

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Johannine Christology

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If Jesus is understood to be both God and man, then in him, if anywhere, the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility will come to its sharpest focus. This section, then, seeks to explore the relationship between the sovereignty-responsibility tension and the distinctive way in which the fourth Gospel presents Jesus. It does not attempt to survey the titles ascribed to him, and thus avoids, for example, the knotty problem of the Son of man sayings, except in so far as it impinges on the immediate topic.¹

¹ S. S. Smalley, *John—Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter, 1978), pp. 210ff., sees the divine/human tension in Jesus as the *Mitte* of the fourth Gospel's use of christological titles; but I must forbear to discuss the matter here. However, because this monograph concerns John and *Jewish* background, therefore one question I cannot evade, even if I do not have space to treat it at length, is this: How truly Jewish is John's ascription of divine status to Jesus? The actual ascription of *theos* to Jesus is not common in the New Testament, but it is scattered widely even if thinly: cf. Heb. 1:8f.; 2 Pet. 1:1 (on which see R. E. Brown, *Jesus, God and Man* (Milwaukee, 1967), p. 25); 2 Thess. 1:12; Titus 2:13; almost certainly Rom. 9:5 (cf. B. M. Metzger, 'The Punctuation of Rom. 9:5', *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 95–112); and the three references in the fourth Gospel discussed in this section. Of course, Jesus' deity does not turn exclusively on the word *theos*. But much, perhaps most, current New Testament scholarship holds that the ascription of deity to Jesus reflects the change in the Church's christology occasioned by the Church's penetration of one form or another of hellenistic culture. The Church, it is held, affected by the pressures of syncretism, presented Jesus, for the first time, in divine categories. See, for example, F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London, 1969), pp. 108–14. The attempt to understand John's *logos* in philonic terms has largely passed away. More recently, however, a strong case for Jewish roots to johannine christology has sprung up from several quarters. R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London, 1970), pp. 136ff., has demonstrated that the explicit ascription of the title *theos* to Jesus arose in *Jewish* Christian circles. C. H. Talbert, 'The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity', *NTS*, Vol. xxii (1975–6), pp. 418–40, has shown that it is unnecessary to resort to Gnosticism to find descent/ascent themes; indeed, there are numerous parallels within Judaism. Similarly, cf. J. P. Miranda, *Der Vater, der mich gesandt hat* (Bern, 1972). Other works of importance which support the essential Jewishness of 'God' and 'Son of God' christology, the position taken in this monograph, include: J. A. Fitzmyer, 'Der semitische Hintergrund des neutestamentlichen Kyriostitels', *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (Tübingen, 1975), pp. 267–98; C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge, 1967); I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester, 1967); M. Hengel, 'Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologie', *Neues Testament und Geschichte* (Zürich, 1972), pp. 43–67; idem, *The Son of God* (London, 1976).

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1. A survey of the evidence

The fourth Gospel, perhaps more insistently than any other New Testament book, ascribes deity to Jesus. The *Logos*, identified with Jesus Christ (1:14, 17), was not only 'with God', but 'was God' (1:1). The *Logos* joined God in the work of creation (1:3). In the three most common critical editions of the Greek New Testament,² Jesus himself is called *monogenēs theos*, 'the unique God', or the 'unique One, God' (1:18; the latter word is probably in apposition). The staggering element to do with Thomas's confession (20:28) is Jesus' reply (20:29); and this confirms Barrett's observation on 1:1: 'John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.'³ In short, John provides us with three references in which the title 'God' is explicitly given to Jesus (1:1, 18; 20:28); and, as has often been noted, John inserts them with considerable deliberation: the pre-existent *Logos* is God (1:1), the incarnate *Logos* is God (1:18), and the resurrected Christ is God (20:28).

Jesus' deity, however, does not depend only on the direct ascription of *theos* to him. Jesus insists that to believe in him is to believe in the one who sent him (12:44), to look at him is to look at the one who sent him (12:45; 14:9), to hate him is to hate the Father (15:23). He says that all must honour the Son even as they honour the Father (5:23), that he and his Father are one (10:30). We not only learn that the Son cannot do anything except what the father shows him, but that the Son does *whatever* the Father does (5:19). At least one scholar thinks the word 'work', when applied to Jesus in the fourth Gospel, reflects the inner unity between the Father and the Son. The 'I am' statements, in particular the absolute ones (cf. especially 8:58), are claims not only for pre-existence but for deity.⁴ Pre-existence does not entail deity; but in the johannine view of things it certainly entails more than ordinary humanity. Pre-existence is repeatedly ascribed to Jesus (1:1, 15, 30; 8:58; 15:5, 24), and it is implied by the ideas of Jesus having come (5:43; 6:14; 7:28; 10:10; 11:27; 15:22; 18:37; etc.), being from God (6:46; 7:29; 9:33; 16:27f.; 17:8), and being sent by God (3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23f.; 6:39f.; 7:16; 8:16, 18; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44f.; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 17:3,

² Viz., the UBS text, the Nestle-Kilpatrick text, and the Nestle-Aland text. The first and third are in the process of getting together.

³ Barrett, C. K. (1978). *Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Second Edition, p. iii). London: SPCK. p. 160.

