

THE VISION OF GOD IN PHILO AND JOHN:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Philo of Alexandria was an eclectic Jewish philosopher of the first century A.D. who by means of unrestrained allegorizing attempted to discover within the Scriptures of the Greek Old Testament all the truths of Hellenistic philosophy. Philo, indeed, is perhaps the best representative we have of Hellenistic Judaism, combining in his person both the mind of a philosopher and the heart of a deeply religious man.

So effective is Philo both as philosopher and religious devotee and in his synthesis of Hellenistic and Jewish concepts, that two of the most prominent Philonic scholars are at odds concerning which is more central to Philo and which thus leads to the most adequate understanding of Philo as a whole. H. A. Wolfson understands Philo to be essentially a creative philosopher¹ who while freely employing the vocabulary of the mystery religions² never "compromised" with them, and thus remained unaffected by their thought.³ Consequently Wolfson minimizes the mystical element in Philo's writings devoting, for example, only a very few pages to the vision of God in Philo,⁴ placing the brief discussion in his chapter of "Proofs of the Existence of God"! In strong contrast to Wolfson is E. R. Goodenough who in his book *By Light, Light*, understands Philo to be essentially a mystic, the proponent of a Mystic Judaism which before Philo had not only been influenced by, but had adopted as its own, the concept of Mystery as found in the Hellenistic religions.⁵ The genius of this Mystic Judaism, and in no small measure the genius of Philo, lay in the discovery of the Mystery within the Old Testament itself, so that the claim could be made that it was the Greeks who had borrowed it from Judaism and not vice-versa. Accordingly, Goodenough insists that the Mystery, i.e. salvation in terms of the vision of God, is central to Philo; this is the subject of all his writings, and this alone provides the key to understanding him.⁶

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1. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), vol. I, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 83-92.

5. E. R. Goodenough *By Light, Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), p. 7ff.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Of course, within the limits of this paper, no attempt can be made to debate this question. When two such competent scholars disagree the dilettante had best remain silent. Goodenough's remark, however, does seem appropriate: "Perhaps I have overemphasized the mystical side of Philo: Wolfson seems to me to have overemphasized his philosophical consistency, and underestimated the importance of Greek religious concepts for Philo's total religious attitude."⁷

Since in this paper we are interested in Philo's mysticism, particularly the vision of God, and any light it may throw upon allied ideas in the Fourth Gospel, we shall favor Goodenough's interpretation of Philo and lean more heavily upon him than upon Wolfson.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

A. The Nature of God

Basic to an understanding of Philo's mysticism is an understanding of Philo's doctrine of God. This doctrine of God is drawn largely from the Old Testament. For Philo, God is One (*heis*),⁸ the uncreated (*agenetos*) Author of creation,⁹ and utterly transcendent:

For in reality God is not like man nor yet like the sun nor like heaven nor like the sense-perceptible world but (only) like God, if it is right to say even this. For that blessed and most happy One does not admit any likeness or comparison or parable; nay, rather He is beyond blessedness itself and happiness and whatever is more excellent and better than these. (*Q.G.* II, 54).

God's transcendence is such that He may be said to be *apoiος*, "without quality;"¹⁰ God is *sui generis*. For God, "no name nor utterance nor conception of any sort is adequate" (*Som.* I, 67). His nature is such that it cannot be seen (*aoratos*);¹¹ He is incomprehensible (*akataleptos*) to men.¹²

From the LXX translation of Ex. 3:14, *ego eimi ho on*, Philo obtains his favorite appellation for God: *ho on*. This conception of God facilitated Philo's identification of the God of the Old Testament with the impersonal Absolute, or pure Being of the Platonists. That Philo meant such an identification is evidenced by the fact that he uses *to on* interchangeably with *ho on*.¹³

7. E. R. Goodenough *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963). Second Edition, p. 19.

8. *Leg. All.* III, 82. Numbering and abbreviations are according to the Loeb edition of Philo.

9. *Quod Deus* 56.

10. *Leg. All.* III, 36.

