

'IS NOT THIS JESUS, THE SON OF JOSEPH . . . ?' (JOHN 6.42)

Johannine Christology as a Challenge to Faith

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In John's gospel, Jesus' fourth sign, the feeding of the five thousand, provides the context for his claim that he is the bread of life (6.35; see v. 48) and for the subsequent disputing of that claim by the Jews (6.41). The issue of Jesus' identity is soon raised in the Jews' question: 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' (6.42). What information about Jesus does the evangelist expect his readers already to have grasped when faced with this issue? They know that the Jews' information about Jesus' parentage is correct: Jesus was unambiguously identified as the son of Joseph by the disciples in 1.45. Yet the evangelist has already informed his readers that Jesus is at the same time, and paradoxically, he who has come down from heaven (cf. 3.13, 31; 6.33, 38). It follows that the readers ought to be able to recognize in the present context that Jesus' opponents have not perceived and accepted Jesus' heavenly origin. Consequently, they are now in a position to appreciate that when the Jews ask this question there is an irony in the situation. The Jews puzzle over the contradiction that the one who is the son of Joseph has come down from heaven, but Jesus' reply, including as it does the appeal to believe and gain eternal life (6.47), makes it clear that the Jews lack the faith which alone would enable them to accept that the claim of the man Jesus to heavenly origin is justified.

The passage raises two important questions with regard to the Johannine presentation of Jesus:

(1) What is the content of Johannine Christology? Specifically, what does the evangelist tell his readers about Jesus in his gospel so that to raise the issue of Jesus' identity at any point is sufficient to perplex his opponents?

(2) How does the evangelist treat this presentation of Jesus in this and equivalent passages?

This paper will begin by attempting to provide answers to these two questions, and this will lead to a consideration of the following two propositions:

(A) that Johannine Christology has in the gospel a particular function in that it is used to serve the evangelist's purpose as expressed in 20.31;

(B) that John's gospel should not, ultimately, be treated as a study in the nature of the person of Christ.

1. *The Content of Johannine Christology*

We turn first to review briefly the content of Christology in the fourth gospel.

In his book *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* John Knox writes, 'We can have the humanity without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both.'¹ To describe Jesus as at once pre-existent and fully human is to state a paradox which Knox at least² finds unacceptable, yet it seems clear that neither Jesus' identification with the pre-existent Logos nor his real humanity is either modified or denied by the fourth evangelist.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature in Johannine Christology, and certainly the most striking, is the identification of the man Jesus with the pre-existent Logos. This theme, introduced in the Prologue, is never relinquished throughout the gospel. It is implicit in John's description of Jesus as sent into the world (e.g. 3.17; see 3.34; 5.23; etc.), in the ascending and descending motif (e.g. 3.13; 6.62), and in Jesus' statements which refer to his 'having come' (e.g. 5.43; 7.28; 9.39). It is explicit in the claims placed upon the lips of Jesus himself: 'before Abraham was, I am' (8.58); 'glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made' (17.5); 'my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world' (17.24). Thus John presents the man Jesus of Nazareth as one who, before the incarnation, was a divine being existing with God from eternity and as one who 'remembers events which occurred in his pre-existent state'.³

Equally, however, the references to Jesus' humanity are not lacking and there seems here no attempt to modify its reality.⁴

Ranging from the casual detail, such as weariness (4.6), thirst (4.7; 19.28), particular affection for certain individuals (11.5), and the factual statement of Jesus' known human parentage (1.45; 6.42) to the emphasis on Jesus' agitation in the face of death (cf. 11.33; 12.27; 13.21), the reality of his flesh (6.53-56) and the Passion,⁵ the evidence seems to suggest that for the evangelist the humanity of Jesus was not in question, but that it is simply assumed.⁶

Futhermore, a full recognition by John of the humanity of Jesus is surely indispensable to his purpose on two specific counts.

The first of these concerns John's use of 'glorification' to speak of Jesus' crucifixion (7.39; 11.4; 12.23; 13.31; 17.1). He believes that the glory of God, possessed by Jesus and revealed by him only to the eye of faith throughout his incarnate life,⁷ is supremely evident in the humiliation of the cross.⁸ We are left in no doubt that the incarnate Christ manifests the full glory of God,⁹ recognizable from the Old Testament as denoting God's presence and the revelation of his nature,¹⁰ but there is a new factor here, namely, the means whereby such revelation takes place. This is nowhere else than in the flesh of Jesus, that is, his incarnate life and, supremely, his death.¹¹ Thus the humanity of Jesus is here seen by John as the indispensable medium of the revelation of the divine glory. Indeed, the very fact that for John salvation lies in the death of Jesus is in itself sufficient reason for his assuming that Jesus' humanity was genuine.¹²

Secondly we see the necessity of Jesus' humanity in John's presentation of one feature of the relation of the incarnate Son to the Father. The following evidence suggests that this relation is envisaged as one which the believer may attain and which is mediated to him by the Son. Jesus, who alone has seen the Father, mediates this vision to the disciple (1.18; 6.46; 14.9). Through him the disciples hear the words of the Father (8.28; 12.49; see 10.3-4, 27), and they inherit the glory of the incarnate Son with its connotation of suffering and death (17.22). The disciples are to participate in the relation of Son to Father in terms of unity (10.30; cf. 17.21), knowledge (10.14-15; cf. 17.25), and the love which finds its expression in perfect obedience (8.29; 10.17; 14.31; cf. 15.10, 13-14; see also 13.34-35). Jesus, the one sent by the Father (see e.g. 5.23-24; 6.44), whose works are proof of this (5.36; 14.10-11) will, after his death, delegate to the disciples the power to perform greater works (14.12). Even the risen Christ calls them 'brethren' since they are children of the same God (20.17).¹³

From this evidence we may draw two conclusions: first, that the

relation of incarnate Son to Father is presented as a genuinely human relation of man to God since only thus can it be offered to the believer as a real possibility in his own life; and second, that in this case too the genuine humanity of Jesus is vital to the Johannine presentation.