⁴ Cf. P. B. Harner, *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 39ff., 51ff. He points out that the 'I Am' sayings are often found in a subordinationist context; but in 8:58, the deity of Christ is in view: cf. Brown, p. 367. W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, op. cit., pp. 294f., not only recognises this point, but sees 8:58f. in terms of the Feast of Tabernacles background (especially Sukk. 4.5) and argues that the divine Presence is here abandoning the 'holy space' of the Temple: 'The Shekinah is no longer *there*, but is now found wherever Christ is' (p. 295).

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8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21; etc.). Not one is before him. Certainly the Jews are represented as hating him precisely because he made himself equal with God (5:17f.; 10:33; 19:7).

At the same time, John refers to Jesus as a 'man' (1:30; 4:29; 8:40; 9:11f., 16; 10:33; 19:5)⁵— even on the lips of Jesus himself (8:40). Admittedly, these references are incidental. However, whatever the attributes of the Word, 'the Word became flesh' (1:14); and despite the efforts of E. Käsemann (on which see *infra*) this clause is best understood within a pattern of humiliation from which the Son is glorified by exaltation to the position he once possessed (17:5), but temporarily relinquished. Although the *Logos* springs from God, 'the Salvation' (= *hē sōtēria*: a title?)⁶ is of the Jews (4:22). If this is a title, then the text can only mean that Jesus springs from the Jewish race—a decidedly human phenomenon. Pilate's words 'Here is the man!' (19:5) may have been uttered in coarse jest, or to arouse feelings of contempt if not pity; but coupled with 'Here is your king!' (19:14), it is hard to resist the conclusion that the evangelist himself, a master at double meanings, saw Jesus as a man in the depths of humiliation and yet the king.⁷ Jesus grew tired and thirsty (4:6f.; 19:28), loved and wept (11:5, 35). He was tempted (6:15, 31; 7:3f.; although this is not stressed). Moreover, whereas he sometimes manifests supernatural knowledge (e.g. 1:48; 2:25; 5:42; 6:6; 6:15?; 6:64; 13:21; 14:29; 16:30; 18:4), there are occasions when he appears to learn things like other men (4:1; 5:6; 7:1; 11:3f.). When he dies, from his side flow blood and water (19:34).⁸

But above all, John presents Jesus as completely and utterly dependent on the Father—for his power (5:19, 30; 8:28; 10:37; 14:10), knowledge (5:30; 8:16), his entire mission (4:34; 6:38; 17:4). These references could be multiplied, and have been well presented, if overstated, by J. E. Davey.⁹

It is possible from such passages as 15:18; 17:16, 21 to conclude that there is no intrinsic difference between Jesus and other (christian) men: they are not of the world, just as he is not of the world, and his prayer for them is that they be one, just as he and his Father are one (although this last petition equally points to Jesus' distinctive unity with the

⁵ C. F. D. Moule has repeatedly suggested that the anarthrous *huios anthrōpou* (5:27) most likely means simply 'man': cf. his 'Neglected features in the Problem of "the Son of Man"' *Neues Testament und Kirche* (Freiburg, 1974), p. 420; *idem*, *The Origin of Christology*, op. cit., pp. 16f., n. 15.

⁶ Cf. R. Longenecker, *Christology*, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷ Cf. Schnackenburg, Vol. iii, pp. 294–6; *idem*, 'Die Ecce-homo-Szene und der Menschensohn', *Jesus und der Menschensohn* (Freiburg, 1975), pp. 371–86; F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Rome, 1976), pp. 202–7.

⁸ Whatever possible symbolic meaning there may be, the evangelist saw the event first of all as historical fact: cf. Barrett, p. 461; J. Wilkinson, 'The Incident of the Blood and Water in John 19.34', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. xxviii (1975), pp. 149–72.

⁹ *The Jesus of St. John* (London, 1958), pp. 90–157.

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Father). Such an approach plays with the evidence selectively, for nothing is clearer in the fourth Gospel than Jesus' uniqueness. Even in the passages cited, there are qualifying factors. In 15:18f. Jesus has *chosen* his disciples out of the world; in 17:24 they will be rewarded with seeing Jesus' glory. The oneness which Jesus enjoys with his Father can pertain to moral and functional categories, and thus be shared by his disciples (as in 8:42; 17:21; cf. most commentaries on 8:38ff. — e.g. Barrett, Brown, Lindars, Morris), but it is not restricted to such spheres. In John, men may become *ta tekna* of God, but only Jesus is *ho huios* — indeed, *ho monogenēs huios*. Although a man, no man ever spoke as he (7:46), who surpasses John the Baptist (1:15, 27, 30; 3:27ff.) and even Moses (1:17). His relationship with the Father is special (2:16); he is 'from above' in a unique sense, and is therefore above all (3:31).¹⁰ He sets the pattern for humility (13:12ff.) but he stands alone in his claim for supremacy and honour (e.g. 5:23; 12:8). He is *the* Son of God (1:49); and whereas he chooses men, he is himself exclusively God's Chosen One, God's Elect (1:34).¹¹

By any reckoning, Jesus is in some sense God, in some sense man, and in some sense unique. How may these things be integrated with each other and with johannine theology? And what understanding of the sovereignty-responsibility tension is betrayed by these data?

2. A selection of proposed solutions

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive; but it does represent a fair selection of modern thought on the christology of the fourth Gospel. I should add that the various categories occasionally overlap somewhat.