11. *Cher.* 101.

12. *Mut.* 9f.

13. cf. C. H. Dodd *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 61.

God, then, is transcendent, describable only by negatives. He is the God of the Old Testament and at the same time the Absolute of Hellenistic philosophy. He is far removed from man, and His nature cannot be apprehended.¹⁴ Man cannot come to know what God is, but only *that* God is: *ouch hoios estin ho theos... alla hoti estin*.¹⁵ God is ultimately unknowable to man; the gulf between the two is too wide to be bridged. This according to Philo is the meaning of Ex. 33:20 "You cannot see my face: for man shall not see me and live." "To God alone is it permitted to apprehend God" (*Praem.* 40).

B. The Relationship of God to Man

Despite this seemingly insuperable doctrine of the transcendence of God, there is in fact a kinship between man and God. God, Who is frequently called the Father,¹⁶ is said to have "made man partaker of kinship (*suggeneias*) with Himself in mind and reason best of all gifts . . . as for a living being dearest and closest to Himself" (*Op.* 77).

In commenting on Gen. 2:17, Philo equates the breath of life given by God to men with the divine image in man, namely man's reason (*logismos*).¹⁷ He remarks in this connection:

For the mind of man would never have ventured to soar so high as to grasp the nature of God, had not God Himself drawn it up to Himself, so far as it was possible that the mind of man should be drawn up, and stamped it with the impress of the powers that are within the scope of its understanding. (*Leg. All. I*, 38).

It is plain that Philo is here drawing upon the Stoic conception of reason as the imprint of the Divine within man.¹⁸ The possibility of communion with God depends upon the fact that "God is the Archetype of rational existence, while man is a copy and likeness," possessing both mind (*nous*) and reason (*logos*).¹⁹ Yet the distinction between God and man remains well defined in Philo, and man never exceeds the status of an adopted (*eispoiotos*) son.

C. The Logos as Mediator

While for the Stoics Logos was a rational principle diffused throughout the universe and was itself considered to be God, for Philo, Logos is that which proceeds from God as an expression of His wisdom. Philo retains Plato's distinction between the world of sense perception (*kosmos aisthetos*) and the world of ideas or forms (*kosmos noetos*) after which the former is patterned.²⁰ The *kosmos noetos* is thus the expression of

14. *Mut.* 9.

15. *Praem.* 44.

16. e.g. *Cher.* 49.

17. *Quis Her.* 56f.

18. cf. Epictetus I, 3.3 (Loeb edition) "these two elements were comingled in our begetting, on the one hand the body, which we have in common with the brute, and, on the other, reason (*logos*) and intelligence (*gnome*), which we have in common with the gods."

19. *Det.* 83.

God's mind, the Divine Reason (*ton theion logon*).²¹ At the same time, however, the Logos interpenetrates the material universe²² and does function as its rational principle, being the ruler (*diopos*) and steersman (*kubernetes*) of all.²³ Within man the Logos is the source of his kinship with God.

In short, the Logos functions as a mediator between God and man: To His Word (*logos*), His chief messenger, highest in age and honour, the Father of all has given the special prerogative, to stand on the border and separate the creature from the Creator. This same Word both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject... neither uncreated as God, nor created as you, but midway between the two extremes, a surety to both sides." (*Quis Her.* 205 f.)

Logos, by which the world was made, also minister's God's gifts to man,²⁴ and, indeed, is set up as God's vice-rejent: "This hallowed flock He leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it His true Word and Firstborn Son Who shall take upon Him the government like some viceroy (*huparchos*) of a great king" (*Agr.* 51 cf. *Mut.* 114 f). Logos is specifically called a mediator (*mesites*) in *Som.* 142 f. Elsewhere "powers" (*dunameis*) function as does the Logos in enabling men to apprehend God's existence (*huparxis*, not *ousia*).²⁵ The *logoi* or *aggelloi* are necessary "fellow-travellers" for the man who follows God.²⁶

