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Son of God, I Am, and Logos

Scholars have long recognized the centrality of Jesus and the high Christology in John's Gospel. In chapter 5 I sought to demonstrate the centrality of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels by attending to the variety of ways in which he is preeminent in the narrative. We also saw in chapter 5 a high Christology in the Synoptics that is easily missed by readers who attend only to titles. In chapter 6 the focus shifted to the titles "Messiah" and "Son of Man." Neither title necessarily signifies deity, but what is remarkable is the content that Jesus poured into both of them. In both instances Jesus stressed that suffering would precede glory. In this chapter we turn to titles that clearly describe Jesus' glory and splendor. The deity of Jesus clearly shines forth in the title "Son of God," the "I am" sayings, and the Johannine teaching on the Logos. There is the danger of abstracting the titles from the person, so that an artificial portrait of Jesus is formed. Jesus is depicted in a variety of ways because no single description captures the fullness of his person. Still, the focus is ultimately on Jesus himself and not on the titles ascribed to him, though in the final analysis the titles cannot, of course, be separated from who Jesus is. Furthermore, we must continue to see that the titles cannot be separated from redemptive history. Since Jesus is Son of God, I Am, and Logos, God's saving promises are fulfilled only in Jesus and in knowing Jesus as the Son of God.

Son of God

Old Testament Context

When examining the term “Son of God,” we will begin with the OT and then examine the use of the term in the Synoptic Gospels and then the Gospel of John.¹ If we begin with the plural “sons of God” in the OT, we find that the expression applies particularly to angels (Gen. 6:2, 4; Deut. 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 82:6; 89:6).² Of course, the interpretation of Gen. 6:1–4 is contested, and space is lacking here to discuss the many interpretations offered. Lexically, however, it seems that “sons of God” refers to angels, and this interpretation is borne out by both the NT and the Jewish tradition. In a number of texts the LXX renders “sons of God” (*bēnê ’ēlōhîm*) as “angels” (*angeloi*) (Deut. 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The term “sons of God,” then, can refer to heavenly beings, to God’s heavenly court.

The singular, “son of God,” refers to Israel, signifying God’s special and covenantal relationship with his people. In Exod. 4:22 Israel is designated as God’s “firstborn son” (*huios prōtotokos*). The collocation of “son” and “firstborn” indicates that Israel enjoyed the privileges of primogeniture as God’s son (cf. Jer. 31:9). The northern kingdom, under the appellation “Ephraim,” was God’s “beloved son” (*huios agapētos* [Jer. 31:20 LXX my translation]). Israel’s exodus from Egypt is described as the calling out of God’s “son” (Hosea 11:1). Although the terminology is not used often, God is also represented as the father of Israel (Deut. 32:6; Jer. 3:4) or with maternal imagery as the one who gave birth to his people (Deut. 32:18). The plural “sons” also denotes God’s fatherly relation to Israel (Deut. 14:1; Isa. 43:6), though sometimes it emphasizes Israel’s treachery as those in a unique relationship with God (Deut. 32:5; Isa. 45:11; Hosea 1:10).³ In every instance it is likely that Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with Israel is in view.

The Davidic king is also specially related to God, via the Davidic covenant, and designated as son. God relates to the Davidic king as a father to a son, and he will never withdraw his covenantal love from the king (2 Sam. 7:14–15; 1 Chron. 17:13–14; 22:10; 28:6–7). As we noted previously, Ps. 89 reflects on God’s promise to David and his heirs in a situation where the covenantal promises are not being fulfilled. The psalmist celebrates God’s unbreakable covenantal love to the Davidic

1. For the OT background along with a consideration of some Qumran evidence, see Fitzmyer 1979: 102–7. For the Jewish and Hellenistic background, see the brief and helpful summary in Cullmann 1963: 270–75.

2. Different Hebrew words for “God” are used in some of these expressions.

3. We should note that both sons and daughters are included in Deut. 32:19; Isa. 43:6, and that the LXX adds daughters in Isa. 45:11.

king, using it as a basis to plead to God for the fulfillment of his promise. The Davidic king will address God as his father and his rock. God in turn considers the king as his “firstborn [*prōtotokos*], the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:26–27). The one who sits on David’s throne and who will rule in peace and justice is a “son” (Isa. 9:6), suggesting his unique relationship to God. According to Ps. 2, the nations of the world chafe at and attempt to dislodge the rule of Yahweh’s anointed. But Yahweh has designated the anointed king as his “son” and has installed him as his king (Ps. 2:6). To this son will be given the rule over all nations, even to the ends of the earth. Hence, other nations must bow in submission to this “son” or else be destroyed by him (Ps. 2:12).

Considering the OT as a canonical unit, we observe that Israel occupies a special position as God’s son. And yet the Davidic king also functions as God’s unique son. The king receives the same covenantal promise that Israel receives. Ultimately, he will rule the world as God’s vicegerent. God’s promise to the Davidic king does not contradict his promise to Israel; rather, the king represents Israel as a whole. He functions as Israel’s covenantal head, through whom the promises will be secured. Israel will rule the world for God through its appointed king, who will be the son of David.

“Son of God” seems to have been a messianic title in Second Temple Judaism as well.⁴ Several texts from Qumran are most naturally understood to refer to the Messiah as the Son of God (cf. 4QFlor 1 I, 10–12, citing 2 Sam. 7:12–14; 1QSa II, 11–12, which speaks of begetting the Messiah; 4Q369; 4Q246).⁵ The Messiah is also God’s Son in *4 Ezra* (*4 Ezra* 7:28–29; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9).⁶ Collins rightly concludes that the Son of God brings about peace and establishes the kingdom, much like the Messiah.⁷ Hence, the conjunction between “Messiah” and “Son of God” in the NT is scarcely surprising. Indeed, in Jewish circles “Son of God” did not designate one as deity, though in the NT it becomes clear that Jesus is the Son of God in an even more profound way than anticipated at Qumran.

4. So Horbury 1998: 113. The notion that “Son of God” comes from Hellenistic circles, though widespread in the history of NT studies, is unpersuasive (rightly Evans 1998: 153).

5. For the view defended here, see J. J. Collins 1995: 154–65; Evans 1998. According to Fitzmyer (1979: 105–6), the expression “Son of God” was not used of the Davidic king in Jewish writings prior to the NT, but Collins’s assessment of the evidence is more persuasive, for it seems that both Qumran and NT writings inferred that the messianic king was the Son of God because David’s successor is identified as God’s “son” at the inception of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:14).

6. For the Son of God in *4 Ezra*, see J. J. Collins 1995: 165–67.

7. J. J. Collins 1995: 167.

Matthew and Mark

If we open the Synoptic Gospels with the OT background in mind, the theme that Jesus is the true Son of God—the true Israel—emerges.⁸ As we noted previously, Matthew sees a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 in Jesus' return from Egypt, though in the original context Hosea refers to the exodus of Israel from Egypt. Matthew suggests from this text that Jesus is the true Israel, the Son of God. At Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration the divine voice identifies him as God's "beloved son" (*huios agapētos* [Matt. 3:17 par.; 17:5 par.]).⁹ We saw earlier that in the OT Israel is acclaimed as God's beloved son. Isaac is also called the beloved son of Abraham (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16), as the son of the promise. Similarly, Jesus is the promised heir as God's beloved son.

The title "Son of God," however, is not limited to the notion that Jesus is the true Israel.¹⁰ It also signifies that he fulfills the promises made to David.¹¹ He is the king of Israel, the one anointed by God to rule over his people. When Jesus calms the storm, the disciples confess that he is God's Son (Matt. 14:33).¹² Perhaps the disciples received a glimmer of Jesus' special relation to God, but they likely meant by this acclamation that Jesus was truly the Messiah, the one to whom the covenantal promises given to David pointed. The same conclusion should be drawn from Matt. 16:16, where at a crucial juncture in the Gospel Peter exclaims that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹³ It is doubtful that at this stage in his thinking Peter grasped that Jesus was divine.¹⁴ The titles "Christ" and "Son of God" were synonyms, denoting that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Equating "Messiah" with "Son of God" is scarcely

8. We should not interpret "Son of God" in light of the alleged divine men of the Greco-Roman world (rightly Fitzmyer 1979: 106; Dunn 1996a: 16–19) or from a Hellenistic background (contra, e.g., Bultmann 1951: 128–33). Several studies have demonstrated insuperable weaknesses in the *theios anēr* theory (Holladay 1977; Brady 1992). Blackburn (1991) argues that the Markan miracle traditions do not reflect a "divine man" Christology. Holladay (1977) demonstrates that the alleged link between Hellenism and Judaism in Josephus and Philo cannot be substantiated, since a careful examination of their writings reveals that they did not think that human beings were deified.