(i) The most common modern approach to johannine christology is to fence the evangelist's language off from ontological categories when in one way or the other he ascribes deity to Jesus. This method develops in different ways, but it is found in writers

¹⁰ This is true even of John 10:34–6. I think the argument is *ad hominem*; but its *a minori ad maius* form also indicates the *minimum* that Jesus expects the Jews to believe about him, the purpose being to show Jesus' superiority (10:36) in a context that has already made Jesus out to be God (10:33). Of course, the precise meaning of the passage turns in part on the background envisaged: cf. J. A. Emerton, 'Some New Testament Notes', *JTS*, Vol. xi (1960), pp. 329–36; *idem*, 'Melchizedek and the Gods: Fresh Evidence for the Jewish Background of John x.34–36', *JTS*, Vol. xvii (1966), pp. 394–401; J. S. Ackermann, 'The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John: John 10:34', *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. lix (1966), pp. 186–91; and especially A. T. Hanson, 'John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered', *NTS*, (Vol. xiii (1966–7), pp. 363–7.

¹¹ Accepting the minority reading (but the *lectio difficilior*) of the Western text, along with most commentators since Harnack.

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from Cullmann to Bultmann¹² (and even in one as conservative as A. M. Hunter),¹³ and usually pictures Jesus' deity as God-in-revelation. M. Appold¹⁴ insists that Jesus' oneness with the Father is not to be explained in moral, metaphysical, or philosophical categories. Rather, it is a oneness of 'equivalent relationality' (*sic*), which, if I understand him aright, is a functional category. J. A. T. Robinson's argument 'places Jesus on exactly the same metaphysical level as every other son of God yet attests him functionally unique, because he alone "always does what is acceptable to God"'.¹⁵ In discussing the matter, R. Kysar prefers to adopt the terminology 'function' and 'person', instead of 'function' and 'ontology';¹⁶ but I doubt if this refinement substantively changes very much. In any case, it is far from clear that absolute distinctions between what is 'functional' and what is 'ontological' can legitimately be made.¹⁷ 'It is questionable whether St John gave any thought to the ontological nature of the sonship', writes T. E. Pollard;¹⁸ to which the appropriate initial rejoinder is: 'It is doubtful whether St John gave any thought to the functional nature of the sonship.' Beyond that, it is of utmost importance to recognise that both ontological and functional categories can be found in John, a point inconsistently recognised by Pollard himself in the same paragraph, when he cites 7:19 and 14:9 and concludes, 'Jesus claims to reproduce not only the Father's thought and action, but also his very nature.'¹⁹

(ii) Many of those who appeal to the functional elements in the deity of Christ in John's Gospel also make recourse to hellenism. Fuller does this, and of course Bultmann. Lindars takes the same approach, arguing that the ascription of *theos* to Jesus shows that 'the restraining influence of rigid Jewish monotheism is beginning to weaken'.²⁰ The habit of calling Jesus *kyrios*, it is argued, led naturally to calling him *theos*, by analogy to 'the Lord

¹² O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London, 1963), pp. 306ff; Bultmann, *passim*, perhaps especially pp. 248–54.

¹³ *Introducing the New Testament* (London, 1972), p. 65; *idem*, *According to John* (London, 1968), p. 115.

¹⁴ *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen, 1976).

¹⁵ 'The Use of the Fourth Gospel for Christology Today', *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 73.

¹⁶ *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* *op. cit.*, pp. 200–6.

¹⁷ Cf. the questions raised by R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London, 1965), pp. 247ff., who, although he thinks the restatement of the gospel for the hellenistic world contributed largely to ontological categories, nevertheless acknowledges: 'For it is not just a quirk of the Greek mind, but a universal apperception, that action implies prior being—even if, as is also true, being is only apprehended in action. Such ontic reflection about Yahweh is found even in the OT, e.g. "I AM" (Exodus and Deutero-Isaiah)', (pp. 248f.). Cf. especially the careful statement of Longenecker, *Christology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–6.

¹⁸ *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 17.

¹⁹ *Johannine Christology*, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London, 1972), p. 615.

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God' in the LXX. Referring to Jesus as God subsequently becomes very common in the epistles of Ignatius, a further step in the hellenising process.

Too many objections may be raised against this easy answer. First, as B. A. Mastin has shown,²¹ Ignatius's ascription of *theos* to Jesus is quite in contrast to the careful reserve exhibited by John. Ignatius repeatedly speaks of Jesus as 'our God'; he writes of 'the passion of my God', and 'the blood of God', and so forth. Second, I have already indicated how common it was in Jewish circles to speak of divine-like beings. In particular, R. N. Longenecker has pointed out that six of the New Testament passages which call Jesus God appear 'in the writings representative of the Jewish cycle of witness', whereas only two or three can be identified in the Paulines. Longenecker argues—and Mastin agrees—that ascribing deity to Jesus in a Gentile setting would suggest he was one god among many; whereas ascribing deity to Jesus in a Jewish setting would lead to 'a rethinking of traditional monotheism in an attempt to include the idea of plurality within a basic unity'²²—unless it led to a charge of blasphemy.

