

John's point, however, for Jesus immediately comments (verse 29): "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Similarly, the risen Jesus tells Mary Magdalene not to hold (or touch) him, for he has not yet ascended to God (20:17). Tangibility may not be the risen Jesus' most important quality.

Jesus breathes the Spirit upon his disciples (20:22), endowing them with his authority (verse 23; cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:18), having just enjoined them to continue his own God-given mission (verse 21). Finally, after Jesus has appeared to his disciples on the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee), in a scene reminiscent of the Synoptics (21:1-14; cf. Luke 5:1-11; Mark 14:28; 16:7), he carries on a pastoral conversation with Peter, who has so recently denied him (21:5-23). Obviously, Peter is reinstated as a leader of Jesus' disciples, literally as pastor (i.e., shepherd) alongside the enigmatic Beloved Disciple. No new theological themes are introduced, but the evangelist uses traditional narratives to show the fulfillment of Jesus' earlier promises to his disciples and to underscore theological points. The reality of Jesus' resurrection is affirmed, through and with tradition, in distinctively Johannine ways.²⁶

5 Other christological titles

In our treatment of Johannine christology we have not begun with a study of titles, because the titles accorded Jesus in John, mostly traditional, do not determine the shape and character of Johannine christology.²⁷ If anything, the opposite is the case. That is, the distinctive Johannine christology lends meaning to the titles. For that reason, we have dealt first with

the characteristic Johannine motifs of Jesus' origin, the sending of the Son, his descent and ascent, and his relation to the Father. Of course, Christians believed Jesus to be the Messiah or Christ of Jewish expectation, and, as we have seen, John thought it important to establish that point while at the same time radically revising the concept of messiahship itself in light of the career and death of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, all major New Testament writers both affirm Jesus was the Messiah and revise the concept in light of his unique ministry. The expected Messiah was to be the king of Israel, the heir of the Davidic line; and while John, in contrast to Matthew, Luke, and even Paul, makes nothing of Jesus' Davidic sonship – not even to call him Son of David – he does have him called king of Israel (1:49; 12:13), and his kingship becomes a major theme of the Gospel.

a *Rabbi, prophet, and Elijah*

Among traditional Jewish titles applied to Jesus in John we find also *rabbi*, *prophet*, and possibly *Elijah*. In the case of *rabbi* (see above, pp. 91-93) and *prophet* the titles as used in the Gospel often imply an underestimation of who Jesus is (for example, 1:38 for *rabbi* and 4:16; 6:14-15 for *prophet*). Yet they are not wrong. Jesus was truly a *rabbi* or a teacher (1:38), as well as a prophetic figure. Jesus the prophet was not so much a figure like Amos or Hosea, pronouncing God's judgment against a wayward Israel, as he was the prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, that is, a second edition of Moses, *Moses redivivus*.²⁸ The figure of Jesus issuing commandments to his followers in the farewell discourses is reminiscent of this prophet of God (Deuteronomy 18:18): "I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

An important aspect of the Johannine, indeed, all the Gospels', portrayal of Jesus that does not coincide with traditional messianic expectations is his miracle-working activity.

²⁶ On the relationship of Johannine christology to Moses and Mosaic traditions in later Judaism and Samaritanism, see the works cited above in Chapter 2, n. 14, and especially Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*.

²⁷ Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, points out the relative lack of sophistication of John's resurrection stories, indeed, their "fairy tale atmosphere" (p. 511): "It is like finding Hans Christian Andersen hand in hand with Søren Kierkegaard." Yet, as I have briefly indicated above, John is using resurrection traditions for his own purposes, and not simply lapsing into fairy tales.

²⁸ Leander E. Keck has trenchantly and effectively shown the inadequacy of approaching christology through an examination of titles: see his "Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology," *NTS*, 32 (1986), 362-377, especially 368-370.