9. In the preferred reading among the Greek texts of Luke's Gospel, God's voice refers to Jesus as "my Son, my chosen one" at the transfiguration (Luke 9:35).

10. Kingsbury (1975: 40–83) argues that "Son of God" is the central christological title in Matthew.

11. Some scholars doubt that "Son of God" raises Davidic associations, but the notion is defended well by Longenecker (1970: 93–99).

12. Cullmann (1963: 279) notes that Jesus is recognized as the Son of God in the Synoptics "only in exceptional cases" based on "special supernatural knowledge."

13. Contra Cullmann (1963: 280), Peter's confession should not be assigned to another context.

14. Peter likely understood the title "Son of God" in messianic terms, but Matthew points the reader to a deeper understanding (Carson 1984: 365–66).

surprising, given the OT background sketched above. Perhaps the same equation exists in Luke 1:32, where Jesus is promised David's throne and identified as "the Son of the Most High."¹⁵

We have seen that the title "Son of God" means that Jesus is the true Israel and the Messiah, the promised son of David. The Gospel writers, however, see a deeper meaning in the appellation "Son of God." Jesus also shares a unique and special relation with God.¹⁶ He even shares the prerogatives of deity without compromising the oneness of God. Indeed, this last category is what the Gospel writers emphasize. Mark, for example, introduces his Gospel¹⁷ with the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, "the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).¹⁸ The Gospel concludes with the same words on the lips of the centurion (Mark 15:39). The centurion recognized that Jesus submitted to God in his death, and so he died as God's obedient Son.¹⁹ Significantly, the centurion identified Jesus only after his work on the cross was completed, suggesting that Jesus can be understood rightly as God's Son only in light of the cross.²⁰ The demons also understood who Jesus is better than did Jews living in Palestine, for the former group recognized that Jesus is God's unique Son (Mark 3:11; 5:7). The divine voice also acclaimed Jesus as the Son of God at his baptism and transfiguration (Mark 1:11; 9:7). An examination of the Markan usage as a whole shows that he does not emphasize by the title that Jesus is the true Israel or even that he is the Davidic king; rather, what comes to the forefront is Jesus' special relationship with God.²¹ When in Mark's Gospel Jesus walks on the stormy waves and declares "it is I" (*egō eimi* [Mark 6:50]), the story implies that Jesus shares the identity of God.²²

Matthew, as we noted, uses "Son" or "Son of God" in contexts where the title likely refers to the true Israel or Messiah. What must be empha-

15. Bock (1987: 67–68) rightly argues that in Luke 1 Jesus was the Messiah at birth, not adopted as such at that point.

16. See Versepunt 1987, a nuanced study that France (1989: 292–98) generally endorses, though he rightly points out that Versepunt underestimates Jesus' unique relation to God and his unique status as God's Son.

17. Mark 1:1 should be read as the introduction to the entire Gospel, not merely to Mark 1:1–15 (rightly Boring 1990; France 2002: 50–51; Hurtado 2003: 309; contra Lane 1974: 42; Hooker 1991: 33).

18. "Son of God" is lacking in some Greek texts but should be regarded as original (France 2002: 49).

19. So Kingsbury 1983: 131.

20. For the centrality of Jesus as the Son of God in Mark, see Kingsbury 1983: 47–55.

21. Cullmann (1963: 282–83) argues that the title designates Jesus' obedience to his Father and his special and unique relationship to God.

22. Marcus (2000: 432) says that here Mark suggests Jesus' divinity, even though not stating it outright. See also Hurtado 2003: 286.

sized, however, is that Matthew typically uses the phrase to denote Jesus' special and unique relation to God. Jesus' sonship cannot be limited to his being the true Israel or the Messiah, for he is even to be worshiped as God's Son. The distinctiveness of Jesus as God's Son emerges in Matt. 1:23, for Jesus as the Son is Immanuel—"God with us." Such language is not merely symbolic, for Matthew concludes with the promise of Jesus' permanent presence with his people (Matt. 28:20).²³ As God's Son, Jesus is God himself with his people, though this does not exclude or cancel out monotheism or the unique authority of the Father. The devil (Matt. 4:3, 6) and demons (Matt. 8:29) recognized that Jesus is God's Son. They did not merely mean that Jesus is the Messiah; they acknowledged his exclusive relation to God. The uniqueness of Jesus' relation to God is evident in Matt. 11:27:²⁴ "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." The Father and the Son know each other exclusively, mutually, and intimately. Only the Father truly knows the Son, and only the Son truly knows the Father. The priority of the Father is maintained because he has given to the Son all that he enjoys.²⁵ And yet no person can come to know the Father unless the Son desires to reveal the Father to that person. As with the "Immanuel" text, it is clear here that Jesus' sonship cannot be limited to his serving as the Messiah. He has a relationship with the Father that is inimitable and exclusive. Indeed, Matthew clearly implies Jesus' divine status here, for he and the Father have mutual knowledge, and the Son is the only one who knows the Father. Further, it is clear in this text that Jesus is part of the divine heavenly council and is thus in a separate category from all human beings.²⁶

Jesus' uniqueness as God's Son stands out in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is to be applied in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. There is one name, and yet three different entities that are to be invoked during baptism. Here we are on the brink of the full trinitarian formulas of later church history, although Matthew, of course,

23. See Hagner 1993b: 21; Luz 2005: 634; Nolland 2005: 1271; contra Davies and Allison 1988: 217.

24. Hagner (1993b: 319–20) rightly argues that the use of "Son" here reflects the Christology that Jesus is uniquely and distinctively God's Son (see also Luz 2001: 164–70 [although he thinks that it is a church creation]). "The point is that Jesus thus has a unique role as the mediator of the knowledge of God to humankind. This role is directly linked with the person of Jesus, his identity as the unique representative of God" (Hagner 1993b: 320).

25. Many interpreters understand *panta* ("all things") here to refer to knowledge (e.g., Davies and Allison 1991: 279; Luz 2001: 166), but Nolland (2005: 471–72) is probably correct in seeing a general and comprehensive reference.

26. Crump (1992: 49–75) points out from the parallel in Matthew that Jesus' role in intercession and prayer here reveals a high Christology.

does not work out his statement into the notion of three persons and one divine essence. What is clear here is that the title “Son” represents divinity. He is equal in some sense with the Father. Examining Matthew’s Gospel as a whole, we see that he clearly invests the title “Son of God” with divine significance. So when Jesus is identified as God’s Son at his baptism and transfiguration (Matt. 3:17; 17:5), the point is that he has a unique relation to God.

In summary, in some instances persons using the title “Son of God” may have meant nothing more than “Messiah.” It is difficult for us to make such distinctions, however, because Matthew and the other Gospel writers were not interested merely in the historical meaning of what was said. Peter probably grasped only that Jesus was the Messiah when he identified him as God’s Son (Matt. 16:16; cf. 16:23), but he spoke better than he knew. Jesus was God’s Son in a more amazing way than Peter contemplated. When the centurion acclaimed Jesus as God’s Son (Matt. 27:54), his words meant more than “Jesus is the Messiah,” even if he did not grasp the full dimensions of the words that he uttered.²⁷

It is more difficult to discern at Jesus’ trial what the high priest meant when he asked Jesus if he was the Messiah, “the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). Was the high priest inquiring whether Jesus is in some sense divine? On the basis of OT antecedents the title “Son of God” could be equivalent to “Messiah.” The Sanhedrin concluded that Jesus blasphemed, and yet claiming to be the Messiah was not blasphemous per se. Jesus links together here the Son of God and the Son of Man (Matt. 26:63–64). It seems, then, that “Son of God” means more than “Messiah” here, designating Jesus’ unique relation to God and his claim to share God’s power by claiming his place on the heavenly throne.²⁸ When Jesus was dying upon the cross, some reviled him, demanding that he prove himself as God’s Son by coming down from the cross (Matt. 27:40, 43). Again, it is just possible that they meant by this that the true Messiah would never die on the cross. Certainty on these historical questions

27. It is unlikely that the centurion grasped the full import of his words, and hence he spoke better than he knew (Hagner 1995: 852–53; France 2002: 659–60). Nolland (2005: 1220) suggests that we are not meant to probe too deeply into the centurion’s consciousness. Luz (2005: 569–70) rightly and strongly argues that in the Matthean context Jesus is confessed here as the divine Son. For a helpful discussion of the use of “righteous” rather than “Son of God” in Luke 23:47, see Bock 1996: 1863–64. For further discussion, see R. Brown 1994: 2:1143–52, 1160–67.

