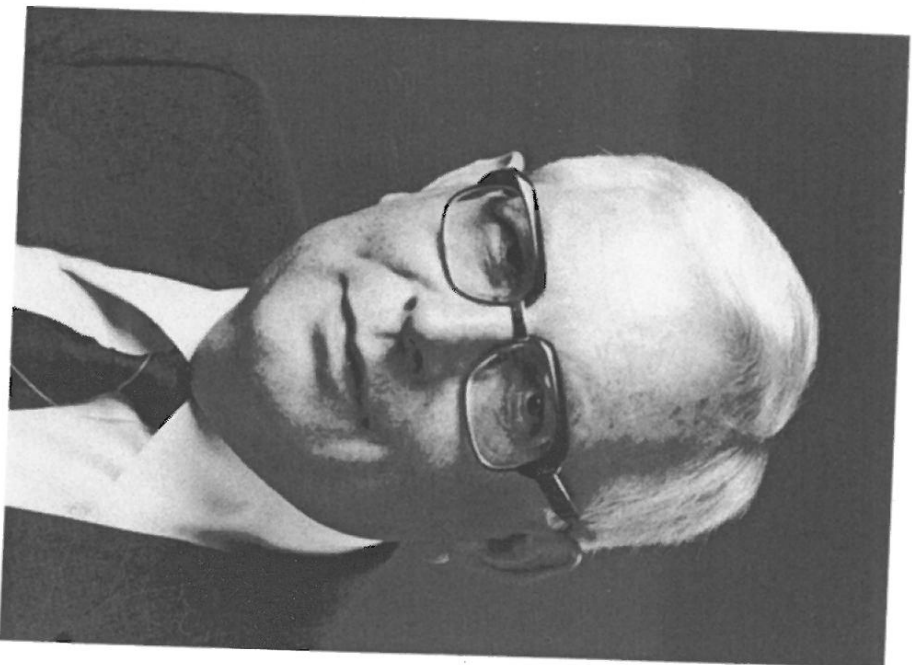




Marinus de Jonge

From Jesus to John
Essays on Jesus and New
Testament Christology
in Honour of Marinus de Jonge

edited by
Martinus C. De Boer

Journal for the Study of the New Testament
Supplement Series 84



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Published by JSOT Press
JSOT Press is an imprint of
Sheffield Academic Press Ltd
343 Fulwood Road
Sheffield S10 3BP
England

Typeset by Sheffield Academic Press
and
Printed on acid-free paper in Great Britain
by Biddles Ltd
Guildford

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

From Jesus to John:
Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology
in Honour of Marinus de Jonge.—
(JSNT Supplement Series, ISSN 0143-5108;
no. 84)
I. Boer, Marinus C. De II. Series
232

ISBN 1-85075-422-5

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imperfect faith only, but for John they are indispensable in order to come to true faith.

5. The development of the Johannine Christology is closely connected with the development of the Johannine community. Social science theories may contribute insight into this relationship.
6. Given the fact that Jesus' humanity is taken for granted in the Gospel of John, and has become a problem in 1 John, the obvious supposition is that the Gospel was written before the first letter.

Finally, the survey shows that at least two problems concerning the Christology of the Fourth Gospel need further clarification:

1. It seems that in the development of Johannine Christology elements from former stages (for example, Jesus as prophet, Jesus as Messiah) remain valid in later stages. The question is then to what extent they have retained any independent significance in the final synthesis of the Gospel. A comparable question can be asked concerning the christological titles 'the Son' and 'the Son of Man', which seem to be, in the evangelist's redaction, of more or less equal value: what is, at the redactional level, the individual value and colour of these titles?
2. What exactly is the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection in the Christology of John, and how are the complex of death and resurrection on the one hand and the incarnation on the other related to each other?

In order to answer these questions, it is essential that we combine the study of Johannine Christology at the final, redactional level with investigation into the tradition history of those elements from which Johannine Christology has been constructed and into the historical development of Johannine Christology—so far as this tradition history and this development can be reconstructed in a reliable way. We may expect that a combination of a synchronic and a diachronic approach will really advance research into the Christology of John.¹

1. I thank Mrs K.M. Court for her correction of the English of this article.

TOWARD THE RENEWAL OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY

Leander E. Keck

The study of New Testament Christology will be renewed if it recovers its proper subject matter—Christology—and its proper scope, the New Testament.