Thus it is clear that for Philo, the Logos or its equivalent, is vitally essential to the possibility of communion between God and man. Logos is the very image of the Existent (*to on*),²⁷ and Philo goes so far as to say that the interpreting Logos, "must be God for us the imperfect folk, but, as for the wise and perfect, the primal Being is their God" (*Leg. All.* III, 207). Dodd's conclusion, however, is that "In spite of all personification, Philo is not really thinking of a personal guide and companion. The Logos is the world of Ideas. Knowledge of God comes by the discipline of contemplating the unseen archetypes."²⁸

D. God in the Johannine Writings

To the degree that Philo is consistent with the Old Testament doctrine of God, John is found to be in agreement. God is transcendent for John as for Philo. Thus John is insistent that "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18, cf. 6:46; I John 4:12). However John's concept of God never merges into a Platonic Absolute as does Philo's; God remains personal throughout the Gospel and Epistles.

20. *Op.* 19f.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Mos.* II, 127.

23. *Cher.* 36. cf. Epictetus III, 13, 8.

24. *Quod Deus* 57.

25. *Post.* 169.

26. *Mig.* 173.

27. *Conf.* 97.

28. C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

While God, for John, is undoubtedly the Father of all men by virtue of the fact that He is Creator, it is only in receiving Him that man may be called a child of God (John 1:12; I John 3:1). There is nothing in John analogous to Philo's doctrine of reason as the Divine imprint in man.

There is however, a great similarity between John and Philo in their need for a mediator between God and man—a similarity which is made all the more striking because of John's employment of the term *Logos* in the Prologue of his Gospel. The mediatorial role of Christ in John is clear. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). As Christ is the way to the Father in John, so in Philo does the *Logos* act as a guide, *hegemon* (*Mig* 174), to the knowledge of God.

A crucial difference, however, is at once apparent. For Philo, despite his language of personification, the *Logos* remains impersonal, and knowledge of the *Logos* falls short of the final goal of knowledge of God. For John, the *Logos* is the incarnate, historical person of Jesus, and thus is decidedly personal. Moreover to know Jesus is to know the Father (14:7), to see Jesus is to see the Father (14:9). Therefore there is no higher goal to be achieved than to know Jesus. There is no higher knowledge of God; there is no direct knowledge of God. Thus C. H. Dodd notes "To love Him and to have faith in Him is of the essence of that knowledge of God which is eternal life."²⁹

II. THE METHOD EMPLOYED

Having concluded our preliminary consideration of the doctrine of God in Philo, we turn now to that which is the highest good and the chief end of man, the knowledge of God. We side with Goodenough in holding that philosophy *per se* was not Philo's interest, and that "He wants not to demonstrate that the immaterial is the only reality, but to experience that reality."³⁰ What are the conditions prerequisite to such experience?

A. Freedom from the Body

From Platonic philosophy Philo borrows the *soma-sema* doctrine, *viz.* the teaching that the soul is imprisoned within the body. The soul (i.e. mind or reason) is urged to escape its bondage by a turning away from the concerns of the body.

For it behooves the mind that would be led forth and let go free to withdraw itself from the influence of everything, the needs of the body, the organs of sense, specious arguments, the plausi-

29. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

30. Goodenough *Introduction*, p. 134.

bilities of rhetoric, last of all itself . . . for it is not possible that he whose abode is in the body and the mortal race should attain to being with God; this is possible only for him when God rescues out of the prison. (*Leg. All. III*, 41 f.)

Philo is unequivocal concerning the necessity of such escape: "When set free from bonds that cannot be broken, imposed by the body and bodily requirements, you will have a clear vision of the Uncreated . . . He clearly manifests Himself to him that escapes from things mortal and mounts up into a soul free from the encumbrance of this body of ours" (*Det.* 158 f.). There must be a turning to the conceptual (*noete*) and immaterial (*asomatos*), a rejection of the senses in favor of mind (*nous*) and reasoning (*logismos*),³¹ which may perhaps be equated with "the eyes of the soul" in *Plant.* 22. It is clear that Philo refers here not to death, but to that which is possible in this life, though attained by few.³²

Although in I John 3:2 passing reference is made to a fuller vision of God than is possible in the present age ("When he appears . . . we shall see him as he is"), nowhere is the connection made between seeing or knowing God and contemplation or mental activity which negates the body. The *soma-sema* doctrine is foreign not only to John, but to the whole of the New Testament.