28. So Gathercole 2006: 278, 292; Evans 2001: 453–57. In *m. Sanh.* 7:5 blasphemy is defined as the pronouncing of the divine name, but both Bock (2000: 30–112) and A. Collins (2004) have demonstrated that blasphemy was defined in a broader sense during the NT era. Jesus’ blasphemy, they both argue, consisted in his claiming power that belonged only to God (see also Stuhlmacher 1993: 32). See also the discussion on blasphemy in R. Brown 1994: 1:520–47.

eludes us. What does seem clear is that “Son of God” in Matthew cannot be limited to “Messiah.” Matthew wants readers to see all the “Son of God” statements in light of the full revelation that has come after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus is not simply the Messiah; he stands in a special relationship with the Father and, like the Father, is divine.²⁹

Luke

It comes as no surprise that Luke also emphasizes Jesus’ unique relation to God, since many of the same texts from Mark and Matthew are included. Jesus is acclaimed at his baptism as God’s beloved Son (Luke 3:22) and at his transfiguration as God’s elect Son (Luke 9:35). As in Matthew, both the devil (Luke 4:3, 9) and demons (Luke 4:41; 8:28) confess that Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus’ unique and exclusive relationship with the Father is expressed in Luke as well (Luke 10:22; cf. Matt. 11:27). The question from Caiaphas as to whether Jesus is God’s Son is also included (Luke 22:70). Jesus is also designated as God’s Son because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit instead of by a human father (Luke 1:35).³⁰ This last text confirms that Luke understood Jesus’ sonship to be unique.³¹ When we examine Luke’s Gospel as a whole, it becomes clear that Jesus’ sonship conveys his divine status, but there is no need to cover the same ground again, since Luke’s view accords with what we have seen in Matthew and Mark.

John’s Gospel

The high Christology of John’s Gospel is evident to all, and in the history of NT scholarship this high Christology has led many to doubt the historical veracity of John’s portrait of Jesus. It is not my purpose here to defend John’s accuracy in detail, since my focus is on John’s theology. Nevertheless, despite the objections of many, good reasons

29. With Cullmann (1963: 289), we should also note that Jesus almost certainly is the son in the parable of the tenants (Matt. 21:33–46 par.). Cullmann (e.g., 1963: 293, 306), however, wrongly sets ontology against function. Nolland (2005: 873–74) argues that Jesus is the son here, but Christology per se is not emphasized.

30. Hence, Jesus is also superior to the Baptist, for although the Baptist’s birth was remarkable, it resulted from a human father (see also R. Brown 1977: 300). R. Brown (1977: 314) also rightly argues that the birth of Jesus is not sexual in any way. Rather, the Spirit’s role is analogous to the hovering of the Spirit over the waters before the first creation. Just as the world was void, so too was Mary’s womb. With the virginal conception, Luke emphasizes that Jesus was always the Son of God (R. Brown 1977: 316).

31. Bock (1987: 63–67) argues, however, that in calling Jesus the Son of God, Luke emphasizes not Jesus’ ontological status but rather his rule as the Davidic king. If so, then “Son of God” for Luke is basically equivalent to Jesus being hailed as the Davidic king.

exist to support the historical accuracy of John's portrait.³² There is some evidence in John, as we saw in the Synoptics, that "Son of God" is equivalent to "Messiah." I suggested earlier that when Nathaniel exclaimed that Jesus was the "Son of God" and "the King of Israel" (John 1:49), he did not mean by "Son of God" that Jesus is divine.³³ "Son of God" in this instance is simply another way of saying that Jesus is the Messiah. We probably can draw the same conclusion from Martha's confession in John 11:27. When she said that Jesus is the "Christ" and the "Son of God," she likely used the two terms synonymously, for it is improbable at this early stage that she even considered whether Jesus was divine.³⁴ When Pilate was informed at Jesus' trial that Jesus called himself God's Son (John 19:7), this could be interpreted as saying that Pilate believed that Jesus claimed divinity. The rest of the passion narrative in John, however, suggests that Jesus' opponents charged Jesus with claiming to be a king—the Messiah³⁵—and asserting a blasphemous unity with God but did not grasp that Jesus claimed divinity.³⁶

When these statements are set against the backdrop of Johannine theology as a whole, however, the point is that all these people spoke better than they knew. Jesus is God's Son in a way they never imagined or contemplated. John's purpose in his Gospel is to persuade readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son (John 20:31). In this purpose statement the terms "Christ" and "Son of God" are not merely equivalent. "Christ" refers to Jesus being the Messiah, but "Son of God" also indicates Jesus' special relation to God—his divinity. That Jesus' sonship implies deity is clear from a number of texts. For instance, the Father and the Son know each other intimately and exclusively (John 10:15).³⁷ The mutuality of the statement excludes the notion that the Son's knowledge of the Father is akin to the knowledge that human beings have of God. Jesus does not merely say here that the Father gave him knowledge, but simply that he knows the Father, showing his independence.

John's Gospel also emphasizes the priority of the Father and suggests a kind of subordination in the Son. For instance, John often emphasizes

32. For sources that support this view, see chapter 2, note 3.

33. See Beasley-Murray 1987: 27; Carson 1991b: 162; see also R. Brown 1966: 87–88.

34. Rightly Koester 2003: 121. Contra Morris (1971: 552), it does not seem that Martha uses the terms with "their maximum content." For the view that this stems only from John's theology, see Barrett 1978: 397.

35. Barrett (1978: 542) does not think that the Johannine account necessarily represents what happened, and so he interprets the statement to refer to equality with God. R. Brown (1970: 891) thinks that John gives a title that later expressed the conflict between church and synagogue.

36. Köstenberger (2004: 533–34) notes that here they may have simply been identifying Jesus as the Messiah. Carson (1991b: 599) detects more significance.

37. See Barrett 1978: 375–76.

that Jesus was sent by the Father into the world.³⁸ Jesus as the one sent by God discharges God's will and represents God to human beings. What God communicates to the world by sending his Son is the depth and intensity of his love. God sent the Son to save the world, not to condemn it, although those who do not believe in the Son are condemned even now (John 3:16–18; cf. 6:40). At the same time, the Son's coming into the world demonstrates his love for and submission to the Father. The Son works not independently but rather solely in concert with and in dependence upon the Father (John 5:19, 30; 7:16; 14:31; 15:15). He teaches what the Father teaches, commands what the Father commands, and reveals what the Father reveals. The subordination of the Son in John's theology, however, does not mean that Jesus is not divine or is a lesser deity.³⁹ John does not work out for readers how the Son can be dependent upon the Father and be sent by the Father while at the same time sharing deity with the Father. The philosophical and theological implications of his statements were worked out in the early church and continue to be reflected upon by theologians today. The distinctiveness of the Son is evident, for the Father uniquely loves the Son and has handed all things over to him, so that those who believe in the Son have life but those who fail to believe experience even now God's wrath (John 3:35–36; cf. 5:20; 10:17; 20:17).

The subordination of the Son is not the only story in John's Gospel, for John clearly teaches also that Jesus as the Son is equal to God, and that he is divine. For instance, Jesus declares that he as the Son grants life to whom he wishes, and the final judgment will be determined by him (John 5:21–22). Granting life to others is a divine activity, for life comes not from human beings but from God himself, and yet the Son claims that he has the ability to bestow life. The divinity of the Son is suggested in that he gives his sheep eternal life, which is a divine activity. Those to whom he grants such life will never perish, for no one can snatch them from his hand (John 10:29). John immediately proceeds to the notion that the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30), suggesting again the divine activity involved in granting and preserving life. Similarly, passing judgment on others is a divine prerogative, but the Son will assess the life of each one and determine the final reward. Even in granting life or judging others, the Son is not divided from the Father,

38. John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36, 37, 38; 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 7:16; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24, 31; 15:15, 21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21.

39. As Ridderbos (1997: 192–93) has observed, Jesus does not reject the notion that he is equal with God but instead emphasizes that he is the Son. As the Son, he is fully equal with God but has not made himself equal with God.

for the Son always does the works intended by the Father (John 5:36; 10:32, 37–38).

The stature of the Son blazes forth in one of the most remarkable statements in John: the Son must be honored in the same way as the Father (John 5:23; cf. 8:19).⁴⁰ Indeed, those who fail to honor the Son also fail to honor the Father. It seems, then, that John is arguing that the Son must be worshiped in the same way as the Father, for the honor that belongs to the one and only God must also be given to the Son. In the monotheistic framework in which John writes, such honoring of the Son must mean that he is fully divine, for worshiping a creature or an angel was unthinkable in Judaism.