John's Christology, then, presents us with a paradox: Jesus is fully human and yet fully identified with the divine pre-existent Logos. Both of these elements, moreover, are seen by the evangelist as essential to what he wishes to say about Jesus.

2. The Johannine Presentation of Jesus

We will now attempt to assess how this paradoxical presentation of Jesus is treated by the evangelist within the gospel-narrative. Here our initial passage from ch. 6 will be relevant, and further examples from the text will be considered.

First of all, it should be pointed out that the evangelist is fully aware of the disconcerting nature of his presentation of Jesus. This writer, who is prepared to state in his Prologue $\delta \lambda \acute{o} \gamma \omicron \varsigma \sigma \acute{\alpha} \rho \xi \epsilon \gamma \acute{\epsilon} \nu \epsilon \tau \omicron$, is not one to shrink from the impact which this juxtaposition of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus inevitably produces. Indeed, this Christological paradox, far from being avoided, seems to receive deliberate stress: nothing less than a literal interpretation of $\lambda \acute{o} \gamma \omicron \varsigma$ as pre-existent divinity and an interpretation of $\sigma \acute{\alpha} \rho \xi$ as genuine humanity can do justice to John's statement in 1.14,¹⁴ and in the body of the gospel the identity of Jesus continues to perplex those who encounter him. We have already noted that in ch. 6 the Jews, who know that Jesus is the son of Joseph, cannot understand how he can claim to have come down from heaven (6.41-42). To this other examples can easily be added. In ch. 7 the people in Jerusalem, because they know 'where this man comes from', wonder how Jesus can be the Christ (7.27). Moreover, Jesus' opponents' perplexity over his claims soon turns to rage and rejection and they seek either to arrest him (see e.g. 7.30; 11.57) or to stone him (see 8.59; 10.31) because, as they explain to Jesus, 'you, being a man, make yourself God' (10.33).

Indeed, it is largely in the signs, and the discourses associated with them, that the issue of Jesus' identity is constantly raised. That the man Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, should heal the sick, give sight to the blind, feed the hungry and raise the dead in itself calls for

explanation: 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?' (7.31); 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' (9.16); 'Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?' (10.21). Thus the signs create an atmosphere of speculation about Jesus' identity, for in them Jesus reveals more and more clearly who he is, and this forces a division of opinion about him.

As we turn to consider in detail further examples from the 'Book of Signs' which elucidate John's treatment of the paradox involved in the issue of Jesus' identity, it will be seen that the raising of this crucial issue (either by a question put to Jesus or to others or a claim made by Jesus himself) is the first of two elements which are always present. The second element is the evangelist's analysis of the reaction to this issue. He will frequently indicate by skilful use of irony that Jesus' opponents have failed to grasp what his own faith, which he presses upon his readers, knows to be true. Indeed, as we shall see, it is this perspective of faith which, to the evangelist, is all-important. However, his emphasis is not on the kind of instant assent commanded by a super-human act. Thus it is not the recognition that Jesus can perform the miraculous that leads to faith: Jesus' ability to do this is never ultimately disputed even by the authorities who oppose him (see 11.47), and the evangelist certainly entertains the possibility that merely to witness the signs may not lead to faith (see 12.37). The real test which faces those who witness the signs is whether or not they have faith to see beyond the external and sensational and accept and understand the real meaning which John intends the signs to convey. Accordingly, he does not intend his readers to derive their faith from a display of 'signs and wonders' (see 4.48), for in these signs what Jesus in fact reveals is his glory (see 2.11), and to see in his work the glory of God demands the faculty of πίστις (see 11.40).

The first example is taken from Jesus' third sign, the healing of the paralysed man. Here the Jews' opposition to him begins to assume the quality of murderous intent. They initially oppose Jesus because he has healed on the Sabbath, thus breaking the Sabbath law (5.16). Jesus answers them by claiming that this Sabbath activity of his is the activity of God (5.17), and this is why, John comments, 'the Jews sought all the more to kill him' (5.18). R.E. Brown doubts whether, in view of 14.28, John would intend his readers to understand from the Jews' accusation that Jesus is 'making himself equal with God' (5.18) that this is substantially the truth which John wishes them to

grasp.¹⁵ Yet Brown has failed to take into account that there is an irony in this situation, and that the evangelist is probably exploiting it to the full. The claim Jesus makes in 5.17 ('My Father is working still, and I am working') is one he alone, as incarnate Logos, is fully justified in making, for John has already informed us that θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (1.1), and the statement implies that as incarnate Logos Jesus is now at work with God in the new creation as he was in the old (see 1.3). The irony consists in the evangelist's presentation of the Jews as failing to perceive what he has informed his readers is the truth of the matter, namely, that the claim of the man Jesus is justified since he is the Logos incarnate. The Jews see in Jesus only a man who *makes himself* equal with God, and this is why they construe Jesus' statement as blasphemy. Moreover, the passage beginning at 5.19 does nothing to diminish Jesus' divinity, for as Son the honour given to the Father is his due (5.23), but instead it explains that Jesus' equality with God is not to be understood in the sense that he is independent of God, but rather that he is the unique revealer of God (see 1.18).