(iii) In an earlier essay,²³ Mastin suggested that ascription of deity to Jesus in John 20:28 was prompted by the imperial cult under Domitian. Suetonius tells us Domitian was addressed as *dominus et deus noster*, to which Christians might well reply that Jesus alone was Lord and God. However, it is by no means universally agreed that the fourth Gospel was written at so late a date. Moreover, it seems strange that the christian response (if such it be) is not framed as a plural confession to parallel the imperially prompted confession (the book of Revelation provides better parallels). Even if John 20:28 were in any way called forth as a response to the imperial cult, that cult can scarcely account for John 1:1, 18. Besides, this fourth Gospel, in contrast to the Apocalypse, does not smack of conflict between Christianity and the imperial cult.

(iv) A fourth explanation has been offered by R. E. Brown. Brown argues that the passages in the New Testament (including the fourth Gospel) which specifically give Jesus the title *theos* are either in hymns or doxologies, and he supposes that this is an indication that the title 'God' was applied to Jesus more quickly in liturgical formulae than in narrative or epistolary literature.²⁴ Brown, in agreement with many others, regards the Prologue (which embraces the first two crucial references, 1:1, 18) as a hymn that was edited before insertion into the fourth Gospel. Moreover, he regards 20:28 as a response evocative of

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²¹ 'A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel', *NTS*, Vol. xxii (1975–6), p. 45.

²² Cf. *Christology*, op. cit., pp. 139ff.; adapted by Mastin, art. cit.

²³ B. A. Mastin, 'The Imperial Cult and the Ascription of the Title *Theos* to Jesus (John xx.28)', *St. Ev.*, Vol. vi (1973), pp. 352–65.

²⁴ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (New York, 1966).

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an early christian liturgy, Thomas speaking on behalf of the entire christian community. He thinks Revelation 4:11, 'Worthy art thou, *our Lord and God*', a confirmation of his interpretation.

There is some truth in what Brown is saying; but his general theory fits the fourth Gospel less convincingly than it fits other parts of the New Testament. J. T. Sanders is willing to concede that the johannine Prologue is 'religious poetry', but, on formal grounds he argues that it is not a hymn in the same sense that the other passages he studies are hymns.²⁵ C. K. Barrett, in an important essay,²⁶ insists that the Prologue is not verse, but rhythmical prose, written originally in Greek, and by the evangelist. Not all of Barrett's arguments are convincing, but his main thesis is eminently defensible. Moreover, Mastin has pointed out that the definition of 'doxology' becomes a little vague if John 20:28 and Revelation 4:11 are both lumped together under this rubric. To serve as evidence that they both reflect the same liturgical/doxological response, they would have to be identical in form and they are not. On the face of it, John 20 is prose narrative; and in Revelation 4:11 the words 'our Lord and our God' simply identify who is worthy to be praised. In any case, our massive ignorance of first century christian liturgy makes theories which depend on early and well-developed liturgy more speculative than most others (and for the same reason, more difficult to disprove!).

(v) B. A. Mastin, in his recent article, already referred to,²⁷ sides more or less with those who see Jewish background as the dominating influence on the fourth Gospel. However, he suggests that it is the church-synagogue clash which calls forth the ascription of deity to Jesus. As the synagogue minimises the significance of Jesus, so the church is helped to see his significance. In particular, he cites the johannine passages in which Jesus is in conflict with the Jews, in conflict which turns on Jesus' identity (cf. especially 5:17f.; 8:58.; 10:30ff., and their contexts). By way of reply, however, certain things must be observed: (1) The three passages which unambiguously ascribe the title *theos* to Jesus are *not* in settings of Jewish/christian controversy. (2) Mastin's theory approximates more closely than he thinks to the thesis that Jesus was deified in proportion as christianity drew away from Jewish monotheism and towards hellenistic polytheism, despite the strictures be imposes on the latter. *Both* see Christianity's withdrawal from Jewish thought as in some sense the pre-condition for the ascription of deity to Jesus; and therefore *both* fall under the stubborn evidence adduced by Longenecker and others. (3) I am unhappy with the way church/synagogue disputes are getting blamed for everything in the fourth Gospel these days. The subject is so vast, I can here barely mention it. Nevertheless I must say

²⁵ *The New Testament Christological Hymns* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 20ff.

²⁶ 'The Prologue of St John's Gospel', *New Testament Essays* (London, 1972), pp. 27-48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-51.

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that Leistner's insistence²⁸ that John is not as anti-Jewish as some suppose makes a great deal of sense to me; while the circular reasoning which crops up repeatedly in a work like J. Louis Martyn's²⁹ engenders suspicion that a clever theory is being foisted on the evidence.

(vi) C. K. Barrett frames the problem in terms of a dialectical christology.³⁰ He rejects as anachronistic the efforts to detect 'two natures' — e.g. to see the subordinationist passages (especially 14:28) as a reference to Jesus' humanity — as he rejects majority patristic and some Reformed attempts to find distinctions between Father and Son independent of the incarnation. His own approach is to focus on one point at a time, and thus to discover the fourth Gospel is christocentric in confronting men, but that even the christocentricity is theocentric, the ultimate goal being to worship *God* in spirit and in truth. At the same time, although he admits that even those passages affirming Christ's deity *accommodate* a distinction between Jesus and God (e.g. 1:1–18; 5:1–47; 10:22–39), he strenuously insists that this is *accommodation*, not *obliteration*. I think his analysis is essentially correct. My criticisms are threefold: (1) The word 'dialectical' is extremely slippery, being used by Barthians, Marxists, and Bultmannians in quite distinctive ways. It is better avoided. (2) Barrett puts too many johannine contrasts under this category in any case — a point to which I must return. (3) His analysis does not explain the genesis of this 'dialectic'.