B. Purity of Soul

Closely related to the freedom of the soul from the body, is the attainment of purity of the soul. Only the virtuous soul is able to come near to God. Thus Philo says of Adam:

He earnestly endeavoured in all his words and actions to please the Father and King, following Him step by step in the highways cut out by virtues (*aretai*), since only for souls who regard it as their goal to be fully conformed to God who begat them is it lawful (*themis*) to draw nigh to Him. (*Op.* 144)

Philo characterizes the blind man as one who "prefers bad to good, base to honourable, unjust to just, and again lower passions to higher emotions, the mortal to the immortal," and concludes that "it is only the man of worth (*ho asteios*) who sees" (*Quis. Her.* 77 f.). The mind (*nous*) which is able to attain vision of the Existent is that which is "perfect" and "thoroughly cleansed."³³ At the same time, however, "virtue and nobility of conduct "are the fruit of the vision of God," the inevitable result of such an experience.³⁴

While in Philo the emphasis is upon virtue and purity of soul as the prerequisite for the attainment of vision, in John holiness is understood primarily as the mark of one who in fact does know God. "No one

31. *Praem.* 26.

32. *Loc. cit.*

33. *Leg. All.* III, 100.

34. *Leg.* 5.

who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him" (I John 3:6). "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:3, 4).

C. The Role of Reason

We have already seen the importance of mind (*nous*) and reason (*logismos*) within the structure of Philo's thought. For Philo man is at his best, and begins to approach things divine, only when he rejects sense-perception and the material realm in favor of contemplating the immaterial by means of the mind and reason.³⁵ Accordingly, Philo remarks that the eyes of the body:

see only the objects of sense and those are composit, brimful of corruptibility, while the divine is uncompounded and incorruptible. It is the eye of the soul which receives the presentation of the divine vision. . . . And so when you hear that God was seen by man, you must think that this takes place without the light when the senses know, for what belongs to mind can be apprehended only by the mental powers. (*Mut.* 3 ff.)

Yet reason can only take us a part of the way to our goal. "For reason cannot attain to ascend to God" (*Leg.* 6). "The soul that persist in noble courses is indeed capable of apprehending self-taught wisdom. . . but is unable as yet to see God the Ruler of wisdom. . . for He is invisible to all who are but midway on their course" (*Det.* 30 f.).

Indeed, reason is able to take us into the lower mysteries, *viz.*, the apprehension of the existence of God indirectly through His creation. Nonetheless it remains "unable to apprehend the Existent alone by Itself and apart from all else, but only through Its actions, as either creative or ruling. This is, as they say, a 'second best voyage'" (*Abr.* 112 f.). While this is approved by God, as far as it goes, there is a direct intuition of God for one who is initiated into the highest mysteries, a "higher way of thinking, more precious than anything which is merely thought" (*Loc. cit.*). God's existence (*huparxis*) thus can be known directly through Himself, even as light is seen by light,³⁶ while "Those who base their reasoning on what is before their eyes, apprehend God by means of a shadow cast, discerning the Artificer by means of His works" (*Leg. All.* III, 99)

In the end, therefore, reason cannot lead man to the goal of the knowledge of God; it is necessary for God Himself to intervene. Commenting on Gen. 12:7, Philo remarks:

For before a great mist had been shed upon it (i.e. Abraham's *nous*) by the things of sense, and only with difficulty could it dispel this mist under the warmth and fervour of higher verities and so be

35. *Praem.* 39; cf. 44.