Here we may include the situation described in 10.33 which is a good parallel. The Jews object to the fact that one who is so obviously human is claiming divinity: they stone Jesus 'because you, being a man, make yourself God' (10.33). Of course the form in which their objection is expressed indicates that they have already judged Jesus to be a blasphemer. But once more we encounter the Johannine irony, for, expressed in this form, namely, that Jesus is a man who *makes himself* God, the claim could be regarded as genuinely blasphemous. Yet it is also the case, as Lindars argues, that 'what they say (when properly understood) is precisely the truth which John wishes to assert'.¹⁶ In this case even Brown has no reservations. He points out that the error in the statement 'was not in the description of Jesus as divine' but rather 'that he was *making himself* God'.¹⁷

Before he narrates the healing of the man born blind, John presents us with two whole chapters where an atmosphere of speculation about Jesus' identity prevails. Throughout, the evangelist's approach to the question of Jesus' identity is always an ironical one, and this irony is intended to be instructive to his readers. Thus, when the people of Jerusalem raise an objection to the authenticity of Jesus' claim to Messiahship on the grounds that his origin fails to conform with their tradition that the origin of the Messiah would be unknown,

their objection is dismissed as irrelevant (7.27-29).¹⁸ John does not enter into any discussion either on this point, or on the question of Jesus' birthplace (see 7.41-42), for he knows that Jesus' claim to Messiahship does not rest on such proofs, but that faith alone can perceive it.¹⁹ In 7.28 Jesus does not deny his human origin.²⁰ The irony consists in the fact that these people are able to see nothing *more* than this in Jesus. What they manifestly lack, as Jesus himself indicates, is knowledge of God, and this prevents them from recognizing in Jesus his divine commission (7.28, 29). In this way these people have demonstrated by the nature of the objection they raise that, like the Jews,²¹ they have failed to perceive the truth of God in Jesus, and so lack the faith to recognize his Messiahship. Moreover, this is soon borne out in their reaction for, like the Pharisees, they attempt to arrest him (see 7.30, 32, 44).

The debate between Jesus and the Jews in ch. 8 follows much the same lines. As Logos incarnate Jesus is the bringer of life and light (8.12; see 1.4; 3.19) whose identity will be fully revealed at his 'lifting up' on the cross (8.28). That the Jews lack the faith to recognize this is made clear when Jesus warns them that they will die in their sins unless they believe *ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι* (8.24). It could be said that it is in the context of this warning that John presents to his readers a full-scale analysis of the character and fate of those who reject Jesus. Chapter 8 depicts what amounts to a complete breakdown in communication between the two sides, and the irony is ever present in the Jews' constant failure to perceive in Jesus what to the eye of faith would be obvious. Lacking in faith the Jews can only judge 'according to the flesh' (8.15) (or 'by appearances', see 7.24). Thus when Jesus tells them he is going away, they take it that he means to commit suicide (8.21-22); when he speaks of the one who sent him, they do not understand that he speaks of the Father (8.26-27); finally, when he claims pre-existence, their reaction indicates that they have judged him guilty of blasphemy (8.58-59). In this they show that their true origin is diametrically opposed to that of Jesus himself. In contrast to Jesus they are 'from below' and 'of this world' (8.23), for in their rejection of Jesus and desire for his death they cannot claim to be descendants of Abraham, the man of faith (8.40). On the contrary, they show that they have ranged themselves on the side of the ruler of this world who is thus their true father and with whom they will be judged (8.44; see 12.31). Moreover, even their questions: 'Where is your Father?' (8.19); 'Who are you?' (8.25); 'Are you greater than our

father Abraham, who died?' (8.53)²² are shown, ironically, to derive from the ignorance of unbelief. Like the people of Jerusalem, the Jews lack the knowledge of God which would enable them to perceive that Jesus comes from God (8.19, 42, 54-55).

As the evangelist continues to narrate the events of the public ministry (chs. 9-12), the tension increases. The more clearly Jesus reveals in the signs who he is (see 9.5, 39; 11.25) the deeper the paradox of identity becomes and the more furious the controversy about him (see 9.27-29; 10.19-21; 11.45-47; 12.34). Again, it is made clear that it is always the faculty of faith which perceives in Jesus' activity the activity of God. The man born blind, for example, recognizes immediately that Jesus is from God while the Pharisees remain ignorant (9.29-33) for he is able to believe in Jesus and they are not (9.35-38, 40-41), and when, later, the Jews request Jesus to tell them plainly that he is the Christ, they are informed that this has already been made clear in the signs, but that their continued ignorance reveals their lack of faith (10.24-25). The faith which alone perceives the glory of God is also requested of the irresolute Martha who, although she has already affirmed her belief in Jesus (see 11.27), now quails before the reality of her brother's return to life (11.40). Finally, when the crowd asks, 'Who is this Son of man?', the answer they receive is the only answer possible—an exhortation to believe in the light (12.34-36).

A. The Function of Johannine Christology

In the previous two sections we have attempted to assess the content of Johannine Christology and the evangelist's treatment of it within the gospel drama. The following conclusions have been reached: first, that John's Christology consists of a paradoxical presentation in which the evangelist claims for Jesus real humanity and full divinity; and secondly, that this is a paradox which John neither avoids nor attempts to resolve. Furthermore it seems that he prefers to raise the issue of Jesus' identity so as to bring into prominence the impact of his presentation, and that reaction to this issue is, for him, all-important.

If these conclusions are correct, then we may surmise another, namely, that John's interests do not lie in the area of attempting a solution to the paradox of pre-existence and real manhood in Jesus Christ²³ such as was later undertaken, for example, by Chalcedon,

but rather that he seeks to give us a deliberate and uncompromising expression of that paradox to carefully calculated effect. This leads us to suggest that the objective of a study of the divinity and humanity of Christ in John's gospel cannot be to attempt to resolve the paradox, but that the very difficulty it presents must have in some way served the evangelist's purpose. We must now attempt to ascertain what that purpose was, and how well it was served by the divine-human paradox in John's Christology.

At the end of the gospel proper, the evangelist states his purpose quite clearly. He has written 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (20.31). John's intention, therefore, is to persuade his readers to believe in the significance of Jesus as he himself understands it.²⁴ But why is he so urgent that they should share his faith?

