



In Honor of Jack Dean Kingsbury

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

ESSAYS ON CHRISTOLOGY

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THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

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John is the most overtly theological of the Gospels, and Christology is its central focus. Nevertheless, to speak of Christology is to bring to bear on the Gospel a systematization of thought and an abstraction of theological categories that had not yet developed in the history of Christian thought. In the Gospel of John memory has passed into tradition, and tradition has been rendered into a narrative that tells the story of Jesus for a particular community. This narrative has clear implications for the community's debates about the person and work of Jesus, but those debates are still carried on in the medium of narrative rather than in doctrine or dogma. First John moves one step further in that it interprets the community's debates by making judgments about christological claims apart from the Gospel's narrative context.

Typically, Johannine Christology has been approached through a survey of christological titles, through efforts to reconstruct various stages in the development of the Johannine community and its thought, or through some combination of the two. The survey of Johannine Christology in this chapter shows that these approaches are not easily compatible or complementary. On the contrary, the conceptual relationships within the Gospel of John make it very difficult to sort out stages in the development of Johannine Christology. I survey briefly both some leading reconstructions of the development of John's Christology and the ways in which John uses some of the christological titles. This survey calls attention to relationships between various strands of John's Christology so that one can see, in rough outline at least, the difficulty of harmonizing theories regarding how the

Gospel's Christology developed historically and how the Gospel develops its Christology.

HOW THE GOSPEL'S CHRISTOLOGY DEVELOPED

Because the prevailing view is that the Gospel of John was composed over a period of time in a process that probably involved the testimony of the beloved disciple, materials shaped within the Johannine community, perhaps two editions of the Gospel, and the work of a redactor, various interpreters have sought to show how Johannine Christology developed in the course of this process. The writers I survey here developed their views independently, but they form an interesting lineage in American Johannine scholarship. Robert Fortna was a student of J. Louis Martyn shortly before Martyn published his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1968). Raymond Brown and J. Louis Martyn both taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Martinus de Boer studied with them.

Robert Fortna recast Rudolf Bultmann's hypothesis of a signs source, advancing the study of Johannine sources methodologically and identifying the contours of an early signs Gospel.¹ Fortna subsequently developed his earlier work on the signs Gospel by showing how the evangelist edited it into the present form of the Gospel.² The function of the signs Gospel, which probably included a passion narrative, was simply to present Jesus as the Messiah. The signs were "demonstrations of his messiahship," and belief was "the paradigmatic response."³ The signs Gospel's account of Jesus' death is apologetic, showing that Jesus suffered and died in order to fulfill the scriptures. Accordingly, there is little theological reflection on the soteriological significance of Jesus' death. The fourth evangelist reaffirmed the source's Christology, changed it, and deepened and enhanced it. Christology remains central, however. The presentation of Jesus' ministry revolves around the signs, but the fourth evangelist drops the report "We have found Elijah," which probably stood at 1:43, in order to defend the claim in John 3:13 that "no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." Jesus is the one "sent by the Father," and John the Baptist is solely a witness to him. Similarly, Jesus is a "new Moses," like him but greater, for through Jesus came not the law but grace and truth (1:17).

The fourth evangelist enhances the Christology of the signs Gospel by adding the discourses in which Jesus speaks revelatory words. The christological titles, which were all subsumed under Jesus' messiahship in the

source, are now differentiated and their significance deepened. The title "Son of man" appears in material added to the source, and Jesus speaks as one from heaven. Jesus declares what the Father has given him to say. He knows what is in the hearts of others; he uses the divine "I am"; and he lays down his life and takes it up again. In short, he reveals the divine glory. The fourth Gospel's Christology of the incarnation, therefore, transforms the Jewish, messianic view of the source into "a cosmic christology."⁴

J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown have set the framework for understanding the development of the Johannine community and its Christology. Their work is well known and hardly needs to be summarized again. Of particular interest for our survey of Johannine Christology, however, is the way in which each of these interpreters views the development of John's Logos Christology. Both affirm that the conflict with the synagogue was in a sense christological and related, either before or after the fact, to the move from a lower (messianic miracle worker) to a higher (otherworldly Logos) Christology. Martyn contends that during the early period, while the Johannine believers were still within the synagogue, they preached Jesus as a miracle worker, "the Mosaic prophet, the eschatological Elijah, the expected Messiah."⁵ The success of this preaching eventually led the authorities to take radical steps to control the problem of conversions and dissension within the synagogue. During the middle period, after the expulsion of believers from the synagogue, the socially dislocated believers increasingly conceived of Jesus as "a numinous and somewhat other-worldly figure."⁶ Martyn therefore assigns the Logos hymn to this period of the Johannine community's history.⁷

Raymond Brown, in contrast, posits the entrance into the community of a "second group" of anti-temple Jews who also brought in Samaritan converts. This group served as a catalyst for the development of the preexistence Christology, which in turn precipitated the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue. As support for this reconstruction, Brown appeals to three elements in the text of John: (1) the conversion of Samaritans in John 4:4-42, which occurs prior to the conflict with "the Jews" in chapter 5; (2) the anti-temple attitude expressed in John 4:21; and (3) the new title "Savior of the world" in John 4:42.⁸

In short, Brown and Martyn differ over the causal relationship between the development of a higher Christology and the expulsion of believers from the synagogue, with Brown contending that the development of such a Christology led to the expulsion and Martyn contending that the development of the higher, otherworldly Christology followed the expulsion. Nevertheless, both agree that the Johannine believers moved from a lower

to a higher Christology and that the Johannine Logos Christology developed prior to the entrance of Gentiles into the Johannine community.