36. *Praem.* 45.

able as in clear open sky to receive the vision of Him Who so long lay hidden and invisible. He is His love for mankind, when the soul came into His presence, did not turn away His face, but came forward to meet him and revealed His nature, so far as the beholder's power of sight allowed. That is why we are told not that the Sage saw God, but that God was seen by him. For it were impossible that anyone should by himself apprehend the truly Existent, did not He reveal and manifest Himself" (*Abr.* 79 f.)

It becomes evident then that we have here that which transcends both the powers of reason, and the mediating role of the Logos. God can be known directly by means of an intuition based upon personal revelation. And thus this knowledge of God, as we shall see below, may perhaps be described more justifiably as an "experience" rather than an apprehension of mind and reason, although the rational faculty of man does have its part to play.

For John, too, God is known by revelation. That revelation, however, is not given in terms of a subjective experience available only to the initiate; it is given to all in concrete objectivity in the person of Jesus. "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Knowledge of God, for John, never transcends knowledge of the Logos as it does for Philo. Thus Jesus says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you have known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (John 14:7-8).

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF VISION

A. Content

Philo speaks at times as though the vision of God were an impossibility:

When therefore the God-loving soul probes the question of the essence (*ti estin to on kata ten ousian*) of the Existent Being, he enters on a quest of that which is beyond matter and beyond sight. And out of this quest there accrues to him a vast boon, namely to apprehend that the God of real Being (*ho kata to einai theos*) is apprehensible by no one, and to see precisely this, that He is incapable of being seen (*aoratos*). (*Post.* 15; *cf. Mut.* 9)

At the same time, however, he can speak much more hopefully:

There is a mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed, which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries, a mind which gains its knowledge of the First Cause not from created things, as one may learn the substance from the shadow, but lifting its eyes above and beyond creation obtains a clear vision of the uncreated One, so as from Him to apprehend both Himself and His shadow. (*Leg. All.* III, 100)

The best of goals is the "knowledge of Him that truly IS." (*epistemen tou ontosontos*) (*Decal.* 81)

Philo, however, is quite clear concerning what is possible and what is not. It is God's existence that is apprehensible, and not His essence.³⁷ In the vision of God one apprehends *that* He is, not *what* He is.³⁸ The chief end of man is thus to perceive God's existence *directly* rather than indirectly through the shadows of His creation. Apparently so excellent is the direct apprehension of God's existence that the language used to describe it sounds deceptively like the apprehension of God's essence.

B. Ecstasy

Philo equates the experience of seeing God with the ecstasy of the Old Testament prophet.³⁹ The prophets experienced the vision of God and were thus called "seers."⁴⁰

Therefore, my soul, if thou feelest any yearning to inherit the good things of God, leave not only thy land, that is the body, thy kinsfolk, that is the senses, thy father's house, that is speech, but be a fugitive from thyself also and issue forth from thyself. Like persons possessed and corybants, be filled with inspired frenzy, even as the prophets are inspired. For it is the mind which is under the divine afflatus, and no longer in its own keeping, but is stirred to its depths and maddened by heavenward yearning, drawn by the truly Existent and pulled upward thereto. (*Quis Her.* 69 f; cf. *Quis Her.* 264 f; *Q.G.*, III, 9)

Similar language is used to describe the vision of the Existent as experienced by the Therapeutae⁴¹ and also by Philo himself.⁴² Bousset concludes that Philo's vocabulary is permeated by that of ancient ecstatic piety.⁴³ For Philo the vision of God is without question an experience of Spiritual rapture. At times this rapture expresses itself not in frenzy, but in undisturbed peacefulness⁴⁴ or tranquility.⁴⁵ Philo notes that "ecstasy," literally a 'standing outside of oneself,' takes different forms, and he proceeds to enumerate the following: mad fury, extreme amazement, passivity of mind, and frenzy, of which he prefers the last as best.⁴⁶

C. Immediateness

Undoubtedly it is the immediateness of the experience, i.e. the direct apprehension of the Existent, that causes it to be ecstatic. "One

37. *Mut.* 62.

38. *Praem.* 39; cf. 44.

39. The experience of prophecy takes one beyond the powers of reason. cf. *Mos.* II, 6.

40. *Quis Her.* 78.

