as the recipients keep on receiving. Third, that the life in Christ is linked in some way to

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<sup>8</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1960), 132.

the resurrection. Fourth, that it offers man the proper fulfillment of his incomplete human life and calling. Fifth, that it signals and epitomizes God's new creative action, in which the Word serves as the agent for bringing in the age to come.

The plot thickens in John 5, where we find another statement about the life that the Son possesses, this one embedded in a context rich with discussion of "life":

*"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.... Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself." (5:24-26)*

Here Jesus closely identifies his life-giving mission with that of the Father. The life that the Son has and gives is possible for him only because of his communion with the Father.

Morris highlights the function of this passage as an apology for Christ's divine status:

The Old Testament makes it clear that life derives from the Father. It is He who breathes life into men (Gen. 2:7), and life is always thought of as His gift. With him "is the fountain of life" (Ps. 36:9). It is He who shows men "the path of life" (Ps. 16:11) and who "holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. 66:9). Moses can go so far as to say "he is thy life"... The Jews accepted unhesitatingly the thought that all life takes its origin from the Father, all life save His own. His own life is inherent in His being. Goodspeed translates "the Father is self-existent." But it is characteristic of this Gospel to bring out the thought that the Son has been given a share in this life. To Him it is given to have the same kind of life within Himself that the Father has within Himself.<sup>9</sup>

Calvin concurs with this general assessment.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Morris 319.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin 17:207.

The Son makes at least two claims about his status—he too is a giver of life, a role formerly reserved to the Father, thus making him equal with the Father; moreover, he is the ontological equal of the Father in that he too has life in himself, rather than derivative life. Of course, there is a great mystery here, since this “life in Himself” has been given to him by the Father, which sounds derivative. But we would do best not to venture further than necessary into the mysteries of Trinitarian theology. In any case, if life-giving is so central a part of Christ’s divine identity, in what sense does he give life? The passage points us toward one clear answer—raising the dead. So the life Christ gives is resurrection, which is clearly future. However, obviously something broader is in view here as well, for Christ makes this life—eternal life—to be a present possession, and the resurrection to be something already accomplished: *“He who... believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

Aquinas solves this quandary by making the present tense expressions to be non-literal: “When he says, *possesses eternal life*, he mentions the reward of faith and states three things we will possess in the state of glory; but they are mentioned in reverse order. First, there will be resurrection from the dead. Secondly, we will have freedom from the future judgment. Thirdly, we will enjoy everlasting life.”<sup>11</sup>

So Christ gives us life in the present because he gives us the promise that we will have resurrection life in the future. This hardly seems to do justice to the emphatic present-tense here and elsewhere in John. Beasley-Murray emphasizes this, though he offers a somewhat odd notion of what “life” here means: “the hearer-believer has eternal life now. He has the judgment

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<sup>11</sup> Aquinas I:311.

behind him, not before him, since judgment is for unbelief, and he has crossed over from the realm of death into the sphere of the divine sovereignty, the characteristic of which is life for all who enter it.”<sup>12</sup> Beasley-Murray has solved the problem, it seems, by making the clearly literal resurrection language into a vague passage from the “realm of death” into the “sphere of the divine sovereignty.” This, I think, will not do either. Something much bigger than mere physical resurrection is in view, but certainly the language of the passage suggests that physical resurrection must be part of the picture. At this point we will not attempt to solve the dilemma here posed, but merely note it for future reference.

This second passage then, has established that the sharing of life is part of the divine identity, and that the Son, like the Father, is an original fountain of life, not a derivative sharer. Moreover, the life given by the Son and the Father is in some sense the life that raises the dead, but which does so now, in the present, before they have physically died.