John believes that as a result of the entry of the Logos into human history, as light into a world of darkness (see 1.4, 9; 3.19), a situation of judgment has come about. Thus whereas God's intention in sending his Son is not to condemn the world but to save it (3.17; see 12.47), nevertheless the very presence of the Son in the world effects a judgment, for he challenges all who encounter him to make the momentous decision either to accept or reject him and thus to determine either their salvation or their condemnation (see 3.18-19; 5.24; 9.39; 12.48). Moreover John makes quite clear to his readers what are the consequences of such a decision. He sees it as nothing less than a matter of life and death: the man who reacts with faith enjoys eternal life (see, for example, 3.36), but he who does not believe will die in his sins (8.24). Thus, in this situation where there are only two possible reactions to him, Jesus' presence can have the effect either of life-giving or of judging.²⁵ It now seems obvious, in view of this consideration, that John writes so that his readers may not 'come into judgment' (5.24) but that 'believing' they may have life (20.31).

We have seen what John believes to be the consequences of the decision which men must make when they encounter the person of Jesus. But what is there about the incarnate Son which is so startling that it provokes this decision, and is so unique and unprecedented that a reaction to him can only be a reaction either of absolute faith or of absolute rejection? This is the point where, it seems, John's paradoxical presentation of Jesus as both human and divine has crucial relevance, for what is startling about the man Jesus is that he

makes, explicitly or implicitly, the inherently outrageous claim to be continuous in existence with the divine Logos. As we have seen, he claims to have come down from heaven (6.38), to be working with the Father (5.17), to be one with the Father (10.30), to be sent from God (see, for example, 7.29), to have existed before Abraham (8.58), and so on. This is the claim which Jesus' opponents cannot comprehend and which causes them to reject him as a blasphemer (see 5.18; 10.33) thus bringing judgment upon themselves (see 8.24). Ironically, their information about Jesus, that he is the son of Joseph, is absolutely correct, yet they fail to understand that he is the pre-existent Logos incarnate because this is something which, unlike his human origin, can never be demonstrated; only faith can comprehend this, and faith is what Jesus' opponents manifestly lack. Thus it is that for all who encounter the person of Jesus, the moment when the paradoxical claim presents itself that this man is fully God is the moment at which all are forced to accept or reject him, and so it is also the moment in which they will irrevocably determine, by their reaction, their own destiny.

Thus we may deduce that John's presentation of Jesus has a particular function: it serves as a challenge to faith. Not only is this true for the characters who encounter Jesus within the gospel drama,²⁶ but also for those who read the gospel.²⁷ However, John's readers have the Prologue at their disposal, and thus are in a better position to understand which reaction to Christ the evangelist would wish.²⁸

At this point it will be helpful to add one further, and very telling, example from the text, for here a single character (in this case the Roman prefect himself) is seen in the process of having to come to a decision about Jesus.

By the time John comes to narrate the trial of Jesus before Pilate (18.28–19.16) the lines of battle have been clearly drawn. Ironically, the Jews in their rejection of Jesus are about to bring judgment upon themselves in their seeming triumph in procuring Jesus' death (12.31–32) while Jesus himself continues to be presented, paradoxically, as 'the man' (19.5) who nevertheless claims kingship which is 'not of this world' (18.36) and whose mission in the world is 'to bear witness to the truth' (18.37). But there is one individual who has yet to be challenged to come to a decision about Jesus, and this is Pilate himself. In this scene Pilate is much more than simply a middleman who puts the questions.²⁹ We must reckon once again with the now

familiar Johannine irony, for in what is ostensibly the trial of Jesus, Pilate, vacillating between Jesus who represents the truth and the Jews who are now irrevocably committed to 'this world', is in effect the one who is on trial. If we accept this, then we may see in Pilate the evangelist's deliberate presentation of one who, in an encounter with Jesus, is challenged to recognize the truth (18.37). The figure of Pilate is thus the portrait of a man who now faces the decision which will determine his salvation or condemnation. We also see that John, with all the dramatic skill he displays so well, has issued in Pilate's question, 'What is truth?' (18.38), a challenge to his readers to accept the claim already made by Jesus to embody the truth (14.6), in itself a reminder of his own description of the Logos in 1.14.

The scenario for the trial is brilliantly handled. R.E. Brown in his commentary notes that it involves two stage settings: the first outside the praetorium where 'the Jews' are gathered; the second inside the building where Jesus is, so that Pilate in his dilemma 'goes back and forth from one to the other in seven carefully balanced episodes'.³⁰ Thus the evangelist is able to give dramatic expression to Pilate's agony of indecision. Yet Pilate's story is ultimately a tragic one. This is not because he decides to reject Jesus—on the contrary, he shows throughout that his attitude towards Jesus is a favourable one (see 18.38; 19.4; 19.6)—but because he fails to come to a decision at all. In the evangelist's eyes this very indecision courts disaster, for Pilate is now caught up in the struggle between Jesus who reveals the truth of God and the Jews who are the murderous children of the devil (see 8.44). The situation of judgment prevails, and for Pilate (as well as for the evangelist's readers) there can be no temporizing here. The danger is soon evident, for we see that Pilate, whom Brown calls 'the would-be neutral man',³¹ having failed to come to a positive decision in favour of the truth, is eventually coerced into the service of the world (19.12-16).

From this and the previous examples we hope to have shown that Johannine Christology has a particular function. The paradox of genuine humanity and full divinity found here is not by any means due to an oversight on the evangelist's part but is indispensable to his purpose and serves as a challenge to faith. John recognizes that by its very controversial nature his Christology is the cutting edge which will divide all men into two opposing categories, the one having gained eternal life and the other having come under judgment. Thus, from the very beginning of his gospel, when he asserts that the Logos

which he has already described as divine and eternal actually became a historical person (1.14), John has defined the nature of the incarnate Christ, to quote Barrett, 'in the most paradoxical terms possible'.³² And as throughout the gospel that paradox is constantly stressed, and human reaction to it is constantly analysed, the evangelist never ceases to challenge his readers to faith in Christ, for even though he has contrived to make the decision of acceptance or rejection as much a reality for them as for the characters in his gospel-narrative, nevertheless, he never fails to confirm in the episodes he relates that his aim in writing is 'that you may believe' (20.31).