The stature of the Son is verified when we consider his glory.⁴¹ Jesus uniquely manifests the glory of God as the Son of the Father (John 1:14), and his glory shines in his miracles (John 2:11). Jesus' glory is particularly revealed in the cross, and this theme will be taken up in due course. Here it should be observed that Jesus' glory suggests his deity, his absolute uniqueness as the Son of the Father. John claims that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory in his vision (John 12:41).⁴² Isaiah's vision in its historical context is one in which he saw the glory of Yahweh (Isa. 6:1–13). In claiming that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus, John clearly identifies Jesus as the holy one of Israel and places him on the same level as the Father. The Son's glory cannot be limited to this life but transcends it, for he possessed glory before the world ever came into existence (John 17:5). Nor will his glory ever end, for the Son anticipates the future when believers will see his glory forever (John 17:24). Indeed, seeing his glory is the climax and goal of the life of those who have put their trust in Jesus. The stature of the Son is also communicated by the promise that the Spirit would glorify the Son (John 16:14). Glory is not restricted to the Father but is also shared with the Son, and it is the Spirit's distinctive ministry to bring glory to the Son. We also see in John's Gospel the interplay between the Father and Son that is characteristic of John's thought. Hence, the Father is the one who glorifies the Son (John 8:54), and therefore the Son asks the Father to glorify him as the cross draws near (John 17:1, 5). The glory that the Son possesses was given to him

40. "So complete is the identity and function and authority between the Father and the Son that it is impossible to honour God while disregarding Jesus" (Barrett 1978: 260). See also Lincoln 2000: 75; Ridderbos 1997: 196–97.

41. On glory in John, see Barrett 1978: 166; Carson 1991b: 128.

42. For a discussion of this text, see Hurtado 2003: 379, where he remarks that the Johannine theme of Jesus' glory demonstrates "the uniqueness of the biblical God, together with an unprecedented treatment of Jesus in terms otherwise reserved for God." After all, in Isaiah (Isa. 42:8; 48:11) Yahweh categorically declares that he will not give his glory to another. Hurtado (2003: 380) suggests that the Johannine theme of God granting glory to Jesus may allude to these texts in Isaiah. See also Ridderbos 1997: 445.

by the Father (John 17:22). Indeed, the Father sent the Son to earth so he would be glorified (John 11:4; 17:1). The relationship between the Father and the Son verifies one of the major themes in this book: the Father is glorified in the Son (John 14:13). The Father and the Son are not in competition in John's Gospel, but the glory of the Son redounds to the glory of the Father.

We have seen that John maintains the priority of the Father. Jesus insists that the Father is greater than everything, even himself (John 10:29; 14:28).⁴³ But at the same time he also teaches that the Son and the Father are equal (John 10:30).⁴⁴ The equality in view cannot be limited to unity of purpose and aim, for the Jews took up stones to put Jesus to death for blasphemy (John 10:31–33). We think of John 5:17–18, where Jesus identified God as his Father and made himself equal to God, so that the Jews attempted to stone him for blasphemy. For John to write that Jesus was equal to God is quite astonishing, especially since he was nurtured in Jewish monotheism. Nor does he in subsequent verses of John 5 provide an explanation that nullifies the claim that Jesus is equal with God, though he does indicate that the Son is dependent on the Father. Nevertheless, Jesus is to be honored just as the Father is honored, so the full deity of the Son is clearly articulated. In John 10 as well Jesus' subsequent words about humans being gods (John 10:34–35) do not nullify the statement on the Son's deity, for Jesus is arguing from greater to lesser. If even human beings can be called gods in a derivative sense, then Jesus is not blaspheming in calling himself the Son of God, since he was consecrated by the Father as such (John 10:36).⁴⁵ Honor

43. "The Father is *fons divinitatis* in which the being of the Son has its source; the Father is God sending and commanding, the Son is God sent and obedient" (Barrett 1978: 468). For a fuller explanation that includes historical reflection in church history on the matter, see R. Brown 1970: 654–55. Ridderbos (1997: 512) argues that virtually all discussions of this verse miss the point, maintaining that there is no idea here of the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. Rather, Jesus emphasizes the inferior state for his disciples while he remains on earth.

44. Barrett (1978: 382) sees "a oneness of love and obedience even while it is a oneness of essence." Cf. Lindars 1972: 370–71; Carson 1991b: 394–95. Contra Ridderbos (1997: 371), who restricts it to unity of function in John 10:30. See Ridderbos's view in the preceding note as well.

45. See Lindars 1972: 372; Barrett 1978: 385. See Ridderbos (1997: 372–76), who rejects any argument from lesser to greater here, contending that such an argument fails to show Jesus' unique sonship. According to Ridderbos, Ps. 82 is addressed to all Israel, not just to judges or angels. Ridderbos (1997: 372–76) also claims that Jesus does not make an ontological claim here; instead, Jesus appeals to Scripture to demonstrate that he does not blaspheme in calling himself the Son of God. S. Johnson (1980: 21–37) argues that the "gods" in Ps. 82 were judges. Jesus argues typologically from the lesser to the greater, but Johnson also contends that the notion of the union of God and human beings is fundamental to the argument, and this union reaches its consummate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

and worship are to be given to the Father and the Son, and so it is clear that the Son is divine, for in Judaism only God deserves worship. Those who hate the Son hate the Father, and vice versa (John 15:23–24). As the one who has life in himself, the Son grants life to all as a gift from the Father (John 5:25–26). To say that the Son has life in himself is to claim deity, since life belongs to God alone.⁴⁶ Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father (John 14:6). Those who have seen him and known him have seen and known the Father (John 14:7–9; 16:3).⁴⁷ The Son's works demonstrate the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son (John 14:10–12; cf. 14:20; 16:15; 17:21).

Perhaps this is the best place to include what John's Gospel says about God's name and the name of Jesus.⁴⁸ We saw earlier, in studying the name in the Synoptics, that God's name was highly significant in the OT because it signified his presence with his people. The name theology in John's Gospel demonstrates a remarkable unity between the Father and the Son. During his ministry Jesus made known the name of the Father to his disciples (John 17:6, 26).⁴⁹ The Father's name signifies his character, and the revelation of the Father only occurs through the Son. Furthermore, Jesus kept the disciples and preserved them from apostasy in the Father's name (John 17:12), and he prays that the Father will continue to keep them in his name so that they will not stray (John 17:11). But what is truly remarkable in John 17:11–12 is the claim that God's name has been given to Jesus, for such a statement can only mean that Jesus shares divine status.⁵⁰ Jesus' prayer to the Father models what he instructs his disciples to do, for he encourages them regularly to entreat the Father in prayer in his name (John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26). We know that Jesus' prayer for the preservation of disciples was answered; so also prayers offered in Jesus' name will be answered in the affirmative. Such prayers accord with the character and glory that Jesus has as the Son, and they are answered because they bring glory to the Son.

46. Carson (1991b: 256–57) rightly argues that this life given by the Father to the Son belongs to the Son eternally (cf. John 1:4) and thus points to the Son's deity.

47. To say that the one who has seen Jesus has seen the Father means not that the Father and Jesus are identical "but that the Son so fully embodies the Word, glory, and life of the Father that to see the Son is to see the Father" (M. M. Thompson 2001: 114).

48. Hurtado (2003: 381–92) also argues that name theology in the Gospel of John highlights the divine status of Jesus. His entire discussion bears careful reading, and I draw upon it on a number of points.

49. See Barrett 1978: 505. R. Brown (1970: 754–56) is likely correct in seeing a reference to "I Am," though what is said here cannot be restricted to such (for criticism of Brown, see Lindars 1972: 521).

50. It is likely that John refers here to the revelation of the Father given to Jesus, and hence Jesus is the unique revelation of God's character (see R. Brown 1970: 759; Beasley-Murray 1987: 299; Carson 1991b: 562).

For the disciples to ask the Father to grant their requests in Jesus' name manifests a high Christology. Prayer is directed to the Father, but it is answered on the basis of asking in Jesus' name. The uniqueness of Jesus is evident if we consider the idea of prayers being offered in the name of the Beloved Disciple or even an angel. Hurtado rightly observes how radical it is that prayers were offered in Jesus' name, given the special veneration of God's name in Jewish circles and the unheard-of idea of invoking someone else's name rather than God's in prayer.⁵¹ Jesus' name apparently has divine power, for not only are prayers offered in his name, but also eternal life is received by believing in his name (John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 20:31), which suggests his divine power.⁵² That Jesus belongs to the divine realm is apparent also because the Father sends the Spirit not only in his own name but also in Jesus' name (John 14:26).⁵³ We will explore this text further in considering the Spirit, but here we note the confluence of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Jesus' divinity is suggested also because he knows what is in human beings (John 2:23–25), and this is verified in the succeeding story with Nicodemus, in which he informs Nicodemus of his need for new life (John 3:1–13). Moreover, Jesus is sinless. He always does what is pleasing to God (John 8:29), and no one can convict him of sin (John 8:46).⁵⁴ Because Jesus always does the Father's will, the devil has no claim on him (John 14:30–31).