In chapter six, John offers us his richest discussion of life yet. Though we may learn a great deal from this entire passage, I want to focus first on 6:57, before widening the lens. Here Jesus declares, “*As the Living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of me.*” This reiterates some of the points in the above passage but takes them further. Christ lives because He is in the Father, who is life itself. We have established this already. But the final two clauses add many additional layers: “*so he who eats me will also live because of me.*” Let us take the second of these first. The one to whom Christ gives life, we are told, possesses life from the Son in just the same way that the Son possesses it

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<sup>12</sup> I do not have the page reference for this quote because I lent the book to Jung Jin before I realized I was missing the reference. ☹

from the Father. *“As...I live because of the Father; so...he also will live because of me.”* The Son does not merely give life to men, but he shares it with them in the same way that the Father shares it with the Son. This is truly an astounding statement. The Father does not confer life on the Son as some transferable gift; no, He eternally invites the Son in to participate in His own life, to live it together with him as a co-indwelling equal. The Son, we are told, does just the same thing to believers. He does not confer on them eternal life as some transferable gift; no, he invites men in to share His very own life with Him and the Father. What a gift indeed!

We also learn here that this gift of shared life is offered by “eating Christ,” whatever this may mean. Scholars debate ceaselessly whether, throughout this passage, the Eucharist is in view, or if a mere believing on Christ is intended—to believe Christ is to appropriate him, to eat him. At the least, it is certainly clear that believing Christ and receiving life from him is not something we do at a distance. If believing is all that is intended, we are at least given to understand that the act of believing is something which brings us into the most intimate union with Christ, which appropriates him into our innermost being and makes him part of us (or perhaps, more properly, allows him to appropriate us into his innermost being and make us a part of him): *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”* (6:54). Christ has life in Himself, and if we want a share in it, our lives must be wholly joined with His, as His life is with the Father. But this must be, it seems, understood as sacramental in some sense, because of the emphatically physical nature of these statements. We partake of Christ’s physicality, his flesh, and we do it by eating; even granting that this is not precisely literal, a physical, sacramental action must be envisioned here. This is emphasized still more when we turn back a few verses, where we also find a number of other crucial points jumping out at us:

*“This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh....Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” (6:50-51, 53-55)*

Christ here identifies Himself as the living bread; he both possesses life in the fullest sense possible and he is life-giving. By identifying Himself this way, Christ reiterates that being a life-giver is not merely something incidental to him, but fundamental to his identity and vocation. Moreover, this is not simply what Christ does as the eternal Word, as divine; it is done by his flesh and blood. He is the life-giver precisely as an incarnate man and it is in his humanity that we have access to this. If the divine nature of Christ were the life-giving source that was in view, it is hard to see why Jesus should emphasize his human flesh so forcefully. This certainly seems to pose a dilemma, since we have so far been led to believe that the life in which we share flows in some way from Christ’s divine identity; it is the life which He shared with the Father that He shares with us. This problem is solved as long as we have a robustly Cyrillian doctrine of the Incarnation. Cyril puts it this way:

He is life by nature, inasmuch as He was Begotten of the Living Father; but no less vivifying also is His Holy Body, being in a manner brought together, and ineffably united with the all-vivifying Word, wherefore It is accounted His, and is conceived as one with Him....and since the Flesh of the Saviour became life-giving, as being united to that which is by nature Life, the Word from God, then, when we taste It, we have life in ourselves, we too being united with It, as It to the indwelling Word.<sup>13</sup>

And elsewhere:

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<sup>13</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, quoted in Edward Bouverie Pusey, “The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent,” in *Nine Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* (Oxford: J.H. and J. Parker, 1859), 12.

The Holy Body then of Christ giveth life to those in whom It is and keepeth them from incorruption, mingled with our bodies. For we know it to be the Body of no other than of Him Who is, by Nature, Life, having in Itself the whole Virtue of the united Word, and in-qualified as it were, yea rather filled with his mighty working, whereby all things are made alive and kept in being.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the life Christ brings is specifically the life of the divine Trinity, but by his Incarnation, the Word has so thoroughly made human flesh his own, that his flesh not only lives with that life, but imparts it to all who unite themselves to it. This understanding ties the emphasis of John 6 together with what we have seen in John 5.