(vii) K. Haacker's stimulating dissertation argues that the high point in the Prologue is not 1:14, but 1:17: Jesus is the '*Stifter*' (founder) of a new religion, replacing Moses and his religion.³¹ In showing how Jesus outstrips Moses, the evangelist must show how Jesus' revelation comes from God in an unprecedented fashion, a way that surpasses all that Moses or any other predecessor brought. Haacker argues that the motifs of the 'sending' and the 'descent' of Jesus are introduced to establish Jesus' superiority;³² and that even

the presentation of his pre-existence is, like Christ's descent, a derivative of the revelation motif. In any case, this is so whenever revelation takes on soteriological significance for the whole world. Pre-existence is the model (*Umsetzung*) of the divine origin in the time category, just as the descent motif is the model of the divine origin in the spatial category of primitive cosmology.³³

²⁸ R. Leistner, *Antijudaismus im Johannesevangelium?* (Bern, 1974).

²⁹ *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, 1968).

³⁰ *New Testament Essays*, op. cit., pp. 65f.; idem, ' "The Father is greater than I" (Jo. 14, 28): Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament', *Neues Testament und Kirche* (Freiburg, 1974), pp. 144–59.

³¹ *Die Stiftung des Heils*, op. cit., pp. 25–7.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 90ff.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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Moreover, in Jewish thought even pre-existent things like Torah, and in some cases Moses, were nevertheless created; but the fourth Gospel ascribes absolute pre-existence to Jesus Christ, again to establish his superiority.

Haacker's analysis, though impressive, stumbles on his method. The superiority of Jesus and his revelation over all predecessors can indeed be plotted throughout the fourth Gospel; but it is not so all-embracing a motif as Haacker thinks. To make any one verse in the Prologue (1:14 or 1:17) so controlling a factor blinds the interpreter to other strands of thought. Most of the texts which Haacker cites concerning Jesus' pre-existence, descent, and the like, are not obviously in contexts which relate to a contrast between Jesus and previous 'founders'.

(viii) Of other proposed solutions to johannine christology, none has created as much stir in recent years as that of E. Käsemann.³⁴ Although not the first in this generation to argue for a docetic christology in the fourth Gospel,³⁵ Käsemann has put the case so forcefully that he has called forth a barrage of protest. Somewhat ironically, while for Bultmann and Cullmann Christ's deity is nothing but God in revelation, for Käsemann Christ's humanity, his 'flesh' in 1:14, 'is for the evangelist nothing other than the possibility for the Logos, as Creator and Revealer, to communicate with men.'³⁶ He understands Jesus' humanity, not his deity, functionally. As is well known, Käsemann views 1:14a as 'the absolute minimum of the costume designed for the one who dwelt for a little while among men',³⁷ needed only to make 1:14b possible; while most of the subordinationist passages serve only to establish Jesus' authority.

Most of Käsemann's critics have focused on the fact that he has blown up one side of the evidence and seriously ignored the other.³⁸ At least one has called his position 'nothing more than absurd'.³⁹ Another concedes Käsemann's point for the body of the fourth Gospel, but thinks 1:14 is a late anti-docetic addition.⁴⁰ K. Berger argues that the verb

³⁴ *The Testament of Jesus* (London, 1968).

³⁵ Cf. *inter alia* G. M. Davis, 'The Humanity of Jesus in John', *JBL*, Vol. lxx (1951), pp. 105–12; J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 25ff.

³⁶ E. Käsemann, 'Aufbau und Anliegen des johanneischen Prologs', *Libertas Christiana* (München, 1957), p. 94.

³⁷ *Testament*, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁸ In particular, cf. G. Bornkamm, 'Zur Interpretation des Johannesevangeliums', *Geschichte und Glaube* (München, 1968), Vol. i, pp. 104–21; R. E. Brown, 'The Kerygma of the Gospel according to St John', *NTS* (London, 1970), pp. 218ff.; S. S. Smalley, 'The Testament of Jesus: Another Look', *St. Ev.*, Vol. vi (1973), pp. 495–501; H. Hegemann, 'Er kam in sein Eigentum: Zur Bedeutung des Erdenwirkens Jesu im vierten Evangeliums', *Der Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde* (Göttingen, 1970), pp. 112–31.

³⁹ E. Malatesta, 'The Spirit/Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel', *Biblica*, Vol. liv (1973), pp. 539–50.

⁴⁰ G. Richter, 'Die Fleischwerdung des Logos im Johannesevangelium', *Nov. T.*, Vol. xiii (1971), pp. 81–126.

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ginomai ('to become'; 1:14) would have to be '*erscheinen*' ('to appear') to suit Käsemann's theory. Berger himself does not see in 1:14 an incarnation so much as a theophany.⁴¹

3. Towards a better synthesis: the transcendent God personally expounded

Before the exile, the chief problem in Israel was her tendency to drift toward idolatry. After the exile, the problem shifted. We have observed in the intertestamental literature a tendency to stress divine transcendence at the expense of divine personality. Under this over-arching umbrella of sovereign transcendence, the people operated in increasing independence: divine ultimacy was squeezed out of the sphere of human moral decisions. Necessarily, God became, in some ways, a little removed from his people.⁴² Free will became formulated for the first time in Jewish writings.