The scholarly literature shows that what is called New Testament Christology is, by and large, really the history of christological materials and motifs in early Christianity and their ancestry. This massive preoccupation with history has, to be sure, produced impressive results. In fact, today it is difficult to imagine a study of New Testament Christology which is not influenced by this historical analysis of early Christians' conceptions of Christ and their antecedents. Nevertheless, the time is at hand to take up again what was set aside—an explicitly theological approach to New Testament Christology, one which will be informed by the history of ideas but which will deliberately pursue Christology as a theological discipline. It is doubtful whether the study of New Testament Christology can be renewed in any other way. This essay intends to illumine and substantiate this claim by considering briefly the nature of Christology, then by reviewing the turn to history and its consequences for the study of New Testament Christology, and finally by sketching elements of an alternative.

On the Nature of Christology

Because this essay discusses the renewal of a discipline by recovering its true subject matter, what will be said here about the nature of Christology should be more a reminder than something wholly new. What might be new is that it is being said in just this way, and that it is being applied to the study of Christology in the New Testament.¹

1. The fact that 'New Testament Christology' is used here in the sense of

'Christology' is a comprehensive term for the statement of the identity and significance of Jesus. Although the vast preponderance of such statements occur in Christian contexts, this phenomenological definition recognizes that christological statements are implied also whenever Jesus' identity and significance are expressed, be it 'religious genius' or avatar.¹ It is, however, with Christian discourse that this essay is concerned. Among Christians, the scope of Christology has, from the start, been wider than 'the man Jesus' because neither his identity nor his significance could be stated by speaking of him alone, as an isolate. 'Jesus' is really an abbreviation for the person who is the centre of an event whose boundaries are not self-evident (see below)—unless one is prepared to deny that to a person belongs one's appropriation of a heritage on the one hand and one's relationships on the other. What needs clarification, in this context, is the rationale of christological statements about this event, the 'rules of the game'. In view here is the formal structure of Christology, its 'grammar' or perhaps better, the syntax of the signification of Jesus for Christian theology.

'Significance' is intelligible only in relation to something or someone.

'Christology in the New Testament' is a matter of style and nuançe; it refers to Christology as the subject matter of a particular body of material. In no way does this usage imply that there is a single Christology in the New Testament.

1. The identity and significance of Jesus can, of course, be expressed in non-christological ways, as in an attempt to identify and assess his impact on western culture, and through it on the modern world. That would be an historical judgment, comparable to judgments about Moses or Mohammed. A statement of Jesus' identity and significance becomes christological when that significance explicates his religious meaning. Whoever affirms the religious significance of Jesus—a first order statement—implies a christological statement (a second order statement). Schillebeeckx introduces the distinction between first and second order statements in order to account for the inevitability of Christology. On this basis, 'living contact' with Jesus 'was experienced as God-given salvation', which in turn produced reflection on the experience, which yielded 'the credal affirmation: God himself... has acted decisively in Jesus' (a first order statement); this produces a second order statement designed to explicate the first by focusing on his identity. This whole discussion, however, occurs in a context in which Schillebeeckx wants to explain the movement from a 'theology of Jesus of Nazareth' to Christology. By the former he means 'reflection upon what Jesus himself had to say'. However, these are two quite different moves, because reflection on Jesus' message is not the same as reflection on a first-order statement grounded in the experience of salvation (E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* [New York: Seabury, 1979], pp. 545-50).

Accordingly, the subject matter of Christology is really the syntax of relationships or correlations. In developed Christology this structure of signification is expressed in relation to God (the theological correlation proper), the created order (the cosmological correlation) and humanity (the anthropological correlation);¹ each of these impinges on the others whether or not this impingement is made explicit. Consequently, from statements about God or world or humanity one can infer the appropriate christological correlates, and vice versa.

Of these correlations, two have not received adequate attention—the cosmological and the theological. Nils A. Dahl has rightly observed that the understanding of God has been the neglected factor in the study of New Testament theology as a whole.² This is particularly true of the study of New Testament Christology, even though every statement about Christ implicates God, beginning with the designation of Jesus as the anointed. This neglect of the theological correlate has constricted Christology and skewed Christianity as a whole, for it is not enough to say with Melancthon that 'to know Christ is to know his benefits'.³ The neglect of the cosmological correlate is even more striking, despite the current interest in the use of wisdom traditions and themes in the New Testament—an interest which thus far has generally remained on the historical plane.