Martinus C. de Boer has proposed a similar developmental approach to the Christology of John by uncovering a series of stages in the christological perspectives on the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John.⁹ Building on the work of Brown and Martyn, de Boer identifies three crises in the history of the Johannine community: (1) expulsion from the synagogue, (2) execution of Johannine Christians for making the claim that Jesus was one with God, and (3) schism within the community (reflected in 1 and 2 John). The three crises divide the development of the Johannine community into four periods. Correspondingly, de Boer identifies four stages in the composition history of the Gospel, with each stage formulating a different understanding of Jesus' death.

John I (the Gospel of the first period) was a collection of miracle stories. Its "miracle-working prophet-messiah" (a term de Boer borrowed from D. Moody Smith)¹⁰ performed "signs" reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha, fulfilling the contemporary expectations of the "prophet like Moses" who was to come. This presentation of Jesus sought to convince Jewish readers that Jesus, not John the Baptist, was the Messiah. Jesus' death was an embarrassment, but one that was deflected by demonstrating that it fulfilled the scriptures. It also served as a prelude to the climactic sign (his resurrection).¹¹

The argument with the Jews culminated in the expulsion of Johannine believers from the synagogue, and this separation from the synagogue prompted a major revision of the Gospel (John II). Believers were challenged for professing that Jesus was the Messiah, and the question of Jesus' authority centered on the issue of where he was from. Did he not come from Galilee, and did they not know his family? How then could he have divine authority? In response, John II affirms that Jesus is the Son of God, the one sent by the Father. Hence he bears divine authority and can even use God's name, "I am."¹² John II also presents an appeal to those believers who remained in the synagogue to declare their faith publicly and depart with the other believers. Consequently, John II develops the importance of Jesus' departure to the Father. Following Brown, de Boer argues that John 20:17 requires the reader to understand that the exaltation to the Father has already occurred in the resurrection. The focus on the departure of the Son to the Father in John II means that the death of Jesus is still subordinate in significance to the resurrection/exaltation/departure of Jesus.¹³

John III, produced after the persecution of Johannine believers, sought to vindicate Jesus and his followers while condemning their persecutors ("the Jews") as those who were controlled by the murderous "ruler of this

world."¹⁴ To this end, the designation "the Son of man" was introduced into discourses that had already been framed in John II, and the emphasis was on the departure or exaltation of the Son of man rather than on his coming. The "lifting up" sayings precipitate a striking change in perspective: "The ascension of Jesus to heaven is newly interpreted as a hidden reference to the sort of death Jesus had died (3:13-15, 12:32-33)."¹⁵ The crucifixion, then, served as an outward sign of its own significance: the exaltation of Jesus. As a result of this reinterpretation, references to Jesus' glorification have in view not merely his resurrection/ascension but also his death.¹⁶ Jesus' death can therefore serve as a paradigm in the Gospel's two-level drama for the martyrdom of his followers, who also glorify God through their deaths. As in the case of Jesus' death, their deaths will bear fruit also.¹⁷

The final period in the history of the Johannine tradition is marked by the division of the community and the departure of a group of Johannine believers who held to different beliefs regarding the significance of Jesus' life and death. In response, the elder, the author of the Johannine epistles, reasserted the salvific, expiatory significance of Jesus' death by emphasizing that Jesus was the Christ who had come in flesh and that the Johannine believers were cleansed by water and by blood. The giving of Jesus' flesh and blood is related to the significance of his death (John 6:51-56), and the foot washing is a demonstration of its cleansing effect. The final redactor of the Gospel weaves this late understanding of Jesus' death into the Gospel through the account of the water and blood flowing from Jesus' side (John 19:34-35). Through this masterful analysis, de Boer shows not one but many Christologies in the Johannine writings, that the various Christologies can be distinguished and related to events in the history of the Johannine community, and that while Jesus' death was not important in the two early stages, it grew in importance in the latter two stages.

The strength of such a careful and comprehensive developmental approach to Johannine Christology is that it provides a rationale for the various christological perspectives in the Gospel by relating them to a reconstruction of the history of the community in which the Gospel was produced. Fascinating and persuasive as its results may be, the developmental approach nevertheless suffers from three weaknesses: (1) It must rely on a reconstruction of the history of the community that is itself uncertain; (2) it distinguishes and separates christological emphases within the Gospel so that they no longer stand in tension, balance, or harmony with one another; and (3) it does not sufficiently account for the ways in which these various Christologies are related to each other and function in

the Gospel as we have it. The solution is not to cease to explore either the variety of christological perspectives in the Gospel or the history of the Johannine community but to bring the historical and literary approaches to Johannine Christology into dialogue with each other.

This survey of developmental approaches to the Christology of John has focused on several closely related proposals that in a sense represent the work of American Johannine scholarship. A more representative survey would consider other approaches to the history of the Johannine tradition as well. One basic line of development would remain constant, however, even in a broader survey of developmental theories: Johannine Christology appears to have developed from an early stage in which Jesus was viewed as a miracle-working Messiah who fulfilled the scriptures to a later stage in which this Messiah was viewed as the Logos who had become flesh. This means that the Johannine signs stem from an early period, while the Gospel's Logos Christology, which is most clearly present in the prologue, represents the mature development of Johannine thought. Paradoxically, when one reads the Gospel, one begins with the prologue and then reads all the rest of the Gospel narrative in the light of its Logos Christology. To a degree not sufficiently recognized, the leading strands of John's Christology are also tied to this late, Logos Christology.