B. Johannine Christology: a Study in Human Reaction

We turn now to our second and final proposition which is that John's gospel should not, ultimately, be treated as a study in the nature of the person of Christ.

Barrett claims that it has been the universal instinct of Christendom to find in the Johannine Prologue 'the climax of New Testament Christology'.³³ Yet if we attempt to apply to John's gospel the view of John Knox that in defining a Christology there is absolutely no possibility of having both pre-existence and humanity then it becomes clear that the fourth evangelist is not prepared to offer assistance. Our conclusion has been that for John the humanity is as genuine as the pre-existent divinity and, moreover, that his sole interest has been to exploit the paradox created by the conjunction of the two in the person of the incarnate Jesus as a means of bringing his readers to faith. Thus, for example, while we are fully justified in regarding θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (1.1) and ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (1.14) as Christological statements, nevertheless John is not prepared to define or analyse these tenets of his faith.³⁴ How, then, are we to assess John's Christology?

In the previous section it was suggested that the fourth evangelist's interests do not lie principally in the area of Christology as such, but that his presentation of Jesus should be seen to serve his purpose in challenging faith. Perhaps, then, this gospel is, in the last analysis, *not* to be treated as a study in the nature of the person of Christ. This is because once the evangelist has made it clear at the beginning of his gospel that the man whose story he is about to relate is at the same time none other than the divine pre-existent Logos, every word

and deed of Jesus is viewed, no longer from a Christological standpoint, but from the standpoint of the two contrasting *human* perspectives, the one of faith and the other of unbelief. In this way John's story of the incarnate existence of the Logos has become, not a study of Jesus, but a study in human reaction to Jesus.

John Robinson claims that the fourth evangelist is deliberately telling two stories of Christ and super-imposing them on each other. However, he defines these two stories as 'the story of the Logos' and 'the history of a human being'.³⁵ We suggest that this is not the case, but that the humanity and divinity of Christ should be taken together as amounting to only one of the two 'stories' in this gospel. This is because the story of the real man, Jesus son of Joseph, who is at the same time, and paradoxically, the divine Logos is the story which faith alone can tell. This is the content of his own faith which the evangelist presses upon his readers. Thus, for John, the man of faith will not deny the reality of Jesus' humanity, but will accept that the man Jesus is continuous in existence with the divine Logos. As Bultmann puts it, 'The hearer overcomes the offence . . . through believing that God meets him in the claim of this man'.³⁶ However, the evangelist has not left it there, for he also presents us with another portrait contrasting with the first: this is the story, seen through the eyes of unbelief, of Jesus son of Joseph as a man who blasphemously claims to be God. Thus the gospel's two stories correspond with the two different assessments which faith, and the lack of faith, will independently reach in an encounter with the man Jesus.

This means that it is not the reality of Jesus' humanity which is in dispute: followers and opponents of Jesus alike recognize that he is Joseph's son and comes from Nazareth in Galilee,³⁷ and speak of him quite naturally as a man.³⁸ This constitutes the 'given', that is, what is obvious to all about Jesus. What matters, and where we encounter the gospel's two 'stories', is the interpretation put upon the words and deeds of this man such that, to quote A.T. Hanson, 'what means one thing to outsiders means something else also to believers'.³⁹

What does the man of faith see in Jesus? His perspective will be governed by his acquisition of the spiritual sight, hearing and knowledge of one 'born anew' through the faith which alone sees the Kingdom of God.⁴⁰ He will identify Jesus as the Son of man, the unique mediator between God and man, and thus the sole means of eternal life.⁴¹ He will recognize that Jesus cannot be convicted of sin,

for he speaks the words of God, does God's will, and is sent by God.⁴² Jesus for him will be the Messiah, the true Son of God and his king.⁴³ Because he recognizes that Jesus is the Saviour of the world who is now working with God in the creation of new men, the life and the life-giver, the revealer of God, the light of the world, and the truth,⁴⁴ the man of faith will, with the evangelist, identify Jesus as the pre-existent Logos.⁴⁵ In his view, therefore, Jesus' claims to divinity and to an eternal existence with God are entirely justified.⁴⁶

The man of faith, it seems, has understood correctly what is indicated in the signs and will, therefore, not take offence at the reality of the cross⁴⁷ but will see its true significance. Accordingly, at the point where the man Jesus is most deeply humiliated and degraded, the eye of faith alone will perceive in Jesus' human suffering his supreme revelation of that glory which he has possessed throughout his incarnate life.⁴⁸ Faith thus attains its object, not by looking away from the man Jesus, but by perceiving the δόξα θεοῦ revealed in his flesh.⁴⁹ It thus perceives precisely in, and not apart from, this very real humanity the creative and revelatory work of the divine pre-existent Logos.⁵⁰ While fully accepting the 'given', that is, that the person he has encountered is indeed the son of Joseph, nevertheless faith is able to perceive 'something else also' in Jesus' words and deeds: his identity as the divine pre-existent Logos.