The Son of God Christology in John's Gospel designates Jesus' special relation to God and emphasizes his divinity.⁵⁵ John's Christology is closely linked to his soteriology. Those who do not believe in the Son and honor him do not have eternal life. Jesus is able to grant the life of the age to come to people because he is the Son of God and because he has life in himself.

Conclusion

In the history of scholarship it has not been unusual to claim that Son of God Christology came from Hellenism, where the simple religion of

51. Hurtado 2003: 391.

52. Many commentators fail to note the significance of this, but Köstenberger (2004: 38–39) rightly underscores the significance of believing in Jesus' name.

53. The significance of this escapes many commentators, but see Carson 1991b: 505.

54. Cullmann (1963: 106) remarks, "With the exception of Hebrews, no other New Testament writing emphasizes so strongly as the Johannine literature the sinlessness of Jesus."

55. For this theme in John's Gospel, see Dodd 1953: 250–62. As Koester (2003: 180) notes, the theme of Jesus' preexistence demonstrates that the title "Son of God" denotes not only messiahship but also divinity.

Jesus was transmuted into another form.⁵⁶ Jewish scholars have often agreed with this assessment. Schoeps, for example, says that Paul borrowed from pagan thought and asserted that Jesus is the Son of God.⁵⁷ Bultmann insists that the notion of a dying and rising Son of God stems from mystery religions and Gnosticism, not the original kerygma.⁵⁸ Hengel demonstrates conclusively that such views lack cogency.⁵⁹ The mysteries do not know of sons of God who died or rose again, nor do devotees become children of the mystery gods. A. D. Nock points out that none of the mystery gods (e.g., Osiris) died for the sake of other human beings.⁶⁰ The real impact of mystery religions began in the second and third centuries AD, long after the writing of the NT. No evidence for such mysteries can be located in Syria in the period AD 30–50. Instead, Christianity probably exercised a strong influence on mystery religions. Others suggest that the sons of Zeus influenced the Christian development, but the dissimilarity is more striking because Zeus had countless children. The emperor was called a son of God after his death, but no claim of resurrection was made. Others have derived influence from “divine men” in Hellenism, but the alleged parallel is questionable because the existence of such figures is uncertain in the first century.⁶¹ Most of the examples of someone claiming to be a son of God are post-Christian. Appeal to the gnostic redeemer myth is doubtful because such a myth has no evidence of being pre-Christian.⁶² No pagan tradition has God sending his Son into history, nor does his Son assume human form and die. We have seen that the Son of God theme in the Gospels develops in a Jewish milieu.

The Son of God Christology in John is quite extraordinary. The disciples who hailed Jesus as the Son during his ministry probably used the term not to denote his divinity but to designate that Jesus was the Messiah. But John teaches that they spoke better than they knew. As the Son, Jesus has life in himself and will stand as the judge on the final day. He is fully divine and equal with the Father, so that those who honor the Father must honor him as well. Prayers offered in his name will be answered, and eternal life comes to those who believe in his name. At the same time, John preserves a delicate interplay between the Father and the Son. The Father indwells the Son, and the Son the Father. Jesus is the revelation of the Father and discloses his character to his disciples and to the world. Still, it was the

56. For a classic expression of this view, see Harnack 1957.

57. Schoeps 1961: 150–60.

58. Bultmann 1951: 28, 32, 50, 80.

59. Hengel 1976.

60. For Nock's view, see Hengel 1976: 26n54.

61. See note 8 in this chapter.

62. See Yamauchi 1973, a seminal study.

Father who sent the Son, and the Father always retains priority as the Father. In this sense he is greater than the Son. The Son existed with the Father before the world began and shares his glory, and disciples will enjoy the Son's glory forever in the future. And yet the Son was sent to bring glory to the Father, while at the same time the Father glorifies the Son. The Son as the sent one acts in dependence upon and in submission to his Father and constantly does what is pleasing to the Father. Christology must not be severed from soteriology, as the purpose statement of John's Gospel affirms (John 20:30–31). Life in the age to come is the portion of human beings even now if they put their trust in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. His name saves because his name is exalted.

The "I Am" Sayings in John

It is impossible to exhaust John's rich Christology, especially in a survey of the theology of the NT. Another dimension of his Christology stands out in the "I am" statements that are sprinkled regularly throughout the Gospel. The words "I am" (*egō eimi*) draw on God's revelation of himself to Moses when he summoned him to liberate Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:6, 14),⁶³ but its closest antecedents are found in Isaiah, who regularly uses "I am" in contrasting Yahweh with the idols, assuring Israel that he will free them in a second exodus (Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:8, 18, 19, 22; 46:4, 9; 48:12, 17; 51:12; 52:6 LXX).⁶⁴ The texts in Isaiah occur in contexts where monotheism is taught emphatically in which the creator God is contrasted with idols. "I am" is reserved for Yahweh, who ordains the end from the beginning and who will accomplish his saving purposes in the world in contrast to idols, which are powerless. As a Jew, John was well versed in OT antecedents. His use of the phrase stands as another strong piece of evidence supporting Jesus' deity, his "unique divinity and sovereignty."⁶⁵ The words "I am" in their full sense cannot and do not appear on the lips of anyone who is merely human.⁶⁶ We also notice

63. Scholars have examined parallels to the "I am" sayings in Hellenism, Gnosticism and Mandaeism, and Jewish sources. For a survey of options, see Harner 1970: 26–30; Ball 1996: 24–45. Ball rightly argues that the meaning of the phrase must be explored within the literary orbit of the Fourth Gospel.

64. For this view, see Harner 1970: 6–17; Ball 1996: 264–69. For a thorough analysis of the Isaianic background, see C. Williams (2000: 23–46), who emphasizes that the phrase "I am he" serves as a divine title.

65. C. Williams 2000: 301. Williams (2000: 302, 303) argues that Jesus is presented as "the definitive revelation of God" and "the only effective agent of divine salvation."

66. "However, most striking of all is the fact that Jesus takes on himself a phrase that is reserved for Yahweh alone and thus intimately identifies himself with God's acts of creation and salvation" (Ball 1996: 203).

that the phrase occurs when Yahweh promises to liberate his people and fulfill his covenantal promises. The “I am” statements on Jesus’ lips suggest, then, that in him the promises of God find their fulfillment. God’s saving purposes climax in Jesus himself.

The words “I am” (*egō eimi*) do not, of course, necessarily harken back to Exod. 3 and the use in Isaiah. In John 9:9 the man to whom Jesus restores sight identifies himself with the words “I am” (*egō eimi*), but of course he is not claiming to be divine. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus confirms who he is after his resurrection because the disciples doubt his identity (Luke 24:39), but any connotations of deity seem unlikely in this context.

Interpreting some of the “I am” expressions in John is quite difficult.⁶⁷ Jesus responded to the Samaritan woman’s belief in the Messiah by declaring himself to be such: “I am” (*egō eimi* [John 4:26 my translation]). Perhaps the answer is akin to John 9:9 and consists of simple identification, but given the use of the phrase elsewhere in John’s Gospel, one suspects that John intends the reader to see more in the expression than would have been perceived by the Samaritan woman.⁶⁸ C. Williams argues that Jesus’ wording here hails from Isa. 40–66 and cannot be restricted to one verse from the Isaiah traditions (i.e., Isa. 52:6).⁶⁹ Jesus’ declaration to the woman (John 4:26) is akin to Yahweh’s ability to predict the future in Isaiah (Isa. 41:22–23, 26; 43:9, 12; 48:14). Hence, Jesus’ self-identification to the woman has a deeper meaning. The same question emerges when Jesus walks on water and identifies himself to the disciples in the midst of their fear (John 6:20). His declaration could be simple self-identification. Yahweh, however, is the God of the storm, and Jesus’ ability to tread on water and to calm the storm suggest that the words “I am” point to his deity.⁷⁰

Often the “I am” statements are tied to an event, so that discourse and event interpret one another.⁷¹ After Jesus fed the five thousand (John 6:1–15), the “bread of life” discourse expounds on the event (John 6:26–59). Jesus is the new Moses giving his people bread from heaven, but he is greater than Moses, for the bread that he gives does not simply satisfy the stomach but grants eternal life. Indeed, Jesus does not merely

67. See Ball 1996: 162–76.

68. Such a view is strengthened by the suggestion that Jesus draws on Isa. 52:6 (Harner 1970: 46–47; Ball 1996: 179–81).

69. C. Williams 2000: 257–66.

70. See also Hurtado 2003: 371; Ball 1996: 74, 185. Ball sees a reference to OT epiphanies of God and traces an OT background.

