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THE INTERPRETATION OF
THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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THE
INTERPRETATION OF THE
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PREFACE

The scope of this book is restricted to the attempt to establish some general principles and lines of direction for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Purely critical questions I have for the most part left aside. Nor have I in general pursued detailed exegesis of the text, apart from passages where such exegesis seemed indispensable for my main purpose. The book falls into three parts. In the first part I have surveyed some important sections of the field in which the thought of the Fourth Gospel has its background. In the second part, assuming this background, I have attempted to define, with such degree of precision as I could compass, some of the dominant concepts with which the evangelist operates. In the third part I have set out to trace the course of the argument through the whole gospel. I had at one time thought of adding a fourth part dealing with the relation of the Fourth Gospel to the historical tradition of early Christianity. This, however, does not seem to fall well within the main intention of the book, which in any case was tending to excessive length, and I have decided to reserve that topic. But since among the leading ideas of the gospel is the idea that certain historical events are a manifestation of the eternal and divine, I have added an appendix indicating briefly a line of thought which I should wish to follow upon the historical aspect of the Fourth Gospel. Some paragraphs in Part I, chs. 1 and 2, have been reproduced, by permission, from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 19, no. 2.

C. H. D.

CAMBRIDGE, 4 JANUARY 1950

The book has been read in proof, at every stage, by my friend and former pupil, the Rev. W. D. Davies, D.D., now Professor of the New Testament in Duke University, North Carolina. I am deeply indebted to him for many valuable corrections and suggestions, as also for verifying citations and references in the Bible and the Rabbinic Literature, and for compiling the Index to the latter. I am further indebted to my daughter, Mrs E. W. Heaton, for verifying and indexing citations and references in Greek (non-biblical) writers, and to my wife and Miss Audrey Bayley for assistance in preparing the indices. To all these I tender my most grateful acknowledgements.

C. H. D.

4 JUNE 1952

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Wir sehnen uns nach Offenbarung,
Die nirgends würd'ger und schöner brennt
Als in dem Neuen Testament.
Mich drängt's, den Grundtext aufzuschlagen,
Mit redlichem Gefühl einmal
Das heilige Original
In mein geliebtes Deutsch zu übertragen.
Geschrieben steht: „Im Anfang war das Wort!“
Hier stoß' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,
Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!
Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?
Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!
Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,
Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.
Mir hilft der Geist! auf einmal seh' ich Rat
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat!

GOETHE: *Faust*, Erster Teil, ll. 863–83