The correlation which receives most attention concerns anthropology—the human condition and the salvific alternative brought (or brought about) by (or through) Jesus. In this connection three observations are called for.

(a) There would be no Christology if there were no soteriology because it is what Christians claim about Jesus as the bringer or effecter of salvation that generates the question of his identity. To oversimplify: soteriology makes Christology necessary; Christology

1. Current sensibility having outlawed the use of 'man' in English theological discourse, 'humanity' must serve as a surrogate, despite its intrinsic inability to function as a real equivalent.

2. N.A. Dahl, 'The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology', *Reflection* 73, 1 (Yale Divinity School, Nov. 1975), pp. 5-8.

3. In this connection, one should ponder Jean Miliet's *God or Christ? The Excesses of Christocentricity* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). He contends that although Christianity is constitutively bi-polar (God and Christ), the modern difficulty of thinking cogently about God has produced such a one-sided preoccupation with Christ that virtually one religion has been substituted for another—a religion with a one-sided emphasis on redemption.

makes soteriology possible. To paraphrase: Jesus' significance must be grounded adequately in his identity. At the same time, Christology is not reducible to soteriology because, at least in the classical Christian tradition, Christ is always more than saviour.¹ Even the Gospel according to John, in which the work of Christ is to manifest his identity, knows this, for its Christ is the incarnate logos 'through whom all things were made'.

(b) Just as a grammar allows all sorts of things to be thought, said or written, so the grammar of Christology permits a variety of things to be expressed concerning Jesus' identity and significance. The formal structure is constant,² but the material content can vary. Further, each of these material contents has its own integrity within its linguistic field. Thus, if the human condition is viewed as bondage, Christ is the liberator and soteriology will be expressed in the idiom of liberation. Christology will then show what there is about Christ that makes it possible for liberation to occur through him. Or, if Christ is hailed as the great teacher, the human condition will be construed as ignorance or illusion, so that salvation will be a matter of learning the truth. Moreover, one of the ways that Christology develops nuance and subtlety is by asserting new mutations of categories. Thus one can speak of ignorance as bondage, and so construe Christ as the liberator from unknowing. What must not be overlooked is this—because Christology and anthropology are always correlates, one cannot agree with Herbert Braun's claim that anthropology is the constant but Christology is the variable.³ A changed Christology entails a changed anthropology as well.

Being aware of the correlational aspect of Christology allows one to see the high degree of theological sophistication of many New

1. It should not be overlooked that the formula, 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer', which is now being substituted, in some Anglo-Saxon quarters, for 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' not only replaces a trinity of persons with a triadic functionalism but also constricts the role of the second person to redemption—a move which lacks clear warrant in the New Testament.

2. To speak of the constancy of grammar vis-à-vis variable formulations is not yet to imply that grammar is static; to the contrary, that grammars have histories also suggests that the 'grammar' of christological discourse too undergoes change (not the same as the history of Christology, the history of formulations). The matter deserves exploration, which cannot be undertaken here, however.

3. H. Braun, 'The Meaning of New Testament Christology', *JTC* 5 (1968), pp. 89-127.

Testament passages, as in Paul's 'If anyone is in Christ one is a new creation'. Understanding this christologically entails delineating the anthropology-soteriology of 'new creation' (including what is implied about 'old creation') as well as that of being 'in Christ' (including being 'outside Christ'); then one can analyze the effect of juxtaposing these two expressions. Naturally, one cannot recover the steps in Paul's reasoning by which he produced this remarkable statement. That would be only of historical or psychological interest anyway. What one can do is to expose the logic, the grammar, of what his text says, and thereby make its tacit meaning explicit.

(c) Christological correlations tend to obey the law of parsimony. That is, generally speaking, Christology and soteriology-anthropology are not wasted on each other, because the understanding of Jesus' identity and significance should not exceed what is required to resolve the human dilemma. A superficial view of sin requires only a superficial view of salvation, just as a superficial view of Jesus cannot deal with a profound view of sin. This implies, further, that unless a tragic view of sin is correlated with a radical view of salvation grounded in a strong Christology, the human dilemma will be too deep to be dealt with decisively by Christ.