HOW THE GOSPEL DEVELOPS ITS CHRISTOLOGY

Although the christological titles provide important avenues for understanding John's Christology, care must be taken to treat these titles in their Johannine contexts because the Gospel of John uses the titles in distinctive ways, fills them with new meanings, and relates them to one another and to important Johannine themes in ways that give them unique meanings and functions in this Gospel. Closely related to the titles are the Johannine "I am" sayings, and these too need to be interpreted in their narrative context in the Gospel. Similarly, the "signs" that Jesus does point to his identity. He turns water to wine (2:1-11), heals the official's son (4:46-54), heals the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18), feeds a multitude (6:1-15), walks on water (6:16-21), gives sight to a man born blind (9:1-7), and raises Lazarus from the tomb (11:38-44). Other actions, if not actual signs, also fulfill an interpretive function in the Gospel: Jesus drives the merchants out of the temple (2:13-22), enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey (12:12-19), washes his disciples' feet (13:1-11), and directs the disciples to a great catch of fish (21:1-14). Jesus' debates with the religious leaders place his ministry in a

trial-like setting and clarify the charges against Jesus and the basis of his authority. Throughout, Old Testament quotations, allusions, and imagery set Jesus' ministry in the larger sweep of Moses and the prophets in Israel's past and its hopes for the future. From among this at times overwhelming multiplicity of ways in which the Gospel interprets Jesus, a few dominant emphases rise above the others: Jesus is the one sent from above to reveal the Father, take away the sin of the world, and give life to those who receive him.

Logos Christology and the Wisdom Tradition

Since the publication of Brown's commentary on John, consensus has grown that John's Logos Christology developed against the background of the Jewish wisdom tradition. The wisdom writings served as fertile soil for christological reflection, and from the Gospel itself one familiar with the wisdom tradition can see numerous points of contact. As early as Proverbs 8, the figure of Wisdom was being personified. Wisdom was identified with God's word and therefore was God's agent in the creation (Prov. 3:19). Wisdom was thus created first (Prov. 8:22). Wisdom is received by her children (Prov. 8:32), and she prepares a table of bread and wine for them (Prov. 9:5). With Sirach (190 B.C.E.), Wisdom was identified with keeping the Torah (Sir. 15:1; 19:20; compare Bar. 4:1). The place of the Torah was being elevated, and sages began to claim that it, too, was preexistent. Wisdom, like Torah, provided "the bread of learning" and "the water of wisdom" (Sir. 15:3). She could therefore tell of her "glory" (Sir. 24:2). Wisdom "came forth from the mouth of the Most High" (Sir. 24:3) in the beginning (24:9) and made her dwelling place with Israel (24:8; see also Bar. 3:37). The praise of Wisdom continues with the Wisdom of Solomon. All things were created by God's word (*logos*; Wisd. Sol. 9:1), and Wisdom is unique (*monogenēs*; Wisd. Sol. 7:22). Wisdom, moreover, was present with Israel throughout its history (Wisd. Sol. 10–11), and the people were saved by Wisdom (Wisd. Sol. 9:18; 10:4).

On this foundation, the evangelist was able to articulate a Christology in which Jesus is identified as the fulfillment of the Torah revealed to Moses, the creative Logos that was in the beginning with God, and the Wisdom of God that tabernacled with Israel and makes its dwelling place among God's people. This constellation of themes drawn from the wisdom tradition explains the development of seemingly diverse elements in John. Like Wisdom, the Johannine Logos was God's agent in the creation, but unlike the praise of Wisdom in Proverbs and Sirach, the evangelist indicates that the Logos was not created first but was with God in the beginning. The Logos

enjoyed "glory" with God before the creation of the world (John 17:5). Then Jesus, as the Word become flesh, can claim that before Abraham was "I am" (John 8:58; compare 8:56) and that Isaiah saw his glory and spoke about him (John 12:41). As the creative Logos, Jesus continues to exercise sovereign and creative power. He can change water to wine, walk on water, and raise the dead. Like Wisdom, Jesus calls to the children of God and feeds them the bread of life and living water. In this respect, the influence of the wisdom tradition on John's Christology is evident not only in the prologue but throughout the Gospel. It is integral to both the actions and the sayings that characterize Jesus in the body of the Gospel.

Son of God

The confession that Jesus is the Son of God functions as a christological climax in the Gospel of Mark. Quite intentionally, according to Mark it is neither the miracles that Jesus does nor the teachings of Jesus that reveal his identity as the Son of God but only his death. The passion of Jesus in Mark is thereby emphasized over his power; the interpretations of Jesus as wisdom teacher and thaumaturge are subordinated to the gospel of his death and resurrection; and the revelatory function of Jesus' death is underscored. In Matthew and Luke, the confession that Jesus is the Son of God is given a literal rather than a metaphorical sense, and the virgin birth accounts serve to defend and explain the literal sense of the confession.

John, by contrast, omits any account of Jesus' birth, thereby opening the way to alternative understandings of the confession that Jesus was the Son of God. Simultaneously, John extends the significance of this confession and gives a much greater role to the Father–Son terminology. Rather than explaining or justifying the confession "Son of God," John treats it as an outgrowth of Wisdom/Logos Christology. To put the matter sharply, Jesus did not become the Son of God by means of the virgin birth; he always was the Son of God. The Johannine Jesus can therefore pray, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (17:5). The Synoptic Jesus never makes any such claim, and could not, given the Synoptics' more literal, physical grounding of Jesus' Sonship in the birth narratives. This transition allows John to present Jesus as the one who was sent by the Father, sent from above, because he is the preexistent Wisdom/Logos that became flesh in Jesus. He is the one who is in the Father's bosom (1:18), who was sent to reveal the Father. Indeed, he and the Father are one (10:30), yet all that he does and says has been given to him by the Father (5:19, 36; 8:28).