Now if Longenecker and others have shown that the ascription of deity to Jesus was first made in Jewish Christian circles (*supra*), the evidence I have adduced from Jewish intertestamental literature reveals the beginning of a need for such a development in the same circles in spite of their simultaneous emphasis on the unity of God—indeed, almost because of it.

John presents this christology in such a way as to fill this need. Some scholars have recognised this. J. Jeremias, for example, says, that although God had in some ways revealed himself in the past, 'he had remained full of mystery, incomprehensible, inscrutable, invisible'; but at one point 'God took off the mask' and spoke clearly and distinctly: and Jesus Christ is that Word.⁴³ Another says:

... God has quite personally and eschatologically disclosed himself in the man Jesus and has spoken and acted through this man. Thus for John Jesus as 'the Son' is the *full-fledged presence* of God (*italics his*) ... and God personally meets men exclusively through the man Jesus.⁴⁴

⁴¹ K. Berger, 'Zu "Das Wort ward Fleisch" Joh. I 14a', *Nov. T.*, Vol. vxi (1974), pp. 161–6.

⁴² Cf. the carefully qualified corroboration by W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1970), pp. 164f. and notes. On pp. 166f., he argues that the development of Wisdom was in part an attempt to reconcile transcendence and immanence in the realm of creation and elsewhere. It is not surprising therefore that a growing number of recent scholars have connected John's *Logos* doctrine with Wisdom motifs: e.g. Lindars, *passim*; F. M. Braun, *Jean le théologien*, op. cit., especially Vol. iii.

⁴³ *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London, 1965), pp. 89f. Cf. B. F. Westcott, *The Revelation of the Father* (London/Cambridge, 1884), pp. 7–10.

⁴⁴ W. Kümmel, *Theology*, op. cit., p. 273.

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Being truly God and truly man, and being also the image of God and the archetype of humanity, (Jesus) is an ontological mediator between God and man; he is no less a mediator of true knowledge, and of salvation.⁴⁵

In short, 'He is—as it is once expressed in Col. 1:15—the visible image of the invisible Father.'⁴⁶

Without, for the moment, further pursuing the question of ontology, I propose now to sketch in John's picture of Jesus, focusing attention first on Jesus' God-like functions, and then on his man-like functions.

The Prologue begins with the *logos*, who from the beginning not only was with God, but was God (1:1). The distinction between the *logos* and God (*ho logos ēn pros ton theon*) makes possible his becoming something other than just God (1:14); their identification (*theos ēn ho logos*) makes certain that the revelation is indeed God revealing himself (1:18). The Prologue concludes with the *logos* becoming flesh (1:14), being identified as Jesus Christ (1:15, 17). The invisible God has thus become visible (1:14f., 18). Between the opening and the close of the Prologue, otherwise transcendent features of God's activity are by this means brought near: the same *logos* was involved in creation (1:3), and has come to what is his own (1:10f.). Even the possibility of salvation by becoming children of God is patterned on this bridging of the gulf between God and men (1:12f.): 'In this way, the necessary and constantly reiterated scriptural affirmation of the infinite distance between God and man, and the affirmation of the coming of the Son of God who bridges this abyss in making believers participate in his divine sonship, are harmoniously related.'⁴⁷

Because Jesus thus bridges the gulf between the infinite God and finite man, the argument can leap with neither warning nor impropriety from Jesus and his words and work back to God and his words and work. Hence, for example, in 3:33ff., the person who receives the witness of *Jesus* 'sets his seal to this, that *God* is true.' Jesus' words are God's words (3:34); that is the reason why the one who receives *Jesus*' witness confirms that *God* is true. Lest there be any suspicion that not all of Jesus' words are God's words, the evangelist hastens to add that God has given the Spirit without measure to Jesus (if we may take the

⁴⁵ Barrett, p. 62.

⁴⁶ E. Haenchen, ' "Der Vater ..." ', *NTS*, Vol. ix (1962–3), p. 210. Quite a number of scholars recognise the revelatory function of Jesus Christ in John's Gospel, yet keep it in proportion. Among the most useful recent articles are: P. J. Cahill, 'The Johannine *Logos* as Center', *CBQ*, Vol. xxxviii (1976), pp. 54–72; E. Ruckstuhl, 'Abstieg und Erhöhung des johanneischen Menschensohn', *Jesus und der Menschensohn* (Frieburg, 1975), pp. 314–41; H. Vorländer, ' "Mein Herr und Mein Gott." Christus als "personlicher Gott" im Neuen Testament', *Kerygma und Dogma*, Vol. xxi (1975), pp. 120–46; T. W. Manson, 'The Johannine Jesus as Logos', reprinted in *A Companion to John* (New York, 1977), pp. 33–58.

⁴⁷ F. Amiot, '*Deum Nemo Vidit Unquam*: Jo. I, 18', *Mélanges Bibliques* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 470–77.

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clause that way), and so loved him as to give everything into his hand (3:34f.). This leap from Jesus to God is not exceptional. In precisely the same way, the faith that leads to life hears *Jesus'* words and believes the *one who sent him* (5:24; 14:24). Only Jesus has seen the Father (6:46); but to know Jesus is to know the Father (8:19).