Generally speaking, the Davidic Messiah was not expected to be a miracle worker.²⁹ Why, then, was Jesus portrayed in this way? One answer that is doubtless correct as far as it goes is that Jesus actually performed mighty works (Greek: *dynamis*) of the sort attributed to him in all the Gospels. His opponents challenge him on the basis of his authority or of the source of his remarkable powers, but do not contest the deeds themselves (Mark 3:23). But such miracle working, particularly the working of signs (Greek: *semeia*), the specifically Johannine term, also belongs to the Mosaic Exodus tradition. Moses, of course, performed miraculous signs before Pharaoh to authenticate his divine commission, which is also what Jesus' signs were intended, in a different historical setting, to do (see Exodus chaps. 4-11 especially). Thus the expected prophet like Moses would also perform signs. Jesus would then be the fulfillment of the expectation of the prophet like Moses as well as of the Davidic Messiah. Not by chance Moses is mentioned a dozen or more times in the Fourth Gospel, more than Abraham, Jacob, or David. Although Jesus' specific role may be related to that of the Mosaic prophet, Jesus is not identified with Moses, but rather placed over against him. This does not mean, however, that Moses, properly understood, is opposed to Jesus. Rather, Moses wrote about Jesus and accuses his opponents (cf. 5:45-47).

Jesus' miracle-working activity seems also to be related to Elijah and Elisha traditions. For example, in the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) John alone mentions a small boy with five barley loaves, and in 2 Kings (4:42) Elisha feeds a company of one hundred men with twenty barley loaves. Both Elijah and Elisha are said to have raised the dead to life (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37), even as Jesus did (John 11:1-44; cf. Mark 5:38-43; Luke 7:11-17). Moreover, at the beginning of John's Gospel John the Baptist is asked whether he is the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet (1:25), and he denies that he is any of these in turn. Since John the evangelist certainly held that Jesus was the Christ, and probably also the

prophet, it is worth asking whether he took him to be Elijah as well.³⁰ Why else would John the Baptist refuse to accept the title in the Gospel of John, whereas in Matthew (17:10-13) Jesus says quite clearly that John was Elijah? Was the title being reserved for Jesus at an earlier stage of the tradition? In this connection it is worth noting that in the Synoptic tradition Jesus is said by some to be Elijah (cf. Mark 6:14-15), and precisely because of his miracle-working activity. That the fourth evangelist took Jesus to be Elijah *redivivus* remains uncertain, but some such speculation may underlie the Fourth Gospel. We are, however, now pushing at the boundaries of messianic and related expectation. The christological titles of central importance for John, aside from Messiah (Christ), are Son of Man and Son of God. As we already observed, *kyrios*, Lord, as a christological term is notable for its absence. Interestingly enough, although Jesus is said to be the Messiah or Christ at the very outset of the Gospel of John (1:17, 41), he never arrogates this title to himself. When he is asked explicitly whether he is the Christ (10:24), he gives a somewhat evasive answer. In this respect there is a striking agreement with the Synoptic tradition.

b Son of God

"Son of God" is, of course, a traditional christological title, found frequently in Paul's Letters, but also in the Synoptic Gospels and elsewhere. Often it is abbreviated simply to "Son" (for example, Mark 13:32; John 5:19; Galatians 4:4), usually in such a context that it is clear that Son of God (rather than Son of Man) is meant. Already in the Old Testament the anointed king, the Messiah, is said to be God's Son (Psalm 2:7; 89:20-27; 2 Samuel 7:13-14), and the attribution of such sonship to the Messiah was known to the Qumran community.³¹ Perhaps it is not necessary to look beyond the Old Testament scripture and

²⁹ See Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 95-100, 110f.

³⁰ As is suggested by J. L. Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History* (New York, 1976), pp. 9-34. But cf. Marinus de Jonge, "John the Baptist and Elijah in the Fourth Gospel," in R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa (eds.), *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville, 1990), pp. 299-308.

³¹ See Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2nd ed. (London, 1977), p. 294.

its ancient Jewish interpreters to find the origins of the Son of God title. (In fact, the attribution of divine sonship to kings, and rulers was not uncommon in the ancient world, so that the Roman Emperor could be called Son of God, and there were more ancient precedents.³²) Yet its prominence in the early church can scarcely be explained on this basis, for "Son of God" is not a characteristic title of the Jewish Messiah.

Of course, if the Gospel of John could be viewed as an historical document, presenting the *ipissima verba* of Jesus, the origin of this Christian usage would be clear enough: Jesus spoke of himself in this way. But precisely such language from Jesus poses the question of the nature of the Johannine account, if for no other reason than that the title is not usually found on Jesus' lips in the Synoptic Gospels and their underlying traditions. More characteristic, however, is Jesus' use of the term "Father" for God, which is, of course, rooted in biblical and Jewish tradition. A notable example is the Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 5:2), in which Jesus addresses God simply as "Father." Not without reason an earlier generation of theological scholarship spoke of Jesus' God-consciousness, and it is not unlikely that the language of later christology has roots in that of Jesus, as well as in the Jewish and biblical tradition. Yet such roots do not explain the development of the concept of divine sonship as a christological category in Paul and John. And while it was once thought that John built upon Pauline usage, this can no longer be easily assumed; both Paul and John relied on earlier, widespread Christian tradition.