Whereas the centurion's confession that Jesus is the Son of God stands in a climactic position in Mark, in the Gospel of John both John the Baptist (1:34) and Nathanael (1:49) confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Because these confessions come so early in the Gospel, they establish Jesus' Sonship as the standard by which other responses to him will be measured. John the Baptist was sent from God to bear witness to Jesus (1:6-8, 15, 19-20), and Nathanael was "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (1:47). The Gospel therefore explicitly certifies both John and Nathanael as authoritative witnesses to Jesus.

The next set of references to the Son of God in John further clarifies his role. The Father sent the Son into the world so that those who would believe in him might have life (3:16, 36; see below the exploration of the giving of life in John's Christology). Jesus is the only, or unique, Son. John speaks of "children of God" (1:12; 11:52), but there is no other Son, and none like him.¹⁸

John 3:17 for the first time in the Gospel speaks explicitly of Jesus as the one sent by the Father. John uses both the verb *apostellein* (seventeen times) and the verb *peripein* (twenty-five times) when referring to Jesus as the one sent. Some of these sayings are cryptic ("him whom he has sent," 5:38; 6:29) while others are explicit ("the Father has sent me," 5:36). Recognizing that Jesus is the one sent by God, however, is virtually synonymous with believing in Jesus (see 11:42; 17:3, 8, 21, 23, 25). Although the Jewish concept of the emissary (*shaliah*) charged with the authority of the sender no doubt lies in the background, it is noteworthy that in John the language of sending is closely tied to the portrayal of Jesus as the Son. It is the Father who sends the Son. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Jesus rarely speaks of himself in the Synoptic Gospels as the one sent (see, however, Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 43; 9:48; 10:16; 20:13). While the role of Jesus as the one sent has roots in Jewish and early Christian tradition, in John sending is closely related to the Father-Son paradigm in its distinctive Johannine expression.

Because the Son was sent by the Father, the Son can do nothing on his own authority (5:19). Nevertheless, the Son does what the Father has given him to do. Like an apprentice, the Son does what he sees the Father doing, even raising the dead and giving life. A few verses later, the Son (that is, Son of God) assumes the role of the expected Son of man, judging the nations and raising the dead (5:25-27). Likewise, the Son says what the Father has given him to say (8:28).

The latter part of John 8 is a virtual paternity suit in which Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders each contest the other's claims. The Jews say their father is Abraham, while there is uncertainty about who Jesus' father is.

Jesus replies that if the Jews were children of Abraham, they would do what Abraham did. On the contrary, however, their efforts to kill Jesus show that their father is not Abraham, who rejoiced when he saw Jesus' day (8:56), but the devil, who has always been a murderer. Jesus does the will of his Father, and the Father glorifies him (8:54). The Father knows the Son (10:15), loves the Son (10:17), sanctifies the Son (10:36), and sends the Son to do his works (10:36). Indeed, the Father and the Son are one (10:30), and the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father (10:38). Nevertheless, the one revealed is greater than the revealer, the sender greater than the one sent: The Father is greater than the Son (14:28). The Father will therefore be glorified by the death of the Son (14:13; 17:1). Because the Son has revealed the Father as only the Son could, and because he has been sent to give life, the Gospel was written to lead those who read it to believe that Jesus is "the Christ [NRSV, 'Messiah'], the Son of God," and through believing to have eternal life (20:30-31).

The Gospel of John has therefore tied the title "Son of God" to the Gospel's Wisdom/Logos Christology. Although the title "Son of God" circulated elsewhere in early Christianity quite separate from the wisdom tradition and Logos Christology, John portrays a Son who was with the Father from the beginning and who does and says what the Father who sent him into the world gave him to do and say. It would be very difficult to conceive of such a characterization of the "Son of God" apart from John's Logos Christology.

Son of Man

A similar situation prevails in relation to the confession that Jesus is the Son of man. John uses the same terminology that we find in the other Gospels, but in a very distinctive way. The Synoptic Son of man sayings are traditionally divided into three categories: (1) the Son of man as a glorious figure who will come in the future to judge humanity (Matt. 16:27); (2) the earthly, suffering Son of man (Mark 8:31); and (3) the earthly Son of man apart from his suffering (Matt. 8:20; 11:19; Mark 2:10, 28; Luke 19:10; 22:48). The distinctive feature of the thirteen references to the Son of man in John is that they consistently deal with his descent to earth and his ascent to heaven (3:13; 6:62), his exaltation (3:14; 8:28; 12:34), and his glorification (12:23; 13:31). These are not unrelated. John presents a consistent picture of the Son of man that is another facet of the Christology we have found expressed by the Son of God sayings and the Wisdom/Logos Christology.

John reverses the sequence of the Synoptic Son of man scheme, in which Jesus will be raised, ascend, and then return in glory. In John, Jesus has come from above (descent) and will return to his Father (ascent). The Johannine Son of man sayings, therefore, speak not of Jesus' return to earth as judge in the future but of his return to heaven. For John, the all-important affirmation is not the "second coming" but the confession that the expected Judge and Messiah has already come: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light" (3:19).

If John is familiar with the tradition of the Son of man sayings preserved in the Synoptics, then, characteristically, he does not use the Synoptics as a source for his Son of man sayings. John 5:27, which claims that the Son has been given "authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man," echoes the first category of the Synoptic sayings, those that speak of the coming Son of man, endowed with authority to judge. The difference is that John perceives that the earthly Jesus was already the authorized Judge, and the judgment was occurring in individual responses to Jesus.