This principle can be applied fruitfully to three quite different Christologies in the New Testament. Over against the fear of the Colossian Christians that the *stoicheia* must be placated even by Christians, the author of the Epistle to the Colossians insists that there is no dimension of the human condition which has not already been dealt with decisively in the event of Christ. Consequently, he explicates a christological hymn in such a way as to show that believers do not live in a world whose hostility outruns Christ's capacity to deliver them. When, however, one reads Matthew in light of this principle, a basic question emerges—is Matthew an exception to the rule, or does it actually lack an integrated Christology, since its view of the human dilemma does not really require all the Christology which the text contains? The virgin birth, for instance, really adds nothing to the identity and significance of Jesus which is required if the human dilemma is centred on the need to acquire the rectitude necessary to enter the kingdom. Again, important light is cast on the vexing problem of Paul's apparent non-use of Jesus' teachings—except in parables—or of his deeds. Given Paul's view of the human predicament as bondage to powers like sin and death, what could be gained by

quoting Jesus or by appealing to his precedent, even if thematically appropriate logia and stories had come to the apostle's attention? Where the human condition is bondage, there one needs emancipation, not a teacher or a theologian to explain it or the example of a free man (especially one whose deeds of freedom were followed by his execution!). Furthermore, one may also ask whether the Matthean construal of Jesus would be able to deal salvifically with the Pauline construal of the human condition—especially if the Matthean Jesus is the bringer but not the effector of salvation. In short, had the syntax of Christology been kept in mind, New Testament study would have been spared a great deal of misplaced worry about Paul's disinterest in Jesus' words and deeds—which is not at all to be confused with an alleged disinterest in Jesus.¹

Having reminded ourselves, in a rather terse and formal way, of the nature of Christology, of its syntax, the significance of turning away from Christology to history can come into view more perceptively.

From New Testament Christology to the History of Christology in Early Christianity

If the study of New Testament Christology is to become explicitly christological, it must come to terms with a legacy which, apart from the Bultmannian tradition, has been dominated by historical questions. Then it can be free to find its own way. To understand this preoccupation with history, no one is more useful than William Wrede, who insisted that the study of New Testament theology (and hence of Christology as well) must become a purely descriptive, historical enterprise, 'totally indifferent to all dogmatic and systematic theology'.²

Wrede called for a turn away from presenting New Testament theology as a compendium of doctrines. The real subject matter was to be 'what was believed, thought, hoped, required and striven

1. These terse, and perhaps cryptic, formulations beg for elaboration and substantiation, which cannot be provided here. That will be provided by my forthcoming book, *Jesus in New Testament Christology*.

2. W. Wrede's essay, published in 1897, has become available in English only recently in *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (trans. and ed. R. Morgan; Naperville, IL: Allenson, London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 69. Morgan's own extensive introduction, which also deals with Schlatter's essay on the same theme, merits careful reading.

for in the earliest period of Christianity, not what certain writings say about faith, doctrine, hope, etc'.¹ The texts were not to be analyzed theologically but used as sources of information in order to describe major types of piety. These, in turn, were to be seen in organic relation to their antecedents in antiquity, on the one hand, and to their subsequent developments in Christianity on the other. 'How the systematic theologian gets on with the results—that is his own affair'.² What Wrede called for at the end of the nineteenth century did, to a remarkable degree, come about in the twentieth.

Wrede saw that for the task of reconstructing early Christian religion the New Testament alone was inadequate; all early Christian literature must be consulted. Moreover, the New Testament had to be disassembled so that their component parts or sources, such as Q, also could be assigned their proper place into a sequence that was historical. Subsequently, certain texts themselves were disassembled so that their component parts or sources, such as Q, also could be assigned their proper place in a comprehensive, chronologically ordered history of early Christian sources. Only then could the history of early Christianity, including its theology, be written properly. Non-Christian materials were used intensively not only to illumine the context of early Christianity (and its Christology), but to explain it. With regard to Christology, Wrede's programme was carried out by Bousset's magisterial *Kyrios Christos*,³ whose sub-title shows the relation to Wrede's programme: 'A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginning of Christianity to Irenaeus'. Neither the legitimacy nor the importance of this enterprise is in question here, whatever one must say about Bousset's conclusions. It is as valid, and as important, to reconstruct the history of early Christian Christology as it is to reconstruct the history of early Christianity or the social structure of early Christian communities.⁴ The point, rather, is that the history of early Christian