God, then, supremely at the 'hour', glorifies his Son and is thereby glorified in him (17:1; 13:31). By accomplishing the work the Father has given him to do, Jesus has glorified the Father, and will be returned to the glory he once shared with the Father (17:4f.). His work entails passing on God's glory (17:22), the glory of the 'one and only God' (*monogenēs theos*), witnessed by his disciples (1:18). Even the descent/ascent theme presupposed by this perspective stresses the revelation of God to man.

The fourth Gospel thus admirably preserves the distance between God and men, while simultaneously bridging that distance by the incarnate *logos*, the Son of God. His coming corresponds to the vertical dimension in johannine eschatology. If contemporary Judaism was convinced that no one could see God until the age to come, John was announcing that the age to come had arrived even in this respect: the first disciples had seen Jesus. There was more glory still to be seen (17:24); but the divine presence had already been expounded to the believers (1:18; 17:26).

What about all the passages which underline the 'sentness' of Jesus and his dependence on his Father? On these points, Käsemann has come very near the truth, despite the objections of his critics. Most of the passages which mark Jesus' dependence and 'sentness' function in their contexts as the ground of Jesus' authority (5:17f., 19–30; 6:28, 32f.; 7:16, 18, 28f.; 8:16, 29, 42; 10:17f.; 11:41f.; 12:45, 48ff.; 14:23f., 28–31; 17:2, 7). In speaking God's words (3:34; 7:16; 8:26, 38, 40; 14:10, 24; 17:8), performing only the Father's works (4:34; 5:17, 19ff., 30, 36; 8:28; 14:10; 17:4, 14), and doing the Father's will (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 10:25, 37), Jesus is 'the voice and hand of the Father'.⁴⁸

In connection with the 'hour' and the fulfilment of Scripture, we have already seen how Jesus is in no way dependent on the whims and decisions of men, but only on the will of the Father. Even the classic subordinationist passage, 14:28, calls for some such comment as that of Loisy: 'It is understood that the Christ, because of his heavenly origin, is in essence divine, since he compares himself with the Father.'⁴⁹ Perhaps the omission of some scenes from the synoptic tradition (e.g. the temptation, Gethsemane, the cry of dereliction) finds its reason in this, that to include them might hinder the presentation of the crossing of the barrier between transcendence and finitude.

⁴⁸ E. Haenchen, ' "Der Vater ..." ', op. cit., p. 211.

⁴⁹ A. Loisy, *Le Quatrième Evangile* (Paris, 1921), p. 415.

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Supremely, then, Jesus the Son of God is seen in the fourth Gospel as the mediator between the Father and men. The Father is therefore presented not so much in his relation to the world, as in his relation to the Son. Even in 3:16, the Father's love for the *world* causes him to send his *Son*; while in 3:34f. and 5:19f. the Father's love for the *Son* prompts him to show the *Son* all he does, and place everything in his hand. 'To get to the bottom [of johannine thought], it must be recognised that the foundation of the church is the fact, not of a sort of divine philanthropy, but of the personal love of the Father for the Son.'⁵⁰ The glory to which Jesus is moving, he already had with the Father before the world began (17:5); but it was given him because of the Father's pre-cosmic love for the Son (17:24). Christians will be especially loved by the Father (14:21–3), but only in their relationship of obedience to the Son. And if the Father is asked to take over some of the functions of the Son (17:11ff.), it is because the Son's work is coming to an end, and the time for the coming of the other Paraclete, for whom the Son himself has prayed (14:16ff.), is drawing on.

All of these features, however, gloss over the stubborn fact that Jesus is consistently presented in a position of subservience and, more specifically, unswerving obedience, to his Father. His food is to do the will of the one who sent him (4:34); and, despite the fact that Jesus' dependence is frequently set in contexts which give him authority, it is real dependence nonetheless. The world must learn that Jesus does exactly what his Father has commanded him, despite the vigorous attack by the prince of the world (16:30f.). This is true not only of the father's words and actions, which the Son takes over, but, as we have seen, of the entire passion: 'the passion belongs to the commission the Father laid on the Son; and Jesus in loving obedience has discharged this commission, right to the last detail'⁵¹ (cf. 18:11, 37; 19:17?; 19:28–30). Thus, even though stress is laid on the fact that the entire 'hour' and its events are predestined by God and foretold by Scripture, equal stress is laid on Jesus' willingness to drink the cup the Father has given him (18:11), to lay down his life of his own accord (10:18). This is the reason the Father loves the Son (10:17; cf. 8:29). The cured blind man was right when he noted that God listens to the godly man who performs his will (9:31). In Jesus, therefore, the certainty of divine predestination and the significant freedom of obedient response meet in a spectacular display.

It is in the life and death of Jesus Christ that the problem of free will and predestination finds its most poignant expression, and here, too, if anywhere, it must find its solution. The predetermined one freely chooses his appointed destiny: 'not what I will, but what thou wilt' (Mark 14:36). In Christ, the elect of

⁵⁰ F.-M. Braun, *Jean le théologien*, op. cit., Vol. iv, p. 93.

⁵¹ A. Dauer, *Die Passionsgeschichte*, op. cit., p. 286.