Similarly, the ascension of Jesus is not, for John, the prelude to Jesus' future authority, as it is in the Synoptics (see Matt. 28:18). Instead, Jesus' exaltation is the completion of his mission to reveal the Father. Three sayings that speak of the exaltation of the Son of man form a subgroup. These sayings all use the distinctive verb *to lift up* (*hypsoun*; 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). The "lifting up" of the Son of man does not occur after his humiliation on the cross, as in the Pauline confession in Philippians 2:5-11. Instead, the cross is the first step in his exaltation. When John speaks of Jesus' being lifted up, therefore, he invites the reader to reflect on the paradox that the lifting up of Jesus on the cross marked Jesus' ascent to the Father. The ascension, after all, is not narrated as a separate event in John. The result is that the Son of man sayings that predict Jesus' exaltation are the Johannine counterpart to the Synoptic passion predictions, the second group of the Synoptic Son of man sayings. The third group of the Synoptic Son of man sayings—the earthly Son of man apart from his suffering—does not have direct parallels in John.¹⁹ John, therefore, has not drawn his concept of Jesus as Son of man from the Synoptics but rather has reinterpreted the Son of man concept in light of the wisdom/Logos tradition in its distinctive Johannine development.²⁰

Moving from one reference to another, one can see that John progressively defines the role of the Son of man. In response to acclamations from his first disciples, Jesus announces that they will see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man (1:51). Since this announce-

ment recalls Jacob's dream vision of a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:12), the implication is that Jesus is the new Bethel, the new meeting place between heaven and earth. Jesus' role as heavenly revealer is secure because only the Son of man has descended from heaven, and no one else has ascended to heaven (3:13). There will be something paradoxical about this ascension, however. The Son of man must be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness (3:14). When Moses prayed that the people of Israel might be delivered from a plague of fiery serpents, the Lord commanded that he set a bronze serpent on a pole. If a serpent bit one of the Israelites, the victim could look to the bronze serpent and live (Num. 21:3-9). Similarly, Jesus' exaltation would provide life for those who looked to him in faith.

The next reference explains that the Son has not only the power to give life but also the authority to judge—the role of the Son of man that is emphasized in the Synoptic Gospels. Because Jesus has descended from above, like the personification of Wisdom, he can invite those who accept him to drink living water and eat the bread of life (6:27). The bread and drink he gives, however, are his own body and blood (6:53). Unless one eats his body and drinks his blood, one can have no part in him. The insight that holds this obscure reasoning together is that the revelation Jesus embodies in himself and gives to those who will receive it nourishes one's life in the spirit as surely as bread nourishes our physical bodies. The language is eucharistic, but the declaration has christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological significance. For the original readers of the Gospel, Jesus' pronouncement probably meant that those who would not break from the synagogue, make a public declaration of faith in Jesus, and join with the Christian community in its worship had no hope of life in Christ. The other side of the scandal is that the Son of man who gives himself to provide life for others will ascend again to the Father (6:52).

A verse from Isaiah unifies important Johannine themes: "See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (Isa. 52:13). But only when the Son of man has been lifted up will his identity and divine authority be evident (8:28). When Jesus asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35), the blind man to whom he has given sight asks who the Son of man is. With delightful wit, Jesus says to the man born blind, "You have seen him!" When the Greeks come and ask to see Jesus, he realizes that the hour has come for him to be glorified. He can no longer remain a provincial messiah (12:23). It is now time for him to be lifted up so that he can draw all people to himself (12:32). Although Jesus has not mentioned the Son of man in this immediate context, the Son of man was

referred to in the first two lifting-up sayings (3:14; 8:28), so the crowd responds by asking the identity of the Son of man. The hour has come, and quickly the events that will lead to Jesus' death are set in motion. When Judas goes out to betray him, Jesus announces, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him" (13:31). For John, that is the essential truth about Jesus. The Son of man has already come. He has been lifted up and glorified, and the judgment is determined by how we respond to his revelation of the Father.²¹

John's portrayal of Jesus as the Logos incarnate, against the background of the wisdom tradition, has therefore also had a profound impact on John's interpretation of Jesus as the Son of man. Although the Gospel uses the title "Son of man," the Son of man concept functions quite differently in John than it does in the Jewish sources or the Synoptic Gospels. The brief survey here supports Moody Smith's conclusion:

Apparently, the meaning and function of the Son of Man title in John stands closer to Johannine christology generally than to the several uses of the term in the Synoptic Gospels. Thus it would be difficult to speak of a Son of Man christology in the Gospel of John that stands out distinctly from a Son of God christology.²²

The Gospel of John has recast the Son of man concept in light of the Gospel's interpretation of Jesus as the Son of God sent from above, who is the Logos incarnate. The emphasis has shifted from the future role of the Son of man to Jesus' present fulfillment of traditional eschatological expectations. Jesus' authority as the Son of man, moreover, is derived from his identity as the Son of God and the Logos. Again, it would be hard to understand this recasting of the Son of man apart from John's Logos Christology.