But we must also ask of this passage, “what exactly is the result of eating Christ?” Cyril has pointed to the answer—we are kept from incorruption, because we have Christ’s life in us. But this seems plainly contradicted by the facts—all Christians die, their bodies rot. Even if they will rise from the dead, the promise of this is something less than what this passage seems to offer: the promises not to die, to live forever, to have life within, to have eternal life, to be raised up at the last day. These are clearly all correlate concepts, but their exact relationship is not entirely clear. The life we possess by possessing Christ is eternal life; so the two terms “life” and “eternal life” seem synonymous, and of course, not dying and living forever are also synonymous. Presumably all four are synonymous, but while we seem to have the first two in the present, the other two seem clearly future. We will not die, we will live forever, but we know that these things cannot be ours in the present; they will be ours after we have been raised up at the last day, because, of course, we know that we will die. Once that has happened, we will live forever and never die again. But this is not quite what is said here; somehow the life promised is life as a present possession. This life can be said to never die, because it is a life that will

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 11.

inevitably triumph over death, that will meet death as an enemy already conquered. But the conquest of death comes through Christ's death and resurrection, right? So far we have only discussed his incarnation. We will come back to this point shortly.

So what have we established in this third passage? Quite a number of things. First, the life that we receive from Christ, we receive by sharing in Christ's life in the same way that Christ shares in the Father's. Indeed, this means that the life we receive is a sharing in the life of God, the fellowship of the Trinity. Furthermore, we must be intimately united with Christ, we must "eat" him, to share in his life. This idea of eating suggests that the Word has so thoroughly become flesh that it is Christ as physical man from whom we gain life, and that we must thus participate in him physically, not merely spiritually, to receive life. From this eating we receive eternal life, as a present possession, a life that somehow will not be stopped by death.

It is now time to analyze and define the notion of eternal life more precisely, in order to begin to make sense of its already/not yet character. Recent commentators have generally agreed that "eternal life," despite its connotations in English, does not refer to an infinite *duration of* life; rather, it is concerned with a certain *quality* of life. Barclay summarizes helpfully:

Now clearly whatever else *eternal* life is, it is not simply life which lasts for ever. It is obvious that a life which lasted for ever could be a most terrible curse; often the thing for which men have longed is release from life. In eternal life there must be more than *duration* of life; there must be a certain *quality* of life. Life is not desirable unless it is a certain kind of life. Now here we have a clue. *Aionios* is an adjective which is repeatedly used to describe God. In the true sense of the word *only* God is *aionios, eternal*; therefore *eternal life is that life which God lives*. What Jesus offers us from God is God's own life. Eternal life is a life which knows something of the serenity and the power of the life of God himself.

When Jesus came offering men *eternal life*, He was inviting men to enter into the very life of God Himself.<sup>15</sup>

Barclay here reiterates some of the conclusions that the passages already surveyed have led us to: the life which Christ gives is His own life; the life which Christ has is his shared life with the Father; when Christ gives life, it is by inviting us to share in it. Barclay's last sentence is simply the conclusion of these three ideas. But this does not really solve for us the puzzle of how John is using eternal life. What, in concrete terms, does it mean to share the life of God? How is this related to never dying? Of course God will never die, but we know we will, so again, how do we have eternal life now? Leon Morris, discussing John 3:15-16, says,

The man who has faith has (the present tense points to a present possession) eternal life in Christ. This associates the life very closely with Christ. The life Christians possess is not in any sense independent of Christ. It is a life that is "hid with Christ in God."...In the Prologue he has informed us that life is "in" the Logos, and it is much the same thought here, with the addition that the lifting up of the Son of man is an integral part of the process whereby the life is mediated to men. The Word rendered "eternal" (always used in this Gospel of life) basically means "pertaining to an age". The Jews divided time into the present age and the age to come, but the adjective referred to life in the coming age, not the present one. "Eternal life" thus means "the life proper to the age to come." It is an eschatological conception. But as the age to come is never thought of as coming to an end the adjective came to mean "everlasting", "eternal". The notion of time is there. Eternal life will never cease. But there is something else there, too, and something more significant. The important thing about eternal life is not its quantity but its quality. In Westcott's phrase, "It is not an endless duration of being in time, but being of which time is not a measure. Eternal life is life in Christ, that life which removes a man from the merely earthly."<sup>16</sup>

This is a striking explanation which illuminates much of what remained opaque in the passages discussed. Again we see the idea that the new life of the believer is in some sense Christ's own life. But Morris has also shown us how we can begin to understand the already-not

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<sup>15</sup> Barclay I:127.