We are able also to distinguish a quite different portrait of Jesus. Here the evangelist deliberately depicts Jesus as he appears from the standpoint of the man who lacks faith. Such a man will judge 'according to the flesh' or 'by appearances', which judgment, Jesus warns, 'is of no avail'.⁵¹ To judge by appearances is the equivalent of being 'from below' and 'of this world' which is ultimately doomed,⁵² and this implies a lack of spiritual sight, hearing, and knowledge of God, and an ambition to seek nothing but the glory of men and to labour for 'the food which perishes'.⁵³ The story of Jesus as told from this viewpoint is of a man who is a Sabbath-breaker and destroyer of the Temple, who speaks incomprehensibly of second birth from the womb, of the eating of his flesh, and of killing himself.⁵⁴ He claims wisdom beyond his learning, is demon-possessed, shows insolence to the High Priest, and is no more than a sinner and an evildoer.⁵⁵ He possesses no credentials which would justify a claim to be from God; even his claim to Messiahship is false because he does not conform to certain traditions about the Messiah.⁵⁶ Since, therefore, neither Jesus nor the Father to whom he claims to bear witness can be

identified,⁵⁷ he is indeed no more than a man who, when he speaks of a divine existence which makes him greater than Abraham and the prophets, can be regarded only as a blasphemer.⁵⁸ Jesus' death on the cross is thus not only a well-deserved punishment for blasphemy but is even politically expedient, for in his popularity with the crowds this man represents a potential threat to the safety of the nation.⁵⁹

Note that in this story, as in the previous one, the humanity of Jesus is not in question. But whereas the man Jesus son of Joseph is as much the subject of this portrait as he was of the first, it is obvious that here he is seen as a false pretender to something which the first portrait was prepared to include: his identity as the divine Logos. This means that for John the humanity of the incarnate Logos has a very specialized role: it can either become the single factor about him which destroys the credibility of his claim to divinity; or it can provide for faith the key which will unlock the door to eternal life. The disparity between the two portraits stems, therefore, from a difference of approach: in the second case the vital element of faith is lacking which alone would have perceived the operation of the divine Logos in his very real humanity, and consequently Jesus is here rejected as a blasphemer.

From the juxtaposition of these two portraits springs the gospel's distinctive irony as, in the narrative, Jesus' opponents constantly fail to perceive in his words and deeds what the faith of the evangelist knows to be true. Here, once more, we see the evangelist carrying out his stated purpose, for in highlighting in this way the contrast between these two understandings of Jesus, he makes it clear which of the two he intends his readers to choose.

We must now sum up the findings of this paper and draw some conclusions.

Conclusions

If we are to attempt an assessment of John's Christology we are faced with the paradox that Jesus in this gospel is presented as being fully God and fully man, and moreover we have recognized that this is a paradox which seems to defy resolution. But the need to resolve the paradox does not arise if we take into account that the Johannine presentation of Jesus is orientated towards the evangelist's purpose to bring his readers to faith. We then see that it is precisely the claim to divinity of Jesus son of Joseph which challenges all who encounter

him to acceptance or rejection, and that their reaction to his challenge will mean for them salvation or condemnation. Moreover, this is the challenge which, the evangelist intends, will provoke his readers to that same decision. Nevertheless, his gospel is no less genuinely a call to faith, for even though his objective is to bring his readers to that point where they must decide for or against Jesus, he never fails to indicate to them that their decision of acceptance in faith is what he would wish. He achieves this by treating ironically every understanding of Jesus' words and deeds which is reached by those who do not believe in him. By this means he enables his readers to understand that faith alone will find revealed in the genuine humanity of Jesus that truth which is essential for salvation, namely, that Jesus son of Joseph is none other than the incarnation of the divine pre-existent Logos.

If we accept these arguments then we must conclude that the unique Johannine presentation of Jesus, remarkable though it is, cannot be adequately understood except in the light of the evangelist's purpose. This is because for John his paradoxical Christology is not of interest as a separate phenomenon to be analysed or explained away, and his two portraits, in which he contrasts what is seen in Christ by the light of faith with what is imagined about him in the darkness of unbelief, represent no mere exercise of literary talent. On the contrary, all of this has its motivation in the evangelist's overriding concern to bring his readers to understand and accept the faith which he himself holds. And so he continues to seek from them that insight of faith which alone will recognize in the person of Jesus, the son of Joseph, that the divine pre-existent Logos has indeed entered human history.

NOTES

1. J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 106.
2. See further T.W. Manson, *On Paul and John* (Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. M. Black; London, 1963), p. 135; A.T. Hanson, *Grace and Truth* (London, 1975), p. 76.
3. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 72. This is contrary to the view of those who prefer to take a less literal interpretation of pre-existence in John, citing, for example, the Jewish principle of foreordination as fundamental to the evangelist's thought (see especially J.A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* [London, 1973], pp. 145-55; Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 108; A. Harnack, *History*

of *Dogma* [London, 1897-1910], I, pp. 318f., especially p. 328 n. 1). However, it is probable that the evangelist's own highly individualistic approach to the significance of Jesus has outgrown this principle and gone beyond it; see R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London, New York, 1968-82), I, p. 493; Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69; J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London, 1980), pp. 239, 241.

4. Pace Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 27; see also p. 80.

5. Käsemann's statement that 'the passion comes into view in John only at the very end' is surely inaccurate (E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* [London, 1968], p. 7). Examples such as the numerous references to the 'hour' of Jesus' death (2.4; 4.21; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23; 13.1; 16.32; 17.1); the expectation of the 'night' of the Passion (9.4; 11.10; see 13.30); the comparison with the Passion of the destruction and raising of the Temple (2.19-22); the allegory of Jesus as the shepherd who gave his life for the sheep (10.11; see vv. 17 and 18); and the deliberate treatment of the Lazarus story in terms of Jesus' own death and resurrection, are alone sufficient to indicate that the Passion is an underlying organic theme of the whole work.

6. Indeed, E.M. Sidebottom remarks that Jesus' humanity is emphasized in John 'more obviously and deliberately . . . than in the synoptics' (*The Christ of the Fourth Gospel in the Light of First-Century Thought* [London, 1961], p. 97); see also G. Sevenster, 'Remarks on the Humanity of Jesus in the Gospel and Letters of John', in *Studies in John* (NovTSup, 24; Leiden, 1970), pp. 185-93 (p. 188).