The One in Whom There Is Life

One of the first affirmations that John makes about the Logos is "What has come into being in him was life" (1:3-4), and this motif runs throughout the Gospel. The end result of the work of the one who is Wisdom/Logos, the Son of God, and the Son of man is not "salvation" (which occurs only once in John; 4:22) or "justification" (*dikaioynē* occurs only twice in John; 16:8, 10, and then in the sense of "righteousness" rather than "justification") but "life" (which occurs thirty-six times in John, seventeen of which are in the phrase "eternal life"). Moreover, John's understanding of eternal life is also distinctive. Characteristically, John does not regard eternal life as something believers will receive in the future. Those who believe al-

ready have eternal life. They have crossed over from death into life (5:24, 1 John 3:14). The dominant reality of eternal life is not quantitative but qualitative: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The purpose of the Gospel, therefore, is an extension of the work of the Revealer: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31).

The characterization of Jesus as the giver of life is one of the themes that unifies John 2-4. Jesus' first public act is the changing of water to wine at the wedding at Cana. The imagery of a wedding and the symbolism of wine both suggest that in the provision of the best wine at the end, Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament visions of the end time (Isa. 25:6-8; Zech. 10:6-7; Joel 2:19, 24; Rev. 19:7-9). Jesus not only provides the good wine; he is the bridegroom (John 3:29).

The scene in the temple in John 2:14-22 differs from the Synoptic parallels in that Jesus' act of overturning the tables and driving out the money changers serves to set up his pronouncement "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). This saying occurs elsewhere, at the trial of Jesus and at the mockery at the cross, but in none of the other accounts of the demonstration in the temple. John interprets this saying as a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus and adds that after his resurrection the disciples remembered that he had made this claim (2:22). Through his resurrection, therefore, Jesus provides a new place in which the glory of God can dwell on earth.

In John 3, Jesus declares that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he or she is born from above (3:3; compare Matt. 18:3). Nicodemus misunderstands because he fails to recognize that Jesus is the one through whom a person can receive this new life from above. He is the Son of man who has descended from above (3:13), and when he is lifted up, whoever believes in him may have eternal life, just as the act of looking to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness gave life to the dying Israelites (3:14-15). The Father's purpose in sending the Son was that he might give eternal life to all who believe in him (3:16, 36).

In the conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus again offers life, this time in the image of living water (4:14). Water is a necessity for life, especially in an arid region, and like wine, "living water" had become a symbol for the eschatological fulfillment of blessing for God's people, both in the prophetic writings (Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:1-2) and in the

writings of Qumran (CD 3:16–17, 19:34). The hymns of the community at Qumran praise the Teacher of Righteousness as the source of streams of living water that water the plantation in the wilderness (1QH 16 (=8):4, 6–7a, 13b–14a, 16). Whether in direct relationship to the claims for the Teacher of Righteousness or not, John appropriates this claim for Jesus: Jesus is the source of living water for all who thirst (John 4:14; 7:37–38).

As if to underscore the validity of this claim, the next act in the Gospel narrative shows Jesus giving life to an official's son (4:46–54). After an introduction in which death is imminent (4:47, 49), three references to believing (4:48, 50, 54) are followed by three references to living (4:50, 51, 53).

The greatest concentration of references to Jesus as the giver of life is in John 5 and 6. After the healing of the man at the pool, Jesus claims that those who believe in him have eternal life. They have "passed from death to life" (5:24). The Son has life in himself (5:26), but his opponents refuse to accept life from him (5:39–40). In the discourse that follows and interprets the feeding of the multitude, Jesus tells the people to strive for the food that endures to eternal life, the food that the Son of man will give them (6:27). Jesus is himself the bread of life, given by the Father, and all who eat of his flesh and drink of his blood have life in him. References to life occur twelve times in this discourse (6:27–68). With wonderful subtlety, therefore, the rhetoric of the discourse sets up Peter's confession at the end of the discourse. In contrast to the Synoptic accounts, Peter does not claim that Jesus is the Christ. Instead he says, "You have the words of eternal life. . . . You are the Holy One of God" (6:68).

As the good shepherd, Jesus has come that his sheep might have life (10:10, 28) "and have it abundantly" (10:10). The images of abundance in the Gospel underscore this claim. Jesus supplies wine in abundance, points to springs of living water and fields white for harvest. He multiplies loaves and fish so that there is more than enough for all. Rivers of living water flow from him, and in John 21 he directs the disciples to a bountiful catch of fish.

Gathering up all the previous references to the giving of life, the raising of Lazarus paints a narrative portrait of Jesus as the giver of life. Earlier Jesus had announced that the dead would come forth from their tombs (5:28–29). Now, as a sign that Jesus is the one in whom all hopes for the future are fulfilled, now and in the future, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead and calls him out from his tomb.

Like a seed falling into the ground, Jesus must die if he is going to give life (12:24–25). The remainder of the Gospel focuses on the preparations for Jesus' death and the meaning of his death and resurrection. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6), and eternal life is defined as know-

ing God through Jesus (17:3). The Gospel, therefore, is written in order that its readers might have life (20:31).

The Gospel of John has no distinctive title for Jesus as the giver of life, but this theme is articulated in the prologue and then provides a unifying perspective from which to understand the end result of Jesus' mission as the one who reveals the Father and takes away the sin of the world. Moreover, because the theme is introduced in the Logos hymn at the beginning of the Gospel, readers interpret all subsequent allusions to Jesus' life-giving role in light of its connection with the work of the Logos.

The "I Am" Sayings in Context

Jesus' messianic identity is a secret in the Gospel of Mark, and much of Mark's plot turns on how those around Jesus learn of his identity. Jesus makes no explicit messianic claims (at least not until his trial; Mark 14:62), and neither his teachings nor his miracles disclose his divinity. Only at his death does anyone exclaim, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39). In sharp contrast, the first disciples use a whole series of christological titles for Jesus in the first chapter of John, and Jesus makes repeated claims regarding his messianic identity in the form of "I am" sayings. Complementing Jesus' use of titles, "I am" sayings, and aphoristic sayings, the Gospel's narration of Jesus' actions adds a further layer of christological interpretation.