41. *Vit. Cont.* 12.

42. *Mig.* 34f.

43. W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im Späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), p. 450. Bousset provides a list of terms and their references.

44. *Q. G.* IV, 140.

45. *Q.G.* III, 9.

46. *Quis Her.* 249.

receives the clear vision of God directly from the First Cause Himself." (*Leg. All.* 102) Thus Philo comments, on Gen. 18:3 that to Abraham "He manifested Himself without the powers that belong to Him, so that he saw His oneness directly before him." (*Q. G. IV, 4*) Since we have already spoken of the directness of the experience, we need not belabor the point. Suffice it to say that if Deissmann's definition of mysticism be accepted,⁴⁷ Philo must be called a mystic. Whether it is a *unio*-mysticism or *communio*-mysticism must now be considered.

D. Absorption and Apotheosis

While Philo at times gets close to both of these ideas, he seems to stop just short of them. It is Moses who tempts him the most in this regard. Moses is said to have been appointed a god (*eis theon*).⁴⁸ It is with Moses in mind that Philo writes these words:

For when the prophetic mind becomes divinely inspired and filled with God, it becomes like the monad, not being at all mixed with any of those things associated with duality. But he who is resolved into the nature of unity, is said to come near God in a kind of family relation, for having given up and left behind all mortal kinds, he is changed into the divine, so that such men become kin to God and truly divine. (*Q.G. II, 29*)

Similarly Moses:

Who was possessed by love of the divine and worshipped the Self-existent only . . . passed from a man into a god, though, indeed, a god to men, not to the different parts of nature, thus leaving to the Father of all the place of King and God of gods. (*Quod Omn. Prob.* 43)

Elsewhere, however, with Moses still in mind, Philo remarks that when a wise man is called a god and compared with the Existent it is only so "in men's ideas and imagination, not in view of truth and actuality" (*to einai*) (*Det.* 162.) Philo remains too much under the control of the monotheism of the Old Testament to allow more than a nominal apotheosis of Moses. The distinction between God and man remains carefully guarded. Man cannot be deified, Philo says, for "sooner could God change into a man than a man into God." (*Leg.* 118)

Similarly, even in the height of ecstasy, the soul, while drawing near to the Existent, never merges with it nor is absorbed into it. Thus the mysticism of Philo is of the *communio* type rather than of the *unio* type. While there is indeed, a suppression of the experient's self-consciousness (to that extent one may speak of being "lost" in the divine) and a possession of the ecstatic by the Deity, the I-Thou relationship is never completely transcended. We conclude then with H. A. Kennedy that

47. "The constitutive element in mysticism is immediacy of contact with the deity." A. Deissman, *Paul* (New York: Doran Co., 1926), p. 149.

48. *Sac.* 9.

"A careful reader of Philo can scarcely avoid the conclusion that, so far from conceiving ecstasy in terms of Hellenistic religion, the thought in which he endeavors to express the mystic experience is determined by the phenomenon of prophetic vision in the Old Testament."⁴⁹

E. The Mystery

The experiencing of the Existent is a rare attainment available only to the initiate:

For this is a divine mystery and its lesson is for the initiated who are worthy to receive the holiest secret, even those who in simplicity of heart practice the piety which is true and genuine, free from all tawdry ornament. The sacred revelation is not for those others who, under the spell of the deadly curse of vanity, have no other standards for measuring what is pure and holy but their barren words and phrases and their silly usages and ritual. (*Cher.* 42)

While Philo exhorts all men to seek God diligently, in the end he must confess that "whether thou wilt find God when thou seekest is uncertain, for to many He has not manifested Himself, but their zeal has been without success all along." (*Leg. All.* III, 47)

Philo, it is clear, attributes purity of soul to the initiate. The initiate is thus under obligation to drive off the unworthy:

Drive off, then, ye initiates and hierophants of holy mysteries, drive off the motly crowd, flotsam and jetsam, souls hardly capable of cleansing and purifying, carrying about wherever they go ears ever unclosed, and tongue ever unconfined, ready instruments of their miserable condition in their longing to hear all that heaven forbids us to hear, and to tell out such things as should never find utterance. (*Fug.* 85)

F. In John

The fact that Kirk can call the Gospel of John a "perpetual theophany"⁵⁰ indicates the importance of the concept of the vision of God in John. As has been shown, while no man has ever seen God (John 1:18; 6:46; I John 4:12), God has become manifest in the Logos, His Son. To see the Son is to see God (14:9). The vision of God thus never transcends the mediatorial role of the Son. This fact is basic to, and governs all of John's theology.