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God, perfect freedom and absolute determination intersect; human freedom and divine omnipotence meet and are one. The problem of free will and determination can be solved only in the new humanity of Jesus Christ.⁵²

Real freedom for a man is freedom from sin (8:34ff.), that is, a freedom which voluntarily performs God's will, in the way Jesus kept his Father's word (8:54). Or, as C. F. D. Moule has put it:

Jesus exhibits the nature and character of God in the only way in which they can be absolutely and perfectly exhibited in the context of human behaviour, namely in such a relationship as properly belongs to man over against God, the relationship of glad and willing filial obedience. To this extent the paradox of glory and humiliation, of equality and subordination, is resolved in that relationship of perfect intimacy and identity of purpose which expresses itself in perfect obedience. Oneness of will is expressed in subordination of will, freedom in constraint.⁵³

We have observed that when Caiaphas prophesied (11:49ff.), he did not speak *aph' heautou* ('of his own accord'; lit. 'of himself'). But Jesus can say, similarly, 'The words that I say to you I do not speak *ap' emautou*, on my own authority' (lit., 'of myself'; 14:10). God's sovereignty therefore remains intact whatever the response of men may be; but men are not thereby absolved of their responsibility to do his will. Caiaphas speaks out of arrogance; Jesus speaks out of conscious obedience to the Father.

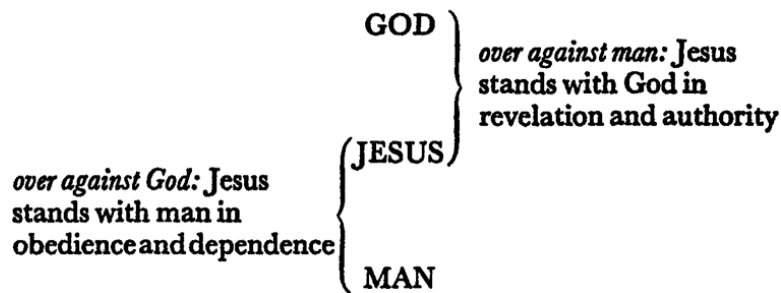
Another corollary of the stress on Jesus' obedience arises from the observation that responsibility is exercised first of all *towards God*. This does not mean that Jesus does not act graciously towards other men; it means rather that he acts graciously towards them because he acts responsibly towards his Father. He gives his life for the sheep; but this is a command received from his Father (John 10:15ff.). He preserves all the Father gives him and resurrects them on the last day, because this is the Father's will (6:37–40). He washes his disciples' feet in token of spiritual cleansing, for he knows the hour has come for the final act (13:1ff.).

⁵² A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), pp. 187f. The use of 'solved' is perhaps infortunate. Cf. also the extended discussion by D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London, 1948), pp. 106–32.

⁵³ 'The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament', *Christ, Faith and History* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 95–110. One must nevertheless be careful with this sort of statement, lest it descend once more into mere functionalism. The same caution pertains especially to the work of A. T. Hanson, *Grace and Truth: A Study in the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London, 1975); for when he speaks of divinity revealing itself in humanity, I am never entirely sure if he is referring to character *as opposed to* essence.

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At the same time, this last action becomes a paradigm of self-sacrificing service for the disciples (13:12ff.),⁵⁴ constituting in fact the ‘new commandment’ (13:34), to love as Jesus has loved. The same pattern—Jesus’ special sacrifice, followed by its function as paradigm for others—is found also in 12:24f. In his sacrifice, Jesus was first of all pleasing his Father, thus standing with men in the necessity of obeying God. But although the sacrifice was unique, it was nevertheless so self-giving that it becomes a paradigm for others to follow; and in establishing the pattern in a new commandment Jesus stands with God in conscious authority. Thus, Jesus stands alternatively with men and with God. On the one hand, he has kept his Father’s word (4:34; 8:29, 55; 15:10), and men are exhorted to follow his example and keep Jesus’ word (5:24; 14:21; 15:10; cf. 8:37)—which, on the other hand, is his Father’s word (8:28, 38; 12:49f.; 14:24), and therefore binds men with all the authority of God. The position of Jesus Christ in all these patterns may be schematised like this:



Thus, the Son can do nothing by himself (5:19, 30), just as the disciples can do nothing without Jesus (15:4). But the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does (5:20), while the Son loves his disciples as the Father loves him (15:9), and has chosen them to go and bear fruit (15:16).

Jesus stands with God and expounds divine transcendence to finite men; he stands with men and demonstrates in his own life the proper relationship between men and God. This structure is called forth by the entire Christ-event, and the church’s Spirit-guided understanding of it as the ultimate revelation of the transcendent and holy God to finite and sinful men. Moreover, in the fourth Gospel the sovereignty-responsibility tension has merged with the tension in the divine-human christology, so that the two are virtually one.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, ‘The Washing of the Disciples’ Feet in John 13:1–20’, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Vol. lxi (1970), pp. 247–52, is surely correct in refusing to split off 13:12ff from 13:1–11. Cf. also A. Weiser, ‘Joh. 13, 12–20—Zufügung eines späteren Herausgebers?’, *Biblische Zeitschrift*, Vol. xii (1968), pp. 252–7.

⁵⁵ Carson, D. A. (2002). *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (pp. 146–160). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.