That Jesus was named Son of God at the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4; Acts 13:33) is probably accurate historically, in that it was from, or after, this point that the crucified Jesus' disciples began to refer to him in this way. Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son, today I have begotten you") used of Jesus' resurrection may have paved the way (Acts 13:33; cf. Hebrews 1:5). There is a basis in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke for linking Jesus' divine sonship to the miracle of his

³² See W. von Martitz, *huos*, TDNT, viii, pp. 336f.

conception and birth. Mary is his mother, but God, through the Holy Spirit, begets him without human paternity (Luke 1:35). John, however, if he knew the birth traditions, made nothing of them. (Nor do Paul, Mark, or Hebrews make use of – or appear to know – the birth narratives or traditions.)

Clearly in the Gospel of John, as in Paul, the title "Son of God" expresses Jesus' close unity with God, as it does elsewhere in the New Testament. But John goes further in refining the nature of this unity and restricting it to Jesus, who is said to be the "only" or the "only-begotten" (*monogenēs*) Son of God (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). In later christological debates in the ancient church, emphasis fell on the latter half of the Greek word, on Jesus' begottenness, while in contemporaneous Greek usage it fell on the former, "only." In either case, John thereby signals the uniqueness of Jesus' relationship with the Father. Characteristically in John, when this relationship is being presented, "Son of God," or "Son," is the title used.³³ The Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20), who accomplishes the life-giving work that he sees the Father doing (5:19). To honor the Son is to honor the Father, that is, God (5:23). The unity of the Father and the Son is thus expressed in terms of love and mission. As the Son Jesus addresses the Father in his final prayer and makes this unity quite explicit (17:20–26, especially verse 23). This unity in love and mission is then extended to include Jesus' disciples, that is, the church (cf. 14:21; 15:9; 20:21), and mutual love becomes the ground and basis of the church's existence (13:34–35; 15:12–17).

In the theological, and specifically christological, debates of the fourth and fifth centuries the language of unity between Father and Son, which in the Fourth Gospel had expressed their mutual love and the character of the Son's mission and work, was interpreted ontologically and metaphysically as the question of the nature of that unity was explored.³⁴ Sub-

³³ On "Wisdom," "Word," and "Son" see James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, and ed. (Philadelphia, 1989), especially pp. 213–215, 263–265.

³⁴ For this development see T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1970).

sequently, the character of the coexistence of God and man in Jesus Christ became the focus of discussion, and it too was debated and decided in metaphysical terms. These doctrinal debates and the creeds that emerged from them went beyond anything said in the Fourth Gospel itself, but it would be a mistake to think that they represent the imposition of a completely unrelated set of questions and issues upon that Gospel. Only the Johannine Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (10:30), and Jesus as Son speaks of his unity with the Father as something grounded in eternity (17:5,24). At the beginning John writes that the word was with God and the word was God (1:1), and at the end Jesus is confessed as Lord (the traditional *kyrios* title) and God (*theos*) by Thomas (20:28). Although John does not engage in metaphysical exploration or ontological construction, the kinds of christological controversies that arose later and drew upon his terminology, and seemingly his conceptuality, were not a misrepresentation of John's own purpose and intent, which cannot be adequately dealt with under functionalist or existentialist categories. The fact that John so consistently centers all talk of God and knowledge of God in the revelation of Jesus as God's Son, and therefore the definitive and exhaustive revelation of God, lends to this fundamental perspective an authoritative role in interpretation. John obviously intends to make far-reaching, extravagant, and extreme claims about who Jesus is, and the interpreter must let him. The fourth- and fifth-century controversies were in their own way an effort to do this also.