71. Smalley (1978: 91–92) sets forth this view clearly in his work, but his schema at several points seems to be forced. For instance, he links the “true vine” saying (John 15:1) with the discourse in John 4. See the criticisms in Ball 1996: 147–48.

give bread from heaven; he *is* the bread of heaven. Thus he says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48; cf. 6:41, 51, 58).⁷² As the discourse unfolds, it becomes clear that the “bread” that he gives for the life of the world is his flesh (John 6:51). Here we have a clear allusion to his death on the cross. Life comes to people only from eating his flesh and drinking his blood (John 6:52–59), from believing in and trusting in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. Just as earthly life is sustained through the death of living things, so also eternal life is obtained only by feeding on Jesus’ death, by trusting that his death is the means by which sins are forgiven.

Jesus also announces, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).⁷³ The event aligned with this declaration is almost certainly the lighting festival that occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles.⁷⁴ It also accords with the restoration of sight to the blind man in John 9. Jesus is the true revelation of God and grants spiritual sight to the blind. But those who insist that they have no need of light and refuse to admit their spiritual blindness continue to exist in darkness. The claim to be the light of the world is almost certainly a prerogative of deity. Only God can create light where there is none (Gen. 1:3, 16; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 31:35; cf. Exod. 13:21). According to the psalmist, Yahweh “is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27:1), and Isaiah says that “the LORD will be your everlasting light” (Isa. 60:19; cf. Mic. 7:8), but John identifies Jesus as the light of the world (cf. Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6).⁷⁵

In John 10 Jesus gives the “good shepherd” discourse (10:1–30) and identifies himself as “the door” for the sheep (John 10:7, 9) and as “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14).⁷⁶ The parable is overloaded, for one cannot function both as the door for the sheepfold and as the shepherd. Such pedantic consistency is no concern to John.⁷⁷ He seizes upon various elements of the discourse to emphasize different facets of Jesus’ person and ministry. The image of the door is used to convey that salvation is available only through Jesus (John 10:9). The true flock enters through that door for salvation. But Jesus is also the good shepherd for his sheep, and he lays down his life for his sheep. He stands in contrast to the

72. The word “life” ties the “I am” saying to the purpose of John’s Gospel (John 1:4; 20:31).

73. Ball notes that the narrative of John 8 raises some ambiguity regarding Jesus’ identity that is resolved by the conclusion of the story (1996: 82). So also C. Williams 2000: 268.

74. See *m. Sukkah* 4:1, 9–10; 5:2–4. For a summary of what occurred during the festival and its relationship to John’s Gospel, see Barrett 1978: 326–27, 335; Köstenberger 2004: 239–40.

75. The reference to light also hearkens back to the prologue: John 1:4–5, 7–9 (so Ball 1996: 87).

76. Ball (1996: 93–94) notes that the narrative is set in the same context as John 9.

77. See especially Carson 1991b: 383–84.

false shepherds of Israel (Ezek. 34:1–6).⁷⁸ These bogus shepherds feed themselves instead of the sheep, exploit the sheep for their own profit, fail to care for injured or straying sheep, and dominate rather than serve them. Yahweh pledges that he will seek out and rescue his sheep (Ezek. 34:11–12). He will liberate them from exile and allow them to feed in the richness of his provision (Ezek. 34:13–14). Indeed, Yahweh promises to become their shepherd: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice” (Ezek. 34:15–16). A few verses later we are informed that a coming David will shepherd the flock: “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken” (Ezek. 34:23–24). Ezekiel’s prophecy of Yahweh serving as the shepherd for the flock finds its fulfillment in Jesus as the good shepherd (cf. Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11).⁷⁹ Moreover, John merges the promises that the Lord and David will shepherd God’s people. Both of these prophecies find their fulfillment in Jesus, for he is the Messiah and the Lord. The promises about return to exile and the covenant of peace (Ezek. 34:25) find their fulfillment in him.

Jesus also declared, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). This declaration is followed by his raising Lazarus from the dead, so that it is closely linked with the sign performed. Since Jesus is “the resurrection and life,” all who trust in him will conquer death by being resurrected (John 11:25, 27). Although realized eschatology receives the emphasis in John, future eschatology is clearly present in this text as well. Still, as is typical in John, realized eschatology comes to the forefront in the statement, “Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:26). Even in the present age believers have conquered death and live with the triumphal confidence that physical death cannot remove the life that they already enjoy. The Christology behind Jesus’ assertion is astonishing, for only God can raise the dead, as is evident from Ezek. 37.

Jesus also says, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1). In the OT Israel is described as the Lord’s vineyard (Isa. 5:1–7; cf. Jer. 12:10), signifying that they are the elect people of the Lord.⁸⁰ Israel was the vine that the

78. For Ezek. 34 as the background, see Ball 1996: 224–26; see also Evans 1993: 28–36.

79. “Jesus identifies himself with the role which God would accomplish as the promised Good Shepherd” (Ball 1996: 225).

80. For the OT background here, see Evans 1993: 37–45.

Lord rescued from Egypt, and the psalmist prayed that the Lord would act on behalf of this vine in his day (Ps. 80:8, 14). The “son” and “son of man” in the psalm may only refer to Israel (Ps. 80:15, 17), but it is also possible that they include a reference to Israel’s anointed king. If the latter is the case, then the vine in Ps. 80 may include a reference to both Israel and the Davidic king.⁸¹ The allusions to the OT provide the necessary backdrop for interpreting John 15:1. When Jesus announced that he is the true vine, he taught that he is the true Israel. Only those branches that are connected to him and remain in him are truly members of the people of God. Whether or not one is an ethnic Israelite fades into the background, and one’s relationship to Jesus is the criterion that determines membership in the people of God. That Jesus is the exclusive pathway to God is not a novel theme in John. Jesus is not the way in a general sense, but he is specifically the way to the Father. Jesus declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).⁸² John’s exclusive Christology is tied to his exclusive soteriology.

A constellation of “I am” sayings sets forth the glory of Jesus. The most striking is in John 8:58, which culminates an account beginning with Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world (John 8:12). Jesus engaged in a debate with alleged disciples as to whether they were truly the children of Abraham (John 8:31–59). He asserted that only those who remain in his word are freed from the slavery of sin. His Jewish listeners were outraged at any suggestion that they were enslaved, insisting that as children of Abraham they were free. Jesus asserted that their desire to kill him proves that their father is the devil, and they countered by smearing him with charges of being a Samaritan and a demon. Jesus promised that those who keep his word will never die—an astonishing claim indeed. The Jews responded that he could not be greater than Abraham, and Abraham himself died. Jesus proclaimed that Abraham rejoiced over his coming, and then he concluded, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). The theme that membership in the people of God comes not via Abraham or being a Jew but only through Jesus emerges again. The Jesus who promised life is the ever-living one, so that as the possessor of life he can grant life to others.⁸³ Jesus’ superiority to Abraham is evident in the discourse. The final claim is nothing short of shocking. The Jews believed that it was blasphemy, for they immediately took up stones to put him to death.⁸⁴ The “I am”

81. See chapter 6, note 61.

82. See Ball 1996: 126–28.

83. C. Williams 2000: 278.

84. Ball (1996: 92–93) rightly maintains that the narrative supports such an astonishing claim because the Jews attempt to stone Jesus. Further, the claim fits with the prologue,

statement likely draws on Exod. 3 and the texts noted in Isaiah.⁸⁵ Jesus' statement certainly is a claim to deity, given the "I am" statement and the assertion that he existed before Abraham lived. Indeed, the "I am" claim indicates preexistence, that he is the everlasting one.⁸⁶

The remaining "I am" statements should be interpreted similarly. Jesus predicts what will happen in advance so that his disciples will believe *egō eimi*, "I am" (John 13:19 my translation). The use of "I am" demonstrates that such predictions are not merely the prophecies of an ordinary prophet. Jesus demonstrates his deity by proclaiming what will happen before it occurs. We have already noted that the "I am" formula is common in Isa. 40–48. These same chapters often declare that Yahweh stands apart from idols as the true God because he is able to predict the future (Isa. 41:21–29; 42:8–9; 44:8–9; 46:9–11; 48:6). The uniqueness of Yahweh manifests itself in his control over history. So too, Jesus is revealed as "I am" in his ability to predict the future. The deity of Jesus is suggested also by his words to those arresting him: "I am" (John 18:5, 6, 8 my translation).⁸⁷ The text could be read in terms of simple self-identification, but since those who arrest Jesus fall to the ground at his self-revelation, we should read the declaration in light of the other "I am" statements.⁸⁸ Human beings are stunned and fall back in the presence of the divine, so what happened here is a kind of theophany. So too the Isaianic background is likely present when Jesus predicted the future before it occurs, demonstrating that "I am" (John 13:19 my translation). In Isaiah the true God differentiates himself from idols, which are powerless to predict the future, and here Jesus identified himself as divine, but the next verse (John 13:20) indicates that he does not act independently of the Father but rather has been sent by the Father himself, so that the unity between the Father and the Son is emphasized.⁸⁹

The revelation of Jesus in John can never be separated from the cross. Jesus declared, "Unless you believe 'I am,' you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24 my translation). Those who confess Jesus as Lord and God (John 20:28) belong to God. In honoring the Son they also honor the Father (John 5:23). Conversely, those who fail to honor the Father do not honor

where Jesus is the Word who was with God from the beginning. See also Harner 1970: 39–42; Carson 1991b: 358. Contra Barrett 1978: 352.