1. Wrede, *Nature of New Testament Theology*, pp. 84-85 (his italics).

2. Wrede, *Nature of New Testament Theology*, p. 69.

3. W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970; orig. German, 1913).

4. This essay's contention that the study of New Testament Christology should become avowedly theological in no way entails a repudiation of historical reconstruction or of sociological reconstruction and analysis, which I have defended elsewhere. To the contrary, my 'On the Ethos of the Early Christians', *JARR* 42 (1974), pp. 435-52 (= 'Das Ethos der frühen Christen', in W. A. Meeks, (ed.), *Zur Soziologie des Urchristentums* [Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979, pp. 13-36] is a

Christology should not be called New Testament Christology because (a) in such a move the New Testament has in fact disappeared into early Christian literature, (b) the problem for Christology created by the pursuit of the historical task cannot be solved by continued historical inquiry, (c) Christology has been abandoned for something else—the history of titles. Each of these results merits further comment.

a. Replacing the New Testament with 'early Christian literature' has consequences—precisely for historiography—which are as serious as they are subtle. No one will deny that all texts must be treated alike, that there is no privileged status for canonical texts, when one is looking for information, or 'facts', about the past; nor will anyone argue that non-canonical texts are of inferior value for historical inquiry because they are not part of scripture. However, problems arise when this stance becomes more than a procedural principle for carrying out a particular task. Not only is the category 'early Christian literature' an anachronism which has become historically significant only recently and only in the scholarly guild, but relying on it alone obscures precisely the phenomenon being studied, namely, that some of this literature was regularly and increasingly shaping early Christianity, and its Christology, by being used repeatedly as scripture on the way to becoming canon. In fact, were it not for this emerging canon and the results of its complex interaction with the developing church, the rest of the literary products of early Christianity would be of but marginal interest and of even less significance as footnotes to the religious history of antiquity.¹

Moreover, to excavate the Christology of Q or of the Johannine signs source is surely historically valid and useful, but to treat these as if they were more than momentary efforts which were absorbed into texts which *did* have a future is to skew historical understanding at the

programmatic call for New Testament scholarship to attend to the social realities which shaped early Christianity and which were affected by it. Likewise, over against a tendency on the part of some literary criticism to be a-historical if not plainly anti-historical, I defended the necessity of historical work in 'Will the Historical-Critical Method Survive? Some Observations', in R. A. Spencer (ed.), *Orientalism by Disorientation* (Festschrift W. A. Beardslee; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980), pp. 115-27. In *The Bible in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), I sought to show how the historical-critical method can become fruitful for preaching.

1. For a more extended discussion of this point, see my 'Is the New Testament a Field of Study? or, from Outlet to Overbeck and Back', *The Second Century* 1 (1981), pp. 19-35.

outset. Wrede himself insisted that the historian must distinguish what was influential from what was of but passing importance. In other words, sound historiography itself requires that due attention be given to the Christology of texts which were on the way toward becoming canonical. Otherwise, what will be reconstructed is not the history of Christology that was but something else—the history that might have been.

b. The turn to history has, unexpectedly for the most part, called into question the legitimacy of Christology itself because the key historical question became ever more difficult to answer historically, namely, why did these christological materials come to be used of Jesus, a Jesus who was reconstructed historically by separating him from just this early Christology? When Boers reviewed the English translation of Bousset, he formulated the issue so well that he deserves to be quoted fully:

The fundamental problem of a christology of the New Testament as posed by *Kyrios Christos*... was that the view of Jesus found in the New Testament was not historically true of Jesus himself. This undercuts the basic assumption on which the christology of the New Testament depends, namely, that it is an expression of the truth about the historical Jesus. Thus New Testament christology is confronted by an irresolvable dilemma: to recognize that christology is a composite product of the early Christian communities and not the truth about the historical Jesus is the dissolution of christology itself, but to justify a christology by attempting to confirm that its claims about Jesus are somehow valid is possible only at the expense of not recognizing the early communities as their true authors. New Testament christology since *Kyrios Christos* has been a constant struggle with, and clarification of, this dilemma, whether in conscious recognition of Bousset or not.¹

C.F.D. Moule, however, takes note of Boers and argues exactly the opposite, contending that 'Jesus was, from the beginning, such a one as appropriately to be described in the ways in which, sooner or later, he did come to be described in the New Testament period'.² For Moule, the later Christologies represent 'various stages in the development of perception, not the accretion of 'any alien factors that were not there from the beginning'. Such an accretion would have been an evolution

1. H. Boers, 'Jesus and the Christian Faith: New Testament Christology since Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*', *JBL* 89 (1970), p. 452.

2. C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 2-3 (this italics).