That the other christological creeds and controversies concerned with the deity of Jesus Christ or his place in the Godhead did not misrepresent the language and intention of the Fourth Gospel is underscored by the fact that at a couple of crucial points Jesus is, in fact, called God (*theos*). The first is, of course, in the opening line of the prologue (1:1): "and the word was with God and the word was God." Secondly, in the final resurrection scene of chapter 20, Doubting Thomas calls the risen Jesus "my Lord and my God." It is likely significant that the earthly Jesus does not claim the divine title, as often as he asserts his sonship, and that the evangelist reserves it for the

preexistent and the risen Christ. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to treat "God" as a christological title. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in his role as revealer Jesus Christ is from the standpoint of the believer equivalent to God in that he definitively and finally reveals God and is thus the only true access to God (14:6). Moreover, Jesus emphasizes his unity with God in mission and work. In fact, all the titles point to this reality.

c Son of Man

The Son of Man title differs from "Son of God" in its background in Judaism and early Christianity, but whether it has a different function and meaning within the Gospel of John is a good question. "Son of Man" is the enigmatic title or epithet by which Jesus refers to himself in the Synoptic Gospels, and the problem of the Son of Man sayings in those Gospels has become notorious. They divide themselves into sayings in which Jesus predicts the suffering of the Son of Man, obviously himself; those in which he speaks of the authority of the Son of Man on earth, again obviously himself; and those in which he speaks of the future epiphany of a supernatural figure, traditionally taken to be his own "second coming." In addition there are other scattered references to the Son of Man, sometimes clearly references to Jesus himself (for example, Matthew 16:13), sometimes not necessarily so (Luke 9:58).

As to their assessment of these sayings, scholars can be grouped in several camps. Some think Jesus used the term only for the future, coming Son of Man, who was someone other than himself. Others take only the authoritative Son of Man sayings to be authentic. Still others think Jesus simply used the term as a common periphrasis for "I myself." Finally, some doubt that Jesus used the term or title at all. This last position seems doubtful if only because the turn of phrase is so pervasive in the Gospels, and occurs almost always on the lips of Jesus himself rather than on those of his disciples or interlocutors.

Most scholars assume that the Johannine Son of Man is derivative from the Synoptic, although this may not be the

case.³⁵ The common point between Johannine and Synoptic usage is the fact that the term is used by Jesus of himself, not by others. The so-called apocalyptic Son of Man sayings are represented only once in John (5:27), where the function of holding judgment is said to have been assigned by God to the Son of Man. Otherwise, the title Son of Man does not seem to coincide with a particular function of Jesus' ministry or with a role or status not otherwise dealt with in the Gospel of John. A number of the Johannine Son of Man sayings have to do with Jesus' crucifixion/glorification (3:14; 8:28; 12:23-34; 13:31) and with the related theme of his descent and ascent (1:51; 3:13; 6:62). Therefore, they present Jesus as the revealer of God, so that Jesus can ask the man whose sight he has restored whether he believes in the Son of Man (9:35). The Son of Man gives the bread from heaven (6:27); indeed, his flesh is this bread from heaven (6:51).

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. Although "Son of Man" frequently occurs where Jesus' historical, revelatory role, especially his death, is set forth, those aspects of his ministry are also associated with the title "Son of God," or with no title at all. Nevertheless, it is probably not inaccurate to say that "Son of Man" is associated more with Jesus' historic, revelatory work, and "Son of God" with his relationship to the Father. On the other hand, it would certainly be misleading to suggest that in the Gospel of John "Son of Man" is associated with Jesus' human nature, while "Son of God" refers to his divine nature. As the one who reveals God to people, Jesus is *theos* (1:1, 18; 20:29). At precisely

³⁵ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 1971), derives the Johannine Son of Man from the Gospel's gnostic source (cf. especially p. 105, n. 3; p. 149, n. 4). Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSS 56 (Sheffield, 1991), argues that it is rooted in scripture, particularly Proverbs 30:1-4. Burkett also presents a valuable discussion of "Son of Man" in Johannine scholarship (pp. 16-37) and of the crucial questions pertaining to it (pp. 38-50).

the points at which Jesus is portrayed as the historic revealer, whether through word, deed, or death, he is transparent to God. Truly to see him is to see who God is.

6 Jesus' relationship to God

At the same time, Jesus is careful to define his relationship to God in such a way as to exclude the charge that he has usurped divine prerogatives. "I and the Father are one" (10:30) means that Jesus is completely subject to the will and purpose of God, to carry out the mission that God has given him. "As the Father has sent me, so also I send you," says the risen Jesus to his disciples (20:21). There is an important sense in which Jesus' commission is no different from his disciples'. He too is subject to God's command.

At the point at which he is accused of making himself equal to God (5:18), Jesus does not deny the charge, but says that he only acts at the Father's behest. He only does what he sees the Father doing (verse 19). Then he goes on to describe his work of raising the dead, giving life, and holding judgment (verses 21-29). Prerogatives that scriptural and Jewish tradition have reserved for God Jesus claims for himself. But he denies that they are his independent prerogatives, and insists rather that they have been given him by the Father (verse 30): "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, for I do not seek my own will but the will of him who sent me."