<sup>16</sup> Morris 201.

yet character of “eternal life” and its connection to the resurrection. Eternal life is the life of the age to come, but Christ tells us that believers experience this life now; that is to say, the age to come is already here. But this is not unconditionally true; rather, it is true only for those who eat Christ, who are found in him. For in Christ is the life of the age to come, which is, it would seem, synonymous (or closely connected) with the divine life, the life of Trinitarian fellowship, which the Son shares with the Father. Because Christ brings the life of the age to come into the present age, we may receive this life (what is called “life in abundance” in 10:10) by becoming united to Christ.

There is a further element here, which Morris has hinted at, and which requires careful exploration.

John 3:14-15 says, “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*” Morris says that in this passage we have “the addition that the lifting up of the Son of man is an integral part of the process whereby the life is mediated to men.”<sup>17</sup> C.K. Barrett explains further (having just made the same point as Morris about the meaning of “eternal life”):

That which is properly a future blessing becomes a present fact in virtue of the realization of the future in Christ. This observation is, however, complicated by the fact that John writes within and for, and from the standpoint of, the post-resurrection Church. In this verse the argument is that the Son of man has been, by his death, exalted to heaven; those therefore who are in him enjoy by anticipation the life of the age to come.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Morris 227.

<sup>18</sup> Barrett 179.

In other words, Christ is not the source of this life of the age to come simply by virtue of his incarnation, as it seemed before. If this life were his divine life, if the “eternal life” is in Christ by virtue of his divinity, and he then becomes incarnate in humanity, this eternal life is now available to other men, right? It doesn’t seem quite so. Rather, it is because he will be lifted up on the cross, killed (and then resurrected and raised up to the right hand of God) that this eternal life is available. This idea is also implied in chapter 10, where the “life in abundance” that Christ brings comes only through his “laying down his life for his sheep.” In other words, the life of the age to come now seems to be something, not that the incarnate Christ possessed by virtue of his divinized flesh, but which he possesses and makes available to us by virtue of his death and resurrection. Does this not throw a wrench in everything?

Though much has become clear, we have left a number of ambiguities on the table. We know that the Son is life because he shares in the Father’s divine life. We know Christ gives this life to men by inviting them to participate in him the way that he participates in the Father; we do this by becoming intimately united to him in his humanity, at least partly by physical, sacramental means. We know that this life which we receive is eternal life, the life of the age to come which is already here in Christ, and that this new life represents God’s act of new creation. But at least three key questions remain: 1) is the life offered in Christ by virtue of his Incarnation merely, or by virtue of his death and resurrection as incarnate man? 2) when we participate in the life of the age to come by being in Christ, how does this relate to our own death and resurrection?

Let us look at one more verse before settling these questions.

*John 11:25-6: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."*

Something we have already seen, but which this passage emphasizes, is that the life that Christ is (by virtue of his participation in the Father) is resurrection life; that is, it is the life which triumphs forever over death. Or perhaps a more significant way of putting this: resurrection is not merely a reversal of death, but is moving into a new kind of life, the abundant life which Christ shares with the Father, the life of the age to come which is on the other side of death and which nullifies death. All the meaning that is wrapped up in "life" for John manifests itself in resurrection, God's great act of new creation.

What does this mean for the believer? The statement before us is puzzling. On the one hand, the believer, "*though he die, yet shall he live*"; on the other hand, he "*shall never die,*" which seems a bit different. There are two fairly simple ways of reconciling this. One is to say that in the believer's death, life overcomes death so fully that it is as if he will never die. The other is to say that in the second clause, when it says, "*everyone who lives and believes,*" we are to understand by "lives" that this is referring to the person of the previous clause who has already died and yet lived; having once triumphed over death, they will never die again. In either case, this passage tells us, in answer to the second question just mentioned, that by entering into the life of the world to come which is in Christ, the divine life which destroys death dwells already in us, so that when death comes, it is transformed into a gateway by which we enter into the full possession of the life that we already have begun to share through Christ. This is why Jesus can make such strong statements as "he shall never see death" or "he will live forever." While "death" in a sense still faces the believer, all its power has been destroyed by Christ, who gave

Himself to death so that, when he rose again and destroyed death, the sting death gives had already been taken by Him and it had none left for those who share in Christ's life. Because we are united to him who has already died and entered into newness of life, we have already died and entered into newness of life. Here Paul can clarify the side of the picture that remains vague in John.