The "I am" sayings in John can be divided into three groups: (1) sayings in which the phrase occurs in common speech, such as "I am he" or "It is I" (4:26; 6:20; 18:5, 6, 8; compare 9:9); (2) sayings in which the phrase is used in an absolute sense as a solemn formula of revelation, echoing Exodus 3:14 (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19); and (3) sayings in which "I am" is followed by one of seven different complements:

1. "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48)
or "the living bread" (6:51)
or "the bread that came down from heaven" (6:51)
2. "I am the light of the world" (8:12)
3. "I am the gate" (10:7, 9)
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25)
6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6)
7. "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5)

Further attention needs to be given to the ways in which the "I am" sayings are related to their narrative contexts in the Gospel. The first two "I am"

sayings in the Gospel use the phrase in ordinary speech, but in a context of self-disclosure. In the conversation with the woman at the well, which revolves around the woman's progressive recognition of Jesus' identity, Jesus responds to the woman's reference to the messiah by saying, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (4:26). Jesus' response is tantamount to saying, "I am the Christ." The second "I am" saying, which is also generally interpreted as an instance of ordinary speech, occurs in the context of Jesus' walking on the water—which is treated as a divine epiphany.²³ The occurrence of the "I am" saying here has a parallel in the Markan account of the walking on the water (Mark 6:50), which shows that the usage probably predates John and is drawn from early Christian tradition. Rudolf Schnackenburg plausibly suggests that the use of "I am" in this context suggested the idiom to John.²⁴ If so, the occurrence of this "I am" saying in the context of Jesus' dramatic act of self-disclosure leads to the absolute use of "I am" in John 8:24, 28, and 58 and to the first of the uses of "I am" with a complement, which occurs in the discourse on the bread from heaven that follows in the rest of John 6 (compare verses 35, 48, and 51).

Some years ago, Franklin Young observed that the Gospel of John has numerous contacts with the book of Isaiah.²⁵ In Deutero-Isaiah, "I am" is used virtually as a name for God; for instance, Isaiah 43:10–11; 43:25 (where the LXX uses *Ego eimi*); 51:12; 52:6. The Johannine Jesus, therefore, speaks in the same idiom in which Yahweh speaks in Deutero-Isaiah. One instance in the Synoptics approaches the absolute use of "I am" in Deutero-Isaiah and John (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8): "Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." This saying is important because it provides a parallel for the use of the formula to sum up Jesus' messianic identity and authority.

The first of the absolute "I am" sayings (8:24) occurs after Jesus' claim that he is going away, an allusion to his death and return to the Father (8:21; cf. 7:33–35; 13:33). The connection between Jesus' claim to divinity through the use of this idiom and his exaltation as the Son of man becomes explicit a few verses later: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me" (John 8:28). As we have seen, the lifting-up sayings serve much the same function as the passion predictions in the Synoptics, and the Son of man sayings typically address Jesus' exaltation. When Jesus is lifted up, the people will know that "I am he," and he will draw all people to himself (12:32) so that whoever believes might have eternal life (3:14–16). Jesus is both one with the Father (10:30) and absolutely dependent on the Father (8:28–14:28). John 8:28, therefore, is

both christological and soteriological; life comes only by believing in Jesus as the one who can say, "I am," in the absolute sense.

In the wisdom tradition, Wisdom often speaks in the first person, but the figure of Wisdom does not use the "I am" formula. Nevertheless, the wisdom tradition helps explain the use of the "I am" formula in John. When Jesus claims, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), the use of "I am" in the absolute sense has merged with the claim of preexistence in the prologue that arose from the influence of the wisdom tradition on John's Logos Christology. Readers of the Gospel, therefore, read the "I am" saying in John 8:58 in light of the frame of reference set by the prologue.

In addition to the absolute "I am" sayings, John contains a series of "I am" sayings with complements. Most of the complements are drawn from the Old Testament, where they are often used as images for Israel. In the Gospel, these complements provide rudimentary images that further interpret Jesus' identity and functions. None of the Synoptic parables appears in John, and the Johannine Jesus does not use parables to describe any reality beyond himself. Instead, the imagery of the Gospel serves a christological function also. Jesus is the good shepherd, the seed falling into the ground, and the true vine.

The "I am" sayings with complements are also closely related to their narrative contexts and often function to crystallize in a single assertion the image that is being developed in that section of the Gospel. The first of these sayings, "I am the bread of life" (6:35), follows the feeding of the five thousand and the "I am" saying in the context of the walking on the water (see above). Jesus has entered into a dialogue with the crowd that found him again the next day, looking for another free meal. He challenges them to seek instead to fulfill their deeper needs (6:27). They challenge Jesus with the quotation from Exodus 16:4 and 16:15 in verse 31, and Jesus begins to interpret this text in relation to himself. "He" was not Moses but God, who gave bread to their ancestors. The bread, moreover, is not the manna but ultimately Jesus himself. The "I am" saying serves, therefore, to crystallize this narrative movement into a single memorable and emphatic pronouncement. If one does not eat the bread, one has no part in Jesus. Although the Gospel of John does not contain the words of institution at the Last Supper, this section suggests that the Johannine community knew and observed the Lord's Supper. These words, too, have christological, soteriological, and sociological significance. Unless one broke from the synagogue, publicly declared faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and joined the Christian community in its worship, one had no life in Christ.