Because the Logos was manifested in history there is, in John, no turning away from sense-perception to the contemplation of the Eternal. On the contrary, the Eternal has entered history, and the importance of having perceived him through the senses is stressed. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have

49. H. A. Kennedy *Philo's Contribution to Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 226.

50. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (New York: Longmans, 1956), p.

beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:14) Thus John is adamant concerning the importance of sense-perception of the Son in I John 1:1-4. Accordingly, there is no mystery here which is available only to the initiate. The constant emphasis of John is not upon the subjective realm of mind (*nous*) but rather upon the objective declaration of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

Similarly, John never recommends ecstasy, whether active or quiescent, to us as does Philo. The mark of the man who had the vision of God, who knows God, is not ecstatic experience, but his living in love (I John 4:7, 8) and his keeping of the commandments. (I John 2:3, 4) There is, thus, a continual emphasis upon deed and fruit in John. It is inconceivable to him that a man can come to know God without displaying the fruit of that knowledge. (I John 2:4, 5) In John this ethical expression is as vital to the knowledge of God as is the ecstatic expression in Philo.

In John, the relation between the Son and Father is reproduced in the relationship between men and the Son. This relationship is one of mutual indwelling (*einai en* and *menein en* of Son and men—John 6:56; 14:20; 15:4, 5) and of God and men in I John (3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). John, however, teaches here neither apotheosis or absorption, for the I-Thou relationship is never transcended. That the unity spoken of is a unity not of substance or essence, but rather of will is evident from the continual stress upon ethical obedience. As the communion of the Son with the Father was based on obedience, consisting in an ethical fellowship of will, so also is that between man and the Son to be.

This brings us to another important difference between Philo and John. Despite the amount of personification employed by Philo, communion with God (i.e. pure Being, *to on*) is essentially impersonal—it comes to focus in "experiences." John, however, points us not to mystical experiences, but rather to communion with God. God in Christ has personally intervened in history to bring about man's salvation. It is the God who has thus acted on behalf of men, with whom we are to come into a personal relationship which expresses itself in love and obedience. Thus Dodd says concerning our indwelling the Son and Father, that this is: "a personal relation with a living God, mediated through a concrete, historic personality, in whom that relation is original and perfect."⁵¹

CONCLUSION

For Philo as for John, the goal of man is to know God. To Philo the most glorious and loveliest of visions is the vision of the Uncreated.⁵² Yet Philo at the same time remains a philosopher. Goodenough sums up the situation thus:

51. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

52. *Ebr.* 152.

First, I see in Philo a man divided in his loyalty not only between the Jewish and Hellenistic ways of living, but also between their religious motivations. I cannot emphasize one at the expense of the other. Philo, as I see him, tried to combine the two, not in a metaphysical system but in his heart. Whether he should consequently be called a hellenized Jew or a judaized Hellenist is quite indifferent, since neither conquered the other.⁵³

John, on the other hand, complements the Old Testament revelation not with Hellenistic philosophy, but rather with the new revelation in Jesus Christ. Since this new revelation is rooted in the Old Testament, John's task was considerably easier than Philo's.

As we have seen, where Philo remains true to the Old Testament, he and John have much in common. Further similarities, especially with reference to Hellenistic religious philosophy, exist only at the terminological level, and not in essential content. John draws freely from the then current religious vocabulary in order to communicate his message more effectively and meaningfully.

53. Goodenough, *Introduction*, p. 26.