7. Note the connection between Jesus' revelation of $\delta\delta\chi\alpha$ and the faculty of $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ in 2.11; 11.40. See also C.H. Dodd's comment that 'there is here no longer any thought of visible light or radiance accompanying Christ in His earthly life; but not less really, the evangelist holds, the divine presence and power were apprehensible by those who had the faculty of faith' (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge, 1970], p. 207); see also G. Kittel, *TWNT*, II, p. 249; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible Commentary; London, 1972), p. 95.

8. Here undoubtedly the $\delta\delta\chi\alpha\sigma\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$ and $\upsilon\psi\omega\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$ of the Suffering Servant (see Isa. 52.13) is the *locus classicus* for the Johannine understanding.

9. *Contra* Westcott, Hoskyns and Bernard, all of whom imply a distinction between the glory of the pre-existent Logos and that revealed by the incarnate Christ (B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* [London, 1908], pp. 240-41; E.C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* [ed. F.N. Davey; London, 1947], p. 506; J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* [Edinburgh, 1942], II, p. 563). See rather Bultmann's comment on 17.5 in which he insists that incarnation implies no diminution in glory (R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* [Oxford, 1971], p. 496).

10. See Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-10.

11. See Bultmann's comment on 1.14 that 'the δόξα is not to be seen alongside the σάρξ, nor through the σάρξ as through a window; it is to be seen in the σάρξ and nowhere else' (*op. cit.*, p. 63).

12. For this suggestion as well as much constructive criticism I am greatly indebted to Mr J.L. North, Barmby Lecturer in New Testament Studies at the University of Hull.

13. See further Manson, *op. cit.*, p. 134; Sidebottom, *op. cit.*, pp. 139f., 147.

14. It is highly unlikely that John intended his readers to interpret σάρξ in 1.14 to mean merely 'flesh' (see, however, O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* [London, 1963], p. 187; J.E. Davey, *The Jesus of St. John* [London, 1958], p. 169). Most commentators agree that σάρξ stands here for 'the whole man' (R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* [Anchor Bible; Garden City, 1966], I, p. 13). See also commentaries *ad loc.* by Hoskyns, Bernard (vol. 1), Macgregor, and especially Barrett (2nd edn), Sanders and Mastin, Lindars, Schnackenburg and Schlatter.

15. See Brown, *op. cit.*, I, p. 214.

16. Lindars, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

17. Brown, *op. cit.*, I, p. 408.

18. See Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

19. Although D.W. Wead's analysis of Johannine irony is otherwise useful (see D.W. Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* [Theologische Dissertationen, 4; Basel, 1970], pp. 47f.), I cannot agree with his interpretation of the situation in these verses (see pp. 60-61). He suggests that the evangelist relies upon his readers' knowledge of the tradition of the virgin birth at Bethlehem, and so the answers the readers will supply to the questions about Jesus' origin and the place of his birth will be those which prove that Jesus does, in this respect, actually fulfil messianic expectations. That John knew the tradition of the virgin birth does not seem clear from the text, and still less can we assume that his readers knew of it: these verses show only that John knows of the traditional Jewish expectations about the Messiah. Furthermore, Wead's emphasis on an underlying knowledge of and reference to the virgin birth leads him to the unconvincing assertion that the statement of Jesus' human parentage in 1.45 is no more than 'a formal mode of identification of the earthly situation in which Jesus lived' (*op. cit.*, p. 62). Finally, I would suggest that Wead's argument does not accord with the evangelist's emphasis on the necessity for faith rather than demonstrable proof (see 20.29, 31).

20. This point is made by Dodd (*op. cit.*, p. 89) and Bultmann (*op. cit.*, p. 62 n. 4). It is, however, contrary to the view of Morna Hooker who interprets the passage beginning at 7.25 to mean that 'the crowds do not believe in him because they think they know where he comes from—though of course they do not, since he is sent from God' (M.D. Hooker, 'The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret', *NTS* 21 (1974-75), pp. 40-58

[p. 44]). However, this takes no account of the disciples' confession of Jesus' human origin in 1.45 (see on this, Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 260 n. 1), nor of the irony involved in the present passage.

21. The question, 'Who are "the Jews" in John's gospel?', has not yet, it seems, received a satisfactory answer. That John carefully distinguishes between 'the Jews' and 'the people of Jerusalem' in ch. 7 (see especially 7.12-13) does not lend conviction to the argument either that Jesus' opponents are invariably described as 'the Jews' (see, for example, Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 86) or that we should translate οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in most cases simply as 'the Judaeans' (see M. Lowe, 'Who were the Ἰουδαῖοι?', *NT* 18 [1976], pp. 101-30), despite Lowe's reference to the distinction already referred to in 7.13 (p. 122). The suggestion that John refers to the Judaeans authorities can be upheld only at the expense of the references to 'the Jews' in 6.41, 52 (see U.C. von Wahlde, 'The Johannine "Jews": A Critical Survey', *NTS* 28 [1981-82], pp. 33-60, especially pp. 42-44).

22. Cf. the Samaritan woman's questions in 4.12.

23. Pace Hanson (*op. cit.*, p. 73).

24. The textual variant in 20.31 makes it difficult to tell whether the evangelist wrote ἵνα πιστεύητε (meaning 'that you may continue to believe') or ἵνα πιστεύσῃτε (meaning 'that you may come to believe'). A strict reading here raises the problem as to whether or not this gospel was meant as a missionary tract, for πιστεύητε would seem to imply that the gospel was meant as instruction to the faithful, whereas πιστεύσῃτε suggests an appeal to a wider, non-Christian, readership. The general consensus of opinion is that ἵνα πιστεύητε should be accepted as the better-attested reading, thus implying that the gospel was meant as a strengthening of the faith of those who already believe in Christ (so commentaries *ad loc.* by Brown, Schnackenburg, Lagrange, Lindars, Macgregor, Bernard). No doubt this work would naturally have the effect of encouraging the Johannine faithful: one would be perfectly justified, for example, in seeing a didactic purpose in the lengthy discourses which follow the situation beginning in ch. 13 in which Jesus confines his work exclusively to 'his own'. But was this John's primary aim? Might it not be said that his purpose was one of awakening faith in any reader, Christian or otherwise, who had not yet achieved the maturity of the *Johannine* understanding? In this sense it is without significance whether we read here πιστεύητε ('continue to believe') or πιστεύσῃτε ('come to believe') and, in any case, as Lindars warns us, 'it is hazardous to build anything on such a fine point of detail as John does not use tenses with absolute precision' (Lindars, *op. cit.*, p. 617; see also Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 134).