85. See Ball 1996: 197; C. Williams 2000: 276–78.

86. See Dodd 1953: 261–62. The charge of blasphemy may reflect the view that Jesus has claimed the divine name (see R. Brown 1966: 360, 367–68; C. Williams 2000: 279–83). Contra Ridderbos (1997: 323), who does not think that Jesus speaks of "the ontological category of divine being."

87. We see here both Jesus' sovereignty and his submission to the way of the cross (Ball 1996: 140).

88. So also Harner 1970: 45; Ball 1996: 141–44, 201; C. Williams 2000: 289.

89. See the full discussion in C. Williams 2000: 283–87.

the Son. Jesus also declared, “When you lift up the Son of man, you shall know that I am” (John 8:28 my translation).⁹⁰ The saying is ambiguous, and probably it has a double meaning.⁹¹ Only those who acknowledge Jesus as the crucified one will experience life, so that those who claim to worship the one true God must also acknowledge Jesus as the one who saves.⁹² On the other hand, those who refuse to acknowledge him during the present age will confess on the day of judgment that Jesus is divine. The cross is the means by which Jesus is exalted or lifted up on high as the ruler of the world.

The “I am” statements contribute significantly to Johannine Christology. They demonstrate that Jesus fulfills the OT hope for Israel. He is the way of salvation, and the cross is the means by which salvation is accomplished. Jesus is the unique revelation of God, and in addition, in Jesus God himself has been manifested among his people. The one who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (John 14:9), for he has explicated the Father to human beings (John 1:18). Jesus is the “I am” of the OT, and yet, as noted earlier, Jesus does not exhaust who God is. Jesus is not God without remainder, but he is both Lord and God, the “I am” of the OT.⁹³ The connection with Isa. 40–66 demonstrates that the “I am” statements are linked with soteriology, with the fulfillment of God’s saving promises, with the realization of the new exodus and the new creation. God’s saving promises are realized in Jesus because he is the “I am” who pledged salvation in Isa. 40–66. Hence, John does not indulge in christological speculation, for the identity of Jesus cannot be severed from his saving work.⁹⁴

Logos

Scholars have long recognized that John’s Christology is more explicit and direct than that of the Synoptic Gospels. One of his distinctive terms for Jesus is “Word” (*logos*). In considering Logos Christology, we begin with the background in Hellenism.⁹⁵ The *logos* in Hellenistic thought

90. According to Ball (1996: 90), the proximity of John 8:28 to 8:24 suggests that they should be interpreted together.

91. So also Harner 1970: 43–44; C. Williams 2000: 267–68.

92. C. Williams (2000: 266–75) rightly argues that the point here, as is clear from the OT allusions, is the identity of the one true God, and that God’s identity is revealed in Jesus himself.

93. “The Son’s identification with the Father is so close that he can even take words from Isaiah concerning the Lord’s role as the only God, and use them of himself” (Ball 1996: 193).

94. So Ball 1996: 126–28.

95. Dodd (1953: 263–85) particularly emphasizes the word of God in the OT, wisdom, and the Logos theme in Philo. For further study of the background, see Keener 2003: 339–63

refers to both the inward thought and the expression of such thought in discourse. According to Stoicism, the *logos* rules the universe and is in the human intellect. Reason—that is, the *logos*—permeates all things. In Stoic thought the virtuous life consists in living according to nature. Living according to nature does not mean that people follow their impulses and desires. Those who live in accord with nature pattern their lives so that they live in harmony with reason. Those who conduct their lives rationally live according to nature. We must recall that the Stoic worldview is pantheistic. No personal God exists in the Stoic framework, and the course of history replicates itself again and again. In gnostic thought the *logos* functions as an intermediary being between God and human beings. Gnostic thought, however, did not influence John, since gnostic documents were composed subsequent to the writing of the NT.⁹⁶

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have recognized anew John's affinity with Jewish thought.⁹⁷ In the OT God's word is effective, bringing into existence that which he says. The power of God's word is evident in Gen. 1, for whatever God says comes into existence. When God says, "Let there be light," light springs into existence (Gen. 1:3). The psalmist reflects on God's creative word: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Ps. 33:6). His word is not considered to be a separate entity or person in the OT, though in some cases poetic language is used that depicts the word as if it were a distinct entity. We see this in Ps. 107:20: "He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction." In this context God's word brings life when death threatens. A similar phenomenon is evident in Ps. 147:18, where at God's command ice, snow, and cold envelop the world, but nature is transformed when "he sends out his word and melts them; he makes his winds blow and the waters flow." The change of seasons is not due merely to the natural course of things. The fresh breezes of spring and the flowing rivers and streams stem from God's word.

(though his identifying Logos with Torah is questionable); Cullmann 1963: 251–54; Klappert and Fries, *NIDNTT* 3:1081–1117. Ridderbos (1997: 28–36) rightly argues that neither a Hellenistic background nor a fully developed wisdom Christology provides a satisfactory context for what John says about the Logos, even though wisdom motifs are present.

96. Note again the seminal work of Yamauchi 1973.

97. For a thorough exploration of the background to the Johannine prologue, see Evans 1993. Evans argues that the most convincing parallels to the prologue derive from Jewish sources, not from Gnosticism or Hermeticism. So also Dunn 1996a: 213–50; Hurtado 2003: 366. For a brief survey of the Jewish background, see Cullmann 1963: 254–58; Lee 2005: 62–77. Fossum (1995: 109–33) argues that John's Christology is rooted in biblical and postbiblical teaching on God's name and the angel of the Lord.

The natural world exists and thrives by virtue of God's sovereign power. "He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (Ps. 147:15). Nothing can deter God's word from taking effect, for what he declares will become reality. Hence, we read in Isa. 55:10–11, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." The effectiveness of God's word continues to be emphasized in postbiblical literature. God's judgments in Egypt at the time of the exodus are described as follows: "Your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth" (Wis. 18:15–16 NRSV). The Targumim also communicate the power of God's word. We see this in the paraphrase of Gen. 1:3: "The Word [*memra*] of the Lord said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light in his Word [*memra*]" (*Frg. Tg. Gen. 1:3*).⁹⁸ The word of God enlivens and kills; it sustains the world humans live in; it never fails in its purpose.

We have seen that the word of God plays a decisive role in the creation of the world. God's creative word, however, is also closely related to wisdom. The world was formed by God in wisdom. "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world" (Prov. 8:22–26). Just as the world was created by means of God's word, it also was formed by his wisdom. In Sirach wisdom is equated with Torah, God's word to his people in the law of Moses (Sir. 24:23). God made the world by his word, and he created human beings in his wisdom. "O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures you have made" (Wis. 9:1–2 NRSV).

Philo uses the term *logos* more than fourteen hundred times.⁹⁹ The *logos* acts as an intermediary between God and the world. Philo establishes a synthesis of Middle Platonic and Stoic views with his Jewish

98. For the targumic parallels, see Evans 1993: 114–24.

99. So Dunn 1996a: 220. See the survey on the *logos* in Philo in Evans 1993: 100–12. See also Dodd 1953: 66–73; Segal 1977: 159–81; Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 4:77–91; Dunn 1996a: 220–30.

monotheism. According to Philo, ideas are in the mind of God, and the *logos*, contrary to the Stoics' view, is inferior to God himself, who is ultimately unknowable. *Logos* includes both the unexpressed thought and the thought that is expressed in speech. Since the *logos* functions as an intermediary, God acts on the world and creates through the *logos* (Philo, *Cherubim* 127). The *logos* is God's firstborn and his Son and is identified as the beginning (Philo, *Confusion* 146). The *logos* is described as God's image (Philo, *Flight* 101) and is even called the "second god" (Philo, *QG* 2.62), though Philo does not intend by this to say that the *logos* is a personal being or is actually divine. The *logos* is what is knowable of God. It is not a gradation of being but rather gradations in God's manifestation of himself, like the halo around the sun.¹⁰⁰ God is unknowable in himself, but he reaches out to the world through the *logos*. It seems that those scholars who claim that the *logos* in Philo's thought is only a personification are correct,¹⁰¹ for Philo's strong monotheism rules out the idea that the *logos* is an independent being or hypostasis.