The pattern of crystallizing narrative imagery in an "I am" saying is evident with the remaining "I am" sayings with complements. The prologue affirms, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (1:3-4). In John 8:12, before the giving of sight to the blind man, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world . . . the light of life." The claim that Jesus is the light of the world captures the revelatory significance of the incarnation. In a sense, we are all born blind, and we all need to come to sight. Otherwise, we love darkness and find ourselves following those who go out into the night with torches to arrest the light of the world.

The allegory of the sheep and the shepherd gives rise to two "I am" sayings. Much of John 10 is devoted to identifying the sheep, the hirelings, the door, and the shepherd. The background of this chapter is probably to be found in the references to sheep and shepherds in the imagery of the Old Testament (especially Ezekiel 34). Israel is pictured as a flock of sheep, and her leaders are the shepherds. The issue is then raised of who the true shepherds are, and who the hirelings are. In the verse after Jesus' claim that he has come to give life to his sheep, he says, "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14). The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The saying functions as another Johannine passion prediction, but Jesus will later tell Peter that he, too, will lay down his life as a shepherd (13:37-38; compare 21:15-19).

Jesus is also the good shepherd because he knows his sheep and his sheep know him (10:14). This part of the allegory describes the intimate union between the believer and Jesus that Jesus will speak of in the Farewell Discourse, where he invites the disciples to abide in him and he will abide in them. Knowing the truth means the full and open reception of God's revelation in Jesus.

In John 11, just before the raising of Lazarus, Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). The raising of Lazarus then dramatically animates John's claim that Jesus has come to give life. (See the discussion of this theme above.) The two "I am" sayings in the Farewell Discourse seem to serve to articulate themes that will be developed in the next verses. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Following the typical pattern of Johannine misunderstandings, Jesus has introduced an ambiguous reference, in this case preparing a place for the disciples, and Thomas has confessed that they do not understand what Jesus is talking about. The "I am" saying is meant to clarify, at least for the reader, that Jesus himself is the means, the process, and the goal. He is the giver of life; but the disciples still do not understand, as Philip's request in the next verses shows.

Jesus' claim that he is the true vine (15:1, 5) again employs an image that the Old Testament uses for Israel (Isa. 5:1-7; Ps. 80:8-13). The children of God (John 1:12; 11:52) abide in Jesus and draw their life from him. They are one, just as he and the Father are one.

Our brief review of the Johannine "I am" sayings that have a complement suggests that these sayings function as aphoristic summaries of the narrative pictures John paints of Jesus. These sayings are generally tied to their narrative context and crystallize in vivid aphorisms elements of John's christological imagery. Many of these sayings, moreover, are related to John's portrayal of Jesus as the giver of life, his preexistence, or his divinity. When the Johannine Jesus says, "I am," therefore, the reader of the Gospel understands that it is the Logos who has become flesh who is able to speak in this way.

CONCLUSION

We have surveyed the two dominant approaches to Johannine Christology: proposals regarding the stages in its development and the range of christological titles John uses. Neither, however, adequately captures the nuances of John's Christology. Developmental theories typically offer persuasive accounts of the history of the Johannine community and illuminating explanations regarding how Johannine Christology provoked or responded to each new crisis in the community. As illuminating as some of these theories are, they stop short of explaining how the various stages or strands of thought are now related in what we know as the Gospel of John. Similarly, descriptions of Johannine Christology that survey the christological titles in John often treat each title as a static entity that can be extracted from its narrative contexts and understood in detached isolation. Our survey, however, suggests that the christological titles are intertwined in the Gospel. No one title can be understood apart from its narrative contexts and its conceptual relationship to other titles and to the presentation of Jesus in the Gospel as a whole. In particular, the Gospel's Logos Christology, which is generally regarded as a late stage in the development of Johannine thought, exerts a controlling influence on the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus from the prologue on. The "Son of God" or "Son" (of the Father) is John's dominant title for Jesus, but it is grounded in the Logos concept in important ways. The Son of God is the one sent to reveal the Father, take away the sin of the world, and bring life. The Son of man sayings are related, in turn, to the Son of God and Son sayings.

If these observations about John's Christology are valid, advances in our

understanding of John's Christology will depend on our ability to interpret the Gospel's thought holistically, as a construct of the Gospel as a whole, and to perceive more clearly the interrelationships between concepts we have typically kept separate and compartmentalized. Even so, John's Word will continue to elude our grasp. The light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness cannot comprehend it.

NOTES

1. Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*, Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
2. Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
3. *Ibid.*, 226.
4. *Ibid.*, 232–34.
5. J. Louis Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 96.
6. *Ibid.*, 104.
7. *Ibid.*, 105.
8. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 36–40.
9. Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 17 (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996).
10. *Ibid.*, 88, citing D. Moody Smith, "The Milieu of the Johannine Miracle Source," in *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources, and Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), 77.
11. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 93.
12. *Ibid.*, 115.
13. *Ibid.*, 144.
14. *Ibid.*, 156.
15. *Ibid.*, 171.
16. *Ibid.*, 189.
17. *Ibid.*, 192.
18. See Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: The Translation of Jn 3,16 in the R.S.V.," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 213–19.
19. Rudolf Schnackenburg, "The 'Son of Man' in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Gospel according to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 1:536.
20. *Ibid.*, 1:541.
21. See further *ibid.*, 1:529–42.
22. D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 132.
23. See Gail O'Day, "John 6:15–21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 149–59.
24. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 2:87.
25. Franklin W. Young, "A Study of the Relation of Isaiah to the Fourth Gospel," *Zeitschrift für die neuwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1955): 215–33.