This dispute (John 5) doubtless reflects the fear and accusation that the role ascribed to Jesus in the Johannine community is a threat to monotheism. From the perspective of anyone who does not believe that God in Jesus has acted or revealed himself in a new and definitive way it doubtless seems such a threat. Understandably "the Jews" accuse him of blasphemy for making himself a mere mortal, equal to God (10:33). How could they think otherwise? Thus questions that are quite reasonable are posed to Jesus. "You are not greater than our Father Jacob, are you?" asks the Samaritan woman (4:12), or, "You are not greater than our Father Abraham, are

you?" the Jews ask (8:53). Both questions in Greek expect a negative answer, as my translation shows, but both press Jesus to define the nature and source of his authority. The highest human authority within scripture or Judaism, Moses, is invoked on the side of Jesus (5:45-47; cf. 1:45), and the question is how shall Moses be understood. Clearly the Jews or Pharisees are unwilling to grant Jesus the witness of Moses. Rather, one must choose between them (9:28).

To the end Jesus views his work and mission as acceptance of the authority and commission of God. As he dies he says, "It is finished" (19:30), meaning that he has completed the work that God gave him to do. Moreover, as Jesus delivers his final prayer to God, and to the reader of the Gospel (chap. 17), he characterizes his entire mission and work as obedience to the mandate that was given him (verse 4): "I glorified thee on earth, having completed the work that thou gavest me to do." Jesus does nothing of his own accord. But obviously God speaks to him in a direct or unmediated way. Who else is privy to such divine revelation? The answer, in John's view, is no one. So how, if at all, can the claim be verified – or falsified? It cannot to everyone's satisfaction. That is, it is impossible to prove the merit or truth of Jesus' claims, or the claims made for Jesus, although his signs or works are introduced to bear powerful testimony (5:36). Of course, John the Baptist has borne testimony (5:33), along with scripture (5:39ff.). But John's authority was debatable (cf. Mark 11:29-33), and the right interpretation of scripture was the crux of the disagreement. The Father himself has borne testimony, but his work must be mediated through persons and events on the human scene. Even if God speaks directly, his word can be mistaken for thunder (12:29), so fallible are human ears.

On the other hand, how can Jesus' claims, or the claims of Jesus' followers, be disproved? One may maintain that they represent a strong misreading of the Hebrew Bible. From any point within the Bible that would seem to be the case, but the very point of the claim is that a new vantage point has been given, outside scripture, so to speak, from which scripture and tradition must now be interpreted. That claim is supported by

the witnesses mentioned above (5:30-47), as well as by the testimony of the Spirit speaking to and within the community of Jesus' disciples (14:12-14, 26; 16:12-15). Moreover, the love of the disciples for one another (13:34) attests the validity of Jesus' mission and message, and the solidarity of the community in love will persuade the world of the validity of the claims made for Jesus (17:21-23).

Of course, the claim that Jesus was the Messiah in any traditional or conventional sense would seem to be refuted by his execution as a criminal or blasphemer. But such a refutation is met by the interpretation of that very death as the expression of God's love (3:16), which underlies all human love. In the eyes of early Christians that expression of love speaks powerfully on the side of the truth and validity of their claims. These Christians, and especially the members of the Johannine community, saw in Jesus' perfect fulfillment of the commission and love of God in his ministry and death the model for their own lives and relationships (John 15:12f.; cf. 1 John 4:7-12). The seemingly exalted christology of the Fourth Gospel presents a Jesus who is God's perfect, in the sense of final or complete, revelation. Yet he does not base that claim on his own authority, but on God's, and his validation of the claim takes the form of obedient self-giving, love, toward his fellows and followers. It is the kind of validation that they can experience and share. Indeed, if they really believe the claim they will manifest this love, and in the only way possible will prove the claim to be true.

C THE REVELATION OF THE GLORY TO THE COMMUNITY

Beginning in chapter 13, at the Last Supper, and continuing through chapter 17, Jesus' prayer, the disciples are constantly in view. In chapters 18 and 19, as Jesus goes to his arrest, trial, condemnation, and death, there is once again a public scenario and Jesus is, as he had predicted (16:42), abandoned by all his disciples except the Beloved Disciple, who is the model of discipleship. But the concluding, resurrection scenes find Jesus