In considering the Logos in John, the echoes of *logos* in first-century culture should be borne in mind. Still, the Jewish background must be considered primary.¹⁰² John's Gospel commences with the same words that we find in Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning" (John 1:1). In Gen. 1 all things come into existence by means of God's word, whereas in John's Gospel all of created life is ascribed to the Logos (John 1:3). John, of course, reflects on the beginning before the beginning, since the "the Word was with God" (John 1:1) before the creation of the world.¹⁰³ John also represents an advance over the OT and postbiblical Judaism because the Logos is personal and divine.¹⁰⁴ John slides from the Logos in John 1:1 to "this one" or "he" (*houtos*), emphasizing again the personal identity of the Logos, for the Logos is not an abstract entity. The distinctiveness of the Gospel manifests itself with his assertion that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).¹⁰⁵ The personal "Word" that existed with God from all eternity took on flesh and became a human being. The Logos for John is not merely a personification but a person, not merely one who existed with God for all eternity but one who has entered his-

100. So Dunn 1996a: 226.

101. This is the conclusion of the survey in Dunn 1996a: 220–30. See also the careful analysis in Lee 2005: 59–75.

102. See Evans 1993. So also Cullmann 1963: 259.

103. Rightly Ridderbos (1997: 24), who also correctly argues that although John writes with the context of Gen. 1 in view, we do not have a midrash on that chapter here.

104. Rightly Dodd 1953: 275; Hurtado 2003: 367.

105. M. M. Thompson (1988: 39–52) shows that the word "flesh" means that Jesus became a human being.

tory as a human being.¹⁰⁶ This shocking claim sets John's Gospel apart from any other previous writing about God's word.

The Logos entered history in the person of Jesus the Christ.¹⁰⁷ Jesus is God's definitive and final word to human beings, expressing and revealing who God truly is. God is invisible and has never been observed by human beings (John 1:18). Jesus as God's Word has explained (*exēgeomai*) him to human beings. We should also note that the "word" in the NT is usually the gospel. John emphasizes that the gospel centers on the incarnate Word, Jesus. The human Jesus is the revelation of God, and his deity is hidden but not cancelled out by his humanity.

The progression of thought in John 1:1 reaches a climax. First, the Word existed for all eternity. There is no beginning at which he is not present. Second, "the Word was with God." The Logos and God are not equivalent, for they can be distinguished. The Word existed with God for all eternity and had fellowship with God. Third, and most stunning, John tells us that "the Word was God" (*theos ēn ho logos*). This sentence cannot be rendered as "the Word was a god." When the predicate nominative precedes the copula, the noun preceding the copula emphasizes quality. So the predicate "God" (*theos*) preceding "was" indicates that the Logos is divine.¹⁰⁸ He is fully God.¹⁰⁹ We must also remember that John was nurtured in the OT and does not tolerate polytheism. The translation "a god" would suggest polytheism, which is unthinkable for a monotheist such as John. What John teaches here is that Jesus is fully God, and yet at the same time there is only one God.¹¹⁰ Could we conclude from this that John falls into modalism, so that God collapses, so to speak, into the Word? We can confidently rule out modalism, for in the preceding sentence we are told that "the Word was with God." The Word and God both existed from all eternity and enjoyed fellowship with one another. Further, John 1:2 reiterates that the Logos and God are distinct, emphasizing again that he was with God, so that the Logos cannot be God without remainder. Hence, "God" and "the Word" are separate entities in one sense. The Logos is fully divine without compromising monotheism or without falling prey to modalism. We are at the brink here of the paradox of the Trinity, in which Jesus is fully God, and God is one, and yet Jesus is not

106. Käsemann (1968) argues that the Johannine portrait of Jesus is "naively docetic." For a convincing response to Käsemann, see M. M. Thompson (1988), who shows Jesus' humanity from his origins (John 6:41; 7:2–9, 27, 41–44), his incarnation (John 1:14), his signs, and his death (John 6:51–58; 19:34–35; 20:24–29).

107. Schlatter (1999: 129) rightly emphasizes that many of our questions remain unanswered.

108. For a helpful study of the grammar here, see Wallace 1996: 256–70. See also Harris 1992: 51–71.

109. Rightly Hofius 1987: 16–17.

110. So also Hurtado 2003: 369.

God without remainder. The Father is God as well. We have the paradox of the Logos being with God and yet also being God.¹¹¹

There is no doubt, according to the Gospel of John, that Jesus is God. The Gospel climaxes with Thomas's declaration to Jesus: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).¹¹² The disciples grasp who Jesus truly is when he is raised from the dead. The acclamation of Jesus' deity forms an *inclusio* with John 1:1, framing the entire Gospel. The same framing device exists in the prologue itself. The best textual reading of John 1:18 proclaims that Jesus is "the only God" (*monogenēs theos*).¹¹³ His revelation of God is trustworthy because of his intimate relation with the Father ("who is at the Father's side") and because he is himself divine. Dunn contends that John's Gospel contains the first clear reference to the incarnation and preexistence in NT writings. He rightly sees that John is the first to move from an impersonal *logos* to the Logos becoming flesh, but we have already seen that the Synoptics teach preexistence in the "I have come" sayings and elsewhere, and we will see that Paul, the author of Hebrews, and the book of Revelation clearly taught the Son's preexistence as well (Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:1–3; Rev. 1:17).¹¹⁴ John's Christology sets forth in bold colors the divinity of Christ. He is one with the Father (John 10:30) as "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Yet the Father and Son are also distinguished. We noted earlier that the Father sends and the Son goes. We never read the reverse, where the Son sends and the Father goes. Clearly, a certain kind of priority belongs to the Father. The Father can be called greater than the Son without compromising the Son's deity (John 10:29; 14:28).¹¹⁵ Later church history worked this out in terms of essence and function, ontology and economy.

Conclusion

One of the central questions raised by the NT is "Who is Jesus?" The Gospels teach that he is not only the Messiah but also the Son of God.

111. Cullmann (1963: 265–66) clearly articulates the paradox, but at the same time he underemphasizes the ontological nature of the Johannine statement in defense of his functional Christology.

112. "This, then, is the supreme christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel" (R. Brown 1970: 1047). See also Barrett 1978: 573; Carson 1991b: 658–59; Ridderbos 1997: 648. For a thorough study, see Harris 1992: 105–29.

113. Rightly Cullmann 1963: 309. Most scholars agree that this is the correct textual reading here (see Metzger 1994: 169–70; Harris 1992: 74–83; contra Büchsel, *TDNT* 4:740; Ridderbos 1997: 59). See also the full exegesis of this text in Harris 1992: 84–103.

114. Preexistence is likely taught in 1 Pet. 1:20 as well.

115. P. Anderson (1996: 260–61) rightly shows that John holds these two themes together. So also Hurtado 2003: 393–94.

The term “Son of God” designates Jesus as the true Israel and the true son of David. Hence, in some contexts those who identified Jesus as God’s Son simply meant that he was the Messiah. But the title “Son of God” cannot be restricted to messiahship even in the Synoptics. The title also designates Jesus’ special and intimate relationship with God. As the Son, he has a mutual and exclusive knowledge of the Father, and as the Son, he determines who knows the Father. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us—and he promises to be with his people until salvation history is consummated.

The sonship of Jesus in John’s Gospel clearly sets him forth as divine. The Son is to be honored as the Father is honored, and the Father and the Son are one. The Son clearly preexisted and shared glory along with the Father before the world came into existence.¹¹⁶ The Father has granted to the Son his name, so that the Son has the same dignity as the Father. The priority of the Father is maintained in John, since the Father sends and the Son obeys and acts in dependence upon the Father. At the same time the Father and the Son enjoy equal dignity. Indeed, the “I am” sayings demonstrate Jesus’ deity, for the great “I am” statements regarding the Lord in Exodus and Isaiah are applied to Jesus. He existed as “I am” before Abraham was born. In the “I am” sayings we see that Jesus is the bread of life, the light of the world, the door for the sheep, the resurrection and the life, and the true vine. Indeed, Jesus is God’s word and message to human beings. As God’s Logos, he has existed with God from the beginning and is himself very God, so that he is the revelation of God to human beings and is confessed by Thomas as Lord and God.

The high Christology of the Gospels cannot be ascribed to Hellenism. It grew and was nurtured in Jewish circles. Those who have attempted to ascribe such Christology to Gnosticism or other Hellenistic literature have failed to make the case. The Jewish roots of Christology also indicate that we do not have ontology for ontology’s sake in the Gospels. The splendor of Jesus’ person means that he is the one who saves his people in accord with OT promises. The good news of God’s kingdom and the promise of eternal life are secured through the one who is God’s Son. Those who put their faith in the Son will be saved on the day of judgment and enjoy the life of the age to come even now. The people of God can be assured that they are saved, for their salvation has not come from one who is only a man but is the work of God himself—the Word become flesh.

116. Hofius (1987: 24) argues that the words “we have seen his glory” (John 1:14) indicate Jesus’ deity.