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his....Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:4-5, 8-11)*

And in Colossians he says, "*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" (3:3) While Paul does not develop a theology of "life" as fully as John, these remarks seem to fit nicely with what we have already seen about "life" in John. Our life as believers is inseparable from that of Christ, and His is inseparable from God the Father's. Paul, however, more fully than John, emphasizes how this life is a function of the Resurrection's triumph over death, in which we participate, and not merely a function of the Incarnation.

This leads at last to the answer to our final question. Even though "in Him was life" by virtue of Christ's Incarnation alone, which was itself a new creation, the fullness of new creation life must arrive by his laying down that life, and taking it up again. By virtue of his divinity, the incarnate Christ possessed the life of the age to come already, the life that will overcome death; but, in another sense, he had not yet entered into it, until, when he confronted death, this victorious life became fully active. Once the man Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, he has

passed over into the full participation in the life of the age to come, the participation in the life of God, and is the first man to be thus glorified. He is the “firstfruits from the dead,” so that, in him, humanity enters into full participation in the divine life, and all other men thus have the opportunity of sharing in it by sharing in him. This implies certain things about the relation of divine and human in Christ; it would seem to be a relation that undergoes change of a kind after the act of the hypostatic union. The divine person of the Word takes humanity unto himself in the hypostatic union and yet it is not until the resurrection that the human nature of Christ enters fully into participation in the divine life, so that now the very human flesh of Christ, glorified by passage into fullness of life, is the instrument by which we receive the life of God. While it is hard to see exactly what this two-stage divinization might look like, something like it seems to be present in Paul’s 1 Corinthians 15 exposition:

*“So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual.” (1 Cor. 15:42-6)*

Paul suggests here that, though the flesh of the eternal Word, Christ’s human body is still a natural body, until he dies and rises again, at which time it becomes a spiritual body—a body which lives by the power of the Holy Spirit and which gives life.

The Anglo-Catholic Edward Pusey theologian reaches the conclusion that we have suggested above, in his own synthesis of Johannine and Pauline teaching:

Our incarnate Lord imparted to our decayed nature, by His indwelling in it, that principle of life, which through Adam's all it had lost: and when “by the Spirit of Holiness,” which resided in Christ, He raised it from the dead, He made it not only “the first fruits,” but the source of our Resurrection, by communicating to

our nature His own inherent Life. . . . He not only has obtained, purchased, wills, bestows, is the meritorious cause of, our Resurrection; He Himself is it; He gives it not, as it were, from without, as a possession, as something of our own, but Himself is it to us: He took our flesh, that He might vivify it; He dwelt in it, and obeyed in it, that He might sanctify it; He raised it from death by His quickening Spirit that He might give it immortality: the “first Adam” was “a living soul;” and that life being by sin lost, “the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.” And we in His Church being incorporated into Him, being made members of His Body, flesh of His Flesh, and bone of His bone, through His sacraments partake of His Life and immortality, because we partake of Him; we are made members of Him, He dwelleth in us, and is our Life; “Because I live, ye shall live also.” . . . It is through the communication of that life, and so by belonging to Him, being joined to Him, that as many as live, have and shall have their life.<sup>19</sup>

So we have found that the already/not yet character of the believer’s life finds some analogue in the life of Christ Himself. Just as we, through Christ, are made partakers of the life that never dies, while knowing that a fuller participation in this life awaits us on the other side of death, so the incarnate Christ, possessing “life in himself” just as the Father, yet had be lifted up on the cross and raised again before entering fully into the life of the age to come. This life, though divine, takes a human form and raises human life to a new level of glory, and so we, in our human nature, come to God not simply through the mediation of the divine Spirit, but by partaking of the power of Christ’s risen and “divinized” flesh, which is a picture of the glory that awaits us in our own resurrections. All of this, while not antithetical to Protestant soteriology, has much more of the flavor of Eastern Orthodoxy. If, then, we are to be faithful to the theology of Paul and John, we should spend more time searching the insights of Fathers such as St. Cyril of Alexandria, and reflect on all the riches contained in that glorious declaration: “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*”

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<sup>19</sup> Pusey 101-2.

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