25. Dodd describes these effects as 'obverse and reverse of the same process' (*op. cit.*, p. 256).

26. John's treatment of the character of Judas Iscariot provides us with the single exception to this rule. For the suggestion that in this gospel the already doomed figure of Judas has acquired the significance of Antichrist,

see my 'Satan in the Fourth Gospel', in *Studia Biblica* 1978. II: *Papers on the Gospels* (JSNTS, 2; Sheffield, 1980), pp. 307-11.

27. While the decision to come to absolute faith in an encounter with the person of Jesus is always the one which the evangelist presses upon his readers, nevertheless it should be noted that not all of the characters who encounter Jesus within the gospel-narrative achieve such a clear-cut decision. The evangelist does also illustrate degrees of faith, but this is all part of his teaching technique (see, for example, F.J. Moloney, 'From Cana to Cana (John 2.1-4.54) and the Fourth Evangelist's Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith', in *Studia Biblica* [see n. 26 above], pp. 185-213).

28. See R.E. Brown's delightful 'pedestrian parallel' with the Sherlock Holmes stories. Holmes, writes Brown, 'is quite opaque to the bumbling Dr. Watson; the reader is brighter and understands some of the clues which Watson overlooks; but the reader is still challenged by Holmes who is more penetrating than the reader' (*The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [New York, Ramsey, Toronto, 1979], p. 61).

29. Morna Hooker's description of Pilate as such is undoubtedly true to a certain extent (see Hooker, *op. cit.*, p. 45). For the questions put to Jesus by Pilate see 18.33 (see v. 37), 18.35, 38, and 19.9, 10. Yet the character of Pilate receives so much attention in these scenes that to describe him as no more than a middleman is probably to deprive him of his full significance in the Johannine scheme.

30. Brown, *op. cit.*, II, p. 858.

31. Brown, *op. cit.*, II, p. 864.

32. C.K. Barrett, 'The Prologue of St. John's Gospel', in *New Testament Essays* (London, 1972), pp. 27-48 (p. 47).

33. 'The Prologue of St. John's Gospel', p. 27. See also Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

34. See on this T.E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (SNTSMS, 13; Cambridge, 1970), p. 19.

35. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-77.

36. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

37. 1.45; 6.42; 7.27, 41, 52.

38. 4.29; 7.46; 9.16, 29, 33; 10.33; 11.47; 19.5.

39. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

40. See 9.39; 11.40; 10.3-4, 14, 27; 3.3.

41. See 1.51; 9.35-38; contrast 12.34; 10.7; 6.68; 14.6; cf. 1.18.

42. See 8.46; 3.34; 7.16-17; 8.26, 28; 12.49; 14.24; 6.38; 8.42.

43. See 1.41; 20.31; contrast 7.27, 40-43; 20.31 contrast 19.7; 18.36; see 1.49; 12.13.

44. See 12.47; 1.29; 4.42; 11.27; 5.17; cf. 1.12-13; 3.3, 16-17; 11.25; 14.6; cf. 1.4; 3.14-15; 5.21, 25-26; 6.27, 35, 48, 51; 17.2; 8.19; 14.9; cf. 1.18; 8.12; 9.5; cf. 1.4; 14.6; cf. 18.37, 45-46; cf. 1.14.

45. See 1.1-18.

46. See 5.17; 8.58; 17.5, 24; cf. 1.1; 20.28.

47. See 6.52-58. See also Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus' later question to the disciples (6.61-62). He sees it as indirectly a question of decision about the cross, the question being, 'Will they overcome the σκάνδαλον of the cross, or will it mean for them the judgment?' (*op. cit.*, p. 445). It is unlikely, therefore, given that the ascent here is a reference to Jesus' death, that when Jesus refers to this he is really implying that this would bring a resolution to the difficulty experienced by the disciples on account of his previous words (see the suggestion in commentaries *ad loc.* by Macgregor, Lindars and Schlatter). It is much more likely to be the case that Jesus, noting that the disciples have taken offence at his verbal description of the paradox of the cross, is really raising the issue as to how they will react when his description becomes a reality. Interpreted in this way, Jesus' question to the disciples is no less vitally a challenge from the evangelist to his readers.

48. See 1.14; 2.11; 11.40.

49. See once again Bultmann's comment on 1.14 (n. 11 *supra*).

50. See R.G. Hamerton-Kelly's comment that 'recognition that the earthly Jesus is the pre-existent Logos is of the essence of Johannine faith' (*Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* [SNTSMS, 21; Cambridge, 1973], p. 222).

51. 8.15; 7.24; 6.63. See here Lindars's comment (*ad loc.*) that the subject under discussion in this verse is not Jesus but 'the disciples' capacity to perceive the truth'.

52. 8.23; see 12.31.

53. See 9.39-41; 5.37-38; 8.47; 7.28; 8.19, 55; 5.44; 6.27.

54. See 5.16; 2.19-20; 3.3-4; 6.52; 8.22.

55. See 7.15; 7.20; 8.48; 10.20; 18.22; 9.24; 18.30.

56. See 9.29; 7.27; 7.41-42, 52; 12.34.

57. See 8.25; 10.24; 8.18-19.

58. See 5.17-18; 8.58-59; 10.33.

59. See 19.7; 11.47-50; see 18.14.

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